Before & After Photography:

The Makeover Method to discipline & punish

By

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☺ God has given you one face,and
you make yourselves another. ☺

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In a March 12, 2008 Makeover special issue of *US* magazine, Ashlee Simpson was presented as one of the celebrities whose life was positively changed by a makeover. It is difficult exactly to say what was wrong with her in the first place - the 23 year old pop-singer who started out rich, thin, pretty and already famous by association with her sister Jessica, underwent a rhinoplasty and several hairstyle upgrades (going from brunette to strawberry blonde) in the past several years. She transformed from a girl who once said, "I used to look at a beautiful girl on the cover of a magazine and think I could never be that" to a bona-fide covergirl, featured on the covers of magazines such as *CosmoGirl!*, *Seventeen*, and *US* (quoted above). Hailed by the article as a "poster girl for transformation," Simpson is celebrated for finally achieving the Hollywood ideal combination of body, face and style through her demonstrated ability to keep up with the latest trends, and finally acquiring personal security and self-confidence. Presumably, now other young girls can look at her and also believe that while there is something invariably wrong with them as they are, with plastic surgery and professional haircolor, they too can become happy, confident and obtain a rock-star boyfriend.

An army of image consultants, life coaches, plastic surgeons and style experts have allied with television networks and magazines to wage a war on our outdated hairstyles, wrinkled skin and tragically uncoordinated wardrobes. Every day in magazines and on reality television, average people are having their bodies altered by plastic surgery, being coached into new roles, revamping their personal styles, or having their houses transformed into *Cribs*-worthy palaces. These contemporary versions of fairy-tale makeovers remind us that in order to compete in a society of others who are losing weight and getting their teeth whitened, we must also be continuously upgrading ourselves to the newest standards. Thankfully, they announce, the self-

improvement industries are here and determined to fix us, one body at a time (...as long as those bodies can afford to be fixed).

While this widespread desire to be our best selves is commendable, the seduction of the makeover caters more to the desire to be someone *else*. The makeover, after all, is not an inner biological metamorphosis, but an externally imposed intervention (by a fairy godmother, style expert, or plastic surgeon). Rather than transforming from the inside (like meditation), it causes a surface change (like amputation) and thus it is always applied to a surface – whether that surface is a body, a face, a house or an image. Usually, the transformation aims to approximate a pre-existing ideal or standard of appearance. The makeover is then a disciplining narrative, one that aims to train and correct, to normalize.

Roland Barthes (1973) wrote that "myth is depoliticized speech," one that transforms meaning into form. The makeover myth, which is built on a long history of visual and literary texts, appears as a naturalized narrative and system of representation but contains complex tensions of class, gender and body control that we have inherited and continue to reproduce in contemporary culture. Used as a method to visually discipline bodies that have been deemed defiant according to the contemporary mediated cultural standards of its time - traditionally, women's bodies and working class bodies – the makeover is a decidedly political and feminist issue, not only a narrative cultural trope.

Much of recent feminist scholarship critiques the makeover narrative both in film (Ford & Mitchell 2004) and reality television (Tait 2007; Heyes 2007; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert 2007), correctly tracing its origins to 18th and 19th century fairy tale plots. My research expands upon that analysis by investigating the entrance of the makeover as a socializing narrative myth (in fairy-tales and literature) into the realm of visual representation at the end of the 19th century

(in advertisements and social documentary). Through historical analysis of the political and cultural conditions under which the makeover texts were originally produced and re-produced, this research reveals the underlying apparatus of power/domination imbedded in contemporary makeover narratives. Leaning on psycho-analysis and post-structuralist critique, this work demonstrates how the makeover "works" to discipline bodies of the viewers/readers through processes of identification and self-correction. Finally, through critical readings of contemporary makeover reality shows, as well as through interviews with producers and makeover guests, my research reveals the complexity of the power relations responsible for the visually disciplining messages reproduced by contemporary makeover narratives.

Theoretical Foundation

According to Michel Foucault's theoretical conception of disciplinary power, best articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975)*, power is a network of decentralized practices, institutions and technologies that maintain the relations of dominance and subordination. The dominant ideology is not exerted through physical force, but by the systematic ideological surveillance and disciplining of individuals within the structures of school, politics, religion, healthcare and the justice system. Through these mechanisms which extend into every corner of an individual's life, one becomes a *subject* when he/she internalizes the dominant ideology to maintain self-surveillance and self-correction to socially, culturally and historically established "norms".

In order to maintain the existing distribution of power, those in the dominant positions must appear legitimately qualified for their roles, while those in subordinate classes should demonstrate a reason for remaining there. In American culture especially, social inequalities

based on class, gender, race or age are perceived not as a product of systemic and institutionalized practice of privileging one group of people over other groups, but as a product of individual failure to succeed in a society which presents all with "equal opportunity."

Cultural apparatuses governing the domain of representations aid in the process of creating self-disciplining subjects by securing and reproducing dominant relations of power/production. Extending Foucault's argument, Tagg (1987), Pollock (1994) and Bordo (2004) claim that practices of domination become real and observable only when manifested within the sphere of everyday life and articulated in the domain of cultural representation. Popular cultural texts can then be examined as a legitimate site for negotiating political relations.

Locating the makeover in this disciplinary framework, the following research explores the narrative patterns and codes of representation that have accompanied makeover texts throughout geographical and temporal adaptations. Explored in a variety of literary and media texts, narratives of visual transformation serve as models of correction for the self-disciplining subject. The change in physical appearance of the made over individual dictates not just contemporary aesthetic ideals, but social, cultural and aesthetic ideals *according to the dominant power.* Thus, makeover texts function as narratives of normalization.

Disciplining Narratives

Although transformation has often been a popular theme in folktales and cultural myths, today's makeover texts consistently recycle only three of the available stories: *Cinderella*, *The Ugly Duckling* and *Pygmalion*. The cosmetic surgery show and beauty pageant *The Swan* is named (rather ironically) after Hans Christian Andersen's coming of age tale of *The Ugly Duckling (1844).* Shows like *A Makeover Story* often evoke the tale of *Cinderella* (1699) by

giving the guests an expensive and glamorous appearance for a special event. The story of *Pygmalion* (both Ovid's and Shaw's) has been borrowed by many film plots (*My Fair Lady, Clueless* – see Ford and Mitchell's *The Makeover in Movies: Before and After in Hollywood Films, 1941-2002,* 2004) and can now trace some of its elements to MTV's *MADE* or TLC's *What Not to Wear.*

Beyond recycling the actual narrative trope, these reincarnations are also inheriting the function that the makeover texts served in their contemporary cultural contexts. Even at the time of their initial publication, these three stories have been used for dissemination of contemporaneous social norms through narratives of reward and punishment. Thus, establishing a history of the makeover narrative as a social/cultural text requires the analysis of the political and cultural conditions under which makeover texts were originally produced as well as the conditions under which they were re-produced and re-evoked.

The story of Cinderella has circulated as a folktale in many different retellings, but was born as a cultural historical text when it was first written down, establishing the fairy-tale as a literary genre. The version most familiar to us today is the one which successfully spread throughout Western Europe and to America. *Cinderella; or, the Little Glass Slipper* was published in 1699, by the French government official Charles Perrault. His adaptation pioneered an external force of transformation in the character of the fairy godmother, which is a critical element in the modern makeover narrative. In his version, the leading lady is submissive and obedient – a model of ruling class ideals during Perrault's time. She is rewarded for her virtues by her godmother's magic wand – and when beautifully dressed, wins the attraction of a Prince. This is actually a radical digression from the original oral folktale, in which Cinderella produced her own change through cultivation of a magical tree watered with tears for her biological

mother. In this folktale version, Cinderella also attempted to kill her stepmother, wore a leather slipper (not the famously impractical glass one), and was witty and independent.

