

Moroccan Beauty Standards

Introduction

When it came to brainstorming Capstone ideas, it did not take me long. I had been researching women's rights and expression through clothing for the Global Citizen mid-year comparison project. Diving into this subject, I found the topic to be very intriguing. I wanted to extend the theme of women's studies to my Capstone. I narrowed my mid-year project to compare what it's like to wear a Hijab in the United States compared to what it is like to wear one in Morocco. As a result of this research I decided to focus my Capstone project to the research of Moroccan beauty standards.

I also developed a stronger interest of drawing this year. I was already into the art realm, so I have a bit of a drawing background. This year, with the encouragement of my new friend Zaynab and help of my language partner Ichrak, I really put an effort into improving and developing my drawing abilities. I met Zaynab in the beginning of the year at school. We sat next to each other in class, so she would see me doodle when I got bored. She showed me some of her drawings, to which I was impressed and inspired. I realized then, if I put more passion into my art, it could be a way to connect with her. This has opened a door for me because finding my identity as an artist has helped me connect to other Moroccans. Making connections in a foreign country can be difficult but finding a common passion helps.

This new enthusiasm towards art has been a huge part of why I came to Morocco. In the United States I had hobbies and interests, but no passion or identity that I felt strongly connected too. Finding the community connected to not only art but music too has shaped me. I continuously meet new people, from places and cultures that seem so separate from what I already know about life but when we can find that common ground; the appreciation of art, there's an instant connection. Looking at my ideas of current beauty norms through the lens of art and in connection with my new peers helps me to compare the standards of American beauty and Moroccan.

American Beauty Collage

When I began my Capstone research, I started collecting faces and names. I asked my cohort and other young Americans; who do you think is beautiful? What celebrities do you admire? What features do you want, or find attractive? I built a collage out of those answers, creating a display of ideal American Women.

These women are all young, ages 16 to 37. And the diversity shows itself clear. In the collage there is a wide range of body types, skin colors, hair, eyes, etc. I believe that's what American beauty strives for today. "What makes someone 'most beautiful' is changing."(Spector 2017) Especially in the community of social media influencers. There is a huge spread of the *Love Yourself* campaign in Media. From Dove's *Real Beauty Sketches* saying: "feeling beautiful is the first step to living happier, more confident lives"(Dove 2013) Or Girl Cove saying

“self-awareness is the biggest form of self-love because it reminds me to look inwards”(Lobo 2018) These influencers recognize that the most critical person of your appearance is yourself. So embrace the beauty within and the traits you are born with and love your body.

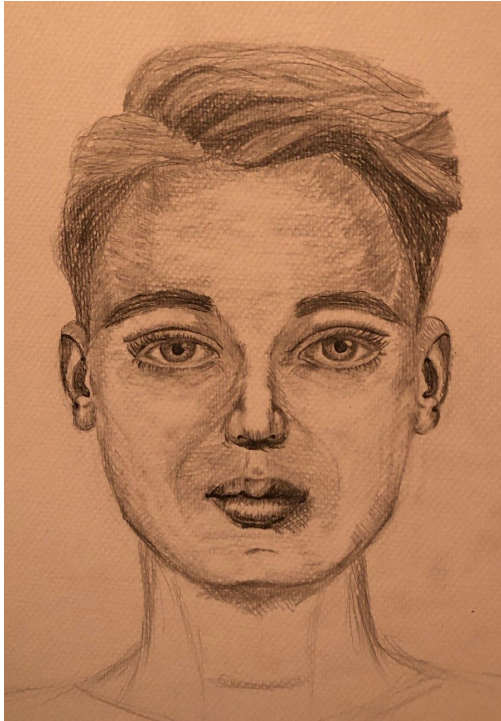
Loving your body also means taking care of it. Some common health ideals in the United States are; straight white teeth, clear skin, fit body. You can be curvy or skinny, just ideally in shape/toned and healthy. There has been a shift in the past few decades away from simply being thin towards being healthy in a way that fits your particular body type. These beauty ideals are more about life style, what you eat, how you exercise and clean your body.

American Drawings

Throughout February I started my drawings for American Beauty standards. American beauty is as diverse as ever, making it almost impossible to represent. So for this project I tried to capture two elements of American beauty that I don't see as often in Morocco, but have been rapidly changing and increasing in western cultures. That being gender fluidity and biraciality.

James Charles/ Ruby Rose

This drawing has been the most challenging. I set out with the intentions to represent gender fluidity. So I wanted to create a face that is neither strictly male or female in an American lens. I referenced two androgynous beauty icons, Ruby Rose and James Charles. I used the eyes, eyebrows, lips and jawline of



James Charles. I combined those with the nose, hair and face shape of Ruby Rose. My first attempt was a fail. I got lost in combining their distinct features. James Charles has untypically male, feminine features. Whereas Ruby Rose strives for a more masculine edge in her beauty. My second attempt was more successful by using a new style of drawing that my language partner Ichrak taught me. I attended a few University classes at the National school of Architecture.

