Making Meaning of Racial Cosmetic Surgery: Its Implications and Effects on the Lives of Women in America

by

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Abstract

Racial cosmetic surgery, a practice where individuals modify their racial features through surgery, is a cultural phenomenon affecting women across the globe. In America, this practice is causing incredible repercussions on the lives of raced women. This thesis explores this phenomenon through a multi-theoretical approach which intertwines notions of the postmodern body, the disciplined body, and the phenomenological/ performed body in order to understand the implications of this practice. An analysis of the racial and aesthetic background of America is followed by an analysis of racial cosmetic surgery and its industry. This helps to explain the question of how and why women are choosing to modify their bodies. Ethnic anonymity arises as the goal for most women engaging in this practice rather than Caucasianization. Through the transcendence of binary notions of oppression and emancipation, this thesis explores the effects of racialized bodily ideals and the ways that women make sense of their lived realities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Women have historically been at the centre of Western society's dominant control system. The subjugation of women and their bodies has typically centered on discourses of the body and the ways that physical characteristics can be used to ascribe individuals to particular roles and spaces in a given society. An extremely powerful discourse in the West about normal, ideal body types serves to further subjugate individuals, particularly women, by stereotyping and by implanting ideologies about individual responsibility in achieving 'perfection'. The body is thus the medium where cultural distinctions of gender as well as sexual orientation, class, race, ethnicity, and age are revealed (Gimlin 2002:3). In this sense, it can be argued that the body is a medium of culture. It is the space where cultural notions, norms, and rules are written and where commonly shared attitudes of the greater society are displayed.

A prevailing feature of contemporary North American society is that notions of the body, gender, and race are considered socially constructed categories. They rest upon society's historical, political, economic, and cultural ideals at any given time. Race in North America serves as a great divider in society, despite the acknowledgement that much historical racist sentiment is no longer considered valid or true. In the context of this thesis, race will be considered as a system of power that "draws on physical differences to construct and give meaning to racial boundaries and the hierarchy of which they are a part" (Kibria, 2000, p. 78). North American society, among many other colonized areas worldwide, has historically been built upon racist ideals. The subjugation, oppression, incarceration, slavery, and murder that emerged out of colonizing practices helped to build many great societies today. Although in North America, great progress has been achieved in attempting to maximize equality for

everyone, racial practices still hold sway in the present. Racism and racial stereotyping are often gendered and this is mostly made clear through the consideration of the discourses around raced bodies. Out of these notions arises a Caucasian[1], Eurocentric normative ideal to which individuals feel the need to adhere.

A particularly interesting phenomenon in our society that brings together gender, race, and aestheticism is the widespread practice of racialized cosmetic surgery. This type of cosmetic surgery involves the alteration of physical characteristics that we would consider racial or ethnic markers in order to allow the face and/or body to fit with principles set forth in the dominant culture about normal or idealized bodies. Such principles of ideal bodies in North American society typically take a very Eurocentric notion in defining and perpetuating themselves as the norm. Typically defined through white or Caucasian features, bodily and beauty ideals serve to subjugate the racialized Other. Beyond this, there is an oppressive discourse of beauty in society that takes Eurocentric notions and instills them into the psyches of women in multicultural North America. This study of the discourse, rooted in social beliefs and dominant structures of power, will help clarify the ways in which, and the reasons why, individuals conform to, or resist, society's norms and ideals surrounding the body. It will also illuminate the ways that the various cultural practices that help maintain these bodily norms are in fact closely related to both the oppression and the emancipation of the individual as well as the wealth of experiences in between. It is important to this study to recognize the ways in which the conformity of women's bodies to an ideal form is not only assured but has also been maintained in the long term. The methods of power dispersal throughout social networks proves to be more important to this study

[1] The term Caucasian is used here and throughout this thesis to be representative of a particular understanding of race and bodily forms. While Whiteness typically is used to only signify skin colour or tone, Caucasian is a term that is used to encompass the full realm of physical features that are associated with a white or light skin colour.

than identifying who actually holds power. Understanding power is more about uncovering its operations and consequences rather than who is in charge (Gagne and McGaughey, 2002, p. 818), as power is not a static entity in society. This is particularly important in this study as the purpose is not to seek how and why certain groups hold power in a particular way in society. Rather, the purpose is to develop an understanding of the ways that certain forms of power, specifically, cultural discourses on ideal bodies and race, affect the ways that women view their bodies and lives and the elements that allow for significant bodily changes.

This thesis will examine three important and interacting theoretical paradigms involving the body: the postmodern or poststructuralist body, the disciplined body, and the phenomenological or performed body, and apply these approaches to the ethnographic literature surrounding race-linked body modification practices. These perspectives are all ways of understanding the body as a response to current social trends. They allow for the deconstruction of a set form of materiality and for the reinterpretation of individuals and their use of the body as a response to power structures and normative frameworks in society.

This thesis also provides an overview and analysis of cosmetic surgery culture through the study of ways that clinics advertise and display their services. It will then return to the theories in order to evaluate their strengths and their inadequacies in revealing how individuals and groups of women respond to racial body modification in our society. In short, the ethnographic literature and the analysis of the cosmetic surgery industry's advertising and discourses will be used to judge the sufficiency of these theories in discussing the problem at hand, which is why and how women engage in such types of racial and ethnic body modification. The primary issue this paper will address is an examination of the implications of racialized body modification practices upon the lived realities of women in North America and how they come to

deal with them. In an effort to avoid the dichotomy of indoctrination versus agency, this thesis will seek a deeper understanding, through the three theoretical perspectives employed, of how ideal bodies exist in our society, why it is that many women feel the need to embrace, aspire to, or submit themselves to such ideals, and what the consequences are for women's lives.

The key purpose of this Master's thesis is to develop a theoretical framework that explains the emphasis society places upon the perfection of women's bodies and the resultant ways that women actively seek to modify their bodies to meet society's ideals. This thesis takes the three interrelated theoretical perspectives as a starting point for understanding real practices of racial body modification, which involves the changing of the body, typically by cosmetic surgery, so as to erase outward signs of racial or ethnic identity. The objective of this is to apply this material so as to generate a better understanding of how and why women choose to undergo racial forms of cosmetic surgery in contemporary North America.

This first chapter of the thesis has outlined the intent of the thesis project with an overview of the research question, its importance to the current field of knowledge, and its intent on illuminating the status and place of women in contemporary North American society and thus its significance in general. Following from the above discussion, I will now undertake an overview of the three theoretical paradigms to show the backdrop against which I will be analyzing the rest of the material in the chapters to follow.

The Postmodern/Poststructuralist Body

The postmodern condition sets out to deconstruct set notions of the body. Essentially, it is a way to problematize the structures that have historically given shape to the body and to understand it more as a response to, or a representation of, changing notions of subjectivity in

society. Postmodernism questions the desire for a set meaning or standard of truth and allows for multiple notions of subjectivity in our interactions with the world. While poststructuralism says that the subject has never existed, postmodernism, on the other hand, says that the integrity that the subject once had is no longer valid (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 91-92). Although there are slight differences between the two theoretical perspectives, they work well together in the dislocation of the idea of the subject. The importance of postmodern and poststructuralist thought in relation to the current project is that these paradigms encourage new ways of understanding the relationships that women have with their bodies—the ways that they come to know and understand their bodies as an interactive part of the self. In the deconstruction of the self, ideas of race, gender, and aesthetics as well become disconnected from the individual. Such notions come to rest upon one's own understanding of their own subjectivity. Therefore, postmodernism and poststructuralism allow us to understand how women use body modification practices to change their bodies, detach themselves from their natural, given bodies, and then take their new bodies as a signifier of the true self.

Both postmodernism and poststructuralism rest upon a particular understanding of the determination of language. The paradigm of postmodernism argues that language produces meaning and identity, often through the use of binary oppositions (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 96). In addition, poststructuralism, with the goal of deconstructing the binary systems which dominate our language and thought, challenges the value judgments placed on certain terms and the subordinate status that is reciprocally placed on its binary (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 93). The binary sets of man/woman, good/evil, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, all carry status and value judgments embedded within the words themselves, as they are part of this binary system. In understanding the value placed upon specific words, we can then understand how subordination

works in contemporary North American society in that these judgments still hold meaning to them. Such binary modes of thought reinforce the domination of particular groups over others, due to the hierarchy that is embedded within our thinking. As language is seen to be embedded within a social relationship of power, postmodernism attempts to break down the set categories which come to rule our lives, such as gender, race, the body, and beauty, as a means of understanding the world. Through the loss of set categories and forms of identities, individuals can understand and challenge or resist dominant societal ideals. The breakdown of notions of gender has allowed for multiple gendered identities and sexualities to be understood and legitimated in our society. This has also given women an opportunity to challenge their subordinate status in Western societies.

The breakdown of notions of race has also occurred by questioning the legitimacy of racial categories in an attempt to show their inconsistencies and thus how such categories do not reflect any form of reality or truth. The postmodern perspective essentially allows for "human freedom from bodily determination" (Bordo, 2001, p. 122). Through the breakdown of established terms and ideas in society, postmodernists demonstrate how open the body can be to new modes of reflection.

Much of postmodern thought has arisen in the context of the consumer culture of capitalist society as well as in a world with ever-expanding technological possibilities. The current disregard of both material and psycho-social limits of the body have occurred in conjunction with an ever-expanding ideology and fantasy of rearrangement, transformation, correction, freedom, and change at the level of the body. In fact, what we are seeing is a defiance of history, mortality, aging, and the "very materiality of the body" (Bordo, 2001, p. 122). It is through the body that individuals make and remake the world, shifting perspective,

location, and thus constantly arriving at new points of view (Bordo, 1993, p. 227). Bordo describes this as "cultural plastic" meaning that humans now hold the power to change and determine their bodily selves as we come to understand the freedom of transformation (Bordo, 1993, p. 246). The current trend of cosmetic surgery demonstrates how women are choosing to determine which type of body they want. Such fantasies and notions of this type of power and transformation are spurred by the media and popular culture, which constantly tell us that our bodies are ours for the choosing. However, taking these notions of cultural plasticity into account, Bordo explains that the individual body cannot be dissociated from the society in which it exists. The postmodern body exists as an expression of, and as a response to, changing forms of subjectivity, power, and resistance to social conditions (Bordo, 1993, p. 288). As such, the postmodern body relies largely upon the changing social norms and practices of gender, sex, race, etc. of contemporary times.

Popular culture plays a large role in fueling these fantasies of self-transformation and determination. Through a variety of media, we are constantly being told of the choices we have in what kind of body we can have. There is a downside to this though in that the images of ideal bodies that are often presented to us are extremely homogenizing and normalizing—they are deeply embedded with the dominance of gendered, racial, class, and other culturally powerful iconography (Bordo, 2001, p. 124). Essentially, they are representative of a Caucasian ideal of beauty and body type. This can prove to be harmful to an individual's sense of self. As Bordo states, "failing to acknowledge the psychological and cultural potency of normalizing imagery can be just as effective in effacing people's experiences of racial oppression as lack of attentiveness to cultural and ethnic differences" (Bordo, 2001, p. 133). The discourse of unlimited modes of change often neglects the set cultural ideals in our society. Bordo gives the

example of the anorexic body which demonstrates the extreme end of a discourse of self-realization. The forms of cultural manipulation to which women's bodies are particularly vulnerable often become manifested in very extreme and harmful ways (Bordo, 1993, p. 143). A postmodern discourse calls for the reevaluation of these norms and ideals. In calling into question the legitimacy of bodily norms and ideals of beauty, postmodernists are also working within a discourse of gender and race. The only way to overcome such normalizing ideals is to de-legitimize their very essence.