In *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion,* Jack Zipes (2006) argues that the attribution of the story's authorship to Perrault is significant, because in the process of adapting an oral folktale into a literary form, the motifs, characters and themes of the story were often rearranged in order to "address the concerns of the educated and ruling classes of late feudal and early capitalist societies" (Zipes 2006, 6).

In the original folktale, Cinderella has an agency in changing her own situation which Perrault's story ridicules. His version is adopted for the children of the court, and teaches that obedience and gentleness will bring fortune and wealth. Cinderella is still trapped in an unfair situation, but she is an aristocracy-worthy child that gets mistreated by an evil force. Her submissiveness saves her, not her strength. Perrault's granting of visual transformation is then a reward for Cinderella's silent subordination.

Hans Christian Andersen's 1844 tale *The Ugly Duckling,* so often evoked in contemporary makeover programs is a story of a homely baby swan born into a henyard and thought to be a baby duck. The bird's different appearance leads him to be ostracized by his foster family. While escaping his unwelcoming home, the ugly duckling sees a flock of beautiful "royal birds" and declares that he would rather be hacked to death by them than return to the henyard. But he is surprised to discover that he himself is a beautiful swan, and joins the others in a garden where he is finally admired.

This seemingly empowering tale, often equated with the temporary awkwardness of adolescence, has deep political connotations. At the end of the 19th century, when the story was penned, European and Colonial rebellions were questioning the legitimacy of the feudal

distribution of wealth. Andersen's *Ugly Duckling* served as a moral tale of the essentialist philosophy that propelled feudalism, defending the "natural" relationship between outward beauty and refinement and social class. Andersen's henyard (the home of a peasant) is a vulgar, intolerant place, unsuitable for a bird whose genetic lineage makes it more fit to serve as decoration than dinner.

Appropriately written by a poor young man himself trying to infiltrate the royal court as a distinguished writer, *The Ugly Duckling* parallels Andersen's struggle to prove his innate sense of belonging. The story ultimately advocates servility and submission to the bourgeois, whose cultural values dictate the ideals of beauty and virtue. As Zipes argues, "the fine line between eugenics and racism fades in this story where once-upon-a-time dominated swan reveals himself to be a tame but noble member of a superior race" (2006, 98).

Following chronologically, George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) overtly unites class and gender in the 20th century's quintessential modern cultural text – the novel. Its title is borrowed from the story of *Pygmalion* from Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses* (8 AD). In his legend, Pygmalion is a bachelor who, disgusted by the indecency of available women, casts a perfect wife for himself out of ivory. He asks the goddess Venus to make his creation human. She agrees and awakens Galatea who proceeds to birth Pygmalion a son. According to this narrative, the ideal woman is one cast out by a man of raw materials, implying that real women are not virginal and submissive enough to become acceptable wives.

In Shaw's story, a lower-class flower girl Eliza is transformed into a "lady." She is not only made over visually, but is disciplined on proper behaviour, manners and speech. Where as Cinderella and the ugly duckling are victims of their social conditions with a visual transformation revealing their inner beauty and nobility, Shaw's heroine, like Ovid's perfect

woman, is completely recrafted physically and socially to conform to bourgeois ideals. There's nothing "essential" about her eventual assimilation into the upper class – she simply learns the rules of this society. This is simultaneously a liberating idea - power is not genetically inscribed - and a criminalizing one: there is a way to be correct and acceptable; and if you are not, it is your own fault.

The intention of the makeover tale has historically served to reproduce regimes of power, to socialize and discipline subjects to conform to idealized modes of conduct. *Cinderella* prescribes female servility and submissiveness, the *Ugly Duckling* defends the belief in feudal superiority, and *Pygmalion* trains poor women to aspire to a bourgeois idea of femininity. It is not within the scope of this paper to determine how effective these morality tales were in marketing their intended ideals. However, these stories have had a lasting impact and their narratives and connotations are continuously evoked and reinterpreted in contemporary makeover texts.

Cultural Philanthropy

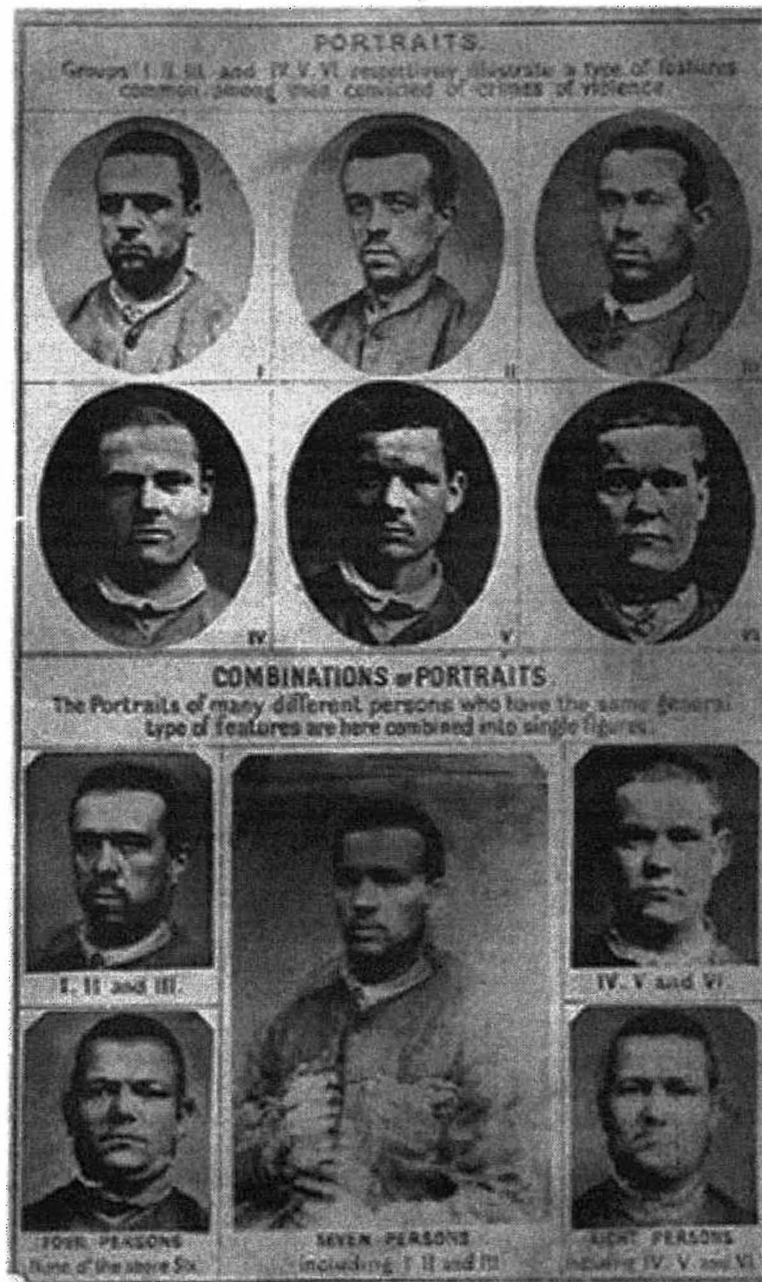
Shaw's narrative of female working class deviance coincided with an important development in the western world: the discovery of the working class by the bourgeois, facilitated by the invention of photographic technology.

