

The Craft Club: Surveillance and Risk Within the *OnlyFans* Community

Sophie Hunt

OnlyFans is a site which individuals can post content, which is generally sexual and revealing, in order to gain monthly subscribers. Anyone over the age of eighteen can create an account, however those who have a larger social media following on other platforms (such as Instagram influencers or celebrities) are more likely to gain subscribers due to their ability to utilize their fanbase to advertise their *OnlyFans* profile (Boseley, 2020). Contemporary society has adapted to living in an attention society in which receiving attention is a form of capital (Davenport and Beck, 2001).

Subscriptions on *OnlyFans* cost the consumer an average of between five to twenty dollars depending on who has created the profile and how explicit the content is. Usually, influencers on *Instagram* and *Twitter* who had free raunchy feeds would post teaser content to their profiles to entice their following to subscribe to their *OnlyFans* (Bernstein, 2019).

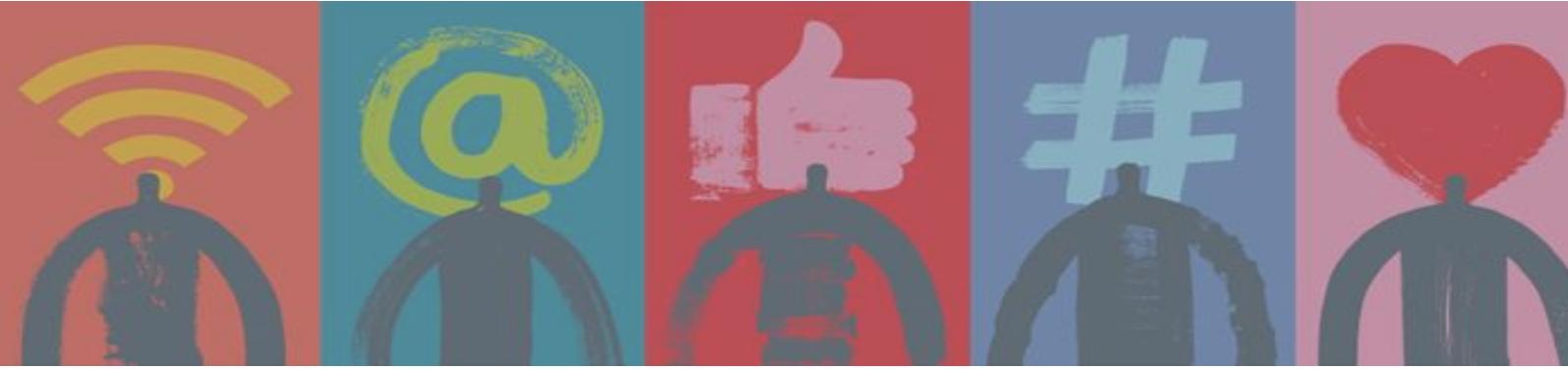
During the pandemic, *OnlyFans* grew from 7.5 million to 85 million users (Boseley, 2020). *OnlyFans* has become a site in which the synoptic surveillance of creators has become the norm, through the viewing of their personalized media by subscribers. The risks of being an *OnlyFans* creator should be well calculated as it can either be an easy money-maker or an unstable full-time job.

Campbell (2005) discusses craft consumption, documenting that the craft producer is someone who holds control over the product, integrates their unique personality into it and makes the product themselves. The craft producer is someone who utilizes mass-produced products and remakes them, creating something more personalised. Mass-produced porn can be viewed for free on the site *Pornhub*, where regular pornographic videos are uploaded. The site has several categories of porn, including amateur and homemade. Recently the pornographic site has had to assess their videos and change their guidelines for uploading as there have been many instances reported where non-consensual sexual videos have been uploaded. Due to *Pornhub* being a popular site where it is free to upload and watch the content, there is an estimated 14 million videos on the site (Haylock, 2020).

However, *OnlyFans* allows the creators to become crafts people, designing and personalising their content for their fans, creating an exclusive and new way to access porn

(Lykousas, Casino and Patsakis, 2020). There has been a shift from aesthetic to sexualized labour as now the subscribers hold power and influence, and the producer must accommodate the buyers' sexual desires (Spiess and Waring, 2005). Contrasting with the mass-produced porn on *Pornhub*, which

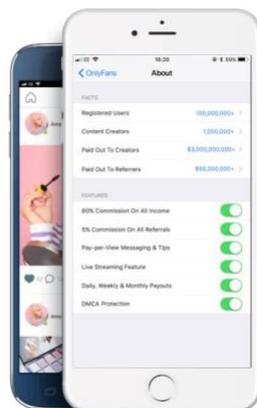




separates the viewer from the content as the producers of the commodity (pornography) do not need to accommodate for their buyers due to the site being free to access. The sexually explicit videos and content on *OnlyFans* will take themes and ideas from typical porn categories and videos from sites, such as *Pornhub*. They will recreate these scenarios and cosplay for their 'fans' to keep them subscribed (Rouse and Salter, 2021).

