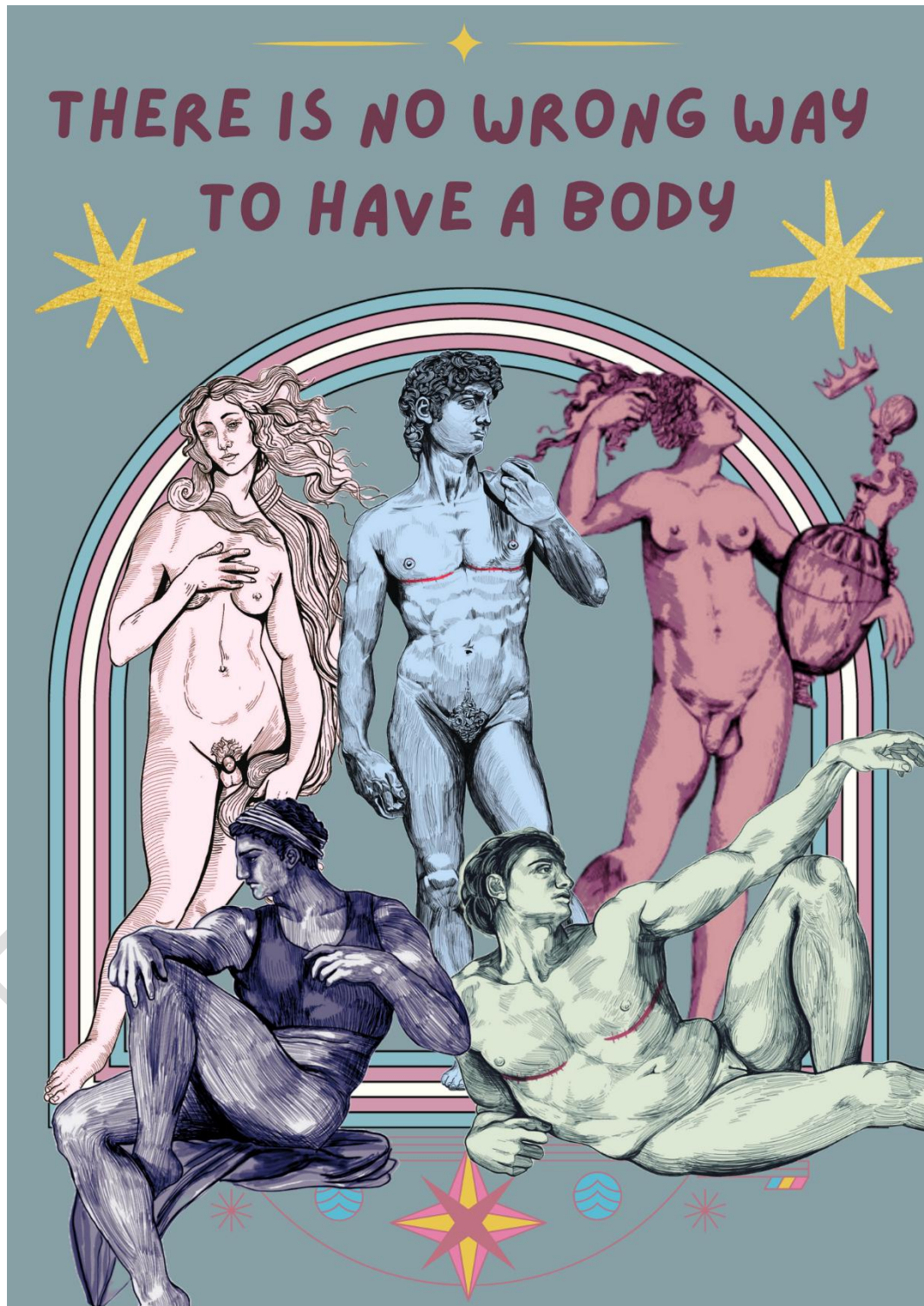


## There is no Wrong Way to Have a Body: A Transgender Propaganda Poster

Gender and Bodies in Media Critical Essay

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The propaganda poster created is a body positivity piece for transgender bodies, designed to uplift and celebrate these bodies. The poster has five depictions of transgender bodies based of classical art pieces, and is accompanied with golden stars, ornaments and the text “There is no wrong way to have a body”. The message of the piece encourages transgender people that their body is valid and beautiful no matter what.

Positive transgender representation has only recently become more popular in media, and this propaganda poster aims to diversify that representation. With various artistic bodies, drawn by Theo Golden<sup>1</sup>, the piece spreads the message that all transgender bodies are beautiful, presenting a body positive image. The text itself spreads the message applicable to anyone, and is a quote by Hanne Blank who expressed body image positivity in women of all shapes and sizes to challenge social beauty standards. In the case of this body positivity propaganda, the text speaks to anyone who feels as though their body deviates from the “norm” of societal beauty standards and offers solidarity to marginalized bodies.

