

The Fakery of the Fake: Social Media Platforms, Essena O'Neill's Edited Life on Instagram

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

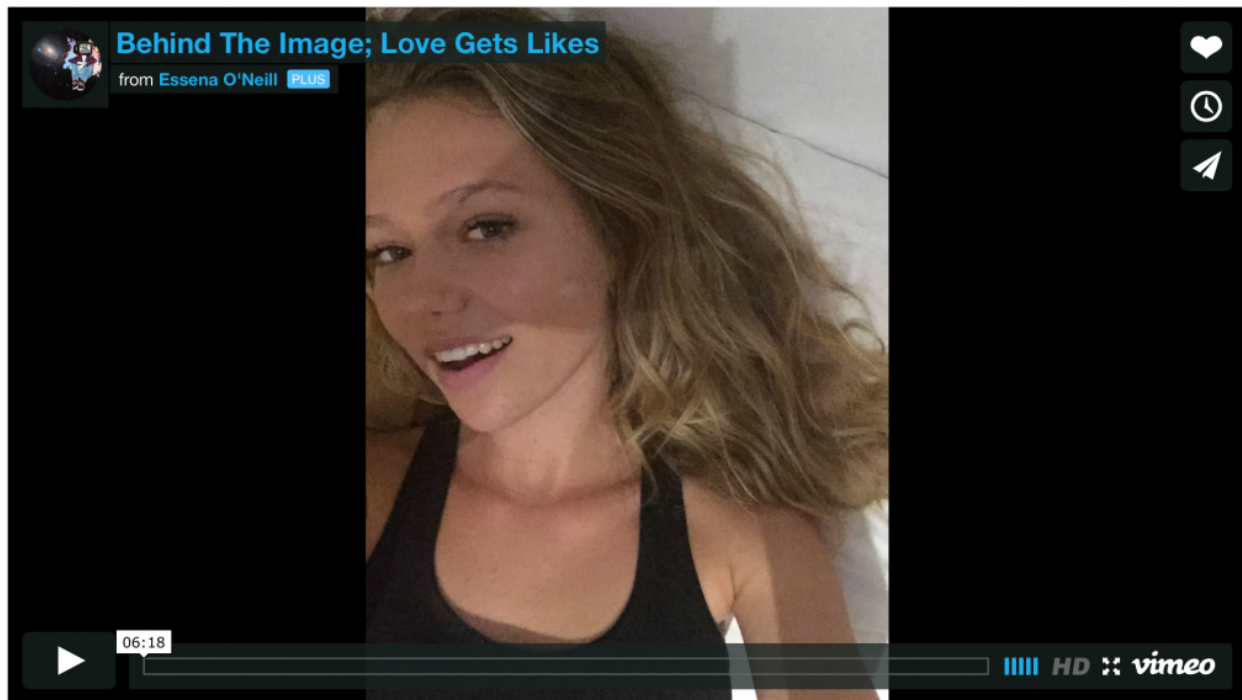
People should know my life was edited and contrived.

Essena O'Neill

The vacuity of television, it has been said, says nothing about it as a medium and everything about its users. "Television," claimed Malcolm Muggeridge, "was not invented to make human beings vacuous, but is an emanation of their vacuity." The mechanism may draw you in, but the hollowness was there to begin with.

Social media platforms enable a continuing, virtual paradise of exhibitionism. While Twitter may well be a vehicle for revolution, the bane of governments, there is very little to assume that it cannot be, equally, a weapon for deception, a playground for hoaxers. Instagram, with its candy, pictorial dimension, is similarly riddled with mendacity and sweet bits for those who wish to believe what they want to.

The posting of banal videos featuring pets on such platforms as YouTube; the uploading of curiosities and fragments of the insignificant life simply suggest the allure of the prosaic. It transforms an 18-year-old like Essena O'Neill of no obvious qualities other than youthful good looks into a subject with 600 thousand followers. That some of the pictures are racy, with figure hugging dresses and bikinis, suggests a range of forces at work: the hungry male gaze, and the seductive look. Equally, it involves the gaze of emulation and envy.