A feminist turn towards postmodernism examines subjectivity as a kind of negotiation between the individual and the world. The deconstruction of the term 'woman' has enabled feminists to analyze the different social, political, and economic statuses of women rather than treat them as a universal subject (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 102-103). An understanding of the multitude of differences between women allows for the analysis of how certain dominating ideals in society can be particularly oppressive depending on one's social status. The deconstruction of subjectivity enables a deeper search into the ways that women's lives are shaped by the forces that surround them. Donna Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg is a clear indication of the step that postmodernist feminism is taking towards new forms of subjectivity. Haraway explains the cyborg as being about transgressed boundaries, fusions, and extreme possibilities which are likely to be embedded in a political system (Haraway, 2004, p. 12). The cyborg is a myth which represents the lengths to which political constructions and attitudes motivate the individual and society in the transformation of the body and of the self as a whole. The cyborg is a hybrid form that falls in the place between machine and organism. With this hybridity, it emphasizes the endless possibility of transformation as it merges material reality with imagination (Haraway, 2004, p. 8). Haraway's cyborg points to a form of subjectivity that

questions the boundaries that exist between human bodies and the technology with which they are in contact. The cyborg is understood as "an embodied subject, but it is embodied through its discursive and material relations with other things" (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 106). Technology is an important fact of today's society and thus understanding the ways that individuals may make use of technology in the shaping of the self, in the indeterminate numbers of ways in which to shape the self, is the goal of much postmodern feminist discourse. That the individual is enmeshed in this society of blurred distinctions and transgressed boundaries is indicative of the relative unreliability of essential notions of gender or race. As each of these categories is part of a social, historical, capitalist reality, they lose concreteness in this context.

Poststructuralism also questions the idea of the subject. Ann Brooks states that the advantage of a poststructuralist strategy lies "in the fact that an awareness of the contradictory nature of subjectivity highlights the possibility of choice in different situations and between different discourses" (Brooks, 1997, p. 21). Therefore, within both the postmodern and the poststructuralist writings, notions of bodily change and unlimited forms of subjectivity give women the freedom to choose the types of bodies they wish to have. The element of choice seems to stress the notion of agency and that women can be considered free agents in their self-determination. However, the underlying dominance of gendered, racial, and aesthetic discourses serves to curtail the various possibilities. In the following analyses of gender, race, aesthetics, and most importantly, of cosmetic surgery, it will be shown how limitless possibilities for change seem to exist in our society, yet the dominance of one particular type of body serves as an important cultural fact. The paradigm of the postmodern/poststructuralist body will thus enable us to examine body modification practices that women engage in as a response to our contemporary world. Given today's consumer culture and freedom of choice, we as individuals

are told that we are in control of our lives and that we can have whatever life we choose. The notion of limitless choice that is promoted in consumerism is echoed through the theory of postmodernism. Our bodies are ways for us to exert what we feel is necessary for a fulfilled life. Such a notion of cultural plasticity and the postmodern condition of the body allows for a reinterpretation of set notions of the materiality of the body and the symbolic importance of impressions and aesthetics.

The Disciplined Body

The paradigm of the postmodern and poststructuralist body demonstrated how in contemporary North American society, the message is that our bodies are ours for the choosing. We have now arrived at a time where technology and social norms have allowed for the acknowledgement that bodies may not be 'perfect,' yet we are able to change them at will. Notions of the disciplined body add to this discussion of the possibilities for change. The "disciplined body" stems mainly from the work of Michel Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* Foucault examines the bourgeois creation of a raced body and of notions of sex that were largely controlled by higher powers. In this text, he examines the ways in which sex is put into discourse and thus created as a site of power (Foucault, 1978, p. 11). He contends that by revealing the nature of human experiences in relation to sex we are able to place ideas about it within a specific hierarchy or structure. Sex is thus also created as a site of repression and self-discipline as it relates to notions of morality. The "disciplined body" is important to the study of body modification as it examines how individuals and groups respond to pressure from power structures in society. Such a theory helps to understand the response of body modification as a means of self-discipline and therefore as a way for women to assert their affirmation or even just acknowledgment of the norm. Foucault explains that by putting notions of sex and gender into

discourse, such notions became subjugated at the level of language. This is what he saw as the true means to gaining mastery over political notions in reality (Foucault, 1978, p. 17). By controlling the ways that we think about, and speak of, notions of sex and gender, new ideas about how they can actually exist in our society are censored and silenced. The prudishness of bourgeois society allowed for one particular notion of sex and gender to be acknowledged, and thus all deviations from this norm were subjugated. This idea ties well into notions of race and the stereotypes associated with it. By naming or bringing race into our discourse, something had to come to be subjugated. Subjugating different individuals, based on race or gender, with the stereotypes and stigmas surrounding these categorical differences, allows for them to become real in our society and for them to dominate in a particular way. It is these discourses themselves, Foucault states, which bring such categories into the exercise of power (Foucault, 1978, p. 18). The process of putting ideas of sex, gender, and race into discourse was illuminated by Foucault as a means of confession of both one's desires and of one's acts which breach the law (Foucault, 1978, p. 21). While confession of sexual preferences or of a gendered identity are internal, the confession of racial difference is often outright visible in our society, although not always. Through undergoing forms of body modification which erase visible racial markers, we might say that this is in fact an act of confession—both of one's difference and of one's desire to assimilate to the norm.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault describes a notion of power and the resulting bodies that come to be formed through such forms of power. The human body is directly involved in a very political field where certain power relations constantly have some form of power over it (Foucault, 1977, p. 25). As the body is invested with particular relations to power and domination, it is realized that this body must also be productive in its subjectivity

(Foucault, 1977, p. 26). Foucault's understanding of power is that it must be productive rather than repressive. It can be productive in the context of the production of knowledge or through the positive reinforcements that accompany its adherence. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, he notes that this notion follows the way that the asylum was constructed. Rather than physical, real constraint upon the visitors, the system was instead organized around an element of self-restraint where the patient realized the potential recognition of guilt and thus controlled his/her behaviour accordingly (Foucault, 1965, p. 250). The response to such discipline included a system of moral consciousness that provided the patient with positive reinforcement for their behaviour (Foucault, 1965, p. 250). Thus, by submitting oneself to higher powers, the patients gained a sense of acceptance into society. This compliance with society's ideals is what Foucault describes as biopower. Biopower is essentially productive as it conceals its underlying procedures and allows for the individual to regulate the self as this power is centered on the individual body. In his discussion of the history of sexuality, Foucault details this notion of self-discipline and self-restraint as a response to hidden mechanisms of power. Essentially, he states that although power comes from 'below', it is exercised with a set series of aims and objectives (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). Power functions as an individually-driven response to cultural norms and ideals. The individual's compliance with these cultural ideas is in fact an enforcement of power. As such, power is seen to come from below, as it is the individual who enforces the power upon her/himself. The force of such power rests in its invisibility and its ability to provide positive reinforcements for those who abide by it.

Foucault introduces the idea of the 'docile body' as an essential element to the productive form of power. Discipline is a way for power to be placed upon the individual body and to allow for self-regulation and self-control. The docile body is an effect of discipline as it is a body that

is open to different forces of power and that can be used, transformed, or improved upon so as to suit society's ideals (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). In this sense, individuals often believe that they are in fact in charge of the ways they, and others, will see and use their bodies. However, Foucault believes that this is not so. This form of discipline, through its seeming invisibility, actually dissociates power from the body. He says that "on one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). The contradiction that seems to arise is what gives discipline its power. As Foucault explains, disciplinary power works mainly through its invisibility; individuals do not see the workings of power being exerted upon them. However, it imposes a kind of compulsory visibility onto those whom it subjects (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). Individuals are the ones who are seen in social life, not the power that is exercised over them. Individuals thus hold themselves in their own subjection in the knowledge that they are a product of visibility and of objectification.

Foucault makes use of Jeremy Bentham's model of a prison to describe the compulsory visibility and endless subjection to power that individuals in society experience. This model, the Panopticon, revolved around a system of design which placed the inmates of the prison into a state of "conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The Panopticon, as an architectural figure, revolves around a central tower surrounded by windows. On the periphery is a building that is divided into cells also with windows which face the central tower and also on the opposite end, so as to allow light to enter the cells. This backlighting allows for observation from the tower of all inmates in their cells. The effect of the backlight, however, does not allow the inmates to determine whether anyone is

observing them from the central tower (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Thus, they are constantly under the assumption that they are being watched. Visibility is a trap in that one is always under some form of control, as one is always visible. In this system, the inmate understands that he/she is potentially always under some form of supervision. The power rests in the idea that the effects of surveillance are permanent upon the individual, despite the fact that this supervision might not always be carried out. Individuals are aware that they might at any time be under surveillance and thus they discipline themselves in a way that speaks to the notion that they are always under a system of power. Power is perfected in this sense in that its actual exercise is unnecessary (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Bentham articulated that this form of organization would only work as long as power remained visible and unverifiable: visible, in that the inmate always has an image of a central tower from where he believes surveillance is stemming; and unverifiable in that the inmate never knows whether or not this surveillance is actually being carried out (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). These notions cause the inmates to themselves be the bearers of power over their lives. Foucault, in describing the effects of the Panopticon, states that "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles: he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, 1977, p. 202-203). The ways that the inmates reduce themselves to a product of constant surveillance demonstrates the ways that power can be dispersed throughout society without any real or set bearer. It does not matter who holds power, but how it is exerted.

This model of the Panopticon is more than a model for a prison. It can be extended as a more general model for understanding the everyday lives of individuals in society. As an ideal form, individuals subject themselves to a particular form of surveillance and thus discipline their

bodies so as to submit to the norms, ideals, and even laws that society calls for. Even Foucault argues that this model is not the only way that power is exerted. "By using the idea of the Panopticon I don't want to imply that everyone subjects themselves in the same way. I want to acknowledge that there is a form of disciplinary power that influences our perceptions of our bodies and allows for us to realize the potential to change" (Foucault, 1977, p. 205). Such a form of disciplinary power can be carried over to discussion of bodily norms in relation to race. In the following chapters, racial and aesthetic notions will be illuminated in order to show the ways that those individuals who are visibly raced often find ways to change their bodies in order to suit society's ideals. Cosmetic surgery is one of the most extreme forms of bodily discipline where the individual, aware that her/his body does not suit the norm or the ideal form, undergoes surgery in order to erase their visibly raced body parts and to conform their bodies to the norm. Despite the seeming normalization of society's ideals, Foucault argues that the socially produced, disciplined individual is not a passive subject within this effect of power. Individuals are actively involved and aware of the processes that they undergo in their self-discipline. In asking why an individual would choose to subjugate themselves in such a way so as to affirm a subjugating form of power, Foucault states that this allows individuals to gain a positive sense of self as we see ourselves acting and participating in the world (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 119). This sense of agency stems from the will to knowledge that we hold in our society. In a desire to know our true selves, individuals create meaning through bodily discipline and through "techniques of the self" which allow individuals to approach their own subjectivity in a creative and interactive way (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 120). Such notions deny the legitimacy of truths and suggest that the individual is more focused on the self and not on understanding society as a whole.

Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary structures in society treats the body as one; that is, he fails to distinguish between male and female bodies, thus ignoring the modes of embodiment and the forms of discipline that are specifically focused on women's bodies. Despite this, theorists can gain by using a clearly feminist approach to Foucault in analyzing the power structures that affect women specifically as the feminine body is seen as a direct effect of disciplinary power. Authors such as Susan Bordo (1993) and Sandra Bartky (1990) both offer feminist interpretations of Foucault in describing how self-discipline is one of the means by which women take part in their own subjugation. They incorporate the concept of the Panopticon to explore the effects of the male gaze, both real and imagined, as active in the production of women's self-surveillance (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 127). They argue that consumer culture and the cult of beauty make women increasingly aware of their bodies and their inadequacies. While these theorists focus particularly on the male gaze, this cannot be taken as the only type of disciplinary gaze that has effects on women. The gaze can arise from men, women, and various other sources that exist in society. The proliferation of images, discourse, and beauty products and services, provide a template against which women judge their own bodily worth (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 127).

The question remains to be asked then, that if women are seen as agents who react to such images in a particular way, how do we come to understand subversions of such norms? That is, where do resistance and challenges to the norm fit in with such an understanding of power? The major concern with Foucaultian thought is that he is often seen to treat individuals as passive recipients of power norms. The position taken in this paper is that agency must be seen from even its smallest beginnings. To simply understand agency as a complete subversion of the norm fails to recognize the ways that individuals establish meaning in their own right

within these power structures. Most understandings and theorizing of agency tends to treat it as a grand act, whereas most individuals can be seen to exert agency in their daily acts. The acknowledgement and utilization of beauty norms for women does not simply mean that women are all passive recipients of society's ideals. Whether women incorporate beauty norms or reject them, they are all working at individual empowerment. Understanding the reasons why women submit themselves to racial cosmetic surgery offers an understanding of empowerment at the individual level. It can be argued that those women who reject popular beauty ideals are revolutionary; however, such rejections can still simply add to one's oppression. The point is that whether or not one incorporates society's norms and ideals into one's life, we are all still under this disciplinary system of power. The importance is to understand the empowerment and the meanings that individuals gain from whatever acts they may engage in. Agency can often only be seen as an expression of one's subversion of social norms. To understand agency as an action which enables the individual to empower herself in any way means to understand how individuals can incorporate certain social ideals into their lives.

The Phenomenological and Performed Body

Phenomenology is the theoretical notion that takes the body as an experience, and not a natural, set, given. As such, the body represents a set of possibilities to be realized through its continuous interaction and expression in the world. This paradigm is important to the current study of race and body modification because it understands the body not as a set standard, but as a discursive notion that is constantly in flux. An individual's perspective on the body is always changing and ways of understanding the self and our position in the world are open to countless possibilities.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty understands the body as an experience of being in the world, and of being in relation to the world. As such, perception and experience can only be considered from the perspective of the body. Thus, our bodies must be understood in a holistic manner, collapsing all sense of duality and experiencing and perceiving the body as a whole, interactive unit (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thomas Csordas expands upon Merleau-Ponty's discussion of phenomenology in explaining how, in the context of late capitalism and consumer culture, the body is constantly in flux as it attempts to perform the various impressions and experiences it perceives as important. Csordas, in describing the body as "the existential ground of culture and self" elaborates how such a body, as it is constantly changing, is difficult as an analytic concept. Therefore, no objective truth can be arrived at as to what it is (Csordas, 1994, p. 4). However, concurrently, Csordas calls for the importance of recognizing embodiment as a starting point for conceptualizing the existential nature of humans. This existential nature of being-in-the-world has a sense of immediacy- not as a synchronic moment of time, but as a temporally experienced presence and reflection of, the world.

Judith Butler also tackles ideas of phenomenology of the body in looking at performance, especially as it relates to gender. As she describes, gender is a constructed identity and, thus, unstable. Individuals perform their identity through various repeated acts in time in order to fit with societal standards and expectations (Butler, 2003, p. 519). As such, the gendered body can be understood as an experienced, temporal mode of being-in-the-world, dependent upon one's performance and her interaction with the world. Butler's work is predicated on the notion that the "personal is political" (Butler, 2003, p. 523), meaning that individuals tend to perform their gendered selves as society deems acceptable. Bodies in this sense are explicitly gendered and, as such, the ways in which one performs such gendered embodiment has implications for the ways

that they interact with their world. The importance of a political understanding of the self rests in the ways one comes to live out his or her material self (Brook, 1999, p. 14). In reference to language and the discursive construction of binary divisions and hierarchical terms, one's understanding of the self is predicated upon their designated place in society. Through an understanding of the self as materially and socially constructed, we can begin to question why particular bodies are subordinated and deemed illegitimate or deviant forms. Calling into question the ways that materiality influences one's designation in society can illuminate how racial and gendered hierarchies are perpetuated throughout society. Taking the phenomenological point of view which understands the self in a complex and ever-changing relation to the world, individuals can be seen as open to negotiating the ways that they wish to be represented and known. Undermining the dichotomies which rule our lives will mean an increased relativistic understanding of differently raced or sexed bodies. As well, it will legitimize the notion that, as our bodies are ours for the choosing, the alteration of the materiality of the body may not reduce the legitimacy of an individual's human status. In a sense, an individual who voluntarily chooses a particular material form which differs from their naturally given state can be seen as creating a personal identity that they see fit in order to work in relation to the world in which they live.

Phenomenological notions work towards an understanding of the self which presumes a necessary interrelatedness between the mind and body, if not a total denial of such entities as separate (Grosz, 1994, p. 86). The mind functions as a result of an embodied sense of self. It is based on corporeal relations and interactions with the world. Racial understandings of the self are typically understood as rooted in the material body. As such, the mind often perceives the self as others in society relate to these individuals in their material form. The ways that

individuals experience the world is a result and a reflection of the ways that they embody a sense of self in the world. Merleau-Ponty believes that experience cannot be predetermined or understood as a natural given. Grosz interprets his belief by stating that "experience is not outside social, political, historical, and cultural forces and in this sense cannot provide an outside vantage point from which to judge them" (Grosz, 1994, p. 94). Effectively, in order for individuals to determine a reflective sense of self, their embodiment must reflect how they wish to be seen and will thus affect the ways that they experience the world.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity can be extended to notions of race and ethnicity as well. Like gender, race and ethnicity are highly constructed, malleable ways of being-in-the-world and of experiencing the world around oneself. Ideas of performance can help illuminate the temporality of the experience of a racial or ethnicized identity and the ways the individuals relate to such identities. As identity rests and is constructed and performed through certain effects of power, the adherence to particular forms of identities can be helpful to marginal individuals. Despite the importance of the materiality of the body, technology and the socio-cultural environment of contemporary North America have allowed for greater ease and access to permanent body modification practices, such as cosmetic surgery, which enable one to essentially construct a new, socially satisfying self.

The phenomenological and performed body speaks to the ways that racial cosmetic surgery is normalized in our society. If we ascribe to the ideas of individual agency and self-determination as a means of creating an embodied sense of self then who is to deny the permanent changes that individuals may wish to make upon their bodies? The understanding of the existential being-in-the-world as a moment in time allows for the question of why individuals

choose to alter their bodies permanently. Perhaps this speaks to the dominating power that bodily norms hold in society.

Outline of the Thesis

This first chapter of the thesis provided an outline of the research question and a basic explanation of the context in which it exists. The theoretical perspectives that have been explained will later be connected to the ethnographic material surrounding the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how and why it exists. The next chapter will examine the ethnographic literature that focuses on the body, gender and race, and aesthetics. The third chapter will examine literature on body modification practices and develop links to gender, race, and aesthetics through the use of the theoretical paradigms employed. Chapter four will examine the industry of cosmetic surgery through an analysis of magazines and websites directly related to advertising the use of cosmetic surgery. It will also examine the growing trend of television programming on cosmetic surgery. The focus will be on the imagery and the discourse used to advertise the use of body modification products and services to determine whether there is a racial bias inherent in them. This will illuminate the trend and the growth of racial cosmetic surgery in our society. The fifth chapter will utilize the ethnographic literature on gender, race, aesthetics, and body modification to evaluate the relevance and value of the theoretical paradigms used. It will also review the relevance of the cosmetic surgery industry in the decision-making process. I will draw conclusions as to why and how women in North America are practicing racialized forms of body modification and what the implications are for society, and for women as individuals. The phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery will be expressed as a means of gaining ethnic anonymity for visibly raced individuals. As a means to gain an individual sense of self, it will be concluded that those who undergo racial

cosmetic surgery are not necessarily or particularly interested in Caucasianization but in developing a sense of self that does not revolve around their race.

Conclusion

This study of racial cosmetic surgery helps to illuminate the status of women, especially those of visible racial/ethnic groups, in North American society. The issue of women's willingness to change their bodies to fit in with a particular norm is addressed so we can understand where oppression and subordination exist in our society. Then, we might also see how women's own responses are shaped as a way so as to work for their own benefit. In short, giving voice and power to women will allow us to understand our place in society and the ways that aesthetics reigns over people's lives.

This project is open to various interpretations and understandings of the body and why individuals feel that it is important, necessary, or just fruitful to undertake body modification. This project does not intend to judge those that practice such forms of bodily alteration, but to understand why and how it is a fact of our society. In addition, this project is not aimed at examining either side of the dichotomous relation of women's subordination and oppression versus women's agency and emancipation. The approach delivered here is holistic, aiming to transcend such binary systems and develop a better framework by which we can understand the complexities behind women's lives in North America. The next step is understanding how gendered and racial aesthetic ideals have enforced a subjugation of women both historically and contemporarily in American society.

Chapter 2: The Body, Race, and Aesthetics

Women have historically been situated in the body and their worth thus determined by the ways in which they fit and suit society's norms and ideals. Looking at gender, this chapter will demonstrate the underlying notions of subordination and the ways that women have been understood from a position that is grounded in the body. Notions of race will show how North American society further divides social groups and subordinates different groups based on ever-changing notions of race and the related hierarchies inherent in our society. Gender and race intersect as women who are notably racially-othered (i.e., not Caucasian) often find themselves in a position of double-disadvantage due to innate physical qualities which mark them in these ways. Looking at historical conceptions of race both globally and specifically in North America over time will demonstrate both the mutability of such concepts as well as the changing social atmosphere of acceptance and oppression and all states that lie between. Finally, this chapter will examine aesthetic ideals in contemporary North American society to see how and if such notions can be divided from race itself. Understanding exactly what aesthetics and beauty mean will illuminate the ways that we come to define individuals in our society and the ways that social meaning is given to an individual based on their physical characteristics. The intersecting notions of race and aesthetics will lead finally to an understanding of a global image of beauty and the ways that, and reasons why, women globally adhere to such singular images.

