Afbeelding met tekst, elektronica, ontwerp, camera

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijving

CONTENT

[Introduction 3](#_Toc160782297)

[Examples 4](#_Toc160782298)

[How hard is it for people to describe why something is beautiful and why is that? 6](#_Toc160782299)

[How do different artists approach beauty in photography? 7](#_Toc160782300)

[How do the factors age, gender, etc. make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful? 8](#_Toc160782301)

[Answers survey 10](#_Toc160782302)

[Conclusion 11](#_Toc160782303)

[Sources 12](#_Toc160782304)

# Introduction

We are Pien van der Horst (15 years old) and Marieke van Hellenberg Hubar (15 years old). Currently, we are in the 4th grade of VWO at 2College Durendael. This year we got a research assignment at the subject Cultural Artistic Training (CAT). We could choose our own interest to do a research about. First, we had to choose our discipline. We chose ‘New Media’, the reason for this is that both of us were interested in photography and that is nee media. For our theme we chose beauty and ugliness because we were wondering what people think is beauty (in photography) and why. We chose to do our research is theoretical because we thought that then we could answer the question(s) more deeply and we wanted to use a survey for our investigation, this was easier to analyse if we would do our research theoretical. Before we started our research, we knew that thinking something is beautiful or ugly is generally easy to say. However, we did not know if people could easily explain why they think that. Also, we were fascinated about what factors would play a role in what and why people think something is beautiful or ugly. Our expectation for our analyses was that we thought different factors would play a big role in what people think is beauty/beautiful and that the majority of people find it hard to explain why they think something is pretty/ugly. The research is mostly about what beauty is according to different people and how hard it is to describe why they think that something is beautiful or ugly. Besides, we will really look in to what factors play a role in why people think what is beautiful. The text we wrote to eventually answer our main question by answering subquestions is structured in paragraphs so that information is spread into smaller pieces so that our story is clear to the reader.   
  
Main question:  
**What is the difference in what people think is beauty in photography?**  
Subquestions:  
⁃ How hard is it for people to describe why something is beautiful and why is that?  
⁃ How do different artists approach beauty in photography?  
⁃ How do the factors age, gender, etc. make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful?  
  
We hope you are going to enjoy reading our research and that you will discover new (interesting) information!

# Examples

Person 1:

Afbeelding met ongewerveld dier

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingExample 1:  
In this photograph you see orange, grey, something yellow, maybe blue. It has special shapes in it due to the fact that the picture is made through glass, with a camera with a big range of zooming in. You can see lines, triangles, and something like rectangles. The image plays with sharp and blurred sharpness, and it is focused on an angled part of the glass, I conclude that to the line in the middle which looks like that it is polished. You can use your imagination on what you see which makes it possible that people do not approach this with the same view. That also makes it very interesting.

*Inclusion, Gijs Vugts, Fomo Fotogroep*

Example 2:   
In this photograph, you see a girl sitting in a white dress. The photo is in front of the girl, and she is looking directly into the camera. She is sitting right in the middle and the position is neutral (so the camera was straight). The girl has brown hair and eyes and a light skin tone. In the photograph you see 2 branches of purple flowers. One is in her hair, and she is holding the other with her hand. Colours are purple, black, brown, and beige. There are shapes such as circles, lines, cylinders and squares. The photograph is classic, not abstract at all. The colours are soft and calm which creates the classical vibe in the image. The girl is looking right into the camera and het face expression is neutral.

*Renske, Gerrie Vermeulen, Fomo fotogroep*

Afbeelding met kunst, verven, fotolijst, tekenfilm

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijving

Example 3:  
In this photograph you look at stairs which is taken from a below angle in a high building with a lot of stairs. This gives the viewer a spiral effect. The spiral effect creates the illusion that it is endless. So, that the stairs keep op going. You see blue, grey, yellow, and black. The shapes are circles, lines, squares/rectangles. This photograph plays a little bit with light. In the back warm light is used and in the front cool-toned. This creates contrast. Also, because the stair railing is black and the walls are white the contrast becomes even stronger.

*Vortex, Klaas de Bont, Fomo Fotogroep*

Examples person 2:

Example 1:

Beachfun made by Bart Smulders. We saw this photograph at the ‘foto expositie 2024’ from the fomo fotogroep.

Afbeelding met buitenshuis, Diermigratie, water, Vogelmigratie

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingIn this photograph you see a beach with the ocean, the picture is made of the coastline. I think it’s made with a drone of with a small plane, because it’s a top view. On the beach you see people and a dog walking. I think this photograph is made by a drone and that the colours are edited because the colours are verry bright. The colours I see are brown (the beach), black (the shadow of the people), white (the foam of the ocean), blue (the ocean, clothes of the people), green (the ocean). The shapes I see are circle, footsteps.

