

A STUDY OF BEAUTY NORMS AMONG YOUNG URBAN WOMEN OF KARACHI CITY: A CASE STUDY OF KARACHI CITY-PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Influences of beauty on young urban women means the overall effect of advertised and promoted images of beauty on women that is idealized by young girls and women. The trend of looking beautiful in women is gaining popularity in Pakistan and the influence of beauty on urban women has been observed for centuries. Gradually, the idealized images of the beautiful women are being reinterpreted in a way that our young women fall prey to the extreme situations of 'make ups' to keep abreast with the beauty norms. This study presents data and analysis on the prevailing beauty norms in young women according to the idealized images of beauty and what is being done by young women to attain those and why is it impossible for young women to avoid and ignore such beauty standards.

Our religion Islam very clearly emphasizes the importance of actions and strongly denounces the judgment of human beings on the basis of physical aspects and appearance. The study focuses on young females from three socioeconomic variable areas about their perception of 'make ups' in following the beauty norms.

It is important to keep in mind that men, unlike women, are not encouraged by their parents or the media to be obsessed with their appearance nor to consider their bodies a material resource. Moreover, while more men are becoming more conscious of their body image, beauty norms for men are not predictable as those for women (Buskirk, 1977).

Findings of the research show that women are highly influenced by beauty and its norms. At present these norms are different from western pre-conceived notions of beauty. However, working females who are expected to be environment and age wise mature and the students who are in the tender age of acceptance, both are interested in the attainment of beauty customs. Use of make up to accomplish these norms is

extraneous of the qualifications, age factor and income groups; because all sampled young women are more or less equally interested in spending on preferred aspects of beauty as an inspiration from models and actresses or by gender consideration.

The influence of beauty on young urban women is so much that they do not pay attention to the basic disadvantages of using different types of cosmetics. In the today's society, uses of 'make up' are legitimated and held up by the members of the society for unattainable beauty norms.

INTRODUCTION

Confined within their gender roles, women learn to enhance the natural beauty of their dark-haired and dark-eyed Mediterranean kind. But they remain focused on enhancing the charm of their graceful movements by the attractive lines of their costume, cosmetics and the use of alluring perfumes. The young women of today are the assets for our developing nation as contributing individuals.

The young urban women of each country would try to reflect the beauty norms of that society and now there is a clear difference of beauty norms that are prevailing in present era than those in the past. Today's norms are different from western pre-conceived notions of beauty that were focused on whiter complexions mostly. Day by day narrowing beauty norms are recasting the images that are a cause of stigma to young women. Mostly, fashion magazines have pages in which women are presented as models, with hair styles and make ups in order to attract the readers and for the marketing of products.

Concept of looking good is an important area of research in the context of beauty norms. Among so many other factors that have made following of beauty norms so important an area of research is that the personal consequences of beauty norms are found to be dissatisfaction with bodies leading to economic costs, time costs and medical side effects (Schweinbruger, 2005).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study has its great importance in the present era. Since our religion Islam always gives significance to the actions and does

not judge a person by his or her physical aspects of appearance. According to Islam, especially, women are required to dress in a manner that covers their entire bodies. There had been strong criticism on trends of exposing women as this is being counted as responsible for enhancing the women's obsession with looking beautiful.

RELATED RESEARCHES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The only previous research conducted in Pakistan regarding beauty norms was focused on body shape concerns and prevalence of eating disorders among schoolgirls in comparison with British adolescent females (Mumford, 1992). A small number of studies have been conducted on Asian females in the area of body image. Of the studies that are available, most have sampled Asian females living in Western countries but many of these studies do not distinguish Asians of different origins or particularly young urban women of Karachi city.

Allah in Surah Noor Ayah 31 states that 'and women do not expose their beauty and make-over on others.'

The Muslim women are supposed not to be in contact with non-Muslims or strangers to avoid wrong influences. Once Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had refused Governor Sir William Moore the permission of bringing his wife in the home because women in the family might get influenced wrongly (Ahmed Naveed, 2000).

Islam very explicitly de-emphasizes the colour, shape and appearance of a person but attributes importance to actions (Ahmed, Waller & Verduvn 1994). Extramarital relations with the opposite sex are prohibited and women are required to dress in a manner that covers their entire bodies.