The Body

There exists a multitude of theoretical perspectives pertaining to the body and its place in contemporary society and thought. There is certainly not one set understanding of the body as

notions of it typically stem from the society in which we are looking. It has been said that the body is in fact a medium of culture (Bordo, 1993, p. 165). It is thus the place where cultural ideals, norms, history, laws, identities, and social categories are played out. It is also the locus of social control, both physical and psychological. This goes against much historical, popular and academic thought which places the body as a fixed, material form that was based purely on biological science. Contemporary Western notions of the body take into account the changing material objects and desires and the body then becomes a sort of performance of the self (Csordas, 1994, p. 2). Although at times perspectives on the body posit it as free-floating and open to limitless change, there do exist many restrictions or guidelines in North American society that individuals are meant to adhere to in order to legitimate their bodies. The following sections will demonstrate the crossover of particular historical ideals about the body and thus show how contemporary society, despite our visions of boundless bodily forms, still maintains several forceful ideals pertaining to the body that are inscribed into our everyday lives.

An understanding of the body and its association with social power is necessary in order to understand the ways in which societal norms and ideals in relation to our bodies are maintained. Elizabeth Grosz explains how bodies, as based upon a given social environment, are thus subject to the very power forces that structure that particular society. There are factors which actively work to produce "the body as a body of a determinate type" (Grosz, 1994, p. x). Accordingly, bodies must be understood as a productive and interactive part of the social network of a given environment. They are produced by specific meanings and thus work in the production of specific social meanings as well. The material outcomes of bodies cannot be understood simply from the perspective of the body itself. The material body is actually a representation of the social structure and power in a given place. Beverley Skeggs explains that

"bodies are physical sites where the relations of class, gender, race, and sexuality come together and are embodied and practiced" (cited in Holliday & Hassard, 2001, p. 3). The body comes to signify social and political meanings and gives a material representation of the structure of a given society. It can be a symbol for social difference and can thus form the basis of discrimination and oppression (Gimlin, 2002, p. 141). Although it can be centered in a position of subordination, the body can also come to signify subversions of, and resistances to, the norms of a given culture. For the purposes of this thesis, notions of gender, race, and aesthetics are examined from the perspective of the body so as to understand how social ideals are played out in physical, material ways.

Much of contemporary Western thought has been historically grounded in early philosophy. Although ancient Greek philosophy set the tone for a particular strain of thought, it was Rene Descartes who later solidified notions of dualism in Western thinking. Cartesian dualism essentially polarizes the existence of human beings into two different realms—that of the body and that of the mind or consciousness (Johnston, 2001, p. 63). With privilege being asserted onto the mind/consciousness axis of these terms, the body has been colonized in a way that control and power have been placed over it so as to affirm its subordinate status due to the inherent assumptions that come with it. Often the body is posited in a negative sense—it is seen as the location of passion, disruption, and intrusion with the higher order of the mind. Bodies are seen as being what the mind, the privileged axis, is not. According to Grosz, the body "is what the mind must expel in order to retain its integrity. It is implicitly defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction/judgment, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of the mind, reason, or personal identity through its opposition to consciousness, to the psyche, and the other privileged terms within philosophical thought" (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). The body is thus understood

as the factor which limits the mind or consciousness from reaching enlightened heights. Historically, women have been associated with the bodily axis of this dichotomy while men have been associated with the mind or consciousness axis. The result is that women, as grounded in the body, have been subordinated due to their inherent bodiliness and the negative associations that accompany such bodies. This historical notion has changed somewhat over the years. Women and men are no longer in opposite realms of the mind/body split, but seem to occupy very different positions in each of these domains (Grosz, 1994, p. 16). The result of this has been the increasing amounts of power and legitimacy that women have gained in Western society. This is despite the fact that a great emphasis continues to be on women's bodies, however altered from historical concepts that might be.

Although dualist perspectives are deeply historical, they continue to direct our frames of reference and structure our everyday lives in contemporary society, although in indirect ways. Bodily ideals and structured ways of living have been posited so as to enforce social structures and to discriminate against those who do not adhere. Due to historical notions of the unruliness of the body, it is an individual's control over her or his own body that helps us in our creations of social identities and hierarchical positions within society. The current emphasis on the control of the body is not new, but as technologies and social ideals change, identifications of the body change as well.

The perspective taken in this thesis holds that "dualistic conceptions of selfhood give rise to a particular ethic of self-control that emphasizes a moralistic obligation to control the body through discipline and rationality" (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995, p. 142). Dualism and self-control are powerfully intertwined at the level of the body as this is the location of disruption and moral failing of the self. In this sense, the material form of the body is often seen as distinct

from the essential, mindful, realm of the self. Individuals often see the body as not being representative of their true self and easily detach themselves from bodies in which they are not happy. However, as individuals see their physical bodies as modeling those which are noted as the norm or ideal in our society, material bodies are often taken as "a window to the soul". The attachment/detachment complex that North American society holds in relation to the body and the self is seen as a result of dualist notions that preside in conjunction with contemporary consumer culture. As individuals are increasingly taught about the deficiencies and problems with our bodies, we are also given increasingly more options as to how to fix or alter our bodies so as to suit the norm in our society. This notion of the emphasis on physical change will be further illuminated later in this thesis.

Race and Racialized Women

As has previously been explained, the corporeal pole of dualist thought is overwhelmingly occupied by and accessorized through the female body. The female body is ruled by nature, emotionality, and sensuality in opposition to the masculine will which is the locus of self-control, rationality, and, of course, power (Johnston, 2001, p. 63). This form of thought has enabled a system of gender oppression to exist throughout history in Western society. Feminists tend to see the social construction of female bodies as the main site of gendered oppression in our society. From the perspectives posited in Chapter 1, we can take gender under Butler's notion of performativity to understand its non-fixity in our world and thus the illegitimacy of dualist notions.

As with the concepts of the body and gender, race is contemporarily understood as a socially constructed, highly mutable social category. The body is historically centered as the

core focus in the construction of race in individuals, such as in skin colour, eyes, hair, lips, nose, etc. However, the growing understanding that such physical markers can not specifically demarcate one as being part of a specific race has left the concept itself in question (Johnston, 2001, p. 71). The ambiguous nature of physical markers shows the difficulty in using a set rule for racial determination. Especially in contemporary North America, a great degree of racial mixing through cross-ethnic marriage and reproduction has made clear-cut categories a historical ideal. The degree of immigration and movement in today's global society leads to the understanding that no races are isolated and pure. An understanding of race as a social entity that is based on physical, visible markers demonstrates the disparity that is often found in defining racial subjects along with failing to see the social, ideological, and perceptual influences that stand behind the concept of race. This section of the chapter will take a contextual perspective on the notion of race, rooting the concept itself in the specific social, cultural, historical, and political environment in which it is found. It will then examine race from both a historical and contemporary perspective in order to illuminate the ways in which racial discourse and racial meaning is important in present-day North America. In conjunction with this, contemporary racial meanings will help lead into a discussion of how race interacts with notions of beauty and aesthetics and therefore influences the lives of racially-othered women.

As David Goldberg posits, in liberal Western societies a position is held that "race is irrelevant, but all is race" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 181). This aptly demonstrates the status of race in our society. It is important to recognize the socially-constructedness of race, its historical contingency, and its cultural contextualism in order to understand the emergence and importance of race. In addition, the ways that race has been reproduced through learned perceptual practices has been a main determinant of the perpetuation of race in our society (Alcoff, 2006, p. 182).

Such an understanding of race allows us to understand the ways that race ideas can change in fundamental ways while still acknowledging the sometimes devastating effects of race on the lives of individuals and communities. Therefore, the main perspective of race that this thesis will follow is that race remains a major force in our society despite the acknowledgement of its social constructedness and contingency. Although this notion is widely accepted in the West, this idea is far from universal nor is it deeply historical. Contemporary Western society has grown more inclusive since the days when eugenics and phrenology were used to determine an individual's worth. Despite the fact that we now disregard racist thoughts and practices, race as a social category still holds power specifically in the construction of identities. Racialization is a kind of process, much like gender, that takes place in time and through space with the resulting effect of racial ideals (Ahmed, 2002, p. 46). The underlying importance of this notion of racialization and race rests on the fact that race cannot be seen as a stable, bounded entity. It is constantly a result of the reaction and interaction with social ideals and structures of power at any given time. Racialization necessarily involves the production of a body that is raced and is inscribed into social knowledge and space and through the relations between individuals (Ahmed, 2002, p. 47). It is thus entirely dependent upon, as it itself acts upon, the structures of power at work in a given society.

The construction of the concept of race is often traced back to European colonialism. An understanding of the history of race is important to this study in order to help illuminate the ways that racial stereotyping and racial attitudes have affected humans over the years. It is also a way to understand how socially and historically contingent racial ideas over individual bodies are. This historical period involved a very direct and often violent form of control and domination over the bodies of the colonized, who were African, East Asian, and Native North American,

among others. The creation of race was the main factor which helped legitimize and justify the colonial projects as hierarchies and stereotypical definitions of races were mapped out onto the bodies of others (Ahmed, 2002, p. 47). From the 14th century on, the history of human beings has been told as a history of migration, colonization, and settlement in new and different environments. An accompanying history to this movement has been a history of cultural mixing, miscegenation, and the resulting laws and guidelines which came to accompany these phenomena (Goldberg, 2002, p. 14). The division and categorization of individuals and groups remains central to the identification of race and racial otherness. One of the key themes to understanding how race has come to hold such power in the world is that it necessarily involves an imposition of a state of 'otherness' as a knowable, recognizable, and absolutely controllable state of being (Goldberg, 2002, p. 23). As racialization and the determination of race concern the elaboration of the Other, it must inevitably also be used to describe and determine the Self at the same time. It is this definition of the racial Other and the racial self that solidifies the real meanings and threats behind racialized bodies. The Other is named and configured as a threat as it is the unknown. As Goldberg explains, "the creating and promotion of difference is the necessary condition of reproducing homogenized sameness; and (re-)producing homogeneity necessarily promotes the externalization of difference to produce its effect" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 31). What this means is that the construction of the Other helps to solidify the Self and to create or intensify the power of those who can fit with the dominant class.

Looking at the imperial landscape of 19th century colonialism, Ann Laura Stoler argues that distinctions of European bourgeois dominance and positions as the first-class citizens of the state were constructed through the use of racial and gendered language which sought to construct hierarchies of bodily types. Although her specific studies focus on the colonization of the Dutch

East Indies, the same phenomena were working elsewhere throughout the colonial world. The bodies of those both in colony and metropole were constructed under a discursively coded power structure. Imperial discourse divided and created hierarchies among individuals on the basis of physical traits, cultural competencies, sexual habit, psychological dispositions, and cultivated habits (Stoler, 1995, p. 8). Through the distinctive hierarchy created among colonizer and colonized, bourgeois colonizers and their subaltern nationals, etc., these discourses on race and sexuality effectively mapped the moral parameters of European society. The identification of marginal members, of those who were deviant from the European bourgeois form, created specific classes of people. What is important is that such boundaries, especially of racial and class designation, were never fully stable, although they were difficult to transcend.