There is absolutely nothing this young lady has told us other than promoting an insecurity that, for all we know, might itself be a fabrication. She claimed, as they all do, that she “fell in love with this idea that I could be of value to other people.” After all, in the manner of the Epimenides paradox, if all Cretans are liars, how do we know the Cretan who claims not to be lying is telling the truth?

O’Neill certainly wishes us to now heed another professed truth – her unhappiness. “Yeah 16-year old Essena would have been like ‘WTF girl you have the dream life’. So why did I feel so lost, lonely and miserable?” It was, she concluded, all an addiction, one that was fed by a readily available form of technology. “I believed how many likes and followers I had correlated to how any people liked me.”

A closer look at the entire world of Internet-speak, where images and views are posted with a certain manic lack of discrimination, should invite scepticism. Yelp uses a filtering system that leaves out reviews about businesses that might be biased. Discussion forums reek of political manipulation and insincerity. Trolls roam with slanderous claims masquerading as fact. Entire Facebook profiles suggest a good degree of manipulation. And Twitter profiles have been created to give the impression of revolutionary or troubled authenticity, when the individual may have never left his town, let alone country.[1]

The O’Neill response is therefore caught in a nightmarish maze. Every emotion she expresses via such forums can, to that end, be deemed faked, constructed, and calculated. The money is doing the talking; the LA modelling scene is coming through.

In a fit of re-editing and deletions of her Instagram account, O’Neill has attempted to revise a past that cannot be forgotten, effectively re-staging what was itself staged. “Candid” bikini shots, she admitted, were agonisingly planned; pictures supposedly taken before nature’s wishes were sponsored; “hot body” shots concealed an unhealthy diet and sucked in tum; hours were expended getting the “perfect selfie”, concealing acne. “Happiness based on aesthetics will suffocate your potential here on earth.”

Tears can sell, and soulful pleas posted on the very format one despises can have the same effect as an endorsement for it. Her weepy video, sans makeup, seemed like a counterpoint, meditations on a wicked world, when it was merely an affirmation.[2] One uses the very medium one is abandoning. A more plausible departure entailing total, monk-like abnegation and dismissal might have been more plausible. Instagram and Facebook, get on your bike!

No such luck with O'Neill. Whatever she was advised to do and whoever her sages are, the entire effort cannot look anything but a replication of its own emptiness. She had been offered various sums to wear dresses, outfits, and brand labels. She launched a modelling career in Los Angeles. And of course, she was going to offer everybody advice, on following her new site, how to accomplish their own Vedic cleansing of social media seductiveness. Only true sinners would understand.

Other bloggers have certainly regarded O'Neill's gesture as uncreditable. It is a publicity stunt that also eschews publicity. In bouts of true playground bitchiness, YouTube "bloggers" such as Nina and Randa Nelson have decided they know what O'Neill was really up to. She left the world of Instagram, they claim, because her boyfriend left her. This entailed a "promotional stunt", in short, a hoax.[3] Once in the system of such use, you can never extricate yourself.

This entire affair has been deemed one of exploitation. Certainly, if one understands that with such media, forces are complimentary. The users are also the used. The publicist from nowhere privileges a particular platform that venerates such publicity. But this is the golden goose which, if killed, reveals no gold inside.

In that sense, there is no "dark side" to the matter. It is simply a deception practiced on those who collude with it, one that consumes all its agents. It may well be disingenuous for O'Neill to have publicised her fakery in order to then proceed to advertise ways of avoiding such fakery. But she has acted as seducer and the seduced. The voice of the inauthentic sells, even when one is trying to avoid it.

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Notes

[1]http://www.salon.com/2015/07/23/a_gay_girl_in_damascus_behind_the_twisted_tale_of_a_blogger_who_catfished_the_whole_world/

[2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xe1Qyks8QEM>

[3] <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/lifestyle/news/a48797/essena-oneill-friends-nina-randa-call-her-out/>

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