

Beauty and Aesthetics in the Contemporary Mind

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ABSTRACT

The concept of beauty and taste is one that has been grappled with for centuries throughout history as different ages, ethnicities, and time periods all define their own idea of what is beautiful. Traditionally counted as an ultimate value, alongside goodness, truth, and justice (Sartwell), the nature of beauty is a primary theme in every culture that is as relevant in today's modern world just as it was in 500 BC. Philosophies of beauty and aesthetics look into the meaning, perception, and nature of beauty and what properties make something more beautiful than others, if such properties exist at all.

In this study, three major philosophical theories of aesthetics (classical, modern, and Kantian) were analysed and categorised as objective or subjective viewpoints. Using an experimental philosophy approach and the concept of nominalism, realism, and anti-realism, participants were surveyed to see if they leaned more towards an objective or subjective viewpoint in order to determine which historical aesthetic philosophy influences the contemporary mind the most. The results of this study indicated that the contemporary mind leaned more towards a classical conception of beauty and aesthetics, showing that there may be an objective standard of beauty within modern society closely related to properties such as symmetry and proportion.

Contextualization

Abstract and concrete objects are a distinction that occurs in metaphysics in order to create a fundamental divide between physical and nonphysical entities. Abstraction can include properties and concepts such as beauty or morality, and in some cases they extend to numbers, sets, and propositions as well (Falguera, José L., et al). While there is no specific consensus on what exactly counts as abstract or concrete entities, for the sake of this study, abstract entities will be defined as those entities that are immaterial, not empirically verifiable, and whose properties may play a causal role. In contrast, concrete objects will be defined as those entities that can be seen, felt, and are material. They must also be entities that are empirically verifiable. Nominalism, realism, and anti-realism will be defined through these concepts of abstraction and concreteness.

Nominalism, in simple terms, is the rejection of universals and abstract objects (Rodriguez-Pereyra). While there is a range of nominalists with varying degrees of rejection and beliefs, for the sake of this particular study, only core nominalists will be used. Core nominalists are those who believe in only concrete objects, denying the existence of any abstract entities and universals. This includes entities such as properties, propositions, numbers, and possible worlds (Rodriguez-Pereyra). Because nominalists believe that there are no abstract entities, all nominalists are also materialists and therefore accept the scientific method of empirical verification, predictability, and falsifiability. Only those things that can be empirically verifiable exist because they are associated with real, physical objects and any expression about abstract objects is meaningless.

Realism is associated with the Correspondence Theory of Truth (CTT), a realist viewpoint connected to metaphysical realism (David), first crafted by Aristotle's definition of truth, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true". CTT states that a statement "P" is true only if "P" refers to a state of affairs in the world of a fact. This theory assumes

that the world consists of objective facts and that universality is achievable through rational argumentation. Because they believe in universals, realists also believe in the existence of abstract entities as real, tangible beings. Similarly to the nominalist, realists also believe in concrete objects too, meaning realists believe in the existence of concrete entities, abstract entities, and universals. Objective aesthetic philosophers believe that there are certain universal truths when it comes to the matter of beauty, just like there are objective truths when it comes to science, mathematics, ethics, etc. In relation to aesthetics, the realist position identifies real properties that are correlated with beauty and ugliness. These properties are independent of any emotions, feelings, or sentiment that an individual may have.

Anti-realism denies this theory and instead states that a statement “P” is true only if it corresponds to sentiment or feelings, which follows the Pragmatic Theory of Truth (PTT). This viewpoint is entirely subjective and believes that objectivity and universality are unachievable (Joyce). In relation to aesthetics, the anti-realist position cannot identify any real properties that are correlated with beauty and ugliness, instead believing that those properties are subjective and dependent on the individual’s own taste. In contrast to the nominalist, the anti-realist does believe in the existence of abstract entities, but only when they serve a purpose or perform causal activity. Therefore, the anti-realist believes in the existence of concrete entities, but, when it comes to abstract entities and universals, the anti-realist determines if they exist based on the purpose they serve. This belief in itself makes anti-realism a subjective viewpoint compared to nominalism and realism, which both hold an objective belief in the constant existence of their respective entities.

Literature Review

Classical

The classical era of aesthetic philosophy took place during the classical period of ancient Greece and Rome (roughly between the 8th century BC and the 6th century AD) and is shaped by the beliefs of famed Grecian philosophers Aristotle and Plato. The classical conception of beauty is that of perfect proportion. Each member, while maintaining independence, is proportional to the coherent, symmetrical, and harmonious whole (Sartwell). “The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree” (Aristotle).

