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One of the major myths of Hollywood is that of feminine beauty. Hollywood and those who ran it created unrealistic body images for women and continue to create those images even in today’s society. False advertisement through things like padding and (today Photoshop) lent themselves to the “standard” of Hollywood. This is shown in many different examples, from the “Star Machine Process” talked about by Jeanine Basinger, to movies like *Singin in the Rain* and *Sunset Boulevard*. Hollywood and the elite created a false and unattainable standard for all women that was perpetuated by the movie studios and mainstream media through false advertisement and the “Star Machine Process”.

Before understanding what happened for stars to become the way they were advertised, one must first understand the myth of Hollywood and why it came about in the first place. Hollywood created this myth in order to increase popularity of their product (both the movies and the stars) and promote what they felt was the “perfect woman” through the “star machine process”- the name used to describe what actresses underwent to become what Hollywood wanted them to be. During the beginnings of Hollywood film, the stereotype that men were more important than women permeated the society. Because of this, not only were women objectified, they were given smaller roles and were held to higher standards of their image. As a result of this patriarchy, women were seen as little more than a mannequin- meant to be seen and not heard- and because of that, the girls needed to be pretty. In a silent movie, or even a talking movie where the women have little to no lines, nobody cared what a women’s voice sounds like, or if she has a nice personality, instead, they care that she looks good on the camera. She is arm candy, so she has to look desirable.

Out of this standard came the myth of Hollywood. Movie companies felt that they needed to create a standard of beauty so high it set the stars on a pedestal- much like the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology- one that no “normal” woman could ever hope to achieve, thereby increasing popularity and giving an air of unearthliness. Not only that, but even those women that were deemed “worthy” outlasted their usefulness. Beauty is fleeting, and nobody knew that more than aging Hollywood actresses. As Janet Todd notes in her article, “the fact that the figure of of the aging actress tends to ‘violate’ certain cherished cultural myths concerning both Hollywood and women…we desire our performers to remain forever beautiful and beyond the ravages of time.” (100) The myth that Hollywood created gave audiences a false view of the world. For them, their actresses were stuck in time, and when one did age, they felt betrayed. Nobody looks like the stars seen in movies, even the stars themselves don’t look like that. That is why the “star machine process” was born, to create a perfect woman out of a “plain Jane”.

The “star machine process” as talked about by Jeanine Basinger, is the process undergone by stars to make themselves look not just beautiful, but “Hollywood perfect”. In the mid 1900s, this meant fixing teeth, hair, posture, size, etc. in order to make women look more appealing to the masses. Those masses were shown a fake version of an actress, a trend that continues to this day. For movie producers, the original product, meaning the women, wasn’t very important to them. If a woman had yellowed teeth or bad posture, they could fix it. If she was a bad actor, she wasn’t given a large speaking role. They knew how to manipulate the screen in order to show what they wanted. The first step in the process was to test the actresses on film and get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Once their few positive attributes and many flaws were found, studios got to work redesigning an actresses’ life, look, and name. Many of the women in Hollywood were given new names if their original names didn’t seem all that glamorous, or were too “ethnic”, or simply didn’t fit the persona that Hollywood was going for. So, they were given new names. Basinger talks about movie star Joan Crawford and how her name came about:

It was famously publicized that her star name, Joan Crawford, was the second-place winner in a movie weekly's "name the star" (and win $1,ooo) contest, after the first winner, Joan Arden, turned out to be the name of someone already in show business. Second place! How would you like to live your life not only without your own name, the one your mom and dad chose for you, but also with a second-place contest winner from a ten-cent fan magazine? (49)

Changing one’s name had to have an effect on a person, but what about their entire life? Studios came up with elaborate stories for actresses’ lives, ones that made them much more interesting to fans. No one wants to hear that an actress lived in the same town her whole life and was one day discovered. They want to hear that she was the daughter of a diplomat, or that she had some incredible trial to overcome in order to get where she was in that day. Audiences want a movie in real life. Once stars were given lives glamorous enough to be on even the biggest screens, they were “fixed”. Teeth were whitened, hair was lightened, posture was fixed, freckles were taken away, and they were given voice, acting and dancing lessons. In the movie *Singin’ in the Rain*, Kathy describes her experience with the “star machine” saying that she had a nose job for one of the studios, and after she did that they realized they didn’t like her acting. These women were made to think that they had to change who they were in order to succeed, and even then, there was no guarantee that they would. After going through the process, women had almost no resemblance or link back to their old lives. This was perpetuated by the movie studios, the media, and even the fans. This trend continues to this day, in an even broader spectrum.

Moving forward, what are the long term effects from the myth and what has happened in the years since the beginning of this “Star Machine Process”? The effect this myth had on women and continues to have on women is detrimental to a woman’s self esteem and the way she views other women. When Hollywood created the “star machine process”, they created much more than just stars, they created generations of women who look up to someone they see on a screen, or in a magazine, or on a billboard. Not only was it detrimental to the public, it was harmful to the actresses. They were forced to give up their stories, their names, and their bodies to a cruel system that would just as easily love them as shun them, but they did it for a living and they did it for a love of film. When a woman looks at a magazine and sees this size 2, clear skinned, perfectly tanned woman, she sees something that isn’t real, and she holds herself to that standard. What Hollywood did and continues to do is harmful to women and girls everywhere, but “sex sells” and Hollywood will milk it for all it’s got.

Works Cited

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