

The music industry does appearance really matter media essay



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It has always been said that show biz was the hardest business there was to break into and actually become a star. Outside of look at the obvious reason for the music industry being a hard one for women to break into a more challenging phenomenon that female artist are facing are in regards to their appearance. In an industry where it should be about a person's voice, it is amazing how many people, especially women, are pushed and pressured into changing their appearance because of society's fleeting standards of beauty. The goal of this paper is to dig deeper and divulge if indeed appearance, more specifically size, really matters.

The Music Industry: Does Size Really Matter?

As time had progressed over the years it appears that in the entertainment industry as a whole there is less emphasis put on a woman's ability to perform her craft, whether it her craft is acting, singing, or even dancing and more and more emphasis placed on her physical appearance. As the information and technology continues to press forward it appears that the music industry has taken a major shift compared to other areas of the arts and entertainment. In many respects it appears that as women have moved from the background to the foreground of music the importance of being or looking a stereotypical way have taken a major toll on artist. As of late it seems that no matter how well a female artist can sing if she is not within a certain size range then she is pressured to lose weight or there is the risk of being air brushed and digitally altered in videos, photographs and things of that sort.

As time has progressed on women's roles in society have become slightly more liberated. There has been a major shift from being barefoot and pregnant to being able to go after high education and careers. While there are those women who still choose to live the domestic life of being simply an at home wife and mother it is no longer the only option. In one of several polls conducted via Facebook it was discovered that approximately 95% of those surveyed, both male and female, believe that a woman's place was no longer at home and in the kitchen. However, many males also believed that if a woman was to be outside of the home that the duties in regards to the home were still her responsibility and more over, they believed that a woman's personal appearance should still be kept up even though she was doing just as much, if not more, than their male counterparts.

Although society as a whole has begun to see women as more than what they can do for their homes and families there is still a strong stigma attached to women as a whole. Taking a moment to look outside of the music industry and looking again looking at the entertainment industry as a whole there has been for the past several decades a trend of seeing the tall thin models on magazine covers, tall thin women in leading moving roles, and tall thin women playing the leading lady or the vixen in music videos, be they Caucasian, African-American, or of another ethnic make-up. Granted the cultural diversity has changed, the image of the women portrayed has yet to follow suit. In recent years, some artist have attempted to break the mold and bring fuller figured women into the spot light, however, it is not a common trend.

Two drastically different views of that can be seen in Kanye West's Workout Plan video and in Anthony Hamilton's Sista Big Bones video. In Mr. West video, there is a depiction of a group of women going through a workout obstacle course in order to find the perfect rich husband. Whereas in Mr. Hamilton's video there is a portrayal of a man who falls for a woman who is larger than "average" and the song is basically praising the larger women. Both songs and videos are polar opposites of one another but it goes to show the constant battle of what is going on in the entertainment industry as a whole but more specifically in the music industry. This is such a bigger problem in the music industry because, the industry used to be about talent and vocal ability not based on a person's looks.

In an interview conducted with Ms. Keontay Vaughn, the question(s) how do you feel about a woman of average weight and how do you feel about an overweight woman were posed. In response to both questions Ms. Vaughn stated, "as long as a woman is comfortable in her own skin who are we as society to judge her. Granted there are medical issues that are generally associated with being overweight, there are health and medical issues related to just walking outside and taking a breath. I don't think that society should try and force their thoughts and opinions on people. We opted to live in a democracy for a reason." Based on just listening to others conversations, it would somewhat of a safe assumption to feel that most people share similar views to that of Ms. Vaughn. Weight is a very personal thing and the truth of the matter is that a good deal of women deal with some sort of struggles with their weight. One of the most profitable areas there is right now center around health and wellness. There seems to be a

new weight loss product coming out every other day and more and more gyms are popping up on every corner and in every shopping center. This would not be as much of a “ problem” if it was properly promoted. There is a huge difference between wanting people to lose weight in order to improve their health and quality of life and in wanting people to lose weight so that they are not more aligned with societal norms.

