

An Individual Capstone Project: Pretty Shouldn't Hurt

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever taken a moment to think about what makes something or someone beautiful? Can you define beauty? Western philosophers have not even been able to agree on what beauty is (Sartwell). It almost seems as if society decides what beauty is. What image comes to mind when you imagine a beautiful person? Is it a fair-skinned skinny young white girl with blond hair and blue eyes? This is the ideal image of beauty for women in the U.S. This project will address the beauty standards in the U.S. and how they affect young Black women. The ideal image of a woman leaves many people out, like Black women. Since there is no possible way for Black women to meet all the criteria of the standard, like being white, there is a slightly different standard that is applied to them. One of the leading research questions of this project is what is the beauty standard for Black women and how does it affect them?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black women are trapped trying to meet two unattainable standards of beauty. Scholars have found that there is a mainstream standard of beauty applied to all women that is impossible for Black women to meet. According to researchers at Stanford, the “standards are relentlessly reinforced in authoritative images, but they are incompatible with black skin, black bodies, and also traditional African ways of understanding human beauty” (Sartwell). In response to the unattainable mainstream standard, another standard for Black beauty has been formed. According to some other scholars, their “findings indicate that women of color struggle to navigate issues around white standards of beauty and their own cultural attitudes around other physical characteristics salient to their body image” (Winter et al. 9). It appears that another standard has been created within the Black community, which may seem like a good thing. However, it is impossible for Black women to fit the two standards simultaneously, or to perfectly meet the criteria of one of the standards. Recognizing that Black women are struggling to meet two standards of beauty is important, but it is also important to why Black women put so much effort into meeting these standards.

The media tells young Black women to value beauty and what it means to be beautiful. According to scholarly research, “Girls who identified more strongly with their favorite television characters were more likely to attribute greater importance to being attractive in their self-worth judgments” (Gordon 253). Research has also shown that the media also indirectly impacts girls self-image because the girls consider how other people consuming the same media may view them. Other researchers’ findings “support the theory... which suggests that people will perceive some influence of media on others and as a result will change their own attitudes or behaviors accordingly” (Capodilupo 274). These studies show that the media is one of the main

culprits of the negative impacts the U.S. beauty standards have on Black young women. If the problem is in the media, the solution can also be in media.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & SIGNIFICANCE

I will create a collection of three mixed media collages to address the impact of the two beauty standards Black women face on young Black women. I will also incorporate a mirror as an additional piece to the collection. One of the collages will be aimed at the breaking down the mainstream standard of beauty. Another one will be aimed at breaking down the more specific Black standard of beauty. The last collage will be aimed at uplifting young Black women and helping them to appreciate and value themselves no matter what they look like. The mirror will also play a role in helping them to appreciate who they are. Through some of my preliminary research of the history of collage, I found that it may be the perfect medium for my project goal, as collage has been used to invoke social change since its beginnings. Collage has been linked to historical art movements like the Dada movement and other movements which sought to challenge the old Western ideals of art. In my research I found that “collage artwork existed as an influential means of social commentary, as its ability to question society’s assumptions and biases made it a worthwhile art form that was explored within a variety of other movements” (Meyer). In the way that artists during the Dada movement used collage to challenge ideas about Western art, I plan to use it to challenge the beauty standards Black women face.

AUDIENCE & IMPACT

The target audience of this project is young Black women in their teens and early twenties. This audience is significant to myself, because I fit into this audience description. This audience is also significant because research shows that the beauty standards established by the media is a large determining factor for Black women’s success and the women in this audience both consume a large volume of media and are in a stage of their lives where they are planning for what they will do with their lives in the future. According to one academic journal, “Among African American women, lighter skin tones are associated with higher educational attainment, higher personal earnings, and higher spousal status” (Harper and Choma par. 4). If the beauty standards continue to only value certain characteristics like lighter skin tones, Black women without this feature will feel less likely to be successful. Another scholarly journal has stated that “Rose Weitz argues that ‘No matter what a woman does or doesn’t do with her hair—dyeing or not dyeing, curling or not curling, covering with a bandana or leaving uncovered—her hair will affect how others respond to her, and her power will increase or decrease accordingly’” (Thompson 852). So the media not only impacts how successful Black women believe they can be, but also how successful other people believe she can be. With this project, I will improve my audience's self-image and help them to recognize that their beauty does not determine their value.

METHODS

The artistic method I will use for the project will be collage. As mentioned before, I will make a collection of collages to address my issue. My research has shown that from its development,

and even now, collage has been used as a tool to address social issues. It will be the perfect technique to address my issue because I am offering alternatives to the mainstream beauty standards for Black women, which is a current social issue. Collage is also a new art technique for me, but I learned that it does not require a sharp learning curve. I will also conduct a media review to learn more about different collage styles and techniques. This second method will be beneficial to my project because it will give me ideas and inspiration about what elements I may want to include in the final project. It will allow me to continue developing my ideas about the final execution of my project.