Stoler writes that repression played a large part in regulating bodies, both in colony and metropole. Discourses on the bourgeois self were based on a particular hierarchy of distinctions which appropriated notions of race, class, and gender or sex and strategically conflated and collapsed the distinctions among them at specific times. Mostly pertaining to the bourgeois European, a cultivation or self-articulation was "affirmed in the proliferating discourses around pedagogy, parenting, children's sexuality, servants and tropical hygiene: micro-sites where designations of racial membership were subject to gendered appraisals and where characters, good breeding, and proper rearing were implicitly raced" (Stoler, 1995, p. 11). The fate of these colonial nations rested in race, its ties to sexual practices, and the ways in which it affirmed bourgeois values and morality. The European bourgeois self as a particular type of bodily form was cultivated through the differential contacts and relationships between Europeans and natives. European men and women required a certain amount of leisure time for their "self-absorbed administering and self-bolstering acts" (Stoler, 1995, p. 111). In order to gain this leisure time,

native women who often served as servants, concubines, nursemaids, and wives, served to affirm these bourgeois identities in that, as they were differentially raced, they became the people who were to become the nurturers of children and men. The differential roles played by European bourgeois women and colonial native women demonstrated the racializing of these particular identities, as was often affirmed by the subservient role, of caregiver and caretaker, of the colonial women. The sexuality of the European bourgeois women was guarded and upheld to a particular moral standard as relations with differently raced men, being the colonial natives, was disallowed. Those who broke these rules lost their bourgeois status. On the other hand, the sexualities of the native colonial women were utilized as a right and a provision for European men. Women were responsible for upholding bourgeois morality while men were free to exercise a more open sexuality where racial boundaries could be transgressed.

The extreme racial attitudes that prevailed throughout the colonial period were used not only to justify the control of the colonized peoples but also behavioural control of the European colonials working in the colonies. Race was essentially the grammar used to justify the colonizing, 'civilizing' missions. Racial grammar was thus invoked as a new form of knowledge and a new way of disciplining the body so as to retain one's privileged status in society. Fear of hybridization and inter-racial mixing were rampant during this time. Fear of the degeneracy of the White European race was dispersed through discursive tactics which led to self-regulation in the colonies. Throughout the 19th century, racial mixing, or *metissage*, the ultimate consequence of inter-racial sexual alliances was at the focus of much political, legal, and social debate (Stoler, 1995, p. 46). Fear of racial and cultural hybridity effectively created new forms of regulation of the body through both legal statures and discursive tactics.

The colonizing project was not only successful in its domination of the bodies of the colonized, but also in its disciplining of European bourgeois bodies. Colonialism as a project was instrumental in creating boundaries of Europeanness which effectively gave rights and class status to some individuals over others. Essentially, race as a social category was the outcome. This is in spite of the fact that Europeanness itself was not a fixed attribute or a clear category. Fears of white European degeneracy in the colonies, fears of racial-mixing, demonstrate that although there were clear ideals as to who and what constituted the upper classes, meaning races, of society, such categories were not givens, nor were they distinct. Racial categories and the grammars used to denote colonial Europeans were effective in that they held weight in regulating individuals and their sexual practices so as to ensure the submission to pressures to conform and to maintain their rightful status in society. As morality is never far removed from discourses on sex and race, the implications upon those who might deviate from their prescribed roles or society's norms, are often feared and appropriated as truth. As a colonial search for the "truth" of the European bourgeois self, the racial and sexual conventions effectively regulated individual bodies through a discourse of power (Stoler, 1995, p. 170). For women especially, strict codes of morality were attached to sexuality so as to delegitimate deviant behaviours.

The colonial order enforced not only racial hierarchies and distinctions but also those of gender, in regards to sex and sexuality. Both European and colonized women were under strict conventions which ruled their sexualities and thus their lives. As Stoler argues, control over women's sexuality and reproduction was in fact at the very core of the definition of colonial privilege and dominance and was utilized in maintaining its boundaries (Stoler, 2002, p. 39). The ways that European women in the colonies appropriated colonial racial discourse in their regulation of sexuality, and thus morality, was a means for them to maintain their privileged

status in the colonies. It served as a way of setting them apart from the colonized women who had little privilege or social standing. European women were construed as carriers of European morality and civility and had the duty to maintain European sensibilities and places of repose for their men (Stoler, 2002, p. 61). As upholders of European moralities, women accepted the constraints on their sexualities as this was necessary in the maintenance of their respected roles, the roles of their men to whom they were willing subordinates, and to the European hierarchy of races in general. There was an appeal in submitting to dominant discourses on sexuality as well as on race. Whiteness served both as a mark of imperial rule and as a mark of privilege.

Stoler's discussion of colonial practices and notions of sex and race speaks to the idea of women and their bodies as symbols of cultural ideals. Within the colonial framework, the heterosexual, racially segregated form was desired as it legitimated constructed hierarchies of power and the colonial project. In contemporary times, women's bodies are still symbols of cultural ideals. The ways that women submit themselves to such ideals works in much the same way as it did historically. Discourse surrounding norms and ideals of a particular desired form of body and the moral implications thrown upon those bodies that do not fit such ideals, provide reason for women to submit themselves to such discourses and to perform the required roles and identities so as to make them privileged within our society. Deviance from such bodily ideals is often subjected to implications of moral failings and decreased self-worth.

What Stoler does not quite articulate in her discussion of the construction of race as a part of the colonial project are the ways that scientific knowledge soon took over as the main force in the construction and perpetuation of the racialized body. Science itself can be seen as part of a racial economy in that it "involves those institutions, assumptions, and practices that are responsible for disproportionately distributing, along 'racial' lines the benefits of Western

sciences" (Ahmed, 2002, p. 49). The explanation for this stems from the fact that Western science is heavily value-laden and situated within a specific cultural and social context, despite its claims otherwise. Essentially Western science, along with the Western biomedical model of health, is imbued with social, legal, and political power. Science was responsible for constructing or inventing the idea of race as bodily difference and hierarchy, rather than simply finding evidence or facts which would demarcate racial difference (Ahmed, 2002, p. 50). It has also historically pathologized and medicalized normal body functions of women. This has had the effect of making both gender and race into clear categories by grouping humans together, distinct from other groups. The scientific discourses which were established and strongly upheld throughout the 19th century took one form of body type as the norm or the ideal and pathologized all bodies of others who failed to adhere to such norms. The somatic ideal and norm that was established revolved around the white male body and therefore women and what were called 'the lower races' were seen to be similar in the ways that their bodies differed from the norm. As Ahmed explains, this process allowed women as a group to become racialized and these 'lower races' to become feminized in their difference (Ahmed, 2002, p. 51). It is this notion that explains why Black women are often associated with a hypersexual and deviant body, even more so than their male counterparts. White women, on the other hand, were associated less with bodily deviance than Black women since they were members of the 'higher race'. White women were given qualities that disassociated them as much as possible from notions of sex and sexuality. They represented such virtues as purity, modesty, and chastity, which allowed them to moderately transcend the limitations and the deviances of the body (Ahmed, 2002, p. 53).

Race in America has taken a slightly different turn than in other colonial states as the United States has a long and destructive history of slavery which was a major force in

constructing and enforcing real and oppressive racial hierarchies and social groups. Hierarchies between lighter and darker-skinned African slaves helped to establish the ranking of individuals due to colorism as those who had lighter skin were awarded more benefits and rights in the pre-civil war era. The main division in early America was between whiteness and all other groups, though this does not adequately summarize the suffering of minority groups and the ways that they have been racialized.

George Lipsitz describes how the racial investment in whiteness goes beyond the mere matter of black and white: "the African slave trade began in earnest only after large-scale Native American slavery proved impractical in North America. The abolition of slavery led to the importation of low-wage labour from Asia. Legislation banning immigration from Asia set the stage for the recruitment of low-wage labour from Mexico" (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 2). The changing political atmospheres throughout history have allowed for various groups to be exploited. It still holds though that in the United States, the concept of race has very purposefully been set in an obsession with skin colour and phenotype. This was articulated best in both the nation's first naturalization law in 1790 which limited naturalized citizenship to "free white persons" as well as in the dominating "one-drop theory". The purpose of the first naturalization law was to demarcate those races that had sufficient "fitness for self government" and those that did not (Jacobson, 1998, p. 7). Disallowing racial groups other than Caucasians to become naturalized citizens reinforced the conception of the inferiority of racial others.

The "one-drop" theory, on the other hand, was a way to establish rules for who could be considered white and black in the United States. This theory held that one was to be considered black if the individual could link themselves to at least one African ancestor (Simmons, 2006, p. 3). What each of these laws and theories did was make race a central and oppressive force in

America. The purpose of linking race to skin color or phenotype was to dominate, and therefore to define and to subjugate the "Other" (Mahoney, 1997, p. 305). This elaborates how the understanding of the many rules and guidelines used to define race have been those established by the white, dominant group. The early definitions excluded everyone from being white who was not Anglo-Saxon-Protestant, or what was called the 'WASP'. Later, however, as more groups of non-Anglo-Saxon Protestant European immigrants arrived, they were incorporated under the broadened definition of 'American'. As they shared a similar pigment to the Englishmen founders of America, they were assimilated into American society and were finally deemed 'white' so as to maintain a separation from the Native Americans and the black slaves who had been brought over (Wynter, 2002, p. 6).

It is important to understand that the assimilating power of American society operated very differently for different immigrant groups. This power essentially portioned and categorized groups under new forms of classifications so as to make them identifiable and distinct in American society. This affected the ways that the American experience has been felt and interpreted for these immigrant groups (Glazer & Moyhihan, 1997, p. 368). Skin colour, or the perception of skin colour based on place of origin, played a large role in the ways that both individuals and whole communities were perceived and placed in American society from the settlement of American onwards. The original Americans, or the WASPs, established racial hierarchies that even split Europeans into superior and inferior races, not simply on the physical markers of skin colour, but based on this along with the examination of other perceived physical traits. As Glazer and Moynihan describe it, "even before it knew what an Italian or Jew or an Irishman was like, the American mind had a place for the category, high or low, depending on colour, on region, on how close the group was felt to be to the Anglo-Saxon center (Glazer &

Moynihan, 1997, p. 369). Skin colour, along with other phenotypic variations, allowed for the categorization, the establishment of hierarchy, and the oppression of those individuals and communities that did not pass as white.

The history of race in America is undoubtedly the history of colour, namely of white and non-white. The power value of whiteness has typically rested on the notion that it is predominantly associated with notions of purity and cleanliness (Dyer, 1997, p. 70). It is the ideal despite its relative absence from discourse and visibility. The power of whiteness rests in its invisibility and in this way it is able to exert power in society. Whiteness as invisibility speaks to its centrality and authority in society. Whiteness is an unmarked category in American society as it remains the dominant norm against which all else is compared.

Identity also plays a large part in racialization and the ways that bodies interact in North American society. To many racially-othered individuals, a lot of their personal sense of identity construction comes from the ways that their race is interpreted and distinguished. A study of Black college students in the United States shows how these individuals define themselves first as being Black before American, as opposed to the White students in the study who had less of a sense of being raced, or White, and defined themselves more so as being American (Simmons, 2006, p. 1). This study was conducted in order to gain insight into the ways that we come to know and identify ourselves and others in racial terms. It analyzed the category of black so as to gain insight into contemporary race relations and identifications in North America. The students demonstrated that despite claims that race is not real, being black is central to who they are and therefore a real part of their lives.

