

A Probe into the Impacts of Cosmetic innovations: Revitalizing Beauty, Body and Identity

Ann Mary Jacob

Department of English, Girideepam Institute of Advanced Learning, Vadavathoor, India

Email: aamikutty@gmail.com

Contact: +91-9446038006

Abstract

In purpose, procedures and impacts beauty treatments have undergone evident changes that are in fact demands made by a growing sense of competence and productivity in the present world. This paper analyses how a paradigm shift occurred with respect to the aesthetic values among the public and how ideologies got revised, 'otherness' resolved and individual competence got improved through various cosmetic advancements. It also inquired how the so called bodily disorders and the subsequent psychological disorders get rectified with the emergence of a cosmetic revolution. The normalization of makeup is a matter worth discussion. Make up has become so deeply embedded in our society's culture. Society once constructed the idea that using make up is an activity of women. Such minimal concepts have also undergone revision and expansion.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, Othering, Diaspora, Body Dismorphic Disorder, Ideology, Identity

Introduction

The emergence and growth of a Global Beauty Industry was triggered by many factors including colonisation, fallacious ideologies, Othering based on Diasporic experience and disfigured bodies, new corporate values, technological advancement and so on. Growing media influence stimulates awareness of personal hygiene as well as beauty consciousness enhancing the adoption and frequency of usage of cosmetics. Cosmetics play a crucial role in developing self-perception, confidence, social acceptance and convictions about one's competence and credibility. The extent to which humanity is manipulated by such a cosmetic revolution is debatable. While cosmetic industry enables survival from traumatic experiences like burns, cancers, acid attacks, disfiguration of body by birth or accidents etc it also permeates a pseudo sense of superiority among the so called beautiful and presentable individuals. History has proof enough for great men

who excelled in their fields of expertise irrespective of their appearance. Pushing them to oblivion, we find human consciousness seriously caught under the spell of the mesmerising power of cosmetics.

Literature Review

The shift from Eurocentric assumptions on beauty to idiocentric ones is a key factor that catalysed the proliferation of saloons across the world.

Eurocentrism is the assumption that Europe constitutes the centre of the world. Edward said examines how Euro centrism has played a major role in the perception and construction of other cultures as he explains European culture was able to manage even produce the Orient politically sociologically me literally ideologically scientifically

and imaginatively during the post enlightenment period^{[1](p.258)}

In developing countries an obsession with white skin persisted during the post colonial era resulting in the expansion of skin whitening industry among native populations. The success of the cosmetic industry is attributed to the mistreatment of the native population and the subsequent development of internalized oppression and ingrained preference for white skin. Writers like Kamala Das have expressed how children were isolated just because of their complexion. "The Humiliation of a Brown child in a European School" is the first chapter of her fictional autobiography *My Story*. "We did not tell our parents of the tortures we underwent at school for wearing under the school uniform of white twill, a nut-brown skin." ^{[2](p.2)}

An interesting stereotype question during every child birth is also a concretization of the underlying white colour supremacy. The question is whether the new born is white or dark. Equally thinkable is the inclusion of words describing the colour of a would be bride or bride groom in matrimonial columns. Nowadays, the use of cosmetics is not meant to achieve the euro centric standards instead it aims at promoting individual uniqueness and self satisfaction. The emphasis on white complexion has lessened giving ample significance to individual varieties of complexion. It promotes beauty treatments that ensure skin quality improvement thereby conferring confidence, uniqueness and likeability in individuals. All individual varieties of colour gain equal status and deactivate the power attributed to white skin. Attempting different hairstyles and trying out smoothening, colouring or curling of hair according to one's own face cut and inclinations have become normal today. Adjustments may be made until an individual is comfortable with one's appearance. As Eurocentric beauty concepts got destabilized giving way to

idiocentric ones, the scope of cosmetic industry went up. This facilitated a transition from deceptive make up to corrective make over.

Another phenomenon that ushered beauty consciousness among the public is Othering based on various reasons such as migration, bodily disorders, psychologic problems etc. Othering is the way of treating a person or group of people as intrinsically different from a community. The practice of Othering is the exclusion of persons who do not fit perfectly in a social group, placing them at the margins of society.

The act of Othering is a manifestation of power relations. When we start describing ourselves as a part of a group of people united in a 'we', while other people are constructed as fundamentally different united in a 'they', we are using a powerful weapon that might serve to delegitimize others. And too often, these distinctions are drawn along the classic axes and discrimination and power differences like sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, class and so on. ^[3]

According to Michel Foucault othering is strongly connected with power and knowledge. When we other another group, we point out their perceived weaknesses to make ourselves look stronger or better. It implies a hierarchy and serves to keep power where it already lies. Thus, one must groom oneself according to the Diasporic demands imposed upon him/her by the migrant country to escape this sort of othering.