OnlyFans allow creators the freedom to personalise, change and customise their content to satisfy and accommodate what their buyers (subscribers) want each month (Bernstein, 2019). Lynch (2012) documents the concept of porn-chic and how sexual aesthetics change due to what is popular within the pornography industry, therefore individuals on *OnlyFans* must continuously create new and contemporary content. Campbell (2005) also notes that the craft consumer is an individual who is likely to be middle class as they can afford to spend more on products that are unique and created by small businesses.

OnlyFans enables sex workers to create and have control over the production of their own content, encouraging subscribers to pay a monthly fee due to the personalised nature of the media produced (Bernstein, 2019).



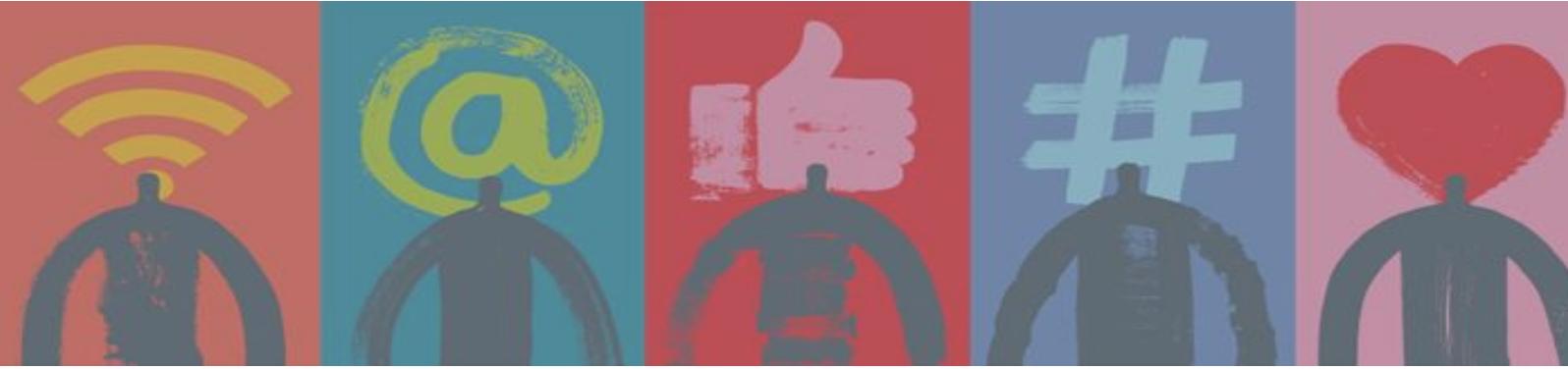
Mathiesen (1997: 219) describes synopticism as being 'a large number focuses on something in common which is condensed' and suggests that we are living in a viewer society where we surveil the few. The Synopticon refers to as a new form of power which is the opposite of the panopticon, where the many watch the few (Öngün and Demirağ, 2014). Social media has become the main place where synoptic surveillance takes

place (Mathiesen, 1997). Individuals have become obsessed with checking social media influencers' profiles to see what they post. In contemporary society, we continue to watch each other on television and social media, it has become the norm to surveil individuals through reality tv shows, such as *Love Island* and *Big Brother* (McGrath, 2004). The desire to watch others without their knowledge is described as voyeurism. In contrast to McGrath's depiction of voyeurism, with links to reality to TV, voyeurism may also be described as sexual arousal by covertly watching individuals performing sexual acts (Freund, Watson and Rienzo, 1988). *OnlyFans* allows 'fans' subscribed to profiles to surveil the individual creating the content (the producer). This surveillance is synoptic as there is only one or a few producers on the *OnlyFans* profile, with many subscribers watching the content uploaded. Fans will continuously check what has been uploaded to see the content and to assess if their subscription is still worth the money.



The word 'fans' suggests that they admire the influencer and that in their eyes they resemble a celebrity (Rouse and Salter, 2021). The more 'fans' a creator has on