American racial culture has effectively been a visual culture in that what is visible has been established as the source of legitimate power and therefore also the control of the society (Dyer, 1997, p. 44). What have come to be defined as the physical markers of race still hold legitimacy in contemporary North American society in subordinating individuals based on these characteristics. An individual is typically deemed visibly White based on an interaction of skin colour and other phenotypic characteristics such as the shape of the nose, eyes and lips, the colour and texture of the hair, and often even body type plays a role (Dyer, 1997, p. 42). To take an example of Jewish people in the 19th century, in America they were often perceived as Black due to particular physical traits they possessed. They held what can be described as a form of "probationary whiteness" at this time. This was due to both the social and political meanings that became attached to Jewishness where physical traits were used to maintain their marginal status in the United States. As quoted by the novelist Marion Crawford in 1891 in his portrait of Jewish evil, he describes: "throngs of gowned men, crooked, bearded, filthy, vulture-eyed...hook-nosed and loose lipped, grasping fat purses, in lean fingers, shaking greasy curls that straggled out under caps of greasy fur...a writhing mass of humanity, intoxicated by the smell of gold, mad for its possession, half hysteric with fear of losing it, timid, yet dangerous, poisoned to the core by the sweet sting of money, terrible in intelligence, vile in heart, contemptible in body, irresistible in the unity of their greed" (Jacobson, 1998, p. 174). Such types of descriptions were frequently used, not only to describe the Jewish peoples, but all those races that did not encompass the ideal whiteness of early American society. Physical characteristics were used to enhance the negative social perceptions of such groups. Thus, these physical markers became inherently connected to the negative perceptions as well as self-perceptions of such individuals and communities. The effects of such discourses have proven to

be oppressive still to this day in that people still view such racial physical markers as negative traits of the self. Even colorism, which is the stratification of skin colour, privileging lightness over darkness, continues to be an enduring part of the American racial landscape today (Hunter, 2002, p. 176). For Mexican Americans, darker skin colour racializes them as ignorant, lazy, and provincial. For African Americans, darker skin colour racializes them as dangerous, angry, incompetent, and oversexual (Hunter, 2002, p. 187). It is the combination of physical markers and inner states that gives a social meaning to racial classification and that undoubtedly leads to racial oppression.

Skin colour mediates the ways that individuals are perceived in American society. The valuation of light over dark continues to be the way that skin colour stratification continues to exert power in racism today. Lighter skinned African American and Mexican women have been found to receive more rewards in society than their darker-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2002, p. 188). Skin colour is also highly associated with beauty, which is also central to a woman's valuation in society. As will be further articulated in the following section of this chapter, light skin has historically been, and continues to be, associated with attractiveness (Hunter, 2002, p. 188). As skin colour and bodily appearance are more important for women, there is a great investment that is often made in achieving this type of beauty ideal.

Aesthetics

Beauty, as a cultural concept, holds much weight in the perceptions, self-perceptions, and social status of a given individual in any society. The ways that beauty norms and aesthetics are linked to the greater political and historical processes of a given environment will lead to the differentiation in types of aesthetic ideals and the advantages given to those who can achieve

them. As women are more liable to be judged in terms of the body and to take greater concern for the appearance of the body, much discourse on beauty and aesthetics focuses on beauty work for women. Paul Taylor explains that "since current social conditions make physical appearance central to the construction of womanhood and femininity, talk about physical beauty more or less reduces to talk about womanhood, femininity, and women (Taylor, 1999, p. 17). This notes that a particular engagement with beauty and aesthetic discourse and work on the body is what situates many women in the realm of womanhood and femininity.

Such beauty ritual and work comes to help define and declare what essential femininity is in our society. In North American society, there exist aesthetic categories and classifications that help to mould together what Judith Goldstein calls the "female aesthetic community". This concept of community effectively integrates women into a group that is based on standardized interpretations of beauty (Goldstein, 1993, p. 151). Whether this standard divides or unites groups of women, they all revolve around this singular ideal. These standardized visions of beauty have historical roots in racism and racial ideals. There essentially exists a universal standard that is often applied to the faces and bodies of women that fail to take into account race and ethnicity which may offer alternatives to the norm. A Caucasian, European aesthetic ideal has predominated through history and it is thus important to realize that such white-dominated culture effectively produces a racialized beauty where the ideals so often come to be defined specifically in terms of white beauty (Taylor, 1999, p. 17). This form of beauty is what creates divides within the female aesthetic community and through the doctrine of beauty, provides new forms of inequality for and between women.

As the overriding concept of beauty is "the production of variation within standardization" (Goldstein, 1993, p. 152) the female aesthetic community often fails to take into

account the degree of variation that exists in the world, and even specifically in the United States. The underlying point of cosmetics and beauty work is to overcome these particular traits which mark a woman as different. The female aesthetic community and those who work to achieve a standard of beauty are all part of a social structure that, in contemporary consumer culture, leads us to believe that what is natural is not good enough but that there are unlimited pathways to change our bodies. Wendy Chapkis gives an example of the "moustached woman" who, like all other women, fails to conform to beauty ideals (Chapkis, 1986, p. 5). She is flawed and therefore unable to display the norms of womanhood and femininity in our society. She is made to feel ashamed of her failure to conform and through this shame realizes that she must work on her body so as to pass as woman in America.

Women in North America specifically have learned to be displeased with their natural, given bodies and tend to invalidate them as unreflective of their authentic selves. Women often internalize discourse and images perpetuated through the dominant culture, and judge themselves as they see the ways that they fit or not within the pretensions of the standards used in the judgment (Johnston, 2003, p. 30). However, this is not to state that women are 'cultural dupes' in that they do not respond to images and discourse in critical ways. Social control has the dominating power of making itself desirable. Many women do not agree with cultural imperatives on beauty, nor do all women adhere to them. Those who do, still maintain an understanding of the ways that they are subjecting their bodies to a destructive mechanism of control. Johnston describes the actions of women in that, "in one breath they are condemning societal influences and in the next, they are condemning themselves for being affected by those same pressures" (Johnston, 2003, p. 30).

Knowledge of dominating and oppressive forces does not free us from them, but it does have the possibility of inducing change through exposing and criticizing the system. In this same vein, taking control of the body is often an empowering action for women as many see it as a way of exerting control over their own lives. This speaks back to one of the purposes of this thesis which is to understand how women internalize beauty discourses and the ways that they utilize them and work with them to create meaning in their lives. The following chapter, which deals with racial cosmetic surgery, will further detail the ways that beauty standards are internalized and the ways that women engage in beauty work to create new senses of the self.

The examination of beauty contests across the United States is a way to gain a better understanding of racial beauty ideals and the ways that women utilize or incorporate them into their understandings of the self and how they wish to be perceived in America. Exclusion from the dominant beauty ideal has meant that certain women, including Black, Hispanic, Jewish and Asian women, have often been excluded from mainstream beauty contests. In 1968 there were several protests against the Miss America contest. One was by members of Women's Liberation who dumped what they considered to be the shackles of femininity—bras, girdles, false eyelashes. The other protest was in fact another beauty contest—the first Miss Black America pageant (Craig, 2002, p. 3).

The Women's Liberation protest spoke to the ways that beauty ideals enslaved all women and that by adhering to them, women were merely adding to their own subordination. The Women's Liberation movement recognized the oppressive forces of beauty ideals upon everyone and saw the focus on beauty and on the woman's body as an oppressive tactic of a patriarchal society. The Miss Black America pageant took a different route, as although it was protesting the Miss America pageant, it spoke to the ways that Black women were continually excluded

from the Miss America title (Craig, 2002, p. 3). This contest, staged by the NAACP, was a direct challenge to the ways that Black women and Black beauty had been depicted over the years. Despite Black women's exclusion from the beauty ideal in American society, they were still objectified in ways that diminished their self- and general worth. Settings such as the Miss Black America sought to challenge the stereotyped racist images which for years had depicted Black women as ugly and vulgar (Craig, 2002, p. 6).

Other ethnic beauty pageants have taken different paths than the Miss Black America. Still making political statements, these contests have sought to reinforce the positive aspects of, for example, Chinese and Japanese culture, with less of a stress on appearance, although it still was a part of them. The examples of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Beauty Pageant and the various Japanese American beauty pageants demonstrate how certain communities respond to the dominant culture and promote their own communities within it. Ethnic beauty pageants are often used to promote, somewhat contested, symbolic representations of their communities. They are also ways to explore, promote, and celebrate a particular form of identity (Wu, 1997, p. 5). Ethnic beauty pageants provide an interesting examination into the ways that communities of racial or ethnic groups in North America interpret dominant messages about idealized womanhood and ideal beauty types. The power structures inherent in society often deem that these types of beauty pageants are modeled, and the women thus judged, on the terms of the dominant White culture.

In the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Beauty Pageant, standards of beauty were meant to reflect Chinese standards, but this was not always so. The pageant typically used White standards with which to judge the Chinese American women competing. One contestant has been quoted as stating that the contest "shows that the closer you look like the Whites, the prettier you are" (Wu,

1997, p. 15). Critics against this pageant have agreed that many Asian Americans have in fact internalized the "White standards" of beauty that have been mass promoted in this society. Such standards are typically emphasized to include a high-bridged, narrow nose, a large bosom, and long legs (Wu, 1997, p. 15). As most Asian women do not typically hold such physical traits, they are often encouraged to meet such standards, both within the realm of the pageant and in the greater environment in general. "Caucasian" eyes have often represented a standard of beauty for Asian American women. A decidedly "Western" look typically involves larger eyes with double eyelids, as opposed to the single eyelids that most Asian women have. Wu, in examining the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Beauty Pageant, describes how in the 1960s women were using various methods to achieve the double eyelid look, including scotch tape or glue over their eyelids at night, or even plastic surgery (Wu, 1997, p. 16). In the following chapter, such forms of racialized cosmetic surgery procedures will be elaborated upon and analyzed. The importance is to understand that the reasons why these women believe in the dominant White ideal of beauty are never clear-cut. There are a multitude of forces that establish such ideal types and the ways and necessities of achieving them and therefore such phenomena are never easily understood.

The majority of Black women have historically been disallowed a place in the beauty discourse of North America. The downplaying of Black beauty effectively lead to the emergence of a system of resistance, called the "Black is Beautiful" movement, whereby in the late 1960s Black women stopped adhering to White cultural ideals and allowed their natural selves to shine through. Prior to this movement, Black women in America found ways to incorporate White standards of beauty into their own aesthetic appearances. They often followed the "straight hair rule" which claimed that straight hair was a necessary component of physical beauty.

This rule not only affected women, but all those who were 'unlucky' enough to have curly hair, who had to go through the necessary ordeals to rid themselves of it (Taylor, 1999, p. 17). Such a rule had the effect of establishing the idea that beauty was within everybody's reach. As Helena Rubenstein, cosmetics industry magnate, has been quoted as saying: "there are no ugly women, only lazy ones" (Craig, 2002, p. 24). This quote speaks to the belief that beauty is available for all those who are willing to go to lengths to achieve it, including straightening the hair. It also establishes a link to the belief that self-presentation or the ways that an individual achieves a standard of beauty makes a difference in how that person is perceived and treated in society (Craig, 2002, p. 37). The "straight hair rule" was less about having straight hair, and more about having a type of hair, whether it was curly or straight, that allowed one to fit in White society. Hair, being one of the most malleable of women's physical traits, has often been used as a means to seek power through aesthetics. That is, the strategies that women use to accommodate mainstream beauty ideals into their lives acts as a means for social advancement.

Ideas about hair have been deeply rooted in the American mind and in American society as markers of race and therefore of inferiority. One ideal is stated that "to be most feminine and hence most attractive, women's hair should be long, curly, or wavy, and preferably blonde. It should most definitely not be gray or kinky (suggesting either African or Jewish heritage)" (Weitz, 2001, p. 672). Racial ideals of beauty relate to hair in many ways, not only through the straight hair rule. What is important to understand about the Black is Beautiful movement is that although it gained incredible force and established new understandings of beauty in American society, it was still suppressed under dominant cultural ideals. While by 1965 straightened hair became a symbol of racial shame for Black men and women in America, by the 1980s, straightened hair was once again acceptable and re-established as a means to attain the dominant

standard of beauty (Craig, 2002, p. 16). The movement did, however, have lasting effects which celebrated dark skin, naturally kinky hair, and full lips as beautiful in their own right.