Diaspora is a term associated with relocation of groups of people or members of communities from one nation to another. The circumstances under which people relocate themselves are generally economic in nature, that is, prospects of better paid jobs, more lucrative business, better socio cultural life or more tolerant political systems. Canada, for instance, has

been considered a destination for people from outside. The immigrants, tormented by an alien feeling, partly due to the different appearances try to fraternize with the new land by giving up their native styles and embracing the stylistic particularities prevalent in the immigrant country. If they refuse and stick on to 'the indigenous' they are at the risk of isolation. To get at least a superficial sense of belonging and social acceptance they must succumb to those new beauty principles. It assures them safety and self esteem.

Lakshmi Gill, a renowned Canadian poet has written about expatriate experience in her poem *Manna*. She speaks about the demands it makes on human body and appearance. The writings of such authors throw light on how important it is to adapt oneself to the culture and ideology of the new lands for a survival and how incredulously people change their attire in doing so. In a survey, done among expatriate women, it was found that majority of them were forced to change their outfits, cosmetics and style to merge themselves with the new work place culture.

Materials and Methods

Questions

- Name
- Nationality
- Currently residing in
- Gender
- What is your Age?
- What is your profession?
- Have you changed your appearance (dressing style, hair style, cosmetics etc) ever since you started working abroad?
- Do you feel that make-up and self grooming are essential for social acceptance?
- Have you ever felt that opportunities were denied because of poor appearance?

- Do you believe that there is a correlation between improved look, job prospects and competence?

The results are as follows:-

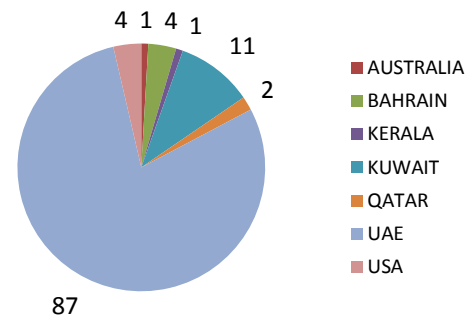


Fig 1. No of members from each country

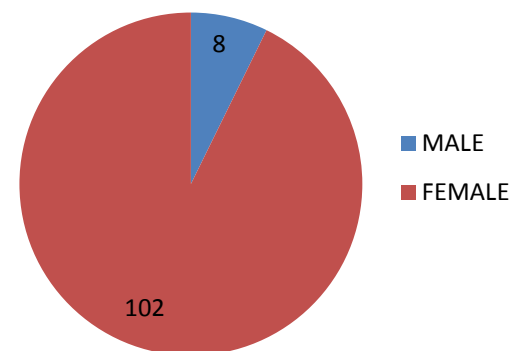


Fig 2. No of people participated in survey

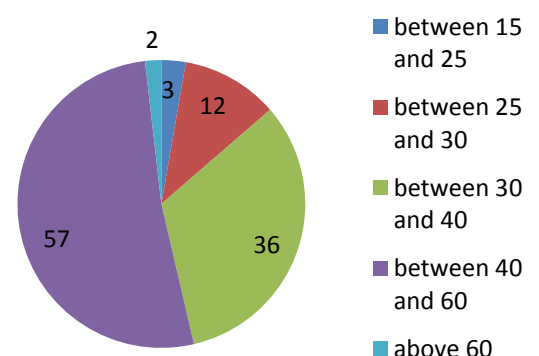


Fig 3. Classification based on age group

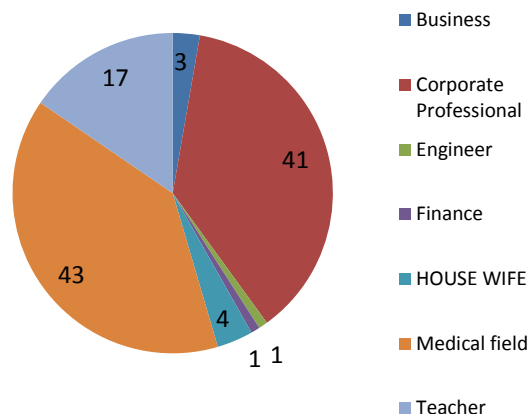


Fig 4: fields of the participants of survey

Do you feel that make-up and self grooming are essential for social acceptance?

110 responses

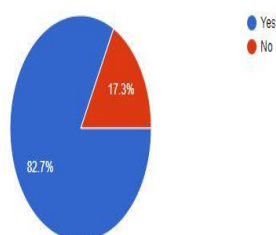


Fig 5: response showing relation with self grooming and social acceptance

Another way of Othering happens due to physical disfiguration. Modernism always emphasised primacy of order and they observed disorder in the depiction of the other. Cosmetic innovations have incredibly contributed to counter this kind of Othering.

