

# The Impact of Attractive Traits on the Outcome of an Arraignment

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Received June 29, 2024; Revised November 21, 2024; Accepted December 27, 2024

## Abstract

Within society, it is common to see the repercussions of how one's outward appearance impacts the treatment they receive from others. The exploration of the extent to which certain attractive characteristics impact the outcome of an arraignment identifies if defendants fall victim to these repercussions. Past studies have alluded to the issue: the defendant's outward appearance, in some cases, has more weight on the judge's decision-making than the crime itself, expressively illustrating how a judge's potential bias may sway their decision of an outcome. Historically, defendants' outward appearance has been seemingly judged, as evidenced by scholars Judith Langlois and Charles Frazier, leading to the question: to what extent is the outcome of an arraignment influenced by certain attractive characteristics of a defendant's outward appearance? By addressing this question, one could determine if a judge's bias influences the outcome of an arraignment. It was hypothesized that defendants who possess more than half of the attractive traits identified by David Frederick and Anthony Little would be released on recognizance while defendants who possess less than half will be incarcerated. To execute this aim, observational research was conducted within an arraignment courtroom by evaluating if defendants possessed light skin, small facial features, ovular face (in women), sharp jawline (in men), symmetry, averageness, clear-looking skin, and slim body appearance. After, the corresponding outcome was recorded within a printed checklist. In total, 30 defendants were observed and a Chi-Square Test was completed to analyze the data. From the Chi-Square Test, it was found that there was a P-value of 0.0730 percent, therefore making the results statistically insignificant, meaning that the eight characteristics evaluated had no impact on the outcome of an arraignment. These results suggest that the outcome of an arraignment is determined by the facts of the arraignment rather than the characteristics of their physical appearance.

*Keywords: Released on recognizance, Incarcerated, Arraignment, America's beauty standard*

## 1. Introduction

Flynn Rider, a character in the 2010 blockbuster movie *Tangled*, is regarded as one of Disney's most attractive male characters. Although he is a criminal, society has agreed with the film's protagonist, Rapunzel; they overcome their distaste for his criminal endeavors due to his outward appearance. While this is a fictional film, there are some distinct similarities between this fictional fantasy and the real world. In the real world, "pretty privilege" is not just an idea, but a scientifically proven phenomenon in which more attractive individuals are regarded as better people and receive better treatment (Lorenzo et al., 2010). This idea can be applied to the legal system as more attractive defendants have historically received better treatment than unattractive defendants (Knox and TenEyck, 2023). This idea can be observed during arraignments.

An arraignment is the preliminary hearing for a defendant. During an arraignment, a defendant is first informed of what they are being charged. Criminals are charged with either a felony, misdemeanor, or infraction, with felony offenses being the most serious and infractions being the least (Hanes and Brannen, 2001). After legal counsel

discusses the charges, a judge will determine one of two possible outcomes: to be released on recognizance or incarcerated. To be released on recognizance, or dismissed, means that a defendant can freely exit the courtroom without having bail set (Hanes and Brannen, 2001). Bail is the amount of money a defendant must pay while incarcerated to be released while waiting for their trial (Dobbie and Yang, 2021). The defendant is typically released on recognizance if a judge does not believe they pose a considerable enough threat to society to require incarceration. Synonymous with the term “remanded,” incarceration is when the defendant is imprisoned. Here, bail and bond are both secured. The bond ensures that the defendant shows up to court for their future court hearing (“A Study”, 1958).

Since defendants have historically been judged holistically, meaning every trait of their outward appearance is evaluated when determining the influence of attractiveness, the following question forms: to what extent is the outcome of an arraignment influenced by certain attractive characteristics of a defendant's outward appearance? The certain characteristics in question are light skin, small facial features, ovular face in women, sharp jawline in men, symmetry, averageness, clear-looking skin, and slim body appearance. This study differs from that of other studies as, in the past, studies have solely viewed the general attractiveness of a defendant to make observations. This was concluded as researchers have not rated attractiveness by identifying certain attractive characteristics, but rather, by determining if the defendant was generally attractive or not. By obtaining observational data to examine how a defendant's attractiveness can be evaluated using specific criteria, one can identify the extent those characteristics influence the outcome of an arraignment.

