

Beauty, Manipulation and Perception.

Student Name: Adonia Williams

P Number: 1800970

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Tutor: Paul Duerinckx

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Beauty, Manipulation & Perception

Context

The context of this writing is to investigate three keywords supported by visual artists as well as statistics and research. After researching the keywords this investigation will explore the relationship between the three words of beauty, manipulation and perception to form a question that will be explored for a dissertation essay. General characteristics of connections that are shared by both formal and material connections (Losoncx, M, 2019). The keywords will relate to photographers including Evija Laivina (Beauty), Jessica Ledwich (Beauty) and Esther Honig (Perception). In addition, authors will be incorporated such as John Berger (Manipulation) and Nicholas Mirzoeff (Perception).

Beauty

Over the years the concept of beauty has been distorted and 'with images of ideal beauty bombarding us daily' (Bradley University, 2020) society is forced to make a decision on whether they are going to strive to achieve the new expected standards presented. Celebrities and social media are the two main sources in which the ideal beauty standards are demonstrated. The public have lost trust in the media (New York Times, 2015). This is due to fake news being presented amongst press releases in which inaccurate or dramatized facts are being released. The image that is being presented on social media or in the newspaper is not an accurate representation of that person as many images are edited to exaggerate parts and suppress parts that are not condemned as perfect. In addition, many of the unrealistic standards that celebrities achieve are created through plastic surgery which can imply to look beautiful you must have money to fix the mistakes on your body. According to The Aesthetic Society (2019) statistics confirm that in 2018 buttock augmentation which was previously thought as a momentary trend has increased by 61%

and labiaplasty has increased by 53% in the past five years. Not only is plastic surgery increasing each year, more and more millions of pounds are being invested into these procedures. In the 1990's, there was an impression that 'beauty practices could be socially transformative' (Jefferys, 2005, p.1) which is still relevant today's society as people battle to have more likes and viewers than others. Every person has the right to proceed to have surgical enhancements, but it should be for the benefit of their own mentality and vision of their body and not to conform with the impractical standards delivered by society.



Fig. 1

Evija Laivina body of work 'Beauty Warriors' feature peculiar beauty products that ensure instant treatments to any beauty problems without need for surgical intervention. As many members of society cannot afford to pay for surgical procedures to change what they believe is imperfect, they resort to cheap alternatives. Evija Laivina (2017) explains society's rules are set to make them look flawless which will ultimately lead them to success. Unfortunately, members of society neglect the thought that 'beauty is not just a visual experience' (Corbett. J 2008) and that features such as personality can be thought of as a portion of beauty. Laivina's photographs are very disturbing as the tools look extremely uncomfortable to use which would emphasise to the viewer the severity

of the change's women are prepared to make. Additionally, the models in the photographs look miserable however this is the reality society is taught, that pain is beauty. Women not only face pressure from other women through social media, they also receive stress when trying to identify a partner or to maintain a relationship with the male gender. Research (Townsend, J. & Wasserman, T,1997, p.243) shows that men focus on women's physical attributes more than any other. By having curvaceous hips and breasts it increases interest of males as they find these indications of fertility.



Fig. 2

Jessica Ledwich is another example of a photographer who mainly investigates the way in which women's gender is constructed and the idealized view of women in the project titled 'Monstrous Feminine'. Jessica Ledwich aims to challenge what rituals women have normalised as regular tasks for example, being well- groomed or having painted nails. Ledwich aspires to do this by displaying the tasks in an extreme light to implicate how these increasingly standardised treatments were once deemed excessive. Additionally, Jessica Ledwich examines the rituals and processes women engross with in order to maintain their hunt of perfection without having to deal with natural body changes. The pressure on women is not just based on the younger

generation as there is a fear adjoining the idea of ageing. This could be due to the association between death and the changes that happen with ageing skin. In addition, anti- wrinkle creams are inappropriately being advertised for the younger generation to preserve these signs when this is an issue that should not be brought to the attention of the younger generation. According to Kilkenny (2017) an American make-up magazine was taking action in banning the word ‘anti-aging’ as it reinforces the notion that aging is a condition that women need to confront. There is enough stigma around having the perfect body without having to be concerned about the future and the natural adaptation the body forms. The aim of this change was to persuade other companies to follow the movement and stimulate a more encouraging language towards ageing.

Manipulation

“Controls or influences somebody/something, often in a dishonest way so that they do not realize it” – Oxford Learners Dictionary

As James Caunt explains in an article posted on Bored Panda, the media is the main cause of manipulation and has a negative atmosphere towards it does not present accurate information on subjects. Their only agenda is to advance, and it does not matter whether deception is used. Many celebrities have stepped forward to say how their photographs have been so edited that it does not reflect their true form. An article by Lucy Yang (2019) reveals the ways in which celebrities have stated that some of their photographs were ‘heavily’ edited. The edited images can have a heavy impact of the mental health of that individual and can influence them to believe that this is an image they are expected to live up too. However, the media industry corrects the pictures to what they believe the trend of the ideal body is at that current time and what will make the images sell without imagining the devastating impact on both celebrities and viewers.