However, classical aesthetics are not limited to strict measurements and mathematical formulas. Vitruvius best characterises this complex form of beauty by explaining order as a balanced arrangement of proportion, used in order to gain a symmetrical result; proportion as a display of details that occurs when everything has a symmetrical correspondence; and symmetry as the appropriate harmony that arises from the details of the work itself. The clearest expression of the classical aesthetics, though, is given by Hutcheson in “An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue” where he states, “What we call Beautiful in Objects, to speak in the Mathematical Style, seems to be in a compound Ratio of Uniformity and Variety; so that where the Uniformity of Bodys is equal, the Beauty is as the Variety; and where the Variety is equal, the Beauty is as the Uniformity”. The classical aesthetic philosophy focuses on the ideal proportion, symmetry, and harmony in a structure, which is derived from the arrangement of integral individual parts in a coherent, beautiful whole. As there are specific requirements and properties of beauty, classical aesthetics were classified as an objective theory under the realist view.

In the modern-day, this can be seen in body and facial trends such as the “Golden Ratio Face” or the “34-23-34 Victoria’s Secret Body”. These trends focus on the symmetry and proportion of one’s physique and how those elements create a more visually attractive appearance. The “Golden Ratio Face” is a form of measurement where the ideal ratio between the length and width of one’s face is 1.6. Bella Hadid, a supermodel, is known in the media for scientifically being the “most beautiful woman in the world” for having a near perfect “1.6 ratio with 94% accuracy” (LADbible). The “32-23-34 Victoria’s Secret Body” is a famous set of body proportions,

mainly held by Victoria's Secret models, where the hip and bust measure 34 inches and waist 23 inches, creating the iconic hourglass figure that many Victoria's Secret models are admired over. Both the "Golden Ratio Face" and "34-23-34 Victoria's Secret Body" are modern-day examples of classical aesthetic philosophy manifesting in physical beauty through strict standards that are related to each other to form what many consider the most appealing visuals.

Modern

The modern era of aesthetic philosophy took place between the 17th and 18th centuries and features philosophers such as Hume, Bentham, and J.S Mill. This era of aesthetic philosophy leads to a more hedonistic and utilitarian view on beauty, which is centred around the human experience of pleasure. Since judgments of taste are "derived from sentiments", the idea of beauty is much more subjective and there is less effort put into determining what exactly makes something beautiful. Compared to Hutcheson, who argues that the pleasure of beauty is only found in uniform objects, Hume takes on a more flexible, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" approach with multiple principles of beauty. "To seek the real beauty, or the real deformity, is as fruitless an inquiry, as to seek the real sweet or real bitter" (Hume). The sentiment and feelings evoked are the beauty of the object. From this, it could be surmised that the hedonistic, Modern era aesthetic of beauty can be described as a subjective concept based on the emotions and type of pleasure evoked from the viewer. This also placed modern aesthetic philosophy under the subjective, anti-realist view.

"Pinterest aesthetics" are a contemporary example of subjective aesthetics, with unique branches, such as "academia", "cottagecore", or "vaporwave", allowing users to express themselves and what they consider beautiful through online, visual means (Aesthetics Wiki). Each "aesthetic" has specificities that the users consider the most beautiful, which are independent of any strict rules or guidelines. "Academia", for example, bases itself on preppy clothing and glamorises old books, classical music, and the prestigious Ivy League/Oxbridge life. "Cottagecore", on the other hand, derives its aesthetic from the romanticisation of rural life, emphasising a simple yet idyllic lifestyle of picking berries while dressed in a flowing prairie dress, bathed in golden sunlight. Finally, "vaporwave" deviates itself completely from the other two aesthetics and instead focuses on visuals composed of 80s-90s themes, virtual reality, and Western/Japanese pop-culture. Aside from these three "Pinterest aesthetics", there are hundreds of other aesthetics with their own branches of "sub-aesthetics", such as "light academia" or "dark academia", with more being created everyday. Because of the variety and personalisation of "Pinterest aesthetics", they serve as a relevant example of the modern era aesthetic philosophy, embodying the concept of subjective beauty derived from one's own unique emotions and responses of pleasure.

Kantian

The Kantian philosophy of aesthetics in the 18th to 19th century is characterised by Kant and Kantian beliefs, in which aesthetic judgement is placed between logic and subjectivity (Graham, Gordon, et al). There are four features essential to the Kantian aesthetic judgement: first, that judgments are subjective and based on responses of pleasure; second, that judgments have a "universality" to them which implies agreement from others; third, that judgments are disinterested and independent from any advantages the object can give, focusing on the contemplation and experience the object provides instead; and fourth, that judgments engage not only the senses, but the imagination and intellect—a concept known as the "harmony" or "free play" of imagination and understanding (Rogerson). These features distinguish aesthetic judgement from other judgments and distinguish Kant's philosophy of aesthetics from that of other philosophers.