There, I went to Ichrak's recreational art class where she would give me tips on drawing. Along with her classmates who would share their styles and their ideas of beauty.

The goal for this drawing is to symbolize the beauty in gender fluidity. The transgender community is small, almost nonexistent in Morocco. My impression from a range of discussions throughout my year here, is that Moroccan people believe that gender is a very physical, unchangeable thing. A girl can dress more "masculine", with short hair and baggy clothes. Or a guy can act more "feminine", with a soft, careful personality. Either way to a Moroccan it is simply that and not associated with gender or sexual preference. In comparison this is also how gender was viewed in America many years ago when girls were referred to as a

tomboy and boys might be called sissy but change in America has progressed at a rapid pace.

Zoe Kravitz/ Zendaya Coleman



Beauty standards are not only changing in the feminine and masculine aspect but also in terms of race and diversity. This drawing was done before I learned from Ichrak. In comparison, it shows my progress as an artist. The style I learned was how to create shade and definition, without blending. This style also taught me precision. With this style every line

counts, you can't blend away mistakes.

The purpose of the drawing was to represent biracial beauty. The two actresses I used for inspiration are of multiple ethnicities. Zendaya is German and African American. Zoe is Ukrainian, Jewish, African American and Bahamian. I used the face shape, and nose of Zoe and the hair, eyes and mouth of Zendaya.

Moroccan citizenship is one of the most difficult to obtain in the world. There is a very specific image ingrained into Moroccan culture of what Moroccans look like. If you look anything different from that, it doesn't matter how you act, your appearance will always be questioned. I have met a few

Moroccans whose skin is naturally pale and their hair a lighter shade of brown. There are even some Moroccans with different colored eyes. These slight differences make them stand out, to the point where they get treated like foreigners. All of these differences are admired in Moroccan beauty but associated with foreigners. This creates a self-defeating paradox in Moroccan beauty.

Beauty In Morocco

Before 2018, I had never really left the United States. So I had no idea how much of an influence our media puts out to the rest of the world. An influential concern in Morocco is advertising. Walking the streets of Agdal (the main shopping area in Rabat) there's a lot of foreign advertisement. Many clothing stores, even those originating in Morocco, display white women as modeling their clothing.

The most blatant example of this is the brand Marwa. It makes sense for brands like Tommy Hilfiger to display American models, because it's an American brand. However Marwa started in Morocco and is directed towards Moroccan women. So when their model for the season is a blond, white woman, it sets unrealistic ideas of beauty.

Products that contribute to these unrealistic standards are skin whiteners, colored contacts and hair dye. All of these products are used at one's own risk. Skin whiteners are known to cause significant damage, as goes for bleaching hair

and not properly cleaning contact lenses. I see these products sold cheaply and commonly, by the market area in Rabat and in every other city.

Moroccan Beauty Collage

Part of my process was comparing standards so I asked the same questions at my Moroccan school on their ideas of beauty. Girls passed around my notes, writing names of who they think is beautiful. At first I got the names of men and even some American celebrities. Until I made my question clear, that I meant Moroccan woman that they look up to. Then I got a bunch of names, all of which I did not know. I looked them up and created a second collage.

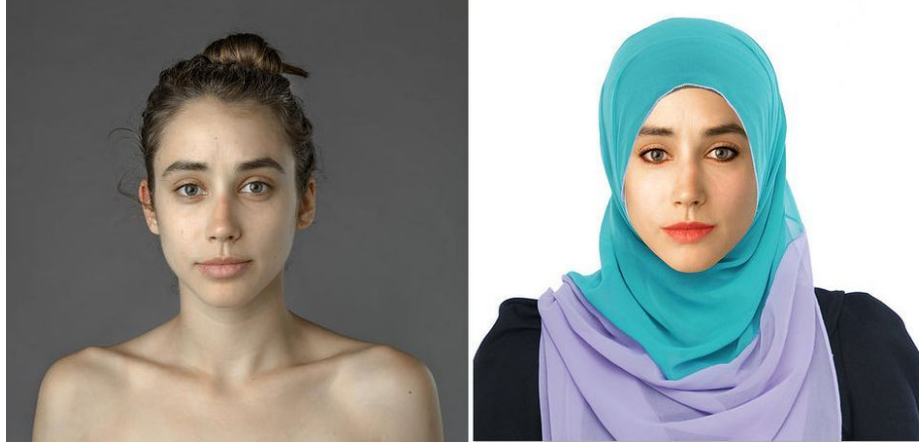
The age range is a bit older, the youngest being early 20's. These women all have pretty similar skin tones, hair length and eye color. None of the women wear Hijabs. Considering the majority of women in Morocco wear them, I found this to be the most surprising. Lastly, from what I notice, these women can be put into two broad categories. These are the two types of beauty I see in Morocco. One category represents a conservative and more traditional beauty. The other has a more modern and international influence. International meaning; directed more towards media trends and of influence of other countries.

