

Beauty Demands: the changing requirements of beauty
AHRC funded project (Jan 2015 – Jun 2016)

Workshop 1: Changing understandings of body Image
4th & 5th March 2015, University of Warwick



The Beauty Demands Project

The Beauty Demands project aims to bring scholars, practitioners, policy-makers together to consider the changing requirements of beauty. It is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, & aims to build a network of individuals, research groups, & centres of those working on the topic. The assumption of the network is that beauty image is becoming ever more demanding & defining of women, & increasingly men, irrespective of their professions. The project will ask whether this is the case, & how this norm is constituted & how it impacts upon women. It will also ask whether the dominant beauty norm is increasingly a global beauty norm, & thus open to less cultural & sub-cultural resistance. The project is especially concerned with role of technology in this. In particular, that procedures which were once regarded as ‘exceptional’ such as the use of surgery, are now regarded as ‘normal’ or even ‘required’ in certain contexts.

The most important ‘deliverable’ of the project is the network & the discussion which we hope to engender. There are also more traditional outputs, including papers & journal special issues, & policy briefing documents. The network is gradually growing & network members are encouraged to post on the blog & to begin debates & to follow up the posts of others. The type of blog posts we welcome from all network members are:

- Blogs which raise or comment on topic issues related to beauty
- Blogs which provide ‘case commentaries’ on topical issues – these can be on legal judgements or simply on cases in discussion in the media
- Blogs which report on research; including, posts which summarise a recent publication, posts which report on on-going research of an individual or a group; or posts which give an account of a recent or forthcoming workshop or conference
- Blogs which provide summaries of public events & debates in this area

Day 1

Introduction

Heather Widdows & Fiona MacCallum

The BeautyDemands project was introduced. Including the aims of the network & the workshop & on-going & future work in terms of the blog & social media as well as more traditional outputs of papers, special issues &/or edited collections & policy briefing papers.

The aims of Workshop 1 were introduced, as well as the format & expectations of the workshop.

Paper 1

Clare Chambers (CC) 'Beauty, Normality, & Choice'

Abstract: Beauty practices are sometimes understood as the free choice of the woman who engages in them, perhaps part of her creativity or bodily autonomy. At the same time, a woman may undertake beauty practices so as to feel normal: to fit in to standards that, supposedly, all women should be able to meet. In this talk I use the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Germaine Greer, Sandra Bartky & Naomi Wolf, as well as examples from advertising & the media, to examine the way that beauty practices are both normatively required & yet interpreted as chosen.

(Presentation retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

This talk set out much of the philosophical debate on beauty & beauty norms – further & more detailed discussion can be found in CC's 2008 book, *Sex Culture & Justice*.

Q&A

The extent to which this is an issue for 'rich' women only was discussed. Broadly agreed by evidence that all women are concerned & do 'to extent can afford' (& often poorer beyond what can afford) [*possible issue to follow up at Workshop 3*]

This is not 'false consciousness' – women not making mistakes, acting perfectly rationally, it is the underlying issues of why this is how judged (& increasingly) etc.

Graduate Session 1

Rikke Amundsen, 'On revenge porn, speech acts & the sexual objectification of women'

Abstract: This project addresses the question 'can a feminist reading of the sexual objectification of women as speech, ground a normative case for making 'revenge porn' a criminal offence?' Revenge porn refers to the act of disseminating sexually explicit images of a previous partner, without the consent of the pictured person (Guillemin, 2014). Objectification is referred to as the act of treating or perceiving another human being as an object or a thing (Papadaki, 2014). Drawing on J. L. Austin's (1962) work on speech acts, the project uses as its starting point the idea that the sexually explicit images of individuals, disseminated as an act of 'revenge' by a previous partner, can be analyzed as speech acts.

This thesis will focus on revenge porn as a site of analysis of the sexual objectification of women, scrutinizing the sexual objectification of women in the context of revenge porn, in

order to highlight the inherent nuances & complexities involved in the sexual objectification of women. The research aims to contribute to (1) the debate regarding the sexual objectification of women in the UK social media, & (2) the debate on revenge porn & whether it ought to be made a criminal offence.

