From Snippets of Life to Snippets of Lies

A look at beauty trends over the years, how portraits have edited to conform to those beauty standards, and the impact this has had on society

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Beauty Standards Over Time

- Throughout history, the ideal of the "beautiful woman" has changed over time but beauty standards have always been around
- Venus of Willendorf : dated 24,000 - 25,000 BC
  - Considered to be one of the oldest surviving works of art
  - Thought to be the representation of fertility and eroticism
  - Scholars speculate that women with these features at that time were perceived as more beautiful
- Emphasis on breasts and pubic region
  - The part of women's anatomy that deal with the process of reproduction and child rearing

# Beauty Standards: Hellenistic Era
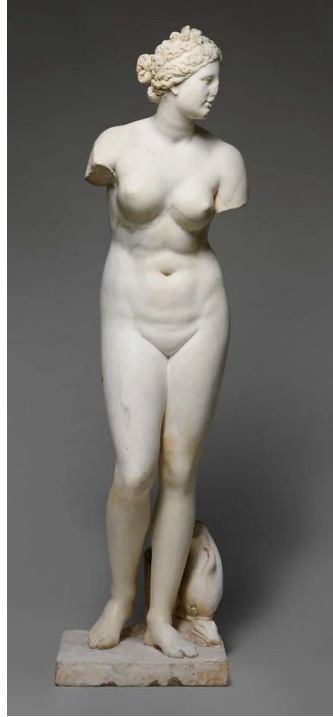
Venus de Milo

- Beauty was an extremely important features for the ancient Greeks
  - A beautiful body was considered to be direct evidence of having a beautiful mind
- For men:
  - Muscular and "masculine"
  - Power could be conveyed via their outer appearance
  - Big penises were considered vulgar
- For women:
  - Having a bit of extra fat on their body
  - Signified that they had wealth and could afford to eat to their satisfaction


Dorphoros

Beauty Standards: Medieval Times

- Due to the rise of the Christian faith, femininity became linked with danger and sin
- This resulted in women being portrayed as plain, unattractive figures
- Women would often cover areas that could arouse desires in the minds of men (heavy clothing and hair coverings)
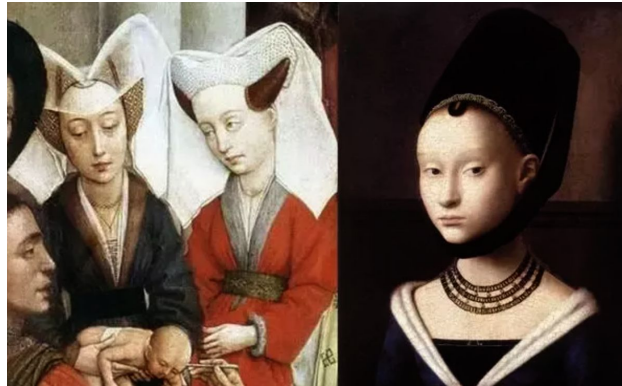
Beauty Standards: Renaissance

- Women were no longer seen as 'sinful'
  - Representation of women in art again took off
  - Further confirmed via the number of naked women portrayed in art during this time
- Ideal women:
  - Long, wavy, golden blonde hair, a high forehead, pale, hairless skin, white teeth, and small breasts
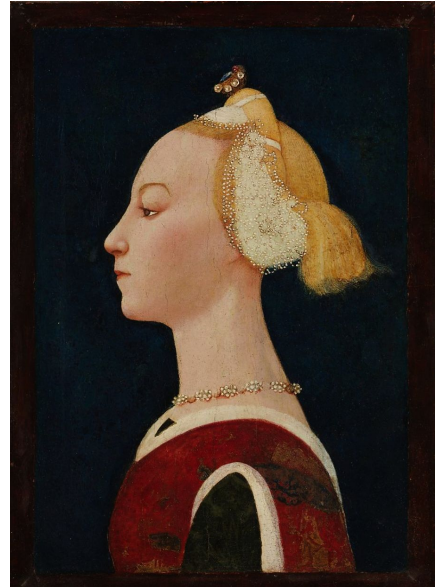
Beauty Standards: Victorian Era

