

Makeovers

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Makeovers Turn on a television anywhere at any time and you are likely to be able to find some sort of makeover show included in the available listings. These shows offer a quick fix to life by providing an improved exterior façade to participants' homes, bodies, fashion sense, faces, lifestyles, you name it. These 'reality' shows claim to be merely for the entertainment and are very focused on the outward image. However, this change in television programming trends is not necessarily the empty, superficial manifestation it originally appears to be. Playing to the modern culture's Cinderella dream for a better future and our insecurities regarding who and what we are in relation to the rest of society, the consumer culture both reflects and magnifies a need for constant change through the use of this type of programming.

It is through our outward appearances that we project who and what we are to other people. Regardless of how much an individual resembles the idealized images portrayed on movies and in television programs, though, there is a clear and consistent message that the average viewer sitting at home is never 'good enough'. "Indeed Smith (1990) believes that women view their bodies as 'objects of work' requiring attention and upkeep in order to operate well and promote the desired effect" (Gillen 2001).

Weintraub (2004) quotes Extreme Makeover creator Nely Galan regarding the reasons she started her reality show. "You know, women are always saying, 'Oh, if I had a personal trainer and chef like Oprah, or liposuction like actresses do ...' Well, we're going to give them that." Critics of these shows discount the professed counseling and other therapy offered as meaningless coatings on the real issue at hand, which is "getting you that new bod, the one that will make all your friends and family at last see you as being 'hot'

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(Gibbons 2004).

However, for many people, being able to classify themselves as being in the ‘in crowd’ is all they need to feel the confidence necessary to make the changes that lead to a better life. It is this hope for the future that the programs play on, both for those participating in the program and for those at home watching their television sets. With confidence that your home, your garden, your abilities, etc. match the ‘norms’ or upper limits of the current culture, the theory goes, you too will be able to conquer the world and become the next greatest success story. “As Jane commented, feeling confident and feeling comfortable stems from ‘conforming, wearing what’s right’, though clearly wearing what is right is quite tightly controlled by external factors” (Gillen 2001).

While those who have participated in the Extreme Makeover experience realize their lives haven’t increased any additional worth as a result of their cosmetic changes, it is argued that this experience of a significant change in the way something is done, in the way society might view an individual’s home, skills, etc., can lead to an experience of rebirth and rejuvenation into a world that was previously considered immutable in nature. Weintraub (2004) quotes Dancey as saying “As a culture and as a country, we’re really invested in this idea of the conversion, and we want it to be overnight. And the idea of a physical makeover gets linked to the idea of a spiritual makeover. It’s almost like being born again, in the religious sense.” The physical changes might not have actually changed anything else about a person’s life, but the perception that change has occurred is enough to spur viewers and participants alike into believing that outward change can bring about fundamental, life-lifting transformation.

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Works Cited

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