Moroccan Drawings

There is an evolving divide in Moroccan beauty. Between conservatism and liberalism. "In Morocco, standards of beauty, whether on an individual or a

collective basis, are widely different.”(Arbaoui 2012) Morocco has a collectivist culture. In relating to beauty standards this means being beautiful is achieving an ideal look that the society expects. In contrast an individualist beauty culture necessitates standing out and having unique features. Collectively, Morocco is a conservative country. There is what Americans would call a conservative section in most clothing stores in Morocco. In the popular chain The Waikiki there are two separate floors, one targeted towards women who wear a hijab, cover their butt, legs, collarbones and arms. The other floor is just what the brand sells internationally.

These two different styles are what I wanted to show for the meaning of Moroccan beauty. Both styles are respected in Rabat. From what I've observed Rabat is about 50/50 for women who wear and don't wear a Hijab. Outside of modern cities, especially in smaller villages, almost all women wear them. There are stereotypes for each style. Like the “simplistic assumptions of Muslims who think that a veiled woman is a holier woman” (Takolia 2012). A more conservative girl is suitable for marriage. This thought of purity that surrounds the Hijab is seen as beautiful.



A project conducted by BuzzFeed asked photoshop experts from around the world, to make the woman on the left beautiful. The woman on the right is the result from Morocco. This video stands out for me because I had seen it before coming to Morocco. At the time I didn't know what it meant for her to be wearing a Hijab, for her skin to be a tone lighter, or for her eyes to be darkley lined. Beauty is believed to be found in the eyes. The liner could be done to accentuate that. Traditionally, even men have worn eyeliner. However, this woman is rare in Morocco because of her light green eyes and pale skin. I can only think of one girl that looks like this. She is 1 in 6 girls of my class and an even smaller ratio comparing to the whole school. This demonstrates that ideal is often not realistic or obtainable.

Conservative/Traditional Moroccan



Representing conservative beauty in Morocco, is a task of symbolizing a majority group in the country. From multiple interviews and and conversations I've had throughout the year, wearing a hijab is believed to be a choice in Morocco. The majority of women have chosen to wear it for God and because their religion tells them too.

My language partner Ichrak wears it because she “prefers to cover up and loves colourful and patterned scarfs.”(Lehmouch 2019) She also wears it for God, but she's the only person I've talked to that has thought out her choice. She's thought of what it means in her life and her religion. Her younger sister doesn't wear the Hijab, which probably means there is no immense family pressure in wearing it. She also wears it tied in multiple unique styles. So she doesn't wear the Hijab as most do to simply fit in.

Through my drawing of the conservative or traditional Moroccan women I aimed to focus on the roundness of the face. This is because in Moroccan beauty standards being “fuller” is desirable. There is a pill called Derdeg that helps women achieve this. “Derdeg pills are generic medical drugs used by girls who are suffering from thinness to gain weight.” (Arbaoui 2012) These pills are a new

alternative to herbs and methods, that Moroccan women have been using for decades. They were originally meant for fattening cows and cause a number of health issues for humans. These pills are not well regulated, but “women are still inclined to use them in order to achieve the socially accepted and attractive appearance.”(Arbaoui 2012) This appearance also includes suitability for marriage.

Modern/International Moroccan



For this drawing I had to capture the woman of Morocco's media. These women comply similarly with American beauty standards. She ideally has straight hair, an angular face, in shape and has strong defining makeup. There is a line between this beauty, where at a certain point it crosses into “foreigners”. There is a certain “Arab” look that Moroccans generalize themselves with. Having; black and wavy

hair, brown eyes, tan skin, angular faces, etc. With foreign influence in mainstream media, a majority of Moroccans idealize lighter; skin, eyes and hair. So when the rare Moroccan has those features, they get treated like foreigners. This sets up modern Moroccan beauty to... well... shoot itself in the foot. Apart that, this new age of beauty is progressive towards health and women's rights.

Limits and Conclusion

My biggest limit was accuracy in my drawings. I attempted to represent a huge number of women in 4 drawings, so not every detail that I attempted is identifiable. I would have liked to put more time into the modern Moroccan drawing. I don't think it represents the strong, confident beauty, that is the new generation of Moroccans.

I was also limited in my research coming from evidence based studies and strong sources. The topic of beauty is marginally opinion based. Most of what I learned was from a variety of conversations and personal observation over the past eight months. Therefore some conversations were difficult to document because they are based on insights I gained before deciding on this topic for my capstone. . If I used opinions, I tried to only include those that I felt were represented by multiple people. I collected the data myself and as I am not a professional, it is not scientifically thorough.

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