- A lot of trends during this time were influenced by Queen Victoria
- Clear, pale skin was thought to represent youth, purity, and virtue
  - Bathing daily became popular during this time
  - Women started to use herbs and essential oils to soften the skin
- Thin waist and large bust was desirable
  - Corsets became a huge fashion trend to achieve this look
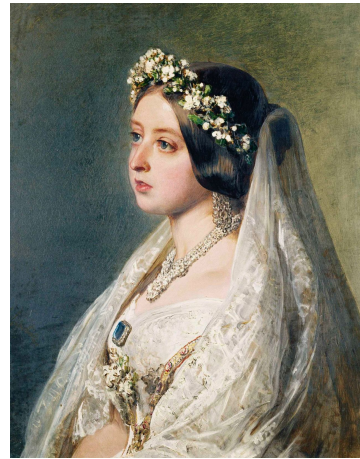
Beauty Standards: Modern Day

- Since the invention of the camera late during the Victorian era, beauty trends were more influenced by photographs during this time
- Beauty trends evolved at a much quicker rate, and there was more documentation of the small changes as things went in and out of style
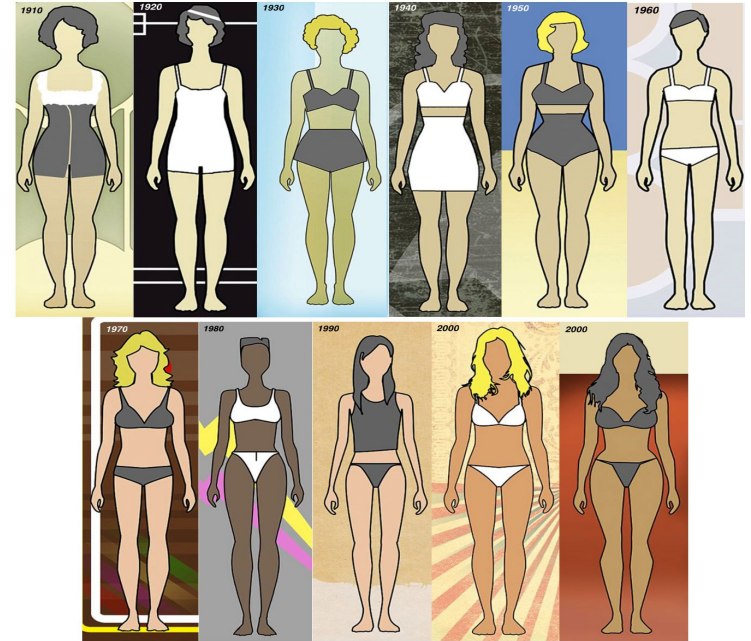
Beauty Standards: Modern Day

- 1910s were inspired by the Gibson Girl look, as illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson
- This was defined by a large bust and small waist, similar to that of wearing corsets
- Camille Clifford was one of the most famous Gibson Girls at the time

