

The Beauty Trap: How the pressure to conform to society's and media's standards of beauty
leave women experiencing body dissatisfaction

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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Contents

Attestation of Authorship	i
Acknowledgment	ii
Contents	iv
List of tables and figures	vi
Literature Review	1
Historical & Contemporary Beauty Trends	11
Introduction	11
Foot binding, high-heeled stilettos and toe-shortening surgery	13
Corsets, weight-loss surgery, dieting and fattening rooms	18
Whitening and tanning of the skin	23
Body hair and hair removal methods	29
Teeth and cosmetic dentistry	32
Hair: Dyeing and permanent styling	34
Female genital cutting and female genital cosmetic surgery	37
Wigs and hair extensions	41
Double eyelids and Asian blepharoplasty	44
Botox and anti-ageing products	46
Theoretical Framework	48
Methods	59
Participants	59
Procedure	59
Qualitative methods versus quantitative methods	60

Data Analysis	61
Qualitative data	61
Qualitative data	68
Discussion: Comparative between Literature Review and Data Analysis	75
Self-esteem	75
Celebrity culture, ‘celebrification’ of beauty and the overrepresentation of Western beauty	79
Body image	81
Beauty practices (Historical and Contemporary)	82
‘Perfect’ body versus the natural body	83
Femininity and beauty: The portrayal of real women via via the media and what roles do we play in?	84
Conclusion	86
Bibliography	88

List of table and figures

Figure 1	Ethnic groups of 110 participants in my structured interview	Page 62
Figure 2	Percentage of ethnic groups in Greater Auckland	Page 62
Figure 3	Percentage of ethnic groups in the Structured interview	Page 63
Figure 4	Comparative graph between Greater Auckland And my study	Page 64
Figure 5	Participants' age groups	Page 65
Figure 6	Well-known figures chosen by participants they believe to epitomize feminine beauty	Page 66
Figure 7	Participants' satisfaction towards their bodies and faces	Page 67
Figure 8	Participants' response to the structured interview question, "Do you think you are beautiful?"	Page 68

Literature Review

The paper aims to explore how media and society's alleged standards of beauty have influenced how they influence women and girls from various socio-cultural backgrounds to define what 'beauty' is and how they perceive their body image. In addition, this paper will compare Western and non-Western beauty practices, both historical and contemporary, and also debunk the myths that beauty is standardised for women and girls.

Etcoff (2000) argues that "no definition can capture beauty entirely" (p.8) and she quotes dictionaries defining beauty as "something intrinsic to the object or simply as the pleasure an object evokes in the beholder" (p. 8). Brand (2000) cites Plato's definition of beauty as timeless, changing and universal where women's bodies have not only played a role in the making of art or provoking philosophical interests but also establishes the business of the beautification such as the use of beauty and hair products for personal grooming. Like its sister called fashion, beauty is a language of identity and a promoter of self-esteem (Man, 2000). Beauty is not just an aesthetic category applied to faces and bodies, instead as Peiss (2000) adds, it helps to define social status, gender and class. Thereby, beauty ideals are formed by social relations and cultural categories and practices which eventually created opportunities and commercialization of fashion and beauty industries (Peiss, 2000).

From the Ancient Persian era to the present, Corson (2003) writes that history has countless records of men and women grooming and adorning their faces and bodies to either mark a rite of passage, for example puberty, or their social status. Sherrow (2001) also believes that beautification has been done to symbolize social history, attitudes and values of many different cultures. For example, during the Elizabethan era, Sherrow (2001) states that English women used saffron and sulphur to dye their hair red in order to emulate the hair

colour of Elizabeth I. In addition, besides being a symbol of beauty, some men, especially members of the royal English court, dyed their facial hair auburn to signify their “loyalty to their queen” (p. 178). Compared to today where one can choose from many shades ranging from blonde to auburn, dyeing one’s hair to emulate a celebrity or a model is more or less similar to the Elizabethan era. The blonde bombshell mania is an example where the platinum blonde shade had been popularized by Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe in the 1930s and 1950s respectively. Johnson and Lennon (1999) state that socially constructed ideals towards beauty not only encourage individuals to create appearances but also determine how they define themselves based on self-worth and their perception towards appearances in the societies they come from. From demure to playful, Man (2000) believes historical and contemporary women project their self-images through make-up and fashion as current or new “frames of references for beauty” (p. 193).

The female body is a medium of culture where a woman faces pressures to meet certain ideals of beauty in society (Gimlin, 2002). Ehrenreich and English (1978, cited by Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, and Ahrens, 1990) agrees that females have historically attempted to change their bodies to conform to a particular era’s beauty ideal. From the Rubenesque voluptuous body of the 1600s to the modern waif-like slender body, Grogan (2008) believes the idealization of the woman’s body is due to the “outcome of successful marketing” (p. 19) which plays a role in the standard of the cultural beauty in Western and affluent societies. Therefore, a woman’s body is not just perceived as an object but also is expected to undergo “constant self-surveillance and disciplinary practices” (p. 38) in the pursuit of the ‘perfect’ body (Blood, 2005). Baumann (2008) adds that ideals regarding beauty vary between societies and cultures as well as groups within a society such as

“ideals for height, body shape, facial parts, hairstyles and skin tone” (p. 4). For example, plumpness is a symbol of beauty and fertility in African and Eastern cultures where a plus sized, usually big-boned and curvaceous, wife symbolised a happy and successful husband. Whereas, plumpness is considered un-ideal and symbolises the lack of willpower in the Western culture which prides on smaller figures. Grogan (2008) agrees by adding that slenderness in the Western norm represents social success, happiness and social acceptability. As a result, Wolf (1990) and Blood (2005) write that beauty standards have not only undermined women’s self-worth but also pressure them to conform to the beauty practices of femininity in the attempt to emulate the ideal images of womanhood presented by media and society. When a woman ignores or fails to conform to the alleged standards of the ideal beauty, she is not only vulnerable of becoming an outcast from normality, desirability and femininity but also Blood (2005) adds she is blamed for resisting societal influences by accepting her body instead of changing it to fit the beauty ideal. Halprin (1995) believes without support and self-acceptance, many women “tend to internalize standards of beauty, and judge themselves to the point of self-hatred” (p. 42) or harbour distorted views about how their bodies and faces should look (Blood, 2005). Therefore, Grogan (2008) believes there is a great need to develop positive body image in women at both individual and societal levels through education and health campaigns.

Throughout many eras, beauty has frequently mattered as an inevitable and underlying socio-political framework for how it tells women what is acceptable as ‘beautiful’ within societal and cultural norms (Brand, 2000). For example, the reinforcement of “media-presented societal messages” of the beauty ideal that are accepted and internalised by women (Jones et al, 2004, cited by Dohnt and Tiggerman, 2006, p. 142). Jeffrey (2005)

agrees with Brand (2000) and Etcoff's (2000) statements regarding beauty by highlighting how feminist critics such as Dworkin (1974) have pointed out "beauty is a cultural practice which is time wasting, expensive and painful to one's self-esteem" (p. 6). Women are required to "'create' beauty through make-up, hairstyles, depilation or creation by surgery" (p.24) in order to create sexual difference to prove they can fulfil the ideal feminine beauty (Jeffreys, 2005). Feminist writers from academic and popular literature have consistently argued when a woman attempts to cultivate her appearance, she is considered as a collaborator in her own oppression at the expense of women's fullest development (Halprin, 1995; Scott, 2005). However, Wolf (1990) argues that beauty practices are actually about men's institutions and institutional power which aims to "destroy women physically and deplete them psychologically" (p. 6). Jeffreys (2005) believe the concept of Western and non-Western beauty practices create a stereotyped masculinity and femininity where women are subjected to criticism instead of being regarded as natural or progressive. Orbach (1988, cited by Blood, 2005) and Lennon, Lillethun and Buckland (1999) conclude that the stereotyped representation of women in media, cultural and societal levels not only define women's relationship to men and to themselves as individuals but increase the pressure to conform to the ideal body or beauty type.

Just as Jeffreys (2005) argues that beauty practices in Western culture should be understood as "harmful cultural practices" (p.3) like corsetry and stilettos in the historical and contemporary eras respectively, Ping (2000) writes that the East Asian symbol of feminine beauty during the olden times was lotus feet, known as 'foot binding'. Like its modern Western sister such as the stilettos, foot binding was the "synonym for femininity, beauty, hierarchy, and eroticism" (p. 7) which are "tightly integrated with pain, violence and death"

(p.8). Similar to its historical sisters, Grogan (2008) writes contemporary women resort to diet regimes and cosmetic surgery to try and attain the “culturally defined” (p. 41) ideal body. As the beauty industry, including cosmetic surgery, continues to thrive, Greer (1999, cited by Gauntlett, 2008) explains the mediated beauty ideal is “often a substantial pressure on women” (p. 86) to attain the ‘perfect body’. Therefore, it is proven that beauty practices from both sides of the world, historical and modern, have played a role which affects the “relationship between women’s bodies and the image industry where women’s physical appearance is able to be changed at will” (Bordo, 1993, as cited by Blood, 2005, p. 13).

In the modern age, Halprin (1995) writes that the maidenly appearance of the extreme, slender youth, cast in a European style of beauty, has become a global standard for women of all cultures which is often “opposed to individuality” (p. 42) or in most, uniqueness. Davies (1982) agrees by stating that the western ideal of femininity has been propagating western cultural imperialism or cultural values onto its non-Western counterparts. Therefore, Halprin (1995) writes the myth of the beautiful white woman plays a role in denying the “value of black beauty, Asian beauty and even the beauties of indigenous or aboriginal peoples” (p. 43). Shennow (2001) provides an example where critics say Barbie dolls provide a limited white Anglo-Saxon beauty ideal which could leave girls, especially from non-Western context, feeling inadequate about themselves. As a result of the ingrained white beauty standard as the unrealistic ideal, Makkar and Strube (1995) believe non-Western viewers are often left “in feelings of low self-worth” (p. 1548).

Halprin (1995) adds that women from the non-Western context undergo pain to alter a physical feature in order to achieve unrealistic ethnic-based standards of beauty ideals. For

example, the rising number of East Asian females undergoing Asian blepharoplasty¹, commonly known as a double eyelid surgery, to attain double eyelids which Kobrin (2004) says are a sign of the ideal Asian beauty. Although the painful but costly procedure has created a craze among Asians, Dr. Lee (2004, as cited by, Kobrin, 2004) states young Asian-Americans are “resistant against blepharoplasty and deem the procedure which aims to alter one’s ethnic identity” (p.1) compared to their Asian peers who sees it otherwise as a way to “make them look prettier” (p. 2).

Another example of Westernization of non-Western beauty is the obsession towards pale skin among East and South Asians. Pale skin is not only an ideal of Asian feminine beauty but also a sign of nobility or aristocracy where the Asian cosmetic giants offer an array of products for their consumers to “brighten, whiten, lighten and illuminate” their yellow-toned or dark skins (Bray, 2002, p.1). Halprin (1995) agrees that the beautiful white woman myth represents a “limited or narrow standard of beauty which renders all others unbeautiful” (p.43), thereby, denying the value of non-Western beauty ranging from Asian beauty to the indigenous beauty. Giddings (1984, cited by Halprin, 1995) provides an example of Black women during the early 20th century enhancing their beauty with hair straightening products and skin lighteners amidst a race-conscious era in America which opposed individual reality.

According to Cortese (2008), advertising and media provide “culturally sanctioned ideal types in a “mythical, WASP²-oriented world where no person is ugly or overweight” (Kilbourne, 1989, as cited by Cortese, 2008, p.57). As a result, women are encouraged to

¹ Blepharoplasty- Cosmetic surgical procedure intended to reshape the upper or lower eyelid

² WASP- White Anglo-Saxon Protestant

achieve an “idealised body shape” when they are exposed to media-portrayed images which promotes the idea that body shape and size are flexible (Monro and Huon, 2005). For example, the frequent use of unrealistic imagery of beautiful models in advertisements and magazines, airbrushed to perfection with the use of photo-editing software, has defined ‘beauty’ to women as the ability to transform one’s body size to unrealistic outcomes through means of extremes such as surgery and dieting. Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braun and Wise (2007) state that media and advertising encourage women to invest on “substantial amounts of time, energy and emotional resources” (p. 265) to conform to the body ideals. Along with a fusion of physical obsessions, fear of ageing and self-hatred, the reproduction of ‘beautiful’ images deny the existence of real women’s faces and bodies (Wolf, 1990).

Sarwer et. al. (2003) say that body image is the most popular topic in the field of psychology at the beginning of the new century. According to Schilder (1950, cited by Grogan, 2008) body image is defined as “the picture of our own bodies which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves” (p. 3). Thompson, Heinberg and Altabe (1999, as cited by Sarwer, Grossbart and Didie, 2003) describe body image as similar to the “closely related construct of self-esteem” which has come to be accepted as the “internal representation of one’s own outer appearance” (p.110). However, there is often a disagreement about the true definition of “body image”. Dittmar (2009) and Cash and Henry (1995, cited by Blood, 2005) add that body image is also a “core aspect of mental and physical well-being” (p.1) where it bears a relationship between self-esteem and psychosocial adjustment such as eating disturbances and social anxiety. Body image not only plays a role in how individuals feel about themselves and their appearances but also

how the individual functions within a cultural or societal milieu. With the significant rise in referral for cosmetic surgery, dissatisfaction or shame towards one's appearances, and increase in dieting amongst women, researchers attempt to "understand reasons behind these behaviours and general experiences of embodiment" (Grogan, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, the misperception towards body size and shape is a great concern for experts involved in body image studies.

When they fail to conform or achieve the standards seen from media and advertising, there is an evidence of body shame or dissatisfaction and the growing desire to alter its weight and shape (Monro and Huon, 2005, p. 86). Cash and Szymanski (1995, cited by Grogan, 2008) explain that body shame or dissatisfaction is not only defined as the "negative evaluations of body size, shape, muscle tone and weight" (p. 4) but also a perceived discrepancy between an individual's evaluation of his body and the ideal body. Dittmar, Halliwell and Ive (2006, as cited by Dittmar, 2009) report that "body perfect" ideals are conveyed to children as young as 5 to 7 years of age (p. 2). Dittmar (2009) provides an example of recent studies of girls being frequently exposed to doll images such as Barbie, are reported to have lower body satisfaction and a desire for a thinner body. Like cosmetic surgery, Davis (1995) believes the beauty system women are exposed to, on screen and print, is an oppressive method to discipline or normalize their bodies in order to fit into the idealized beauty categories.

Images of ideal female bodies produced by media and advertising play a role in detailing the 'perfect' female in the global capitalism of the twenty-first century (Shields and Heineken, 2002). Within the consumer culture, the female body is not just a vehicle of pleasure and desire but also is believed to have a higher exchange value when it

“approximates to the idealised image” of youth and beauty (Featherstone, 1991, cited by Frost, 2001, p.42). Pollay (1986, as cited by Baumann, 2008) writes advertising aims to show us how individuals should appear, or what is ideally attractive, even if this is not its manifest function. Shields and Heineken (2002) quotes a report by a research participant who views advertising as stereotypes which “provides pressure for one to have society views” about others and prescribe “how women should see themselves” (p.13). In addition, Lavine, Sweeney and Wagner (1999) add portrayals of unrealistic imagery of thinness and beauty ideal increases the likelihood of women experiencing body dissatisfaction or shame.

Polivy, Garner and Garfinkel (1986, as cited by Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel and Stuckless, 1999) state that individuals look to both media-portrayed images and society’s standards for their personal concept of the ideal beauty. To be able to achieve the beauty ideal is a badge of success for a woman who pursues it with tenacity (Frost, 2001). As a result, the gulf between a woman’s body and the perceived ideal in recent decades has initiated a great deal of body dissatisfaction amongst women especially to those who cannot attain the beauty ideal. McKinley and Hyde (1996, cited by Monro and Huon, 2005) discuss how the focus on appearance results in increased body shame and appearance anxiety especially “when the female body is subjected to scrutiny” (p. 86). Another term to describe both body shame and appearance anxiety is ‘body-hatred’ where the female body is perceived as a reviled enemy that must be controlled and altered through diet and makeovers (Frost, 2001). According to Frost (2001), body-hatred is not just classified as a negative relationship, frequently a damaging one, between females and their bodies but also it comes in harmful forms such as eating disorders and self-harm. Therefore, Dittmar (2007) believes the pursuit for such unrealistic, toxic motives focussing on a better, happier

identity, especially in the struggle to attain physical perfection, is detrimental for individuals' well-being in pursuit of a better, happier identity.

When the issue of beauty becomes a painful subject for women, their bodies are used as “instruments to punish” them and other women where the ‘value’ of their bodies are impinging those who are unable to fulfil the beauty ideal (Wolf, 1990, p. 234). As a result, the constant comparison between themselves and the beauty ideal not only fuels the fluctuation of women’s self-esteem but also the hostility hurts them. McBryde (1999) and Grogan (2008) believe that if women can choose to ignore the need to discipline, compare and conform to unrealistic ideals promoted by media and beauty industries, they will be able to “appreciate their unique beauty” (p. 7) and enhance their self-esteem. To gain an understanding into the beauty culture is to not only encourage us to think critically about women and beauty but also understand how a woman’s body can be a “tool for resistance and agency in the construction and reconstruction of a contemporary selfhood” against the cultural objectification of the body amidst modern consumer culture (Gimlin, 2002; p. 149).

Historical and Contemporary Beauty Trends: From foot-binding and corsets to cosmetic surgery, fad diets and high-heeled stilettos

Introduction

Women's fashion, in both Western and non-Western context, has frequently symbolize the important eras in a country or society's history and culture (Phelan, 2002). In addition, Phelan (2002) and Kunzle (2004) say fashion not only "makes a statement of what society wants women to be" (p. 2) but also expresses the dominance of a social class. For example, lotus feet or bounded feet were considered endearing on a woman whilst large feet were seen as grotesque and a signifier of low class in ancient China (Kippen, 2005). However, in the contemporary Western context, having a tan now implies wealth, high social status and good health unlike in the past, such as the Elizabethan and Victorian eras, where it was once associated with hard labour and poverty (Phelan, 2002).

