

9. For an evolutionary psychology take on aesthetic experience, see Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).
10. Osteogenesis Imperfecta Type III. The child may be born with fractures and the skull is well ossified. There is progressive deformity of the skull, long bones, spine, chest and pelvis during early years. Face appears triangular with large vault, prominent eyes and small jaw. Sclera is blue in infancy but normal colour in childhood. Patients rarely walk even after multiple surgical procedures, and have very short stature. Early death can occur from respiratory infections predisposed to by reduction in vital capacity associated with severe kyphoscoliosis. Cf. <http://www.patient.co.uk/doctor/Osteogenesis-Imperfecta.htm>. Last visited June 18, 2011.
11. Loc. cit.
12. Winnie Hu, "In New Jersey, Learning Empathy By Looking Beyond Disabilities," *New York Times*, June 22, 2011, A18.

Beauty as Pride: A Function of Agency

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As clichés go, there's none better than "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Often this phrase is invoked to reconcile differing value judgments between pet owners, fashion designers, or family members who simply cannot fathom what you see of aesthetic value in another person whose looks fail to impress. But among aestheticians and lovers of art, this phrase can provide a plausible reason, a convincing rationale, or a failsafe escape from artistic disagreement. Locating the source of one's judgment of beauty in the eye of the beholder allows the viewer to be the subjective decider. Never mind that the artist has intentionally crafted a visual spectacle that embodies or expresses objective properties of beauty; let the decision rest with the viewer.

When the representation open to judgment is the human body—naked or nude (the distinction made emphatically by Kenneth Clark in 1956 in his classic book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*)—then interpretation and evaluation become more complicated. No longer are we merely following the five-part formula of eighteenth-century British empiricists like Edmund Burke, Francis Hutcheson, and David Hume who characterized the supposedly "disinterested" experience of beauty as consisting of:

1. Perception
2. Triggered faculty of taste
3. Object with particular properties (of beauty)
4. Resulting in pleasure
5. Yields a pronouncement of "this is beautiful."

Rather, we are in the realm of contextual analysis: looking at the simple fact that many of the most famous nude bodies depicted throughout the history of art are those of women, created by men, as objects of beauty for us to freely gaze upon: perhaps disinterestedly, and perhaps not.¹

This presentation will explore and engage the newest mode of defiant challenges to that ideal standard of beauty portrayed throughout the history of art—the female form—as expressed by artist Joel-Peter Witkin in a series of provocative photographs from the past ten years. I will narrow the scope considerably, to only a few artworks, because they are so complex: choosing to focus on three images (plus one of a male nude) that involve bodies with disabilities posing, i.e., performing for the

camera, the photographer, and the viewing audience. This is basically a paper about artistic evaluation and how multiple interpretations can give rise to inconsistent and conflicting meanings. Images like Witkin's *First Casting for Milo* (2004) challenge the viewer to look closely, understand the formal properties at work, and then extract a meaning that ultimately asks, Is the model exploited or empowered? Is Karen Duffy, pictured here, vulnerable and "enfreaked" or is she potentially subversive, transgressive, and perhaps self-empowered?



Joel-Peter Witkin, *First Casting for Milo* (2004). Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

I will offer an argument in agreement with artist/author/performer Ann Millett-Gallant that favors the latter interpretation, but will augment and complicate the issue by also introducing a pointed question or two taken from a recent analysis by Cynthia Freeland on objectification. I judge the works by photographer Joel-Peter Witkin to be representations of disabled persons who are empowered through agency and pride, but I also worry about the risk of multiple, conflicting interpretations on the part of viewers who do not, or cannot, entertain such enlightened readings. Like second wave feminist views about pornography that depicted women in demeaning ways, or feminist critiques of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, Witkin's photos can be judged as potentially offensive. But they are also objects of beauty—both in terms of aesthetic properties (they are magnificent studies in black and white, shadows, the human body, with many classical references) and because of the feeling of beauty and pride felt by the posers, who become performers of their own beauty and pride. I argue that beauty trumps offensiveness. Pride wins. But I'm not sure that everyone will agree.