Beauty Standards: Modern Day

- 'Skinny' went into style in the 1920s
  - Due to the popularity of flapper girls
- 1930s-50s reintroduced curves and a more 'feminine look' during the war
- 1960s brought back a much slimmer figure being popular again
  - Twiggy, a supermodel during this time, became one of the pioneers of this aesthetic
- 1970s through the 1990s had a small waist, thin hips, and long legs as the big trends
  - These were the characteristic traits of supermodels at the time
  - Elle MacPherson (right) was a supermodel in the 80s
  - Kate Moss (left) was a supermodel in the 90s
- 2000s introduced a "skinny" curvy beauty trend, where being fit while still in shape was in
- 2010 up until the present sees very curvy frames, with big breasts and hips as a trend
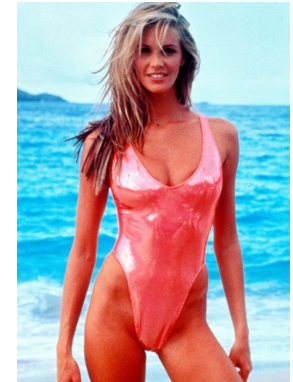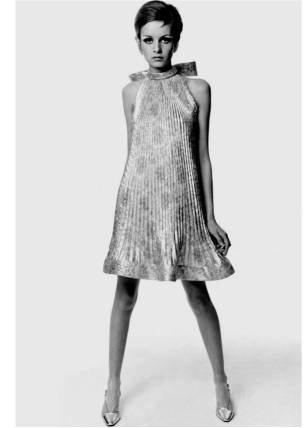
Portrait Manipulation

- Editing has been around since portraits have been done
  - But without 'originals to compare them to', we can only speculate the extent to which portraits were modified
- Representations of the statues of men likely had themselves depicted with smaller genitalia
- Portraits were done airing more on the side of the beauty standards of the time
  - Ie. whitening of the skin, clear faces, more curves

Before restoration vs After restoration
Isabella de' Medici

Photographic Manipulation

- It wasn't until photography came around that we had "proof" of editing, by means of an original image
- 1841: William Henry Fox Talbot patented the calotype
  - Photographic process that created a negative that could generate multiple copies
- 1846: Calvert Richard Jones manipulated the negatives to produce the first famous example of photo manipulation

Photographic Manipulation

- 1878: Wet plate collodion process was invented
  - Used glass negatives
  - This was great for photo manipulation, as glass provided a transparent, solid, and easily modified base for the images
- Most common form of correcting was to apply graphite to areas that needed retouching

Photographic Manipulation

- Eventually more "detailed work", called etching, could be done by using a blade, similar to that of a surgeon's scalpel
- Only experienced retouchers performed extensive etching, due to it being highly delicate work

Photographic Manipulation

- With the invention of Photoshop in 1987, photo editing became even easier, thus allowing for editing to be more widely used
- With Photoshop, and digital editing tools that came in the subsequent years, there is no bounds as to the editing that can be done on photos
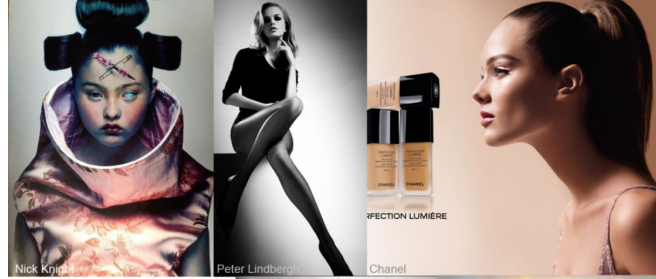
Photoshop

Photos by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

Photoshop in Marketing
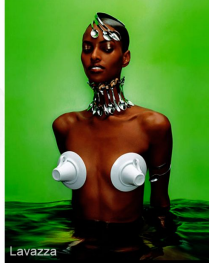
Conformation to Representation of Trends

- Pale skin, rosy cheeks, and blonde hair was 'in' during the Renaissance
- Women would often put leeches on their ears or cheeks to drain the blood from their faces
- To lighten their hair, women would apply products to their hair and sit in the sun for hours
- Dark, 'seductive' eyes were also desired
  - To achieve this, women would put drops of *Atropa belladonna* into their eyes to dilate their pupils
    - aka deadly nightshade

Conformation to Representation of Trends

- During the Victorian era, women strived to achieve pale skin
- Whitening products, like Madam Ruppert's face bleach, were some of the most popular skincare products of the time

Conformation to Representation of Trends

- Camera Magazine noted in 1904 that "the most frequent use of the knife by professional [retouchers] is to reduce the waist line on pictures of some of their female sitters."
- New Photo-Miniature commented in 1913 that "the etching-knife is one of the most useful tools in the retouching department, and its uses are so many that it is almost impossible to count them all. There is the cross-eyed man or woman who wishes that fault corrected… stray hairs must be removed, also wrinkles in dresses, hair darkened… undesirable parts softened."

