

Quam pulchra es/ frumoasa: When Beauty is the Norm, is Ugly False?

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When we know that *norma* is the Latin word for T-square and that *normalis* means perpendicular, we know almost all that must be known about the area in which the meaning of the term “norm” and “normal” originated...A norm, or rule, is what can be used to right, to square, to straighten... to impose a requirement on an existence. (Canguilhem 239)

Beauty is truth, truth beauty is often discussed as a noble vision. Beauty is symbolic that signifies to dwell and encourage larger significations and is, perhaps believed as truth. Truth, again an abstract notion of the ideal is understood to be the embodiment of beauty. This phenomenon is responded in this research article. If Keatsian or the Renaissance philosophy is the truth, eventually the classicists accepted that ugly is false. The prejudiced approach of the society in creating varied binaries to establish certain ideological positioning propagates deviant presentations to the civic. In the creation of binary oppositions such as good/evil, beauty/ ugly, royalty/commoners, it is ability and disability that operates as a signifier to define beauty. This phenomenon is looked through the lens of norm and normal to enlarge the canvass of the term -disability.

Robert Hoge, born with deformed legs and facial tumour, embraces ugly in a beauty-obsessed world. As an adult, Hoge has made a career as a journalist in the world of the media. He was also the media adviser to former Queensland premier Anna Bligh. Robert Hoge's new memoir is about his childhood- his first day of school, making friends and learning to ride a bike. But it's also about getting called "cripple," having multiple reconstructive surgeries and teaching

himself how to play sports with two artificial limbs. Hoge lives in Brisbane, Australia, with his wife and two daughters. His new memoir is called *Ugly* published in the year 2013. The former speechwriter and political adviser have written a memoir of his experiences in a bid to help others to overcome such deformities. In the memoir he discusses with severe deformities and narrates how his own mother was so horrified by his appearance that she branded him 'ugly' and even admitted that she 'wished he would die. *Ugly* is about courage and provides awareness to people about the idea of 'beauty' or 'ugliness.'

The research paper tries to look at Robert Hoge's memoir as a tool to study the disabled and define disability in the Australian milieu. To define disability Robert Hoge himself tries to see beauty in ugliness. The concept of norm and normalcy is recognized for reading the memoir and to redefine disability. This novel attempt as a novice in this vast area hopes that the book is recommended to counselors, pediatricians, nurses and also the literary academia for future research.

Disability encompasses a broad range of bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capacities. It is more fluid than most other forms of identity in that it can potentially happen to anyone at any time, giving rise to the insiders' acronym for the nondisabled. It is a matter of choice. It is usually measured as comportment against the normed expectations. Tanya Titchkosky writes, "Both in everyday life and in the human sciences, "normal" often appears as if it is a static state of affairs, and when people are said to have unwanted condition, they are deemed to have an abnormality" (371). Disability maintains a unique relation to normal. Lennard Davis, distinguished author who has immensely contributed to Disability studies, argues that "

the constellation of words describing this concept "normal," "normalcy,"

"normality," "norm," "average," "abnormal,"- all entered the European

languages rather late in human history. The word “normal” as “constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual” only enters the English language around 1840. (3-4)

Tracing out this argument for further development, disability studies theoretician Tanya Titchkosky writes in the essay “Normal” quoting Michel Foucault that “the sense of a normative order required that the human sciences not only make “man” (humans) an object but also make them knowable, to one another, through “norms, rules and signifying totalities”(372). This normative order is evidently dominant version in Robert Hoge and his life narrative. The norm measures Hoge through psychometric and intelligence tests, structure and symbolic of the physical appearance, to name a few. These instances reveal the power of normalcy that can be used to “all conflicts, differences, ideals, or values in relation to a taken-for-granted sense of normal life (Titchkosky 372-373).

Disability In The Australian Milieu

People with disability have the right to freedom, respect, equality and dignity. Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 reflects the Australian Government's commitment to take action and support a coordinated plan across all levels of government to improve the lives of people with disability, their families and carers. The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) collects information about the wellbeing, functioning and social and economic participation of people with disability in Australia. The SDAC was developed to align with the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health 2001 (ICFDH). The survey defines disability as any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months. In 2015,

almost one in five Australians reported living with disability (18.3% or 4.3 million people). A further 22.1% of Australians had a long-term health condition but no disability, while the remaining 59.5% had neither disability nor a long-term health condition.

The Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (D.D.A.) provides protection for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability. It encourages everyone to be involved in implementing the Act and to share in the overall benefits to the community and the economy that flow from participation by the widest range of people. Disability discrimination happens when people with a disability are treated less fairly than people without a disability. Disability discrimination also occurs when people are treated less fairly because they are relatives, friends, carers, co-workers or associates of a person with a disability.

