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Article Summary

The Male Gaze in the Medical Classroom: Proximity, Objectivity, and Objectification in "The Pornographic Anatomy Book" by Amanda Friz and Marissa Fernholz is an article published in 2020 that discusses the intersect between the distant, disinterested medical gaze and the close, interested male gaze. This is done primarily through an analysis of a 1971 medical textbook which included nude photography designed to appeal to a white, heterosexual audience in conjunction with tongue-in-cheek writing that objectifies the models used (Friz, 293). One of the claims made by the paper is that a medical gaze is inherently a male gaze (Friz, 295), and the differing "rhetorics of proximity" that each view demands highlights the overlap between the two, while simultaneously undermining the objectivity of all medical imagery (Friz, 311). In addition, the racialization of the male gaze is also brought into question. Since all the pinup photos used were of white women appealing to a white, male audience with white beauty standards, does this inherently categorize all other body shapes, sizes, and colors as less than desirable (Friz, 302-303)?

The article's insights towards male gaze separate from the medical gaze are also worth noting. One of the claims the article makes provides a very straightforward understanding of the male gaze, notably, that gazes gain their power not only through the *perception* that gazing is harmless (and by extension, inconsequential), but also that they structure subject-object

relationships with their perceived inconsequentiality (Friz, 296). Building off this, although elementary, it is important to remember that gazes in general (including the male gaze), are a method of dehumanizing and objectifying anything being looked at (Friz, 303). Related to the textbook, the male gaze associated with the pinups places emphasis and special value on bodies seen as “sexy” rather than “healthy” (Friz, 302). As stated earlier, this method of comparing people based on arbitrary metrics dictated by the dominant group intrinsically devalues anything that’s not the norm. In the case of the male gaze, this means that anyone who is not white enough or skinny enough is automatically considered abnormal and less desirable.

Regarding the last few questions in the prompt, I would not say that there was necessarily a central question being asked. Rather, the article was more so structured around an analysis of a poorly executed textbook in an attempt to reveal information about the male gaze more generally. As a result, the “inquiry” is structured mostly through document analysis. Most of the things I learned from this article cleared up preconceived ideas of the male gaze I already had. For example, I had a foggy idea that the male gaze is the way in which men look at people, objectifying them and thus devaluing them. This article made that connection and many others like it much clearer to me. In addition, I learned how the male gaze is tied to most other gazes and how they combine to make situations more complex. The article helped me understand the influence of colonialism on contemporary images of the body by highlighting the ways in which the pervasiveness of colonialist-era beauty standards are present and preserved through modern uses of the male gaze as a tool of objectification.

Bibliography

Friz, Amanda M., and Marissa L. Fernholz. "The Male Gaze in the Medical Classroom: Proximity, Objectivity, and Objectification in 'The Pornographic Anatomy Book.'" *Women's Studies in Communication*, vol. 43, no. 3, Aug. 2020, pp. 292–316. *Taylor and Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2020.1740899>.