Conformation to Representation of Trends

- During the era of flapper girls, strict diets became the norm to achieve the skinny look
- Medical Millenium Diet
  - Called for patients to chew slowly, eat one dish per meal, and endure regular enemas
  - Advocated calorie-counting to achieve the desired look
- Women turned to laxative-laced weight-loss gums, slimming girdles, and cigarettes

Rise of Social Media

- Social media services started with a few smaller platforms like Six Degrees and Friendster in the early 2000s
- MySpace launched in 2003 and became the most visited website on the planet
- In 2004, Facebook launched, and by 2008, it surpassed MySpace, now currently with 1.7 billion users
- Reddit, Twitter, and Instagram followed in the coming years, each amassing millions-billions of users
- With these websites, users could connect to millions of others around the world and share posts, updates, and photos

Photo Manipulation in Social Media

- Beauty filters on social apps are notorious for highlighting Eurocentric beauty features
  - Lighter eyes, smaller nose, flushed cheeks, smoothed pores, enhanced size of lips, and larger eyes
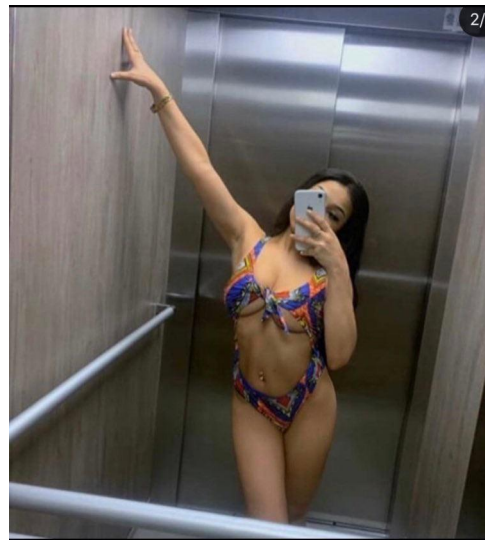
Conformation to Representation of Trends

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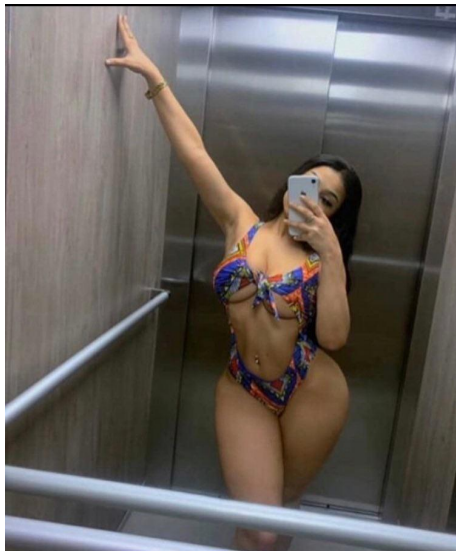
Social Impact

- "Photoshop has made society believe that it is normal to be flawless and have perfect proportions." - Dr. Sarah Ravin
- Various polls have shown dissatisfaction in body image, especially when compared to images in the media
  - Fifteen percent of 18 to 24 year olds surveyed in a UK survey were convinced that the images of models and celebrities in advertisements accurately depicted what those woman looked like in real life
  - Over 30% of people in this same survey reported that they were unconfident or extremely unconfident
  - Another poll showed that 33% of the women polled felt that the body they aspired towards was not possible for them to achieve