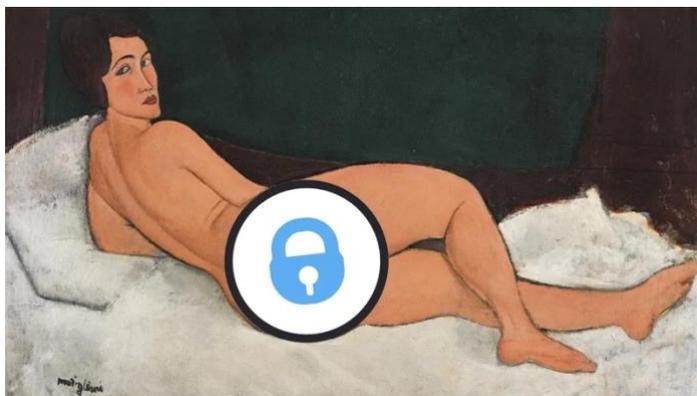
the app the more watched they will be and therefore the more people they have to accommodate for, whilst being surveilled. Scott (2015) discusses 'fan-ancing' on *OnlyFans* and how when roleplaying and cosplaying the creator must be a fan, therefore their fans are evaluating their adaptation of the cosplay. However, creators can be subjected to criticism when fans do not agree with the roleplays,



such as Belle Delphine receiving backlash and losing followers due to her 'rape fantasy' content (Rouse and Salter, 2021).

For Giddens (1991), we are now living in a society in which we are faced with new risks to our everyday lives through the choices and decisions we make on our own paths of life. The creation of our own identities through our life choices is still dictated by class and wealth, therefore individuals' trajectories are hindered or elevated due to their class. He suggests that we are now free from the customs and religious ideology in which dictated the creation of our biographies (Giddens, 1991). Giddens also discusses the monitoring behaviour of humans by other members of society as being a central part of reflexive modernity (1976). Beck (1992) examines the risk society in which we now live, where individuals determine their lifestyle choices due to changes and developments in society, for example, changes within the labour market.

These developments, however, create a new group of risks which are attached to them, and it is up to the individual to make an informed decision if they choose to take that risk. He suggests that individuals can acquire private escape routes and their position in society is based on how many risks they are taking, the more risks an individual takes the greater the chance of failure. Beck (1992) argues that this is the main reason for inequality in our society, as opposed to class inequality which Giddens suggests hinders the creation of biographies.



Individuals making the choice to create an *OnlyFans* account can accumulate many personal risks.

Friedman (2021) discusses how many creators (especially women) have turned to *OnlyFans* due to desperation from various grievances, such as insufficient pay from previous employment, the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the hope created from success stories. Not having to interact with the customers face-to-face and having the power to control who views the content is a compelling seller to create an account. However, this deception entails that many individuals make the decision to sign up and create *OnlyFans* content with the false ideology that they are in control of their new formed sex work, without prior knowledge of the true risks of having an *OnlyFans* account.

Creators can receive threats of harm, rape and death by those who do not agree with the sexual use of the site or by subscribers that have been banned or asked to leave (Friedman, 2021). They are enticed into the *OnlyFans* community

with the hope of making fast and easy money, but later find that their success on the site is based on influence and popularity from other social media platforms (Boseley, 2020). Producers may also lose their power and control due to their subscribers screenshotting or recording their content and posting it online for all to see, this process is referred to as capping (Friedman, 2021). *OnlyFans* creators' risk the stability of their job as an online sex worker and content creator being quickly destroyed, as recently the site experimented with the idea of no longer allowing the distribution of sexually explicit content, which



led to many creators panicking for a safety net alternative platform (Hern and Waterson, 2021). Sex work within the *OnlyFans* community has many benefits and risks, however individuals are not fully aware of these risks due to being seduced by quick money in a desperate financial economy.

In summary, this reflection has explored the growing popularity of the site *OnlyFans* and how both the producers and consumers use the site to craft unique content, surveil individuals and navigate the risks of being a user of the site. Content creators on *OnlyFans* have become craftspeople in the art of hand-making (producing) their own explicit content to sell to subscribers and followers who seek a personalised and intimate experience with pornography, crafted to their own fantasies. Creators are surveilled by fans due to their content being deemed important to them, as they are paying a subscription fee to see certain individuals of their choosing interact sexually on the internet. The risks of starting an *OnlyFans* are high, creators are usually seduced by the dream of getting money fast and being in control. However, it is an individual choice whether to make an account and account holders participate at their own risk.