SKILLS

I have seen other people make collages before, but I have never tried to make one. I have a limited experience with visual art. I know that collage making does not have a very sharp learning curve, so I can learn how to do it quickly, but I will have to research collage techniques and important artists as well as practice to be able to make a collection of collages for my final project.

BUDGET

Cardboard: between \$5 and \$10

Construction paper: between \$7 and \$10

Tape: about \$6

Glue: \$0 (already own some)

Magazines, newspaper, and other recycled paper: \$30

Markers: \$10

Small mirror: about \$5

Scissors: \$0 (already own a pair)

PROJECT GOALS & WORKPLAN

Goal Chart:

<i>Main Objective:</i>	<i>Create a collection of collages to challenge the beauty standards applied to Black women and empower young women to value who they are</i>
<i>Sub Goal 1:</i>	<i>Research 2-3 different famous collage artists or techniques to gain a better understanding of how to make a collage</i>
<i>Sub Goal 2:</i>	<i>Gather the necessary media and materials to be used on each individual collage. With the items corresponding to the goal of that particular collage</i>

<i>Sub Goal 3:</i>	<i>Arrange and assemble three collages to address each aspect of the smaller goals for each peice</i>
<i>Sub Goal 4:</i>	<i>Develop the order and arrangement of the collection of collages</i>

Workplan:

Week	Project Goals
Winter Break (you may break this section down into further increments if desired)	Buy and collect all necessary materials needed to make the collages, including the mirror. Also during this time, take a few moments to learn more about different collage technique. - Find 2-3 famous collage artists or techniques you want to look to for guidance - Also go to youtube to find a video or videos about the best planning strategies for making a collage.
Week 1	With the use of concept mapping and brainstorming, plan out what elements I want to include in each individual collage so that they can each best serve the broader project goal. - Develop one concept map for each collage and another one for the mirror piece.
Week 2	- Use Google Slides to create an iteration for each of the collages and the mirror peice. - Create at least one iteration for each peice, incorporating the ideas I developed in my concept maps.
Week 3	Use Google Slides to create a second set of iterations, one for each peice in the final project. Once this is complete compare these iterations to the previous interations and select the elements from each piece you plan to include for the final artworks.
Week 4	Prepare all the materials I will put together in the first collage. - Cut out all the images or materials needed for the first collage. - Without using any glue or tape, play around with where I want all of the pieces to lay on the cardboard and take a picture of the final look for later refernece
Week 5	Using the reference photo taken the previous week, complete and assemble the first collage and make any necesarry adjustments to it.
Week 6	Prepare all the materials I will put together in the second collage. - Cut out all the images or materials needed for the second collage. - Without using any glue or tape, play around with where I want all of the pieces to lay on the cardboard and take a picture of the final look for later refernece

Week 7	Using the reference photo taken the previous week, complete and assemble the second collage and make any necessary adjustments to it.
Week 8	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS
Week 9	Prepare all the materials I will put together in the third collage. - Cut out all the images or materials needed for the third collage. - Without using any glue or tape, play around with where I want all of the pieces to lay on the cardboard and take a picture of the final look for later reference
Week 10	Using the reference photo taken the previous week, complete and assemble the third collage and make any necessary adjustments to it.
Week 11	Design the mirror piece. Write or add the wording/quotes I will put on or around the mirror.
Week 12	- Add any necessary finishing touches to the mirror piece. - Make any necessary additional adjustments to the three collages.
Week 13	Dress Rehearsals
Friday	Arts Fest exhibition and display set up (4pm-6pm) and Opening Night (7:30pm-9pm). All students expected to attend Opening
Saturday	Arts Festival @ Adele H. Stamp Student Union. All students expected to participate throughout the day.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Capodilupo, Christina M. "One Size Does Not Fit All: Using Variables Other Than the Thin Ideal to Understand Black Women's Body Image." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, vol. 21, no. 2, Apr. 2015, pp. 268–78. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037649>.

This article explores how the media impacts the way Black women perceive themselves in terms of their beauty. They found that Black women's perceptions about the way the media impacted men's perceptions of beauty caused Black women to have lower body esteem and feel invisible. Their findings can help in thinking about ways to address the issues of Black women having lower confidence and self-esteem because of our beauty standards. Knowing some of the causes and direct effects can offer some insight into where things can be improved.

ENNY - Peng Black Girls Remix (Feat. Jorja Smith). Directed by ENNY, 2020. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz9hUiwNP5I>.