Kant rejects the idea that beauty is merely subjective, due in part to the language used when something is declared beautiful: “Accordingly he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a quality of the object and the judgement logical” (Kant). This aesthetic judgement of beauty is not quite logical as it is dependent on one’s personal taste, yet it is not quite subjective as it is also dependent on the assent of others. Kantian aesthetics are ultimately objective, though, because of the disinterested state of mind used when contemplating beauty. Because an individual’s desires are not active when appreciating beauty, the judgement of taste is automatically considered objective and universal.

Kant also focuses on the contemplation of an object’s beauty itself, claiming that beauty requires thought. This separates beauty from sensuous pleasure, which can be enjoyed thoughtlessly but can never be beautiful (Brielmann, et al), although feelings of beauty do increase linearly with feelings of pleasure. Due to the above reasons, Kantian aesthetics were classified as an objective theory under the realist view.

An example of Kantian beauty is poetry. Considered the highest form of art by Kant himself, poetry is a type of artform that requires thought and contemplation in order to experience the full beauty of the writing. Language, rhythm, structure, and imagery are essential in forming the most direct presentation of “aesthetic ideas”. The more one uses their cognitive capacity to experience the beauty of poetry, the more pleasure they derive from the complexity and aesthetics of the writing. This allows for a harmony of imagination and understanding—a relevant example of Kantian aesthetic philosophy.

Contemporary

For this research, the contemporary group was defined as Jackson High School students currently taking AP classes this school year (2021-2022). This allowed for a smaller yet diverse sample pool. While research has been done on historical periods of aesthetics, little research has been done on how these historical periods affect the viewpoint of students within the modern-day world. Not only that, but the primary sources focus on beauty in the eyes of adult men, causing one to wonder how aesthetics relate to the modern century, or if it has any value at all.

This led to the research gap: how do the classical, modern, and Kantian philosophies of aesthetic affect the contemporary (AP students’) mindset towards beauty? The hypothesis was that the contemporary minds would be most influenced by the modern aesthetic philosophy because of large amounts of popular media embracing different types of beauty and the general consensus among the younger generation that beauty is “in the eye of the beholder” and unique to each individual.

Methodology

Data Gathering Method

This study looked into how the classical, modern, and Kantian aesthetic philosophies shape and influence the contemporary (AP students’) view of beauty. In order to complete this, an experimental philosophical method was used, where survey research was conducted, gathered, and analysed through correlational analysis. An experimental philosophical method uses empirical data, often survey data, in order to answer philosophical questions. The use of real, hard data makes this method much more accurate and true to the group being studied compared to other popular philosophical methods, such as thought experiments. The survey focused on quantifying the participant’s answers and thoughts on beauty into measurable values, using “True/False” and “Yes/No” questions. Through the values gathered, students were categorised as realists, or anti-realists, which was then used to evaluate the students’ responses to questions focused on aesthetic properties through correlational methods.

The survey consisted of ten “True/False” multiple choice questions centred around finding out if participants lean more towards objectivist/realist or subjective/anti-realist views. To avoid dependence upon single questions, multiple questions were used to help classify the participant’s philosophical beliefs. Appendix “A” contains the list of questions and the assessment flow.

In addition to the “True/False” questions, participants were asked to view five pieces of historical fine art and answer whether or not they found the artwork beautiful through a simple “Yes/No”. The paintings come from different time periods and philosophical aesthetics (Appendix E) to help identify if the participant enjoys classical aesthetics.

Individuals who answered “Yes” to questions 3, 9, and 12 were considered to enjoy classical aesthetics, whereas those picking paintings 6 and 15 were not. If participant’s leaned more towards the objective philosophy, the responses could then be analysed further to figure out if the majority of student’s fell under the Kantian philosophy or the classical philosophy, effectively narrowing down the options until there is only one left. Participants were told to answer the questions based on their initial reaction in order to make sure the data gathered was based on the participant’s instinctive response and avoid potential misinformation that could occur if participants spent too much time deciding how to answer.

The participants were chosen based on whether or not they were part of AP classes in the 2021-2022 school year. All AP teachers in Jackson High School were contacted through email and asked if they could administer the surveys to their AP classes sometime during the school day within a three-day period. This allowed for a random pool of responses as every AP student would have an equal opportunity to take the survey.

Data Analysis Method

After gathering the data, the results would be analysed through a correlational analysis. In order to derive a single aesthetic philosophy from the responses, the responses were first generalised into nominalists, then filtered out into one of the two general viewpoints, anti-realists or realists. This was done because nominalists share a commonality with anti-realists and realists, which is that all three viewpoints believe in the existence of concrete objects. Once this was established, the students could then be further narrowed down into either anti-realists or realists.