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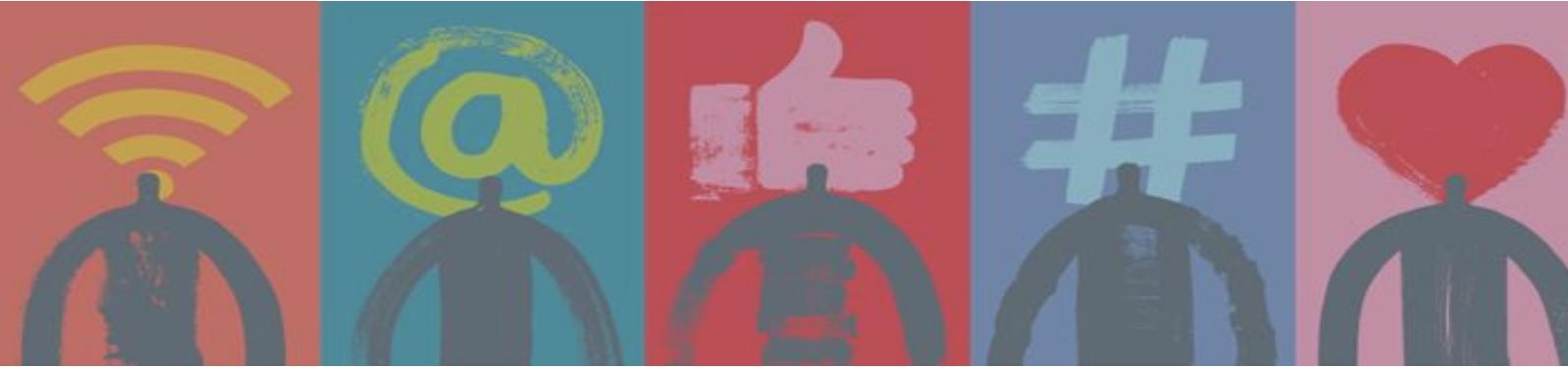
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Gendered Reflexive Projects of the Self: Individualisation or Visual Standardisation?

Aishaa Pascha

Contemporary society has witnessed an increase in the prevalence of aesthetic surgery within mainstream culture, such as nonmedical cosmetic procedures performed by surgeons to reshape the visual aesthetic of a patient (Gilman, 2000). A fundamental feature of cosmetic corporate marketing is language which advocates improved safety and natural, lasting results (Swanson, 2013). By utilising intrinsically gendered adjectives - such as 'more youthful,' 'less tired' - the concept of an empowering 'makeover culture' is reinforced whereby 'the self is a project continually to be worked on' with endless choices (Alsop & Lennon, 2018: 100).

The makeover paradigm depicts how primarily women believe they or an aspect of their life is deficient or flawed in some form, and by following the advice of experts or modified consumption habits those areas can be reinvented or transformed (Gill, 2007). Postfeminist literature is highly influential when analysing the paradigm as it implies aesthetic surgery provides patients with the freedom to reinvent themselves based on fluid beauty trends.

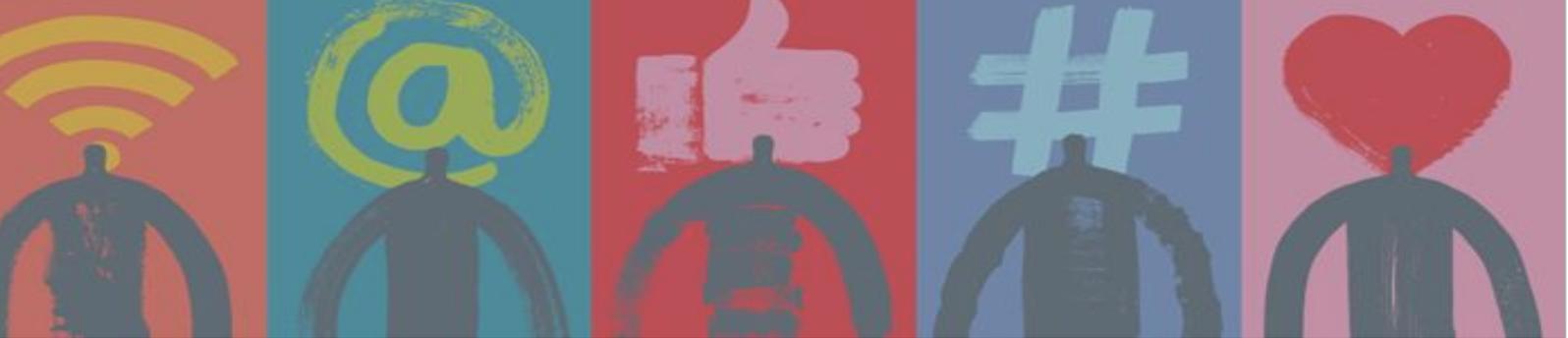
There is no definite consensus among critics regarding the reflexive empowerment of visual customisation tools and a large and growing body of feminist literature rejects this claim and states

aesthetic surgery is a product of gender inequality which 'upholds patriarchal consumer capitalism' (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012: 175). Feminist theorists criticize the assumed biological nature of women and their governance of female behaviour by hormones, which is said to reduce women to emotional and irrational objects engaged in constant self-scrutiny (Holliday & Sanchez Taylor, 2006).

As already argued by Simone de Beauvoir: 'girls are brought up to experience their bodies as objects to be disciplined into compliance with a predominantly visual norm,' a mass consumed and standardised norm (Alsop & Lennon, 2018: 102). In this contribution existing discourse surrounding aesthetic surgery are discussed to examine whether this process be seen as an empowering self-project or whether misogynistic beauty ideals produce homogenised appearances.