I. Disarming Venus

"Disarming Venus" is not my term but rather the creative phrase offered by author Ann Millett-Gallant in her recent book, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*.² It is the title of the first chapter in which she seeks to educate viewers in how to "visualize disability" in opposition to canonical erasure or more recent trends of casting such bodies in freak shows and displays of "otherness." She cites images by painter Frida Kahlo as historical precedents of a woman picturing her own body (starting in the 1930s in Mexico) as "broken, wounded, and degenerate due to her disabilities."³ She focuses on self-portraits that display Kahlo's "personal and medical body" in images of "her numerous miscarriages, surgeries, recoveries, and physical degeneration."

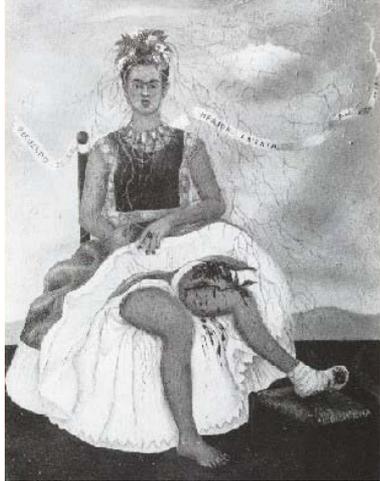
The "self" portrayed in Kahlo's work emerges as a body in pieces—graphically ripped apart, wounded, bleeding, and impaled. ...Kahlo was ahead of her time in her unashamed, graphic, and performative bodily displays of disability.⁴

She cites feminist admirers and the overall popularity of Kahlo—both as artist and Mexican role model—as she emphatically points to the transgressive nature of her performance:

This performance contradicts conventional narratives of pity, deficiency, and isolation that characteristically

surround disabled women...[she] is portrayed as passionate and sensual, rather than corporeally and sensorially “lacking” and helplessly dependent.⁵

Perhaps even more importantly for this session, being sponsored by the APA Committee on Philosophy and Medicine, her body—boldly on display as a “spectacle” (her preferred term—serves “as a site, target, and vehicle for ideology and creative



Frida Kahlo, *Remembrance of an Open Wound* (1938).

expression” within disability studies “to overturn predominant stereotypes about bodies and norms for social acceptability” based on medical models that view disability as “a set of medical and corporeal ‘problems’” to be cured, fixed, or eliminated.⁶ The posing of her self elevates Kahlo to a level of agency and activism; she becomes a proponent of visualizing the disabled that results in the subversive, transgressive overturning of traditional western ideals of

feminine beauty (such as those embodied in the classical *Venus de Milo*) and an example of a new and different sort of beauty, namely, one that exudes a concept promoted by the Disability Arts and Culture movement and involves what is known as disability pride.

This is the thesis of her entire book, as she works through numerous examples and argues that disability as socially constructed by our culture as abnormal, lacking, other, and freak, is wrong. She seeks to correct the readings of visual disability through her (admittedly) subjective interpretations of bodies on display by contextualizing them within an interpretive framework that sees and identifies with the poser/performer who chooses to exhibit her disability rather than hide or deny it. These posers choose to flaunt their bodily differences in resistance to mainstream culture

that teaches disabled people that our success is intrinsically tied to the denial of our disabilities and our bodies. If we are successful (“able”), we must “overcome” our disability—effectively defeat our impairments—and become as normal as possible, for, we are told, this is the goal.⁷

This form of self-exhibition is counterintuitive, alarming, and even shocking to some viewers. Photographer and disability studies theorist David Hevey has suggested that “photography ‘enfreaks’ disabled people, thus socially and visually constructing them as ostracized ‘others’.”⁸ This is the risk that all visual (and perhaps literary) representations run when interpreted by an audience who is unlearned in the interpretive framework advanced by Millett-Gallant. The question becomes, Is it worth the risk of misinterpretation to visually represent disability, particularly when the poser *feels* empowered, beautiful, and proud? The same question was once asked about women posing in porn designed for the male gaze, as if feminists knew better than porn-posers what was empowering and what was not. But more recent artworks by women have become more transgressive than ever, reproducing the conventions of porn

while simultaneously parodying them. The lesson of learning how to look is a valuable one, if not still controversial.