Beachfun, Bart Smulders, Fomo fotogroep

Afbeelding met persoon, teddy, Menselijk gezicht, muur

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingExample 2:

Renske made by Gerrie Vermeulen. We saw this photograph at the ‘foto expositie 2024’ from the fomo fotogroep.

In this photograph you see a little girl with a teddy bear in her hand. The girl has two braids and looks sad and frustrated, she wears a black top. I think that there is a painting behind the girl, because of the colours. The colours I see are black (the top of the girl, eyes/nose of bear), brown (the hair of the girl), skin colour (of the girl’s skin), gold brown (the teddy bear, the background), red (the girls lips), white (the girls eyes), dark green (the background). The shapes that I see are circle, cylinder, line.

Renske, Gerrie Vermeulen, *Fomo fotogroep*

Example 3:

Afbeelding met drinken, cocktail, sinaasappel, Barware

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingSunny Days made by Mischa Vennix. We saw this photograph at the ‘foto expositie 2024’ from the fomo fotogroep.

In this photograph you see a glass with some sort of drink standing on a table. Probably a cocktail or a lemonade. I think they tried to make the drink look delicious. On the glass there is a lemon. The colours you see are yellow (lemon, drink), orange (drink), beige (background), brown (below the glass, table, or something), red (at the bottom of the glass) and white (reflection of the light). The shapes that I see are a half circle (the lemon), oval (bottom of the glass), cylinder (the middle of the glass).

Sunny Days, Mischa Vennix, *Fomo fotogroep*

# How hard is it for people to describe why something is beautiful and why is that?

Afbeelding met Menselijk gezicht, wimper, persoon, huid

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingIf you look at the definition of beauty you would find things such as: the quality of being physically attractive, the qualities of a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or the mind. However, if you would ask someone what beauty is and what is beautiful (or ugly), a lot of people have a hard time explaining this in detail, especially looking at art. Even some artists struggle with this, a reason for this is that people percept beauty differently and connect certain things with their personal experiences. When artists want to capture a ‘beauty-shot’, it is a close-up from a woman. Artistic beauty requires the collaboration of a make-up artist, model, and photographer. But a lot of people would see images with a flower or something abstract as beautiful too. So, the definition of a beauty-shot does not mean that the photograph is always beautiful according to everyone and it also does not mean that other photographs can not be beautiful.

When the explanation comes as to why people think that a photograph is beautiful or ugly, the answer is often short and does not talk about any details. Thinking something is beautiful or ugly is natural to us. Things like education, culture, and interests can subconsciously affect your perception of beauty-/ugliness. In neurological research, it is proven that when people think something is beautiful dopamine is released. This gives you a happy feeling. People do not choose to release dopamine, that can be another reason to make it so hard why you think that. Also, certain colours can play along with your opinion about a photograph. It is very probable that people do not know what gives them this nice feeling, or in other words, find something beautiful, and so, find it hard to explain what makes them find it beautiful.

Even thought often people think it is hard to describe if they think something is beautiful or ugly, some people do not struggle with this at all. A part of our population can just easily bring their feeling to words and explain their feeling. These persons can often easily write without having to think to much.

Overall, everyone has a different opinion about what they think is beautiful which is affected by many factors. Your culture and personal experience play a big role in what and why you think something is beautiful. Most people have a hard time explaining this because they are not conscious of what is influencing their opinion. Your brain just decides when to give you a certain feeling (by releasing dopamine) and many people just do not know why. Of course there is an exception of a group of people who do not struggle with this. However, the majority of people do actually have a hard time explaining what they think is beauty and why they think something is beautiful.

Here I try to explain everything about this photograph and my opinion about if I think it is beautiful, that is why I think this example suits this subquestion:

Afbeelding met ongewerveld dier

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijving(One of the examples)  
In this photograph you see orange, grey, something yellow, maybe blue. It has special shapes in it due to the fact that the picture is made through glass, with a camera with a big range of zooming in. You can see lines, triangles, and something like rectangles. The image plays with sharp and blurred sharpness, and it is focused on an angled part of the glass, I conclude that to the line in the middle which looks like that it is polished. You can use your imagination on what you see which makes it possible that people do not approach this with the same view. That also makes it very interesting. I do not think it is extremely pretty because I would not know what I see if I took a first look at it. But with some different colours I would think it is pretty. Orange just does not really appeal to me, especially in my house.

*Inclusion, Gijs Vugts, Fomo Fotogroep*

# How do different artists approach beauty in photography?

Some people may think that all artists think the same and have the same view on subjects and pieces of art. However, this is really not true. All artists have different perceptions on subjects concerning art. In art, or in this case, photography, opinions are always divided. You could say; ‘Can work be good art if it doesn’t spark debate?’.

