

‘I look therefore I am’

Online representations and the dangers of assumptions

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We’ve all heard the cliché of not being so quick to assume that guy in the BMW is happier than everyone else, that the family in the mansion doesn’t have the same relational issues as everyone else, and that celebrities aren’t necessarily as happy as they display on social medias.



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This article aims to shed some light on the more micro-assumptions we resume in day-to-day life, and the emphasis we place on looking, rather than being or feeling.

We inhabit a culture of abundant material goods and endless opportunities to express yourself and cultivate identities through the clothes you wear.

We are told not to judge on appearance, yet simultaneously forge our identities and express our interests, preferences and even distastes through how we present ourselves. Haircuts, material goods and the

music we listen to all intend to wave a flag stating *'if these resonate with you, we should be friends.'*

As a sort of trial and error process, we judge and form opinions rapidly through observing the aesthetics of others.

We are both attracted and deterred from others, almost entirely dependant on who we perceive them to be.



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The truth is, you could be a malevolent, misogynistic character but that comedic Louis Theroux T-shirt will envelop assumptions that you're an approachable, cultured, witty individual.

Meanwhile a genuine and humble individual who doesn't take much interest in material expression could be disregarded as boring and uninteresting.

Obviously, observations and assumptions to an extent, have some practical utility. They are crucial in avoiding unpleasant interactions and sometimes can keep you out of trouble, but superseding this, the

The primary issue with this is that when you cultivate your own style, it is, to some degree, a representation. The secondary issue is that we don't interact with most humans we observe.

We make loose assumptions based on a few pieces of information we extract from a representation of a personality.

length to which we rely on assumptions to give us authentic information on someone's personality can be dangerously misleading.

The Virtual Self and the Extension of Representation

Social Media's input has been extensive; we can now carefully choreograph our desired image, without necessarily having to promote anything real about ourselves.

I like to label this procedure as *'identity catfishing'*. We bait certain artefacts about ourselves to instigate response from others, beckoning them into our virtual existence.

Instagram can be used to meticulously refine our brand.

No one sees the hundred photos you took prior that perfect selfie, or the argument which was quickly followed up with an all-smiles family holiday photo.

The absence of critical thought in all areas discussed above leads us towards dangerous ground.

Comparisons make us unhappy; we compare our lowest to other peoples' highest and we simply do not see the journeys and the struggles that everyone grapples with daily.