Commodification of the Body, Beauty, and Sexuality

Media and Gender

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#ReinventCommunication

Beauty
How do we measure beauty?

Social comparison theory:
In the absence of any other objective external benchmark, people define themselves by comparing themselves to other people in their environment.
Beauty

Socio-cultural theory:

Pervasive social and cultural values, especially from peer, parental, and media influences, have a tremendous effect on individual values and behaviors.

Beauty

Symbolic Annihilation:

the absence of representation, or underrepresentation of some group of people in the media (George Gerbner, 1972)

Beauty

Media’s dominance

The average person is exposed to 4,000-10,000 Ads per day (2018 estimates).

The average girl will watch 5,000 hours of TV & 80,000 ads, before she starts kindergarten (2007 estimates).

Media Portrayals of Women

The four stereotypes

Femme fatale

Supermom

Sex kitten

Villainess
Media Portrayals of Arab Women

Two stereotypes:

- Submissive covered woman...
- Exotic "harem"

Beyond the Stereotypes

Normalizing Beauty

Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

Skewed BMI: Average 17.1 - Normal BMI: 18.5-24.9
Normal BMI: 18.5-24.9

Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

A young woman has
7% chance to be as slim as a catwalk model
1% chance to be as thin as a supermodel

Milan Fashion week (2006): Italy banned models with a BMI below 18.5. Same occurred in Spain and Brazil where two models (sisters) died from anorexia.

TV shows:
Over 3/4 of the female characters in sitcoms are underweight
Only 1 in 20 are above average in size.

Normal BMI: 18.5-24.9

Julia Roberts and Cameron Diaz have BMIs of 17.
Kate Moss borderline severe anorexia at 16. (2010)
Heavier actresses often receive negative comments about their bodies.
80% of comments followed by canned laughter.

Normalizing Beauty: Thinnness

Female characters younger than male characters
Men are twice as likely as Women to be 50-60 years old

Normalizing Beauty: Youngness

Arab anchors also getting (or looking) younger, thinner and focused on appearance

Normalizing Beauty: Appearance vs Brains
Normalizing Beauty

**appearance**

When Greta Van Susteren moved from CNN to Fox in 2002 surgically altered her face to appear younger and more "beautiful."

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Normalizing Beauty: Representation

Female Journalists in Lebanon

(4:1) Females : Males in journalism/media programs

(1:2) Females : Males in news industry

Management: only 22% women

Boards/ownership: 15% women

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Normalizing Beauty: Representation

Guests on prime-time news programs

- CNN: 30% female, 70% male
- Fox: 30% female, 70% male
- MSNBC: 30% female, 70% male
Normalizing Beauty: Representation

Males outnumbered females nearly 2-to-1 in primetime TV (2011).
In 1970s: 3-1
Today in top G-rated films: 2.5-1

Video Games
1 in 7 characters in best-selling video games are women
(40% wore revealing clothing, were partially or totally nude)

What is the percentage of family films with a female narrator?

A. 12%
B. 26%
C. 32%
D. 41%
E. 50%
Normalizing Beauty: Representation

What is the percentage of prime-time shows with gender-balanced casts?

A. 11%
B. 22%
C. 33%
D. 44%
E. 55%

Normalizing Beauty: Representation

What is the percentage of speaking characters in prime-time comedies by gender?

A. 11%
B. 22%
C. 33%
D. 44%
E. 55%

Normalizing Beauty

sexiness
Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Female body parts in America sell everything from food to cars.

Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Female body parts in Lebanon sell everything from malls to cable.

Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness
to lottery…

Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness
To slavery…
Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Ministry of Tourism MEA advertising campaign
2008

Lebanon Blues campaign

Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Ministry of Tourism “Lebanon Blues” campaign
2011

Normalizing Beauty

Domestic-ness & Subservience
Normalizing Gender: Domestic-ness

1950s
2013

Normalizing Gender: Male Dominance

1970s
2015

Normalizing Beauty: Domestic-ness

The Bechdel Test? (movies)
What is the % of movies that have at least two women, who talk to each other, about something besides a man?

approx. 50% (as of 2016)
Latest:
https://bechdeltest.com/
Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness
Other Arab countries?

Don't forget the music

Normalizing Beauty: Sexual Objectification

Music videos: displays of women as sex objects

Video 1b: Sexual Objectification:
1:00-3:30 and 6:30-8:30

Video 2: Hayfa
Video 3: Klink
Normalizing Beauty

plastic-ness

Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

Local plastic surgeons:

Most clients consider Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram as “ideal Lebanese beauty…”

Both have had extensive plastic surgery.

Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

Playing on the national obsession with image.

Plastic surgery to sell alcohol

Plastic surgery to sell food.
Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

First Nation Bank (Lebanon):

"Have the life you always wanted... via loans for plastic surgery."

Survey of Lebanese women:

99% either agreed with the statement: "Lebanese social values promote cosmetic surgery."

