

Forum: Discussion #2

Organize Forum Threads on this page and apply settings to several or all threads. Threads are listed in a tabular format. The Threads can be sorted by clicking the column title or the caret at the top of each column. [More Help](#)

This is a 'post-first' discussion forum.

There are currently 7 threads in this forum. Join the conversation by creating a thread!

Create Thread

FORUM DESCRIPTION

Due date on syllabus.

Please see discussion rubric for guidance and be sure to read ALL directions. Discussion policies are also listed in the syllabus. Respond to at least one other student's post in a meaningful way. I'd prefer you respond to someone who disagrees with you, but either way is fine.

No direct quotes UNLESS you are quoting from the Beyonce video (you should feel free to quote Beyonce regularly as you go about your day, every day).

1. Before you start the assignment, please be sure you've read the lecture notes on Beauty norms and race as well as the article White Privilege and Male Privilege by Peggy McIntosh if you are unfamiliar with this piece (Google the article).
2. Watch the Beyonce Formation video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV_bQ (explicit lyric warning...kids out of the room, unless you're fine with that sort of thing because whatevs). There are also "cleaner" versions of the video that you can Google.
3. I want you to do an IN-DEPTH analysis of the video. Watch it a few times (even though you've probably seen it a million times already). The more in-depth your response, the better your grade will be. Do not use direct quotes from any sources in your analysis. As always, use your own words. YOUR voice is important here. Feel free to provide your opinions here as well. The focus here is hair, White hegemony, beauty norms (especially hair), the intersection of race and gender, etc.
4. Connect your analysis of the Beyonce video with the article "Black Women, Beauty, and Hair..." that's on your syllabus and the lecture notes I posted on hegemonic beauty standards (Content). You need an IN-DEPTH discussion of that article as well so that your analysis of the Beyonce video is properly contextualized. Again, feel free to express your opinions.

PER USUAL, FEEL FREE TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CLASSMATES ON GROUPME. I'm sure I can chime in and help as well.

Lecture #10: Beauty Norms/Race

In terms of beauty norms, they've always been defined differently. Most interesting was the 70s, when women were supposed to wear ace bandages around their breasts so they would appear as flat-chested as possible, have skinny hips, and no curves at all. Yet, there have been times in history when women were supposed to have large stomachs, large hips and busts. There are several theories for these changing norms.

Some theorists claim that after times of war, when we needed a higher birthrate due to so many deaths, women who were very shapely were considered very beautiful. Think Marilyn Monroe, for example.

At some points in history, "heavy" women (whatever that means at different times is subjective) were equated with wealth. Think of what a huge diamond ring means today...that your fiance is wealthy, right? It's a status marker for other women to see. Well, during times when wealth was scarce, being a woman with some fat on your body meant a) That your husband could afford to feed you and b) that you were a woman of leisure, meaning that you didn't need to work in the fields, so you didn't lose weight from all of that exercise. This is why white women used to put that awful white paste on their faces that actually contained arsenic. To be white as possible used to mean you never needed to go outside.

Now, if you're thinking that this has something to do with racism and fade cream for Women of Color, you are correct. Dark skin tones were looked down upon because it indicated a low social class (outside labor). Asian women also use fade/bleaching cream for the same reasons. It's why you sometimes see Asian students on campus with umbrellas when it's not raining. But, it's not only that. When we're talking about light-skinned Black women, for example, why do some consider that more attractive?

Well, first,, Whites have institutionalized power in our society. Whoever has the power dictates beauty norms. It's called hegemony. So, we have white hegemony, which dictates that "Whiteness" is beautiful/the norm. This is why most other racial/ethnic groups get specific surgeries...to conform to beauty standards of the hegemonic group. Asians get eyelid surgery, some people of color bleach their skin, etc. People of many, many ethnic groups straighten their hair (my ethnic group, Jewish people, included). Yes, I'm white, but I'm "ethnic" white. Does that all make sense?

Secondly, and most upsetting, is that fact that light-skinned African Americans are sometimes viewed as more attractive by dominant society because they more closely reflect hegemonically White beauty norms. So, the white masters would rape Black slaves, leading to light-skinned babies.

So, you might ask, what about White people who are all supposed to be as brown as possible now through tanning beds, sprays, etc.? Isn't that the same thing as Black people who are bleaching their skin? No, no, and no. Completely different sociological process. When White people do the darkening thing, it has more to do with wealth than anything else. Not that we do it because we're wealthy (I know I'm not!), but it's one of those indicators that we presumably have

it because we have lots of leisure time to be lying on the beach, money to use tanning beds, etc. Like our Coach purses (fake or real). I know you don't think that's why we do it, but it actually is. It's the same reason we wear heels, have long nails...these are indicators that we're not working in the fields. We wouldn't be able to. It's not something I think of when I put on my heels and get my nails done, but it's theorized that that's at the root of it.

So, beauty (what's considered beautiful) is usually contained in these three elements:

1. It's not natural (sad, huh?). Think Kardashians, huge implants, long fake nails, dyed hair
2. It's unusual (you can bet that soon, when most people have implants, the trend will change to being smaller-chested and natural)
3. It requires a lot of time and wealth (here I think of my favorite store, Sephora). You have to have some serious cash to get implants, keep up with your botox injections, hair appointments, eyelash extensions, hair extensions (Yaki silky straight anyone?), tanning appointments, waxing/laser hair treatments, and so on. CHA. CHING.

Now, as far as our norm of beauty involving youth and thinness. We are all supposed to look young, right? Thinness is typically linked to youth. So is the norm of hairlessness (or as little hair as possible) that we have going on now. Hence the waxing, botox, butt and breast lifts, lipo....

Think of yourself as a young teenage girl (if that's possible). If you were like most of us, you were pretty insecure, easily manipulated, sort of vulnerable, not a great decision-maker, not necessarily the GENIUS you are now. Well, that's why youth is considered beautiful by society (but only for women). Sadly, vulnerability, insecurity, malleability, letting others make decision for you is something that seems to be a desirable in a female mate. So sad. But we like older men, right? We're always supposed to date someone who is at least a year older than we are. It's why we don't mind gray hairs on men...or wrinkles. These indicators of aging also point to intelligence, self-esteem, experience, leadership qualities.