II. Performance as a Freakish Venus

When Irish artist Karen Duffy posed for the Witkin photograph in 2004, she was engaged in a silent performance of disarming Venus. Born without arms, Duffy has performed in live artworks since 1995 when she posed in the nude, in a self-objectifying act where she verbally explained that her body was already objectified in society and she was taking control/ taking back her dignity—from cultural stereotypes that cast her body as shameful, unacceptable, and better left unseen. She becomes the anti-idealized body: excessive and taboo. Staged by Witkin in seductive lingerie and partially shrouding drapery, she also openly performs “as a freakish Venus” who “means to intrude upon and liberate herself from histories of oppressive representations of women and disabled women specifically.”⁹ This is intended to be an exercise of agency by which one’s experience of disability becomes a tool toward artistic and feminist activism.

Moreover, she parades herself in defiance of a condemning medical gaze that has turned disabled bodies into “medical curiosities” within a purportedly sanitized, scientific, and objective realm. Citing early medical photography in the nineteenth to early twentieth century that became a widely popular form of entertainment, disabled bodies were displayed for paying customers to gawk over with voyeuristic pleasure. Millett-Gallant suggests that the photographer, Witkin (who studied such early photographs), appropriates the voyeuristic and theatrical medical gaze for the purpose of subverting its belittling power over such bodies that were forced to recoil under view. *Humor and Fear, New Mexico* is another work by Witkin that is cited as accomplishing similar goals. In this depiction, the author contends, the poser is “performing amputation”: a clear reference to medical vocabulary that focuses on the model’s impairments, her hands and particularly her right leg. Like

photographer and disability studies theorist David Hevey has suggested (that “photography ‘enfreaks’ disabled people, thus socially and visually constructing them as freakish, ostracized ‘others’”), critic Garland-Thomson maintains that fetishization of the body and particular body parts, derived from medical models, “serves to eclipse the multidimensional



Joel-Peter Witkin. *Humor and Fear, New Mexico* (1999).

nature of disabled subjects, constructing disability as social spectacle.”¹⁰ In other words, multiple readings of the body are lost in favor of one objectifying, “enfreaking” process by which the viewer gazes/stares to see and to know “what happened” to cause the abnormality. Upon learning that the model lost her limb, as a young woman, due to toxic shock syndrome incurred from the use of a tampon, and thus amputated by medical procedures, Garland-Thomson’s reading of the body-as-spectacle construes her in the “role of medical specimen, subjected to a diagnostic gaze/stare.”¹¹ Millett-Gallant argues

in response that the image “exceeds medical discourse in its blatant theatricality” and defies such a predictable, objectifying reading. But remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder; with which reading are you more comfortable?

Perhaps, as we quibble over conflicting interpretations, it would be good to hear from the model who was reported to have said to Peter-Joel Witkin, upon viewing the finished photograph “with pride,” that it made her feel beautiful. This is Millett-Gallant’s strongest argument for her interpretation but it may not be decisive for some viewers who simply cannot read the image in that way. It is worth noting that one of my students, who weighs 83 pounds and is a force to be reckoned with when she enters the classroom in her wheelchair, giggled with glee when she saw this photograph and the previous one by Witkin. Having studied the works of Frida Kahlo, she felt vindicated by contemporary images of the disabled body in which she immediately saw (and felt, I presume) a similar sense of agency, pride, and beauty. She acted as if the artworld had finally caught up with the self-empowerment felt in the paintings by Kahlo that were seen as being ahead of their time, a harbinger of a more organized disability pride movement. She only read them in one way: positive. And she wanted to learn more about them.

III. Objectification or Subjectification of Performance/Posing?

It is worth noting that Millett-Gallant realizes that her interpretations are disputable. She always frames the question of interpreted meaning in terms of the *possibility* of the images being transgressive. She leaves open the charge of exploitation, “enfreakment,” and invites dialogue. Allow me to offer one way of extending the discussion, namely, by means of an interesting analysis of portraiture offered by Cynthia Freeland, by way of Martha Nussbaum. First, consider a third example by Witkin of a work that “performs amputation”: *Portrait of Greg Vaughn*.