Sociologist Carrie Smitghh (Smitghh, 2006) stated her experience as 'Anyone who's ever taken social science or Women's Studies classes in college has undoubtedly learned about the many negative impacts of trying to live up to the White norm of beauty by people of color. Little girls of color grow up learning that they will never look like Barbie, and that the world around them will never look upon them as beautiful. Many of these girls go on to suffer low self-esteem or worse yet, self-hatred.'

Modifying appearances is denying what a woman already possesses; in other words it is equal to denying the 'self'.

Dr. Riffet Malik (Malik, 2007) head of Fatima Jinnah Medical College Department of Psychiatry stated that 'It's not easy being a young woman. It's not at all easy being a student in a highly competitive atmosphere. Being both is positively difficult. These who have been teaching and working with female college students have found a number suffering from problems such as repeated exam failure, anxiety and adjustment difficulties to more serious problems of personality difficulties, acute emotional distress and even suicide.'

Richard Wilk (Wilk, 1999) pointed out that Beauty is an abstract, culturally relative concept, but 'beauty industries' are actual places where beauty ideals are negotiated and produced in modern consumer societies. The origins of these beauty industries relate closely to processes of globalization, including the export of American entertainment products and the quest to 'open markets' for Western beauty products and technologies in East Asia.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to find what makes young urban women follow the beauty norms. And is it being incorporated through male prejudiced designs in order to keep women busy in striving to look good and resulting in social, economical and psychological costs?

In particular this article examines the prevailing beauty conventions of young women according to the idealized images of beauty and what is being done to attain those. The focus of study is young and educated women, why is it impossible for young women to avoid and ignore such beauty norms? At what expense is it being followed? Along the study of social constructs of beauty this study will also explore the social implications and how are young women affected by the beauty norms.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Approach & technique

Focus will be three geographical areas in cosmopolitan Karachi city to allow socioeconomic variability. These will be; Orangi Town; Gulshan Town and DHA. Orangi Town is a small densely populated town in the northwestern part that is considered Asia's largest squatter settlement belonging to lower-Middle income group. Gulshan Town is the location of the main University of Karachi campus, as well as the offices of the City District Government of Karachi and the Attorney General of Sindh. Upper Middle-income group, Defense Housing Authority, a large suburb providing commercial and residential housing for the army of Pakistan.

Population sample technique

Prevalence of phenomena suggests the sample to be consisted of young female. The Universe of the study is the young female of the above selected geographical area. This was divided into two groups; randomly selected college students aged between 17 and 23, and female working group age below 30 years from the selected areas will be chosen. Probability sampling technique was used on the population of three colleges.

Simple random sampling was done at Abdullah Government Girls College near Orangi Town, RLAK Government College of Home Economics Gulshan Town and College of Business Administration near DHA. These represent lower middle, upper middle and high-income social classes respectively. SES is further determined by household income data.

Design of research

Survey was classified by Cross-Sectional study. Survey was conducted through questionnaire.

Tools of data

A questionnaire was distributed among 110 randomly selected students at these colleges. Same questionnaire was for 42 randomly selected working women visiting parlors. Basic structure

of questionnaire has demographic part dealing with education and income levels; while structured and closed to open ended questions pointed to quantitative & qualitative information about the reasons, consequences and costs of the phenomena under discussion. A verbal permission was sought from college Heads and Parlor's owners before administering the questionnaire.

Data collection plan

Private resources were used to visit the areas and data was collected within a week's time.

DISCUSSION

Globally, Asian beauties have been making a splash in the catwalks of Hollywood, and the Western mass media. Evidently, these Asian women have been judged on their attractiveness based on a Western notion of beauty. This highly publicized beauty norm has, without any doubts, broken into not only the Asian-American community, but also Asia – mainly, Korea, China, and Southeast Asia (Diana, 2007). It has targeted the women from Asian developing countries especially.

The increased consumption of beauty products resulted in the growth of beauty industry in both Muslim and Non-Muslim states. Consumer surveys showed that more and more people throughout the region have been engaged in purchasing beauty and personal grooming products. Cosmetic-related sales of beauty, grooming and other personal care products are growing 12 per cent annually in the Middle East and it is estimated that the total value of cosmetic-related sales will reach \$2.1 billion for 2006 (Cherrayil, (2007). This is a concern in itself that why Muslim countries are spending so much money for cosmetics and products for enhancing the physical beauty when religion Islam doesn't appreciate showing off the physical beauty of women specially their faces.