It is essential to explore this topic as it is vital to evaluate if judges are significantly influenced by underlying bias. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure defendants receive fair treatment. After reviewing the current body of knowledge, it can be hypothesized that defendants who possess more than half of the attractive traits identified by David Frederick and Anthony Little will be released on recognizance, while defendants who possess less than half will be incarcerated. This hypothesis is supported by researcher Judith Langlois, as she has concluded that the attractiveness of an individual has inherent implications on how others may treat and perceive them; attractive individuals are treated better than unattractive individuals in all facets of life (Langlois et al., 2000). This concept can be applied to the legal system as attractive defendants may receive superior treatment compared to unattractive defendants. Moreover, defendants' outward appearance may influence a judge if they possess more attractive characteristics.

## **2. Literature Review**

This topic is best understood when looked upon through works of previous research. By analyzing previous works, coherent principles can be drawn from each and will serve as a foundation for future research. The findings of this study will not only develop the previous relevant discoveries but also expand the current field of knowledge on this topic.

### **2.1 The American Beauty Standard**

Attractiveness is the extent to which another person possesses physically appealing traits. While many believe this topic is subjective, researchers Steven Gangestad and Glenn Scheyd prove otherwise. Using meta-analyses, participants rated how influential attractiveness was on different aspects of life. From this, the researchers could identify the participants' perspectives on attractiveness. Ultimately, it was concluded that people within the same culture and across cultures tend to find the same traits attractive (Gangestad and Scheyd, 2005). This principle can be applied to how judges perceive defendants' attractiveness. From evaluating their studies, the idea is supported that people can generally agree on who is attractive.

Frederick conducted research in a manner similar to Gangestad, as he gathered feedback on the public's perception of attractiveness. With this data, he outlined which physical characteristics are typically favored within American culture. These features are light skin, small facial features, and ovular face in women (Frederick et al., 2015). Furthermore, Little contributes to the discussion by showing that across cultures, symmetry, averageness, or not possessing unique or distinguishing characteristics, clear-looking skin, slim body appearance, and sharp jawline in

men (Little et al., 2011). From these studies, it is evident which traits are most favorable to society.

Altogether, these factors compile aspects of America's beauty standard, a standard that many try to uphold to be perceived as more attractive and thus receive better treatment. Though Frederick and Little have outlined these traits as attractive, they solely identified the attractiveness of each trait; they have not applied their findings to how it would impact defendants that possessed these traits. This absence of knowledge allows for research to be conducted that explores how these characteristics together impact the outcome of an arraignment. This study aims to evaluate if defendants possess certain aspects of America's beauty standards, such as light skin, small facial features, ovular face in women, sharp jawline in men, symmetry, averageness, clear-looking skin, and slim body appearance, and if their possession of those traits influences the outcome of their arraignments.

## 2.2 Effect of America's Beauty Standard

Upholding oneself to America's beauty standard reaps many benefits. In the past, studies have looked at this concept while rating the general attractiveness of an individual. It was found that generally attractive individuals received better treatment from others in other facets or fields. Attractive individuals tend to secure better jobs, earn higher incomes, and thrive socially compared to unattractive individuals (Langlois et al., 2000). This was found by evaluating the attractiveness of the individual holistically, meaning, raters are not evaluating all traits the person encompasses to justify their perspective but solely looking at whether the person is generally attractive or not.

Charles Frazier added to the conversation with his execution of observational research. Within this study, several researchers went into an arraignment courtroom and evaluated the holistic demeanor of the defendant in 286 bond cases. He did this by categorizing the defendants by attractiveness: 1 = very unattractive, 2 = unattractive, 3 = about average, 4 = attractive, and 5 = very attractive. After reviewing a multitude of defendants, it was concluded that defendants who possessed more appealing demeanors were 34.8% more likely to be released on recognizance compared to defendants with unattractive demeanors (Frazier et al., 1980). Notably, Frazier's study is limited by his system of categorization, which classified how attractive the defendant was and was flawed as there were no clear guidelines as to what would qualify a defendant in each category, i.e. where they ranked from 1-5 in attractiveness. Ultimately, the findings of both Langlois and Frazier, it can be concluded that one's outward appearance tends to impact judicial outcomes.

