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NYU London: Fashion, Culture, and the Body
Paper 1
Due: 10/20/16

Question: Why is fashioning the body considered more important for women than for men? Use examples of contemporary and/or historical body practices in your answer and refer to at least one work of theory.

Throughout this essay, I am working to theorize the fact that women are mostly associated with fashion because of the consequential effects of being controlled and disciplined socially by the means of a circular and controlling female gaze formed adjacent to a seemingly misogynistic view of panopticism in order to perpetuate the ideal look of the so called “gender female.” Therefore, through this socially constructed “gender” women consequentially force themselves into the role of conforming to the ideals of the female “Docile body” in order to gain a means of acceptance and sense of control over their everyday lives. The formal idea of the female “Docile body” fluctuates between cultures but a common view of the “Docile body” in the American culture can be seen generally through the representations of popular pop-culture icons in the media but can be further analyzed by studying the detailed instructions of YouTube “Makeup Gurus” that everyday women look towards to learn how to become this “ideal women” they often view in pop-culture. “Makeup Gurus” such as ItsMyRayeRaye have become the base for which an everyday female viewer can transform themselves from dull to seeming “Docile.” These “Makeup Guru’s” capitalize on not only capturing the “ideal” for their own sense of self-worth, but also financially. YouTube has become a home base for stabilizing identity for both “Gurus” and viewers, as well as a form of financial well-being used by “Gurus” in order to sustain themselves and higher their rank in society by conforming to and perpetuating the

“stereotypical women”, an idea which is then placed on younger generations to continually conform to in order to gain similar status and success.

The first aspect of social control, through the means of makeup, can be analyzed as stemming from the general fear and anxiety women have experienced throughout history as a result of being judged by their outward appearances as the forefront of determining their place within society. This idea of always being watched in society is perpetuated in Figure 1: ItsMyRayeRaye’s “How to: No Makeup, Makeup LOOK in Less than 5 Minutes!” When watching the Youtube clip, the viewer is first struck with the capitalization of the word “LOOK” in the caption of the video which initially drives this idea of being “Seen.” As the actual video begins the viewer is introduced to a “natural” but actually unnatural look throughout the tutorial. The tutorial therefore enforces the idea that in order to look and feel accepted, women have to put on a natural look through the use of makeup because their natural and biological look is actually not seen as natural in the eyes of the society around them. This idea of being constantly under surveillance can be related to the Foucauldian view of panopticism. For example, within Foucault’s writing of “Panopticism” in “Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison” he describes the prison structure of the panopticon which allowed prisoners to be seen without seeing their onlooker thus creating a sense of power over the individuals being watched which relates to the idea of always being watched in society showcased through the need to have a “natural” but truly unnatural look like that of Figure 1. Throughout the video ItsMyRayeRaye makes comments such as “Now this look is a very natural look, it only takes about five minutes to do and I can still look good, healthy, and radiant” and “Now for my mascara, I don't want to use black because I want to look natural and not so hard so I'm just going to put that on my lashes and on my bottom lashes” She then concludes the video by saying “Now I am all done, A

natural look, no cake base and now it's time to hang out with Teddy and take some selfies!"

These comments provide the video with an urgency as if these unnatural fashions, such as mascara, will help onlookers see the “natural woman” as beautiful and healthy. The fact that she concludes by alluding to the fact that she will then take part in taking “selfies” in order to display her natural look for others is the key take-away from the video clip. Though claiming a “No makeup look” there is still a necessity to show others how “radiant” the everyday woman can look if she conforms to this “natural” but unnatural state through essentially fashioning her own face. In Foucault's “Discipline and Punish” he also says, “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 3). He then goes on to say that “This architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relations independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault 3). Furthermore, by being constantly judged in the outside realm both female “Makeup Gurus” and female viewers of these tutorials “bear” the strain of applying makeup to themselves because of this feeling that results from being under a system of surveillance, similar to the Panopticon. The surveillance and overlaying power over women that comply to this act of conformity works on their anxieties through the lens of the public eye and because of the indirect “power” these “ideal looks” have on them, women unknowingly perpetuate their own stress and anxiety by conforming and teaching others to conform to a “female ideal” that is essentially grounded in nothing because the idea of the “ideal female” is constantly changing not only in American culture but also in many other cultures.