Here the young, androgynous male body resembles the early Greek ideal kouros figure with idealized Classical features. But the overdone theatricality and humorous, playful props are absent. This young man poses in quite a vulnerable and expectant position. As Millett-Gallant observes,

this modern day *kouros*...is entirely nude (as the body is considered in art) and/or naked (as it is considered in medical imagery)...the photograph, like *Humor and Fear*, plays with visions of the body *with* and *as* ornamental objects...[it] not only represents but performs amputation, not as a surgical and disarming act of removing limbs, but rather as an embodied performance of identity...Witkin’s photographic performances of amputation dissect the inherent contradictions, supposed neutrality, and integrity of the medical gaze and medical imagery.¹²

But do they? Is this how you read this image, as opposed to the previous one? Or does the age of the poser and the vulnerability of his stance (with his arm leaning on the marble), jeopardize the preferred interpretation of an agentic, empowered, proud beauty?

A new book by Cynthia Freeland, entitled *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry*, offers an enlightening analysis of portraits in terms of personal identity as well as aesthetic qualities that focuses in one chapter on the topic of intimacy.¹³ Basically, Freeland’s thesis is that portraits are a genre of fine art that express (1) physical individuality and recognizability, (2) an inner life/character/psychological or mental states of the sitter (poser), and (3) an awareness on the part of both the artist and subject that they are self-consciously engaged in a process

of depication, thereby excluding most animal portraiture from the definition of the term. At one point Freeland suggests that the portrait subject must actually “look back” at the artist, allowing him/herself to be viewed, in order to be a full participant in the process of portraiture.¹⁴ I raise this condition from Freeland as a way of complicating the meaning of the performance of the poser in *Portrait of Greg Vaughn* because, unlike the previous two photos (but like the paintings of Frida Kahlo), he looks out at the artist and viewer. Freeland cites



Joel-Peter Witkin. *Portrait of Greg Vaughn* (2004). Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

Martha Nussbaum’s criteria for objectification as follows:

1. Person P uses person Q as an instrument (means);
2. P denies Q’s autonomy;
3. P treats Q as inert;
4. P treats Q as interchangeable or fungible;
5. P violates Q’s boundaries;
6. P treats Q as something that can be owned;
7. P denies Q’s subjectivity.¹⁵

She then constructs her own set of criteria, based in opposition to Nussbaum, that define what she calls “subjectification” that allows for the intimate depiction of a sitter in a non-objectified way:

1. Person P treats Q as an end and not a means;
2. P endorses Q’s autonomy;
3. P treats Q as active and alive;
4. P treats Q as unique and irreplaceable;
5. P respects Q’s boundaries;
6. P treats Q as something that cannot be owned;
7. P endorses Q’s subjectivity.¹⁶

It is easy to see how Freeland would interpret many so-called portraits of nude females in evidence throughout the canon of western European art history as objectified according to these criteria. But how do Witkin’s photos fare on her analysis?

Millett-Gallant’s informal criterion of agency seems to replicate conditions (2) - (3), and perhaps (6) - (7). But in looking at *Portrait of Greg Vaughn*, can we decisively say that Witkin treats Vaughn as an end and not a means (condition (1)) or as unique and irreplaceable (4)? (His uniqueness, indeed his humanity, seems threatened by his physical connection to the marble support, of which he appears to be a part.) In painting the model’s skin a pasty white to resemble the roughly hewn, unsculpted marble support, has Witkin respected Vaughn’s boundaries (5)? I believe these are difficult questions to answer and pose a challenge for Millett-Gallant who is willing to admit to competing interpretations of visual disability in art (and disability pride), but who repeatedly minimizes them. I do not have time to delve into it fully here, but Freeland is much more unsure about how to interpret problematic and controversial images; she cites, for example, the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and the examples that really push people over the edge, the



Sally Mann. *From the Night-Blooming Cereus series* (1988).



Popsicle Drips (1985).

photographs of nude children posed by their mother in rural Virginia: photographer Sally Mann.

