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In this proposal, I am going to be looking at how people represent themselves and how people fake this to make themselves look perfect. Social media has become a big part of the modern world, and is the main way that people show their lives to the world. The problem with this is that it is hard to tell when people are being genuine and showing their true selves or are just following the trends of the time. I'll also be looking at identity and how photographers use their work to show and express identity. My three chosen key words/phrases, link to each other as they all link to you as a person and how you present yourself.

First Keyword: Fake-Reality

Photography was once seen as showing the truth/reality, but over time this view has changed as artists have used this form of art to show their creative thinking. Many artists use real-life experiences to influence their artwork, but some create their own stories and create a fake reality. One artist that has used both 'concepts' is photographer Stefanie Moshhammer with her project called 'I can be her'. The project was a response to a love letter she received from a man she met once after he turned

up to her house. This project combined both reality and a fake reality that was promised to her.

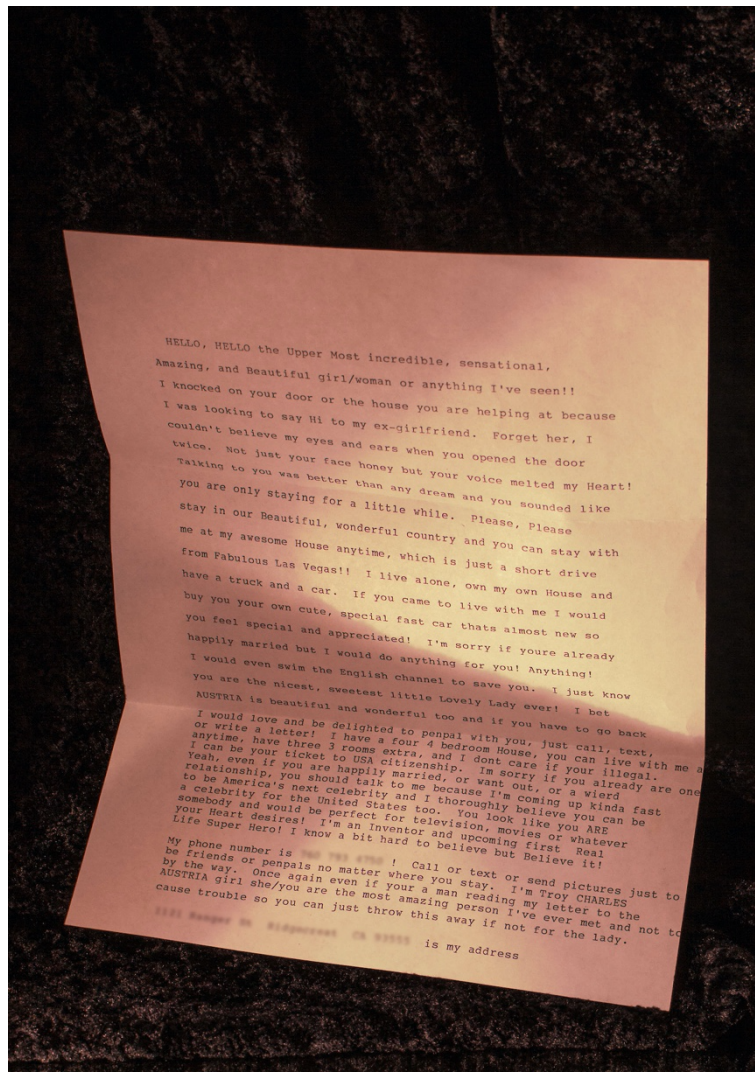


Fig. 1

Figure 1 show is the letter that Moshammer received telling her that she could have the perfect American life is she dated this man. Moshammer uses contrasting photos to show reality and the true American life that she could have (which many immigrants are promised), showing that what this man promised would not become true. Moshammer is a Austrian immigrant who moved to Las Vegas, she saw this letter as an opportunity to show 'American culture and men's idea of how to pursue women'(Phillips, 2018), this statement is prevalent when looking at the photos in this project. When looking at the collection of photos, you are able to split the images into

groups, one that is a collective of the 'American Dream' life, and the rest into a 'Reality' group, showing a clear difference between the two.

The problem with creating a fake reality is that sometimes it can cross a line from being creative to being cultural appropriation, artist Nikki S. Lee can be one of these people.



Fig. 2

When Lee's photos were originally released, Lee was praised of these photos as it was seen as she wasn't trying to trick these people that she belonged to their culture, instead showing different cultural group, but in the past couple of years people have started to realise that there are some problems with these pieces of work (Vogel, 2020). As the times have changed, people view on what is Cultural appropriation or not has changed drastically, if these photos were released today, there would be problems with them, such as blackface. Both figure 1 and 2 subjects revolve around fake reality and identity, with both women involved being foreran to America, which is

where both projects take place, they can both be seen as an outside view of the many lifestyles in America.