Fifteen questions were used to classify participants (see Appendix A). Ten were philosophical evaluation questions to categorise nominalists, then filter them out into either realists or anti-realists. The remaining five questions were paintings (see Appendix E), followed by the question, “Is this beautiful?”, which were used to classify participants into either classical or Kantian aesthetics, if the majority of participants were found to be realists.

Question 10 was used to evaluate whether the participants believed in the existence of beauty. This question stated “Beauty exists.”, to which students could answer “True” or “False”, to determine their perspective on the existence of beauty. If the majority of the participants respond “True”, then the study would have meaning and be able to continue forth in its analysis of the data. If the majority of the participants respond “False”, the analysis would end since there would be no further purpose in analysing data that is dependent on beauty existing in a situation where beauty does not exist.

To classify nominalists, three questions (1, 7, and 8) were used. These statements are all concrete statements that are empirically verifiable without having any abstract elements to them, making them ideal for verifying if one had nominalist beliefs. Any responses that failed to answer 1,7, and 8 affirmatively were dropped from the response pool as they could not be considered nominalists and were now irrelevant towards the study.

Two questions (2 and 4) were used to classify realists because of their reliance on abstractness. Although these questions had what seemed like factual statements, neither statements were truly empirically verifiable, nor did they have the property of being seen, felt, or material. Due to this, the statements were unable to

be classified as concrete, making them abstract instead. Since realists believe in the tangible existence of the abstract, answering affirmatively to questions 2 and 4 would logically make one a realist.

Two questions (4 and 15) were used to classify anti-realists because of their subjective nature, both in the context of the statement and on abstractness itself. Both questions were moral philosophical statements involving concepts such as justice and morality. Justice is an abstract concept, something that is neither tangible nor empirically verifiable, however, to an anti-realist, justice would exist due to the fact that it serves a purpose. Both justice and morality do not have a strict set of rules that allows one to define something as justice or morally good since both are largely dependent on one's personal beliefs and sentiments, making them subjective concepts.

If students ended up being majority anti-realists, it can immediately be concluded that students fall under the modern aesthetic philosophy, since this is the only aesthetic philosophy included in the study that falls under anti-realism. If students were majority realists, then the study would have to narrow down the realists' philosophy into either classical or Kantian aesthetics, since both classical and Kantian aesthetic philosophies fall under realism. This would be done by using student responses to the paintings.

Questions 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 contained an image of a painting followed by the question, "Is this beautiful?". Questions 3, 9, and 12 used paintings with classical elements in order to assess classical aesthetics. Questions 6 and 15 did not contain any classical elements and, by virtue of being the only other option, could only be used to help classify Kantian aesthetics.

Through this method, shown visually below, the analysis can narrow down the pool of responses into a condensed selection of students who believe in a single aesthetic philosophy in order to find out which aesthetic philosophy best aligns with the contemporary mindset of Jackson High School AP students.

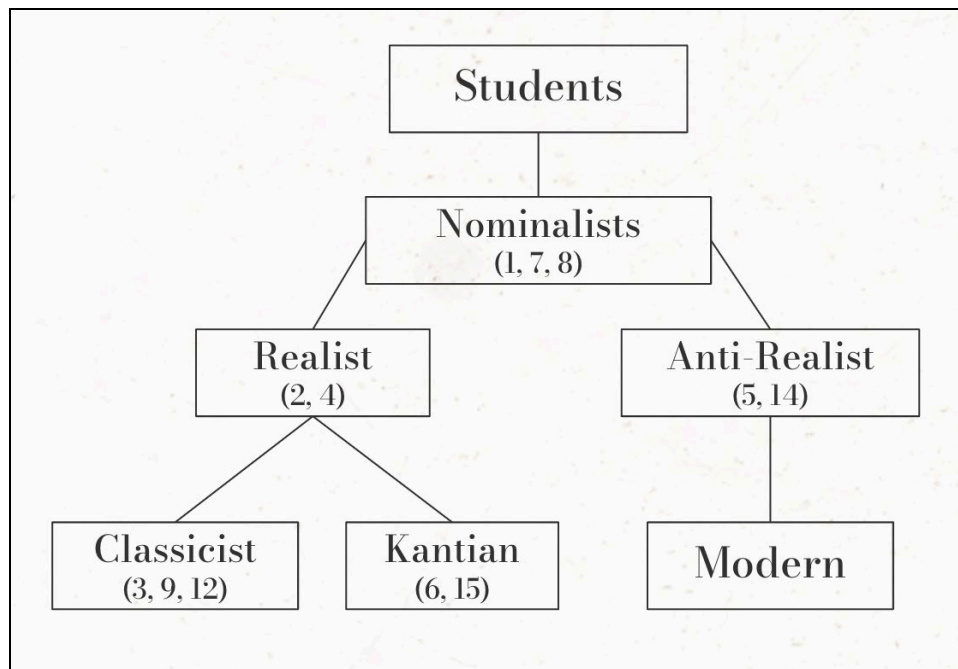


Figure 12. Identification Chart

Results

The survey gathered a total of 210 responses within the three-day period (Wednesday through Friday) from a variety of AP classes, such as AP Calculus AB, AP Chinese, AP Drawing, and more, providing a diverse selection of responses and reassurance that responses came from multiple perspectives, not just one.