What are the top three procedures among 18–24 year olds in Lebanon

A. Liposuction, nose job, breast enhancement
B. Eye lifts, nose job, Face lifts
C. Botox, nose job, breast Lip enhancement
D. Eye lifts, nose job, Butt implants
E. Face lifts, Botox, Liposuction

More Than Just Another Pretty Face, 2011

Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

Makeover shows in the USA

Extreme Makeover first aired in the 2002.

From 2003-2004, 44% increase in number of cosmetic procedures.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu6TdZRQpSE
Risks of Cosmetic Surgery

“... complications can occur even in the best of hands. Hematoma and bruises, seroma formation, nerve damage causing sensory or motor loss, infection, scarring, blood loss and complications of anesthesia can occur in any surgery. More serious complications such as deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism can cause death.”

National Institute of Health (2015)

Normalizing Beauty

the unattainable normal

Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Idealized bodies often impossible to Attain

Filippa Hamilton

5ft-10 : 178cm
120 Lbs : 54Kg
Size 4

Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Almost all images/videos we see undergo extensive beautification

Video 4: dove
Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Why are the media’s standards of beauty so different from the norm?

Message: women always need adjustment
A woman’s body is an object to be perfected.

Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Why are the media’s standards of beauty so different from the norm?

Diet Industry $70B (US 2017)
Cosmetic Surgery Industry $16B (US 2016)
Cosmetic Products Industry $533B (Global 2017): 1/3 goes to Ads

Saudi Arabia GDP: $646B (US GDP)

Exposure to idealized body images lowers women’s self-worth.

Studies:
- People shown slides of thin models had lower self-evaluations than those shown average & oversized models
- Most girls reported that “very thin” models made them feel insecure about themselves.

Video 5: Photoshop
Normalizing Beauty: Anorexia

Stringent dieting to achieve an ideal figure plays key role in triggering eating disorders, including anorexia

- 1 in 4 college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of weight control (fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting).

Normalizing Beauty: Body image & self worth

75% of "normal" weight women think they are overweight.
90% of women overestimate their body size.

Video 6: self-worth

Normalizing Beauty: Manorexia

Muscle Dysmorphia (bigorexia): obsession with obtaining the "perfectly masculine" body.

Lebanon: 42.1% of gym goers use supplements.
- 10.7% Steroids
- 18.5% Creatine
- 41.1% Protein

Negative side-effects:
severe acne, testicular atrophy, reduced sperm count, stunted growth, increased risk of stroke, kidney and liver failure, high blood pressure, enlargement of the heart, various cardiovascular problems, mood swings, elevated aggression, and other psychiatric disorders.

Media Portrayals of Men

The four stereotypes

- Superman/tough guy
- Suave, womanizing professional
- Lazy/dumb dad
- Nerd/Geek/Loser
Normalizing Masculinity: Body Image

Using shirtless men to sell... ...air freshener

Normalizing Gender: Toxic Masculinity

“Media messages encourage boys to be competitive, focus on external success, rely on their intellect, withstand physical pain, and repress their vulnerable emotions. When boys violate the code, it is not uncommon for them to be teased, shamed, or ridiculed.” Marvin Allen: “Why Men Can’t Feel”

Normalizing Gender: Toxic Masculinity

Studies show that men:
• Die younger (10 years) than women: low self-care
• Twice as likely to suffer from rage disorders
• More likely to abuse alcohol, drugs, engage in risky behavior
• More likely to kill and be killed
  - 90% of all murders committed by men
  - 77% of murder victims are men
  - 80% of suicides

Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture
Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture

“In a rape culture, people are surrounded with images, language, laws, and everyday phenomena that validate and perpetuate rape.

Rape culture includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, legal jargon, laws, words and imagery, that make violence against women and sexual coercion seem so normal that people believe that rape is inevitable.

The persistence of rape becomes “just the way things are.”

Some facts on rape in the USA

- 20% of reported rapes are prosecuted
- 50% of all rapes are not reported
- 3% of rapes lead to jail time for rapists
- 25% of rapes in the US military prosecuted
  - Less than half of those resulted in any convictions

Changing the Conversation

#MeToo Movement

Past 20 years:
- Strides in how media portray women
- More women in media behind the scenes
- More watchdog groups
- More public awareness, discussion, debate, and advocacy
- New avenues of research: media’s effects on men, masculinity, children
Diversity in Media: Women & Minorities

“If you don’t see a clear path for what you want, sometimes you have to make it yourself” – Mindy Kaling

Diversity in Media: LGBTQ

“It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist.” – Laverne Cox

Miss America: re-Focus on Brains

As of 2018: no more swimsuit and evening gown competitions...

Companies are Listening...

2014: Aerie stops using supermodels and retouching in their lingerie campaigns...

They reported a 9% increase in sales in the following financial quarter.
Demanding Change and Breaking the Cycle

• More participation of women in media production → behind the scenes
• Greater industry regulation, influence of watchdog groups
• Awareness campaigns; community initiatives
  video 12: Miss Representation
  video 13: #MeToo
• Supporting positive role models: Women in Film Fund
• Consumer demand
• Dialogue: parents play the biggest role!

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