Wykes and Gunter (2005) say beauty ideals have been projected by the dominant communication forms of time, for example visual art, throughout history. From high culture to mythology, Wolf (1990) says romanticized beauty in art and many cultures "determines not only the relations of men to women but also the relation of women to themselves" (p. 59). Akin to the unattainable but romanticized historical icons in visual art, readers and audiences of the present are invited to emulate modern media role models such as celebrities, supermodels and socialites of the past and present (Mazur, 1986, as cited by Wynter and Gunter, 2005).

Phelan (2005) states Western and non-Western beauty trends "have a price for women and girls who attempt to achieve the fashionable look" (p. 138). At the same time, women of the past and present are expected to regulate their bodies and produce femininity through

beauty practices (Black & Sharma, 2001). With beauty being idealized by media and society, Gimlin (2002) and Kunzle (2004) write that the female identity is believed to be tainted causing women to face “acute tension between assertions of individualism and the demands of conformism” (p.5). Jeffreys (2005) agrees that beauty trends, traditional and contemporary, are not only harmful to the health of women but also “creates stereotyped femininity” (p. 59) such as waxing to create the hairless feminine body. Cortese (2008) says the image of the ideal beautiful woman is captured with “the concept of *provocateur* which is a form or a hollow shell representing the female figure and accepted attractiveness” (p. 59).

With the standardised beauty glamorized by media and culture, Gimlin (2002) writes that “women’s bodies have fallen short of the ideal body in print and film” (p.5). As a result, the imperfect body becomes a sign of an imperfect character whilst the ideal body represents success, self-control and ultimate perfection. When women fail to emulate the images of the ‘perfect’ beauty, it can lead them to feel guilty or ashamed about their appearances. Therefore, they must attempt to repair the blemished identities which imperfect bodies symbolize. For example, the use of cosmetic surgery to create a slender body when dieting and exercise fail. Cortese (2008) and McKinley (1999) add self-objectification and body shame has been related to both low self-esteem and increased risk of psychological problems such as eating disorders and depression. Phelan (2002) says the acknowledgement of the importance of fashion and beauty in cultures and the consequences of various trends towards women is essential to both health care professionals and women experts.

Foot binding, high-heeled stilettos and toe shortening surgery

According to Thompson and Coughlin (1994), footwear has been an important attire since early civilization which its main purpose is to protect the human feet. Throughout many centuries, footwear has not only evolved but also has become a fashion and beauty statement for the wearer (Phelan, 2002; Thompson and Coughlin, 1994). Although Thompson and Coughlin (1994) report the “prevalence of foot problems have dramatically increased” (p. 1586) in modern society, Phelan (2002) argues that foot problems have been around since “the platform shoe has been in and out of fashion during the middle ages” (p.140). Kippen (2005) and Gates (2007) agree with Phelan (2002) by highlighting how the defunct practice known as Chinese foot binding, usually referred as lotus feet, had not only “maintained its erotic attraction for Chinese men through lore and literature” (p.58) but also left Chinese women and young girls deformed in ancient dynasties until its abolishment during the early 20th century due to intervention by anti-foot binding movements and legislations organized by a modern government, missionaries and Western educated locals who deemed the practice as sado-ritualistic abuse.

According to Kippen (2005), historical evidence proves that “foot binding was practiced amongst the daughters and wives of officials and noble families in China” (p.2) when “large feet were despised and considered low class or grotesque” (p.1). In a time where feet and shoes were symbols of aristocracy and pride within a patriarchal society, Ross (2001) and Schnabel and Schnabel (1986) write that foot binding also “signalled the value of a young woman as an object of exchange”, especially in a marriage market, and acted as a “testament of a girl’s ability to withstand the pain” (p. 313) of having her feet not only

broken and bounded since infancy or childhood but also having to “walk on compressed feet daily” (p.183).

Benamou (2006) adds that bounded feet were not only a symbol of the ideal feminine beauty but also deemed as “a source of extreme sexual gratification to the Chinese male” (p. 48). Foot binding was also considered as “a kind of chastity belt” (p.131) where it was symbolized as a “practice which restricted women from exercising any freedom or independence and thus protected their chastity” (Jeffreys, 2005). Dworkin (1974, cited by Jeffreys, 2005) describes foot binding in ancient China as “the crippling of a woman where man “glorifies in her agony, adores her deformity, and annihilates her freedom even if he must destroy the bones in her feet do it” (p.112). According to Shennow (2001), the fixation towards foot binding in Chinese society extended to brothels where women stood behind screens that only revealed the tiny shoes they wore for their male clients to make their selection. In addition, the practice of foot binding also saw the birth of ‘tiny feet festivals’, a beauty contest where all the female competitors were maidens with bound feet, was held in many provinces in China

Mackie (1996) cites a source which quotes a discussion on the origin of foot binding which was invented by a palace dancer during the Tang Dynasty. As a result, it began to “spread as an imitation and eventually became a common practice amongst Chinese women from middle and high classes for the sake of a proper marriage” (Mackie, 1996, p. 2). Benamou (2006) explains the process of foot binding happens where Chinese mothers would “start with their baby girls by turning their toes back, except the big toe, and bandaging the toes back onto the foot” (p.47). As the pressure increased, Benamou (2006) adds that an “acute angle was eventually achieved between the tarsals and the metatarsals where the feet were

reduced to the ankle more, or less, where it could be shod with tiny shoes” (p. 47) which were no bigger than a human fist, between three to four inches long. During the process of foot binding, Shennow (2001) adds that the flesh beneath the bandages would rot due to the lack of circulation. As a result, women with bound feet resorted to washing them in perfumed water daily to minimize the rotting odour prior to wrapping them with clean, new bandages and wearing their embroidered silk shoes.

Drucker (1981, cited by Mackie, 1996) reports the process of foot binding usually resulted in complications such as “ulceration, paralysis, gangrene and mortifications of the lower limbs” (p. 997) which Fairbanks (1992, cited by Mackie, 1996) believes they resulted in ten per cent of girls dying as a result of foot binding. As a result of the binding, the extreme contraction of the foot caused a hollow space to form underneath. Schnabel & Schnabel (1986) describe the bound foot “resembled a *pes cavus* with a high instep and a prominent, vertically placed heel” (p.183). Over time, the painful process of binding would not only “reduce the length of each foot to a mere three inches” (Thompson & Coughlin, 1994, p. 1586) but also Levy (1966, cited by Jeffreys, 2005) states the feet become “practically dead and painless” (p.130). As a result, Schnabel & Schnabel (1986) state that the deformity severely limited a woman’s ability to walk or perform weight-bearing household chores such as collecting water from a well or gardening. Therefore, it became fashionable for Chinese women with bound feet to be carried around in sedan chairs or have their domestic maids perform household tasks in their stead. Although bound feet were the object of sensuality, wealth, and ideal feminine beauty, Thomas and Coughlin (1994) highlight that practice not only caused “severe deformities of the feet of Chinese young women but also serious difficulties with walking in their later years” (p. 1586). Cunningham and Stone

(1997) agree by stating medical evidence of elderly women with bound feet who are more likely to fracture their hips and other bones from falls, since they could not balance whilst walking or rise securely from chairs.

Although Ross (2001) believes Chinese foot binding practice is extinct and the tiny shoes serve as proof that such impossibly formed feet once existed, Thompson and Coughlin (1994) argue how the desire to make feet appear daintier and narrower is prevalent in modern societies, especially within the Western context, as it was in the Eastern cultures of the past. Jeffreys (2005) agrees by stating that the appreciation towards high heels today “resembles in many respects the attitudes of individuals in Imperial China have towards foot binding” (p. 138). Unlike the ancient three-inch lotus feet, high heeled shoes, such as stilettos, usually make the feet “appear smaller because they place them in a more vertical position” (Thompson and Coughlin, 1994, p. 1587).

Benamou (2006) and Phelan (2005) say high heels were invented in Venice, Italy during the 16th century where they had been in and out of fashion “since the middle ages where they could be up to 30 inches tall” (p.140) and were commonly associated with aristocracy and wealth. Although Phelan (2005) believes high heels and stilettos of today are now “up to six inches” (p.140) and are less damaging than its ancient sister, Chinese foot binding, their tall spiked heels and narrower toe boxes, usually tapered to needle points, are reported to not only place “increased pressure on the ball of the foot” (p.183) but also “encourage the development of corns, bunions, calluses, ingrown toe nails and hammer toes” (Schnabel and Schnabel, 1986, p. 183). Phelan (2005) supports Schnabel and Schnabel’s (1986) report that high heels decrease the leverage of the foot as a result of the wearer walking on one’s toes. Like ancient Chinese foot binding, Sherrow (2001) states high heels not only elongate

the appearance of the wearer's legs but also "cause their hips to sway" (p. 120). As a result of the reduced leverage, the wearer not only "loses her sense of balance and ability to judge distance to the ground" (p. 140) but also "increases the likelihood of sprains and fractures" (Schnabel and Schnabel, 1986, p. 184).

As the popularity of high heels and stilettos grow in a "world where 'some women invest more in their shoes than they do in the stock market'" (Vollandes, 2006, p. 74), Jeffreys (2005) writes that cosmetic surgeons offer surgeries to women which involve the shortening of the toes and narrowing of the feet. In some cases, it is reported that some women request to "get their little toes cut off" in order to fit into Jimmy Choos and Manolo Blahniks (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 144). Harris (2003) writes women undergo the procedure known as toe-tuck surgery "to improve the appearance of the foot or help them to fit into fashionable shoes" (p.1) where it involves the feet being "chiselled, chopped and filed into submission" (Shields, p. 12). Gifford-Jones (2004) cites Dreeben's report that most women undergoing toe-tuck surgery have normal feet and consider undergoing surgery to enable them to fit into fancy shoes rather than purchase footwear for comfort. Kadel (2004, cited by Gifford-Jones, 2004) supports Dreeben's (2004) statement by writing that toe-tuck surgery results in some women ending up with lifelong complications such as deformities, chronic pain and difficulties in walking which prevent them from wearing any kind of shoe comfortably. Jeffreys (2005) concludes that the toe shortening surgery is not only a clear parallel with ancient Chinese foot binding but also is considered as an example of a twenty-first century beauty practice which is "more brutal and invasive" (p.145).

Corsets, weight-loss surgery, dieting, and fattening rooms

As old and controversial as the ancient Chinese foot binding, Phelan (2002) and Steele (2001) say the corset is not only renowned for creating the hourglass figure or was a symbol of self-discipline, beauty and erotic allure but also was an “essential element of fashionable dress” (p.1) throughout the western world from the late Renaissance to the early twentieth century. The corset begun as a finely decorated outer garment during the medieval era and later became an undergarment of the 19th century where the wasp-like waist of less than 17 inches became desirable and heavily priced (Phelan, 2002). Although Steele (2001) says the corset is today “universally condemned as having been an instrument of women’s oppression” (p.1), Summers (2001) argues it was not only essential in constructing femininity and a class-based identity but also the corset was heavily prized by fashion-conscious women because of its ability to “craft the flesh into class-appropriate contours” (p.9). In addition, the corset was used by women to “strengthen and protect their class hegemony” (p.10) or to enable them to escape their working class origins and mobilize them to move upwards into a higher social class.

In an era when the maintenance of status was heavily emphasized which Davies (1982) says “the wearing of corsets in England and America was the ‘hallmark of virtue’” (p. 619), Summers (2001) writes the corset had been “the subject of intense medical and scientific scrutiny since the 1860s” (p.49). Steele (2001, p.70) agrees by citing Gau’s (1998) statement that the corset reduces the wearer’s lung capacity which resulted in dyspnea³ and abnormal breathing patterns. In addition, the frequent use of the corset subjects the human torso to pressures of 30 to 85 pounds which “reduces the circumference of the lower and

³ Dyspnea – shortness of breath

abdomen by 6 inches” (Phelan, 2002, p.138), thus altering the position of the internal organs. For example, the liver fills the entire right side of the abdomen and the fat and muscles of the abdominal wall atrophy until the peristaltic waves could be seen clearly through the skin (Schnabel and Schnabel, 1986). Summers (2001) adds that medical accounts by Victorian physicians prove that long term corsetry is responsible for digestive problems, such as constipation, as a result of the stomach and intestines being constricted by frequent tight-lacing. Contemporary corset enthusiasts agree by reporting how even modern corsets, like its ancient versions, make eating too much uncomfortable for the wearer. Chavasse (1898, cited by Summers, 2001) also believes that corsetry could contribute to spontaneous abortion, reduced fertility and has the potential to affect the development and the well-being of the foetus.

Although corsets are now reduced to being part of pop culture and the wardrobes of modern haute couture, fashion and media often place an increased emphasis on being thin (Phelan, 2002). Amidst the frequent pressures to conform or achieve the ideal body size and weight, many women are likely to end up with body dissatisfaction which Ogden and Munday (1996) describe it as not only “in terms of attempts to restrain food intake” but also “express in discrepancies between the perceived and desired body size and weight” (p. 171). Cortese (2008) writes as one continuously monitors one’s physical appearance and constantly internalizes cultural standards of feminine beauty, it has been reported that “self-objectification is often related to eating disorders and depression” (p. 61).

According to a 1994 report, the weight-loss industry in America contributed \$32.6 billion to its economy through commercial weight-loss programmes, health club memberships and self-help books on dieting (Sarwer et. al., 2003). In the wake of growing prevalence of

obesity, Sarwer et. al (2003) says more individuals turn to dieting to improve their health status when the primary motivation is to transform one's appearance from the unacceptable to the accepted ideal. As a result, most women have been reported to "actively trying to lose weight at anytime, with most regaining the unwanted weight within less than one year" as a result of fad diets and crash dieting in order to gain the bodies they desire to emulate in a short amount of time (Phelan, 2002, p. 139). Goss and Gilbert (2002) writes that individuals with disordered eating behaviour or eating disorders often meet with a variety of physiological changes which Keys, Broze and Henschel (1950, cited by Goss & Gilbert, 2002) believe it could affect the individual's health and well-being in relation to weight maintenance and body image.

When diet and exercise fail to give the individuals the idealized body shape they desire to achieve or to "alter a physical attribute which is known as a 'genetic flaw'" (p. 78), Gimlin (2002) writes cosmetic surgery is one of the "astounding lengths which contemporary women will go in order to obtain bodies that meet the current ideals of attractiveness" (p. 78). Although Wolf (1991, cited by Gimlin, 2002) says cosmetic surgery is rapidly expanding, Gimlin (2000) argues that many social critics and theorists consider it to be the "ultimate symbol of invasion of the human body for the sake of physical beauty" (p.78) which Bordo (1990, cited by Gimlin, 2002) calls it 'cultural plastic' where the body no longer stands as a symbol of identity alone but also as a "commodity where it could be continuously upgraded and modified in accordance with new interests and greater resources"(p. 78). Although many, including Jeffreys (2005), consider and challenge cosmetic surgery as harmful, destructive, and most often, unnecessary, Gimlin (2002) says women undergo such procedures are "simply making do within a culture that they believe

rewards them for their looks” (p. 97). However, Davis (1995) argues that cosmetic surgery on the female body can be an informed choice for women caught between female liberation, which is the celebration of natural beauty and body acceptance, and the beauty system.

Whilst women in developed nations pride themselves to be slender through diets, exercise and sometimes, aesthetic surgery, Onishi (2001) argues it is the contrary in Africa where thinness is associated with illness, poverty, unattractiveness and infertility. Hawks (2001) says corpulent women in many parts of Africa are not just associated with wealth, sexual desirability and high social status but also symbolise successful and happy husbands. Brink (1995) adds that overweight or large women in Central and West Africa are frequently described as “women of substance” (p. 71) who are the perfect embodiment of health, feminine beauty and fertility. In order to enable African females to fulfil the corpulence ideal held by their societies, they undergo a fattening process, sometimes known as leblūh⁴ (Popenoe, 2004). Bernus (1991, cited by Popenoe, 2004) notes the fattening process is done to “accelerate puberty and enhance the marriageability of girls” (p. 39).

Hawks (2001) provide an example where in Kenya, heavier and bigger brides receive a higher bride wealth as a reward of being able to fulfil the fatness ideal held by their communities. In addition, stretch marks on a plump woman’s body are considered as both marks of beauty and achievement where the female has successfully attained the fat ideal (Popenoe, 2005). Although Brinks (1990) reports that adolescent girls and women usually undergo the fattening process to prepare them for marriage or assist them to conceive their

⁴ Leblūh- ‘Forced feeding’ in Galgaliyya Arabic

first children, some girls begin the process after their first two milk teeth fall out, a sign that their bodies will enter female adulthood (Popenoe, 2004). As a result, Popenoe (2005) adds that Central and West African girls learn about 'the value of fatness' where they must maintain their fatness throughout their adult lives as their bodies are "potent symbols of their menfolk's success" (p. 18).

Often considered as a rite of passage for young African females, Brink (1990) says girls undergoing the fattening process are known as mbobo⁵ where they are in seclusion for weeks or months. Whilst in seclusion, the mbobo is forbidden from doing any physical work, exercise or household chores, where a small child of either sex is employed by her family to perform her tasks (Brink, 1995). Throughout the fattening process, Popenoe (2004) notes the mbobo consumes a carbohydrate-rich diet, usually lacking in fruit and vegetables, and large quantities of milk and millet between regular meals daily to hasten the fattening process. However, Popenoe (2004) states that the fattening process often involves the elders exerting greater authority onto the mbobo. As a result, the mbobo is subjected to yellings and beatings where she endures physical pain and force-feeding daily, mostly against her will. Popenoe (2004) provides an example of an African woman of Azwagh Arab descent who recalled a childhood experience where her mother stood on her hand and fractured her wrist to "make her drink her porridge" (p. 46). Although the infliction of physical pain onto a mbobo would be perceived as harmful in the Western point of view, Popenoe (2004) argues the use of corporal punishment during the fattening process is considered as "the disciplining of the body" (p. 47) as well as the process of disciplining the girl's mind and soul. However, if the female fails to live up to the fat ideal, it is

⁵ Mbobo- 'Fattening room girls' in Annang language

“thought to be her own fault” (p. 25) and therefore, rendering her ineligible for marriage (Popenoe, 2005).

