

Assessing Gluteal Hardness in Uniformed Security Guards

by Peter Freunlich
The Peter Freunlich Institute
New York City, New York

Photographs by S. Drew, AIR staff

There is something that will almost certainly happen to you at some point in your life, if it hasn't happened repeatedly already: You will be engaged in what seems to you to be an entirely innocent and unobjectionable activity when you feel a tap on your shoulder. Turning toward the tap, you will find yourself facing a Uniformed Private Security Guard (UPSG), who will inevitably say one of two things -- either "Do you have permission to do that?" or "You can't do that here."

The author of this study has often been an object of intense study by Uniformed Private Security Guards. In response, he has spent much time in turn studying them and their behavior. Here is the fruit of that study. Read it, and you will have a clear understanding of the concept of Gluteal Hardness.

Private Parts of Behavior

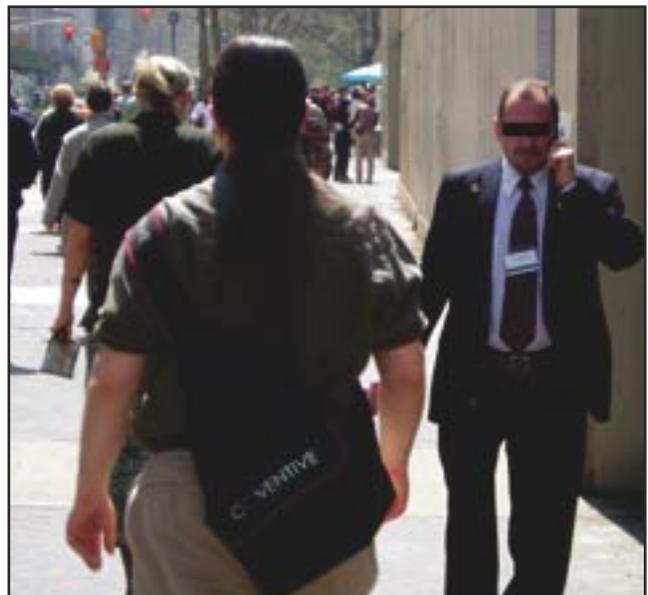
If in the course of doing whatever it is you are doing, you are approached not by a police officer but by a UPSG, then you are not, as you may have thought you were, on public but on private property, and this is a critical difference, because on public property you are up against the law, which is hard and fast and applies equally to everyone.

whereas on private property you're up against not the law but "rules." Many spaces that may seem public (and are sometimes for that reason in fact called "quasi-public") -- plazas, atriums, outdoor cafes, areas adjacent to the sidewalk, walkways leading to lobbies -- are in fact controlled by institutions, corporations, landlords, universities, and so forth. The police enforce the law, as we've said, but they have no interest in corporate and institutional "rules." This is where private security forces -- and the tap on the shoulder -- come in.

Let's stipulate, as the lawyers say, that there is no point arguing against "the rules." For one thing, you don't know what they are. They have been propounded by shareholders, board members, alumni, executive vice presidential conference committees, and cabals of maintenance and security men, and are published -- if published at all -- in employee policy handbooks unavailable to you (and unread by those to whom they are available). In sum, the rules are what "they" say they are -- and there you are. But -- and this is the nub of the current study -- not all uniformed security guards are equally inclined to make an issue of these so-called rules. Far from it. This being the case, what you need to be able to do is to quickly assess the degree to which an individual UPSG will be inclined to get in your face.

Luckily, this is not as daunting as it seems. In fact, it's rather simple. I herewith offer you the fruits of my long experience in the area of gauging GH (Gluteal Hardness) in security guards.

Just follow these few straightforward guidelines, and you will quickly be able to tell whether or not a particular UPSG is inclined to make trouble, or to "let it slide, this one time, if you don't do it again."



Security guards in New York City.



Guidelines

GENDER. Women are relative newcomers to the private security game and so (as is true in many other walks of life) many of them still have something to prove. This results in a very high GH rating. All other things being equal, you are much better off tangling with a male than with a female security guard.

AGE. By and large, the younger, the better, for the purposes under discussion. Younger men are “only doing this for the summer,” or for “a hoot.” They tend to get a kick out of almost being taken seriously, and security work is a step up from mending bicycle tires. The older the guard, however, the more likely the work is a step down -- from the police force (twenty years on the psycho-bunko squad) or, worse yet, the military (two tours in ‘Nam, and a couple of decades of rehab). These are guys who have known real power, and are in no mood to take crap from the likes of you. (Just for definitional purposes, “crap” is anything you open your mouth to say.)

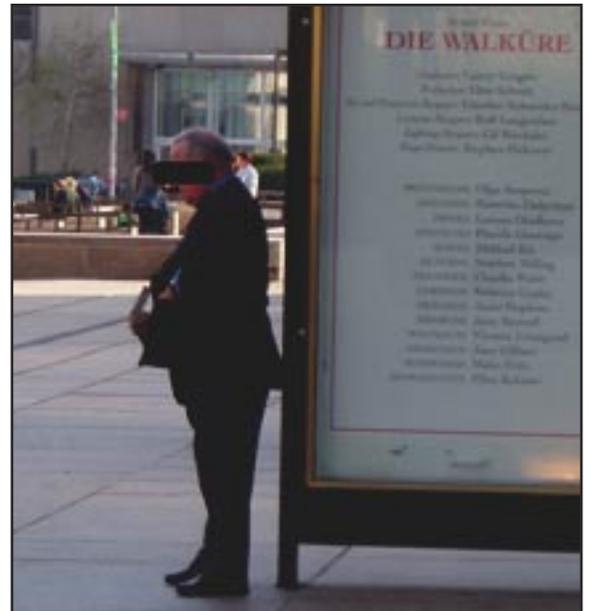
DEGREE OF UNIFORM (General). A guard wearing the full kit -- hat, jacket, shirt and tie, matching slacks, and company-issue shoes -- has the highest GH rating, and is almost guaranteed to get in your face. The more complete the formality, in other words, the greater the problem.