From the raw data, several significant observations were gathered, particularly from the baseline question, Question 10. Question 10, which stated “Beauty exists”, collected 193 “True” responses, meaning roughly 92% of students agree that some form of beauty exists.

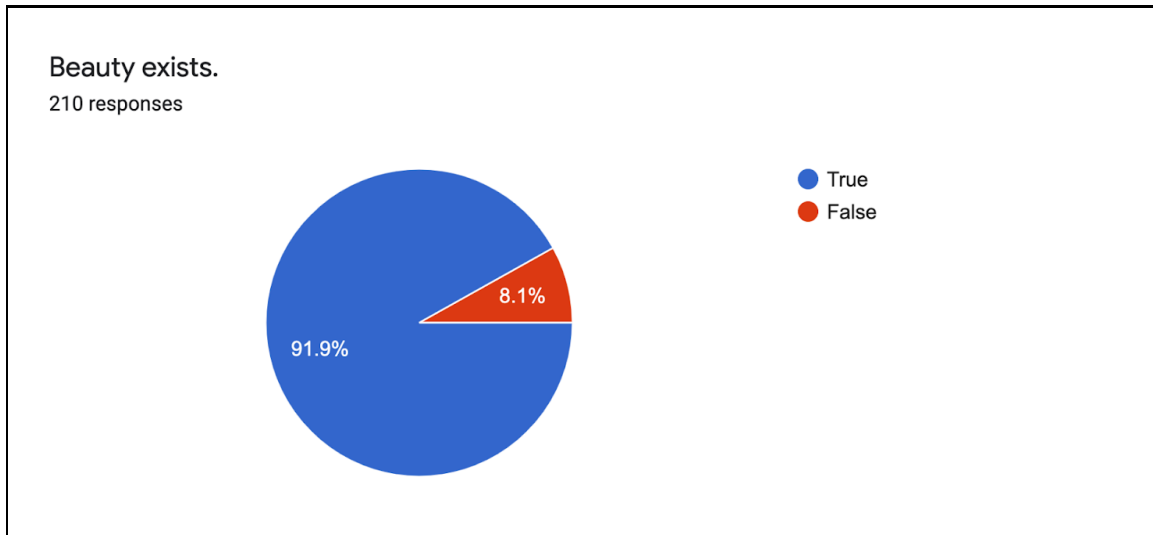


Figure 13. Raw Data of Question 10

Because it has been established that beauty does indeed exist, in the viewpoint of the participants, the rest of the data, which correlates to the property of beauty, has meaning. Thus, the data concludes that there is a need for aesthetic theory in order to make sense of these meaningful claims and judge which aesthetic claims are true and which are false. To argue otherwise would result in a contradiction as more than 90% of respondents believe that aesthetic claims are meaningful. This also means that students must end up being either anti-realists or realists because it is impossible for the majority of them to be core nominalists, seeing as core nominalists do not believe in the existence of beauty.

Questions 11 and 13, which state “The spirit world sometimes mixes with the real world” and “A person's thoughts are identical to their brain state” ended up being disregarded in the data analysis. After gathering the data, both questions were discovered to not have provided any more useful understanding to the study and instead provided more variables that could potentially result in inaccurate results. This potential for inaccuracy was due to the questions’ lack of specificity that would allow them to be confidently sorted into one of the three above philosophical beliefs (nominalist, realism, and anti-realism). Because of this, both questions were dropped and the data analysis proceeded as planned.

Data Analysis

Using Microsoft Excel, the responses were converted into a value of “1” for “Yes/True” or “0” for “No/False”, which were then added into sums for each question. This was done to aggregate affirmative answers (see Appendix B for exact function).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1

Figure 2. Sample Raw Data Converted to Values (10 Rows of Data)

To determine the nominalists, participants had to answer all three determining questions (questions 1, 7, and 8) affirmatively, which resulted in 164 (out of 210) participants being classified as nominalists (Fig 8). From this new pool of nominalists, the number of anti-realists and realists were derived through the other criterias: questions 2 and 4 and questions 5 and 14.