The difference between these two pieces of work, is that Moshhammer's view is based on the letter and then the world of America around her making a contest between both concepts, whereas Lee's projects just seem like she is trying to fit into a community that she doesn't belong to. The problem with creating a fake reality the way Lee has is that you are going to get a strong divide between people that think its ok and people that think she should have not created these piece of work as she is not part of their society. Lee's photos can also be connected to my next keyword 'Self-representation' as she is representing herself in this fake reality, she has created by using herself in the photos and not someone from the social or cultural group. 'Portraits do not lead viewers to an encounter with the facts about the person in the photo but rather towards a funhouse mirror that cannot be trusted for veracity despite how hard one might look' (Haggerty Museum of Art, 2011) is a good way of putting that you shouldn't fully trust a photo of someone as its never showing a true image. in recent years, unless it is blatantly obvious that an image is fake or not.

Second Keyword: Self-Representation

With the rise of social media, people have been representing themselves the way they want to be seen. 'The selfie ... is perhaps the most conspicuous, notorious, and debated type of social photography' (Jurgenson, 2019, p.g. 54), you can't scroll through multiple social media apps without seeing people selfies. These have become that main way people show themselves on social media. Even some professional photographers have started to use social media as their main platform for showing

their work and have started to use the more unprofessional form of a selfie instead of the cleaner look of a professional self-portrait to present themselves.

Many artists have used these platforms to show their work, and a couple of these have based their work of how social media works and how it has changed the way people show themselves. Artist Molly Soda uses the concept of things such as her desktop for her artwork, which she utilised in her *Me and My Gurls* Exhibition at *Annka Kultys Gallery*.



Fig. 3

In this piece of artwork, Soda created a desktop-esk instillation, transforming the white gallery space into a more personal look into Sodas life (Annka Kultys Gallery, 2018). With this instillation, Soda is opening-up a part of her world to the public, showing a part of herself the way that she wants to. The way that the work is also instilled also gives of the look of a desktop with the grid format. Soda also has many other pieces of artwork that follow the desktop theme and many other app themes such as iMovie.

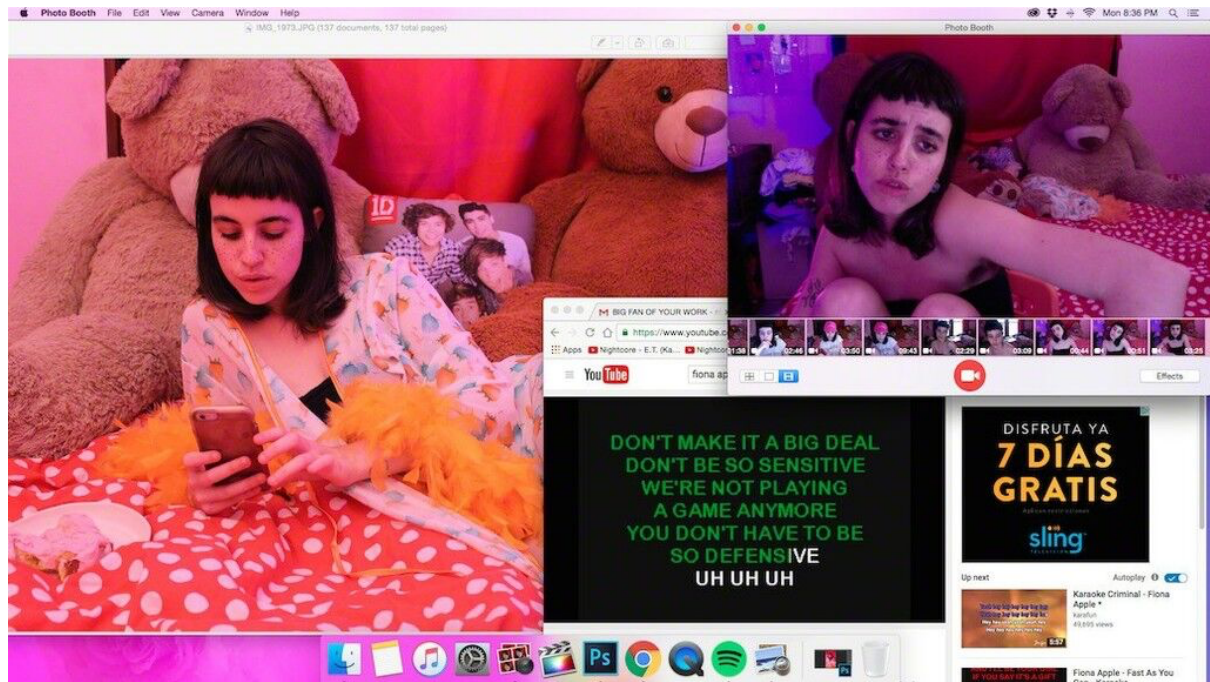


Fig. 4

This image (Figure 4) has more of a recognisable layout to everyone, with multiple windows open on the screen. Soda is showing even more of herself with being able to see into her living space with the two photos of herself and having a glimpse into her music taste with the YouTube website open on a song lyric video open. These two images (figure 3 and 4) show that Soda is not afraid of showing her true self and is comfortable with opening up her world to the audience.