DEGREE OF UNIFORM (Specific). Interestingly enough, the removal of the hat makes no difference whatever to the GH rating, although the removal of the jacket does. A further easing of Gluteal Hardness has

been documented when the hat, jacket and tie all are dispensed with. Now you have a SSPSG (Shirt-sleeved Private Security Guard), who is likely to be amenable to joshing, sweet-talk, and other forms of hail-fellow-well-met badinage. Bear in mind, however, that an SSPSG with embroidered patches on his sleeves and a walkie-talkie clipped to his shirt above the breast pocket is in fact a FUPSG (Fully Uniformed Private Security Guard) in disguise. Do not attempt badinage at all with a crypto-FUPSG.

HAIR. Less hair, higher GH, from shave-pates (bald women are 2.3 times as bad as bald men) to buzz, brush, and crewcuts, to “normal-length,” mullet, and pony-tailed. If ever you run into a security guard with a blue Mohawk, deal with him as you would deal with a golden retriever: Throw him a treat and then ignore him.

WIDTH OF BELT. If you are in a sticky situation and do not have time for a full assessment of a guard’s trouble-making propensities, this is the single best detail on which to concentrate. Anything noticeably wider than the average dress belt (about an inch, give or take) is a sign of what may be extreme GH, regardless of how the guard in question scores in any of the other areas covered above. Belts that are three, four and five inches wide suggest past careers in areas (law enforcement, the armed forces, piano moving, professional wrestling) you are almost certainly not equipped to deal with. Also be aware that a belt of an otherwise acceptable width, when fitted with a bizarre outsized buckle advertising some sort of institutional allegiance, is as much a warning sign as a garrison or weight-lifter’s belt.





BELT ACCOUTREMENTS. The number of things hanging from a guard's belt is directly proportionate to his inclination to enforce the rules. For one thing, you can't hang much from a normal-width belt (see above for a discussion of belt-width.) For another thing, as trappings are added to the belt (two-way radio; Leatherman tool; flashlight the size of a Genoa salami; large, menacing but entirely mysterious rubberized articles; spray cans in customized holsters; Magic Marker tricked out to look like a truncheon; spiral-bound stainless-steel notebook), the guard's comfort and walk both are affected, and an uncomfortable UPSG with a bowlegged John Wayne gait is always more trouble than one who is comfortable and light footed. Also,

since the accoutrements are largely the guard's own idea, they provide a very clear indication of how he sees the scope and importance of his duties. When the waistband itself is hardly visible anymore under the gizmos hanging from and clipped to it -- when, in other words, it amounts to a facsimile of Batman's belt of wonders -- then you are dealing with a man who feels called upon to be ready for an enemy invasion, much less some puny rule-bender like yourself. Imagine a fully-armed big game hunter, frustrated in his attempt to bag an elephant, suddenly bothered by a bug. He is going to be vicious to that bug. In this circumstance, you are the bug.

Summary

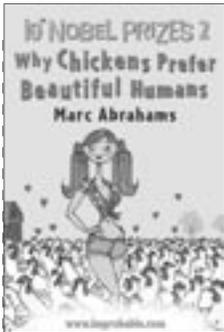
Gluteal Hardness is simple to gauge, at least in security guards. The parameters of interest are: gender; age; fullness of uniform; visibility of scalp; and belt-width and -trappings. The values of these parameters reliably distinguish a guard who is basically strolling over to say hello in case his supervisor is watching from a guard who'd shoot you if he could.

A security guard at Nottingham Trent University engages Ig Nobel Prize winner Pek Van Anel in a discussion about some mysterious objects. Moments earlier, Dr. Van Anel had wandered into the office, handed the objects to the guard, and asked "Good sir, do you happen to know what these are?" Dr. Van Anel and several other Ig Nobel winners were visiting the university as part of the 2005 Ig Nobel Tour of the UK, in celebration of the UK's National Science Week. The objects, it turned out, were dried bull penises.





Millionaire J.P. Morgan and security guards. 1903. Photo: Library of Congress.



The Ig Nobel Books!

Why Chickens Prefer Beautiful Humans, by Marc Abrahams, Orion Books, London

The Ig Nobel Prizes, by Marc Abrahams

[U.S. edition] Plume, New York

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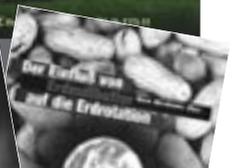
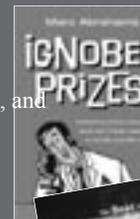
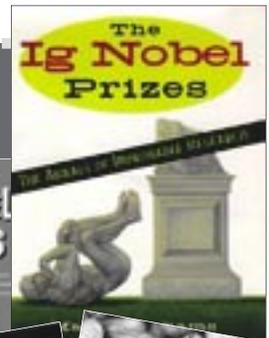
The Best of *Annals of Improbable Research*, Marc Abrahams (ed.), W.H. Freeman

The Best of *Annals of Improbable Research*, Chinese edition, Shanghai Scientific and Technological Education Publishing House

Der Einfluss von Erdnussbutter auf die Erdrotation, Marc Abrahams (ed.), Birkhäuser.

La scienza impossibile—Il meglio degli <<Improbable Research>>, Marc Abrahams (ed.), Garzanti

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