Although Hawks (2001) maintains the slenderness ideal has spread into Africa due to the influence of global media, improved health system and wider access to education for girls, Brink (1995) argues the fattening process still exists as a modernized version under a different name amongst girls from wealthy or influential families in their communities. Onishi (2001) agrees by stating that women in Africa, often facing the pressure to fulfil the plumpness ideal, would resort to steroids, fattening pills or animal feed to enable them to gain weight. However, Batouré (2001, cited by Onishi, 2001) believes the ingestion of animal feed and other chemical products can cause lasting health complications to women such as organ failure and poisoning. Popenoe (2005) concludes the African fattening rooms, like its Western slimming routine, is an odious task of living up to a body ideal where an African woman’s corpulent body consisting of rolls of fat, stretch marks and a large behind signals ‘a condition of desirability’ (p. 23) where it simultaneously excites and denies sexuality.

Whitening and tanning of the skin

Draelos (2002) and Phelan (2002) write that skin colour has always been a source of fixation for mankind from all cultures where it not only represents one’s health condition or attractiveness but also his or her social status and wealth. Therefore, Glenn (2008) believes skin tone is often perceived as a “form of fixed or unchangeable capital” (p. 282) which individuals attempt lighten or darken to enable them to be accepted as desirable or part of the in-crowd where one’s worth is judged based his appearance. Sherrow (2001) agrees and

states that individuals from various cultures and eras have used various substances and formulations to make one's skin paler or darker.

Throughout human history pale skin was not only desired or connoted the signs of beauty and a higher social status but also symbolised purity which people used various herbs and even homemade cosmetics to whiten or bleach their skins. Sherrow (2001) and Pointer (2005) provide an example of how women during the Roman Empire and the Elizabethan era resorted to using face whiteners made of ceruse, a type of lead compound, which they thinly applied to their faces and necks to achieve the pale matt complexion. Although ceruse was the highly preferred cosmetic among European women, especially from noble or royal status, due to its whitening properties without the need for heavy application, Pointer (2005) and Corson (2003) mention it was not only for severely ravaging the skin followed by other health problems such as poisoning and hair loss. Despite scientists and physicians warning against the use of ceruse, Sherrow (2001) stated some women continued to use it until rice powder was introduced during the 1700s as a safer and harmless substitute. During the reign of Queen Victoria when tanned skin was the sign of a lowly status or a negative connotation associated with the term 'temptress', Phelan (2002) wrote women would preserve or achieve the pale complexion by not only avoiding household tasks which required toiling under the sun but also carrying parasols, wearing bonnets and gloves, and some resorting to smaller doses of arsenic. Dadie and Petit (2009) add that radiation therapy had been advocated by some American physicians during 1900s. However, like ceruse during pre-Victorian times, the use of arsenic and radiation therapy also left side-effects that affected the users' health (Dadie and Petit, 2009).

From the colonisation era in the 1800s and the present, Hunter (2002) and Glenn (2008) write that women of colour, especially from Africa and many parts of Asia, are oppressed by the European ideals of beauty where dark or tanned skin is often associated with primitiveness, lack of sophistication, hard labour and lower social status. Whereas, fair skin is not only a symbol of beauty but also is associated with better employment and marital prospects (Dadie and Petit, 2009). Shankar and Subish (2007) and Leong (2006) agree that the greater preference for fair or 'white' skin in both post-colonial African and Asian societies is a colonial legacy where advertisements and skin-lightening products feature pale-skinned celebrities and models which present a combination of traditional and Westernised visual signifiers to evoke sophistication and purity. Glenn (2008) provides an example of a Malaysian television advertisement that shows a college student feeling despaired because she could not get the attention of a boy in her class due to her dark complexion. As a result, the female character in the advertisement uses Pond's lightening moisturiser which not only made her "several shades lighter" (p. 298) but also catches the attention of that male classmate. At present, Ashikari (2005) and Chong (2005) state many non-Western women, especially from Asian communities, are resorting to skin-whitening cosmetics or beauty regimes, wearing masks and hats, and shielding themselves outdoors with umbrellas and long gloves in order to preserve or enhance their pale complexion.

Although skin lightening or 'whitening' products have been claimed or marketed to guarantee users that they will attain the pale and radiant complexion they desired, Easton (1998), Fuller (2006) and Olumide et. al. (2008) highlight numerous medical reports stating health-related complications arising from the use of skin lightening cosmetics, especially those which are not regulated by health officials and are often sold as bootleg products.

According to Dadie and Petit (2009) and Olumide et. al. (2008), hydroquinone and mercury are the most common ingredients found in many skin whitening or bleaching products which not only poison users but also left them with irreversible skin conditions. Fuller (2006) cites an example where Thai dermatologists have reported individuals ending up with leukoderma⁶ or ochronosis⁷ as a result of using bleaching or whitening agents containing hydroquinone. As a result, Fuller (2006) writes these skin conditions are not only irreversible and unsightly but also leave its sufferers with a lifelong of shame, loss of self-esteem and loss of opportunities in life. For example, in the case of a Thai nightclub singer, Panya, who lost her livelihood at a restaurant after she ends up with an irreversible skin condition on her face due to using an illegally produced bleaching lotion for two months (Fuller, 2006). Counter (2003) and Olumide et. al. (2008) write that mercury in skin-lightening creams and soaps not only cause neurological and kidney damage but also is responsible for discolouration of skin and nails resulting from prolonged use. Al-Saleh and Al-Doush (1997) add that it is also fatal to the development of the foetus by “affecting membrane function” (p. 124). Counter (2003) provides an example where a three-month-old infant was diagnosed having kidney, eye and blood disorders as a result of the mother using mercury-containing whitening products during and post-pregnancy. Therefore, Dadie and Petit (2009) not only believes that awareness on the dangers of skin whitening should be spread to the public via education and health campaigns but also Glenn (2008) concludes that individuals from non-Western societies are taught that beauty valorises every skin shade instead of upholding and internalizing the “white is right” values.

⁶ Leukoderma- An irreversible skin condition where the skin loses the ability to produce pigment resulting in patches of pink and/or brown.

⁷ Ochronosis- An appearance of dark patches on the skin which are difficult to be removed

According to Vannini and McCright (2004), enthusiasm towards tanned skin has varied across both time and space. Although tanned skin had been shunned and often associated with labour and humble origins as a result of toiling in the fields under the sun, Draelos (2002) states there are reports of Egyptians using burnt ochre and crushed beetle shells to adorn their faces as well as ancient human beings using burnt ashes to darken their skin. Like the modern fake tan sprays and tanning booths, recreational tanning was done occasionally during the olden eras. Tanned bodies became fashionable during the 1920s when renowned French designer, Coco Chanel, was photographed with a suntan (Sherrow, 2001). Eventually, it not only broke the ideal beauty of the delicate pallor among Westerners but also tanning became popular and began to signify the affluent lifestyle and good health.

Although numerous research having proven that premature aging and skin cancer are associated with tanning, Draelos (2002) says it still remains a popular practice in the modern age where bronzed skin is highly prized. Sherrow (2001) states that a variety of creams, sprays and lotions are manufactured to be used on the face and body to give a temporary tan without facing the risk of a sunburn. Vannini and McCright (2004) add that the popularity of tanned skin is fuelled further by the emergence of tanning booths and salons during the 1980s in Western countries. However, Draelos (2002) argues tanning from an artificial tanning booth does pose the same risk as prolonged natural sun exposure which is ignored by many individuals. Rawe and Scully (2006) agree by stating that doctors and dermatologists voice their concerns towards increasing melanoma rates, especially among adolescents and young adults, due to the growing popularity of indoor tanning.

As the popularity of the tanned body remains, especially among Western youths, authors such as Kornblum (2004) and Nolan, Taylor, Liguori and Feldman (2009) state tanning addiction or tanorexia is on the increase amongst those who frequent tanning salons or lie under the sun. Although Kornblum (2004) writes that tanorexia is not a diagnosable medical condition, Phillips et. al. (2006) argue that tanorexia or BDD⁸-related tanning is a severe disorder which is defined as a preoccupation with one's complexion where the sufferer thinks he or she is too pale or not tanned enough when actually the individual is normal. As a result, tanorexics⁹ resort to frequent use of tanning salons or lying under the sun to darken "pale" skin colour. Rawe and Scully (2006) support Phillips et. al. (2006) by citing a survey that states more women are reported to be using tanning beds on a regular basis to not only maintain their tanned complexions all year-around but also to emulate famous tanned celebrities like Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson. Although, tanorexia is considered as a BDD-related disorder, Feldman (2006, cited by Burton, 2006) cites a study conducted on frequent tanners which explains the reason why individuals become addicted to tanning that are due to cutaneous endorphins being produced when one is exposed under the UV¹⁰ rays. When the endorphins are released into a tanner's system, Feldman (2006, cited by Burton, 2006) describes how it leaves him or her feeling relaxed or experience a positive mood change after a tanning session. Similar to a drug, UV-induced endorphins are reported to reinforce tanning addiction among frequent tanners.

Although Draelos (2002) says a tan remains fashionable in modern Western society, Counter (2003) states that lying under the sun or in a tanning bed in a pursuit of a bronzed

⁸ BDD- Body dysmorphic disorder

⁹ Tanorexics- Sufferers of tanorexia or BDD-related tanning

¹⁰ UV- Ultraviolet

complexion is as hazardous as one using skin-whitening products, to achieve the delicate pallor. Therefore, there is a need to not only educate individuals that they are as beautiful as they are regardless whether they have a natural pallor or a beautiful tan but also an effort to counteract overrepresentations of tanned bodies as the ideal beauty at media and societal levels.

Body hair and hair removal methods

Toerien and Wilkinson (2003) cite Synott's (1993) statement that body hair reflects the cultural and social distinctions between femininity and masculinity throughout ancient and modern societies in both Eastern and Western contexts. Sherrow (2001) adds that attitudes towards female body hair vary from place to place where some societies considered certain parts of body hair as a sign of unattractiveness or a sign of poor personal grooming. In addition, Toerien and Wilkinson (2003) write how female body hair has not only been associated with female wantonness or a lack of femininity but also was linked with insanity and witchcraft during the olden eras. For example, Ferrante (1988, cited by Toerien and Wilkinson, 2003) describes during the Middle Ages in France, it was common for women caught in witch-hunts to be shaven by interrogators who believed that body hair represented strength and protection through black magic and the devil. However, some societies have positive views towards female body hair, for example, European Jews considered female body hair to be a sign of good luck during the medieval times (Sherrow, 2001). Like the European Jews, the unibrow connoted wisdom to the ancient Greeks whilst Halprin (1995) writes the Kenyans consider women's facial hair as a sign of family honour. Moreover, removing body hair was once deemed immoral by conservatives due to women's bodies which were not on public display (Toerien and Wilkinson, 2003).

In the modern age, hairlessness and depilation is strongly normative for women in contemporary societies. Basow and Braman (1998) and Labre (2002) state that many women of today resort to various hair removal methods to not only enable them to adhere to the ideal of feminine beauty but also hairlessness is associated with social and economic advancement. However, Toerien, Wilkinson and Choi (2005) argue that body hair removal for women originates from different cultures ranging from Ancient Egypt to India and the Middle East. Therefore, depilation is shown to be neither modern nor purely a Western trend. According to Sherrow (2001), the use of wax for depilation at home or beauty salons in contemporary societies could be dated back to the Ancient Egyptians where women used warm liquid wax to create a clean look on certain parts of their bodies.

Before do-it-yourself hair removal creams, shaving products, chemical depilatories and electrolysis devices are available today, different depilation methods existed since wax was introduced by the Egyptians. Basow (1991) reports that women in Ancient Rome used hot tar and razor sharp shells, similar to today's modern shavers and hair removal creams, to remove body hair. One of the most ancient but popular hair removal methods created many centuries ago is threading or sometimes known as 'khite' in the Middle East or 'fatla' to the Egyptians (Verma, 2008). According to Verma (2008), threading, now growing in popularity in Western societies, is used to either give the eyebrow an aesthetically pleasing shape or remove unwanted facial hair involving the beautician's speed and precision. Threading is done where the beautician holds one end of a cotton thread in her mouth and holds the eyebrow or facial hairs between the string, which is wound around the beautician's fingers like a loop. The thread is looped around a few hair shafts and then the hairs are removed with brisk movements in an instance.

According to Sherrow (2001), one depilation method is used by many women to not only allow them to fit the hairless ideal but also to permanently rid of unwanted hairs around their face, brows and certain parts of their bodies. The method known as electrolysis was devised by Charles E. Michel during the 1800s which involved inserting an electrified fine needle into a hair follicle and allowing electrical currents to destroy the individual hair at the root. After a successful experimentation, Sherrow (2001) adds Michel developed improved and safer methods for electrolysis which eventually led to women seeking the inventor for permanent depilation treatments. Although electrolysis is considered as the most effective method for permanent body hair removal, it can be time-consuming, uncomfortable and costly.

Although Labre (2002) writes that body hair removal is one of the routines of beautification where women attempt to fulfil the ideal of feminine beauty or to preserve and/or restore femininity, Sherrow (2001) and Chapkis (1986, cited by Labre, 2002) argue that hair removal has been controversial like other grooming practices where it is not only a reflection of demands from a patriarchal-dominated culture but also deemed as time-consuming, repetitive and subjugate women into a narrow beauty ideal. Therefore, Toerien and Wilkinson (2003) believe the inevitability of the norm of hairlessness is an issue we not only question but also challenge the “restrictive construction of the feminine woman” (p. 343).

Teeth and cosmetic dentistry

Sherrow (2001) writes teeth in the ancient and contemporary eras not only signify youth and good health, which are the desirable traits in seeking the perfect mate, but also as symbols for higher economic and social status. In addition, Nalbandian and Millar (2009) states the appearance of the human teeth, ranging from colour to alignment, have been an important indicator to facial attractiveness. Throughout many eras, teeth have not only been subjected to being adorned and chiselled into particular shapes but also various treatments have been available to alter, clean, repair and replace teeth (Sherrow, 2001).

According to Corson (2003) and Sherrow (2001), oral health could be dated back to the ancient Egyptians and Romans where physicians learnt to not only treat swollen gums and tooth decay but also developed teeth fillings using enamel and gold. During the Elizabethan era, which Corson (2003) writes where a lack of proper dental care was common, tiny wax balls called puffers were used by Englishwomen of nobility status to maintain the shape of their cheeks due to their missing back teeth (Sherrow, 2001). Compared to the past, modern-day dentistry has improved tremendously where individuals are not only educated on the importance of oral health but also provide them opportunities to whiten, shape or straighten their teeth to not only enhance their smiles but also enable them to possess beautiful teeth like what are often seen through media and advertising.

Bloom and Padayachy (2006) believe with cosmetic dentistry, it is possible to not only rehabilitate functionally compromised dentition but also aesthetically transform an individual's teeth to enable patients to preserve or regain their smiles. Sherrow (2001) agrees by stating how the perception towards teeth colour varies between cultures and

societies. Although teeth with white or natural shades are considered beautiful in the contemporary viewpoint, it was considered unattractive in some ancient eras. For example, Japanese women during the Heian era (794-1185) practiced ohaguro, the act of blackening their teeth, with a concoction of powdered iron fillings and water or vinegar. Hattab, Qudeimat and Al-Rimawi (1999) believe the practice of ohaguro was done to not just prevent oral decay but also to signify the women had come of age or to artfully hide their mouth expressions. Ai, Ishikawa and Seino (1965, cited by Hattab et. al, 1999) provide scientific evidence that ohaguro-treated teeth are resistant against demineralization of the enamel. Sherrow (2001) provides a similar example where Egyptians considered red teeth, tinted with ochre, to be appealing.

However, to possess white teeth is now considered attractive, healthy and a sign of proper oral hygiene. Modern dentistry now offer veneers which make it possible for a dental patient to cosmetically achieve the desired white shade and particular teeth shape resembling a celebrity's smile seen in fashion and beauty magazines. In addition, Sherrow writes (2001) teeth whitening also range between the use of baking soda and tooth powder as home remedies to the bleaching procedure offered in dental clinics. Ritter (2002) and Sherrow (2001) add teeth whitening is now offered in forms of tooth-whitening toothpastes and customised whitening trays. However, dental experts and critics have reported the use of teeth whitening or bleaching products, whether excessively or improperly, is harmful to the enamel which not only causes tooth sensitivity or severe decay but also the repairs on damages are costly. Therefore, Bloom and Padayachy (2006) suggest value and safety of the oral patient are to be done with care where cosmetic dentistry is performed by a dental

professional which will not only maintain the health of one's teeth but also guarantees continuous patient satisfaction.

Hair: Dyeing and permanent styling

Although hair does not have vital functions on the human body, Harrison and Sinclair (2004) believe it plays a role in an individual's self-image against a backdrop of cultural and societal views. Rosenthal (2004) writes hair is also associated with transformative life experiences such as coming-of-age rites of passage. For example, young Wayana Indian females in South America cut their hairs to mark a transition from childhood to adulthood (Sherrow, 2001). Hair has been styled and manipulated to enable individuals to fulfil the dictates of fashion and feminine beauty in both historical and contemporary eras. For example, during the Elizabethan era, Sherrow (2001) explains how some European women would pluck their hairlines in order to emulate the high foreheads of the noble women from the royal courts of England, France and Holland. However, hair also symbolises rebellion against societal norms such as the popularity of the hippies' long, untamed hair in the 1970s or the flappers' short haircuts of the 1920s (Synott, 1987; Sherrow, 2001).

The hair grooming industry of the present is now one of the largest beauty industries since hair adornments and grooming rituals were introduced during ancient times (Sherrow, 2001). From dyeing to styling hair into having straight locks or beautiful curls, Harrison and Sinclair (2004) says one is not only enable to have the desired hair colour or style which represents one's individuality or fulfil the ideals of attractiveness, but also the wearer is subjecting her hair to changes that alter its physical properties. Therefore, researchers and manufacturers have been conducting studies and seeking new ideas to improve hair care

and grooming products, for home and in beauty salons, to fulfil consumers' growing demands for hair-styling items which could not only maintain their hair regularly in daily life but also improve the texture and condition of their hair (Sherrow, 2001). For example, the introduction of safer but advanced permanent straightening chemicals made it possible for women to attain permanently straightened locks from home or in the salon without any irritation on the scalp (de Sá Dias, Baby, Kaneko and Robles Velasco, 2007).