According to Nancy Armstrong (1999), the Western world underwent a pictorial turn with the invention of photography (which she attributes to Talbot's calotype in 1844) and was saturated with photography by the 1860s. The practice of portraiture and documentary photography immediately established an archival system of visual representations for both people and places. Parts of the world and social groups or cultures that were previously unseen

by the majority of the Western world were now captured in a highly realistic representation. In turn, "the entire epistemology of knowing imperceptibly installed itself in readers' imaginations along with the images that allowed them to identify virtually anything that either had been or could be rendered as a photograph" (Armstrong 1999, 21). In this way, photography helped to shape notions of the "Other" and of one's own class and social category. It effectively established an archive of visual categories from which individuals could choose images to identify with or deviate from. As Armstrong argues, photography gave middle-class men and women a visual means of identifying themselves as such. Simultaneously, it rendered visible the previously unseen categories of social undesirables – the poor, the sick, the criminal – arousing among the bourgeois a sense of social responsibility and the need to legitimize their own role in a society that produced the subject matter of these images.

The tension between the feeling of social responsibility and the middle class desire to legitimize the system of inequality was played out in the eugenics movement of the 19th century. Sir Francist Galton used photography to support his studies in eugenics, the science of human-driven evolution with the intent of forming a superior race of beings. His experiments were designed to verify an essentialist assertion of the connection between the psyche and physical appearance. Creating composite photographs out of a number of individual portraits that shared some "internal" trait, Galton was attempting to establish a generic image that would correspond to a psychological quality. Blending together faces of violent criminals or individuals who were clinically ill, Galton tried to discover whether there was a common physical feature that corresponded to lack of morality or the presence of madness. He was coming from the positivist assumption that "truth is in the body to be read, that all bodies are equivalent, and that the

features distinguishing one from the other can therefore be statistically determined" (Armstrong 1999, 17).



Sir Francis Galton, *Combination of Portraits: Violent Criminals*, c.1885.

The eugenicist used photographic means in an attempt to confine socially undesirable individuals to a myriad of visually displayable traits. SImultaneously, the widely seen social

documentary photography of journalist Jacob Riis (see *How The Other Half Lives 1891)*, social reformer Lewis Hine and others revealed the unsafe and unsanitary conditions of poverty, serving as visual evidence against essentialism and inspiring bourgeois commitment to social responsibility. Dan Bivona (2006) argues that a growing fascination with urban poverty in the late 19th - early 20th centuries was infused with "an urgency and symbolic imagery" that contributed to middle class self-definition as "gentlemanly," self-controlled, concerned with its political legitimacy and possessing cultural and intellectual responsibility to the poor.

The newly emergent concept of "the slums" became both a pilgrimage experience and a visual spectacle for the fin de siècle Victorian bourgeois. As part of the settlement house movement, which originated in London but quickly spread to America, middle-class men and women were settling – moving into - poor neighbourhoods to provide programs and activities to educate the local population on matters of taste and aesthetic appreciation. As if discovering the real Cinderella in her tenement prison, the middle-class felt a personal responsibility to intervene.

The diaries of Lillian D. Wald articulate this developing consciousness. Wald was a young nursing student in 1893, who suddenly became aware of the poor living conditions of people in New York City's Lower East Side and founded a settlement house on Henry Street,. She describes meeting a man and his ill wife during her first visit to the area:

> Although the sick woman lay on a wretched, unclean bed, soiled with a hemorrgage two days old, they were not degraded human beings, judged by any means of moral values… In fact… it would have been some solace if by any conviction of the moral unworthiness of the family I could have defended myself as a part of a society which permitted such conditions to exist (Wald 1971, 6-7).

Wald seems amazed that the people whom she encounters do not appear to be sinners, deserving of their lot in life, but poor victims of unfortunate circumstances. This surprise reveals

her previously held belief that social inequality is justified and that people who are well-off are naturally better human beings.

Despite this realization, practices of cultural philanthropy still privileged the culture, tastes and standards of the bourgeois, imposing those standards on the working class populations whose living conditions the settlers were attempting to improve.

In the account of her experiences, Lillian Wald is extremely sensitive to the social and economic factors that cause the residents' unrefined and disorganized behaviours and attitudes, her motivation to move into the neighbourhood being genuine concern for the population. She realizes that poverty fails to foster education and cultural tastes. However, Wald admits that occasionally it was necessary to remind their young that "conventions established in sophisticated society have usually a sound basis in social experience" (Wald 1971, 189). She tells this story of gently disciplining a young woman about her appearance:

> Two girls classified as "near tough" seemed young the control of their club leader, who entreated help from the more experienced. On a favourable occasion Bessie was invited to the cozy intimacy of my sitting-room. That she and Eveline, her chum, were conscious of their exaggerated raiment was obvious, for she hastened to say, "I guess it's on account of my yellow waist. Eveline and me faded away when we saw you at dancing class the other night." It was easy to follow up their introduction by pointing out that pronounced lack of modesty in dress was one of several signs, that their dancing, their talk, their freedom of manner, all rendered them *conspicuous* and to cause their friends anxiety. Bessie listened, observed that she "couldn't throw the waist away, for it cost five dollars," but insisted that she was "good on the inside." An offer to buy the waist and burn it because her dignity was worth more than five dollars was illuminating. "The strikes me as somethin' grand. I wouldn't let you do it, but I'll never wear the waist again." So far as we know, she has kept her word (Wald 1971, 190-191).

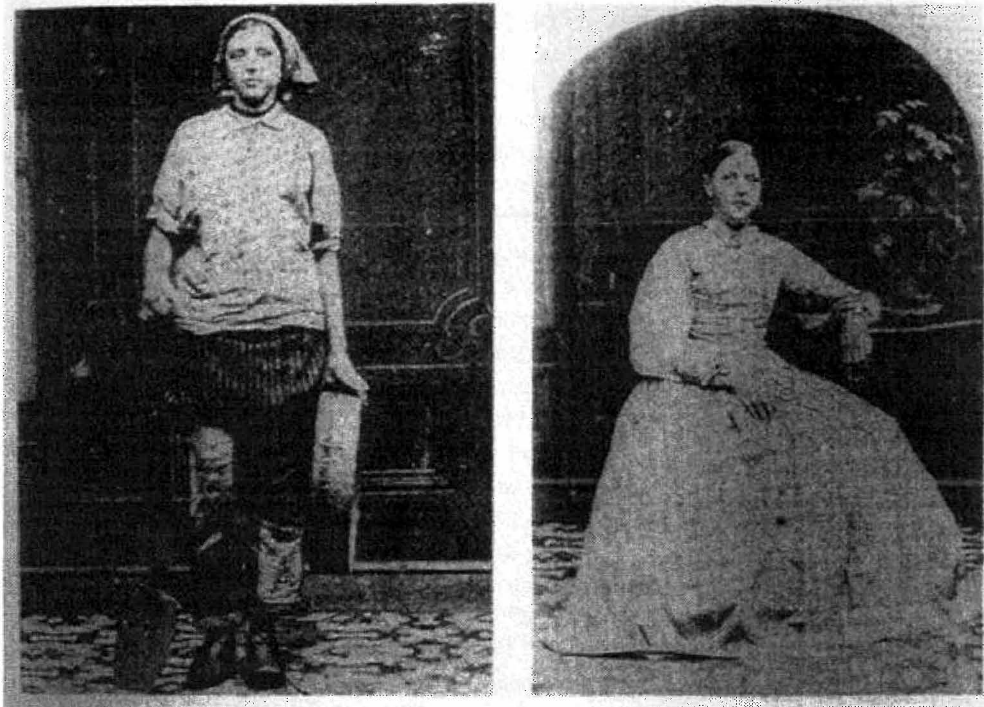
The above paragraph illustrates how Wald facilitates the imposition of bourgeois feminine ideals in the settlement house. Bessie is scolded (or rather, "willingly repents") for acting and looking too "conspicuous" – literally too visible, too spectacular. The debate over her waist (a type of Victorian shirt, fitted at the waist) is openly conducted in terms of her dignity

and moral worth. Thus, the essentialist conception of a direct relationship between honorable character and outside appearance is believed to be inscribed in the woman's manner and dress.