## 2.3 Rationale for Research

Through referencing studies like Langlois and Frazier, it becomes evident that greater physical attractiveness leads to more favorable judicial-decision making. While Frazier's study gave insight into the topic at hand, it was limited and did not specify which traits led them to classify the defendants in each category. Due to his lack of specificity, it is unclear what characteristics he looked upon to deem the defendant attractive. As many traits influence one's attractiveness, studies by scholars Frederick and Little can be referenced to close the gap presented in Frazier's study. As Frederick and Little have already identified certain characteristics to be attractive by society's standards, their pre-selected attractive traits can be used as the criterion to evaluate a defendant's attractiveness during an observational study.

While research such as Langlois and Frazier's studies, have been conducted on how attractiveness may influence a judge's decisions, general attractiveness has been evaluated, meaning no specific attractive traits were evaluated when deciding the attractiveness of a defendant. This gives room for more intensive research to be conducted on how certain attractive traits influence the outcome of an arraignment rather than from a holistic standpoint. This study aims to research how certain attractive characteristics may influence the outcome of an arraignment. This original criterion is composed of certain characteristics Frederick and Little touched upon, including light skin, small facial features, ovular face in women, sharp jawline in men, symmetry, averageness, clear-looking skin, and slim body appearance. With these original criteria, evaluations were made in the courtroom solely based on the combined impact of these characteristics as opposed to a holistic approach.

Ultimately, if no relationship is present, the findings would have implications for defendants as defendants may

find comfort in the idea that those factors of their appearance do not affect them in the courtroom. If a relationship is present, judges must ensure that their decisions are reflective of the severity of the crime committed in order to maintain the impartiality of the courtroom.

### 3. Materials and Methods

To address the formulated research question, it was necessary to develop an original approach to distinguish this study from the current field of knowledge. First, it was crucial to evaluate the different research methods and determine if they were applicable to answer the research question. Two methods of data collection were initially considered: content analysis and observational research. It was theorized that a content analysis would effectively analyze previous texts and could assert how defendants were treated in past studies. After further research, a content analysis was deemed an ineffective method of collecting data based on the aim of this study, which is to determine the extent to which certain attractive characteristics influence outcomes. These characteristics have not yet been looked upon in the current body of knowledge; therefore, a content analysis would be inadequate. Furthermore, evaluating these traits through in-person observations was critical as it would be impossible to evaluate the effect certain characteristics had on an outcome without physically going into the courtroom to view these features. As a result of the weaknesses presented within a content analysis, it was concluded that an observational method, which entails making specific observations within certain circumstances, would most effectively adhere to the aim of this study.

Furthermore, Frazier employed a successful observational research method as he went into the courtroom to evaluate the attractiveness of the defendants (Frazier et al., 1980). It was conceptualized that if Frazier could conduct successful observational research within the courtroom, it was possible to conduct research similarly in this study. For this reason, an observational research method would be appropriate in evaluating certain attractive characteristics, making it feasible to determine whether they exhibit a collective influence on the outcome of an arraignment.

#### 3.1 Benefits of Arraignments

For this task, arraignments were observed rather than trials as there were more benefits to observing arraignments. For starters, arraignments take a matter of minutes to complete, while a trial may take weeks, months, or sometimes longer. With this, a larger sample of data can be collected in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, arraignments are public hearings. As arraignments are conducted in public courtrooms, getting any specific approval to go into the courtroom and collect data was unnecessary. This also eliminates any privacy violation on behalf of the defendant, as all information is public information.

#### 3.2 Data Collection through Arraignments

Data was collected in a local county court, specifically, in the courtroom designated for arraignments. This local county court was only open on weekdays from 9 AM to 5 PM. Within the courtroom, a specific procedure was followed to attain observational research. First, before going into the courtroom, it was necessary to print out a checklist that encompassed the traits outlined by Frederick and Little. This checklist, shown below in Table 1, was printed before each trial day, allowing data for 10 defendants to be recorded.