This song discusses the different types of beauty within the Black community. It emphasizes the variations of the way that Black women can look and praises all of them. It brings up some critical issues with the beauty standards for women, specifically Black women. This source gives me ideas on the issues I should do more research on and try to address with my final capstone project.

Gordon, Maya K. "Media Contributions to African American Girls' Focus on Beauty and Appearance: Exploring the Consequences of Sexual Objectification." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, Sept. 2008, pp. 245–56. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00433.x>.

This study found that the media has caused young Black women to place high importance on their appearance. This fact just emphasizes how much we need to be mindful of the images young Black women are exposed to in the media and what ideas the media may be conveying to them about their image and self-worth.

Harper, Kathryn, and Becky L. Choma. "Internalised White Ideal, Skin Tone Surveillance, and Hair Surveillance Predict Skin and Hair Dissatisfaction and Skin Bleaching among African American and Indian Women." *Sex Roles*, vol. 80, no. 11/12, June 2019, pp. 735–44. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0966-9>.

This source is a study that shows that Black women in the U.S. and Indian women internalize white beauty standards and objectify themselves using these standards. The article argues that these women evaluate their self-worth based on these standards and they are treated better or worse in society depending on how well they align with the standard. This source provided the meaning of colorism and hinted at ways to address the issue. It raises questions about whether the standard should be broadened, whether or not people should even determine their worth based on their physical appearance, and if the problem can be addressed by trying to improve the way women of color view themselves and also changing the way society views them.

Killing Us Softly | Kanopy. Directed by Sut Jhally et al., <https://www.kanopy.com/en/umd/watch/video/216732/41634>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.

This film by Jean Kilbourne goes over the way the media impacts women's self image. Kilbourne argues that the implicit messages women get from advertisements is that they are not enough and they will never be enough. The film sheds light on the fact that the images of women in advertisements are all edited and that no one can ever actually look like the women in the ads. One important point to note from the film is that almost all of the ads were images of white women, so no Black woman could ever really come close to the ideal look. This source gave more insight on where our beauty standards come from and why they are the standard.

Little Brown Girl. Directed by Ebony Jenae, 2019. *YouTube*,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9Y-A2k1OqI>.

This song is meant to empower young Black women, specifically the ones who are of a browner skin tone. This song serves as an example of how Black women have tried to improve the confidence and self-esteem of other Black women. I can reference it for ideas about messages to convey to my targeted audience in my final project.

Meyer, Isabella. "Collage Art - A History of Collage as an Artistic Medium." *Art in Context*, 8 Apr. 2021, <https://artincontext.org/collage-art/>.

This source provides background information of how the art of collage was developed. It discussed the early social movements associated with collage as well as the artists who made collage popular. This source showed that collage is a useful art medium to elicit social change. This reaffirms my decision to use collage as the art medium for my final project.

Sartwell, Crispin. "Beauty." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2022, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/beauty/>.

This source goes over the meaning of beauty. It discusses the varying viewpoints that different philosophers have had about the definition of beauty. It argues that philosophers have not been able to agree on a definition and then goes into the way that society has interpreted beauty at different points in time.

Thompson, Cheryl. "Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being." *Women's Studies*, vol. 38, no. 8, Dec. 2009, pp. 831–56. *EBSCOhost*,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870903238463>.

This source goes over the history of how the standards for Black hair came about. It explains how hair for Black women was a determining factor in their worth. It discusses two standards. Either wearing your hair styled naturally was perceived as better within the Black community or wearing your hair straight. This makes it difficult for women to try to fit the standard. Either they will be praised or criticized for choosing to straighten their hair or wearing natural. It also brought up how wearing your hair straight is associated with the middle class in the Black community. I plan to see how I can make Black women feel good about themselves no matter how they style their hair or what their hair texture is.

Watson, Laurel B., et al. "A Sociocultural Examination of Body Image among Black Women." *Body Image*, vol. 31, Dec. 2019, pp. 280–87. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.03.008>.

This article goes over how the intersectionality of a Black woman's gender and race impacts her body image. It concludes that more research needs to be done about what factors may help

improve Black women's body image. It does, however, mention a way in which the improvement of the body image of white women has been attempted. This is a tool that I could try to implement in my final project.

Winter, Virginia Ramseyer, et al. "Toward an Understanding of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Body Image among Women." *Social Work Research*, vol. 43, no. 2, June 2019, pp. 69–80. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svy033>.

This article goes into specific characteristics of the body that Black women and other women of color may favor more than others, such as their lips or eye color. It goes into how our beauty standards affect women depending on their racial identities. It gives a little insight into the way that Black women feel about their weight. It explains that Black women tend to have a more positive body image when compared to white women because the standard for a Black woman is not to be super thin. One question this finding raises is how Black women who are thinner may feel as a result of not being as curvy as other Black women.