Griselda Pollock (1994) traces the emergence of working class women in middle-class representation – in art and photographs of the mid 1800s. She argues that the body of a working class woman violated the bourgeois Victorian ideals of a pure and submissive female servant (the "Cinderella"). Its public display of controlled sexuality and productivity provided a threatening alternative to the rigidly gendered ideal of the "lady" who was not included in the economics of sex, labor, money and power.

Photographs of female coal miners in their work trousers caused a moral panic in the English miners union at Wigan in the 1860s. The pictures were presented along with a petition to the House of Commons claiming that such dress for women was indecent and shamed the civility of the society which allowed it to exist. In their own defense, mine owners sent in photographs of the women workers in their Sunday dress, arguing that they were still "feminine" – trousers being a only a temporary costume.

Unknown Photographer. *Women Miners in Wigan*, circa 1860s

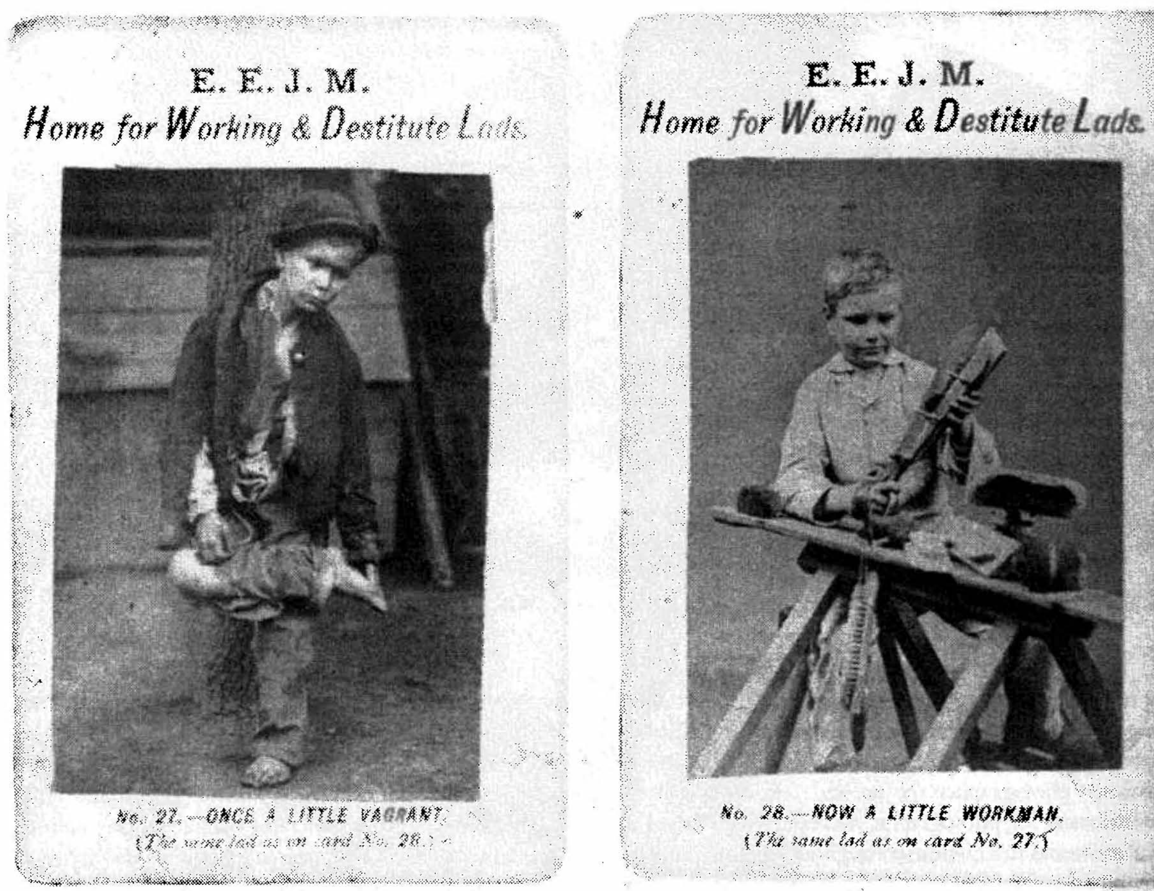


Robert Little, *Ellen Grounds in Working Costume*, 1866; *Ellen Grounds in Sunday Costume*, 1866

The two sets of photographs present the female body with competing persuasive visual codes. In the working costume, the women display a confident androgyny – a look that sharply violates the Victorian conceptions of "a lady." Elegantly posed in Sunday dress, the woman appears modest and unthreatening. Interestingly, both sets of photographs are used as proof; not of the decorative powers of clothing, but of the "mental, moral and spiritual" condition of the depicted persons (Pollock 1994, 20). While not an actual makeover, through codes of dress, setting and posture, the photographs articulate the representational gap between the socially undesired and the normative image of a Victorian woman.

If physical appearance could determine the difference between a socially undesirable person and a model Victorian citizen, then the transformation of the one into the other could also be visually articulated. That was the idea that Dr. Barnardo, an entrepreneur and founder of the orphanage he called "Home for Working and Destitute Lads," came up with for his fundraising

campaign. Barnardo originally began taking photographs of the orphans that entered his institution in 1870s in order to facilitate their identification and return to appropriate authorities if they ran away. He then photographed the same boys in studio settings with various props. In order to demonstrate the positive effects of his orphanage, Barnardo created a series of images of the boys in their original "vagrant" look juxtaposed with the images of the same boys now cleaned up and performing some respectable task. These "before and after" shots, the first historical instance of a photographic makeover. did not attempt to sell a product but instead claimed to serve as evidence for a social and moral transformation.



Unknown photographer, *Before and After Photographs of a Young Boy*, c. 1875.

Social documentary of the late 19th and early 20th centuries created an awareness of social inequality, urging the middle class to feel the need to intervene and improve the living and

working conditions for the oppressed social groups they saw in the pictures. However, the essentialist connection between moral character and physical appearance also fostered the mistaken belief that class struggle could be fixed cosmetically. What achieving Barnardo's "after" photograph actually entailed was a treatment of a symptom of larger political and social inequalities. Instead, the superficial images came to represent the solution for the entire problem. The moment that issues of social justice were resolved by a neat pair of complimentary images was the moment the visual makeover became a cultural myth, transforming complex politics into a flat surface.

Visual Subjects

The invention and proliferation of photography led to the creation of what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2002) calls "visual subjects," persons constituted as both agents of sight and subjects of constant (even if imaginary) surveillance. On a psycho-personal level, photography extends Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. When you see your image in a mirror and identify with it, you are aware that this image is simultaneously you and not you. It is a perfect, indexical, interactive representation of yourself, yet it was a way you can never know yourself except for this technology. You cannot look at yourself from the outside except through a mirror, or eventually a photograph or a video. At the same time, you understand that the image in the mirror is the only way others can perceive you, by looking from the outside at your physical body. Seeing yourself being seen, you become aware of your social identity and the extent to which your appearance constantly communicates who you are, whether or not that may correspond to who you *think* you are. During the mirror stage, we learn that we are subject to our

bodies and their variables: gender, race, ethnicity, size; concurrently our bodies are subject to the gaze of others.

