

Jackie Levitin:

In 2002 Lincoln Clarkes, formerly a fashion photographer and now a resident of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, published a book of photographs titled *Heroines*. The title is a play on words - the feminine of hero and the word 'heroin,' similarly feminized. The women depicted are all drug addicts. Lincoln never photographed male addicts. Because of their poses and their ultra slim bodies, the women of Clarkes' photos resemble fashion models. Indeed, as I've learned from interviewing Clarkes, he did pose them and the women typically dressed up to be posed. Many present undeniable 'style' in their mode of dress.

I came to know some of these women during the three year period prior to 2003 when I worked on a research project on women's health and housing issues in the DTES. I came to understand a little bit about what happens to the body of a woman who is addicted to drugs. Their slimness, it is clear, is not achieved through a model's diet. Skin, fat and muscle tissue break down in heroin addiction, especially where injections are used. Addicts neglect feeding themselves, and, because of the addiction, the body is unable to assimilate the food that is taken in. Typically, the drug addicted woman's skin is marked by sores. Teeth loosen and fall out. One need to know this fact to understand why in the photographs the women keep their mouths closed as they stare back at the camera. My interest is to understand the meaning of this book of photographs. and the thoughts that go through the mind of the woman who is photographed. What is it saying to the reader about the body of the drug-addicted woman, and how does she regard her own body? What does the photo mean to her? Does the way we, the reader, see her change as a result of the photography process? As a result of this book, do we view her and her body differently from the way we would have viewed her before - caught in our glance on the streets of the DTES?