Firstly, this paper will focus on reflexivity in a risk society and the extent to which this outlook potentially depicts aesthetic surgery as a form of personal freedom. As Giddens (1991) often reiterates, in late modernity the impermanence of human relationships often shifts identities to be considerably self-centred and concerned with one's own attractiveness, which would imply that cosmetic surgery allows individuals to redesign themselves and maintain desired levels of attractiveness.





That said, critics (see, for instance, Beck et al, 1994: 14) question the freedom surrounding the reflexive identity project by stating ‘people are condemned to individualisation’ and this obligation to manufacture an identity both biographically and physically is subject to socio-cultural agencies in society. The arguments by Askegaard et al (2002) may have been more relevant if the authors considered the cultural implications of mass media as a social agency. In particular, popular culture that is emitted through such media and its influential nature in causing consumers to perceive a discrepancy between their appearance and an ideal, eroding personal choice (Blair & Shalmon, 2005: 15). Instead, individuals become concerned with media produced attractiveness.

Furthermore, Askegaard et al (2002: 800) examines aesthetic surgery as an instrument of psychological empowerment. Cosmetic surgery can be described as a form of therapy, a self-constructing project ‘that involves buying a service on a market’. A likely interpretation of this argument is that cosmetic surgeries can be beneficial for patients’ mental health and low self-esteem. This is exemplified through the work of Lasch who focuses on the narcissistic traits

mirrored by individuals in a threatening modern world which offers little stability (in Giddens, 1990). Uncertainty is a pivotal aspect of late modernity with individuals suffering to form solid identities as a result of everchanging culture. Narcissism can be seen as a defence strategy to this social climate, the obsession with one’s visual image distracts individuals from socially induced anxiety and fear (Giddens, 1991).

Measuring therapy against cosmetic surgery is implausible. A key criticism of this argument is that a cosmetic patient partakes in a voluntary risk aware of potential dangers but chooses to proceed

nonetheless (Jones & Raisborough, 2007). Also, this voluntary risk can be witnessed among many aesthetic patients, specifically the risk to mimic digitally altered facial attributes endorsed by *Instagram* and *Snapchat* filters (Varman et al, 2021). These homogenised surgeries do not provide the safeguarding measures and long-term mental improvements therapy does in order to build stable identities.

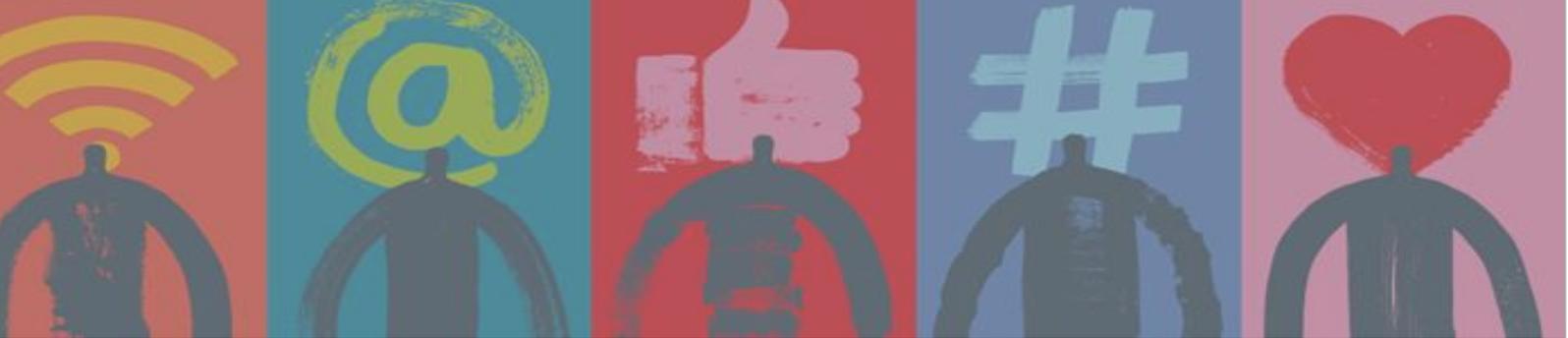
According to Bauman’s (2001: 25) theory on consumer society, the consumer market offers choice ‘complete with the reassurance that the choice is right’. In the labour market the goods on offer will constantly be replaced by ‘new and improved ones,’ seller’s do not conceal the general rotation of commodities and products based on current trends (Bauman, 2001). These elements are reflected in the targeting of specific body features in relation to aesthetic surgery, and consumer culture has witnessed an increase in the purchasing of rhinoplasties and Brazilian bum lifts over the past few years. Purchasing a cosmetic surgery can categorise as luxury goods which have become a universal fascination through the process of globalisation (Featherstone, 2014). This

is because aesthetic surgeries are not easily financially accessible nor are they deemed necessary.