Upon entering the courtroom, it was

Table 1. The image illustrates a blank checklist that would house the observations of 10 of the 30 defendants evaluated. It would be utilized within the courtroom to record both observations of the defendants' outward appearance and the outcome of the arraignment.

Defendant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Light Skin										
Small Facial Features										
Oval Face (In Women)										
Sharp Jawline (In Men)										
Symmetry										
Averageness										
Clear Skin										
Slim Body Appearance										
Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Released										
Incarceration										

crucial to find seating that allowed for optimal viewing of the defendant. Optimal viewing would entail a seat in the public seating section that would allow for observations of the defendant's face and figure to be made.

Once finding optimal seating, it was necessary to take note of the defendant’s appearance. It's crucial that this step was completed before hearing the charges made against the defendant to eliminate potential biases. All observations were made based on the criteria in the checklist and were to be recorded in the checklist under the *Defendant* section of the checklist, as shown in Table 2. Observations were recorded by checking off the boxes to account for the attractive traits the defendant possessed. If the defendant possessed traits that were contrary to the selected attractive traits shown, they would be crossed off in the checklist and categorized as an unattractive trait. For example, if the defendant possessed large facial features contrary to small facial features, an X would be added to the small facial features category. Additionally, it was possible to have neither a ✓ or X if the defendant’s traits did not fit into that criteria, as shown in Table 2. This would signify that the defendant did not possess the trait that was being evaluated, resulting in a blank in that section of the checklist.

Finally, the judge decided the outcome of the arraignment. This outcome was then recorded in the *Outcome* section of the checklist by checking off either *Released* or *Incarceration*, as evidenced in Table 2.

To obtain a sufficient amount of data, this procedure was repeated twice, creating a total of three evaluation days. On each evaluation day, 10 defendants would have their physical appearance as well as their outcome evaluated and recorded within the checklist.

Table 2. Data from the first evaluation day is illustrated. In total, 10 defendants were evaluated.

Defendant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Light Skin	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Small Facial Features	✓			✓			✓	X		✓
Oval Face (In Women)			X	✓					✓	✓
Sharp Jawline (In Men)	✓				X	X				
Symmetry	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	X		✓
Averageness	✓			✓		✓	✓	X		✓
Clear Skin	✓	X	X	X	X	✓				✓
Slim Body Appearance	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓		✓		✓
Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Released	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Incarceration						✓	✓	✓	✓	

#### 4. Results

In total, data was collected for 30 defendants, all of whom were observed within the same local county court and evaluated with the same procedure: outward appearance was evaluated by the standard of the checklist. Each participant was an offender whose arraignment was on the day observational data was collected. After observations were made, it was necessary to organize the raw data in Google Sheets to analyze the data.

When organizing data, each attractive or unattractive trait the defendant possessed equated to a value of one. If the defendants did not possess a specific trait, the trait would not receive a value and would not be included in the total added in the spreadsheet. After giving each trait a value of one, it was necessary to count the total amount of attractive and unattractive traits each defendant possessed. This data was then organized into Google Sheets, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The image shows the completed checklist containing observations made within the courtroom.

Defendant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Attractive Traits	6	0	0	6	0	5	3	2	2	6	4	6	4	5	6	2	6	6	5	6	0	5	2	2	7	5	3	2	6	5	
Unattractive Traits	1	3	3	1	4	1	1	3	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	4	1	3	3	0	2	2	1	1	2	
Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Released	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	
Incarceration	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0

From this data, whether the defendant was deemed attractive or unattractive could be concluded. For the purposes of this study, defendants were deemed attractive if they possessed more than half of the attractive traits identified by

Frederick and Little. Alternatively, the defendants who possessed less than half of the traits were deemed unattractive. This is justified as people who possess more attractive traits are usually viewed as more attractive than people who possess little to no attractive traits.