Harrison and Sinclair (2004) writes that hair dyes are used to not only change one's natural colour but also to cover greying hairs. Use of hair dyes can be dated back to the ancient Mesopotamian and Persian empires where botanical ingredients such as walnut hull extract, camomile and henna were used to darken or brighten one's hair (Sherrow, 2001). Sherrow (2001) adds that other common substances such as wine, roots and later, chemicals such as lead and sulphur powder had been experimented with to highlight, lighten or darken their hair. However, the use of lead and sulphur powder as dyes in the 1600s had been reported to cause negative side effects such as poisoning, nose bleeds, and death (Sherrow, 2001).

Like clothes, preferences towards hair colour and dyeing varied throughout human history. Pitman (2003) gives an example where during the early Roman era, to have dyed blonde hair or to sport a blonde wig was always negatively associated with prostitution. However, by the twentieth century, blonde hair began to be associated with youth and sex appeal due to the popularity of blonde celebrities such as Jean Harlow, Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe (Pitman, 2003; Sherrow, 2001). As a result, many women began to bleach or lighten their hairs in order to emulate the lighter shades popularised by these actresses. Therefore, Sherrow (2001) believes to dye one's hair is not just a beauty trend which paves

an opportunity for individuals to copy the hair colour of renowned celebrities and models but also to express one's individuality.

Although Harrison and Sinclair (2004) believe that modern synthetic dyes are created to be safer and long-lasting than its predecessors, Patlak (1993) argues that many critics question the safety of hair dyes. In addition, a recent FDA¹¹ report not only states that the ingredients of modern hair dyes are derived from petroleum sources but also associated with allergy reactions and increasing rates of cancer (Patlak, 1993; Sherrow, 2001). Despite the safety of the hair dyes being questioned in relation to health issues, Patlak (1993) concludes that researchers and consumer experts alike continue to monitor and study the safety of hair-dye ingredients. In addition, scientists have warned women against the use of hair dyes during pregnancy to avoid possible birth defects or other problems affecting fetal development. Therefore, consumers have to proceed with caution and make considerations when they select or use hair dyes throughout their lifetime (Patlak, 1993).

Throughout many eras, curls and straight hair have gone in and out of fashion where women have tried pomades and other methods to create curls or straighten their locks. According to de Sà Dias et. al (2007) and Sherrow (2001), permanent styling was introduced in the early twentieth century which finally enable women to achieve longer lasting curls or iron-straight hair today. Harrison and Sinclair (2004) define permanent styling as a chemical process of altering the structure of the hair shaft so that the new hair shape will remain the same throughout several washes until it grows out. As a result of using permanent styling chemicals, women are encouraged to subject their hair to the process of straightening or curling at their will (de Sà Dias et. al, 2007).

¹¹ FDA- Food and Drug Administration

Although permanent styling has made it possible for women to achieved the hairstyles they desire, Robinson (1976) and Harrison and Sinclair (2004) argues that it is harmful to both hair and scalp health. For example, de Sà Dias et. al. (2007) state how some permanent styling chemicals not only irritate to the scalp but also are capable of damaging the hair until it is dry and prone to breakage. Therefore, the importance of cautiously selecting a product suitable for the consumer depends on not just the hair texture but also differing reaction towards them during the process of straightening or curling. However, Jeffreys (2005) believes that permanent styling, especially straightening, has been labelled as a harmful beauty practice which “creates an impossible goal of emulating whiteness” (p. 113) for black women since the early 1900s through advertising and social attitudes. Etcoff (1999) explains this attitude prevailed until a Black Pride movement in 1960s America encouraged women of African descent to take pride in their heritage and non-Western beauty by embracing their dreadlocks and afros. As a result, hair care products for African women were introduced into the mainstream Western market. Therefore, it shows that hair is not just both a physiological phenomenon and a social distinction but also it is a symbol of self and a mode of individuality (Synott, 1987).

Female genital cutting and female genital cosmetic surgery

Toubia (1995) writes that certain surgical procedures in many civilizations have been symbolised as either a religious or ethnic identity that plays a role in the socio-political history of a group (Toubia, 1995). For example, male circumcision which is significantly linked to Muslim and Jewish cultures. Female genital cutting (FGC), also known as infibulation or female circumcision, is a traditional procedure which involves the process of partial or total removal of the external female genitalia (Morison et. al. 2001; Oldfield

Hayes, 1975). Despite a great attempt to eradicate female genital cutting, Toubia (1995) and Cook, Dickens and Fathalla (2002) maintain that female genital cutting remains prevalent today not only in many African countries but also among African immigrant communities in developed Western countries such as Sweden, France and United States. Tabrizi (2004) provides an example of a recent case where an American man of Ethiopian origin was criminally charged for circumcising his two-year-old daughter with a pair of scissors.

Although Toubia (1995) says female genital cutting is commonly practiced when a female child is at her infancy or pre-pubescent stage, Tabrizi (2004) argues that adult African women are often socially coerced into this cultural but dangerous practice to not only improve the aesthetic attractiveness of the vagina but enable them to become marketable for marriage where chastity and modesty are highly-valued. Mackie (1996) adds how the practice of female genital cutting (FGC) serves as a proof of a woman's virginity, thereby, fuelling the belief that it "secures fidelity by reducing a woman's desire" (p. 1004). Morison et. al. (2001) quote a 2000 report that states around 130 million women worldwide have undergone FGC and about 2 million girls and women a year are subjected to such operations. Moreover, this procedure is performed on children and women by traditional practitioners under non-sterile conditions and the absence of painkillers and anaesthetics (Mackie, 1996; Morison et. al, 2001; Tabrizi, 2004). Tabrizi (2004) gives an example where an eight-year-old girl is subjected to FGC would be accompanied by celebrations and other possible negative effects which could affect her well-being ranging from blood-borne diseases to death.

Morison et. al. (2001) and Cook et. al (2002) describe FGC as an unethical and illegal practice which seeks to not only harm women's health but as a manifestation of gender inequality and the pressure placed onto girls to fulfil the definition of the ideal womanhood. Toubia (1995) criticizes FGC as the female equivalent to the amputation of the penis which denies a woman her right to sexuality and reproductive rights. In addition, there are numerous reports that proven female genital cutting does not enhance female fertility or improve infant survival during childbirth. Toubia (1995) and Mackie (1996) explain that health consequences from FGC are usually severe where females are not only vulnerable to septicaemia ¹², severe pain or death but also face long-term complications such as urinary tract infections, painful intercourse, infertility and childbirth difficulties. In addition, Toubia (1995) provides an example of her clinical experience in Sudan where psychological trauma, including chronic anxiety and depression, are evident among females who undergone infibulation.

Cook et. al. (2002) states that FGC is considered as not only as a violation of human rights but also as unlawful child abuse according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, the growing practice of female circumcision among African immigrant communities in United Kingdom between the late 1970s and 1980s has resulted the enactment of the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act in 1985. Therefore, it not only made female circumcision illegal but also calls for coalitions to abolish it (Toubia, 1995). However, Shell-Duncan (2001) highlights the issue of African immigrant communities demanding for harm reduction and medicalisation of FGC in their home or adopted

¹² Septicaemia- blood poisoning

countries. Gordon (1991, cited by Shell-Duncan), medical associations, and WHO¹³ argue that the incorporation of FGC into both local and global biomedical healthcare system not only undermines the elimination of the practice but also denies females the right to keep their bodies safe from any harmful practice which could threaten their health and well-being. Tabrizi (2004) concludes that bans and laws are insufficient in tackling the issue of FGC and Cook et. al. (2002) believe that education to communities is useful in helping to protect the rights and well-being of women from the damaging consequences of female circumcision.

As African female genital cutting is believed to improve the aesthetic attractiveness of the female genital (Tabrizi, 2004), Green (2005) writes that Western female genital cosmetic surgery, or FGCS, have given women the opportunity to “remodel their labias and vaginas to a standard feminine ‘perfection’” (p. 170). Unlike female genital cutting, Essen and Johnsdotter (2004) believe that FGCS is done to emulate the ‘designer vagina’ which is influenced by pornography and provocative fashion advertising. However, surgeons argue that FGCS is done to improve women’s genital sexual function due to heightened expectations for pleasure (Braun, 2005, cited by, Tiefer, 2008).

According to Tiefer (2008), FGCS first appeared in 1998 when two Los Angeles surgeons publicised procedures that focussed on enhancing “vulvar appearance and orgasmic functions” (p. 467). Although FGCS is often used by women with congenital conditions such as intersex, Lloyd, Crouch, Minto, Liao and Creighton (2005) believe many women undergo this procedure to achieve the ‘designer vagina’ with the belief that her genitals are not normal or ideal. In a patriarchal culture where women are trained to notice their

¹³ WHO- World Health Organization

genitalia more, Zawadi (2000, cited by Jeffreys, 2005) agrees that they reveal their self-consciousness about the presumed ugliness of the female genitals. Like female genital cutting, Western female genital cosmetic surgery can lead to risks such as scarring, difficulties in sexual functioning, discomfort, loss of sensation and over-tightening of the vaginal opening.

Branded as a Western cultural hypocrisy and being questioned about its legality (Braun, 2009), Jeffreys (2005) adds that FGCS is also the act of “carving the genitals of pornography onto women’s bodies” (p. 86) and can possibly be as damaging as African female genital cutting. Essen and Johnsdotter (2004) conclude that there is a need to not only highlight the issue of women holding beliefs towards the ideal female genital but also stress the dangers and double standard of African FGC and Western FGCS.

Wigs and hair extensions

The use of wigs and hairpieces can be dated back to the ancient Egyptian and Roman eras where both men and women have worn them for personal adornment, disguise or religious reasons (Sherrow, 2001; Corson, 2003). However, wigs in ancient China and Japan were only used for theatrical purposes such as stage operas. In addition, Fletcher (2002) states that wigs were also used for hygiene reasons when hair was frequently plagued by parasitic infestation such as lice. Sherrow (2001) argues that wigs sometimes were a health and safety hazard. For example, during the late 1700s in France, heavier and taller wigs had been reported to cause the wearers to sustain sores on their heads and sometimes, skin abscesses¹⁴ on the scalp due to a lack of hygiene. Sherrow (2001) writes that most wigs from ancient eras were not just obtained from humans through slavery or the selling of

¹⁴ Abscesses- Painful swellings containing pus

hairs of living or dead individuals but also from horses and other animals. Compared to its modern versions which are made from vinyl and other synthetic materials, earlier wigs were made from organic materials ranging from grass to plant fibres. Furthermore, Sherrow (2001) explains whilst ancient wigs were dyed in natural hues with the use of indigo and henna, modern wigs now come in a variety of shades ranging from natural black to bright pink.

Other than being used as a personal adornment, Sherrow (2001) writes that wigs also signified social class. For example, between the medieval and Elizabethan era, European lower class individuals wore bushy wigs with a centre part known as a minor bob. Whereas, the upper-class could afford to have wigs which were powdered in pastel coloured scented powders or adorned with gems and hairpins. However, Sherrow (2001) explains that wigs have been in and out of socio-political controversies throughout the 1700s in Europe. For example, prior to the French revolution (1789), powdered wigs were a political issue where many French people were going hungry due to commoners and the nobility hoarding flour to use on their wigs. As a result, laws were passed in Europe which required people using powdered wigs to pay a special annual tax which cost about one guinea or more to tackle the misuse of flour to powder hairpieces.

Although wigs have remained popular in both Western and non-Western cultures for theatrical purposes or to cover thinning hair, hair extensions have been growing in popularity and are often seen on famous young celebrities such as Mischa Barton and Victoria Beckham. However, Fletcher (2002) argues that hair extensions existed during the ancient Egyptian era, as early as 3400 B.C, where false braids or curls were woven into hair to artificially lengthen or thicken hair. For example, the Egyptian queen, Meryet-Amun,

was reported to have tapered braids woven onto some parts of her head to create a 'top-heavy' effect which was fashionable during her reign (Fletcher, 2002). Similar to the use of slaves' blonde hair for creating wigs for patrician women in the Roman era, Berry (2008) says modern hair extensions are made of human hair or 'virgin' hair, which has never been chemically treated or dyed, that originally come from China, India and some parts of the former Soviet blocs. However, hair extensions are also made of synthetic fibres, such as rayon and vinyl, or "a combination of human hair and synthetic materials" (Sherrow, 2001, p. 269). Sherrow (2001) writes that hair extensions are not only available in beauty salons but can also be attached at home with the use of snap-on clips or created with the use of do-it-yourself kits with "the help of manuals and videos" (p. 269).

Despite hair extensions increasing in popularity due to its more natural look or its ability to remain on the wearer's head for weeks or months through wear and tear, Yang, Iorizzo, Vicenzi and Tosti (2009) explain that hair extensions, especially for long-term use or applied on due to the lack of safety procedures in beauty salons or at home, can be harmful to both the scalp and natural hair of the wearer. Based on a recent study, Yang et. al. (2009) state that wearers are not only susceptible to acute hair loss but also to acute allergic dermatitis of the scalp due to the glue and other chemicals used for attaching or removing hair extensions. Therefore, long-term use of hair extensions are not only discouraged but also Yang et. al. (2009) stress that application of hair extensions should be done based on health and safety precautions.

Double eyelids and Asian blepharoplasty

Like how pale skin is considered a beauty ideal among Asians, Liao, Tung, Tsai, Wang and Lin (2005) explain double eyelids in Asia are always considered desirable and more appealing than single eyelids which are often perceived to be unattractive. In addition, Liao et. al. (2005) provides an example of how an individual with single eyelids in East Asia is often misunderstood to be unsuccessful both in one's social life and at work. As a result, individuals with single eyelids would result to using adhesive tape to create temporary, artificial double eyelids (Zane, 2003). Kruavit (2009) describes the tape to be small and elliptically-shaped, usually transparent or skin-coloured, and can be found in most Asian shops under different brand names such as Koji and Eye Charm. However, Chua (1982) states that some individuals are willing to “do away with the tedious process” (p. 221) of taping their eyelids by relying on Asian blepharoplasty to attain the desired eyelids permanently. According to Kruavit (2009), the purpose of this surgical procedure is to “enhance the Asian eyes” (p. 273).

Chua (1982) and Liao et. al. (2005) write that Asian blepharoplasty, usually known as double eyelid surgery, is the most popular cosmetic surgery procedure in both Asia and East Asian communities in Western countries. Kang, Koo, Choi and Park (2000) and Kobrin (2004) define the procedure of Asian blepharoplasty involving the “surgical creation of a suprapalpebral fold by supratarsal fixation” (p. 1884) by stitching a permanent crease into the eyelids. Double-eyelid surgery usually lasts between thirty minutes to an hour where it involves the incision method with the use of catgut or nylon to create the superior palpebral folds (Kruavit, 2009; Chua, 1982). Kang et. al. (2000) add that a non-incision stitch technique such as the use of laser is another popular method which intends to

“minimize intraoperative haemorrhage” (p. 1884) than the scalpel technique. Although Asian blepharoplasty aims to help clients to achieve the desired aesthetic outcome, Codner (2004) and Kruavit (2009) state that the cosmetic surgery often comes with postoperative complications such as ptosis¹⁵ and scarring which require elliptical skin excision and scar revision respectively.

Like how their Western counterparts usually opt for liposuction or breast augmentation, Kaw (1993) states Asian women undergo the Asian blepharoplasty procedure to not only enhance their ‘natural Asian beauty’ by widening their eyes but also are “motivated by the need to look their best as women” (p. 75). Chua (1982) agrees by stating the growing affluence within Asian societies and the influences of both Japanese and Western culture and fashion fuel individuals’ desire to attain double eyelids. In addition, double eyelids are highly sought after by individuals working in the entertainment industry (Chua, 1982). However, Zane (2003) argues the use of double eyelid surgery has been criticised by Western liberals as “unnatural and self-hating” (p. 357). Wong (2004, cited by Kobrin, 2004) agrees by considering Asian blepharoplasty as self-mutilation which denies Asian cultural pride and encourages Asian women to accept a non-Asian based beauty myth due to pressure from the older generation and the reinforcements of the ideal beauty projected via media and advertising. Therefore, Halprin (1995) and Wang (2004, cited by Kobrin, 2004) states the importance of Asian women appreciating themselves instead of conforming to the Western beauty ideal which represents a limited standard of beauty.

¹⁵ Ptosis- Drooping of the eyelid

Botox and anti-ageing products

Although ageing is a normal process bodies experience, many individuals of the past and present attempt to “defy the signs of aging” (p. 71) with anything from black bituminous muds and milk to chemical peels and cosmetic surgery (Caputo, 1996; Singh, Hankins, Dulku and Kelly, 2006). In the contemporary beauty market, hundreds of anti-ageing products are marketed to fade skin discolouration, reduce redness, rejuvenate skin and diminish fine lines (Choi and Berson, 2006). With the growing demand for the modern-day ‘elixir of youth’ now available over the counter in supermarkets and departmental stores, Carmichael (2009) reports the global anti-ageing product market is predicted to not only “reach US\$115.4 billion by 2010” (p. 24) but also targets younger consumers before the “signs of ageing set in” (p. 24) when they enter their thirties and forties. For example, Dr. Lewinn’s Pureessence skincare range which is targeted to female consumers in their late teens and twenties. Sarrabayrouse (2002) adds that cosmetic surgeons and beauty experts have attempted to find a safe, non-surgical method to correct facial wrinkles without having to spend hours or a night at a surgeon’s office.

Singh and Kelly (2003) explain that botox is a “purified crystalline form of exotoxin type A produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*” (p. 273) that became well established in 1992 as the ‘elixir of youth’ of the modern cosmetic industry. According to a 2007 American report, an estimated US\$3 billion dollars are spent on botulinum toxin type A (Botox) and other injectable facial fillers which are renowned to have “long lasting improvement of facial wrinkles” (Niamtu, 2009, p.13). Botox is usually injected into the forehead, lip and eye area to eliminate fine lines and crow’s feet respectively. As a result, Niamtu (2009) says the effect of Botox leaves the face lacking in facial expressions or

appearing 'frozen'. Therefore, the facial muscles experience temporary muscle paralysis. However, Sarrabayrouse (2002) explains the paralysis is temporary due the nerves being "replaced by neurogenesis¹⁶" (p. 233) with 6 to 8 months of the injection. Despite being renowned for its availability in many cosmetic surgeons' offices or its ability to mask the signs of aging from a syringe, Klein (2004) and Niamtu (2009) notes Botox, like other injectable fillers, often comes with complications such eyelid or lip ptosis, bruising and rarely, "irreversible histologic changes in muscles that have been injected" (p. 68). However, Botox is an effective and safe cosmetic treatment for facial wrinkles when it is used properly to minimise the incidence of post-injection complications (Klein, 2004).

