

## The Public as the Fashion Police

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that patriarchal Hollywood conventions objectify women by making them objects of the "male gaze." *E!*'s "Live from the Red Carpet" at the Academy Awards this year is a modern day example of Mulvey's "male gaze." Women are not only objectified by men in this example, but celebrities of all genders, races, and weight are critiqued by the public and media. Mulvey's concept of identification and difference is at play in the public's and media's fascination with celebrities' Red Carpet looks. Making the Academy Awards Red Carpet an arena for judgment of celebrities' looks based upon various social identities transforms them into objects of the public's and media's "gaze," which expands upon Mulvey's original argument for the "male gaze."

Suture, or how the celebrity looks are created by the camera work and structure of the program are essential to the objectification of celebrities for our "gaze." For example, the positioning of *E!* correspondent Ryan Seacrest on the Red Carpet interviewing the celebrities moves the "action" along. Seacrest stands to the side of the camera's view with the camera's central focus on the celebrity. This positioning emphasizes the celebrities' status as the object of our "gaze." Without fail, Seacrest asks, "Who are you wearing?" and *E!*'s "Glam Cam" scans the celebrity head to toe, front to back to display the entire look for us to gaze upon. Periodic interruptions of Seacrest's interviews allow for *E!* correspondents Giuliana Rancic and Kelly Osbourne to critique the images by considering how the choices the celebrities make highlight or detract from a star's gender, race, weight, or other social identity. These critiques spur subsequent critiques by other media outlets and the public.

Critiquing celebrity looks not only position the celebrities as objects of our "gaze," it also positions celebrities as distinct from us, or in Mulvey's words, "self and other." Gender is one social identity that affects the critique of a star's look and George Clooney and his current girlfriend are a perfect star couple to critique. Clooney is a familiar object of our "gaze" because of his charisma, impeccable ability to wear a tuxedo, and his ever-changing girlfriends. Clooney's latest girlfriend, Stacey Kiebler, provided much to critique in her look during this year's "Live from the Red Carpet." The media repeatedly compared Kiebler to an Oscar because of her metallic gold look. *Us Weekly* went so far as to deem Kiebler "George's Clooney's best accessory" of the evening (<http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-style/pictures/oscars-2012-best-and-worst-dressed-stars-2012262/21142>). This comparison not only positions Kiebler as an object of our gaze but also literally objectifies her, which expands upon Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" objectifying women.

Critiques of celebrities' Red Carpet images often focus on race as well. The big story from this perspective this year was Viola Davis' decision to wear her hair naturally. One fashion blog commented, "Perhaps my favorite part of this entire look is entire look is Viola's choice to rock her natural hair..." (<http://www.redcarpet-fashionawards.com/2012/02/27/viola-davis-in-vera-wang-2012-oscars/>). It is more common to see African American stars with relaxed hair on the Red Carpet because of the traditional definition of beauty defining straight, smooth hair as beautiful hair and shunning kinky, coarse hair. Therefore, Davis' decision to forgo her usual wig declares "Black is beautiful" and she adds, "It gives me flavor. It makes me feel like I'm spicing up my life a bit,"

<http://stylenews.peoplestylewatch.com/2012/02/26/viola-davis-wears-her-hair-natural-at-the-oscars/>). This Red Carpet statement demonstrates Davis' engagement in constructing the image that the public sees of her because she recognizes that she is an object of our gaze.

Octavia Spencer's look as a plus-sized celebrity was another common focus in critiques of celebrity looks this year. E!'s Fashion Police described Spencer's look, "This beaded silk and tulle Tadashi Shoji gown fits her perfectly and proves that you don't need to be a size 0 to look like a million bucks—just the role of a lifetime and a great stylist!"

<http://www.eonline.com/photos/gallery.jsp?galleryUUID=4602#171831>). In Hollywood, super skinny is the norm as opposed to curvy, plus-size women. Because being thin is typical, critiques of plus-size celebrities often include some comment about the celebrity's body. This is not the same for thin celebrities. Comments such as these from the media separate celebrities from themselves by placing celebrities in the role of objects of their gaze.

Celebrities are often objects of the public's and media's gaze, but this is especially true on the Red Carpet when celebrities painstakingly construct their image. The primary goal of critiques of these looks is judging the complete look, but critiques vary across social identities. Varying critiques exemplify Mulvey's argument for the distinction between the self and other when considering the "gaze." A modern example of this concept is the Red Carpet in which celebrities are aware of their objectification, so they consciously construct their image.

- Red carpet fashion and criticism
  - o Mulvey gaze: looking practices embedded in social/contextual "field of looks"
    - Describes how a person experiences looking in a social context; notion of power in this form of looking
    - 3 looks: cinematic apparatus, scopophilia, voyeurism

Notes from watching red carpet stuff

- Ask who you are wearing: dress, shoes, jewels, accessories
- Camera shows mostly head to waist but also scans to toe and asks girls to twirl
- Seacrest on carpet interviewing, osbourne above looking down
- Rancic leads discussion of fashion with celebrity stylist, osbourne, and actress (sarah hyland)
- Ask actresses about why they chose look, what they expect from the night, what they did earlier that day, career path
- Surprise that Rooney Mara didn't pick dress til morning of—she breaks rules but then they find out that she actually spent a lot of time deciding and made the final decision that morning so it's a little better
- Dresses: sparkle, sheen, skin, make up, severe hair, lots of romantic looks
- Far more attention to women fashion than men
- First awards are to cinematography and costume & make-up = importance of image and appearance

## Notes from Internet research

- <http://www.eonline.com/photos/gallery.jsp?galleryUUID=4602>
  - o “And the statue for boldest look of this year’s Academy Award goes to—drumroll, please—Gwyneth Paltrow...it took chutzpah for the actress to wear this caped Tom Ford gown...Leave it to Gwynnie to go totally out of the box but totally pull it off.”
  - o Angelina Jolie’s leg was a huge deal
    - But totally awesome that E! calls her too skinny
  - o Penélope Cruz looked gorgeous but E! calls it generic. “She’s not making any worst-dressed lists in this strapless Giorgio Armani gown with hardware by Chopard, but she’s not about to win any prizes, either.”
  - o Michelle Williams went from “dowdy at the Globes to nice at the SAG Awards to glamorous, age-appropriate and whimsical at the Oscars”
  - o Rooney Mara “looks as if she’s setting sail with a first stop at Fugly Town in this Givenchy gown with sailor lapels. The sleek hair and red lips are striking, but the nautical-style bustline and protruding sternum aren’t doing the actress any favors. A little more prep time might have gone a long way to making a better choice.”

- <http://www.redcarpet-fashionawards.com/>

- o Seems to be a blog about the fashion
  - Angelina worked gown too fierce



- Emma Stone’s look was similar to Nicole Kidman’s 2007 oscar look—how can we remember this and why do we care?



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