After viewing defendants over a series of days, the following data was collected and demonstrated in Figure 1: from the 30 defendants viewed, 16 were deemed attractive (53%), and 14 were deemed unattractive (47%). As shown, from the sample of attractive defendants, 12 were released on recognizance (75%), while 4 were incarcerated (25%). From the sample of unattractive defendants, 6 were released on recognizance (43%) while 8 were incarcerated (57%).

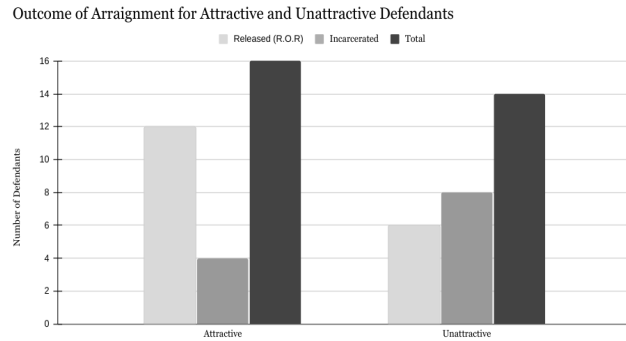


Figure 1. The image reflects the number of defendants who were deemed attractive and unattractive in correspondence with the outcome of their arraignment.

### 5. Discussion

With the data collected, it was deemed that a Chi-Square Test would be most appropriate to analyze the data. A Chi-Square Test is a method of data analysis that allows the researcher to determine whether observed data varied from expected data because of chance or because a relationship was present. This method was utilized as it identified if a causal relationship was present between defendants' outward appearance and their outcome. For this study, the Chi-Square Test was executed by creating a comparison between the observed values and the expected values. Observed values encompass the data values that are attained from the completed observational research; also known as the “raw data” of the study. Expected values are the values that are expected to be produced in the case that there is no relationship between the two variables being studied (certain attractive characteristics and the outcome of an arraignment). This allowed for the identification of a change between the observed and expected data to see if the results were coincidental or if a relationship existed. If there was a relationship present, the results signify statistical significance.

Table 4. The observed table is shown. The observed table encompasses data collected from Table 3. into organized columns and the totals from each column.

Chi-Square Test	Released	Incarcerated	Total
Attractive	12	4	16
Unattractive	6	8	14
Total	18	12	30

Once an observed table was created, an expected table, shown below as Table 5., was calculated through the values of the observed table. This table would create proportionality disregarding the categories in the observed chart, meaning what the data in the expected table would be if there were no differences between the proportion of attractive and unattractive sample sizes. This table was calculated by taking the row total from the observed data, multiplying it by the column total from the observed data, and dividing by the total number in the sample. The expected values within the chart (other than the totals) are found by multiplying the column totals by the row totals and then dividing by the complete total.

Table 5. The expected table is shown.

Chi-Square Test	Released	Incarcerated	Total
Attractive	9.6	6.4	16
Unattractive	8.4	5.6	14
Total	18	12	30

Once an observed and expected chart is produced, the values can be compared, creating a P-value. A P-value is a probability value measuring the statistical significance within data by predicting the likelihood that an event would occur. P-values below 0.05 are statistically significant, while P-values greater than 0.05 are not statistically significant, meaning no relationship is present between the two variables.

### 5.1 New Understanding

The Chi-Square Test concluded that the P-value was equal to 0.0730. As the P-value is over 0.05, the data was not statistically significant, producing the new understanding that there is no relationship between certain attractive characteristics and the outcome of an arraignment. Additionally, the P-value suggests that no detectable bias influenced the outcome, as bias would be reflective in a P-value under 0.05. As the P-value is over 0.05, it can be suggested there was no detectable bias within the judges' decision of the outcome. These findings support the null hypothesis while disproving this study's alternate hypothesis.