Is it enough for Mann's daughter to report, later in life, that "we enjoyed being photographed. It gave us a sense of beauty?"¹⁷ The similarity, in some respects, of Witkin's *Portrait of Greg Vaughn* and Mann's *Popsicle Drips*, is instructive. It alerts us to the multiple meanings not only of visual representations of boyhood, young men's bodies, and the depiction of disability, but also to the professed voice of the poser/performer whose pronouncements might more reasonably be taken with a grain of salt. As mentioned earlier, I offer the comparison of these photos as a way to extend the dialogue begun by Ann Millett-Gallant, as it brings together two realms of inquiry—disability studies and feminist aesthetics—at the site of very complicated images. In re-reading Freeland's analysis, I sense her difficulty and frustration at arriving at clean, decisive readings of the photographs of Sally Mann. Aware that subjective responses can vary greatly, Freeland argues that some of Mann's photos fail the criteria of subjectification, and she relegates them to the realms of objectification instead. Her reaction to the comment made by Mann's daughter, Jesse, in which she conveyed a sense of enjoyment and beauty, is none too subtle:

My response to this comment is the same as the point made earlier about little girl beauty queens. It is difficult to defend the position that their choices to participate in competitions that objectify and hypersexualize them at a young age are autonomous. And so even if, like Jesse Mann, they comment later on that they enjoyed the process, their opinion does not cancel out the fact of their objectification. Sally Mann is like any other stage mom (or dad) using a child as means to an end.¹⁸

IV. Millett-Gallant's Performing Amputation

In this final photo by Joel-Peter Witkin, Ann Millett-Gallant herself, the author of the text I have used primarily throughout this paper, is performing amputation. Entitled *Retablo*, *New Mexico*, she is the figure on the right with her back to us in an elaborately staged retablo which references Latin American, Catholic folk art traditions (and for Millett-Gallant, she notes, the works of Kahlo). Witkin was inspired by a retablo image of two lesbians embracing, posed above a prayer to San Sebastian, thanking him for bringing them together. Witkin's photograph also contains this prayer (at the bottom) and is steeped in the European tradition of retablos such as the Italian painter Duccio's painting of Christ resisting Lucifer's temptations (although in Witkin's, this includes a future of the world after the tragedy of 9/11). The principle female nude is modeled after Veronica, who gazes down at her lover, Sylvia, staged on a pedestal covered in flowing drapery, and includes a

characteristic St. Sebastian and a skeleton reminiscent of death. Even Millett-Gallant summarily states, "I cannot logically explain the photograph, as it defies a central narrative. It is far more sensory than sensible," but she is quick to proffer that she felt no embarrassment disrobing, removing her prosthesis, being painted white, and being posed.¹⁹ She concludes her book with this image, sharing her thoughts with us:

I have my back to the camera and am seated on my two shorted legs (one congenitally amputated above the knee and one below), as I extend my "deformed," or here fabulist/fabulous arms. The female figures are opposing in the positions—one flaunting the front of her nude body, the other much smaller and flaunting her back. The two bodies complement one another and complete a disfigured, heavenly narrative. Witkin said he especially, aesthetically admired my back, which inspired the pose. This seated figure that is me is magical and all-powerful; as viewers stare at my back, I stare back. Like the other models in this book, I perform for my readers/viewers. Life becomes art.²⁰



Joel-Peter Witkin. *Retablo*, *New Mexico* (2007). Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

I leave the final analysis, interpretation, and evaluation up to you. Does performing amputation embody agency, pride, and beauty? Or is it an ill-conceived exploitation of one's vulnerability? I would suggest that there are multiple interpretations to ponder here and that perhaps the more we consider, the richer the discussion will be. I look forward to the discussion in the hopes that we can discern even more nuanced criteria for a concept of "disability pride" and the natural correlative of that

concept, one which has so far remained unnamed: the concept of disability beauty.

Endnotes

1. My favorite Burke quote always seemed to reveal more desire than disinterest: "observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts: the smoothness; the softness; the easy and invisible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to

- fix, or whither it is carried.” Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, trans. J.T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 115; see also Peg Zeglin Brand, ed., *Beauty Matters* (Indiana University Press, 2000), 10.
2. Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
 3. *Ibid.*, 2.
 4. *Ibid.*, 2-3.
 5. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
 6. *Ibid.*, 7.
 7. *Ibid.*, 9.
 8. *Ibid.*, 13. The work referenced is David Hevey, *The Creatures that Time Forgot* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
 9. Millett-Gallant, 37.
 10. *Ibid.*, 84. The source is Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Laurie Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 335-74.
 11. Millett-Gallant, 84.
 12. Millett-Gallant, 95-96.
 13. Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford University Press, 2010).
 14. *Ibid.*, 21.
 15. *Ibid.*, 199.
 16. *Ibid.*, 200.
 17. *Ibid.*, 223.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Millett-Gallant, 143.
 20. *Ibid.*, 144.