What is it about our world and our society that causes us to equate being slim or skinny with beauty? As much as people would like to believe that this is a new millennium issue and that this just happened over night, the reality of the matter is that women have had to deal with “ weight issues” for centuries. If we were to take a look back at history, we can look at something as simple and innocent as Disney’s Cinderella. When the step-sisters are preparing for the ball, one of them is being squeezed into a corset. The corset served and still serves to main functions, to life a woman’s breast and to pull in her mid-section to give her a slimmer looking waist line. Are we so obsessed with looks that we have weaved these thoughts into the intricate fiber of children’s movies. The danger associated with equating slimness with beauty is that is can and usually does prompt a host of other problems that are not only detrimental to a singers career but also to their life as well. One of the worst problems a person obsessed with weight can deal with is an eating disorder. While there are an array of eating disorders out there one of the most harmful and dangerous to a singer is bulimia. Bulimia involved binge eating followed by vomiting and/or the use of laxatives. While these eating disorders can help an artist maintain the look she desires, in the end it is doing more harm than good. In inducing vomiting, there is damage

being done to the throat because the acid from the stomach is being driven back up and out of the mouth. Not only is there damage done to the throat but also to the teeth as well. So while the artist may be the size she wants to be it will ultimately result in them paying a high cost which could be actual medical bills, an early end to their career, or the highest cost being their life.

In addition to the physical side effects of having an eating disorder there is also a mental taxation that goes on. Part of having an eating disorder deals with the mind and an individual's mental perception of who and what they are or are not based upon standards they may have placed on themselves as the rest of others. Most of the time when these individuals look into a mirror or ask for a physical critique of themselves what they see and what they hear is not actually what is being displayed or said to them. Breaking the cycle of an eating disorder for an artist sometimes requires them to step down from the spot light and deal with the mental, emotionally, and then the physical aspects of their disorder in order to be able to continue not on living, but to be able to maintain and survive in a such a coat throat industry.

When it comes down to the industry itself and the images that are portrayed through videos, magazines, and cover art, there appears to be a slight variation in what is acceptable as far as body images in regards to Caucasians and minorities, more specifically African-American, women.

There appears to be a greater amount of pressure put on Caucasian women to be smaller and slimmer in size than there is for African-American women.

Part of this stigma, I believe, stems from the fact that African-American women, generally, are more shapely then their Caucasian counterparts and

therefore it is a little more acceptable for them to be slightly thicker. Another <https://assignbuster.com/the-music-industry-does-appearance-really-matter-media-essay/>

key factor to the distinction between the two races would definitely have to be advocacy. In recent years, there have been several African-American female singers who have come out and were not your average size. Artist such as Jill Scott, Queen Latifah, Angie Stone, and Jennifer Hudson brought back the notion that the music was about simply that the music. It was not about how the person behind the microphone looked.

For the May 2008 issues of Allure magazine, Gabrielle Union and Jill Scott shed their clothes for a photo shoot. The significance of this particular shoot is the difference between the two women. Jill Scott, being a full figured woman, and Gabrielle Union, being a slimmer more socially accepted size. Jill, was quoted saying, " nobody ever celebrates women whose bodies are bigger than a size 8. But here I am, naked in a magazine at size 16. I hope that I can be an inspiration to all women. We're all beautiful, each and every one of us." The interesting thing about this particular shoot is, although Jill Scott was the full figured woman on set, she had no problem shedding her clothes because she is very comfortable in who she is and what she looks like, clothed or unclothed. Another interesting aspect of this particular shoot was that Gabrielle Union, who has a body that most women would kill for stated that she put in extra workouts for the shoot because although she was comfortable being naked and in her own skin she " stepped it up for this one." Below you can see an example of each woman's image. While the article did not specify if each woman had a choice in her pose, it is clear that Ms. Union's photograph is slight more revealing than that of Ms. Scott's, so it begs the question of whether or not each woman's size and body make up

had anything to do with which photographs were chosen and actually used for this particular layout.