With this message, I wanted to combat rising transphobic ideologies that are often presented in right-wing politics. These ideologies frequently depict transgender bodies as monstrous and ugly, taken over by the so-called “woke mind virus”, a phrase often used by right-wing spokespersons such as Elon Musk. This message is a form of resistance and pushes back against transphobic ideology, asserting that transgender bodies are valid.

In order to convey this message of positivity and validity, various persuasive techniques were used within the propaganda piece. Persuasive techniques appear in both visuals and text of the propaganda piece.

A first persuasive technique used is deification, when an idea is made to appear holy or sacred, and thus ‘special’. This is done by using depictions of transgender bodies represented through classical paintings and statues. The five bodies represented are from *The Creation of Adam*, the *Allegory of Fortune*, *The Birth of Venus*, the statue of *David*, and what the artist called “*trans heavenly bodies*”. These relate to concepts of the divine in relation to religion, which is analysed further on. With the technique of deification, these transgender bodies are depicted as holy, actively combating transphobic ideology that depicts transgender bodies are monstrous. Deification was chosen as a persuasive technique due to its ability to visually convey the idea of godliness, allowing for transgender bodies to be seen within a specific lens. With this, the technique allows the poster to spread the positive idea and convince the viewer(s) that transgender bodies are valid.

In combination with deification, symbolism is also utilized as a technique, as transgender bodies in this propaganda piece are used to symbolize holiness and the divine. Other symbolism in the poster is the transgender rainbow behind the bodies, representing transgender pride, and the golden stars that represent guidance and brilliance which reinforces the message that transgender bodies are divine. Lastly, nudity is a big symbol in this poster. In Christianity, it is believed that the body is created perfectly and unclothed by God (GotQuestions.org, 2024). In modern times, nudity is seen as repulsive, and alongside the various body shapes in the poster, these bodies do not adhere to typical beauty standards. With these bodies and the text portraying that all bodies are beautiful, the use of symbolism is also a form of resistance against beauty standards and harmful stereotypes about what is considered “beauty”. Lastly, the use of transgender physiques, such as top surgery scars or the women having a penis, as classical art

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<sup>1</sup> Bodies depicted are from [@tgoldenprints](#) on Etsy

forms like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Michelangelo's *David* legitimizes these bodies. These bodies then symbolize "high art" associated with beauty, tradition, and historical importance. The combination of symbolism through the (nudity in) bodies and the background ornaments (the transgender flag and the stars) associates transgender bodies with power and pride, creating a concrete message of acceptability.

Pathos is also used as a technique in the poster, as the propaganda emotionally persuades the audience into accepting transgender bodies as valid. The diverse representation of transgender bodies, including post- and pre- surgical bodies evokes compassion and pride. In media, transgender bodies are often depicted as already having undergone gender-affirming surgery. Because of this, transgender bodies who have not yet undergone surgery, or do not feel the need to have surgery, can feel validated and accepted in this poster. This diverse representation is also depicted in the colours of the bodies. The different shades of pink depict transgender women of different colour. The blue statue of David depicts trans-masculine bodies. The two bodies sitting depict other gender identities that fall under the umbrella of transgender physiques. The body in dark purple represents a colour from the non-binary pride flag, and the green body represents the green from the agender pride flag. This allows for a wider representation of different transgender bodies, regardless of whether they identify with binary concepts of gender or not. Pathos is also applied in the text, as the phrase "There is no wrong way to have a body" is emotionally reassuring and speaks to the viewer regardless of whether they are also transgender or not. The text connects to one's desire to feel accepted and loved, especially felt by those who are marginalized, such as transgender persons. Pathos was chosen as technique for this poster due to its ability to connect the viewer to the piece and reinforce the propaganda's validating message.

Utilizing the various techniques, especially with the visuals, representation of transgender bodies is achieved. Representation, referred to by Struken and Cartwright (2017) as the use of language and images to create meaning of and define the world around us, is important in affirming ideologies. In this case, the poster utilizes representation of different genders, colours, and types of bodies to affirm the ideology that all bodies, but specifically transgender bodies, are valid and beautiful. Representing transgender bodies means representing "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (McLaren, 2018, p. 6), which is achieved in this poster due to various types of transgender bodies being presented. However, according to Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity, gender is a performativity and manifests as everyday repetitive acts, such as gestures, that consolidate an impression of being a certain gender. Because of this, it can be argued that gender is not fully represented in the poster because they lack the performativity aspect. Although the bodies, which are originally motionless statues, contain certain traits attributed to femininity, masculinity, or other, through their poses, such as the *Birth of Venus*'s pose with her hand over her chest or the statue of *David*'s pose where he looks confident and taking up space, that does not mean they necessarily embody that gender. Essentially, because gender performativity is not necessarily clear for all five bodies, as there are not repetitive acts, we can know that these bodies are transgender bodies supported by McLaren's (2018) definition but cannot know which gender they embody. Therefore, the poster creates representation for transgender bodies in general, however it can only stereotypically be assumed what gender they are representing through the colors: pink for femininity, blue for masculinity, and other colors for other gender identities.