They are purely for personal aestheticization purposes to exercise choice through large or financially valuable consumptions.

Both risk theory and consumer society complement one another, the reflexive individual consumes what they desire from a range of advertised products. Choice and freedom are key factors in this process. Moreover, a theory to strengthen the argument brought forth by consumer society is an interpretation of commodity feminism. This examines the self-





acceptance, independence and freedom inscribed on to feminine commodities (Repo, 2020). Aesthetic surgery may not be a literal commodity however it is transactional and requires consumption. Therefore, links to neoliberalism can be made, which argues for the privatization of the market economy and seeks to give consumers exactly what they yearn for (Trentmann, 2007). Referring to aesthetic surgery this encourages the project of the self and emphasises the opportunity to be free rather than narrowing its focus towards a homogenised visual norm.

Lastly, it is imperative to evaluate and apply surveillance society theory to aesthetic surgery. The work of Rosalind Gill covers surveillance and monitoring through the 'dramatically increased intensity of self-surveillance, the extensiveness of surveillance and the focus upon the psychological' (Gill, 2008: 441). She argues that successful femininity is contingent on the act of self-discipline and monitoring. Mathiesen's term synopticon whereby the many watch the few can be applied to our multi-directional surveilled society and can be illustrated by media personalities such as Molly Mae, a young, British influencer 'actively shaping and filtering information' later consumed by a mass audience (Mathiesen, 1997). A possible contradiction within this idea is that although the few are observed and possess a profound amount of power, the many are significant in deciding which media personalities continue to succeed. This is evident through the cancel culture that can be witnessed online.

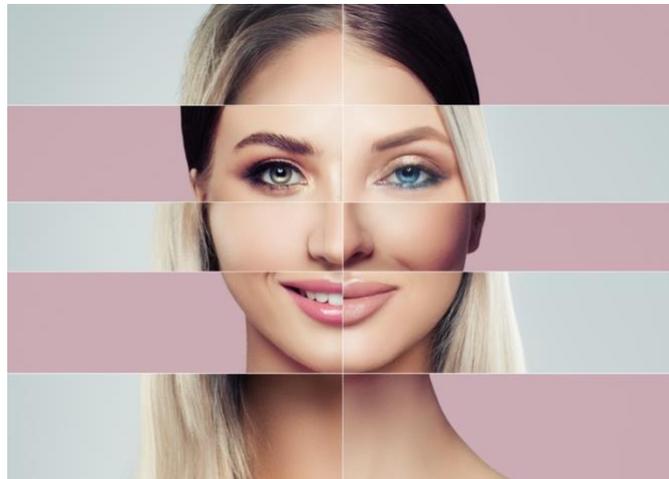
When studying aesthetic surgery, the synopticon alludes to the notion that the wide and diverse content online results in a range of multiple visual

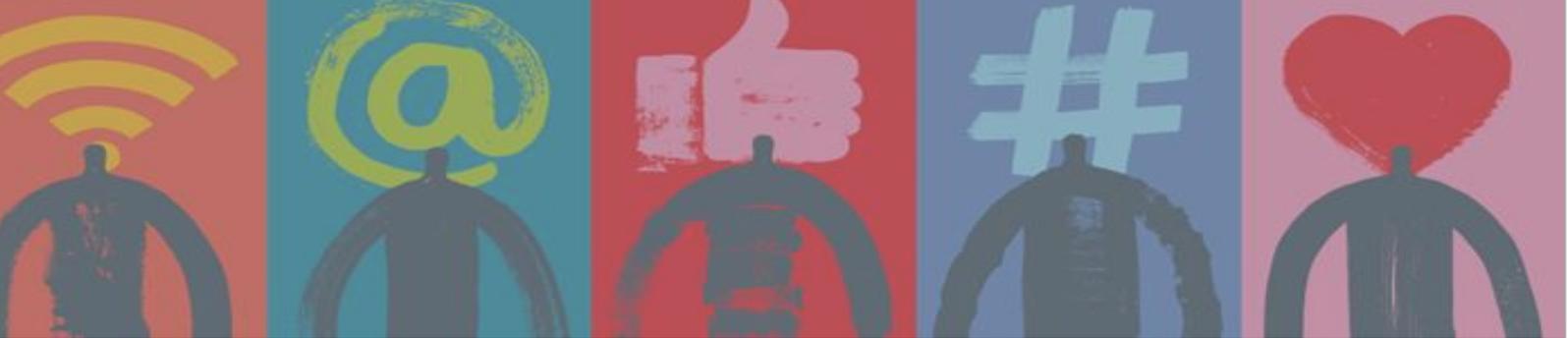
appearances to choose from. Many theorists argue that not only does fluid surveillance result in everyone watching each other, but the objectification of women in relation to their visual aesthetic portrays a battle between producer and consumer power. Oversexualising females is a prominent issue within media culture, and this can cause females to experience objectified body consciousness leading to negative physical or mental implications (Ward et al, 2018). A contrast

of this is the hypersexualisation of oneself in the media, those personalities do not escape the ill-treatment of audiences engulfed by patriarchal consumer beliefs. So, the shift to hyper surveillance illustrates the multiple aesthetics patients must pick from which defy traditional female expectations.