This chapter will close by examining contemporary beauty ideals and the ways that these have changed to deal with an ever-increasingly multicultural and multiracial American community. What constitutes "all-American" has changed so as to include just about everybody. Whiteness is being subtly redefined, and physical characteristics which were used to denote Whiteness in the past are being broadened so as to include fuller lips (and behinds), and expanding shapes of eyes, noses, and cheekbones so as to reflect the genetic dispositions of new cultural icons (Wynter, 2002, p. 137). Effectively, the mainstream has incorporated multiracial and multiethnic bodies so as to increase the hold that consumer culture has upon women. Inclusivity, in beauty styles, magazines, advertising, and beauty products means that greater numbers of women are included within a dominant framework of beauty work for women—effectively meaning greater profits for the industries responsible for promoting and distributing such products and services. However, there remains a large emphasis on the control of the body and in self-maintenance as a right and requirement of all women.

In the early 1990s, the major cosmetics companies, Cover Girl, Revlon, and Maybelline all began designing cosmetic lines which focused on previously unrecognized "ethnic" markets. They offered options and shades which were formulated specifically for the skin types of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian women (Wynter, 2002, p. 157). This recognition of alternative skin types and colourings also spoke to the recognition that women may want to enhance themselves based on their so-called natural colourings. The beauty ideal was broadened to include more women who, now that they had the resources available to them, could work on their beauty in new and more elaborate ways. Once women of colour where recognized as a

market, the result was the discovery that in America, "women were more alike as cosmetics consumers than they were different because of race" (Wynter, 2002, p. 158). Concepts of beauty were much more fluid than previously imagined and women were utilizing their newfound resources to establish their own beauty ideals.

This transracial approach of the beauty and cosmetics industry has revolutionized racial and aesthetic meanings in providing the necessary elements for women to change and achieve any look they desire. L'Oreal's Feria hair-colour line attempted to break down beauty ideals by placing an African-American model on the box of a blonde hair dye. The message both breaks down racial beauty ideals, and upholds them in new ways. By placing an African-American model on the box of blonde hair dye, L'Oreal was demonstrating that it does not matter what skin colour an individual has, they can have the blonde hair that they desire. However, this movement also simply reinforced the ideal of blonde hair as the norm and ideal form of beauty (Wynter, 2002, p. 161). Despite the many ways that the beauty and cosmetics industry is breaking down racial barriers, and providing options for all women, they are still simply reinforcing the necessity for women to fit with prescribed beauty regimens and ideal styles in the West. Options for hair dye, colour contact lenses, makeup shades, and the increasing culture of cosmetic surgery still points to the fact that although women are given increasing options on how to beautify their bodies, they are still working under an oppressing regime which reinforces beauty ideals. The transracial approach to beauty has in large part affected the global image of beauty as well. Those who create the images for sale globally are still overwhelmingly controlled by industries based in the United States or Western Europe. Advertising campaigns often ignore the cultural context of particular environments and establish advertising with a distinctly white American image to them to sell globally (Chapkis, 1986, p. 39). The Western

model of beauty, despite the recognitions of other forms of beauty, still dominates and represents a mandate for a particular way of life for women around the world. While the Western model of beauty appears to reign still, there also exists the idea of a standard, whatever the details are, that is achievable through consumption and work. The postmodern take on the body fully supports the notion that any ideal can be achieved if an individual pursues it properly.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the meaning of aesthetics and beauty in a racially-charged society such as America. In this light, an understanding of the ways in which individuals are ascribed social meaning through their physical characteristics is seen to follow racial distinctions and hierarchical definitions. As has been explained, the body is representative of, and laden with, cultural meaning depending upon the society which we examine. The ways that we perceive of gendered and racial bodies depends on the power structure of a given society.

American society is a place where a strong racialized sense of beauty prevails. Due to many forces such as colonization, slavery, the two World Wars, assimilation practices, and consumer culture, the dominant powers of American society have rested in the hands of Caucasian Europeans. Those who adhere to cultural norms are representative of the interaction that takes place between cultural norms and social mobility. As such, empowerment is seen to stem from taking control of the body so as to bring it in line with reigning aesthetic norms and ideals. This is the effect of the assimilative or melting-pot nature and power of American society. Status and power is awarded to those who fit well with the dominant ideal. As such, individuals will often choose to conform to the dominant ideal so as to gain status in a given society. Beauty, and thus a normative sense of identity, is available for those who are willing to

go to lengths to achieve it, whether that is through the temporary or permanent modification of their bodies. Meaning is created through this power struggle. Women utilize normative aesthetic ideals so as to create an effective sense of identity for themselves.

The following chapter will examine the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery in North America. Taking the notions of the body, gender, race, and aesthetics that have been discussed, it will illuminate how this trend has gained popularity over the years and the reasons that women give for undergoing such procedures. In light of the changing context of race in American society, it is still an important factor in women's body image.

Chapter 3: Racial Cosmetic Surgery

The literature on cosmetic surgery will now be examined so as to place the specific phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery in the context of contemporary North American society. This chapter will first provide an overview of the history of racial cosmetic surgery in order to set the stage to see how this practice has developed through the years. Then, looking at racial cosmetic surgery today, and the specific ethnographic material presented on it, an examination of the culture that gives rise to such practices (and emerges from such practices as well) will demonstrate how and why racial cosmetic surgery is a fact of contemporary North American society. Taking into account the previously discussed notions of the body, gender, race, and aesthetics, the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery will be analyzed as a response to such notions as well as through the light of the theoretical paradigms explained above. The purpose of this study is to bring together the ways that women in contemporary North American society explain and deal with the decision to undergo racial cosmetic surgery and the ways that they interpret such practices in order to make sense of their lives and to establish an identity from and through it. Several important questions that this chapter will consider include: what are the meanings behind the undertaking of particular forms of racial cosmetic surgery? How do individuals negotiate a sense of identity through and despite their appearances? And how is racial cosmetic surgery understood as a choice for oneself? Delving deeper into these particular questions will allow for a greater analysis of the dilemma of what this phenomenon means in contemporary American society.

What is Racial Cosmetic Surgery? A Historical Overview and Contemporary Analysis

Plastic surgery, including both reconstructive and cosmetic forms, is currently one of the largest and fastest-growing specialties in the field of medicine in the United States (Haiken, 1997, p. 4). In 2006 America the industry of cosmetic surgery was valued at 15 billion dollars (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 4). This industry has seen a 465 percent increase in procedures since 1997 (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 10). This type of growth points to the fact that the industry and its procedures continue to play a large role in the ways that individuals perceive their bodies and their ability for change.

The historical context in which cosmetic surgery developed to its contemporary form was powered by the intersection of many historical processes. The two great World Wars, industrialization, colonization, and consumerism have all been forces which have led to the formation of a specific notion of identity and of the ways that individuals relate to their bodies in the determination of what they believe to be one's true identity. North America's history is a tale of colonization, immigration, naturalization, urbanization, and assimilation. The terms 'Westernization' and 'Americanization' have been used to describe how the social influences which are prevalent in North American society have led to the homogenization of individuals in this area. The historical investment in whiteness and in Caucasian features of the late 19th and early 20th centuries enforced specific ideals and norms for ways that bodies were to be displayed in society. The resulting subordination and oppression of those who did not meet such ideals has previously been described in this paper. What is important now is to see the responses that these racially 'Othered' individuals had to such cultural ideals.

There were two main pushes which lead to the advancement of this branch of medicine. The first among these were the two World Wars, which enabled the specific craft of reconstructive and cosmetic surgery to become further developed and specialized. The other force was the impact and importance of race in North America and worldwide, both stemming from and relating to the World Wars, and also to immigration at that time. In examining the historical context in addition to these forces, this section will analyze how it developed that cosmetic surgery, and specifically, racial cosmetic surgery, came to be a well-accepted fact of North American society.

Cosmetic surgery must be understood in relation to other cultural norms of aesthetics and of the alteration of the material body in the name of beauty which has reigned throughout modern history. In the late 18th century, changes in appearance began to be reflective of the sexual stratification of individuals which helped to define power relations. Women became increasingly concerned with altering their bodies so as to 'beautify' themselves, while men paid little attention to their appearance at all (Davis, 1995, p. 40). The process of the cultivation of appearance for women gained great strength as it was often the means by which women achieved status in society. Fashion and aesthetic trends have had a strong hold on women, more than on men, since this time. In the 19th century, the corset became symbolic of the lengths to which women would (and potentially had to) control their bodies to fit with aesthetic ideals. As Davis notes, the corset of the 19th century was extremely unhealthy, "causing breathlessness, fainting spells, shifting organs, but the 20th century has produced an even more constraining corset—the woman's own skin" (Davis, 1995, p. 41). Although fashion trends pertaining to clothes were of great importance in the 19th century, the focus has indeed shifted to a more direct form to which women try to fit within an ideal. The individual cultivation of appearance, spurred by notions of

morality, race, class, and aesthetics in general, established a set of standards to which women were meant to adhere, if possible, and by which women were separated and classified. The beginnings of individual self-discipline and self-control can be seen in this period where the focus became more individualized and where women were increasingly entering the public realm.

The turn of the century was a time of change from Protestant Victorianism to a more secular consumer culture in America (Haiken, 1997, p. 19). In conjunction with this change, American ideas of beauty were altered to fit with this new form of society. The new emphasis was on external physical beauty, rather than internal qualities (although these external traits were thought to be reflective still of internal moral characteristics). Haiken describes how beauty was increasingly seen as an alterable quality which demanded time, attention, and money in its pursuit (Haiken, 1997, p. 19). The increasing emphasis on external physical beauty for women was an aspect of many Western cultures at this time. The emphasis on women's physical characteristics, and on the importance of maintaining or achieving ideal material forms, had the effect of keeping women in a particular realm in society. Their proper identities were based on appearances and how well they fit with American society at the time.

In the early 20th century, the United States saw a great transformation from a mainly rural nation to an increasingly urban one. Accompanying this change was a shift in identity and the ways that individuals were viewed (Haiken, 2000, p. 83). In a predominantly rural society, identity was firmly grounded in the family and in geography. Aging and other effects on the body were considered natural processes of life. However, the increasing urbanization of the United States led to a new form of identity which was located in the self and in one's presentation of the self (Haiken, 2000, p. 83). As more individuals and groups came into contact

with each other and developed new forms of relating to one-another, the emphasis turned to the individual and her/his own responsibility in representing the ideal American citizen. As 20th century North American society was heavily dominated by Eurocentric norms and Caucasian aesthetic ideals, there was increasing pressure for individuals to maintain this standard so as to fit with the prescribed ideals of the dominant society.