Lacan proposed that once an individual accepts the permanent relationship to his/her image in the mirror stage, s/he forms an Ideal-Ego – a conception of his/her perfect self, which the person wishes to present to the others. This idea is articulated in our relationship to photographs of ourselves. When having a portrait taken, we will typically dress up and smile, desiring to appear better than we usually look. Knowing that the image of us will be fixed, we strive to perform our Ideal-Ego, our best self. We construct our desired reflection for the imaginary gaze of others, Lacan's Ego-Ideal.[1]

How we formulate our Ideal-Ego is predictably influenced by the images we see in cultural representation. Living in a world of photographic saturation is like being continuously surrounded by mirrors. Through the experience of constantly looking at flattened representations of real people, living in a world of reflections, one's body becomes subject to the imaginary collective gaze and understood in relation to the two-dimensional bodies that populate the image world. The codes and patterns through which images of people are repeatedly presented establish which images become culturally idealized and which are deemed different, unacceptable, transgressive.

The practices of institutional photography unite the domain of personal identity with structures of disciplinary control. According to John Tagg (1987), photography became a tool of control and regulation in the late 19th century, following other social developments such as the modern prison and the police force. The mug shot – a photographic document of an arrested individual – became standard practice in the mid 1800s. Based on the ideas of Alphonse

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[1] References to Lacan's Mirror stage and Ideal-Ego are collected from several cited texts, most heavily from Fraser (2003) and Armstrong (1999)

Bertillon, it acquired a standardized "aesthetic" including lighting and scale requirements that would ensure reliable identification of the criminal. Brightly lit and photographed full face and in profile with an identifying number, the mug shot is hardly a portrait of one's "best self." Used as proof, a portrait of the produce of the disciplinary method, the mug shot forces the arrested to submit to the truth of his/her face. Simultaneously, it inscribes his/her image into a database of other documented criminals.

Mugshot, c. 1916

It is significant that the first instances of photographic makeovers began as institutional documentation, akin to police mug shots. The photographs of Galton's criminals, the women

miners, or Barnardo's orphans were official documents of social transgressors created by middle-class men, and used of evidence of the subjects' deviance from the expected, desired Victorian norm. In this way, photographic technology became another tool in the hands of the ruling groups to inscribe their codes of meaning onto the bodies of the power-less.

Foucault, referring to the development of medical records, said that "the examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" (Foucault 1975, 189). The institutional photograph becomes another identifying document, a proof of existence, official evidence of one's transgression within a system of other transgressors. Institutional photography thus contributes a new meaning to Foucault's aphorism, "Visibility is a trap" (200). It both renders an individual visible and traps one in his/her own image.

Thus, photography extends Foucault's concept of the mechanism of panopticism; documentary media images discipline and punish their viewers by granting them the pleasure of a voyeuristic and controlling gaze and simultaneously forcing them to internalize its invisible presence upon their own bodies. It establishes a system of constant visibility that also functions as an archive. In such a system, the ideal punishment is not incapacitation, torture or death, but quite the opposite:

> "The ideal point of penality today would be an indefinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation, a judgement that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed, the calculated leniency of a penalty that would be interlaced with the ruthless curiosity of an examination, a procedure that would be at the same time the permanent measure of a gap in relation to an inaccessible norm and the asymptotic movement that strives to meet in infinity." (Foucault 1975, 227)

The makeover is the ultimate penalty of the visual subject because it traps him/her in a system of visuality that separates images of people into two categories: ideal images (based on

ruling-class ideals) and images that are criminal based on their difference from the ideal. A makeover first labels an individual as a visual offender and in turn prescribes an identification with a new, normalized ideal image - a new Ideal-Ego - and a life-long assignment to attempt to approximate that ideal, thus forcing him/her into an indefinite discipline.

In the examples discussed above, the makeovers are clearly driven by social and political concerns. The women miners and Barnardo's orphans are not themselves deemed criminal, but are presented as victims of a society that has neglected them. However, when their images are transformed and presented as a solution or a proof of successful philanthropic intervention, their appearance, as a symptom of belonging to an undesirable social category, becomes criminalized. Thus, Galton's essentialist argument is simultaneously confirmed and denied. An individual's physical appearance effectively becomes synonymous with his/her inner character, which is paradoxically judged on the basis of the subject's failure or success in approximating a socially desirable look.

Technologies of Femininity

Feminist interpretations of post-structuralism argue that the creation of a subject does not only consist of performing one's class/position in society but the systematic production of sexual difference, which is represented by " a figuration of the body (indicated by the symptomatic insistence on the phallus, or on penis envy in Lacan and Freud respectively)" (Pollock 1994, 7). Based on its anatomy, the body is disciplined to perform femininity or masculinity according to the historical, social and cultural standards of sexual difference.

Kathryn Fraser (2003) argues that femininity is constructed as a function of male desire, creating a problem of "dual subjectivity" for women. According to John Berger (whom she

cites): "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (Fraser 2003, 47). In other words, women desire to be objects of male desire. They are constructed not just in terms of their position in the overall social system, but also in terms of their subordination to men's historical position of privilege.

In four out of six examples discussed above, the subject of the transformation is a woman. Unlike Barnardo's orphans, the made-over women are not just cleaned up but invariably dressed in appropriate *feminine* costume and taught to act and look modest and submissive, like "a lady."

Just like social documentary photography created a crisis of political legitimacy in regards to the class system, women's movements across the world began causing unrest in the western patriarchal order. The photographs of women miners in their work trousers caused a panic not because the women were not fit for the hard labour they were performing, but because they appeared too masculine, blurring the delicate boundary of sexual difference in a society which clearly privileged one gender over another. Images of working women threatened the naturalized representations of bourgeois sexual difference and echoed the arguments of middle-class women's rights activists demanding recognition of gender equality.

As a solution which simultaneously acknowledged and reinforced the woman's subordinate role in a system of patriarchal power, woman was reconstructed as an empowered consumer and provided with a recipe to achieve the desired feminine image based on the values of the Victorian middle-class. The female consumer was shaped by media directed specifically at women, which emerged and rapidly spread in the late 1800s. Kathryn Fraser argues that he woman's new function both extended her role beyond the purely domestic realm while actively

constructing a desirable/acceptable femininity that was based on purchase of certain commodities.

The makeover naturally lends itself as a format for depicting the empowering effects of this imposed identity. The format of the "before & after" picture sequence as a visual syntax of implied causality was first commercially employed in advertising trade-cards of the late 19th century, around the same time as Barnardo's vagrant-to-worker campaign. The trade-cards were illustrated and interactive collectible cards demonstrating the satisfying effects of a product. The "before" image usually depicts an unhappy person before using the product while the "after" demonstrates the same individual visibly satisfied by their purchased solution. The makeover here is very simple: from frown to smile. Though it was used to advertise everything from tobacco to shoes to sewing machines, the cards promoting items targeted at the female consumer used an advanced rhetoric as attractive by the opposite sex.

Fig. VI

For example, the above card addresses the woman's unglamorous role as a home-maker with the advertised product promising a relief from house work. The "Modern Cinderella" is empowered by her effective stove polish, which not only helps her perform her duties quickly enough to enjoy a night on the town, but works so well that she realizes she is pretty and "distinguished" enough to compete with her pompous sisters. The source of modern Cinderella's transformation from a poor home-maker to a desirable, marriage-worthy lady is <u>stove polish</u> – a brilliant advertising twist! By addressing the woman's desire for marriage and relief from housework as her greatest needs, the makeover's commodified solution constructs the feminine ideal as a subordinate home-maker at best, promising consumerism as the gesture of self-empowerment.

True Story of The Madam Warren Corset, 1886.

Another allusion to a fairy-tale transformation is seen in this card from 1886, published by a corset company to sell the superior body modifying qualities of its garment. In the sequence of pictures, Madame Warren is not only improved aesthetically by her new corset, but actually gets married as a result of it! She is her "own self-made Cinderella." Her consumer power gives her the ability to transform into a more desirable wife, implying that marriage is her greatest hope. The makeover advertisement acts as a correctional narrative, constructing the self as a problem to be fixed and immediately providing a solution – the purchase of a commodity.