While data suggests that defendants are not judged based on the certain attractive characteristics looked upon in this study, the closeness to the 0.05 threshold of statistical significance suggests the possibility that those certain characteristics may actually hold weight in the courtroom. The results' closeness to the threshold of statistical significance may submit that there were confounding variables during testing that diluted the results, making them less accurate in attesting to the lack of bias within the courtroom setting. As it is nearly impossible to isolate the variable in any study, further testing may be useful to assess the true catalyst of the results. If results of future studies found there to be a relationship between the certain characteristics evaluated in this study and the outcome of the arraignment, it may denote that bias outweighs the impartiality that is meant to be regulated within the court system.

### 5.2 Implications

With the knowledge that the eight attractive traits do not influence the outcome of their arraignment, a defendant may feel more at ease in the courtroom. They can find comfort in the idea that the outcome is based on the facts of the arraignment, not the eight uncontrollable factors of their outward appearance. As the outcome of an arraignment is based on the defendant's character and how likely a defendant is to come to the next hearing, it is possible that defendants' habit of disregarding their court hearings contributes to them becoming incarcerated rather than the certain traits of their physical appearance ("A Study", 1958). Fortunately, a defendant's ability to appear at their next hearing is controllable and has been proven to have a larger influence as opposed to immutable factors of their appearance.

Additionally, the findings from this study can inform public defenders. Public defenders are the legal counsel that typically defends individuals with lower socioeconomic status who do not have the funds to defend themselves (Goldman 276). This study's findings may impact public defenders; the results can act as a point of relief for them, as well as defendants. A public defender must protect a defendant regardless of their looks. If they must defend an unattractive defendant (by the standards of this study), the public defenders can have peace of mind knowing that the eight characteristics of the defendant's appearance will not factor into the outcome. It will be understood that the arraignment's outcome will be reliant on the facts instead of factors both the public defender and the defendant cannot change.

### 5.3 Limitations

A limitation of the study was the sample size. While as much field research was conducted as possible, the arraignment courtroom was only open during the weekdays, inherently restricting the amount of data that could be collected during the school year. Although the sample size was large enough to conduct a successful Chi-Square Test, ultimately, a larger sample size would have been ideal. With a larger sample size, it is easier to see a relationship between the two variables, certain attractive characteristics, and the outcome of an arraignment, with the Chi-Square Test. Additionally, a larger sample size would be more representative of defendants as a whole as the appearance of 30 defendant's cannot possibly represent that of every other defendant who is undergoing an arraignment.

Another limitation that arose was the courtroom setting in which the study was conducted. While 30 defendants were observed, each defendant was observed within the same county courtroom. It is possible that the single courtroom setting limited the characteristics of defendants that could be observed. Specifically, if multiple courtrooms were looked upon to collect data, it is possible that a broader pool of defendants with a vast variety of traits could be observed, granting different observations and thus, results.

#### 5.4 Future Directions

While this study distinguishes itself from past studies that evaluate attractiveness holistically, future studies may investigate how a broader range of characteristics may influence an outcome. It is possible that researchers can look at the influence of “healthy-looking” hair in future studies as it has already been deemed an attractive trait (Frederick et al. 4). Furthermore, other factors, such as clothing style, the use of makeup, etc. can be tested along with the characteristics looked upon in this study. Broadening the range of characteristics studies would allow the line between attractive and unattractive to become more defined. Because of this, more research must be conducted that focuses on broadening the range of traits studied.

Although there was no statistical significance within the results, it does not make this study insignificant. This study showcases the null effect of eight attractive traits on the outcome of an arraignment. Highlighting the null effect of certain characteristics, leaves room for future research to be conducted. Inherently, this study prefaces the need for future research to expand on the horizons of the topic at hand. The execution of future research is critical and must focus on evaluating the influence of a broader range of characteristics, a larger sample size, and multiple courtroom settings. This is necessary as it is critical to further investigate the decision of the judge as it is imperative to ensure every defendant receives the fair treatment they are entitled to.

#### Acknowledgment

I would like to impart my gratitude to my high school law teacher, Daniel Bachman, for teaching me the intricacies of the legal system whilst also acting as a supportive and guiding force throughout the research process and my high school career. Additionally, I would like to extend my appreciation to my advisor, Jennifer Tucker for her consistency in aiding me in my research endeavors and teaching me how to conduct my own research.

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