

FILM REVIEW: *The Ugly Truth*

by Earl P. Holt III

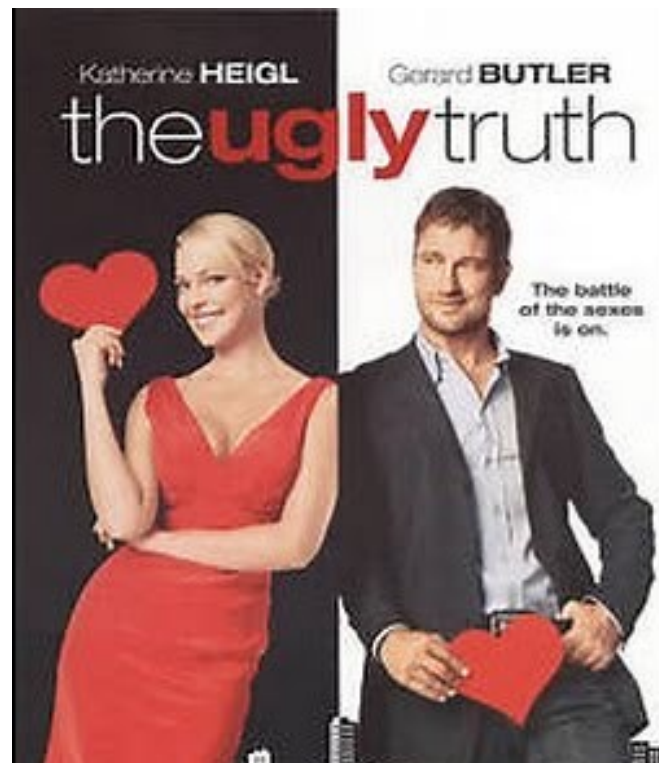
(WARNING: Prior to reviewing this film, I must have watched an edited version where its crude and vulgar language was removed. I have since watched the full version, and was surprised at its vulgarity and crudity. I'm not saying it wasn't funny, I'm just alerting those are offended by VERY STRONG language that this may not be your kind of film.)

While even the conservative news media tediously speculated about the June 27th presidential debate in advance -- and then regurgitated many of the same points afterward -- I took Rush Limbaugh's advice and enjoyed a *sabbatical* from the news. I watched several films, and came across one of the funniest and more entertaining romantic comedies I've yet found, *The Ugly Truth* (2009.)

The title is a reference to male/female relationships, and interpreting its meaning is probably much like a *Rorschach Test*, with an infinite and subjective variety of possibilities. One that was clearly evident in the film is that **the image we initially project to the opposite sex is rarely that of our true selves, so both parties are always at a disadvantage upon first meeting.** I will suggest several other interpretations, later.

Abby Richter (Katherine Heigl) is an obsessive woman who produces a morning news show at KXP in Sacramento that has experienced declining viewership. Concerned with the show's low ratings and its likely cancellation, her Station Manager -- who has *"two daughters in college and a son in Beauty School"* -- hires a controversial *on-air* personality named **Mike Chadway** (Gerard Butler,) whose local cable-access show draws large audiences of men *and* women. Mike is quite popular because he is unfiltered and defiantly cynical on the subject of

romantic relationships. He fully embraces an image that brittle feminists would call that of *"a misogynistic and chauvinistic male pig."*



Abby had already been exposed to Mike before he was hired at KSXP, because the previous night, her cat had inadvertently stepped on her remote and summoned his cable-access show, *"The Ugly Truth."* As an avid reader of books like *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, Abby was so offended by Mike's commentary on his show that she called his show to set him straight about love and romance. Mike had the better of their argument because he managed to get her to concede the fact that she lives alone and has no current boyfriend, nor any prospect of one. (As J.D. Vance would describe her, she is *"a childless cat-lady."*) In his own, unique way, he then ended the conversation by telling her that she must be ugly.



Mike Chadway's Cable-Access Show

The following morning, Abby is appalled to find that Mike Chadway has already been hired to make two appearances per week on her morning news show. When Abby is introduced to Mike as his Producer, he remarks that ***"I like a woman on top."*** Naturally, the two immediately clash when they begin working together. Mike lords it over Abby by reminding her that he is the ***"talent"*** who's been chosen to save her job, and that she should try to keep him happy rather than insult him. To this she responds that the cable audience he brings to KXP ***"consists of men with their hands so far down their pants they can't even work the remote."*** That was a hilarious zinger, and one beautifully delivered.

Mike's *alpha male* testosterone quickly comes to dominate the show and dramatically raise its viewership. In the second show, he summons the mobile cameraman to follow him to a remote corner of the station where two nubile young women in bikinis are lustfully engaged in ***Jell-O wrestling*** inside a child's inflatable wading pool. Abby is once again

mortified by Mike's antics, but recognizing the importance of viewership, after he is dragged into the pool by the two girls, Abby tells him through his ear-piece to lick the *Jell-O* off their fingers. He obliges by doing so in a very suggestive and erotic manner.



First Day at KSXP

At this point in the film Abby betrays a hint of jealousy when she rebukes Mike for crassly introducing *Jell-O wrestling* to the morning news at KSXP. It becomes subtly apparent to the audience that Abby might be somewhat jealous of the mutual attraction between Mike and the two *Jell-O wrestlers*, who she derisively calls the "***Jell-O Twins.***" Later in the film, she even accuses him of sleeping with both of them, to which he replies, "***Not true: I only slept with the one who can read.***" This was another beautifully delivered *zinger* that was accompanied by a look of aggrieved innocence and pained sensibilities on Mike's part.

As an actress, Katherine Heigl has mastered the dry, often sarcastic wit that made her a star in other *Rom-Coms* (romantic comedies.) Thus, she and Gerard Butler are absolutely hilarious, together. I had never seen

Butler in a comedic role before this, but they both proved to be consummate actors and skilled comedians, with their excellent comedic timing and the crispness with which they delivered *zingers*. Their chemistry was perfect. Unfortunately, this made the ending somewhat predictable.



"Chemistry"

One alternative interpretation of "*the ugly truth*" is that men can read other men better than women, and women can read other women better than men, a fact that invariably puts both genders at a disadvantage from the start. A third interpretation might be that the characteristics we initially seek in the opposite sex can become casualties of the "*chemistry*" that may spontaneously and unpredictably evolve between men and women.

Naturally, the film was panned by what passes for film criticism in this day and age, probably because there were no sightings of *Bigfoot* or *zombies*, and it featured no NAZI bad guys. Hell, there weren't even any

high-speed car-chases! Of course, the film was a significant commercial success among normal people who experience life outside the internet and their smart phones, and who still possess a sense of humor. It cost \$38 Million to produce, but grossed \$205 Million.

This film is not *Casablanca*, but it *IS* light entertainment and funny. It is also appealing because it doesn't allow feminism or any other *isms* to intrude on its successful, romantic comedy formula.