Another artist that has used social media, and the effects that social media has made to people's appearances is Cindy Sherman, who for the past couple of years has been posting images on Instagram that are self-portraits that have been drastically edited, making it look like she has used filters over the images.



Fig. 5

Figure 5 is one of Sherman's photos that stand out to me the most as she has edited many of her facial features to fit in with the high beauty standards that are in mainstream media. The images that Sherman creates drastically change the way she looks, which many people do in real life, these follow what are seen as beauty in the western world mainly. With these images, they can also relate to fake-reality as Sherman is creating something that does not exist in real life and is creating a false image, but you are easily able to see that they are not real, unlike some others on social media.

With self-representation, you are showing yourself the way you want to be seen by the world, even if that means that you only show one side to yourself. This can also relate to fake-reality as there have been many cases of people creating a fake-reality in the way that they present themselves. Both figures are examples of self-representation but in different ways. Sogas is more of a personal, honest way of showing herself, not hiding anything, and Shermans way show more of a dishonest way of self-representation, highly edited and filtered, showing one side of themselves, which connects to fake reality as it is showing something that is not real. Overall people are going to show themselves the way they want to no matter what people say, even if that means lying to people.

Third Keyword: Identity

Identity is an integral part to being ourselves and is individual to each person. Many artists use the concept of identity in their artwork; with photographers mainly producing portraits to portray their identity. 'The Self – that feeling that you are you and not someone else'(Jurgenson, 2019, p.g. 54) is something that Nathan Jurgenson talks about in their book *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media*, this can be connected to identity, 'Every individual has a self, yet no two selves are the same'(Talaifar and Swann, 2018) meaning that everyone is individual. Cultural identity is also a subject that artists show in their artwork as these aspects are important to people and can show their family history which many people identify with.



Fig. 6

Zanelle Muholi is a South Africa activist and has been taking self-portraits and portraits of the LGBTQ+ community of South Africa, who Muholi saw as participants instead of subjects (Ali, 2020). Many of their photos are very striking and don't hide anything from the viewer, they are eye opening for anyone that is not part of the subject community. Showing your identity through photography can be a very personal subject as you are

opening yourself to the world, showing your 'self'. Muholi's work also can address cultural identity as they the subjects are a part of the South African LGBTQ+ community (Ali, 2020).

Cultural identity is probably the easiest part of your identity to show, as visually you can represent it quite easily. This can be connected to Nikki S. Lee's work that was shown previously in this essay with Figure 2, but instead of showing their own personal cultural identity, they are showing others and slightly becoming a part of it by making themselves look like them to fit in. Lee's work connects more to the social self,' The social self refers to the various selves one may express and others may recognize depending on the social setting'(Talaifar and Swann, 2018), seeing as she changes the way she looks depending on what social or cultural group she is working with. This means that someones identity many change depending on who they are around as they then may relate more to their surroundings.



Fig. 7

Figure 7 shows a self-portrait of photographer Tiffany Smith, structured with objects that signify the Caribbean culture. She also aimed to explore cultural identity that formed in multinational America. With these photos, Smith is showing the cultural identity she has as the first generation in her family to live outside the Caribbean (Larsen, 2019). The images feel more true compared to Nikki S. Lees photos, as the references in the photos are coming from what she saw growing up as multicultural.

Identity can be a hard subject to understand when looking at a photo representing it, as some aspects maybe unfamiliar to the viewer, but can be explained with simple pointers and clues in images. The subject of identity can be related to both fake reality and self-representation, as people are able to create a fake identity, such as Nikki S. Lee, where through creating the multiple projects where she adopts distinctive ethnical features, creates fake identities for each one. People are able to show their identity through the way they represent themselves, you are able to show what make you, you. Molly Soda shows little aspects of herself through her artwork, ranging from little images from her desktop, to seeing inside her living space. Through little clues like these you are able to construct a little image of who Molly Soda is and what her identity is like.

With these three key phrases, they all link together in a specific way when talking about how people present themselves online, how people show their identity. More key phrases were produced from looking at the three one that I chose, such as Cultural Identity, and how people present themselves. The questions 'Why do people present themselves the way they do?', 'why do people lie about themselves?' and 'Why do people lie about their identity online?' are the main ones that come out from doing this research with the main question for the extended writing coming out to be 'Why do people present themselves in a certain way, even if they are lying, and what affect does this have on the photography community?', but many of the question previously stated will also be answered within the document. Throughout the essay there is a running theme of how people see themselves as a person, how they want the world to see them. The questions stated will help me arrive to an answer and help me understand why people feel the need to lie about themselves to make them seem like

a better and more likeable person, someone that fits the beauty standards of today society. Why do people feel the need to edit the way they look just to fit into the 'norm'? My extended writing next year will hopefully cover subjects I talked about in this essay and expand on them to hopefully uncover more examples of artists using their work to show their 'true' selves.

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