Disability, Internalized Oppression, and Appearance Norms

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Whether disabled or not, people who do not meet appearance norms often feel intense pressure to use available medical interventions to “fix” their appearance. Feminists have critiqued the practice of cosmetic surgery given its complicity with sexist norms of appearance and standards of beauty.¹ In disability studies circles, the pressure to adhere to norms of species-typical functioning has also been widely criticized.² Should such criticisms extend to practices and medical interventions designed to help people achieve species-typical *appearance* norms? In this paper, I argue that they should, but with certain caveats. Namely, the criticism of species-typical functioning is not so much a problem with the attempt to help people achieve the norms as such, but rather the social, institutional, and contextual features that make that offer very difficult to resist, and that simultaneously denigrate the worth of the individual as she is without typical functioning. In a world in which disabled people were widely valued and respected for their abilities, some individuals might well prefer to use medical technologies or other interventions to attempt to achieve typical functioning. But not all would, and we could perhaps be more confident that what motivated individuals who did desire such change would not be a sense that they could not be complete or valued without it. Similarly, in the case of interventions to achieve normal appearance, what matters most, morally speaking, is not that an intervention aims at producing a particular look, but rather

the relative ease of acceptance of the individual regardless of whether she gets the intervention, and the ways that social practices can constrain her alternatives.

In this paper, I focus on how pressures to achieve appearance norms align with similar and troubling pressures to meet functioning and beauty norms, and how such pressure can undermine or diminish individual autonomy. Put another way, I’m less interested in what the particular aimed-for appearance is, and more interested in what motivates a person to seek it. As a secondary point, though, I think we need to be aware of how social expectations shift in accordance with what many individuals do, even if each individual does so autonomously, and they do not aim for a collective end. When many people seek surgery to enhance their looks, they exacerbate pressures on others to meet similar standards.

Cosmetic surgery is a relatively widely accepted practice that still raises the hackles of many feminists. In philosophical debates over its moral acceptability, criticisms sometimes focus on how autonomous choices for cosmetic surgery really are. That is, although women certainly can be said to “choose” such surgery, and even sometimes adamantly insist that they are doing it for themselves (not for anyone else, or due to any troubling interference), critics have expressed concern about two possibilities: 1) that such women don’t have sufficient alternatives, at least with respect to maintaining their social status, given sexism in society; 2) that such women may have internalized oppression that undercuts the apparent authenticity of their choice. When people act within unduly constrained circumstances (“your money or your life” spoken at gunpoint is obvious coercion; “get a face lift or lose your broadcasting job” may similarly be coercive, even if it is not directly threatened but clearly understood), or when they accept norms that denigrate them, learning to see themselves as problematic or of lesser value than others, we need to pay close attention to how much weight we give their individual decisions in terms of their responsibility and our duty to respect their autonomy. Saying “she knew what she was getting into, and she chose it” seems troubling if a woman who gets cosmetic surgery deeply felt that she could not be acceptable or employable without it. It sets an overly narrow scope on the moral dimensions of the issue at hand. Instead, the widespread use of cosmetic surgery, particularly by women, means that we need to attend to the broader social forces—such as continuing oppression of women—that constrain women’s action and may undercut their senses of self.³ Sexism in norms of appearance hasn’t gone away, despite the efforts of third wave feminists to try to seize control of our ideas of beauty and appearance.

Our reasons for questioning the sexist norms of appearance underlying the use of cosmetic surgery may also be reasons for questioning the norms of appearance that motivate people with visible bodily abnormalities (e.g., facial “wine stains,” cleft palate, atypical limb growth, scars from burns or trauma) to seek to “correct” their appearance. That is, we should also be asking whether or not such individuals have sufficient alternatives to treatment (or do they feel unduly pressured to receive treatment?), and is their choice among alternatives possibly the result of internalized oppression? In what follows, I will explore how norms of appearance influence decisions about medical interventions for people with visible abnormalities. In particular, I want to examine a) whether those norms are morally troubling in ways similar to the norms of appearance that drive the cosmetic surgery industry; and b) how we might distinguish between internalized oppression and autonomous choice in accordance with mainstream values.