It is amazing that the only sector not affected by the recent economic recession is the beauty parlor business and the cosmetics products manufacturing and selling. Moreover, it is strange that the business is growing in the most developing countries including Pakistan.

According to the rough estimation made out of yellow pages 2008, for the registered beauty parlors, Karachi has 1.5% more than the rest of the major cities in Pakistan. Karachi is estimated to have 24% of all the beauty parlors located in upper strata localities, 55% in upper middle and 21% in middle.

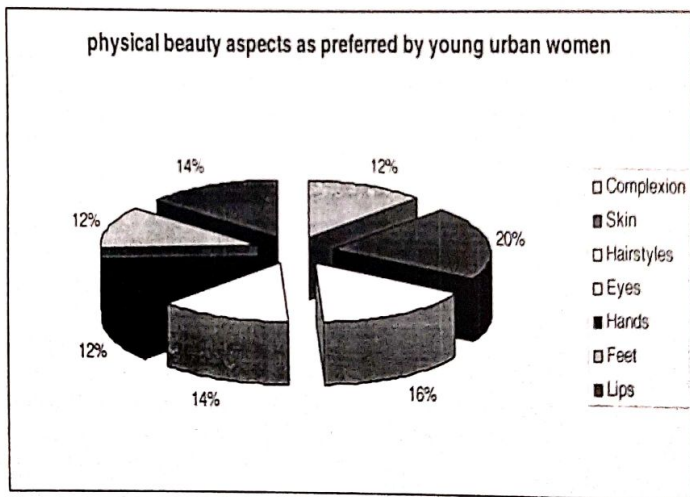
A GLANCE AT PREVAILING BEAUTY NORMS

The data collected from the sample of young females reflects the preferred aspects of looking good in the existing period of time.

The table shows average of responses for preferred beauty aspects

Complexion	Skin	Hairstyles	Eyes	Hands	Feet	Lips
2.6	4.4	3.5	2.9	2.47	2.5	3

Chart shows Physical beauty aspects as preferred by young urban women



There is more emphasis on good looking skin than on 'whiter' complexion, that is, 6% less than 20% preferences for just the good looking skin. Similarly according to these data hairstyles, eyes and lips are focused more in terms of beauty aspects in a woman.

It is showing a clear difference of beauty norms that are prevailing in this era. These are different from western pre-conceived notions of beauty that were focused on whiter complexions mostly.

BEAUTY IS CULTURALLY RELATED

As there are certain beauty norms of every region, for example, in most of the cultures the ugly means having 'four eyes' or having spectacles and in the same way tanned color complexion is highly disliked in China. Since the world is getting closer with the advent of technology and masses are considered to be in a global village, the culturally related concepts and norms of beauty are replaced with several universal beauty norms that are accepted and being followed universally. The women who are influenced with westernized east meets west beauty norms are striving to attain those culturally as well as universally accepted beauty patterns.

Normative standards of beauty are also gendered and, in our society, women much more than men, are valued by others and derive their self worth from how well they match up to our culture's idealized images of the beautiful women. Beauty norms are defined as culture's idealized images of the beautiful women. It has been claimed that standards of beauty transcend culture (Wolf, 1991). Most researches indicated that beauty norms vary cross culturally as well as historically.

For better or worse, the bottom line is that beauty matters; it prevails in the society and affects how we choose loved ones. Normative social influence explains that both men and women probably learn what kind of body is considered attractive by their culture through the process of informational social influence (Aronson, E., Wilson, T.D., & Akert, A.M., 2007).

BEAUTY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There is a relation between beauty and social problems. As in developing societies and economies, we assume that young women fall prey to the extreme situations of 'make ups' to keep side by side with the beauty norms and it is said that rigid and unattainable

beauty norms are promoted and cultivated in women anxiety and dissatisfaction with their appearance (Ussher, 1989).

In a number of situations, these beauty norms can become a social problem. As some of the sociologists said, what people perceive as a threat is the thing that society varies from time to time and from place to place (Poplin, 1978). Earl Rubington and Martin S.Weinberg quote 'Some of the long lists of items that have been considered social problems were not so considered in earlier times, places and circumstances. And similarly some events now being ignored will, in the future, come to have genuine status as social problems. And finally, some events regardless of their troublesome nature never have and never will be considered as social problems' (Poplin, Dennis E., 1978).