To conclude, the debate around aesthetic surgery remains a controversial issue, the reflexive theorisation of these procedures has confirmed that the homogenisation of visual appearances is not a definite concern in mainstream culture. The conflicting literature on cosmetic surgeries is associated with aesthetic corporations encouraging a certain beauty ideal which is relayed through their physical work on all patients. When the freedom of an individual is taken into consideration, the comprehension that they specifically chose a look strengthens the argument of the reflexive identity project.

However, whilst personal choice is key to the topic of aesthetic surgery, inherent patriarchal ideals also impact the aesthetic an individual chooses. This may not always be conscious to the patient. In this way, media culture and patriarchal agencies can be seen as having a subconscious effect on what aesthetic procedures individual choose as part of their project.





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Neoliberal and postfeminist intensification of gynaeoptic surveillance (on beauty standards and the gendered female gaze)

Ella Riley

This contribution explores how neoliberal and postfeminist values have caused surveillance to intensify into a gendered female gaze where women watch other women and face pressure to compete with themselves and one another to achieve societal beauty standards. Due to advances in technology and the wider use of social media sites, women are constantly exposed to one another meaning the competition to reach beauty ideals is ever-growing. Gill (2007: 163) argues that postfeminist and neoliberal values can be seen to interchange as 'an autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism'. Against this context, this critical reflection will also examine the negative consequences of the constant surveillance and expectations for women to strive to become better versions of themselves by drawing on Walker et al. (2019) that it often leads to issues surrounding body image, body dysmorphia and cosmetic surgery, thus leaving us to question how much free choice women really have in modern society.

Winch (2019) suggests that neither panoptic nor synoptic forms of surveillance accurately explain modern day surveillance as the main form of surveillance is now focused on women. Wider access to media and photographic applications such as *Instagram* and *Facebook* have incited women to surveil other women's bodies, creating

tightly bound gendered networks where women can gaze and be gazed upon (Gill, 2019). This has been referred to as gynaeoptic surveillance and explains the way contemporary media culture allows women to compare differences in appearance surrounding weight, facial features and skin texture and compete with one another to reach societal beauty standards (Elias et al., 2017). Winch's (2019) notion of scopophilic surveillance explains the way women judge one another through a range of comparative and competitive gazes, such as desirability and hostility. This is used as a way to both appreciate and attack other women in a form of 'intimate homosocial policing' (Gill, 2019: 21).



Living in a neoliberal society means every citizen is an agent of their own destiny and particular mindsets and attitudes are deemed to be more or less valuable (Gill and Scharff, 2013), the ideal neoliberal citizen is someone who values self-discipline and self-transformation and is expected to interpret their

individual biographies 'in terms of discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice' (Gill and Scharff, 2013: 6). Stable self-identity, Gill and Scharff (2013) argue, no longer derives from a person's position in the social structure and is now ground in the body as individuals become preoccupied with themselves in order to be valued and gain capital. Gynaeoptic forms of surveillance can be seen to reflect neoliberal values of entrepreneurial selfhood as these subjects relate to themselves as if they were a business as they are constantly self-regulating, thereby encouraging women to focus



on themselves makes it easier to circulate and sell them in the marketplace.

To gain capital in modern society, the way a woman presents herself and especially her body is important as this allows her to be marketised and consumed by others (Scharff, 2016), benefitting neoliberalism which is driven by material well-being and profit accumulation (Romstein, 2017). The self-verification theory suggests that advances in technology allow women to gain visual capital as they now have a greater ability to receive feedback on images they post of themselves through likes, comments and shares across social media platforms.

However, for those who do not meet the beauty standard, this only leads to constant seeking of validation and comparison between themselves and others. Neoliberalism has been critiqued for causing depression and anxiety amongst its subjects for the constraints placed on its values to self-transform and the blaming of the individual, rather than society, if they fail to do so (Wineguard and Wineguard, 2011). Khanna and Sharma (2017) found that young women who spend the most time on *Facebook* are more likely to suffer from self-hate and have an increased want to lose weight.