In terms of being a propaganda piece, defined as a piece that promotes a particular cause or point of view through the systematic dissemination of information (Oxford University Press, n.d.), the poster achieves this through its supporting techniques. The poster promotes the point of view that transgender bodies are valid and beautiful, and the dissemination of information is done through the visuals. The piece utilizes philosophic and religious concepts, such as the human form as an expression of divinity. Historically and culturally, classical art emphasizes a culturally condition concept of beauty and the human body is seen as a tangible manifestation of shapes of divinity (Encyclopedia of Religion, 2014). Moreover, Christian and classical artworks can be seen as primarily objects of aesthetic pleasure and often communicate the meaning of divine revelation (Bühren & Jasiński, 2024). Lastly, artistic heritage, specifically those from the Catholic Church, attract worldwide attention. This attention can help the propaganda piece with spreading its message. With this information regarding cultural, religious, and traditional aspects of the referenced classical artwork presented in the poster, the piece's visual aspects are supported by information. This allows it to easily disseminate information of the validity and beauty of transgender bodies due to the viewers' underlying understanding of classical artworks such as *The Creation of Adam* and the *Birth of Venus*. Hence, by utilizing the viewers' previous knowledge on classical art, and its association with certain concepts, such as beauty, the poster can more easily spread its message. Furthermore, if the viewer does not recognize the artistic references in the bodies, the art style combined with the poses allow the viewer to realize that there is some sort of historical, cultural, or religious past to these bodies. Aside from the dissemination of information presented through the bodies, the other visuals and the text also disseminate information about bodies and their beauty. Altogether, the poster leverages cultural, religious, and aesthetic symbols to shape the perception of transgender bodies and visually normalizes and celebrates them through symbols of pride. The poster subverts the traditional gaze by framing these bodies as common sense and justice, opening up the viewer to seeing these bodies are human rather than monstrous or as the other, fulfilling the goal of a propaganda poster.

The poster resists the objectifying and male gaze, which positions marginalized bodies as objects for the heterosexual male pleasure. Transgender bodies are often reduced to spectacles and are fetishized rather than being seen as human beings. This poster combats voyeuristic consumption and the cisgender, heteronormative lens by placing transgender bodies at the center in classical art forms. Furthermore, the golden starts and pride colors present transness as central rather than marginal. Whilst the bodies themselves combat cisgender, heteronormative, and male gazes, the text combats societal beauty norms by affirming that all bodies are beautiful the way they are and there are not features that make a body less beautiful.

Within the current socio-political society, transgender propaganda that uplifts, celebrates, and validates transgender bodies is not only desirable, but also necessary. The poster counters transphobic ideology and society's cisgender norms and sends a desirable message to transgender individuals that makes them feel seen and accepted. The use of pathos and symbolic techniques creates an emotional connection and impact with the viewer. This propaganda poster is highly desirable as it reclaims historical and traditional views and artworks and creates a representative and resistant message that combats harmful transphobic ideologies to promote inclusivity and validity within gender and bodies presented in media.

Lastly, as a transgender person myself, I find it highly desirable to have positive representations of different types of transgender bodies. Within media, when transgender

bodies are represented positively, they are often represented as having already undergone medical and surgical procedures. Because of this, having a wider representation of transgender bodies in terms of state of transition allows people who are still closeted or not (yet) medically transitioned to also feel accepted. Also having a wider representation of genders, such as including non-binary, agender, or genderfluid people, allows for other transgender people than trans men/trans women to feel validated. I believe that body positivity movements or propaganda that validates marginalized bodies is always desirable.

To summarize and conclude, the poster is a transgender affirming and body positive propaganda piece that sends the message that all (transgender) bodies are valid and accepted, and that being transgender is not a flaw. This poster utilizes various persuasive techniques such as deification, symbolism, and pathos to create an emotional impact on the viewer. The poster creates an acceptable representation of various types of transgender bodies that combats the cisgender, heteronormative, and male gazes by allowing the audience to view transgender bodies as radiant, central, and something other than objects of spectacles. The poster fits well as a propaganda piece, as it effectively conveys a message that challenges certain anti-trans ideologies and elevates transgender bodies, framing transgender bodies as non-marginalized.

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