By further looking into Tynan's view of Foucault's concern with this power relation in chapter eleven, “Michel Foucault: Fashioning the Body Politic,” we can analyze this idea of the

power of the “societal gaze.” Tynan writes, “Once the prison becomes a metaphor for how people are organized throughout modern society, we can see how Foucault saw social life as embodied subjectivity. The anxiety we feel about our bodies – particularly concerns about appearance – result from this scopic regime of modernity” (Tynan 6). Therefore, in order to essentially become the “ideal”, women can work to escape the constant motion of anxiety they experience concerning their appearance by conforming to the norm. Many of the comments that were made in the tutorial’s review section exemplify the desire to reach the “ideal look” portrayed by ItsMyRayeRaye. One comment says, “She is awesome, I wanna be like her when I get older (I’m 12 today is my bday)” and another says, “Wow you look so cute and where can I get those products?” There is an effort on behalf of the viewers to buy the products advertised by the “Makeup Guru,” as well join in on the simple but unnatural form of socialized “natural” beauty that has been determined for the female body.

The real dilemma of the unnatural “natural” look lies in the determinants of what makes a female “feminine.” In Entwistle’s “Fashioning of the Body: Chapter 5 Fashion and Gender,” she discusses the implication of placing characteristics on gender, which is exemplified by the fact that an “ideal look” has been enforced throughout the tutorial. She theorizes that gender and sex are not “naturally entangled,” but that by common association they have been forced together. She defines sex as biological, but gender as socially constructed. In an early example she discusses the fact that skirts are considered masculine in certain cultures and feminine in others, meaning that the norms of individual cultures are the determinants of their specific views on gender characteristics. Therefore, the makeup channels that users subscribe to in order to conform to their supposed “gender,” are not grounded at all in the fact of what is biologically male and female, but actually grounded in the gender ideas constructed by America’s cultural

norms. Hence, in essence, the “natural” look portrayed by the tutorial in Figure 1 is simply a social construction fabricated in order to regulate the way the female body moves throughout society. Entwistle goes on to theorize that, “Fashion turns culture into nature, it *naturalizes* the cultural order” (Entwistle 144). This process of the naturalization of cultural norms can be witnessed through women’s ongoing adornment of several types of fashion, including clothes and makeup, in order to display their discipline to the norm and shed away from their fear of objection of their peers. Furthermore, with that said, the tutorials have become a false, but necessary means for which women can learn how to sustain a “normal” and accepted life in the female body. Also in “The Fashioned Body: Chapter 1 Addressing the Body,” Entwistle terms human bodies as actually being “dressed bodies” (7) unable to show “nakedness” (7) as exemplified for the need for a falsely “natural look.” She then describes dressing oneself as a “practice requiring knowledge, technique, and skill.” When studying the process of following tutorials, it is evident that the practice of applying the knowledge of tutorials to everyday life is not only a learned action but also a normalized process of self identification and worth for the female body within the schema of everyday life. In her writing of “Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo” Douglas theorizes that “Rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know their own society. The rituals work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body” (Douglas 129). This practice and process of learning and taking part of fashion through this use of makeup creates a discourse for which the female body can learn and follow a practice in order to “remain ideal.” This process concerning normalized but also culturally formed “natural” fashions often goes beyond makeup. In “Chapter 5: ‘The Commodification of the Body’ in Buying Beauty: Cosmetic Surgery in China” Wen Hua discusses the common practice of

cosmetic surgery in China which that has been formed from the misconception that there is a “natural” look that needs to be obtained which differs from the biologically natural makeup of the female body. Wen says “Sometimes, cosmetic surgery is glorified not only as a means to embrace beauty, but also as a way to happiness” (Wen 131). This focus on the misconception that conformity equals happiness and reward is the basis on which the concept of the “Docile body” can be analyzed.

The “Docile body” can be described as a body that is not only manipulated in order to conform to the cultural normative but as containing an aspect of advantage because of that conformance. In Blackman’s, “The Body: Key Concepts: Introduction” he describes an extract from Foucault’s “Discipline and Punishment” in which he describes the Panopticon as “a form of an apparatus intended to render the individual docile and useful” (Blackman 26). He then also equates the “Docile body” to a “Disciplined body.” This disciplined body is often not directly pushed into conformance but actually places regulations on itself in order to receive the rewards that accompany meeting certain societal standards. When thinking back to the rewards and the “happiness” achieved from the conformance that Hua describes through her work, “Buying Beauty,” it becomes evident that through fashioning oneself to a “natural” look, one can even support themselves financially. ItsMyRayeRaye not only has over one million subscribers, but is also being financially supported by her action of teaching and enforcing cultural ideas of the “ideal feminine body” through her videos. Also, according to Forbes.com, the highest payed “Makeup Guru,” Michelle Phan had made three million dollars 2015 alone. This earning resulted from a mixture of promotional advertisements, and additional business ventures that were popularized by the “Makeup Guru’s” youtube channel. This income is a reflection of the myriad of the prizes that the docile body receives by stepping into this ideal role and the evidence of this