As Ring (2002) believes 'anti-ageing' is a powerful marketing tool of the contemporary beauty industry, Kumar (2005) and Carmichael (2009) writes that anti-aging is "big business" (p. 24) for cosmeceuticals and aging baby boomer consumers. However, regulators and experts question whether anti-ageing products should be tested and licensed like medicines. In addition, Thornfeldt (2005) and Carmichael (2009) state how regulatory agencies also question claims made by cosmeceuticals regarding the efficiency of their anti-ageing products as well as the safety of the ingredients, especially chemicals and botanicals, used to manufacture their creams and serums. As skincare products always play a role in tackling the signs of aging, Caputo (1996) concludes that consumers "must be under no illusions about their real functions" (p. 22).

¹⁶ Neurogenesis- The production of new neurons (nerves)

Theoretical Framework

Entwistle (2000) writes that sex and gender are often conflated to appear as ‘natural’ and having a link between them. However, Oakley (1976, cited by Entwistle, 2000) argues there is a distinction between the two terms. Sex is defined as the biological differences between a male and a female, for example, the difference in genitalia and other physiological differences. Wharton (2005) adds in another example of how male and female bodies differ from each other through chromosomal differences and hormonal production. However, sex does not define the traits for ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Whereas, gender is a matter of culture: the reference to social and cultural classifications in ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ (Oakley, 1976, as cited by, Entwistle, 2000). Gender is described by Wharton (2005) as “social understandings of what men and women are” (p. 20). Cialdini and Trost, (1999, cited by Mahalik, Morray, Coonerty-Fermiano, Ludlow, Slattery, and Smiler, 2005) adds that gender is a description of ‘rules and standards’ which guide and/or constrain social behaviour of an individual. For example, girls are taught that they must engage in practices that are considered ‘feminine’ in order to create a ‘sexual difference’ between themselves and the boys (Jeffreys, 2005). In addition, Burke (1996) believes with the power of gender role expectations, especially in a child’s world, a boy knows he must not wear pink whilst a girl understands that playing with boys’ games would mean disapproval from many including their peers.

Although masculinity and femininity are believed to be internalized sex roles via social learning, Connell (1995) argues that they can be changed by social processes or reforms such as media and education. Entwistle (2000) believes that not all cultures agree on the characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Mead’s (1935, cited by Entwistle, 2000)

study demonstrates repeatedly on how other cultures, for example Pacific cultures, interpret sex and 'make-up' gender. Entwistle (2000) provides another example on Stoller's (1968) study about hermaphrodites¹⁷ and transsexuals which proposes that the acquisition of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is not 'natural' or 'biological' but a result of socialization such as parental and socio-cultural expectations. For example, the 'third gender' in Polynesian cultures such as the *fa'afafine*¹⁸ shows "alternative ways of thinking about the relationship between sexed bodies, gender and sexuality" (Holmes, 2009, p. 25). Therefore, it shows there is no "'natural' relationship between the biological categories of male and female and the socio-cultural characteristics of masculine and feminine" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 143). Connell (1995) concludes that we need to understand how masculinity and femininity affect the way men and women conduct themselves in gendered lives.

Mahalik et. al. (2005) believes that gender role norms not only provide guidance on how we are supposed to behave but also they are vital in fostering identity development in individuals. However, gender norms can create a strain for some women who are unable to fulfil the definitions of feminine and femininity especially in a consumer culture which focuses on body discipline and body maintenance (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer, 2004; Malacrida and Low, 2008). For example, amidst a Western culture which emphasizes on a feminine ideal body, physically active women are faced with a dilemma which contrasts with the athletic body. In a struggle to fulfil the definition of femininity, female athletes are expected to be not only strong, powerful and feminine but also possess toned bodies which are not "masculine-perceived" (Krane et. al, p. 317). Therefore, Krane et.al

¹⁷ Hermaphrodites- Individuals with characteristics of both sexes

¹⁸ Fa'afafine - From the Samoan literal phrase, "way of a woman", a biological male expressing feminine gender identity

(2004) believes sportswomen live in two 'cultures', the sport culture and the ideal culture where sports and social ideals clash. Jeffreys (2005) states that feminist theorists believe femininity is a politically constructed behaviour in which individuals are expected to use their bodies to define the behaviour of a subordinate social group.

For example, high heels and rouge are considered natural on women whilst they are ridiculous on men. The same applies to facial hair that is considered appropriate on males whereas it is considered unacceptable on females. Therefore, Cahill (2003) questions if feminine ideals and femininity impede women's "ability to function as equal, autonomous beings" (p. 43). Dozier (2005) concludes that doing gender involves a balance of performing masculinity and femininity rather than "performing appropriate masculinity or femininity" (p. 314) based on one's sex. Therefore, we cannot be held accountable for a gender performance based on our sex (West and Zimmerman, 1987, cited by Dozier, 2005).

Witz and Marshall (2003) believe that embodiment is rendered literally and metaphorically where it can individuate and create social forms such as femininity and masculinity. The body is a locus which is both relative to the individual in society and creates a hierarchy order between the sexes (Libbon, 2007). However, Keywood (2000) argues the body is a site for "potential reconfiguring of identity beyond the male/female, mind/body dualisms" (p. 320). The history of the human body as Libbon (2007) notes is also a history of medical research, political activism and sociology. Farganis (1986, cited by Libbon, 2007) believes the female body is "conceptualized on the basis masculine parameters that defines her not relative to a normative standard for women" (p. 79). As a result of the disembodied, masculine knowledge, the male body serves as a basis for metaphorical representations of the body which denies the relevance of women's bodies (Keywood, 2000). Giddens (1991,

cited by Budgeon, 2003) agrees the body is “mediated by constant projection” (p. 37) by mass media and open human intervention that serves to negate the feminine.

The female body is argued to have a material presence where biology stands within culture. Therefore the body is a medium of expression which is “heavily mediated by culture and expresses the social pressure brought on to bear on it” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 15). Other than dress and adornment, Keywood (2000) believes when a female body is presented as a biological fact, it is “situated as the object of medicine’s gaze” (p. 324) where it enters the medico-legal discourse which moulds our understanding of what it is to be female. According to Keywood (2000), the female body has not only been a signifier of volatility and fluidity but also “inextricably associated with the bodily secretions of female reproduction (menstruation and pregnancy)” (p. 320). In addition, Gillies et. al. (2004) believe the body is determined by its “appropriateness for the performance of social identities” (p. 105) such as gender-specific bodily practices, for example, sweating and pain. Therefore, culturally and context specific appropriateness can allow us to experience our bodies but at the same time “restrict or limit the possibility for bodily experiences” (Gillies et. al., 2004, p. 105).

Menstruation is not only described by Lee (1994) as a “biological act fraught with cultural implications” associated with the uterus (p. 343) but also Greenhill (1954, cited by Elson, 2002) says it is a badge of femininity that signals a woman’s biological tie with other women. Within many cultures and societies, especially in a heterosexist context, menarche signifies the simultaneous emergence of sexual availability and reproduction potential. When girl experiences menarche as a ‘transition’ from child to adolescent, Thorne (1993, cited by Lee, 1994) and Elson (2002) believes she not only “starts to negotiate the forces of

adult femininity” (p. 344) but also accepts menstruation as a “sense of cyclicity” (p. 43) throughout her life. Always considered as both a sign of entering womanhood and a symbol of female normativity, Elson (2002) questions whether the cessation of menstruation, for example experiencing menopause or undergoing hysterectomy, means the individual “is no more a woman” (p. 39). Although the cessation of menstruation is considered as a loss of femininity, Markovic, Manderson and Warren (2007) cite from a research where some women perceive the end of menstruation due to menopause or hysterectomy actually give them an embodied reliability that not only reaffirm their femininity but also put “an end to a biological and biomedical intrusion in their lives” (p. 474). Therefore, women not only demonstrate they are in control of their bodies but also hysterectomy and menopause do not have “universal effects” on women’s gender identity (Elson, 2002, p. 47).

According to Burke (1996), human appearance not only sends messages through the clothes we wear and our bodies but also it “affects the perception of masculinity and femininity” (p. 139). If we believe our clothes and bodies are the source of our identities, Burke (1996) questions if they are determinants for us to believe ourselves to be and others to perceive who we are. Therefore, we are often judged and constructed by others based upon “what people see on the surface” (Burke, 1996, p. 140). Numerous literature have underlined that the human appearance is not only about “developing the ability to construct a visual and strictly governed identity” (p. 75) but also plays a role in defining attractiveness (Frost, 1997; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001). Frost (1997) provides an example of where women are evaluated based on their bodies, such as hair colour and body shapes, as part of an appraisal of overall attractiveness against which all women are judged. Eicher (2001, cited by Jeffreys, 2001) questions why the use of overall attractiveness is used to not

only attract men's admiration but also secure their love and approval. The focus on the human appearance and attractiveness is considered as a challenge to the socially-constructed definitions of subjectivity "that privilege rationality to the exclusion of the body" (Cahill, 2003, p. 43).

As Kimmel (2000) says beauty and attractiveness are deeply engendered, Burke (1996) believes physical appearance can be "an indicator of sexuality as an equal opportunity disorder" (p. 178) where a feminine-appearing male and a 'masculine' female are not only perceived as sources of confusion but also are a threat to both masculinity and femininity. Therefore, the bipolar trap of the masculine and feminine is an obstacle from allowing us to experience our true identities. Whilst we are trying to fulfil the definition of masculinity and femininity, Burke (1996) states the Madonnas and David Bowies of the world are geniuses for creating and re-creating themselves by playing with gender cues and "crossing the gender barrier" (p. 140). Described as "infinitely plastic creatures" (p. 140), their deep understanding of the power of appearance enable them to not only reinvent themselves with their bodies and clothes but also control how others see them (Burke, 1996). As we watch the re-creation of those icons, Burke (1996) says we are not only witnessing an irony on gender identity based on the masculine and the feminine but also we question if anything about our bodies and clothing are objectively 'real'. Or is it a matter of style and our bodies that decide "who we believe ourselves to be and, who others believe we are?" (Burke, 1996, p.140).

Like the reinvention of Madonna and David Bowie, cross-dressing goes as far as "claiming that the mismatch of body and clothing is an 'instatement of metaphor' itself" (Garber, 1992, cited by Connell, 1995, p. 50). With the existence of cross-dressing in the past and

present, Halprin (1995) suggests that gender is not based on biology alone. Burke (1996) agrees that to cross-dress means to not only cross the gender barrier but also to “challenge the identity that society has dictated” (p. 145) and declare that one is not wholly determined by the powers outside oneself. As cross-dressing is believed to be a technique to establish contact with oneself as an individual, Burke (1996) believes men cross-dress to experience beauty and sensuality whilst their female counterparts want to experience power and authority. Flexibility is the key trait crucial to our psychological well-being in the postmodern world where we can “be capable of seeing beyond the surface characteristics of a person’s body” (Burke, 1996, p. 170).

As Miller and Levy (1996) state that participating in sports is primarily a “masculine activity” (p. 111), the participation of women in sports and bodybuilding has expanded for the past few decades. With more females getting involved in sports, sportswomen pose a challenge to the notions of female frailty (Lenskyi, 1994). Despite the participation of females in sports is hailed as both physical and gender equality which empower women and defy the frailty myth, Krane et. al. (2004) argues that female athletes often face a paradox where society’s feminine ideal contrasts with the sporting culture’s athletic body ideal. Therefore, a female athlete not only finds the existence of contradiction between her personal values and expectations and society’s ideal but also mixed messages sent towards the value of her athletic participation (Desertrain and Weiss, 1988). As a result, the conflict female athletes are facing not only affect their self-esteem, body image and self-presentation but also the issue of femininity and gender role appropriateness are questioned. With the fear of female physical power, Dowling (2000) believes the insecurities of men and society’s confusion towards gender and athleticism not only undermine women’s

abilities as athletes but also keep females “from entering sports in a serious way” (p. 199). However, female athletes are able to negotiate with femininity where they can redefine female bodies and reconcile with “the physical and physiological benefits” of sports which empower them within and outside the sports context (Krane et. al, 2004, p.328). Therefore, females’ participation in sports encourage female athletes to not only challenge the sportswoman myth but also choose “how the paradox of duelling” (p. 327) identities between society and the sports culture is lived through different gender and femininity performances.

Wall and Jones (1991, cited by Robinson et. al., 2001) writes that one in six adults is in pain in any moment. Many epidemiological data on pain studies indicate that women are more susceptible than men to chronic pain conditions such as menstrual pain (Aloisi, 2000, cited by Grace, 2004). However, Godfrey and Mackey (2008) argue that pain research has shifted beyond the debate whether “sex differences in pain exist to recognise the importance of these differences in managing pain” (p. 917). The study on pain is a medical specialty which Grace (2004) describes as embracing the notion of the ‘biopsychosocial model’ that could enable medical understandings of pain to not only acknowledge the psychosocial factors but also interact with “biomedically identifiable pathology” (p. 132). Therefore, the analysis on ‘sex differences’ are researched, understood and clinically acted to reveal the role of sex-gender distinction in health and medical research (Grace, 2004).

Women are often believed to have “lower pain thresholds and tolerance than men” (p. 918) due to being influenced by hormonal fluctuations followed by pharmacological and psychosocial ‘factors’ such as menstruation (Godfrey and Mackey, 2008). In addition, Godfrey and Mackey (2008) believe the differing social expectations for the expression of

pain or biological differences in the way noxious stimuli are processed to explain how men and women respond to pain. Grace (2004) believes the distinction between femininity and masculinity associated with pain would serve to establish the binary of biology/culture as well as “irreducibly embedded in the binary male/female” (p. 135). However, Robinson et. al (2000, cited by Grace, 2004) argues by citing a study that males have a high overall linear association with pain like their female counterparts. Therefore, it proves there is no consistency of sex differences in emotional response to pain (Robinson et. al., 2000 cited by Grace, 2004).

In contemporary society, being young or appearing youthful is considered a value where one’s appearance and body equates with beauty and the “desirability with youthfulness and slenderness” (Ogle and Damhorst, 2005, p. 1). However, Twigg (2004) states that aging is not a part of the fashionable and media-focussed representation of the human body. Aging is seen as a worrisome process of decay that must be controlled through diet, exercise and the use of skin creams (Ogle and Damhorst, 2005). Capanec and Payne (2000, cited by Grogan, 2008) note as women are expected to maintain youthfulness, they under constant pressure to “meet the cultural requirements of youth and femininity” (p. 150). The exclusion of the aged, particularly older women, reflect the gerontophobia of the wider culture (Arber and Ginn, 1991, cited by Twigg, 2004). Calasanti and King (2007) believe the depiction of agelessness not only fuels the anti-aging industry of modern society but also pressure individuals to “live up to the ideals of age and other social categories in their daily lives” (p. 358) as well as the standards of masculinity and femininity. Teuscher and Teuscher (2007) argue that studies by Laurence (1964) and Deutsch, Zalenski and Clark

(1986) have shown that older women are “judged more negatively than older men” (p. 631).

As a result of modernisation of urban societies, Sontag (1972, cited by Teuscher and Teuscher, 2007) believes the double standards of aging allow two standards of male beauty: boy and man, whilst females are allowed only one standard of female beauty: girl. With the ‘double standard’ of aging, many researchers note that aging men are considered ‘distinguished’ whereas signs of aging in females are “negatively seen both by others and themselves” (Grogan, 2008, p. 151). With the emphasis on youthfulness and physical beauty, Goodman (1994, cited by Hurd, 1999) states the cultural message on women spread via media and advertising “endorse a value system that preaches bodily perfection and deny women the right to age” (p. 422). In addition, the loss of women’s physical beauty and youthfulness are often equated with the loss of their social value (Lauzen and Dozier, 2005). Wolf (1990) provides an example of how airbrushing on females’ faces, especially aged individuals, in women’s magazines is considered as a form of censorship which “ignores older women or pretend they don’t exist” (p. 62).

Therefore, older females are not only underrepresented in the mainstream media but also are portrayed as ‘unattractive’ or ‘incapable’ (Ogle and Damhorst, 2005). Although older women are hardly portrayed in sexual roles, Grogan (2008) argues that older women are sometimes presented sexually on print and screen as long as they have a youthful appearance, for example, Susan Sarandon, or have had undergone aesthetic surgery to “make their bodies acceptable to a critical audience” (p. 152). In addition, Calasanti and King (2007) believe making youthfulness as the male and female beauty ideals reinforce ageism and gender inequality among aging individuals. The importance of exploring men’s

and women's experiences with aging would be vital to not only enable us to understand the aging process as an embodied experience but also dispel the social fears and myths associated with ageing (Graham and Kligman, 1985; Ogle and Damhorst, 2005). Hilhorst (2002) concludes that aging "implies neither beauty nor ugliness" (p. 20).

Spelman (1982) concludes that our bodies, male and female, are always unique and we cannot always "attend to the social significance attached to embodiment without recognizing" (p. 128) them. Our bodies not only play a role in our self-esteem, especially on our psychological and physical health, but also are fundamental to the male and female experience (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein and Strigel-Moore, 1986). Connell (1995) believes that a *re-embodiment* for men and women is needed to not just help individuals to find different ways of feeling and showing their bodies but also develop capacities of unique bodies other than those developed through sport and industrial labour only.

Methods

Participants

The participants were female respondents within and outside the premises of AUT in the Greater Auckland region. Each participant completed a questionnaire in relation to body image and feminine beauty. A total of 110 participants undertook the structured interview at the time of the study. The participants are from various ethnic and cultural groups: 38% were New Zealand Pakeha, 4% were Maori, 18% were of Pasifika background, 25% were Asians, 2% were Americans, 1% were Canadians, 2% were Australians, 1% were of Arabic background, 5% were South Africans, 3% were other Africans and 1% were of other Asian background. The participants ranged between 18 years and above: 79% of the respondents were aged 18-30 years, 13% percent were aged 31-40 years, 6% were aged 41-50 and 2% were aged 51 and above.