(Presentation & PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Anna Westin, ‘Dangerous Beauty: Power, Intelligence & the Role of Beauty’

Abstract: Since the release of *Gone Girl*, viewers have articulated a strong range of responses to the female lead role. This discussion attempts to articulate some of these responses in a philosophical analysis of the use of power, intelligence & beauty, as being exemplified in female lead roles such as Rosamund Pike’s Amy that promote a system of relatedness that is both individually isolating & communally destructive. Here, the female is exemplified as a beautiful body: tall, slim, blonde, well-manicured. Yet what marks her out is her sharp intelligence. This intelligence that is frustrated, then expressed through a series of dark, twisted half-truths show a woman who inhabits both her body & intellect as a powerful self-willing agent, while trapped in a vicious cycle of broken relatedness that leads to death & human hatred. Comparisons will be drawn with Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth, who dominates the events of her husband Macbeth’s destiny & shapes the outcome for an entire nation.

Though both female characters are fictitious & are dissimilar in placement in historical & geographical contexts, I would like to consider each of these two females in a phenomenological understanding of the female self. Drawing on the existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard & the phenomenology of inter-relatedness in Emanuel Levinas, I will suggest that both *Gone Girl* & *Macbeth* use the female as a platform through which to explore the tension between self as body & mind

(Presentation retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Revenge porn – 80% of cases is a selfie that then sent to partner. Disseminated as act of revenge to shame individuals, normally online. 90% of victims are women, & likelihood increases if diverse sexuality.

To what extent is criminalisation the right way to address revenge porn?

Internet as new platform for acting out intimate relationships & shaming of women’s bodies & sexualities.

Relates to “victim-blaming” & drives women offline – bodies as harmed & sexualised.

Comparisons to domestic violence pre second wave feminism as women are forced offline as it often doesn’t stop at one image & personal details are posted, & employers, friends etc. can be sent images & recurs – making leaving cyberspace to protect themselves the most likely response.

Female body sets the female apart as other, & is a tool to an end – associated with alienating anxiety. Anxious tension in the experience of the female. Frustrated by embodied experience where the feminine is reduced to the physical. Is this particularly relevant in beauty.

Are assumptions about beauty v intelligence particularly problematic?

Paper 2

Melanie Latham, ‘If it aint broke don’t fix it?’: Scandals, ‘risk’, & cosmetic surgery regulation in the UK & France’

Abstract: The recent PIP scandal that affected patients worldwide, & received extensive media coverage, led to concerns being felt by patients about the ‘risks’ of cosmetic surgery. Theories about regulation & risk refer to societies such as those in the West becoming more risk averse. Regulation, in turn, has come to be seen as an instrument to solve a problem for a community seen to be or which perceives itself to be at risk. The political & electoral risk acknowledged by government if it ignores that concern, or at least media coverage of it, can lead to regulation, or the tightening up of regulation, as a response. This article looks at current proposals for legislation in the UK following the PIP silicone implant scandal as an example of the risk-regulation premise. Are cosmetic surgery patients in the UK now going to see stricter regulation of the cosmetic surgery industry? The article argues that the UK & France have both reacted to healthcare scandals & the ensuing societal conception of risk by drawing up more thorough legislation on cosmetic surgery than previously existed. France enacted the Kouchner law in 2002 & the UK government published the Keogh Report in April 2013. A comparison is made of these to establish whether the UK can learn from the French legislation when it comes to drafting actual regulation in the future, perhaps in 2014. Finally, some arguments are made about whether risk aversion may make better law.

(Paper available: *Medical Law Review* doi: 10.1093/medlaw/fwt033)

Discussion

Prior 2002 regulation in France made it far easier to address harms after PIP scandal. The UK evidence is much less & GMC information about the surgeon is insufficient in terms of specialisation, experience, whether insured. Moreover, there is not one single professional umbrella body & surgeons don’t *have* to be a member of any body to practice.

Issues of extent to which procedures are complied with, problems of self regulation, reporting & records & data in general.