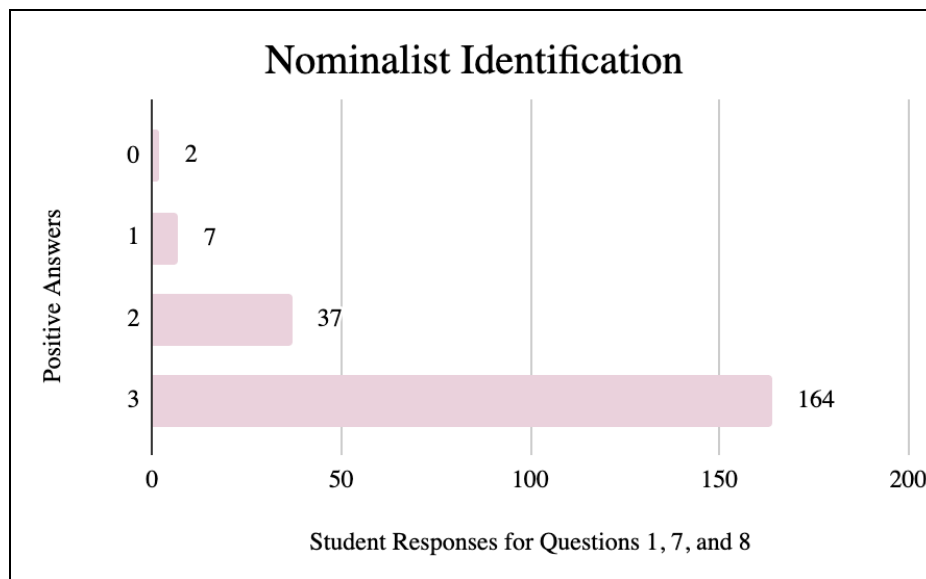


Figure 8. Nominalist Identification Graph based on Questions 1, 7, and 8

Next, questions 2 and 4 were used to determine realists. A total of 156 participants answered affirmatively for both questions, resulting in 156 classified realists (Fig 9). However, for questions 5 and 14, there were

zero nominalists who answered both questions affirmatively, and only 55 nominalists answered at least one question affirmatively (Fig 10). This data concludes that the majority of the nominalists held realist beliefs, seeing as there were 156 realist-identifying responses compared to the zero anti-realist identifying responses. Because the majority of responses ended up being realists, the students likely aligned with either classical or Kantian aesthetics.