The use of the attractiveness rhetoric is significant. Selling corsets is not the same thing as selling soap or sewing machines. Corsets, along with cosmetics, hair accessories and recently cosmetic surgery are what Susan Bordo, appropriating a Foucaldian concept, calls "technologies of femininity" (Bordo 2004, 171) A corset is not functional in itself except to make a woman

appear more feminine based on cultural ideals of the time. Visual narratives like these trading cards act as "illustrations of a recipe for femininity," producing both pleasure and anxiety (Fraser 2003, 69). The messages of the makeover: that femininity is something to be bought and applied on, it must be produced to appeal to male sexual desire, and a woman is incomplete unless she is performing and presenting a femininity which is defined to her through contemporary media images.

What the trading cards were attempting to do for corsets, women's magazines did for the cosmetic industry. The advent of cosmetics in the 1920's created further anxiety about appearance, while delivering an immediate solution in the form of make-up powders and mascaras. The magazine makeover first appeared in 1936 *Mademoiselle Magazine,* and featured a nurse (an average Mademoiselle reader) who was transformed in a photographic sequence using various cosmetics – mascara, rouge, eye shadows and lipsticks. Later, the magazine stopped using the in between images, condensing the makeover process to only the "before" and "after" photographs – leaving the sequence of transformation implied, while prominently featuring the products used to achieve the final result (Fraser 2003).

The trading card and magazine makeovers effectively acknowledged the woman's subordinate position in society of being the primary care-giver, a working mother, or an uncompensated housewife. However, they presented these conditions as fixable or justly reattributed through self-making magic of consumption. Stripping the women of agency to initiate real political change, women-directed media concentrated on producing anxiety with personal appearance and shaping women into pro-active buyers of technologies of femininity. The message presented by these texts suggests that only by approximating an ideal of media-prescribed feminine beauty (possessing an hourglass figure, properly made up, fashionably

dressed), skills (home-making) and manners (pleasant and submissive) could a woman attract a good man thus achieving the only version of success available to her.

In the 1950s, shows like *Glamour Girl* and *Queen for a Day* pioneered the televised makeover show that had women competing against each other for a makeover by confessing sob stories of their lives, whether it involved raising a handicapped child, or supporting an ill parent without adequate resources. Whoever produced the most sympathy-inducing narrative received a glamour makeover or thousands of dollars worth of consumer products (Cassidy 2006; Watts 2006). Marsha F. Cassidy argues that although these “misery shows” exploited women’s tragedies while promoting consumption as a solution to all individual social and cultural problems, they also created a public forum for women to express and acknowledge their unsatisfying position of subordination in society. Cassidy argues that the *Glamour Girl* makeover was a temporary but a defiant gesture of asserting one’s visuality at a time when women’s struggles were acknowledged in very few popular contexts.

I disagree with Cassidy. Referencing the narrative trope of Cinderella’s story, in the process of acknowledging the unfair conditions of the women who appeared on the show, these televised makeover texts *rewarded* the suffering women for their hard-work and sacrifice by presenting them with large quantities of material goods. While receiving one-time help may actually be analogous to getting a conditional gift from a fairy godmother that comes with an expiration date, the shows could never guarantee a happy-ever-after fairy tale ending for its contestants. Inadvertently, the shows end up inheriting Perrault’s intended function for Cinderella’s story – of socializing the women to continue carrying their cross in the promise of some potential, eventual, universal reward.

These texts allude to fairy-tale narratives because they present a fantasy version of the world created by a male-dominated society. In this world, women function not only as a subordinate class of home-makers but also as visual objects of male desire. Thus, while popular culture may allow some room to acknowledge that the work women have been expected to perform has been hard and unrewarding, maintaining a desirable appearance is never presented as a strategy of depoliticizing control, no matter how difficult it becomes to approximate the continuously redefining yet peculiarly specific ideal of female beauty.

While makeover texts may acknowledge the makeover subject as a victim of certain life circumstances, allowing her appearance to demonstrate the effects of those circumstances is her own responsibility and crime. Thus, Cinderella is recognized and rewarded for working hard, but she also serves as an example to all other, un-chosen for TV, real Cinderellas to strive to stay sexually appealing while performing their expected labor.

Visual Eugenics

In the early 2000s, America saw an explosion of makeover reality shows as a new popular televisual genre. From fashion makeover shows such as *Fashion Emergency*, *Style Court*, *How Do I Look?*, *A Makeover Story*, *Ambush Makeover* and *What Not to Wear;* to plastic surgery shows like *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan*, *I Want a Famous Face;* to coaching programs such as *MADE*, *The Biggest Loser*, and *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy;* to renovation shows like *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and *Pimp My Ride*, makeover shows are a standard item on a nightly menu of television entertainment. While in the coaching and renovation shows the makeover's subjects represent a mix of genders and social classes, the fashion and plastic surgery shows focus largely on fixing women's bodies and wardrobes. I will draw on readings of

Tait, Heyes, Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert that deconstruct the narrative formats of the makeover shows as well as personal interviews with the producers with TLC's *A Makeover Story* and *Ambush Makeover* Michelle Clark and Michael Precheur to trace how different elements of these programs function to problematize the unmediated female body, promoting the practice of what Tait calls "visual eugenics."

Contemporary makeover reality programs construct a feminine ideal achievable only through cosmetic and surgical alterations by victimizing the makeover subjects and criminalizing their appearances. Style-based shows accuse the participant for the wrong fashion choices she has made, assigning the makeover as the corrective penalty. Intrinsically conceptualizing the body as an object to be molded, shows such as *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* present plastic surgery as a "solution" to an imperfect appearance. The body is fragmented, and individual parts are identified as abnormal or imperfect, while surgery is offered as a means of fixing the flesh. Narrativizing Foucaldian disciplinary methods, makeover reality shows promote consumption and surgical intervention as authentic technologies of gender and self.

Whether it provides cosmetic surface (fashion/makeup) or surgical alternations, a maker show usually begins with a presentation of the guest in their everyday appearance and a discussion of why they want or should have a makeover. The producers Michelle Clark and Michael Precheur refer to this portion as "the background." According to Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert (2007), this section of the narrative is set up more as a "confessional." In *Extreme Makeover*, for example, the participants discuss their problematic, abnormal bodies and their resulting low self-esteem. Simultaneously, they perceive plastic surgery as a way to solve their problems and make them acceptable to participate in society. The women appearing on the show repeatedly equate insecurities with their appearance to their inability to sustain relations with

men, a revelation that serves as evidence of their failure to perform the image of a feminine ideal. Although these women may have families and friends that care about them the way they are, the desire for a heterosexual relationship is often the main motivation for the makeover. Tait calls these testimonies of one's defiant body "confessions of ugliness" and identifies this process as "central to the historical justification and normalization of cosmetic surgery" (Tait 2007, 125).

Additionally, in this part of the show, supporting evidence is provided by friends and family members to testify to the suffering caused by the appearance of the participant. *A Makeover Story (TLC)* transforms two people that have a close relationship with each other such as a mother and a daughter or two sisters. According to Michelle Clark, the relationship plays a big factor within the episode, as the second person provides support for the first to get a makeover. In shows *What Not to Wear* (TLC), *How Do I Look*? (Style) and *Style Court* (Style), family members actually nominate the candidate to be on the show, literally prosecuting them for their appearance.