Figure

Figure

The film *Dreamgirls* starring Jennifer Hudson, touched on this particular subject in a manner in which crossed all racial and ethnic barriers. Jennifer Hudson's character Effie White was truly the voice of the group. She was a powerhouse, a force to be reckoned with. However, when the group started to go mainstream, which meant more television appearances and the like, the groups manager opted to move one of the other singers to the forefront and push Effie to the background because she was slimmer and more "appealing" to television audiences. As the groups popular grew more and more, the other character Deena Jones, was pushed further and further into the spotlight while Effie is pushed further and further back until ultimately she leaves the group. Ironically Effie's replacement is yet another slimmer character. Although the film was a fictional account, this is what is seen to occur in girl groups time and time again.

For Caucasian artist it is more prevalent that you see and hear about the struggles related to weight loss and gain. Two artist that are seemingly always on the cover of tabloids as a result of their weight loss and/or gain, as well as other personal problems are Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson. For both of these young women they started their careers as teen pop sensations and as they grew up in the spot light and deal with the toils of life, for Britney having children and for Jessica going through a very public

divorce. One would think that common sense would apply in the situation of Britney Spears and that the public would understand the fact that she had gone through having children and some weight gain was to be expected, however, it appears that the general public hold stars to a greater standard of living. With the tabloids displaying constant pictures of both of these women at varying weights and sizes people automatically assume the worse, particularly when it comes to “dramatic” weight loss.

For both of these women, the following statement, “The most crucial aspect of this singer is no longer her voice. It has now become about her body and how she can sexualize herself to appeal to a large male audience (in hopes of obtaining fans that may not have been attracted to her music in the first place).,” rings all too true. While record companies, at least some anyway, are about making good music, most are about record sales, and the age old saying is that sex sells, so it is job of the artist to be as sexy as possible in order to sell as many records as possible. As a consequence most labels do not go out of their way to sign full figured artist unless their voice is way above average and it is thought that there will be extremely high record sales as a result of the voice alone. For Spears alone there was a tension from the get go in separating the young artist who did “Opps, I Did It Again” from the more mature and sexual artist who did “Toxic”, in addition to her music having more grown up themes Britney had to also make sure she had a more grown up looking body, which meant more skin being revealed. In order to undertake this she had to make sure she fit the societal mold of what was sexy, meaning, washboard abs, well sculpted arms and legs, and a firm backside.

The idea of sex selling is more common and widespread today than it has ever been. For most artists, taking the “sex sells” route is the easiest and most frequented road travelled. There are a few artist in the industry who have staying power and need not stoop to the societal lows of need to use sexual songs, lyrics, or videos in order to sell records. Artist such as Patti LaBelle, Celine Dion, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, and Reba McEntire have been in the industry for years and have not necessarily had to use any forms of sexual exploitation. Although when Patti LaBelle was a part of the group LaBelle who had the song Lady Marmalade, the remainder of her songs have not been along the same lines. These icons came up through the industry during a time when sex was the prevalent selling point and yet they were able to bypass all of that and still establish their artistry and maintain great record sales as well as make a name for themselves in an ever so shaky business.

With some of the new rising icons in the industry there is a more accepting attitude to be different and still be an artist. Three artist who exemplify this are Christina Aguilera, Beyonce, and Jennifer Hudson. The reason for listing these particular artist is simply, they are advocates staying true to oneself and one’s dream. Although Beyonce has been seen wearing short shorts and cut off shirts, she is also a very “thick” woman who is not a perfect size zero. In numerous interviews she makes mention of her love for food and how she balances her love for food with exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle and weight.

Table

Facebook Poll: Do You Think The Music Industry Over Emphasizes Body Image (for Men)

Yes (male response)

Yes (female response)

No (male response)

No (female response)

Table

Facebook Poll: Do You Think The Music Industry Over Emphasizes Body Image (for Women)

Yes (male response)

Yes (female response)

No (male response)

No (female response)