Bringing sexy back: Reclaiming the body aesthetic via self-shooting

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Abstract
This paper is based on visual narrative analysis of cyber-ethnographic material from a 2.5 year field-research with ‘not safe for work’ (NSFW) bloggers and self-shooters on tumblr.com. I use Koskela’s concept of ‘empowering exhibitionism’, Waskul’s ‘erotic looking glass’, and Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’ to analyze self-shooting (taking photos of one-self). Constricting societal norms of sexuality, body shape and body practices influence how my participants (N=20, 10 female, 9 male, 1 transgender, ages 21 - 51, average age 34) live their embodied and sexual lives. Through self-shooting and by negotiating the community specific issues of control, power and the gaze, they are able to construct a new, empowered, embodied identity for themselves.

I look at self-shooting and selfie-blogging as a practice of reclaiming control over one’s embodied self AND over the body-aesthetic, thus appropriating what is and is not ‘sexy’. The NSFW self-shooting community offers a safe space otherwise so hard to find within the body/sexuality-normative mainstream culture. This makes self-shooting a collective therapeutic activity. In their self-images participants construct themselves as ‘beautiful’, ‘sexy’, ‘devious’, ‘more than just a mother and an employee’ and as someone who ‘likes their body instead of trying to not hate it’. The technologies of the self activated through diaristic blogging and selfie sharing, along with the empowerment from interactions with peers take bloggers on a path of sexual awakening and reintroduce them to their own bodies.

Bibliographic citation

Keywords
selfies; sexuality; body; self-identity; visual narrative analysis

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References

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