On *What Not to Wear*, families assist the television crew in installing a hidden camera in the makeover candidate's closet for two weeks prior to her finding out about being selected for the makeover. This surveillance tape serves as incriminating video evidence of the candidate's abominable fashion sense. Once the hosts present the candidate with their surreptitiously obtained information and mockingly point out the many inadequacies in their wardrobe, they offer their expert advice as the only salvation. Surveillance continues to be an important element in the show. The makeover subject is provided with a $5000 credit card and told to shop according to the correct fashion principles dictated by the hosts. The hosts proceed to watch her attempts on a TV screen, but she inevitably fails and is ridiculed, at which point they intervene once again.

Perhaps the most literal depiction of the makeover's criminalizing narrative is seen on Style Network's *Style Court,* where the guest of the show is actually "sued" by one of her friends or family members for her unpleasant appearance. The prosecutors bring photographs or clothing items as proof of the defendant's criminal style. A jury of various celebrities or style "experts" can declare her guilty and sentence her to be made over. This format may seem to be parodying itself, but the audience's reactions to the final reveal always imply that the guest's look is improved by the makeover.

What these shows connote is that in the surveillance culture, one is never free from the disciplinary gaze. Militant observers may approach you on the street (*Ambush Makeover*), spy from your closet (*What Not to Wear*) or come in the guise of your closest relatives (all of them!).

In plastic surgery shows such as *Extreme Makeover*, the evidence offered by the patient and her loved-ones do not scorn her personal fashion choices, but present the patient as a victim of undeserved suffering caused by the body. The testimonies presented include the embarrassment of children to be seen with the mom, low self-esteem, inability to sustain a relationship, and poor job prospects. The patient's physical appearance, not the cruelty of others, is identified as the source of her unhappiness, while she is constructed as an unjustified victim of her defiant body. "Ugliness" or another form of visual inadequacy is constructed as a veritable deformity, and the psychological suffering caused by a small bust or an aging face is equated to the suffering caused by an illness or a "debilitating accident" (Tait 2007, 121). By rewarding the morally worthy individual with a beautiful appearance, cosmetic surgery is framed as a form of "justice" and a cure for "suffering." (Tait 2007, 125)

The cosmetic surgery shows also include an examination element, similar to the surveillance procedures in the style-oriented shows. In this part of the show, the surgeon

inscribes the patient's flesh with marker outlines of problematic areas. The body is fragmented and diagnosed. Fat, sag and wrinkles are reconstructed in medical terms and assigned specific surgical remedies. Foucault said that the examination is a ceremony of objectification (Foucault 1975, 187). Surgical makeover shows present the human body as a collection of parts, acceptable or unacceptable objects to be arranged into the desired whole. By presenting the examination process on television, surgical makeover shows also equip the viewers to objectify themselves, to navigate the surgeon's office, to know which procedures to ask for, giving the viewer basic knowledge to diagnose the defiant/defective parts of his/her own body.

Tait argues that the ideals sought out by the patients and offered by the doctors are ultimately culturally gendered, offering men more "masculine" chins and rendering women more "feminine" by giving them delicate features or emphasizing the female contours. It is not the patient herself, but her body that is deemed criminal and defiant, by comparing the patient's body with the spectacularized bodies of "consumer and televisual culture: the hegemonic bodies which do not bear the traces of childbirth, aging or poverty" (Tait 2007, 125). The bodies of unhappy makeover patients are measured in their gaps and distances from the 'ideal' cultural body, belonging to the airbrushed images of wealthy celebrities. Thus the normative body established by our culture is a necessarily mediated one, impossible to achieve without exercise regimes, diets and cosmetic alternations – without relentless consumption.

Once identified as visually criminal, the patient obviously cannot be trusted to fix herself. According to Foucault, "the relation of each individual to his disease and to his death passes through the representatives of power, the registration they make of it, the decisions they take on it." (Foucault 1975, 196-7). In both the style and the surgical makeover shows, the guest must submit themselves or their body to an external correction officer – a doctor or style "expert." In

the style shows, an expert is someone that works directly with the ideal body, celebrity stylists and make-up artists. However, according to Michael Precheur, an expert on *Ambush Makeover* may be chosen simply for being "very attractive." Having close contact with the ideal body or being one apparently deems one qualified to correct others. The experts claim to work with the guests in order to bring out their best features, but the ideal remains a glamorous celebrity look. The producer of *A Makeover Story*, Michelle Clark, emphasized that the final look of the participants was always determined more by external stylists than their own ideas of what would look good:

> We would listen to their wishes, but a lot of times we would push. Because when you're doing a makeover a lot of times people are afraid to take it to the next level for themselves. People do not want to stand out. They like to blend in. But a lot of people we did had the potential to stand out – they could look really, as you would say, *hot*. But they did not feel comfortable looking hot necessarily. So our typical makeover would be Soccer Mom transformed into a Glam-o-Rama Queen. You know, she could go back to her pre-married, pre-baby, Hot Self.

In *How do I Look?*, the participant can choose a look selected for them by family, friend or a professional stylist. Thus, the qualifications of the expert are less important than the fact that the participant loses the privileges to dress his/herself. The makeover is always externally imposed.

In the cosmetic surgery shows, the patient entrusts their body into the hands of a professional. The process of transformation is a serious medical procedure, causing severe trauma to the body. However, the pain and risks of the surgery are trivialized, as the footage of operation effectively conceals shots of flesh, blood and the cut-up body. The pain caused is rarely addressed and the recovery time is downplayed.

In all the shows, the final element of a makeover is the reveal. It is either a special event or a staged gathering of participant's friends and family members anticipating the participant's

new look. As she walks out like a model her friends and loved ones exclaim their approval of the new appearance. According to Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert's (2007) analysis of *Extreme Makeover*, the reveal is problematic because "it is narrated in such a way that it appears as if every participant's life is improved, her problems are solved, the results of a little 'nip and tuck'." The risks and scars associated with the procedures are never discussed, and the makeover is marketed as "another commodity, the 'natural' next step after highlights and a new wardrobe." In addition, there is no mention of the exorbitant costs of the makeovers, because the participants did not have to pay for their transformation. The construction of *Extreme Makeover* promotes the practice of "visual eugenics" as a form of charity.

For the networks and producers, makeover shows are a brilliant economic initiative. Except for the costs of actual filming, practically everything on the show is free for the production company. The recipient of the makeover is an eager volunteer (or eagerly volunteered by her friends and relatives), while the clothes and cosmetic services are traded by the stores and professionals for free integrated advertising. The commercials interrupting the flow of the episode are really interrupting one long commercial for hair salons, clothing boutiques and plastic surgeons.

Meanwhile, the solutions promoted by the shows are increasingly expensive. Cosmetic surgery costs thousands of dollars for each procedure (though can often be conveniently financed). Even with clothing and cosmetics, according to Michelle Clark, the trading arrangement allowed the show to obtain top of the line items and services, which would be unaffordable to an average viewer. While one person may have his life changed by receiving

$60,000 worth of dental work that was donated by benevolent, fame-seeking doctor[2], it hardly improves the situation for thousands of Americans with bad teeth and lack of dental insurance.

Despite depicting dramatic transformations, makeover programs are affecting real behaviours. According to a study published in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* (Carmichael 2007), four out of five people seeking cosmetic surgery claimed to be "directly influenced" by surgical makeover shows such as *Extreme Makeover* and *I Want a Famous Face*. Only twelve percent said they had never seen a reality show about plastic surgery before. A study at the Virginia Commonwealth University (Mazzeo et al, 2007) found that women viewers of cosmetic surgery makeover programs indicated an increase in disordered eating attitudes and behaviours, and a deeper internalization of the thin body ideal. Moreover, the messages of makeover programs are penetrating female audiences at a younger age. As Camille Sweeney noted in a *New York Times* article published April 3, 2008, girls as young as 8-10 years old are demanding $200 highlighting treatments to imitate the hairstyles of their favourite celebrity idols. Accordingly, their parents are forced to decide very early on when to allow their daughters to begin participating in the culture of commodified femininity, abandoning the color-coded girlhood for mediated and sexualized ideals of womanhood.