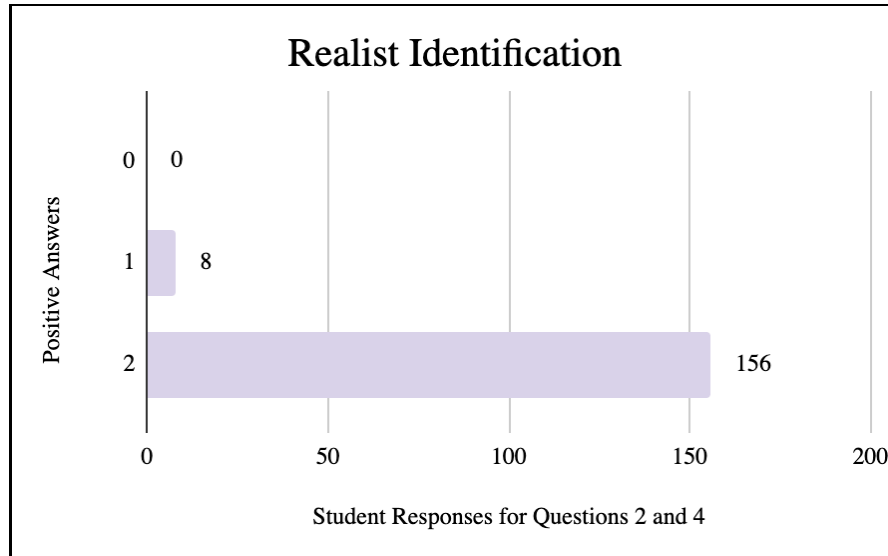


Figure 9. Realist Identification Graph based on Questions 2 and 4

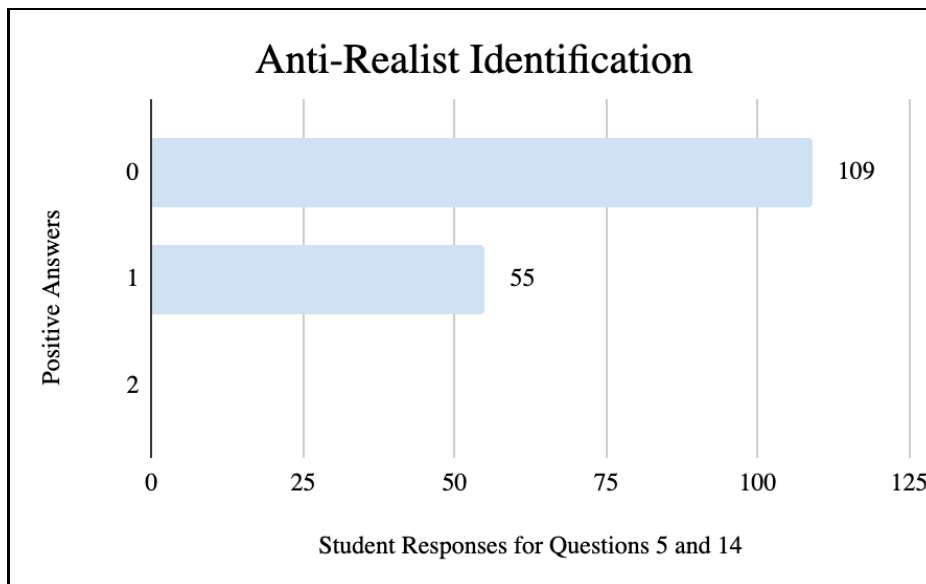


Figure 10. Anti-Realist Identification Graph based on Questions 5 and 14

The responses of the realists towards the paintings were assessed to narrow down the two aforementioned aesthetic philosophies into one. By using another SUM function in Excel, it was found that of the sample of 156 realists, 105 of them answered at least 2 out of 3 of the classical-identifying questions with “Yes”. 105

is a majority of 156, meaning that, through these correlational methods, it was found that Jackson High School AP students most closely identified with classical aesthetics. This can be seen in Fig 11.

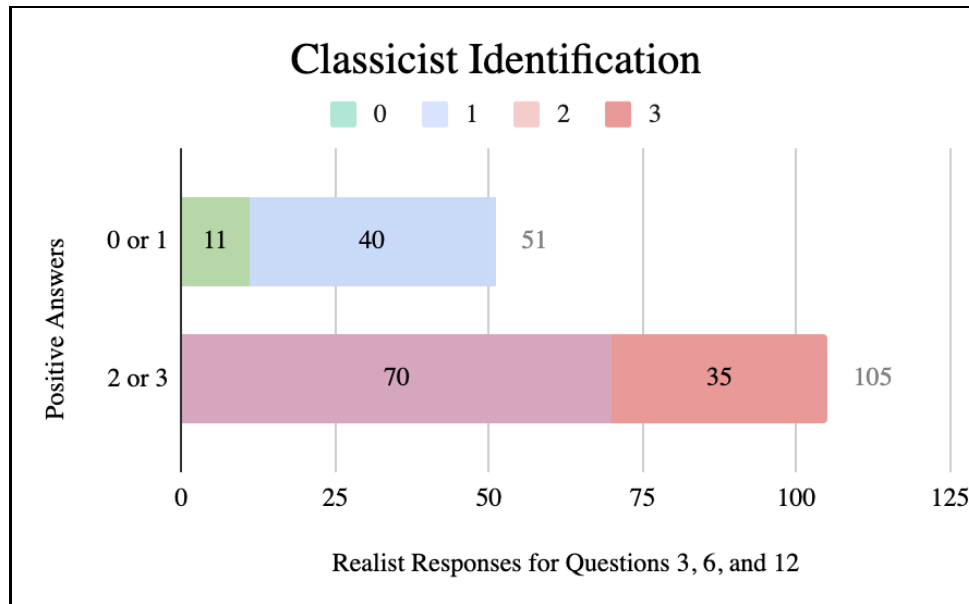


Figure 11. Classicist Identification Graph based on Questions 3, 6, and 12

However, out of the 105 classicist responses, 84 of them also responded positively towards the other two paintings (Fig 7). While this does not directly affect the conclusion, since the number of classicists still holds a majority, it does lead to questions and assumptions, such as how most of the “classicists” had very loose definitions of aesthetics and are more flexible in their standards of beauty compared to the rigid rules of beauty true classicists held.

Conclusion

Going back to the original research question, from the data analysis, it can be concluded that the majority of the contemporary mind are realists who are most influenced by classical aesthetics, albeit a flexible interpretation of the philosophy. This directly clashes with the initial hypothesis, which states “...the contemporary minds would be most influenced by the modern aesthetic philosophy because it is likely that the participants would prefer a more subjective type of beauty”. Compared to the initial hypothesis that the contemporary mind would prefer subjectivity, the data instead shows that students prefer a more objective, universal, and rigid form of aesthetics.

This conclusion is consistent with real-world phenomena, such as K-Pop. The industry thrives off of the strict beauty standards that have been developed and cultivated in Korean society, which includes, but is not limited to, clear, pale skin, big eyes, a small head, and a slim and fit figure. Many idol groups even have an entire role dedicated to one’s appearance called “visual”, a role given to those who are the most physically interesting or attractive and, therefore, are the most likely to be centre in photoshoots or used in marketing campaigns. These factors lead to the conclusion that the K-Pop industry, like the participants of this study, are realists in terms of beauty due to how the industry believes there are specific standards of beauty that make something aesthetically pleasing and how they use beauty, an abstract concept, as something that can be monetized and sold, as if beauty was something tangible and quantifiable.