ECR Session

Joyce Heckman, ‘This is What a Feminist Looks Like: Analysis of Feminist Appearance Negotiations’

Abstract: Drawing from analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with self-identified feminists, this paper explores the following research question: “How do feminist beliefs impact the way self-identified feminists negotiate their appearance on a daily basis?” First, there is an examination of how the respondents define “feminism,” & second, by looking at how feminist beliefs impact one’s appearance. Both parts of the question will be considered separately, & then examined together to determine what conclusions can be drawn regarding feminist appearance.

The project starts with definitions of feminism, both broad & personal, provided by the participants, participants’ own perceptions of the interaction of apparel & the human body as they discuss ways in which they alter their appearance depending on the contexts, environments, & roles in which they find themselves. Furthermore, the work will investigate

how modern definitions of the term *feminism* affect how these women have developed their personal appearance & what types of dress & appearance they associate with the feminist movement.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of feminist appearance & to explore appearance negotiations feminists use in their everyday lives. A secondary goal is to discover if feminists feel their appearance choices conflict with their feminist beliefs.

(PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Feminism is a very contested concept – who defines as is (& not) especially in the public eye is interesting in terms of how feminism perceived. I.e. celebrity statements, like Emma Watson’s embracing feminism ‘v’ Lady Ga Ga “I’m not a feminist I love men”. But is more interest, for instance *ELLE* ran a feminism issue in Nov 2014.

Discussion of private v public self. Covering tattoos, wearing make up or shaving because feels required (& don’t want to have to engage in the discussions/defence if don’t).

How are norms changing – & how does it differ (i.e. wrinkles, hair dye & make up in terms of routine norms of those portrayed not as being in the beauty business – cop shows used as an example).

Herjeet Marway, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all? Race & beauty’

Abstract: This paper explores norms of beauty from the perspective of race, in particular whether such norms (covertly or overtly) are merely racially insensitive or more seriously racist. The discussion will draw on four arguments about racial insensitivity & racism, which have been used in debates about race in general (such as in discussions about intellectual abilities, racial profiling, & integration) & consider them in relation to beauty ideals. Beauty has not been explored in quite the same way as these other areas in philosophy, perhaps because it is deemed trivial.

First, drawing on Lawrence Blum’s (2002) strong definition of racism, this paper will argue that prevalent beauty norms are potentially racist because they might lead to inferiorisation of nonwhite races &, for nonwhite women, may lead to antipathy directed towards the self as a member of a racial group. Second, drawing on Joshua Glasgow’s (2009) less stringent definition of racism that relies on disrespect, argue that even if we cannot support the view that there is inferiorisation & antipathy, the norms are racist because they are humiliating for women that do not fit the fair-skin, narrow nose, fine hair, hairless archetype. Third, following debates about whether profiling is expressively or intrinsically racist (Risse & Zeckhauser 2004; Lever 2005), that beauty norms like the ones being discussed are only made possible in light of background conditions of racism (as well as sexism whereby women, so often, are judged primarily according to their looks) but that they are constitutively racist too. The beauty norm is itself a manifestation of racist tendencies & does a great deal of harm to nonwhite women. Fourth & finally, following debates about integration (Anderson 2010, 2013; James, Taylor 2013), the paper will argue that beauty norms are racist because they (subtly) demand assimilation to a dominant white ideal.

(Handout & paper retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Discussion about global & historical norms & the extent to which homogenising. Discussed points of previous resistance, such as black is beautiful & segregated beauty pageants.

Norm to hairlessness is not just racial but also points to immaturity – the extent to which youthfulness is also about child-like-ness & infantilising merits discussion. *[Possible topic to follow up in future workshops]*

Art Session

Annabel Mednick, ‘Under the Skin: an examination into the process of portrait drawing to discover the person within...’

Abstract: Red haired, middle aged mother of three Annabel Mednick has changed her body shape many times over the years, & at the moment is ageing. She has managed to remain married despite finding that nothing she does lengthens her legs & one ear always remains higher than the other which tends to make her glasses lopsided, but she compensates by buying bright red ones. Oh & she paints a bit....