The law D.D.A. privileges the disabled but that license was denied to Robert Hoge by his own mother for the first time when he was pushed out from her womb. Hoge responds on how his mother reacted when she learned about his deformities in an interview

I was born in the early 1970s, so before prenatal scans were commonplace, and I'm the youngest of five children. And my parents had four healthy kids before me. I'm not going to call my brothers and sisters normal, but they were certainly healthy. And so I think, you know, my parents had every right to expect the healthy, normal child they thought they were owed. But I turned up without any warning, with these deformities. And my mother didn't even see me before I was taken away to intensive care, and she knew something was wrong because it was a difficult labor. (Hoge)

As I pointed out in the beginning the objective of the paper is to define disability, Robert Hoge himself tries to see beauty in ugliness. This could be explained by analyzing an instance in his life that explained his deformities to other growing up kids.

Normally with one quick and short answer. So, you know, kids would ask me, "Why have you got bumps on your head?" or "Why have you got a squished nose?" or "Why don't you have any legs?" And I would simply say, "I was born that way." And probably nine times out of 10, the questions wouldn't go much further than that. ... That satisfied them, and it certainly satisfied me. (Hoge)

To continue the beautification of his "ugliness" he decides not to have a major reconstructive surgery that would diminish the appearance of the birth defects. He made that decision when he was 14. By then, he had 24 different operations, some quite small and some very large and complex. And his parents said, "Well, Robert, you're almost an adult so you get to choose" (56) . His parents and doctors talked about the potential side effects of the operation and chanced that he might go blind. During this discussion his brother, when he heard that, piped up and said, "Well, what use it is looking pretty if he can't even see himself?" (56) So right then and there "I decided no, I'm not going to have this operation" (56).

In another instance from the memoir, Robert Hoge moves against his doctors' advice when he decided to opt out of the surgery. He had genuine love and affection for the massive changes all of the doctors and nurses who worked on me made to my life. But he feels that doctors are tinkerers. As a continuation he exceeds to comment that he is not going to look like "Brad Pitt or George Clooney, so I think I should just stick with my rather distinctive face and go from there"(40).

The lived experiences of the registered memory which dwells through many internal as well as external struggle drives Robert Hoge's book that credits to recommend for future research. It tries to redefine disability through acknowledging differences in appearance without attaching value to them. Hoge gently recognizes that he is ugly but it is negated by his dears and

receives a respond as “No you’re not, you’re just... different” and, “everyone is beautiful in their own way” (quoted from *youtube* videos). It’s comfortable to say that about oneself, though, because a self has realized how a subject look like is part of the self but not all of self. This realisation doesn’t come fully formed when a baby is born. It developed over years of thinking, teasing, talking, friendship, bullying and love. These are some things one figures out along the way.

Interviews of Robert Hoge shows us how the “normal” is imitated, enacted, enhanced enforced, sold and recycled and resisted. It documents how people are conditioned to become normal and frequently managing the appearance to depart from unwanted difference. Hoge as a memoirist, he himself identifies and prefers to be himself ugly. Ugliness is not the absence of beauty. It’s not in opposition to it. Ugliness is its own, wonderful thing. Defining ugliness only in opposition to beauty narrows our sense of normal. A quick look at history shows that defining beauty in one particular way is just another fashion choice – apt to change with the seasons. Defining a person’s appearance only in terms of how it relates to that definition robs us all of a deep richness. Appearance is linked to identity and self-worth. Acknowledging the breadth of differences in appearances, it helps us acknowledge differences between people.

Beauty itself is a million points on a map. Beauty is a contested space. Notions of what is or isn’t beautiful are constantly changing. No one, except maybe supermodels, will win, however, if we define beauty as just one point on the end of a continuum with ugliness at the other. Beauty isn’t the end point of a treasure map; it’s actually a million different destinations, with a million different ways of getting there. It is shaped through individual self- discipline. In European world, self disciplining was principally considered as the residue of power. Power, constantly is treated as *dominance*. But the novel idea of the French intellect Michel Foucault suggests that power is dispersed throughout in society, inherent in

social relationships, embedded in a network of practices, institutions and technologies- operating on all levels of everyday life. Foucault's concept of "biopower" asserts that power operates on our own body. The result of biopower is subjugating ourselves. The driving force of biopower is "knowledge and desire"- the production of scientific knowledge which results in a discourse of norm, and normality, to which individuals desire to confirm. Hoge too confirms to the canonical knowledge that are shaped and established, perhaps deviant from his desires. Hoge's memoir and the decision to narrate his experiences in life through this piece depict his knowledge and desire. But Hoge negates and at the same time accepts the norm, thereby normalizing his viewpoint.

Considering the above arguments on beauty and ugliness, disability is defined as a physical or mental condition that limits a person's attitude, norms, or activities. So if we were to take the literal meaning of this, then every single person would be known as having a disability. A fear is a disability because it inhibits us from doing something. One disability should not be distinguished or highlighted more than another. If we look close enough, we all have a disability and the truth is, having a closed or judgmental mind is also a disability. We are all people with disabilities, some more visible than others, therefore we should all be considered normal just doing life in different ways.

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