Procedure

Participants were enlisted for the research survey via an advertisement created by the researcher. Each participant was asked to complete a study questionnaire comprising of thirteen questions relating to body image and feminine beauty between ten to twenty minutes. Moreover, each participant was given the option to terminate the survey and the freedom to refuse to answer either question. Confidentiality and anonymity were granted to everyone who agreed to participate. Therefore, the privacy of the participants is protected under the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor where their names and other personal details were not written in the Study Analysis section of the thesis.

Qualitative methods versus quantitative methods

Qualitative methods within the research mainly focus on the collection of non-numerical data and also aim to focus on research participants' behaviour which describes one's thoughts and perceptions towards a particular issue. For example, the participants' perceptions towards femininity and feminine beauty in the survey. The most effective method in obtaining qualitative data is via interviewing or a research questionnaire. Whereas, quantitative methods concentrate on obtaining numerical data such as the number of participants and age groups in a research. In addition, quantitative methods often use statistics and graphs to obtain mathematical data, for example, pie charts.

For the research on women's perceptions towards femininity and feminine beauty, qualitative methods shall be used as qualitative data obtained are credible and reliable from the participants' perspectives. For example, a participant's belief that feminine beauty is universal and subjective throughout various cultures and societies. In addition, qualitative methods also emphasises on the importance of dependability where there is a need for the researcher to account for changes within the research which could influence both results and post-study analysis. Therefore, the author of the thesis is responsible for describing the changes which could affect the way the structured interview approaches the thesis topic.

In conclusion, qualitative methodology in any social sciences research is considered more effective in which the researcher is able to adapt to new developments throughout the study. Moreover, greater diversity in responses is encouraged where researchers are allowed to gather and document data in a more consistent manner.

Data Analysis

110 women from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and ranging between 18 years of age and above have participated in a structured interview which part of the thesis. The aim of the structured interview is to not only explore the issue of body and image dissatisfaction among women but also to investigate participants' personal opinions towards feminine beauty and body image issues they face daily in their lives. In addition, the structured interview provides participants the opportunity to voice out how the standardization or 'celebrification' of beauty can be detrimental to women's well-being and self-esteem. Exploring the well-known adage 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', all participants had the opportunity to not only name a well-known woman (e.g. celebrity, actress, sportswoman, etc.) whom they believe epitomizes feminine beauty but also explain what makes her beautiful.

Quantitative data

My 110 participants comprises of 3 of other African background, 2 Australians, 1 Canadian, 2 Americans, 27 Asians, 20 Pacific Islanders, 5 of Maori background, 35 New Zealand Pakeha, 1 of Arab background, 6 South Africans and 1 of other Asian background.

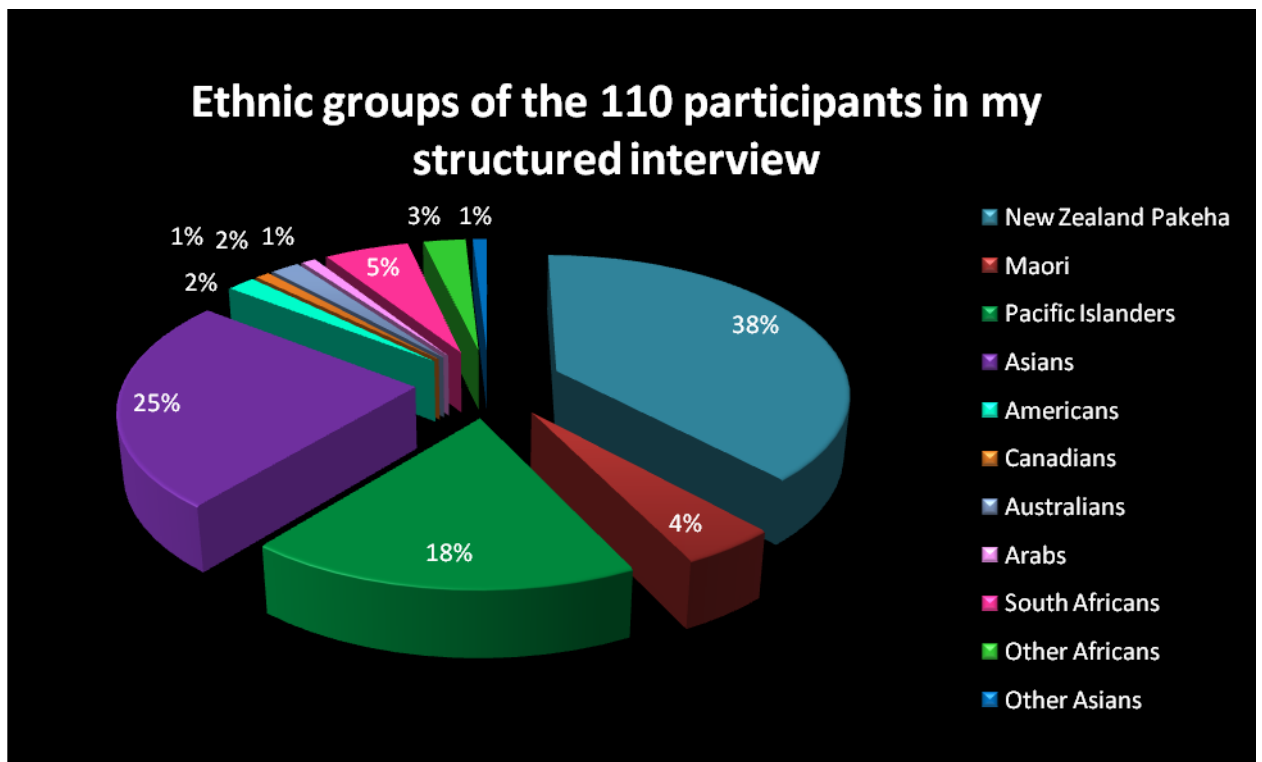


Figure 1: Ethnic groups of 110 participants in my structured interview

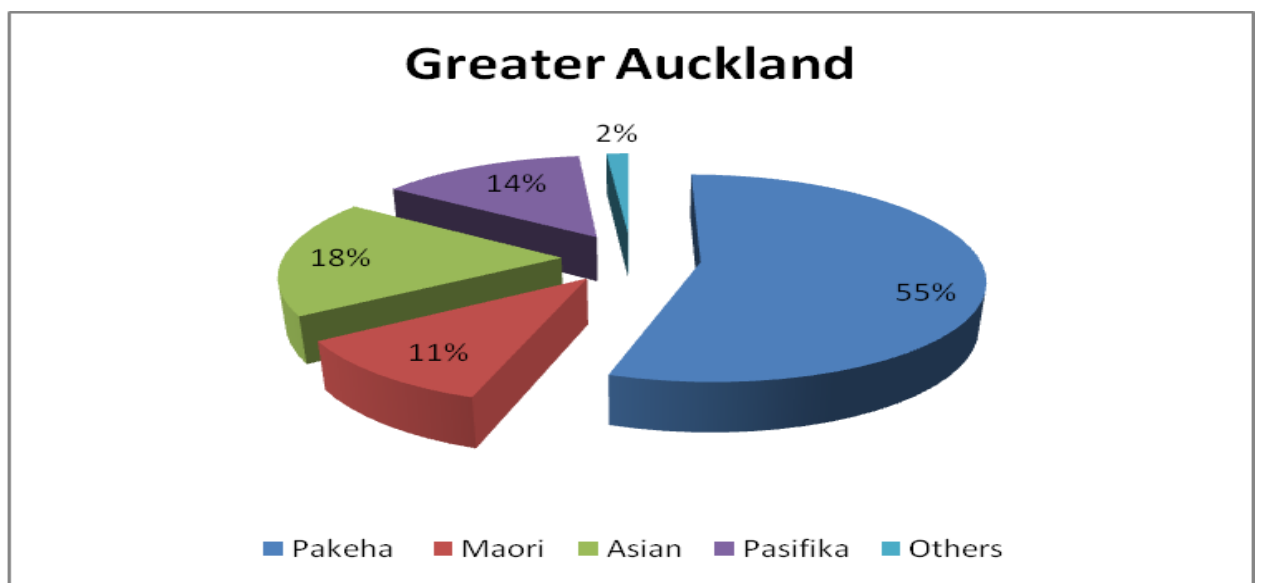


Figure 2: Percentage of ethnic groups in Greater Auckland

Percentage of ethnic groups in the structured interview

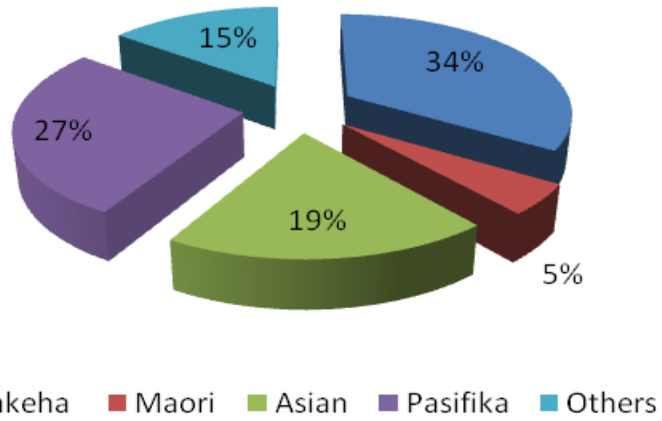


Figure 3: Percentage of ethnic groups in the structured interview

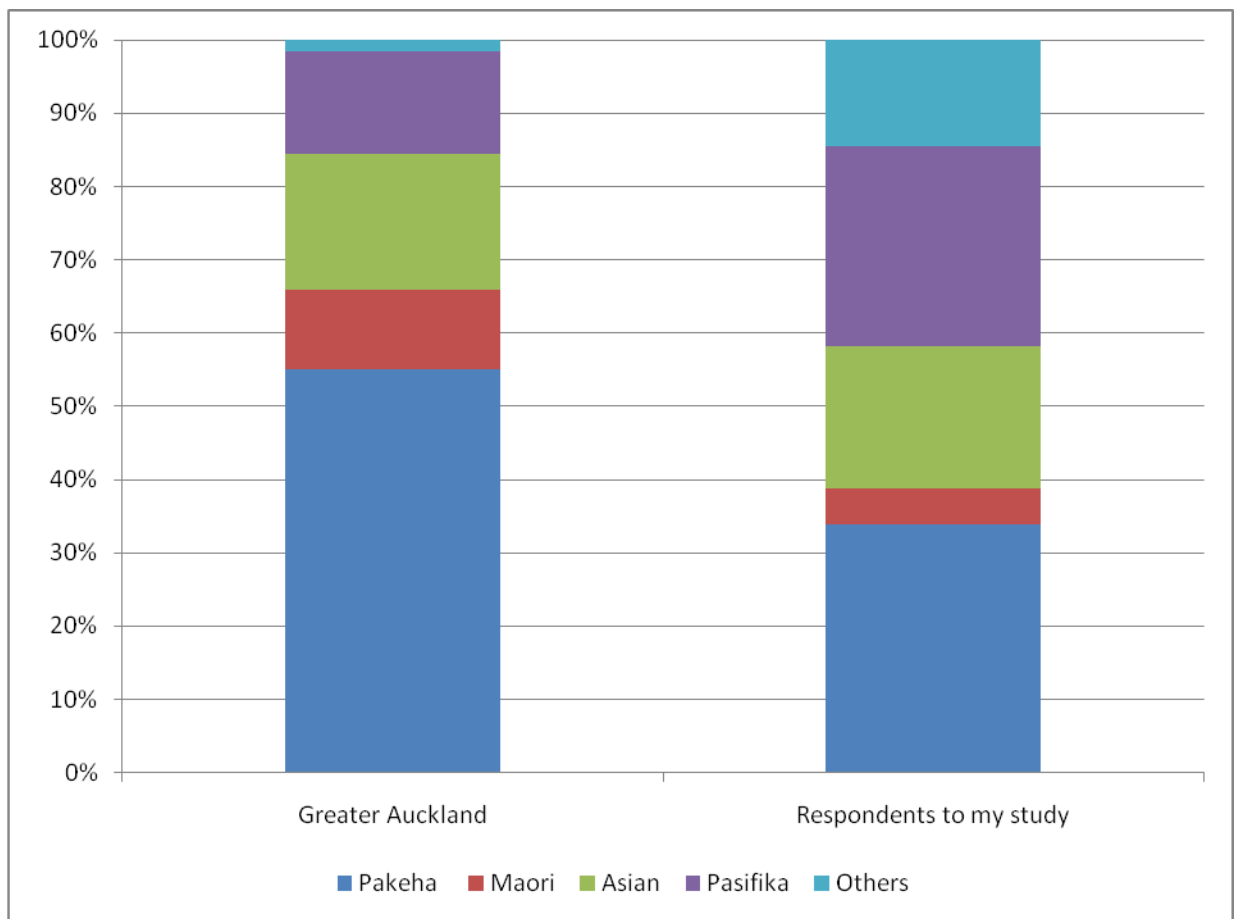


Figure 4: Comparative graphs between Greater Auckland and my study

According to the Figure 4 chart above, Maori are underrepresented whilst Pacific Islanders are overrepresented in the research analysis. Whereas, the percentage of Asians in the study remains the same as Greater Auckland's percentage.

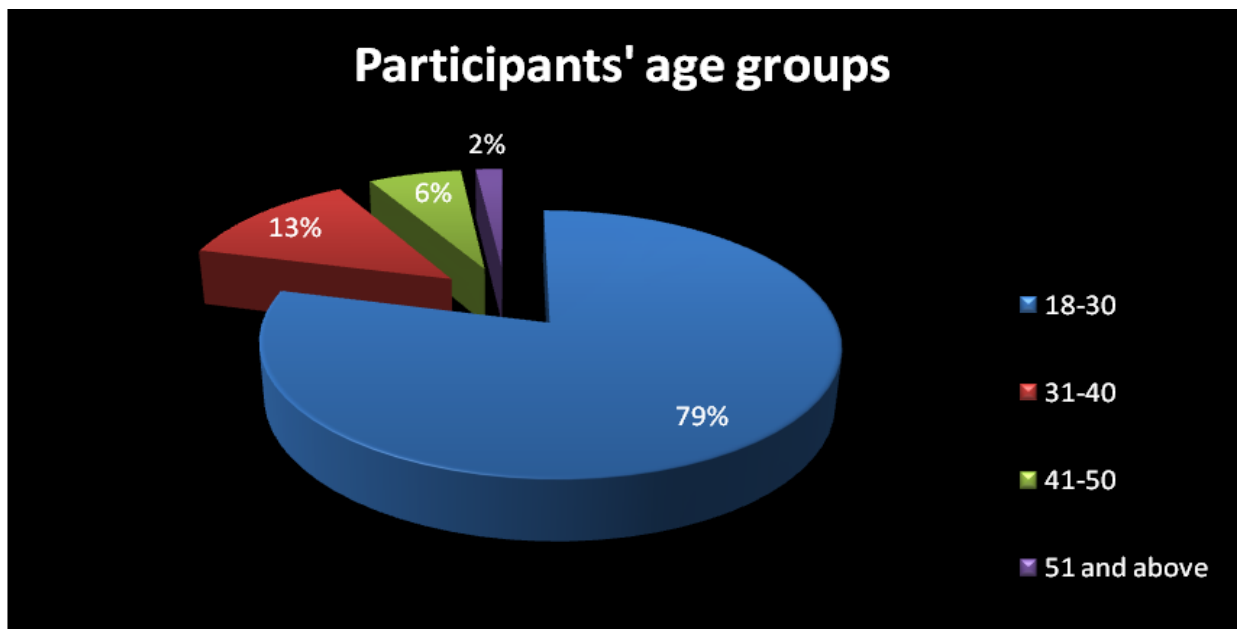


Figure 5: Participants' age groups

In the Figure 5 chart, 79 percent or 87 of the participants are aged between 18 to 30 years of age, 14 between ages 31 to 40, 7 between 41 to 50 years old and 2 participants are above 51 years of age.

