



## Why Photoshop is a feminist's best friend

Let Liz and Kate keep their airbrushed beauty. They've earned it

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Votes for Women! The Equal Pay Act! Divorce! Abortion! Ooo, don't you love the smell of full-on feminist legislation in the morning? This, girls, was the 20th century.

And now, lucky ladies that we are, we're about to get ... um, a law in France banning all 'ultra-thin' models and in this country, if not a law, then a request from the British Fashion Council to the Periodical Publishers Association to, in the words of heat magazine, 'form a group to curb the use of airbrushed and digitally enhanced pictures.' This followed an inquiry held last year into the health of models (originally sparked by the size-zero debate) during which the leader of the inquiry, Baroness Kingsmill, concluded that airbrushing could 'perpetuate an unachievable aesthetic'. Magazines including Elle, Hello! and Vogue are apparently 'considering' new practices which would mean less retouching.

What's wrong with this picture? Basically, everything. In the past, pro-female law changes stated unequivocally that women were every bit as able as men to vote, work, divorce and have sex. That is, that they were adults. But these new ones ... laws, guidelines, suggestions, whatever ... portray women as neurotic, looks-obsessed cretins who are likely to collapse in a weeping heap of jelly if they come across proof that any other woman is better-looking than they are. If you do exist, ladies - grow up, or kill yourself, or something! But don't kid yourself that all broads are as tragically low in self-respect as you are, and don't hand this absolute gift to the sort of creepy man who soothes his sad soul by imagining that every woman between the ages of 16 and 61 lives in a permanent self-loathing state of competition with every other woman on the planet. Personally, I love good-looking women - it gives a girl something to perve over if there are no good-looking men around.

What sort of sap doesn't know by now that picture-perfect beauty is all done with smoke and mirrors anyway? Even the vision of loveliness that is our cover girl Kate Moss can frequently be seen sporting a complexion that makes the Rocky Mountains look like chiffon velvet. All those candid snaps that grace Heat and its sleazier little sisters every day of the week - why, I'm now more familiar with X's funny feet, Y's sumptuous cellulite and Z's tartar-ridden teeth than I am with my own!

Knowing as we do just what Kelly 'My Struggle' Osbourne, for example, really looks like, how on earth can some of us fly into a frenzy of self-doubt when we see an obviously phoney photo of her? Knowing that the Sex and the City chicks now rack up almost two centuries between them, why do some of us fuss and hiss about a bit of retouching on their forthcoming film poster? And do 'children's health campaigners' really care if Liz Hurley likes a bit of airbrushing, as she admitted recently? Let's face it, Liz is never going to win any props for her acting. Shouldn't we celebrate wholeheartedly the fact that so long as she looks good enough to earn a decent living from standing around in her scanties - whether by trick or treat - there's minimal chance of her ever again tormenting us with another tragic excuse for a film?

Indeed, it is this same interview that bears such poignant witness as to why we should feel pity, not pique, at the vanity of our prettier sisters. Miss Hurley likes her photos doctored so they make her look 'thinner and younger - I like a certain amount of retouching, like anybody. We all like to get rid of spots and shadows under our eyes. Every time I download my holiday snaps, I always go over them.'

Imagine that; being so conscious of being an APB - Ageing Professional Beauty - that you even doctor your own holiday snaps! No wonder Liz calls the rest of us 'civilians'; this is surely a level of discipline that rarely exists outside the armed forces. Although of course the enemy in this case can never be beaten; an evil axis of one's own mortality collaborating with Mother Nature and Old Father Time. Surely being a Professional Beauty - let alone an ageing one - is one of the most insecure and doomed careers imaginable. And the idea that they are happier with their lot than the rest of us - from Marilyn Monroe to Naomi Campbell - obviously isn't true. Why in the world should we begrudge them a bit of airbrushing in order to soften the blow of being mugged by gravity?

Most women are wise to the fact that lots of men love a cat-fight, and thus go out of their way not to give them one. But there's more than one way of giving a bitch-slap - and the weary old face-off between 'plastic' and 'real' women is one of them. At the end of the day, we are sisters under the skin - even if we are led to believe that theirs is like liquid silk, while ours is more like bubble-wrap. Vive la différence!