Implication

The data and conclusion point toward some significant implications regarding beauty and beauty standards. First, the fact that the majority of students turned out to be realists signifies that, at least to the tested demographic, there may truly be some universal standards of beauty that are irrevocably more aesthetically pleasing than others. These universal standards may be proportion, symmetry, and order, which were all represented in the classicist-identifying paintings used in the study, and could also serve as an explanation for why certain people are more visually pleasing than others. However, because so many respondents also voted positively for non-classical artworks as well, it might be that while classical aesthetics are still apparent in the contemporary mind, it is less valuable in the present-day and is only a slight factor in what dictates beauty.

The fact that the contemporary mind aligns with classical aesthetics also brings about the question of what exactly in classical beauty appeals itself to the participants. The raw data actually shows that of the classical paintings used, the two paintings that used more subtle forms of classical aesthetics garnered a majority of positive responses, shown in Fig 15 and 24, while "Tableau II", which had very obvious use of proportion and symmetry, gained a majority of negative responses, shown in Fig 21. This implies that there could be that only some forms of classical aesthetics are visually pleasing while others are extremely unappealing. This observation can be explored in further research.

In terms of real-world applications of this knowledge, companies could use this research on aesthetics to market their products in a way that greatly appeals to the audience. Many advertisements already make use of visuals as a key focal point in their tactics, and knowing what exactly visually appeals to a group of people makes it much easier to garner an audience. From a purely capitalist standpoint, this research on aesthetics could be one way to make more profit.

Limitations

Although the study was completed in what was perceived to give the most accurate data, there were still some limitations that affect the authenticity of the results. One of these limitations include the number of aesthetic philosophies included in the study. Since only three philosophies were included, there was less variety in the viewpoints towards beauty that were accepted. Of the three philosophies, two of them were also realist viewpoints while only one philosophy had an anti-realist viewpoint, which naturally created some bias that leaned more towards the realist viewpoint, simply due to the fact that the majority of the aesthetic philosophies were grouped in that category.

This limitation also applies to the images included in the survey. Of the five images, three of them represented classical aesthetics, which unintentionally created some bias favouring classical aesthetics since students were given more chances to vote positively on classical aesthetics. If more images that represented both classical and Kantian aesthetics equally were included, the data may have resulted in a different conclusion.

The questions used in this study also limited the responses to an extent. If more questions that fell under each philosophical viewpoint were included, there could have been more diversity in the responses and perhaps even completely different conclusions, seeing as only two questions were used to assess if participants were realists or anti-realists.

Aside from the questions, one could also use completely different methods to gather more accurate data. In-person interviews would most likely lead to deeper understandings of an individual's philosophical alignments, thus providing more accurate data than an online survey. The sample pool could be changed as well, since this study focused only on high school AP students. Observing the entire high school, or expanding beyond could provide varying results.

Furthermore, the field of aesthetics that was used in this study was strictly centred around Western aesthetics, which limited the variety of aesthetic philosophies used in the study. In future studies, researchers

could explore other cultures and their aesthetics, such as Indian, Chinese, or African aesthetics, in order to garner a better understanding of the contemporary mindset towards beauty and broaden the field of study.

Future Research

Overall, these limitations do not take away from the conclusion that was derived, but instead open up possibilities for future research that may be able to cover these limitations and expand upon this study's understanding, leading to more accurate conclusions and deepening the understanding of aesthetics as a whole. Those future studies may include widening the demographic studied to different age groups or narrowing it down to a specific gender, ethnicity, etc. Other researchers may also test different forms of aesthetics, such as Indian or Chinese aesthetics, in order to see if they hold more importance than Western aesthetics.

The idea of classical properties holding meaningful weight in terms of beauty is also one path that future researchers can explore. Past research has been done on these properties to see if they hold real-world significance in relation to aesthetics, yet studies such as "The Golden Section Hypothesis" actually disproved claims that properties such as the Golden Ratio are meaningful in beauty. This clash in results may bring one to wonder why this occurred, leading to further studies in order to derive a proper conclusion.

The loose definition of classical aesthetics that was found to align with students may also lead to further research on why people hold classical elements in less importance than people did historically in the Classical and Renaissance periods. A researcher could study the aesthetic shifts throughout history and look into why certain aesthetics with specific beauty standards seem to prevail throughout time while others fall. Because this study provides an idea of how to quantify and study aesthetic preference in the modern-day, future researchers can take a variety of paths to broaden the knowledge of aesthetics and beauty.

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