Fig. 3

Kelsey Higley's looped video demonstrates the unreachable idealizations of beauty, and by using herself as the model it depicts inner conflicts that she has of what true beauty and features that make her feel self-conscious is in a short period of time. The opinion of the perfect body has drastically developed and changed throughout the years with the aid of the media and growing societies, yet all body ideals are contradictive. The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe (Berger, 1972).The manipulation from the media leaves members of society in a constant battle between whether they should accept themselves for who they are or follow 'social norms' that are being depicted to fit in. However, what does not appear in the media is the pressure celebrities themselves face on their appearance, for example in the area of modelling careers. Ralph Lauren is a company that published an image in 2009 of a model named Filippa Hamilton that was highly disapproved off as they digitally retouched her body to unrealistically slim her. The image instigated the idea that this was a healthy body and an article by Belfast Telegraph (2009) explains that the model's contract was not renewed as thy believed she was "too large". This could have contributed to the development of eating disorders as the model was a healthy weight before the edited image. As explained by Forgács (2018) eating disorders became more apparent in the 20th century due to 'sociocultural changes' and eating habits are influenced by marketing on media. The pressure from large companies to obtain an unnatural weight that can only be achieve through editing could give the impression to other models that to pursue and

achieve a respectable career in modelling they would need to be extremely 'skinny'. After this incident the French Public Health Code legislated a law in October of 2017 that photographs that had had altered a model's figure to appear slimmer or thicker would need a label with the words "photographie retouchée". Following this legislation Getty Images responded by stating that any images that had retouching of a body shape would be banned. However, these legislations and bans only cover body altering edits instead of any editing of an image which is still exposing to the younger generation to the concept that we should be altering what is still be allowed to be edited in images.

Perception

Perception is that way in which a piece of information is interpreted and can often have a close association to manipulation. Over the past few years society has become more perceptive to believing fake news that it displayed on social media. According to Douglas LaBier (2016) believing fake news is due to reading the inaccurate information and not evaluating whether the source is reliable. For example, Facebook plays a major part in perception as people tend to believe conspiracy theories that are displayed are correct before researching to find out more information. An example of this from Schrarer and Lawrie (2020) is a conspiracy theory that 5G equipment is aiding the transmit of the coronavirus and society is sharing this theory across multiple platforms. This conspiracy is biologically impossible, yet even with information to explain how the theory is false it has continued to escalate and is still be shared across social media. As clarified by Nicholas Mirzoeff (2015, p.150) people spend at least 5 hours online each day which leads to the conclusion that an increase number of misinformed articles will be shared amongst the media platforms. In relation to the cosmetic industry, perception can often be evident as well as manipulation. For instance, with makeup artists that own their own brand of

cosmetics such as Jeffree Star can be perceived as many individuals look up to his personality because of his fame. In relation to this make-up can affect the individuals perceived age and attractiveness. An experiment carried out by Age Discrimination in 2018 discovered that make up applied to women over 50 years old were perceived to be at least 1.5 years younger whereas women in their 20's made them appear 1.4 years older. This effect occurs as make-up focuses on areas such as the smoothness of the skin, sculpture of the face and feature sizes. This perception can be transferred into photography and how editing software can change the view of reality.



Fig. 3

The above images were created by numerous retouch artists after Esther Honig sent an unedited image of herself with the instructions “make me beautiful”. The perception of female beauty can vary from culture to culture. For example, in America tan skin is considered as beautiful whereas in Asia a creamy complexion is more appealing. In addition, Japanese women tend to protect their skin from the sun in order to maintain fair skin as paler skin is seen to be associated with youthfulness. As advertisements on media platform mainly promote bronzed complexions, communities tend to forget that this may not be trending in other areas of the world. After researching the different cultures and the idea of beauty a concept that linked each one together was that many of the cultures were stereotyped to have an appearance that did not appear

naturally and the stereotype that is perceived much have worked on achieving those standards as well. Furthermore, media can expose celebrities and the way in which society perceives them for example, many unposed photographs of celebrities on the beach have led to the celebrity being body-shamed on social media whereas a posed celebrity on the beach has been described to be beautiful. In addition, body shaming has no limits and has only in recent years been brought to light, shaming could be from looking too skinny, 'pregnancy rumours, comments about weight gain, and bullying for clothing choices' (Jeunesse, 2018). This pressure on celebrities can impact them severely as it would put them on edge to maintain a flawless look as they are constantly in the public eye due to the paparazzi. It could impact their mental health as this type of body-shaming can contribute to an increase in body dysmorphic disorders.

After examining the three keywords there is a clear correlation that each have become a prominent feature in today's society. Beauty and photography evidently have always been related throughout the years however, through technology and social media it has only heightened this link. As a result, social media platforms have become a prominent part of daily lives which has elevated manipulation. For example, any person's appearance can be idealized to such an extent to give the impression that the only way of achieving this look would be to change whether that means through dieting or cosmetic surgery. Manipulation shares similarities/effects perception which can and has revolutionised beauty and photography. Many artists are trying to expose the beauty regimes society has perceived to be a normal daily task and are successfully gaining the attention of women. It allows women to recognize the strain they put their bodies just from the manipulation of social media. Therefore, a question that will be further explored based on the three keywords is 'How have women exposed and taken control of the industries perception of beauty standards?'.

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