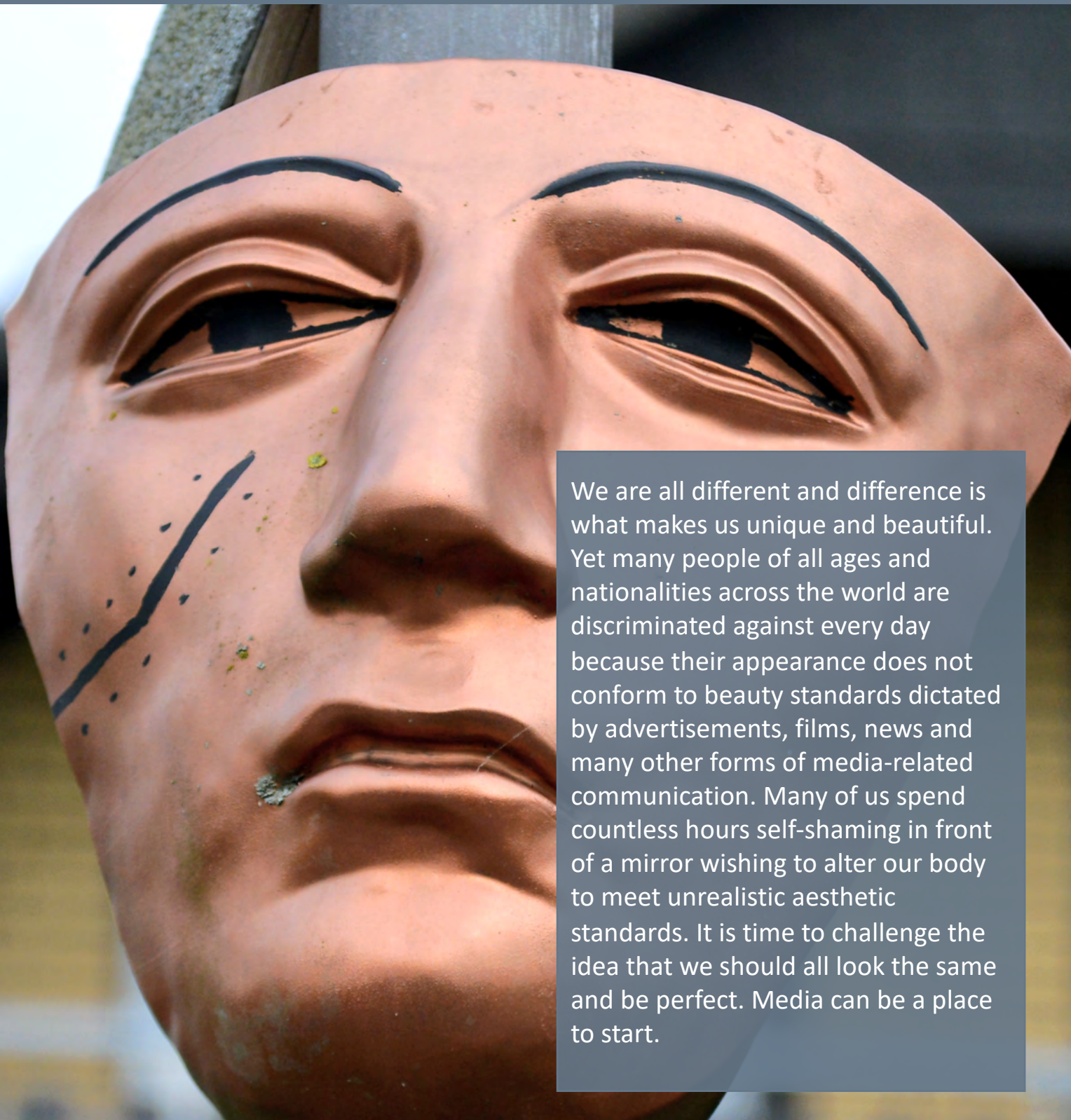


FACIAL DISFIGUREMENT AND THE REPRESENTATION OF EVIL



We are all different and difference is what makes us unique and beautiful. Yet many people of all ages and nationalities across the world are discriminated against every day because their appearance does not conform to beauty standards dictated by advertisements, films, news and many other forms of media-related communication. Many of us spend countless hours self-shaming in front of a mirror wishing to alter our body to meet unrealistic aesthetic standards. It is time to challenge the idea that we should all look the same and be perfect. Media can be a place to start.



KEY IDEAS

People with visible differences, such as facial disfigurements, are often misrepresented in the media (for example on television, film or newspapers). Disfigurement generally refers to one's appearance being affected by a congenital or acquired medical condition such as from a disease, birth defect, or wound. The formulaic and simplified discourse often used to portray people with visible differences can lead to stigmatization. This means that people could be bullied, shamed or discriminated against because of their appearance. Adjectives deployed in the media to describe disfigurement often include 'horrible', 'horrendous', 'heinous' and 'terrible'. The use of this lexicon neglects that there is beauty in difference. Disfigurement is not something to feel pity for: it is something that needs to be understood and the media could potentially play a big role in it.

There is a common association of facial disfigurement with the villain or an evil person in cinema. The University of Texas found out that 60% of the all-time top 10 American film villains have skin conditions which include alopecia, multiple facial scars, verruca vulgaris on the face and bulbous noses (Croley et al., 2017). Employing facial disfigurement to signal the difference between the good and the bad is part of a deep-rooted tradition. People with facial disfigurements can be also portrayed through the use of sensational tropes, neglecting that we are all human and therefore we are all different. In broadsheets particularly, 'disfigurement' tends to feature in articles about entertainment and crime; and in articles on crime, popular medicine and entertainment in the tabloids (Johanssen and Garrisi, 2017). Films such as *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Deadpool* (2016) or the British television series *Bodyguard* (2018) have also contributed to more exposure of facial disfigurements and bodily differences to audiences. The type of media and its audience can be directly linked to the way in which representation of disfigurement is presented.



KEY READINGS

Changing Faces: *Disfigurement in the UK* (2017).
Available from: bit.ly/2VgoYk9.

Garrisi, D. and Johanssen, J. (2018). Competing Narratives in Framing Disability in the UK Media: A Comparative Analysis of Journalistic Representations of Facial Disfigurement Versus Practices of Self-representations Online. *JOMEC Journal*, 12, 128–144.

Garrisi D., Janciute L. and Johanssen J. (2018). *Portraying disfigurement fairly in the media.* CAMRI Policy Series. London: University of Westminster Press. Available from: bit.ly/2J4LKF1.

Croley, J. A., Reese, V., & Wagner, R. F. (2017). Dermatologic features of classic movie villains: the face of evil. *JAMA dermatology*, 153(6), 559-564. Available from: bit.ly/2WOYdjp.

ACTIVITIES

1. Think of a sitcom targeting young people and answer the below questions:
 - i. How many characters in the show are portrayed as having Acne or any other condition affecting their face?
 - ii. If the answer is none, what could be the reason for erasing all imperfections from the faces of the characters?
2. Think of a film that you have watched in the past:
 - i. Are there any characters presenting a visible difference such as a scar, or a facial asymmetry?
 - ii. What role do these characters play?
 - iii. What role do their visible imperfections play from a narrative point of view?
 - iv. How could the plot be changed?