Coerced forms of surveillance such as biometric monitoring are used to control populations by creating gendered, racialised, able and disabled bodies through digital means, placing individuals into categories and suggesting the way they should aim to look. Female surveillance can therefore be seen as a neoliberal practice as young women, in particular, are ideal subjects of neoliberalism as they face the most pressure on their appearance and self-transformation in order to gain capital in society (Gill and Scharff, 2013). Gill (2019: 14) contends that 'the surveillance of women's bodies

constitutes the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms'. This leads to women becoming obsessed with self-presentation and measuring the self by constantly judging and comparing one another's appearances in an attempt to reach beauty ideals.

The desire to fit into modern neoliberal culture in fear they may be socially excluded if not means women submit themselves to gynaeoptic forms of surveillance, where they face direct objectification as they are valued predominantly based upon their appearance, resulting in appearance changing strategies due to inability for everyone to reach beauty ideals. This reflects neoliberal attitudes regarding citizens being the agents of their own destiny, which in this case unfolds as changing one's appearance to reach societal beauty standards.

However, due to applications that allow women to edit the shape, complexion and overall appearance of their face and body, which creates an unrealistic beauty ideal, it can be argued that this cannot usually be

obtained without surgical treatments (de Vries et al., 2014). Women face huge pressures to produce the desired physical form but not all have the capabilities of doing so. Critical Race Theory argues that not all women are able to reach these beauty ideals, depending on their skin colour, weight and whether they have disabled/able bodies (Riley et al, 2017). A woman who is highly invested in her appearance may therefore have a greater desire to undergo cosmetic surgery.

This shows that although in a neoliberal and postfeminist society women are given the option for choice, freedom and empowerment, not all women have this option as they are bound by constant surveillance, pressure to conform to





beauty ideals they cannot reach and scrutiny for their failure to self-transform and reach them. McRobbie (in Gill, 2019) argues that there is too much pressure on girls to recognise themselves as successful and empowered without much thought to the self-scrutiny they experience when surveilling themselves in comparison to other women and the feeling of failure for those who cannot meet the beauty standards they see.

Rather than placing the blame on society for exerting this pressure on women, the individual is held accountable for failing to conform to neoliberal values and is incited to self-transform to meet societal beauty standards. This alongside the gendered nature of surveillance, which exposes women to further comparison and self-scrutiny, causes risks. The intensified use of social media has been related to wider body image concerns and eating disorders (Walker et al., 2019). Brown and Tiggemann (in Walker et al., 2019) found that viewing pictures of attractive peers on *Instagram* has a negative effect on a woman's mood and body image, suggesting that high usage of photographic media can be harmful for certain individuals regarding their mental health, including lowered self-esteem and increased risk of anxiety and depression.

The exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals and constant surveillance of the self and of other women also results in an increasing number of young girls forming Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), due to their rigid beliefs regarding the way they should look which leads to negative self-evaluation and low self-esteem. BDD has consistently been found to be related to the desire to undergo cosmetic surgery and among individuals who seek cosmetic enhancements, it is estimated that 7% to 15% have the condition (Walker et al., 2019). Individuals with BDD who

engage in cosmetic surgery as a way to treat the condition often display negative outcomes, such as being dissatisfied with the result of the surgery, resulting in higher levels of mental health issues and low self-esteem (Mulken et al. 2012).

This shows that gynaoptic surveillance leads to women forming concerns around their body image



and, due to constant pressure to self-transform, striving to meet the beauty ideals they see across social media platforms through cosmetic surgery. However, this neoliberal incitement to strive for better is never ending and women are still valued based upon how they look, meaning even when they undergo surgery they are never fully satisfied with

their appearance. This leads to further self-scrutiny and feelings of low self-esteem.

This reflection has explained that wider access to photographic technology and social media allows women to observe one another through comparative and competitive gazes in an attempt to reach societal beauty ideals. This is because neoliberal and postfeminist values encourage individuals to be self-regulating, free to make their own choices and strive to be better versions of themselves.

However, it has also argued that even when beauty practices are seemingly freely chosen, values around a woman's appearance are subject to profound discipline and regulation (Gill, 2019), leading us to question how free and empowered women really are. Practices of surveillance such as gynaoptic surveillance only really expose women to become subject to particular kinds of observation and scrutiny and McRobbie argues that women experience a 'double entanglement' in society as they are promised fluidity, freedom and empowerment in an exchange for self-transformation and reflection (Gill, 2019: 8).



With this pressure comes risk, as due to neoliberal values blaming the individual for their own failure to conform, women who are incapable of reaching beauty ideals develop feelings of low self-esteem, self-hate and body image issues such as BDD, leading them into a life of cosmetic surgery in desperation to meet societal values. This leaves us to question whether women are actually ever free from the constraints of surveillance, beauty ideals and the values of a neoliberal and postfeminist society.

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