success works to make female viewers of these tutorials aware of the fact that they are not only being watched, but that the act of being watched and conforming to the ideals of societal lenses can result in benefits to their everyday lifestyles, long term. This further encompasses Anderson's definition of fashion as an economic feature from "Exploring Visual Culture: Fashion, Style, Identity and Meaning." By showcasing the process of fashioning the face, "Makeup Guru's" not only benefit financially, but they also further drive sales of the brands and beauty products that they subsequently advertise through their videos. Furthermore, this process of advertising a "No makeup, Makeup Look" exemplifies that docility is far from coercion, but actually a way in which the female body utilizes the difficulties of conformance for personal gain.

In "Up against Foucault: 'Feminism, Foucault, and the Politics of the Body'" Bordo touches on the idea of the reward factor that accompanies notions of the docile body when discussing breast implants. She says that the women receiving these implants are not "cultural dopes" but actually are "conscience of the system of values and rewards that they are responding to and perpetuating" (Bordo 250). These rewards develop a consequential desire among women to work to conform to this docile body in order to gain acceptance by giving into social control. In Marianne Thesander's, "The Feminine Ideal: Introduction" she discusses the forces which are used to control women as well as the ideals placed on women especially when seen adjacent to male body's positioning within society. When delving discussion of the body Thesander says, "We exist through our bodies, but it is the formed and moulded body that signals our social position and cultural affiliation" (Thesander 9). She then says, "The natural body, through various artificial means, is re-formed into a cultural image of femininity" (Thesander 9). This idea of social signaling in order to situate one's social position as a "Docile" female body

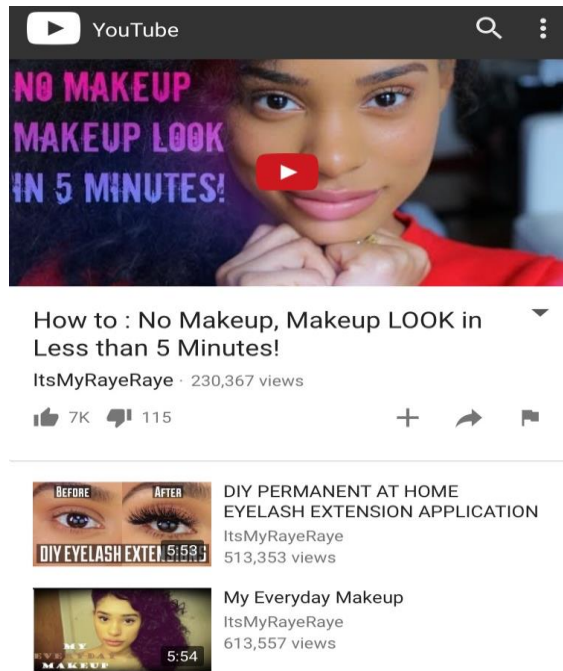
contributes to the aggressivity for which women are giving into the practices of continually adorning themselves with fashion, such as makeup, and undergoing a process that is unnecessarily perpetuated by the female gaze on one another.

In conclusion, not only are the aesthetic fashions of female body watched and under a constant social system of surveillance, but they are also used by women in order to continue portraying the idea of the “Docile body.” Adherence to the norms and regulations of this docile body come with countless rewards as far as status and acceptance from the society that surrounds these bodies. The makeup channels on YouTube constantly work as a means for which women can take part in the discourse of “Becoming docile” and learn the processes and practices that come with fashioning the female face. Thus, this creates an ideal of “natural” beauty that is associated with the female body socially but not biologically. The actions of the female body within the scheme of its cultural normative can be used to project the idea of necessary conformance and the “happiness” that follows it. The social control of the female body though influenced by the position of the male gaze, is actually perpetuated more so by the female gaze, and this therefore makes the female body its own “bearer” of anxiety and social pressures. This circulation of the discourse of fashioning the body from women themselves has made fashion more important to the well-being of the female body than the male body.

Figures

Figure 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtVNB7vR4M8>



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