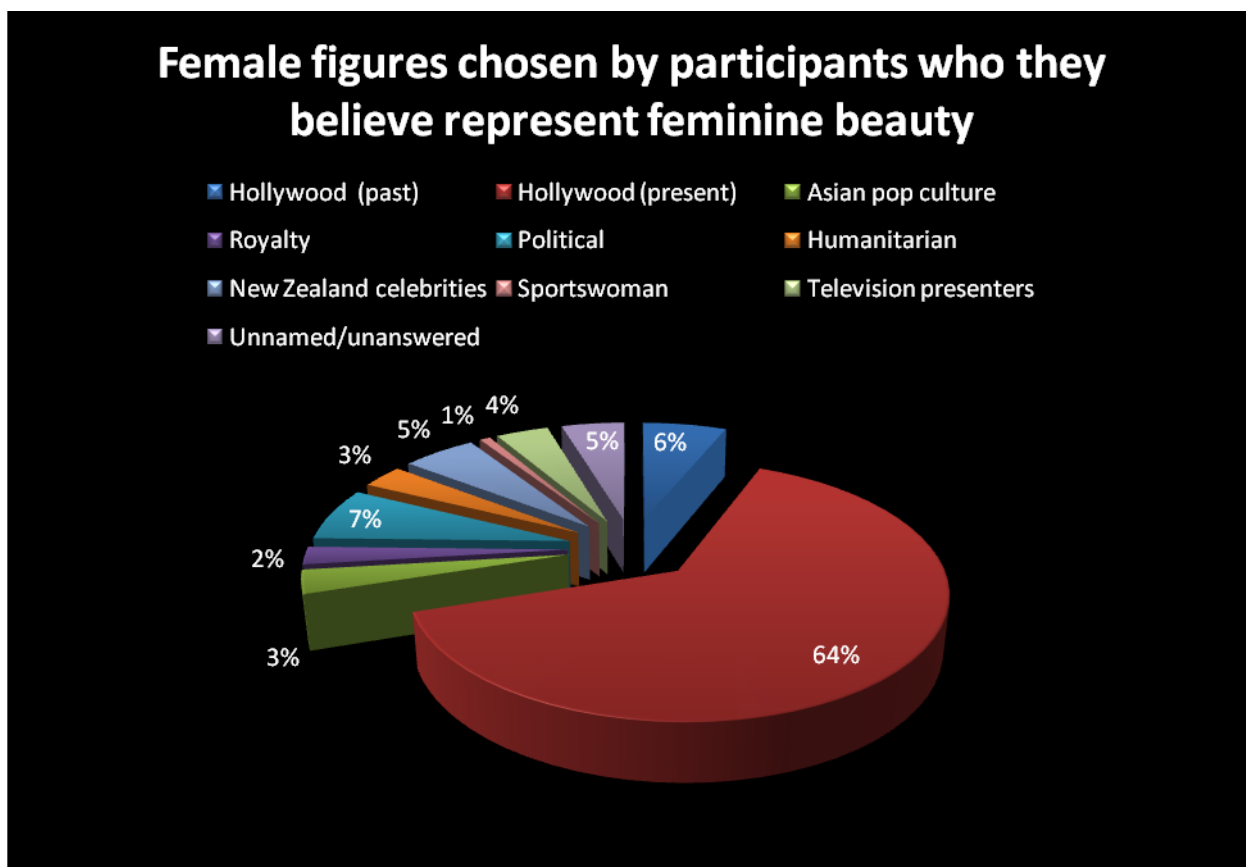


Figure 6: Well-known figures chosen by participants they believe to epitomize feminine beauty

According to the pie chart in *Figure 6* above, 91 participants have named past (6 percent) and present (64 percent) Hollywood female celebrities and models, from Audrey Hepburn to Queen Latifah, whom they believe epitomize feminine beauty whilst 4 participants of Asian background named Asian celebrities such as Bollywood’s Aiswarya Rai and Korean soap actress Hye-Young Jung¹⁹. On the other hand, 9 participants or 7 percent had named female political icons such as Tariana Turia, Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi, and Madame Sun Yat-sen, whereas 3 participants (2 percent) named female royal family members, for example, Princess Diana and Queen Elizabeth II. 4 interview participants (3

¹⁹ Hey-Young Jung – A renowned Korean soap drama actress

percent) chose a humanitarian as a feminine icon such as Mother Teresa. 7 participants (5 percent) chose New Zealand celebrities, for example Madeleine Sami and Hayley Holt, whilst 5 participants (4 percent) have chosen television presenters such as Anna Ford, Nigella Lawson and Carly Flynn. Only 1 participant (1 percent) named a sportswoman (Bernice Mene) as her chosen icon who represents feminine beauty. However, 6 participants (5 percent) are unable or opt not to name any prominent female figure.

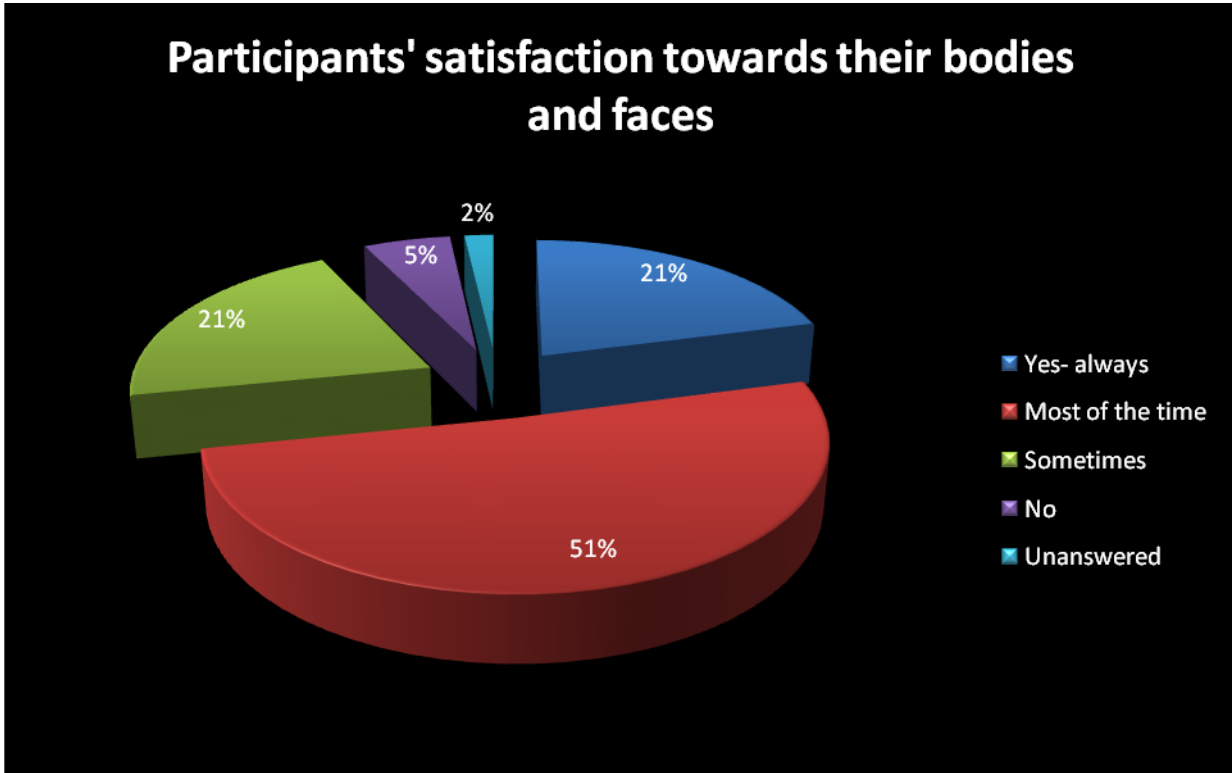


Figure 7: Participants' satisfaction towards their bodies and faces

In the *Figure 7* chart, 56 participants (51 percent) answered the structured interview that they satisfied with their bodies and faces most of the time. Whereas, 23 participants (21 percent) answered 'yes' to indicate they are always satisfied with their physical features

while another 23 (21 percent) answered ‘Sometimes’. 5 percent or 6 out of 110 participants answered ‘No’ whilst 2 participants (2 percent) opt not to answer.

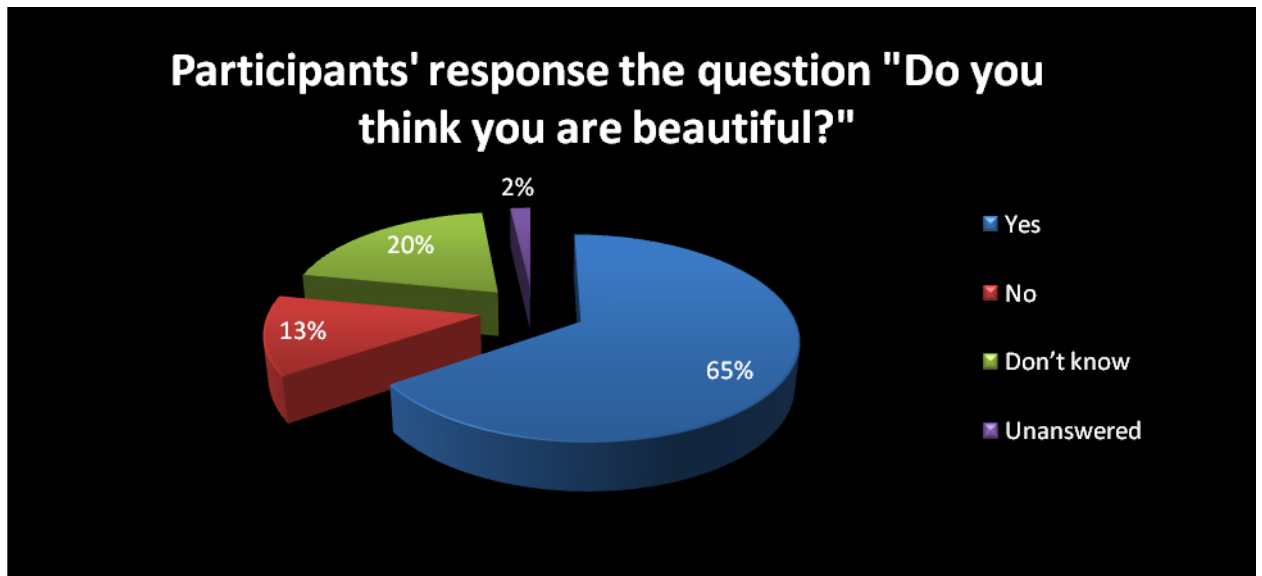


Figure 8: Participants' response to the structured interview question, “Do you think you are beautiful?”

The *Figure 8* chart above shows the percentage of responses the participants gave in response to the structured interview question, “*Do you think you are beautiful?*”. According to the pie chart, 65 percent or 72 participants answered “Yes” whilst 13 percent (14 participants) answered “No”. 22 participants answered “Don’t know” and 2 chose not to answer.

Qualitative data

Englis et. al. (1994) believe although it is difficult to define beauty, people “know it when they see it” (p. 49). According to the structured interview, many of the 110 participants define beauty as not just being aesthetically pleasing and healthy but at the same time

possessing “inner beauty” such as selflessness, kindness and good personality. As Black and Sharma (2001) believe that beauty is associated with kindness, Halprin (1995) adds that beauty is a greater strength when a woman develops her skills and intelligence. Beauty is also described as the ability to embody self-confidence and a sense of satisfaction with one’s self and her body (Unknown participant, 2009). Therefore Marwick (1988, cited by Hilhorst, 2002) believes beauty is “not merely skin deep” (p. 11) but is innately connected to an individual’s behaviour. Quoting a participant’s phrase ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’, some participants believe the definition of beauty is not only subjective but also it varies across cultures and societies (Yu and Shepard, 1998).

According to Fiebert (1990, cited by Duke and Kreshel, 1998), femininity traditionally consists of four dimensions: “adherence to cultural fashion and beauty standards, performance of family and domestic skills, satisfaction of needs of others, and the acquisition of male attention” (p. 49). Two unnamed participants of Asian background agree with Fiebert’s (1990) statement by describing femininity as the ability to be a wise mother and a good wife and at the same time, being able to embody feminine beauty. Although femininity is usually defined as an aspect of “how one feels and acts as a woman”, the ability to embrace womanhood and to create a sexual ‘difference’ between male and female (Unnamed participant, 2009; Jeffreys, 2005), it is as subjective as beauty where some participants define it as ability to be empathic, graceful, and elegant whilst at the same time, being confident with herself and her body. Femininity is also described as the ability ‘to stand up for her rights as a woman’ and uphold her beliefs and values as an individual (Unknown participant, 2009).

Dittmar (2007) writes the ‘perfect body’ norm is reinforced by a sociocultural ideal of feminine beauty which “becomes synonymous with ultra-thinness” (p. 24). Although Hilhorst (2002) believes the beauty ideal is a subject to time and fashion, Forbes et. al. (2007) argues it never “represents the bodies of most women” (p. 13) and only represents physical standards that few women could achieve through beauty practices. In addition, the myth of the beautiful, slender white woman represented via the media denies the value of the non-Western beauty (Halprin, 1995). Many participants of the structured interview not only point out how media and advertising do not give a positive depiction of women but also voice their concerns towards the use of unrealistic and unnatural portrayals of beauty in print and film. For example, one unknown participant of Pakeha background (2009) believes the ‘amount of airbrushing’ and the slender ideal used in media and advertising fuels the pressure to be thin for women. A participant of Taiwanese origin provides an example of Asian media and advertising using ideal models with fair complexion and big eyes which Wolf (1990) believes denies the existence of real women’s beauty especially in the Asian context. A narrow representation of women’s bodies not only make the beauty ideal become socio-culturally homogeneous but also leave viewers “trying to conform to the unrealistic ideals” and feeling dissatisfied towards their bodies (Grogan, 2008, p. 205). With women’s growing cynicism towards the promotion of the ideal beauty, Grogan (2008) believes the demand for realistic images of women in the media increases.

However, one participant argues that the media of today show different representations of women from various socio-cultural backgrounds, for example, the New Zealand soap opera, Shortland Street. An example of advertising giving a positive portrayal of women regardless of shape, skin colour and socio-cultural groups is Dove’s Campaign for Real

Beauty which aims to promote positive body image among women (Unnamed participant, 2009). Johnston and Taylor (2008) agree that aim of Dove's advertising campaign is to promote a democratic vision of women's beauty. Another participant adds that media and advertising now include plus-size models which she believes now gives a positive representation of women with voluptuous bodies, for example, Queen Latifah, Crystal Renn and Kate Winslet. Therefore, Grogan (2008) believes acceptance towards a wide variety of body shapes and sizes within a mainstream culture may lead to a reduction of body dissatisfaction and a resistance against the slender norm amongst women. With the acceptance of diversity towards various body shapes, the development of positive body image is likely to allow women the freedom to flaunt their bodies with pride.

Based on the structured interview, 16 Asian participants, 5 participants of Maori background and 17 Pasifika participants named Hollywood celebrities, a royal family member or a Western humanitarian icon who they believe represents feminine beauty. Most of the participants cite aesthetic features and high self-esteem as reasons that make their chosen Western female icons represent feminine beauty whereas some consider their chosen icons based on their ability to empathise with others and their humility. However, 7 participants of Asian background chose non-Western political icons and celebrities as their chosen representatives of feminine beauty such as Benazir Bhutto, Taiwan's Dee Hsu²⁰, Thai actress-cum-entrepreneur Aum²¹ and Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai. Although Halprin (1995) believes the over-representation of the beautiful white woman myth denies the existence of non-Western beauty, Darling-Wolf (2004) argues that non-Western female

²⁰ Dee Hsu- A well-known Taiwanese actress, singer and television show host commonly known as Xiǎo S (小S) to her fans in many Chinese communities.

²¹ Aum- Thai actress born Patchrapa Chaichua

consumers are able to negotiate with Western influences whilst being able to express their individual identities amidst a globalised consumer culture.

16 out of 110 participants (12 percent) answered Question 11A ²²by selecting female politicians, royal family members or a humanitarian figure as their chosen feminine icons who epitomize feminine beauty. From Mother Teresa to Aung San Suu Kyi, the participants chose renowned non-celebrity females in the structured interview possibly because their chosen feminine icons are considered as celebrity icons like their entertainment counterparts. Another reason would be the 16 participants might not be able to name a female entertainment icon they relate to. The participants chose non-celebrity females because they might be seen as realistic portrayals of real women outside media and advertising.

Other than the possibility of the 16 participants (12 percent) easily relating to female non-celebrities, the participants might have chosen non-celebrity figures as representatives of feminine beauty because they are believed to embody humility, empathy, intelligence and external beauty altogether. Another possible reason why the 16 participants chose politicians, royal family members and humanitarians as icons who epitomize feminine beauty might be probably these female non-celebrities are probably considered as 'celebrities'. For example, the late Princess Diana who was not just renowned for her humanitarian works but also as a beauty and fashion icon to the media.

Prior to undertaking the structured interview, each respondent is given the freedom to refuse to answer any question in the questionnaire. Based on the findings, 6 participants (5

²² Question 11A- Name a well-known woman (celebrity, actress, TV presenter, musician, sportswoman, etc.) who you think epitomizes feminine beauty.

percent) in the interview are found to be unable or opt not to answer Question 11A, regarding their feminine beauty icons of their choice. In addition, the same respondents did not answer Question 11B ²³which aims to find out reasons why a particular female icon is believed to epitomize feminine beauty. One of the reasons why 5 percent of the participants do not name a female figure might be due to being unable to name a female icon they know of via media and advertising. In addition, they might not be able to identify with any famous woman, celebrity or non-celebrity. Another possibility would be the 6 participants decided not to select a well-known woman as a symbol of feminine beauty due to their belief that all women do epitomize feminine beauty despite of physical appearances, age, socio-cultural backgrounds and the societies they come from.

Based on the comparative analysis done between the two groups of respondents, they prove that a prominent non-celebrity female can be a symbol of feminine beauty. Moreover, the analysis proves that feminine beauty is subjective and there is no ‘correct’ answer on which woman epitomizes feminine beauty. Therefore, any woman can represent feminine beauty regardless whether she is a prominent figure or she is an ordinary individual within society.

As Wolf (1990) believes there is a need for a pro-woman definition of beauty to enable women to defy the beauty myth which is promoted by media and society, the portrayal of minority groups, for example, albinos and red-haired individuals, in both the alternative and mainstream media would not only minimise stereotypes but also affirm the existence of real women beyond print and screen where various looks are shown to be “equally beautiful in their own right” (Marwick, 2002, p. 13; Unnamed Pakeha participant, 2009). However, Wolf (1990) believes women need to stop looking at themselves and other women critically

²³ Question 11B- What makes her beautiful?

and start “hearing one another out” (p. 236). As McBryde (1999) says to criticise one’s self and her body means to “perpetuate the social habit of judging other women by their appearances” (p. 41), many study participants believe compliments, encouragement and unconditional support are essential in making women feel happy and beautiful about themselves based on their talents, values and character rather than their physical features. Compliments and unconditional support from peers and family are considered as positive strategies that are likely to be effective in improving women’s body image and self-esteem (Grogan, 2008). Wolf (1990) concludes that as long as a woman sees herself as beautiful and unique, she challenges the world by refusing to be trapped within the beauty myth.

Discussion: Comparative between Literature Review and Data Analysis

Self-esteem

In the literature review, self-esteem in relation to body image is defined as a core aspect between the mental and physical well-being of an individual. Self-esteem also plays a role in body satisfaction and acceptance towards one's self. With the rise in body dissatisfaction and the growing desire to alter one's body through diet and beauty practices, experts in body image studies attempt to understand reasons behind these behaviours among individuals. From eating disorders to body dysmorphic disorder²⁴, Grogan (2008) says the 21st century is a growing concern towards body dissatisfaction among individuals. According to my literature review, beauty can act as a promoter of an individual's self-esteem. My data analysis not only agrees with the literature review's statement but also defines beauty as the ability to have high self-esteem towards the self and the body.