BDD or Body Dysmorphic Disorder is a chronic disorder that affects men and women equally. It usually begins during the teens or early adulthood. Common areas include skin imperfections wrinkle, scars, acne blemishes, body hair, absence of hair, facial features, nose, shape and size of

any feature, body weight etc. Such people may engage in repetitive and time-consuming behaviours such as looking in a mirror, picking at the skin and trying to cover up the perceived defect. They will constantly ask for reassurance that the defect is not visible. They may also withdraw from public spheres. (Mental Health: Body Dysmorphic Disorder). In the movie *Rakshasan*, the villain is depicted to have a strange bodily disorder eventually converting him to a psycho^[6].

Subsequent to such bodily disorders individuals may be under the classes of psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, hoarding syndrome, post traumatic stress disorder etc. Plastic surgery or cosmetic surgery is a surgical speciality involving the restoration, reconstruction or alteration of human body. Cosmetic surgery improves patient's appearance, aesthetic appeal, symmetry and proportion. Breast enhancement, facial contouring facial rejuvenation, body contouring, skin rejuvenation etc are some methods which the cosmetic industries offer to resolve physiological and psychological disorders. By doing all these, one can improve self esteem.

It should be remembered that in spite of all such sophistication, there exists a minority with a renewed consciousness; a group of people who are unaffected by their looks. Victims of acid attacks were recently found to have united in opening a restaurant as a way of resisting the fate that their face brought forth. In India, Sheroes Hangout Cafe, run by acid attack survivors celebrated second anniversary. Laxmi Agarwal is an icon among acid attack survivors^[7]. They emerged into the social mainstream from the shadows where they had hidden their scarred faces. There is a perceptible shift in public attitude towards them.



A Cafe Managed by brave #AcidAttack Survivors, the cafe serves you food with a flavor of love and warmth.

Fig 5. Acid attack survivor

It is worth discussing how ideologies are modified, altered or even subverted by the onslaught of cosmetic industry. We live in a technology-driven age where individuals are known by profile pictures in Facebook, WhatsApp etc. The prioritising of one's appearance in defining his identity is a noticeable amendment in our ideology. Formerly, identity was largely hooked up with binary concepts like male/female, literate/ illiterate, rich/poor, believer/atheist etc.

Cosmetic innovations have revitalized body and face, in particular, to redefine identity. "Identity is the image of who one is. This may be either a self imposed image, that is, the image one has of oneself or it may be imposed from outside, that is, the image others have of one. These two images are not always in harmony with each other."^{[4](p.242)}

Furthermore, patriarchal ideologies also get reinforced and even subverted. Women were viewed as 'objects of sex and male gaze' previously. Women were commodified historically in a world-wide marriage market and this constituted the backbone of beauty industry. "Women are specially made to please men" ^{[5] (p. 44).} Earlier, the use of cosmetics among women was solely meant to ensure male gaze thus cementing the patriarchal ideology about women. Now the purpose and methods of beautification have drastically changed. Concepts like 'privilege' and 'freedom' are placed on a

par with make-up and women consider it as a way of self-assertion in a male-dominated world. The beauty industry absorbed men as well into its mainstream abandoning the gender boundary. Subsequent to this successful inclusion of men, we find how the male folk across the world turn 'objects of female gaze'.

The conspicuous correlation between the growing professionalism in the corporate world and the cosmetic industry is another fact that deserves special mention. In a world that necessitates the use of masques of various kinds make-up or make-over has become crucial for existence. A well groomed professional will be respected in workplace and among customers either. Good looks are undoubtedly inevitable criteria in areas such as hiring employees, acceptance among peer group members, customer satisfaction and even promotions. People tend to over value appearance.

Comments given by less attractive people are given less credibility. There are institutes which include theory as well as practical sessions on grooming to ensure their all round competence. Aviation sector is an example. The authenticity of this attributed correlation between appearance and competence was scrutinized in a survey.

Survey among Employers

• Questions

- Name of the Respondent
- Designation
- Name of the firm
- Type of firm
- Location of the firm
- Is the appearance of a candidate an inevitable parameter for hiring?
- Do you insist your employees to maintain pleasing attire while at work?
- "Opinions of less attractive people in a peer group are given less credibility." Do you think so?

- Will you send an unattractive employee to represent your firm in a public platform?
- Do you believe that the competence and excellence of an employee is positively influenced by the physical grooming?