The problem is that, if the girls who are not able to follow fashion and use fashionable products will be afraid to go to work or to go to educational institutes for fear of not accepted by people in the respective environment or cause them an environment of inferior status.

As we all know that working females are more conscious and inclined towards keeping control on all the exposed parts of their bodies, whereas the students of colleges and universities are mostly focusing on their facial features to other parts as feet and hands. Since there is no significant difference between the thoughts of working females who are a little environment or age wise mature and the students who are in the tender age of acceptance, that's why they all react in the same manner. Irrespective of the fact that, whether they belong to a class which can afford all those expenses, they some how meet all their needs related to their beauty. All the classes in our society are more or less equally interested in spending on their preferred aspects of beauty.

Anxiety and dissatisfaction about the looks are promoted and cultivated by those beauty norms which are beyond the reach of an average woman. It was found that the ways through which these young women are informed about fulfilling their desires of looking beautiful is the use of cosmetics. Awareness levels for cosmetics products amongst the women of all income groups and ages have been increased due to marketing and advertising.

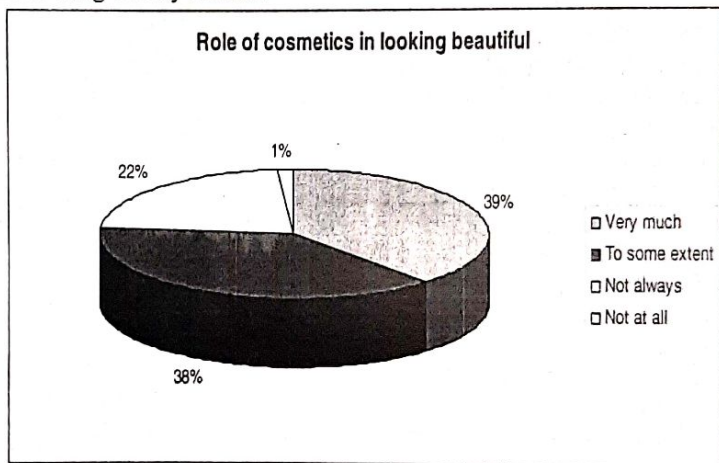
CONFORMITY WITH BEAUTY NORMS

To achieve a sense of security within a group, the beauty norms are willingly conformed. The next finding is the response of young urban women on the importance of "make up" in making a woman look beautiful as per norms. Following was revealed from a sample of young student and working women who are striving to attain more than one beauty aspects.

The table shows total responses in conformity with beauty norms

Very much	To some extent	Not always	Not at all
58	58	34	2

Chart shoes the responses on the role of cosmetics for following beauty norms:



There was a mixed response on why making up for different aspects of beauty is important. Several surveys related to the conformity of the beauty norms have been conducting among the young urban women on the importance of 'make up' in making a woman look beautiful as per norms. There were mixed responses on why making up for different aspects of beauty is important. Almost all- of them stated that it was a basic requirement of the environment to enhance their looks so that they projected an updated modern image that made them confident. And most of

them were inspired by the models and actresses. These results were irrelevant of the qualifications, age factor and status. The use of cosmetics is legitimate to attain the unattainable beauty norms that are advertised through media and public display. Data reveals that the most of the cosmetics used to enhance beauty aspects are imported from USA, Holland and Italy. Markets are flooded with the imported brands providing an easy access to all income groups and age levels.

PROMINENT ROLES IN PROMOTING BEAUTY ASPECTS

The developments in media culture with the provision of advanced technologies, the young urban women have been surrounded by promotions of beauty products and colored cosmetics that they can not escape and have to surrender in conformity with the prevailing beauty norms. These women are targeted most through advertisements on growing private TV channels.

As said by Plato 'The beautiful never lacks proportion', it means that those women who consider that the cosmetics and products are the ways and means of bringing about proportion of various physical features in a woman are right at their places.

Young urban women of the present day society are highly influenced by beauty. Since the article has also revealed that the most exciting aspects of beauty for young urban women are the ones most publicized through various means. Growth in the number of television channels and associated advertising has affected the opinion about beauty aspects. Prominent aspects of beauty today are found to be different from preconceived notions for example it is found that instead of whiter complexions, there is more focus on skin tones, eyes and hair styles.