The literature review reveals how the frequent portrayal of unrealistic images of the beauty ideal affect women's self-esteem when bodies are considered as flaws that must be disciplined and controlled to perfection through diets and makeover (Lavigne et. al., 1999). The purpose of my data analysis in the thesis is to investigate how self-esteem links with body satisfaction. Although the data analysis confirms with the literature review's findings on how unrealistic portrayals of women's bodies leave female consumers feeling less confident towards their bodies, it also adds how some are left feeling cynical towards the airbrushed beauty which denies the existence of real women. In addition, my data analysis also investigates further into self-esteem and its link with body satisfaction which the literature review might not have written about earlier.

²⁴ Body dysmorphic disorder- A somatoform (psychological) disorder in which the affected person is preoccupied by a perceived defect in his or her physical features (body image)

The data analysis in response to Questions 10²⁵, 12²⁶ and 13²⁷ of the thesis' structured interview confirms the link between self-esteem and body image in relation to the emphasis on the beauty ideal via the media as highlighted in the literature review. The data analysis also affirms how the use of idealised beauty images is detrimental to women's self-esteem and their bodies. Although the literature review states that women can boost their self-esteem by ignoring the beauty ideals in the media, it does not mention how media can play a positive role in promoting self-esteem and body image among women. The literature review also states how media is prescribing unrealistic beauty ideals which increase body dissatisfaction among women. However, my data analysis argues that media and advertising are able to give positive representations of women regardless of skin colour, body shapes and dress size. For example, Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty promotes the existence of real women's bodies to its consumers with the goal of tackling body dissatisfaction among women. In addition, the data analysis mentions the portrayal of minority groups in both alternative and mainstream media, for example, redheads and plus-sized women. With the diverse representation of women via the alternative and mainstream media, it not only minimises stereotypes but also portrays all females to be uniquely beautiful. Therefore, the data analysis argues that media is not always an oppressive tool which harms self-esteem or perpetuates body dissatisfaction among individuals.

²⁵ Question 10- Do you think media and advertising give a positive representation of women regardless of skin colour, body shape and appearances in print and on screen (Please specify in your own words)

²⁶ Question 12- What do you think media and society should do to make women feel happy about their appearance and their body

²⁷ Question 13- As an individual, what can you do to help a fellow female (friend/sister/loved one/daughter) to feel happy and beautiful about herself

The literature review states that body dissatisfaction among women has not only risen in recent decades but is also linked to lower self-esteem and appearance anxiety (McKinley and Hyde, 1996 cited by Munro and Huon, 2005). However, my data analysis in response to Questions 7²⁸ and 8²⁹ disagrees with the literature review's statement. According to my data analysis, 56 participants (51 percent) and 23 participants (21 percent) answered Question 8 that they are mostly satisfied or extremely satisfied with their physical features. Whereas in response to Question 7, 72 out of 110 participants (65 percent) answered they believe they are beautiful. Therefore, my data analysis proves the participants of the structured interview are likely to be not only satisfied with their bodies but also might have high self-esteem. However, I believe in-depth studies would be useful to investigate the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem among individuals in the near future.

The literature review mentions about the overemphasis of Western ideal of beauty which denies the value of non-Western beauty (Halprin, 1995). My data analysis confirms with the literature review's statement by providing an example of my interview participant explaining the use of unrealistic portrayals of non-Western models in non-Western media and advertising. For example, the use of ideal models with fair complexion and big eyes in Asian advertising which Grogan (2008) believes leave Asian consumers experiencing low self-esteem and appearance anxiety. The data analysis also agrees with the literature review that the ingrained white beauty standard is detrimental to non-Western consumers' self-esteem. Although both the data analysis and literature review have touched on the effects of

²⁸ Question 7- Do you think you are beautiful?

²⁹ Question 8- Are you happy with your body and your face?

overemphasis of Western beauty ideal on non-Western consumers' self-esteem, future studies would be vital to study the effect of media and advertising onto non-Western female consumers' self-esteem. In addition, an in-depth study on portrayals of non-Western women in both Western and non-Western media and advertising would be useful in the fields of advertising, media and communication studies.

According to the literature review, a woman's body can be a tool of resistance against the objectification of the body in consumer culture (Gimlin, 2002). The data analysis agrees with the literature review's statement by confirming that women have better self-esteem towards themselves when various female bodies are accepted by media and society. Although the literature review says gaining an insight into the beauty culture helps us to think critically towards feminine beauty, it does not explain further how we, as individuals, can play a role in improving women's self esteem in society. The data analysis mentions that compliments, support and encouragement from peers and family are vital in improving women's self-esteem as well as minimising the chances of experiencing body dissatisfaction. Therefore, the data analysis proves that pro-woman support and views towards beauty equate higher self-esteem among females.

Although the data analysis has explored further into self-esteem by confirming its correlation with body satisfaction as mentioned in the literature review, I believe further research into self-esteem would be useful to enable us to understand body dissatisfaction among women in-depth in the fields of psychology and communication studies.

Celebrity culture, 'celebrification' of beauty and the overrepresentation of Western beauty

Bordo (2003, cited by Grogan, 2008) believe past and present consumers are taught “what to expect from flesh and blood” (p. 25) through art and media. From the Rubenesque body to the present-day supermodel, the literature review confirms that ideal beauty varies across time and cultures (Mazur, 1986). For example, the ‘sweater girl’ fashion of the 1940s which heavily emphasized on the fuller figure whilst the 1980s saw the Jane Fonda-like lithe and toned body as the beauty ideal.

Like magic mirrors from fairytales that are “direct outgrowths of modern culture and consumer consciousness” (p. 63), Lin and Yeh (2009) say female consumers turn to celebrity culture to emulate perfect femininity which is believed to embody feminine beauty, sex appeal and physical attractiveness simultaneously. Grogan (2008) says female celebrities and models are seen by consumers as role models who “present a fantasy image of how women should look” (p. 19) or for observers to identify with. My data analysis agrees with Lin and Yeh’s (2009) statement by confirming 95 percent of the 110 participants have responded to Question 11A³⁰ of the structured interview by naming well-known women of their choice whom they believe epitomize feminine beauty. The data analysis also investigates further where participants respond to Question 11B³¹ by revealing qualities their feminine icons have which they believe relate to feminine beauty.

³⁰ Question 11A.- Name a well-known woman (celebrity, actress, TV presenter, musician, sportswoman, etc.) who you think epitomizes feminine beauty

³¹ Question 11B. - What makes her beautiful?

When celebrities and models are seen as fashion gate-keepers who represent the ideals of beauty, consumers attempt to imitate or merge their own characteristics with those of the endorsers by “selectively emulating what they feel is the essence of connection” (p. 66) between themselves and the endorsers (Blum, 2007; Lin and Yeh, 2009). My literature review confirms that consumers would strive to discipline their bodies in order to match the ideals displayed on print and screen. Blum (2007) provides an example of celebrity identification where some people are willing to undergo makeovers such as cosmetic surgery to transform themselves from ‘plain’ to ‘glamorous’ in “the pursuit of favourite celebrity features” (p. 34). The literature review affirms that when a female celebrity becomes the cookie cutter for the ideal beauty, female bodies become the subject of scrutiny and self-surveillance in order to fulfil the ‘ultimate’ body.

Both the literature review and data analysis highlight the overrepresentation of the idealized Western beauty through media and advertising especially towards non-Western consumers (Halprin, 1995). For example, the frequent use of models with pale skin or Eurasian features to endorse beauty products in Asian advertising which Makkar and Strube (1995) believes it not only denies the existence of real Asian women but also fuels the unrealistic ethnic-based standards of beauty ideals. The overrepresentation of Western beauty not only makes the beauty ideal socio-culturally homogenous but also leave non-Western consumers experiencing low self-esteem and feeling dissatisfied towards their bodies (Grogan, 2008). Therefore, the “narrowing views of what it means to be a woman” (p. 67) will not benefit consumers in the long run (Lin and Yeh, 2009).

Darling-Wolf (2004) and Blum (2007) argue that consumers can negotiate with media influences whilst expressing their uniqueness amidst a globalised consumer culture without

having to refashion themselves as celebrity-grade humans. A model of feminine beauty by women can be produced to celebrate diversity and allow “an expansion of ideas of beauty” (Bartky, 1990, cited by Grogan, 2008, p. 79). My data analysis also states the inclusion of ‘minority’ women in the media, for example albinos and red-haired individuals, would affirm the existence of real women of various appearances especially in a globalised consumer culture. Therefore, the data analysis confirms that proper depictions of femininity not only can lower women’s anxiety in fulfilling the beauty ideal but also minimize the stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising and media.

Body image

According to Öberg and Tornstam (1999), body image is fundamental to individuals where self-identity is affected by judgments made towards the body. Although the literature review states body image is believed to be related to physical and mental health, Thompson (1999, cited by Grogan, 2008) defines body image as an individual’s perceptions and feelings towards his or her body. Body image is also determined by social experiences such as exposure to media or socio-cultural cues and peer influence. When the ideals of beauty are internalized, one’s perceptions towards his or her own physical attractiveness are not only affected but also his or her consumption activities are related to attaining the ‘beautiful’ body (Englis, Solomon and Ashmore, 1994).

The literature review states that preoccupation with one’s body until the point of hatred and dissatisfaction is considered as the “hypochondria of beauty” (p. 41) where the body is seen as an imperfection which must be fixed through diets and makeovers (Frost, 2001; Blum, 2007). With the internalization of the unattainable ideal, Groesz, Levine and Murnen

(2002) believe body dissatisfaction is likely to lead to low self-esteem, eating disorders and depression. Grogan (2008) adds that body dissatisfaction, especially within the sports culture, can lead to drug abuse and over-exercising when an athlete attempts to fulfil the athletic ideal.

However, the data analysis argues that individuals who reject the beauty ideal are likely to have positive views towards their bodies including healthy eating habits and higher self-esteem. My data analysis confirms its statement when 79 participants (72 percent) of the structured interview are reported to be satisfied with their bodies in response to Question 8³². The data analysis also discovers that 72 interview participants (65 percent) believe they are beautiful in response to Question 7³³. With body image issues on the rise, future research into body dissatisfaction should not only just explore weight and appearance concerns but also investigate how some individuals maintain positive body image by resisting the beauty ideal (Dione, Davis, Fox, and Gurevich, 1995). Grogan (2008) includes the importance of further research into body image and self-esteem issues among non-Western groups.

Beauty practices (Historical and Contemporary)

The thesis chapter (Historical and Contemporary Beauty Trends) investigating Western and non-Western beauty practices, both historical and contemporary, helps us to understand how women endure pain, labour and pressure to regulate their bodies in order to achieve the ideal standard of beauty. From footbinding to tanning, Wijsbek (2000) questions whether the pursuit for beauty are “for others to exploit” (p. 454) or simply a freely adopted lifestyle

³² Question 8- Are you happy with your body and your face?

³³ Question 7- Do you think you are beautiful?

which Frost (2001, cited by Jeffreys, 2005) describes as a “positive ‘central identificatory process’” (p. 20) for women to express their identities through fashion. In the literature review, Jeffreys (2005) believes that beauty practices are harmful and aim to create a stereotyped femininity which portray women spending amounts of time and energy in order to fulfil the accepted standard of attractiveness. However, Bloch and Richins (1992) argue that beauty practices are not necessarily oppressive where they can serve as positive self-esteem enhancers. For instance, the use of cosmetic concealers which are found to boost the self-esteem of individuals with facial blemishes (Wright et. al., 1970, cited by Bloch and Richins, 1992). As little is known about consumer behaviour with regard to beauty practices, additional research is needed to not only understand the roles of beauty practices in societies but also the investigation of relations between consumption and self-esteem.

‘Perfect’ body versus the natural body

When the aesthetic ideal is heavily emphasised, Bronwell (1992) believes the drive for the ‘perfect’ body fuels the fitness and beauty industries of modern society. The quest for physical perfection would often become the “need to attain standards” to the extreme (Pliner and Haddock, 1995, p. 382). The literature review agrees when the body is under constant surveillance and scrutiny, the individual would be considered to have failed to attain perfection through diet and exercise as means of discipline and control. When diet and exercise fail, the literature review proves how some individuals would make do with cosmetic surgery or other beauty practices as a last resort to achieve the perfect body (Gimlin, 2002). For example, when cosmetic surgery is used as the last resort to attain the ‘ultimate’ body, it would be considered as the invasion of the human body for the sake of fulfilling the beauty ideal (Bordo, 1990, cited by Gimlin, 2002). As a result of the emphasis

on the 'perfect' body, it blurs the lines between the natural body and the beauty ideal. Although authors such as Wolf (1990) and Jeffreys (2005) in the literature review consider the beauty ideal to be unrealistic, Grogan (2008) believe we can resist the internalization of the 'perfect' body through psychoeducational interventions regarding unrealistic images portrayed media and advertising. In addition, further research is needed to investigate the link between body dissatisfaction and media and advertising.

Femininity and beauty: The portrayal of real women via the media and what roles do we play in?

According to the literature review, beauty is defined as an aesthetic category that applies to bodies and faces. Although my data analysis affirms with the literature review's definition of beauty, it argues that beauty is beyond skin deep. The data analysis defines beauty as the ability to possess inner qualities such as selflessness and good personality. Moreover, beauty is explained as the ability to embody self-confidence and satisfaction towards one's body. Therefore, the data analysis has shown that beauty is not only subjective but also shows that it varies across all cultures and societies of the world. In-depth studies into beauty would be useful for us to understand how individuals and societies perceive beauty, past and present, especially from the perspectives of psychology and social sciences.

In the literature review, femininity is equated with the ability to conform to beauty practices and changing one's body in order to fulfil the beauty ideal. However, my data analysis argues the definition of femininity is subjective as it goes beyond the ability of embracing womanhood and embodying feminine beauty. The data analysis also says that femininity is defined as a woman's ability to embody high self-esteem towards herself and her body.

Femininity is also described as a woman's ability to stand up for her beliefs and values as an individual of society. Despite the data analysis has further explained on femininity, I believe future research would be useful to study femininity and its portrayal by media and society.

Although is easy to blame media and advertising for encouraging the internalization of beauty ideals within our consumers, the literature review cites Wolf's (1990) suggestion that we can play a role in society by counteracting the beauty myth by reinterpreting beauty as non-hierarchical and beyond appearances alone. The data analysis not only confirms with the literature review's statement but also points out how realistic portrayals of women in the media is beneficial in acknowledging the existence of real bodies rather than pressuring female consumers to conform to the beauty ideal. The data analysis, in response to Question 13 of the thesis structured interview, also adds the importance of moral support and compliments from peers and family being helpful in promoting positive self-esteem among individuals. Therefore, beauty will not be used to divide and rule all women.

When efforts are put to recognise the existence of real women via the media, a pro-woman definition of beauty can be achieved when we choose not to be snared into the beauty backlash which denies the diversity of feminine beauty. As Grogan (2008) believes further research need to be made regarding body image and the portrayal of beauty via media, she states the importance of acceptability of various body types, including less focus on aesthetics, would be fundamental in improving body satisfaction for all women.

Conclusion

Although Entwistle (2000) says fashion and dress articulate the female body by producing discourses on the body, Clark (1972, cited by Etcoff, 1999) and Rich and Cash (1993) argue the body is difficult to make into an art via direct rendering especially when women are under pressure to conform to the beauty ideals that society and mass media depict as attractive with regard to body size, body weight, hair colour and the use of adornments. Etcoff (1999) says although all cultures, historical and contemporary, revere the beauty ideal and “pursues it at enormous costs” (p. 233), a core reality to beauty exists amidst the cultural constructs and myths. With the existence of the ideal beauty in every culture and the constant pressure to conform, women’s bodies are used as instruments to not only punish other women but also divide and conquer them based on their abilities to fulfil the definition of ‘beauty’ (Wolf, 1990).

The aim of the thesis interview is to explore how women from various age groups and different cultural and societal backgrounds not only define feminine beauty but also, in Wolf’s (1990) words, defy the beauty myth which can allow them to reinterpret ‘beauty’ as universal, non-competitive and non-hierarchical. Therefore when women can adorn and dress up in celebration of their bodies, they are doing it for themselves and others in a positive light (Wolf, 1990). In addition, the purpose of the interview is to investigate how self-esteem and body image co-relate with each other regarding women’s perceptions and acceptance towards their bodies. From the thesis interview, a data analysis is used to present qualitative and quantitative findings. A discussion section is created to not only compare between the literature review and data analysis but also to report any additional findings relating to self-esteem and feminine beauty which are not mentioned earlier in the

literature review. This thesis aims to encourage us to not only affirm the existence of real women's bodies but also help us to understand how self-esteem and body satisfaction are linked to each other in relation to feminine beauty and its portrayal by media and society.

Secondly, the thesis extends into the exploration of women's views towards beauty, femininity, body dissatisfaction and the issue of how beauty is portrayed by media and culture. The results of the structured interview not only reveal participants' concerns towards media's portrayal and societies' views of beauty and the issue of body dissatisfaction among other women but also their answers prove that beauty is subjective where "no definition can capture beauty entirely" (Etcoff, 2000, p.8). Moreover, opinions from participants not only agree with the renowned adage "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" but also prove beauty varies across cultures and societies of the world. Therefore, Wolf (1990) believes a pro-woman definition of beauty exists amidst a mainstream consumer culture which promotes the beauty ideal.

Body image is defined as not just as one's perception towards her body or her values towards herself but it is also how she relates with other women (Notman, 2003). Therefore, the research addresses the beauty ideal challenge women face daily in their lives. Wolf (1990) believes as long as a woman sees herself as beautiful, she challenges the world by refusing to be trapped within the beauty myth. As Grogan (2008) states the 2000s is an era of increased concern with the body, there are still many questions to be answered via future studies into body dissatisfaction and self-esteem as well as the portrayal of feminine beauty via media and various cultures. Research would be useful to enable experts in the fields of media, communication studies and social sciences to not only dispel the beauty myth but also help women to appreciate themselves and their bodies rather than propel towards the

unrealistic beauty ideal. In addition, intervention could be developed to improve body satisfaction and self-esteem to help us understand why individuals, especially women, are compelled to scrutinize or attempt to alter their bodies in order to fulfil the beauty ideal their societies and the media are upholding. Therefore, media images and socio-cultural views towards feminine beauty should not be blamed or eradicated but Ogden and Munday (1996) believe they can be useful tools in the study of women's body image and body dissatisfaction as well as self-esteem.

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