In recent years Annabel has, alongside her painting, developed work that uses her performance skills in combination with her art practice, with solo & collaborative pieces that explore themes of how women are seen & represented in society.

Discussion

Over two hours Annabel did a self-portrait & then a portrait of a workshop participant. This was done in & by discussion & looking from the inside out, as well as reflecting of the different gazes which we are judged by (or perceive ourselves to be judged by). Throughout discussion focused on what beauty means in terms of what it is – especially over time – as well as in different roles. Discussed what is required in different contexts & the different requirements of public & private & questioned how different these were (or might be) for women & men.

Day 2

Paper 3

Clare Murray, ‘Body image, sex & relationships across the life-cycle’

Abstract: The role of body image in sex & relationships is a complex one, involving psychosocial, physiological & socio-cultural elements. One’s relationship to one’s own body & internal representations of the body will be discussed in terms of the implications for heterosexual couple relationships & sexual functioning. Examples will be drawn from psychosexual case studies & discussion will focus on the key transitional stages couples are required to negotiate over the course of the lifecycle.

(PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Internet porn distorting some people’s views of sexual relationships & these issues are being seen more often in the consulting room. Leads to expectations of sex as aggressive &

disconnected & with more focus on penetration. Affects both men & women (women become over sexualised & think this is what is required).

Sex can meet attachment needs, sexuality of hope – emotionally intimate as well as physically – confident will be comforted etc. secure attachment. But when it doesn't becomes avoidant or insecure/clingy. When sex is meeting insecure attachment needs then it's a 'need to satisfy something'.

Graduate session 2

Jennifer White, 'Introducing the Case of Indoor Tanning into a Feminist Debate on Harmful Beauty Practices'

Abstract: This paper investigates a carcinogenic regime which has been largely overlooked by feminist debates of harmful beauty practices: indoor tanning in the pursuit for bronzed 'beauty'. Starting with a review of the medical literature, the paper then focuses in particular at the incidence of cutaneous malignant melanoma, which has steeply increased in the past 50 years. The medical community consider the main cause for this rise to be the fashion for intermittent sun exposure, specifically the use of sunbeds in cultures with a less sunny climate. With a UV intensity often 10-15 times higher than that of the midday sun, indoor tanning devices pose considerable risks to those in search of a 'cosmetic tan'.

Nevertheless, allegedly 'safe', 'controlled' sunbed use is legal in the UK for those over the age of sixteen. Due to the unregulated nature of this industry, it is considered the responsibility of the individual to gauge what constitutes 'safe' sunbed usage. It is thus a concern that the term 'tanorexia' has now entered our cultural vocabulary, coined to describe a type of mental disease or disorder in which the 'afflicted' person is preoccupied in the pursuit of achieving a dark tan. Whilst the label 'tanorexia' may seem trivial, & is yet to appear in the *DSM*, there is a new body of medical literature which proposes the addictive-like nature of sunbed use.

This paper critiques the alleged links between 'obsessive' sun-bed use & BDD, & argues against the medicalisation of this cultural beauty regime, drawing on Bordo's critique of the medicalisation of anorexia. Tanning as a phenomenon which cannot be understood solely as 'tanorexia'; there is a wide scope of tanning behaviours, & it is problematic to categorise excessive tanning as symptomatic of a perceptual defect, a compulsion, or an addiction.

(PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Breana Monique Musella, 'Beautiful Cancer'

Abstract: This research aims to explore to what extent non-profit, well intending organizations, perpetuate messages of normative able-bodiedness. These organizations exist to encourage & assist mostly women, in learning ways to beautify the appearance-altering effects of cancer & treatment. There seems to be a continued juxtaposition that expects women, & only women, to have beautiful cancer bodies. These clearly gendered pressures arguably demand women hide their "deformity" & "mutilations" from the world.