We contacted different photographers and asked to fill in a survey about how they approach beauty and how they would argue about their opinions about photographs (look page 10, survey 2). 4 artists replied, 2 were female, and 2 were male. They are all in the age group from 41-59. We asked the question: ‘What is the definition of beauty according to you (in photography)?’. If I look at their answers I see that they often say it has to do with light, colour usage and the composition is essential. Also, the story behind the picture and your personal experiences can make something beautiful. If we look at the question: ‘When do you choose to photograph something?’, you might expect that the artists say; something breathtaking. This is partly the case, but mostly, they say that the image has to be unique, extraordinary, and something you want to keep because it is so remarkable. The opinions about some photographs we chose were divided. Someone found one image interesting and opened his/hers imagination, while someone else thought it was boring and not well thought through. Most of them (3 out of the 4) said they found it easy to explain why they thought a photograph was pretty of ugly. This will most probably have to do with the fact that they have a lot of experience in photography and know why they think a photograph is beautiful or ugly. If you look at their photographs the styles are different. One photographer is more focused on nature, the other one on capturing people, and the other is about making atmospheric images.

If we look at how ‘ordinary’ people look at beauty and especially art, we see that artists are way more focused on the elements. They obviously are professionals, and so, they possess way more knowledge and are able to give a lot of information about beauty because it is their expertise.

Afbeelding met persoon, Menselijk gezicht, muur, overdekt

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijving‘I like to seduce visually’, are the words of the photographer Erwin Olaf. He made photos on the basis of firstly the beauty, then the feeling. He describes beauty as a ‘feeling of pleasantness to watch someone/something’. ‘Taste and beauty flutters everywhere’, he means that there is not 1 definition, they are abstract terms. Erwin Olaf was a famous and special photographer who made images that were out of the ordinary. He always knew exactly how he wanted his models to pose and what to do to create the photograph he wanted to make. This shows that his imagination was hugely big, that made his work so special. Unfortunately, he died on the 20th September in 2023 of emphysema.

In conclusion, if we look at multiple artists they approach beauty in a way of abstractness; light, colour, and composition. But also about the feeling you have because of looking at an image, for example, when you get to know the real story behind it, or when you can relate the photograph to your own life, values or opinion. The artists describe beauty differently and more detailed than ‘ordinary’ people.

Rain Hope Grief & Fall (2009) – Erwin Olaf

# How do the factors age, gender, etc. make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful?

I think the factors age, gender and personal interest do make a big difference in what people think is beautiful. We made a survey to look at the differences (look page 10, survey 1). We asked questions about the age, gender and personal interest of the person, afterwards we asked what they thought of certain photographs, if they thought it was beautiful and why, they needed to try to explain it as specific as possible. The question if they thought it was beautiful was a closed question, people could answer very beautiful, beautiful, not beautiful not ugly, a bit ugly, ugly and very ugly.

Afbeelding met tekst, ontvangst, schermopname

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijving27 people made our survey, 40,7% (11) was between 13-18 years old, 44,4% (12) was between 41-59 years old and 14,8% (4) was older that 60. 88,9% (24) of the people are woman and 11,1% (3) are man. 11,1% (3) do/did havo, 37% (10) do/did vwo, 18,5% (5) do/did MBO, 22,2% (6) do/did HBO and 11,1% (3) do/did WO. 40,7% (11) is interested in art/photography, 44,4% (12) is a bit interested in art/photography and 14,8% (4) is not interested in art/photography.

Afbeelding met bloemblaadje, plant, bloem, Eenjarige plant

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingA big difference that I saw was how specific people answered the question to explain why something is beautiful or not. Younger people answered less specific than older people. An example is ‘I do think the shadows are beautiful but the colors not really’, this is not specific if you compare it with the answer of someone with the age of 41-59. They were more specific and used more terms that have to do with photography.

Something else that stands out to me is that 19 of the people thought that the photograph of the flower was beautiful (13 people), very beautiful (4 people) or a little beautiful (2 people). But they all thought it was beautiful. Marieke and I discussed if we thought it was beautiful before we put it in the survey and we also thought that it was a beautiful photograph. We thought it was beautiful because we both like art and photographs of the nature.

Cursist by Titia

More than the half of the people thought the explaining of the reasons why you made a certain choice was easy. This was not what I expected because some answers were very short, so I thought that that was because they thought it was hard to answer. But maybe people thought that the explanation was already good enough.

Afbeelding met buitenshuis, Diermigratie, water, Vogelmigratie

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingThis was my first example, we also put this photograph in the survey. A lot of people thought it was beautiful, 85,1% of the people. The majority was between the age of 13 and 18, after that the people between the age of 41 and 59. 11,1% thought it was not ugly but also not beautiful, 7,4% was between the age of 41-59 and the other 4,3% was 60+.