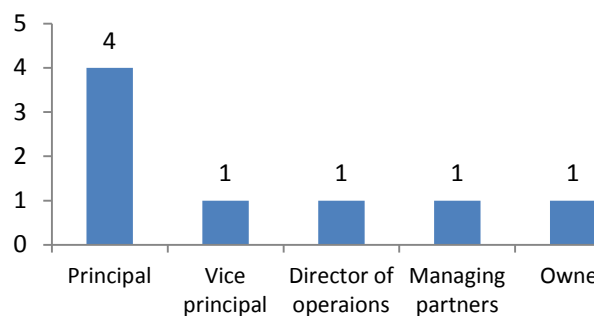


Fig 6: designation of participants
Is the appearance of a candidate an inevitable parameter for hiring?
8 responses

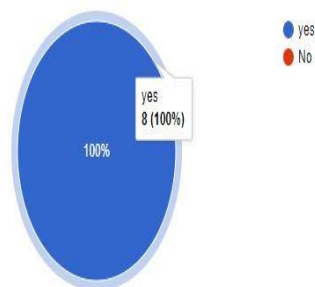


Fig 7: response on hiring parameter

Do you insist your employees to maintain a pleasing attire while at work?
8 responses

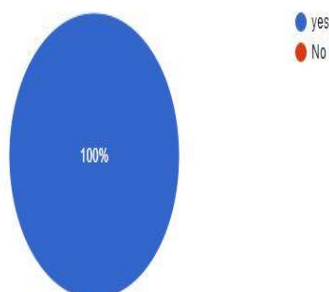


Fig 8. Response on employees' attire while work.

Will you send an unattractive employee to represent your firm in a public platform?

8 responses

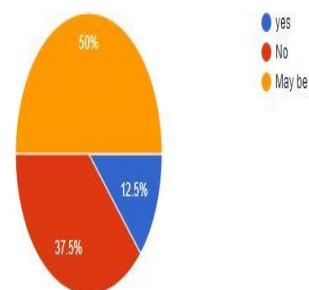


Fig 9. Response on representation of an employee in public platform

Do you believe that the competence and excellence of an employee is positively influenced by the physical grooming?

8 responses

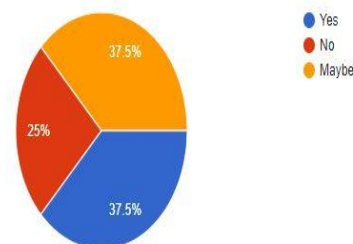


Fig 10. Response on excellence and physical grooming

"Opinions of less attractive people in a peer group are given less credibility." Do you think so?

8 responses

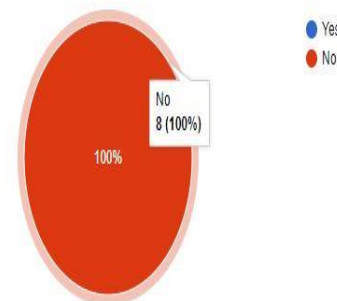


Fig 11. Responses on credibility and attractiveness

Results and Discussion

Beauty, body and identity constitute the new three tier definition of human beings. The use of cosmetics promotes individual uniqueness and self satisfaction.

People largely associate beauty with freedom and self esteem.

Individuals must refine their appearance to cope with the Diasporic demands made by the migrant country.

Different sorts of Othering occur due to dismorphic features.

In hiring and promoting employees appearance is considered as a parameter. Good looks play an integral role in binding as well as reframing ideologies.

A minority with a refined concept on beauty have started propagating the necessity of shedding misconcepts on beauty and of vitalizing individuality by relieving it from the clutches of beauty.

Conclusion

Even as the cosmetic industry makes possible the rehabilitation, survival and revival of many affected by various physiological defects, they inculcate a very deep sense of 'blemishless appearance' and which is in turn negative. In their efforts to overcome the transience of human life, they are in fact falling into the pits of early ageing. Moreover, great social figures like Abdul Kalam, Albert Einstein and many others are still remembered for their talent and intellect regardless of how they looked. The success stories of many other personalities from various other fields are sufficient evidence for this. For example, the Malayalam actress, Nimisha Sajayan who does not use much of cosmetics to deck up herself won an award recently. Therefore, by ensuring a healthy and balanced usage of cosmetics, a renewed consciousness about beauty and appeal should rewrite our existing aesthetic ideology.

References

- [1]. Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th

ed., Penguin Books: London, United Kingdom, 2014; pp 258

- [2]. Das, Kamala. *My Story*, 1st ed.; Sterling Publishers: New Delhi, India, 1976; pp 2
- [3]. "Introductory Essay: "The Other" and "Othering"/ New Narratives." 15 October 2018: URL(accessed on 4/3/2019)
- [4]. Buchanan, Ian. *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 2nd ed.; OUP : New York, United Kingdom, 2010; pp 242
- [5]. Groag Bell, Susan and Offen, M. Karen; ed, "Women, The family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents", *Women, the Family and Freedom*, 1983, vol.1:1750-1880, pp.43-49.
- [6]. "Mental Health: Body Dysmorphic Disorder." 20 May 2018: URL (accessed on 11/3/2019)
- [7]. Voanews.com. 23 Dec 2016: URL (accessed on 11/ 3/2019)