The project will explore the ways in which these largely gendered messages police the bodies of the "disabled" as well as the many ways that attending these workshops are largely liberating for women & beneficial to their well-being & contributory to a positive outlook in

the face of chronic illness. Moreover, this research will aim to understand the ways in which current societal structures continue to perpetuate dominant western ideologies of racism, classism, sexism, etc., all of which go essentially unquestioned by a culture that compulsively demands conformity to strict social constructions of normativity & deems all else as deviant & problematic.

(PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Issues of medicalization – tanning addiction (& is some evidence), but other issues too as both sunbed tanning & spray tan also diminishes spots, wrinkles etc. & minimise cellulite. So distracts from ‘ugly body areas’. [*Issues of medicalization & normal will be taken up at Workshop 2*]

Equation of ‘health’ & ‘beauty’ – which again makes it ‘required’, ‘normal’ & ‘good to do. In both there is the rubric of normality – able-bodied-ness – & what its ‘acceptable’ to show in public, which has potential to be embodying, but also might be yet another requirement to achieve ‘normal’ (& this is different for men as women).

Paper 4

Jean McHale, ‘Children, cosmetic procedures & perfectionism: A case for legal regulation?’

Abstract: In the past the debates concerning cosmetic surgery were largely focused upon adult choices, questions of autonomy, the boundaries of social acceptability & safety. But the rise in the use of cosmetic procedures in relation to those under the age of legal majority has started to become a question of concern for both clinicians & regulators, so much so that in Australia this has led to legal regulation. Has the time now come to consider these questions in the UK itself & whether we too need to go down the path of using the law to constrain clinical & related "beauty" practices in relation to minors?

This paper first examines the normalizing of perfectionism as evidenced through what appears to be increased social acceptability of bodily modification for cosmetic purposes in general & in the context of children & adolescents specifically. Secondly, it examines whether a case for the regulation or prohibition of cosmetic surgery concerning minors can be made & explores issues around societal harm. Thirdly, it examines if such procedures should be restricted wholly or in part then what possible regulatory models could be adopted.

(PPT retained for reporting purposes & not publication.)

Discussion

Parallels with motivation of HFEA & HTA. Plus possible use of ‘welfare of the child’ (despite doubts about how this has been used), but could be a model which could be used. Practices of cosmetic dentistry raised – which included in Australian prohibition but routinely funded by NHS. Is this really for health reasons or is this seen as minimal standards – simply because it is what is done. [*Issues of what is routine will be returned to in Workshop 4*]

Closing discussion & workshop end.

Key points to take forward re. policy briefing papers & future discussion:

Ethical concerns & issues

- Philosophical analysis suggests that ‘choice’ in this context is vastly constrained by social construction, making usual assumptions about ‘consent’ problematic
- ‘Choice’ is not a ‘normative transformer’ it can’t nullify harm or make an otherwise ethically problematic or harmful act not ethically problematic & harmful
- Psychological analysis shows the importance of body image for self-identity, but also questions the pressures of this.

Legal concerns & issues

- Legally autonomy is not the only value which counts – especially, but not only, when it comes to children.
- Possibly parallel between regulation of repo-tech & cosmetic procedures
- Lack of evidence & reporting due to self-regulation
- Little oversight, monitoring, checking & enforcing
- Even less oversight & regulation for non-invasive procedures which are not without side-effects.

Policy concerns & issues

- Body image is clearly important for individuals identity & is action guiding, but the extent to which this justifies public policy intervention is questionable. Areas where it might – or at least could be discussed further are in instances of:
 - Harm to individuals (for instance, in ‘revenge porn’ or use of harmful technologies, such as tanning beds)
 - Care of vulnerable groups – most obviously children – although questions about how body image might make other groups who are not normally considered ‘vulnerable’ might be.
 - Extent to which social harm & pressure can be managed (either by regulation or norms), for instance advertising of cosmetic procedures (banned in France), or by anti-ageism discrimination rules (i.e. re. acceptable hair colour).
- Huge gap in terms of evidence & reporting & data, could possibly be addressed by:
 - Regulation rather than self-regulation
 - Required reporting of procedures & possibly a monitoring body
 - Other means to report ‘harms’ (i.e. from GPs & A&Es)