Beachfun made by Bart Smulders. We saw this photograph at the ‘foto expositie 2024’ from the fomo fotogroep. In this photograph you see a beach with the ocean, the picture is made of the coastline. I think it’s made with a drone of with a small plane, because it’s a top view. On the beach you see people and a dog walking. I think this photograph is made by a drone and that the colours are edited because the colours are Afbeelding met persoon, teddy, Menselijk gezicht, muur

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingverry bright. The colours I see are brown (the beach), black (the shadow of the people), white (the foam of the ocean), blue (the ocean, clothes of the people), green (the ocean). The shapes I see are circle, footsteps.

Beachfun, Bart Smulders, Fomo fotogroep

Photograph 1: Renske, Gerrie Vermeulen, *Fomo fotogroep*

Photograph 2: Sunny Days, Mischa Vennix, *Fomo fotogroep*

Afbeelding met drinken, cocktail, sinaasappel, Barware

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingAnother thing that can influence the view on beauty in photographs is a personal experience, like a trauma. If you look at photograph 1 (little girl with the teddy bear), imagine that someone would have a trauma as a child, for example because they were abandoned, they will look at this photograph differently than someone who has not experienced being abandoned. So personal experiences can really influence how you look at a certain photograph. But this can also be positive, if you look at photograph 2, imagine that someone really loves this drink and that you can wake them for it. This person will look at it differently than someone who has never drank this drink.   
This can all happen subconscious, this is why people think it’s hard to explain why something is beautiful because they do not know because it happens subconscious.

I also looked on the internet for some sources, I found 2 sources (are in the source list) one about the difference between how children and adults look at art and the other one about the difference of how man and women look at art.

Children and adults look at art in a different way, they did research with 12 children and 12 adults, they all had a special device. The device could see were the adults and children looked at when they looked at a painting. What stood out was that children look at notable things, for example a bright colour or a weird shape. But adults looked at different things, probably that’s because adults know more about the painting or the painter.

If you look at the difference about how man and woman look at art, it’s a bit different than the difference of children and adults. Scientist asked 518 people to look at two paintings and read the matching biography of the painter. Afterwards the scientist asked if they would buy it and for how much. The difference between man and women was that man were very sensitive for the background of the artist, but women also judge the painting themselves. Another difference is that women are prepared to explain the difficult process wherein they judge the painting. But man say, this is a good painter, so I would buy their art. The scientist also think that this is also with other things like restaurants and clothes.

So, if you look at the subquestion, how do the factors age, gender, etc. make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful? First thing to say is that these factors make a difference is what someone thinks is beautiful. They make a difference by how people look at photographs and were they look at and were they think about when they see a photograph. I think age and gender make the biggest difference in what people think is beautiful.

# Conclusion

Our main question is ‘What is the difference in what people think is beauty in photographs?’ We made 3 different sub-questions: How hard is it for people to describe why something is beautiful and why is that? Marieke found out that a lot of people find it hard to explain why they think something is beautiful, this is because they are not conscious of what is influencing their opinion. This is because your brain gives you a certain feeling by releasing dopamine. So that’s why most people do know that they find something beautiful or ugly but can’t explain why. Of course, there is a group of people that do not struggle with explaining why they think something is or is not beautiful.

How do different artists approach beauty in photography? Marieke found out that artists approach beauty in a different way, some approach beauty in a way of abstractness, like light, colour and composition. But others approach beauty in a way of the feeling you get from the image, like when you know the real story behind it. So, this is different from how normal/not experienced people look at it, they just look at a photograph, but artists focus on certain elements.

How do the factors age, gender, etc. make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful? I found out that the factors, like age, gender and interest can make a difference in what someone thinks is beautiful. But also, personal experiences, for example a trauma. They make a difference in how someone looks at a photograph and were they think about when looking at a photograph.

Our main question ‘What is the difference in what people think is beauty in photography?’

There are a few things that make a difference in what people think is beauty in photographs. For example, the factors like age, gender, and interest. But also, personal experiences like a trauma. Another thing that makes a difference is if the person is an artist or not, this is because an artist is an expert in photography and a normal person mostly is not. People also think is hard to explain why they think something is beautiful.

If we look back on the research, our expectations were correct, our expectations were that different factors would play a role in what people think is beautiful and that the majority would find it hard to explain why something is beautiful. However, we didn’t really think about that a trauma, or a personal experience can affect the way someone looks at a photograph and that artists look different at a photograph then normal or not experienced people. So, these are the things we have learned when doing this research.

If we had more time we would contact more experienced photographers, to get a more deeper explanation by these experts on what is beauty and how they look for it when taking a photograph. Besides we would also ask them more information about the elements in photography to get even a better understanding about beauty in photography.

Thanks for reading our research.

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