Social Impact

- The phenomenon of people requesting procedures to resemble their digital image has been referred to as "snapchat dysmorphia"
  - Cosmetic doctors, such as Dr. Tijion Esho, noticed that patients would bring in facetuned images of themselves and ask to look like *that*, with airbrushed skin and large eyes
- The US medical journal of Facial Plastic Surgery suggested that filtered images "blurring the lines of reality and fantasy" could be triggering body dysmorphia

Social Impact

- Studies have found a strong link between heavy social media use and an increased risk of depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts
  - One of the factors that may contribute to this is the feeling of inadequacy about your life or appearance, especially when comparing it to the 'airbrushed' photos being posted
- Other studies have shown that eating disorders, especially among young girls aged 15 to 19, have become more prevalent
  - This increase has been hypothesized to be attributed to media playing a central role in creating and intensifying the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction
- A study that looked at the influence of social media on cosmetic surgery found:
  - Viewing cosmetic surgery-related material on social media, spending longer hours no social media platforms, and having negative self-views when viewing social media are associated with an increased likelihood of considering undergoing cosmetic procedures in the future

Social Media Editing on Beauty Standards

- 72% of millennials that buy their beauty products are influenced majorly by social media
- Beauty apps encourage women to see themselves through a lens of "defects"
  - Filters and modification apps, surgery try out apps, esthetic benchmarking apps which help individuals visualize how they will look after certain changes
- The images on social media sites are idealized and unrealistic, setting high expectations and negative consequences of increased body dissatisfaction

Conformation through the Ages

- Modifying ourselves and our images is not a new development
- But wide availability of edited photos to the world is
- The introduction of photoshop and hyperrealistic filters editing out 'problem areas' only serves to reinforce unrealistic beauty standards

Software to Detect Editing

- Some softwares have been developed to help try and determine whether or not a photo has been photoshopped
  - These tools are relatively new, so their success rate is not always consistent
- Fotoforensics is one example of software that does this
  - Clone detection
  - ELA
  - Noise analysis
  - PCA
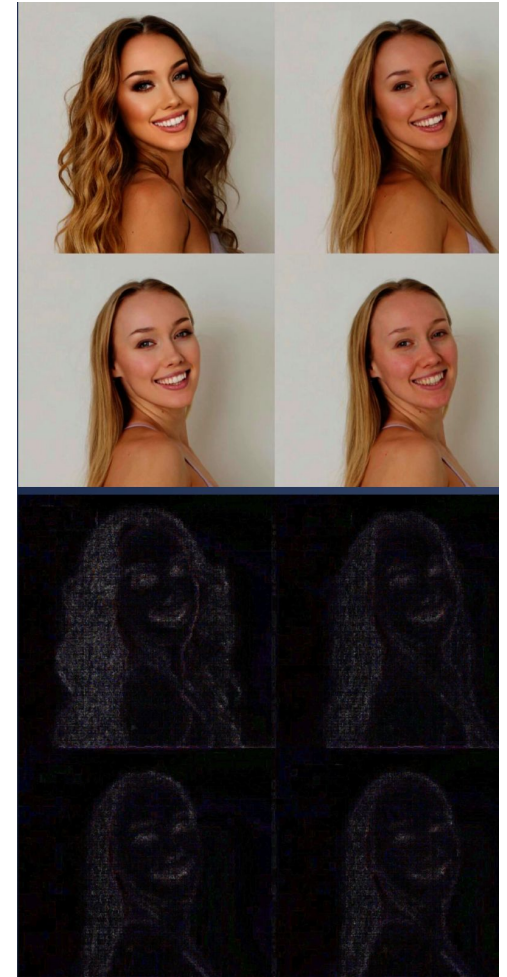
What Can We Do About It?

- Understand that beauty trends are just trends
  - Especially now having the trends be unrealistic
- Education, especially towards young women, that what they see is most likely edited
- More transparency with edited photos
- Limiting time on social media
- Further development into software that can better detect edited photos

Thanks!