Makeover reality shows provide a model narrative of self-transformation. The final reveal is a triumph of visuality, declaring the made-over subject finally worthy to be seen, not just by their family and friends but the entire televisual public. As June Deery (2006) argues, the makeover subjects are not just mediated, but *mediatised* – crafted for optimal appearance on a visual medium. According to producer Michelle Clark, guests of *A Makeover Story* who did not

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[2] Clark and Precheur worked for "The Greg Behrendt Show" hosted by the author of *He's Just Not That Into You (2006)*. One of the episodes featured a musician whose teeth had completely rotted out. As part of the makeover, he received around $60,000 of dental work (as a trade) from a dentist in the Philadelphia's Queen Village.

need to be dressed up for a specific professional occasion usually looked like they "could be on a magazine cover and they were going to a cocktail party" when they were done.

According to Heyes's (2007) reading of *Extreme Makeover*, the show, focusing largely on white working-class bodies, depicts cosmetic surgery as having the ability to erase class lines and elevate success and happiness through purely aesthetic means. Tait also addresses this fact, suggesting that offering women surgery as a solution to problems of self-esteem "circumscribes the possibility that women will respond politically to the social and cultural factors which produce the experience of alienation from one's body" (Tait 2007, 121). She argues the shows like *Extreme Makeover* are part of a cultural post-feminism which works to undermine the gains of second wave feminism through popular representations, by rendering feminist agendas "as achieved and thus exhausted" (Tait 2007, 122).

Makeover narratives tend to re-surface in cultural texts at moments of changing social roles – crises of cultural legitimacy. 1950s America was faced with the task of carving out a postwar ideal of the woman as a suburban housewife, after women had tasted the liberating potentials of war-effort workforce. The cultural legitimacy of the post-war feminine ideal spawned both radical feminist protests (casting off bras – modern technologies of femininity – at a beauty pageant!) and disciplining televisual narratives – where feelings of being trapped and unfulfilled in the role of a housewife were ameliorated with a consumer makeover (a la *Queen for A Day*).

Today, women are embraced in the corporate world but they also face increasing pressure to not only tirelessly strive for a successful career, but continue to sustain a (well-decorated) household, be full-time mothers AND stay in perfect shape while always sporting photo-op worthy blow-outs. In other words, while women have gained political and economic power, it

was under the condition that they remain sources of visual pleasure, that they continue to perform the part of a sexualized femininity. This impossible standard is the lingering disarming strategy of the relentless patriarchal order.

The surgical makeover narrative positions the natural body as not "feminine" enough and offers plastic surgery to correct its defiant contours. This growing belief might explain why the most visual of the biologically female metamorphoses - the post-partum body - is also the most reported rising motivation for getting cosmetic surgery by women ages 20-39. According to a *New York Times* article by Natasha Singer, published on October 4, 2007, the package of operations known as the "mommy makeover" promises to "erase the unwanted effects of childbearing and age" and return the new mom to her desirable pre-pregnancy shape.

The makeover criminalizes the unmediated body, pathologizing marks of aging and giving birth as visually criminal, while simultaneously legitimizing "corrective" technologies of femininity such as cosmetic surgery, makeup, and fashion. The intelligible female body existing in the domain of cultural representations is thus effectively translated into practices of the useful body. Anne Balsamo, in her essay "On the Cutting Edge: Cosmetic surgery and the Technological Production of the Gendered Body" (1992), argues that through cosmetic surgery, the physical body becomes a material site for circulation of cultural meanings. The technologically restructured body is used to reproduce culturally constructed ideals of beauty and femininity. Thus women's own bodies are finally colonized and established as mediums of their own oppression.

In the language of Bordo:

> Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity – a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation,

> 'improvement.' Through the exacting and normalizing principles of time and space in the day of many women – we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough. (Bordo 2004, 166)

Through culturally evolving makeover narratives, the woman and her body have been constructed as particularly pathological criminals of the visual culture. As women gain more political and economic power, technologies regulating cultural ideals of gender also become more severe, invasive and financially draining, continuously increasing the stakes of the "indefinite discipline."

The socializing messages of fairy-tale narratives, disciplining power of the photographic gaze and promises of empowerment through consumption are intricately imbedded into contemporary reality television makeover texts. By employing surveillance, confession, testimony, examination and correction as narrative elements of each episode, makeover reality shows effectively discipline bodies of the makeover subjects and viewers to conform to gender and aesthetic ideals prescribed by professional stylists and plastic surgeons – the so-called "experts" of the self-improvement industries. The empowering message that everyone has the potential to be beautiful is underscored by the implication that no one is good enough just the way they are.

Possibilities of Resistance

Balsamo suggests the possibility of using cosmetic surgery as a technology that helps to transgress gender ideals, by approaching it as a body modification akin to piercing or tattoos. In a similar hopeful argument, the makeover can be a narrative that subverts cultural ideals and plays with established gender identities. MTV's teen show *MADE*, for example, transforms "girly

girls" into BMX racers and "football jocks" into ballet dancers defying the traditional ideals of masculine/feminine-coded interests. One of the participants of the show, Josh, was made into a soccer player on one episode and then into a fashion journalist two seasons later. The show effectively harnesses the possibilities of adventurous self-making specifically because its participants are young, at a stage where identity exploration is encouraged and expected and because MTV caters to a younger, more alternative audience. However, the process of coaching and transformation is not without pain, and the show can sometimes serve as a cautionary tale about defying cultural stereotypes.

It is hard to escape the makeover's disciplining intentions. In an episode of *A Makeover Story*, the band SNAKEBiTE jokingly applied to get a punk rock makeover in order to "make it big" in the music world. The style team eagerly dressed the band members from upscale 'punk boutiques' like Trash and Religious Sex in New York, cut and colored their hair into spiked mohawks and even offered them rock-star tips like "don't wear underwear with your leather pants!"

When the band's new look was finally revealed, the attempted subversion of the makeover format got turned on its head. The band looked so authentically like rebellious punks that they became caricatures of themselves and the entire punk aesthetic. The very idea of rebellion was effectively commodified to a mediated ideal, completely stripped of the movement's radical and anti-consumerist politics.

Similarly, Denise McGuigan's transformation on the show was supposed to make her into a "rocker chick" dressed for the occasion of seeing a female rock-singer perform in concert. The episode was sponsored by a new Revlon campaign that had bold, spunky imagery, and

McGuigan's makeover was made to match. The stylists cut and dyed her long hair, and gave her dramatic stage make-up. Upon seeing her new look, McGuigan commented:

> I didn't like the makeup and I didn't like the hair. I felt like I wasn't myself. The clothes were me, I thought. But not my whole look. I looked goth… I had really long hair and they cut it. And they dyed it blonde, black and brown. It was crazy. They put tons of makeup. When I first saw it, I was like… Oh I like it.. And then… I started to cry.

Resistance to the new look is a frequent element in makeover shows. The makeover subject is assigned not only a new appearance, but an associated new identity – a new Ideal-Ego – with a prescription of necessary products and services to maintain their supposedly improved style. Essentialism is revealed in this interior conflict. Despite acknowledging our transgression from the image of the media ideal, we seem to be very attached to our plain and deviant looks and what they represent about our inner selves.

It is still possible to experience the empowerment of self-transformation and the pleasures of looking good, but we must be careful to negotiate the messages of visually disciplining media narratives with our own creative representation of individual difference, because the most beautiful part of each of us is one that cannot be bought.

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