According to Plato the so-called 'golden proportions', in which, amongst other things, the width of an ideal face would be two-thirds its length, while a nose would be no longer than the distance between the eyes. Plato's golden proportions, however, haven't quite held up to the rigors of modern psychological and biological research. But today women are inspired by actresses and models when it comes to beauty norms. These models and actresses are used by cosmetic companies for brand endorsements.

The cosmetic products that are used by most of the women include 95% of foreign brands that are imported from China, Thailand, Malaysia, the US, Europe and Italy.

And after media, the second most inspiration is the compulsion from environment and peer pressures to follow the beauty norms. Social unrest may be evident among women due to peer competition to look better. These might result in effecting the family units e.g. women compel their men to earn more for their expenditures on cosmetics and efforts to look good. This can be an area of study in itself.

From television shows to tabloids, the standard of beauty has widely changed. Today, young girls and women can see beautiful women of the same skin tone, as they have, in movies, magazines and television. They no longer have to aspire to achieve the beauty norm of White women. In recent years, the influence of Western perceptions of beauty has been sweeping aside by classical Asian ones as faces of oriental celebrities appear on the big screen and spread across the glossy magazines. Undoubtedly, the current trend of beauty mixture in Asia is a result of the longstanding influence of Western images in movies and television, accelerated by the advent of the media.

Whatever the income group may be, the cosmetics are made to be in range for all. There has been more money to be spent on items that were once considered a luxury, but are now more commonly viewed as a necessity. Taking care of skin and maintaining appearance is clearly becoming an increasingly important activity to women in this part of the world.

In ancient history, especially Egyptian, people who were poorly groomed were considered inferior. This aspect is very evident in today's study of beautification as well. Therefore the mostly followed inspiration after models and actresses in following the beauty aspects is the peer group and pressure from the environment for these young women.

Religious, cultural, social and economical limitations of Pakistani society are being violated. Social norms are changing negatively. As an influence of beauty norms these young women seem to have been following the trends blindly. To get a self esteem the beauty norms are followed without a second thought.

regarding a threat to social values and economic burden of developing country.

The use of colored cosmetics is built in behaviors. Young women find them more attractive, consequently more confident, and are able to gain the attention of peers and opposite genders through use of these products. Reference B.F Skinner's reinforcement theory, the gaining of attention works as a positive reinforcement and women continue following the beauty norms without considering the psychological deterioration in their personalities and economical burdens on family and country. They would spend money and time on more effective cosmetic products to gain more satisfaction.

Those who are running in the race of looking beautiful, they some how change the way of their lifestyles. Although the change is considered good but at the same time it is creating economic and psychological pressures in the form of frustrations in a unit's family of young women in the different pockets of society. Besides this, this change is resulting in a huge amount of foreign exchange bill for our already stumbling economy. But it is amazing that the only sector not affected by the economic recession is the beauty parlor business.

It is very clear that the glitzy and glamorized environment is acting as positive reinforcement for young urban women to use various cosmetics to look beautiful. To restructure the problem we can use B.F.Skinner's influence on education as well as psychology. He asserted that positive reinforcement is more effective at changing and establishing behavior than punishment. Taking from this point educationists and sociologists may use education enhancement and indulging in effective social activities as a positive reinforcement for women to prove themselves in a society rather than striving to look beautiful for self esteem.

There should be started a formal counseling or guidance service for females; in order to improve their roles for the society and practicality in education patterns. So that instead of negativity about appearance, women should try to lead a healthy lifestyle that will in turn make them a happier person equally good for the people around them. Longer enhanced self esteem through other

than physical aspects of human personality should be reinforced through easily accessible means like media.

Cosmetic products manufacturing, advertisements and sale is a booming business. But media as a widely accessible medium of communication could deal with serious issues that effect us, rather than introducing, propagating and promoting the enhancement of external beauty. There are many people with incredible inner beauty that no cosmetic in the world can help to achieve. There are ways to enhance inner self and prove for example indulging in charity, social work, environment protection and humanitarian causes like focusing education and health in the less privileged groups of the society. Media and magazines should write about these aspects by drawing the attention of young and educated urban women towards their societies and imparting right values and directing that the social and religious norms can be much more socially benefiting than advertising a cosmetic product that will lose its impact the minute another product is launched in the market.

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