Cosmetic surgery as a necessarily professional field arose from the technological innovation in surgery which accompanied the two great World Wars. The injuries sustained in WWI and WWII provided an impetus for surgeons to refine their skills in surgery and in the reconstruction of war-wounded faces. As most war veterans at this time were men, much of this reconstructive surgery focused on male faces and male identities and the ways in which a recreated face would enable the veteran to function in his ideal role—that being the male breadwinner—in American society (Haiken, 2000, p. 84). A further analysis of the relation between cosmetic surgery and identity will be discussed later in this chapter. The importance of this historical fact for the present remains in grounding the practice in a particular frame of thought which enforces the view that the face is a reflection of one's identity and of one's proper place in society.

Powerful racial ideals throughout the 19th and early 20th century established cosmetic surgery of racial characteristics as a norm. The alteration of racial features in cosmetic surgery was historically understood as necessary for assimilation, but has changed to a point of contention. Although the types and forms of racial cosmetic surgery have remained the same over the years, the ways they are understood and discussed have changed dramatically.

Historically, cosmetic surgery in the United States has focused on reconstruction and alteration of features that were seen as 'too-ethnic'. This is despite the fact that the individual bearing these features may or may not have been from an ethnic minority. Gilman describes how in the 18th and 19th centuries, there existed a very powerful idea that considered the noses of Black people and of Jews to be signs of their "primitive" nature (Gilman, 1999, p. 85). Africans, Black Americans and Jews were considered to be equal in their physiognomy. As has been previously discussed, Jews and Black people were considered to be racially 'Other' as they did not fall under the category of White. This perception existed not only in America, but throughout much of Europe as well. The Jew was considered the stereotypical 'Other'. Images and discourse propagated ideas of the Jewish body as deformed or pathological. Among the stereotypical notions held about Jews were that they had flat feet, skin diseases, elongated ears, and characteristic noses (Davis, 2003, p. 89). Of all of these physical markers, the nose has continued into contemporary times to be a significant marker of a Jewish ethnicity accompanied by the various moral attributes associated with it. The racial markers of Jewish people in the 19th century were perceived as being related to weakness, illness, and degeneracy. Davis notes that these physical (and thus associated, moral) attributes proved to be a major obstacle in the assimilation of Jews into the dominant, Caucasian society at the time, which was mainly Aryan (Davis, 2003, p. 89). As individual responsibility and self-determination were dominant views, individuals who wished to fit with dominant society had to find ways to assimilate, not only psychologically but physically as well.

In Europe, early cosmetic surgeons focused on allowing their patients to become "ethnically invisible" in society. One of the most noted of such surgeons was himself a well assimilated German Jew, Jacques Josef, who developed procedures that focused on the nose and

allowed his patients to become "ethnically invisible" (Davis, 2003, p. 89). The concept of being 'ethnically invisible' demonstrates a standard perception of the reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery, which will be further established and evaluated in the following sections of this paper. The important facts that arise from this argument rest upon the notion that while ethnicity and race appear to be barriers to an individual's success or self-determination, cosmetic surgery does not seek to transform these individuals into another racial or ethnic category. The aim appears to be more about normalizing the body, or removing all sense of race and identity at all. The erasure of a particular physical marker does not necessarily mean the transformation into another category of being, it is more about removing all concern of such categories in general.

The rise of cosmetic surgery in the United States was accompanied by the waves of immigration that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this light, the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery cannot be separated from the racial stereotyping, discrimination, and scientific ideas that proliferated at the time. Social inequalities based on race have often been legitimated in Western society through popular discourse. However, the 'racial science' that arose in the late 19th century proved to be the main means of institutionalizing a particular discourse on race and "providing a series of lenses through which human variation was constructed, understood, and experienced" (Davis, 2003, p. 90). The scientific discourse that led to the eugenics movements operated through a perception that European, Caucasian, or Aryan features were a standard against which all other types were judged. The measurement of features that differed from this norm provided a standard by which races were constructed and stereotyped. Categories of pathology and of race were the central ways that individuals and groups were categorized. Notions of pathology rested upon characteristics which were viewed as healthy or diseased, while notions of race rested upon the differentiation of, for example, the Jew

from the Aryan, the Irish from the English, and, most often, Black from White (Gilman, 1999, p. 23). Race and pathology were essentially used as categories by which to differentiate people from the 'norm'. In this sense, cosmetic surgery was considered for individuals to erase their physical characteristics which marked them as different and to 'pass' as 'normal' in American society. Haiken notes that in the early 1900s, "prospective patients viewed surgery as an option according to the amount of prejudice they encountered, the identifiability as ethnic of particular features, the availability of surgical techniques to eradicate the offending features, and money" (Haiken, 1997, p. 181). Those groups most frequently choosing to undergo such procedures at that time were often Jews, Italians, and the Irish, as these groups all were considered to have features which violated the Caucasian norm of acceptability. In the United States, the history of racial cosmetic surgery seems to parallel the pattern of immigration to the country.

The first case of racial cosmetic surgery that has been noted in the United States was performed on an Irish immigrant by John Roe. Irishness was often noted in the "pug nose," a feature that has been historically associated with negative qualities such as "slovenliness and doglike servility" (Davis, 2003, p. 89). Irish immigrants in the United States were among the first groups of immigrants who were notably 'different' than the original European colonials. Their difference had been rooted in European stereotypes and norms and their acceptance into mainstream society depended on their ability to demonstrate their sameness and not difference. The next wave of racial cosmetic surgery gained popularity with immigrants from Europe who were mainly Jews, Italians, and others of Mediterranean or Eastern European descent that mainly underwent procedures to alter their noses. After World War II, racial cosmetic surgery became popular amongst Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other Asian Americans (Davis, 2003, p. 89).

These Asian Americans mainly chose procedures to create double-folded eyelids, or 'Western eyes'.

This concept of the 'Western eye' dates back to 1896 in Japan where surgeon K. Mikamo introduced a procedure to create a double eyelid in an otherwise singularly folded lid (Gilman, 1999, p. 100). This trend of creating a double eyelid gained popularity with the domination of Western medicine in Japan. At the end of the 19th century, Japan replaced most traditional Chinese forms of medicine with Western medicine. With this change in forms of medicine came a change in the ways the body was viewed and therefore, aesthetic surgery of the eye and nose came to be seen as markers of modernism in Japan at this time (Gilman, 1999, p. 99). In the early 1920s, augmentation rhinoplasty for the Japanese "sunken" nose was developed as a response to Western medicine's primitivising of non-Western faces. Concurrently, traditional medicine became subordinated to Western medicine as this non-traditional form offered new opportunities and potential results that traditional medicine was unable to do. Gilman notes that the introduction of cosmetic surgery in Japan was also seen as a means to cure unhappiness, *jibyo,* which is a sense of unwell that an individual possesses in their constitution. Cosmetic surgery offered a way to change one's *taishitsu,* or their inborn constitution, as an intense form of intervention, as opposed to traditional tonics and medicines which did not allow for the opening and altering of the body (Gilman, 1999, p. 103). Western medicine thus took on a form of privilege that was solidified with the Medical Act of 1874 which relegated traditional medicine to a subordinate status and forced all new physicians to receive their training in Western medicine (Gilman, 1999, p. 103). The privileging of Western forms of medicine, and the ways that it allowed for the opening and altering of the body and its *taishitsu* allowed for

cosmetic surgery to become solidified as a legitimate form of medicine in Japan at the end of the 19th century.

Before World War II, and the occupation of Japan, there existed a clear desire in Japan "to have a well-defined nose; a clear-cut, double eyelid fold; and larger, more attractive breasts" (Gilman, 1999, p. 100). The Western influence is seen strongly in this case as these physical characteristics that were so desired in Japan at this time were ones that were not typically found naturally[2] on Japanese women. Although most descriptions speak to the purpose of beautification rather than Westernization, there is a look that individuals are seeking which points to happiness in relation to a face that does not have characteristically Japanese physical features. The influence of a Western aesthetic has continued to hold strong in Japan and elsewhere in Asia to this day. Gilman cites the "Asian development of aesthetic surgery as a sign of the modern" (Gilman, 1999, p. 108). The confluence of notions of 'Western' and 'modern' for many Asians and Asian Americans has been noted in the sense of aesthetic that reigns still.

A study conducted from 1946 to 1954 demonstrated the reasons why individuals have chosen to undergo cosmetic surgery on their noses. Frances C. Macgregor (1967) examines cosmetic rhinoplasty in relation to the symbolic significance of racial characteristics. Providing an overview of racial body modification practices, Macgregor explains how in North America, Blacks have used skin-whiteners and hair-straighteners, while Native American and Asian women have gotten permanent waves in their straight hair. These were seen as ways to "reduce differentness by disguising traits that in an Anglo-American society are familiar cues to group

[2] The word 'naturally' is used in this context and throughout this thesis to signify an individual's pre-surgical, non-manipulated body. Natural is not meant to imply a sort of biological essence about an individual, but the body in an un-altered state.

identification" (Macgregor, 1967, p. 125). Individuals saw deviance in noses with shapes that were seen as 'different' from the norm. Those that were "too big," "too long," "flat," "humped," "bulbous," "hooked," "disproportionate," or identifiable with a minority group provided the basis for discrimination (Macgregor, 1967, p. 126). Macgregor shows the ways in which physically deviant features affected an individual's mental and emotional health as well as economic and social problems. In an environment of American conformity, the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery was seen as a response to discrimination and stereotyping based on race. It was also seen as a means to overcome the barriers that came with racial characteristics. As a 25 year old Jewish female participant in the study stated, "I feel I am just as American as anyone else, but my nose sets me apart and keeps me from feeling I belong. My friends have modern faces not a nose that shrieks your nationality. When I'm with Gentiles I feel a curtain comes between us because of my nose. It identifies me as Jewish…I want to look like an American" (Macgregor, 1967, p. 130). As other participants in the study noted, the nose was often associated with racial stereotypes and often brought forth prejudice and was thus seen as imposing upon one's life.

The modern form of cosmetic surgery has roots in early 20th century America (Haiken, 2000, p. 8). It embodies the idea of the 'American dream' (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 6) in that success is measured by the ways that the individual is free to engage in self-determination and demonstrate progress of the self. Although this phenomenon is seen worldwide and is particularly demonstrated by certain racial and ethnic groups, the story of cosmetic surgery is one that can also be read through an American light. Kuczynski explains that "America is an up-by-your-bootstraps kind of place, where self-invention and self-creation are signals of the meritocracy, where you get where you're going with hard work, craftiness, and charm. And what's better than self-invention? Reinvention" (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 25). Part of American life

appears to be a kind of invention or creation of the 'true self' for everyone to see. The makeover reigns high in contemporary American society as a means of showing one's true self or true beauty within. As a means of self-enhancement, the makeover, through various uses of cosmetics and cosmetic surgery, is prevalent in this society. American popular culture has perpetuated the idea that the makeover, often involving extreme forms of cosmetic surgery or bodily alteration, is the means for individuals to pursue their dreams.

Even in a multiethnic and multi-racial society such as America, racial and ethnic physical differences hold the stigma of being perceived as ugly or as representing poor character (Gilman, 1999, p. 98). Although differences in appearance are at times valued, there exists a threshold of actual acceptability. Contemporarily we claim to honour our differences; however it becomes clear, through the use of cosmetic surgery, cosmetics, and advertising, that only a small amount of difference is acceptable. It is for this reason that racial cosmetic surgery continues to hold sway in contemporary American society. What remains a dominant fact about racial cosmetic surgery is that it typically focuses on the most easily identifiable and often highly caricatured physical characteristics—for Jews, it is their noses; for Asians, it is their eyes and noses; and for African American or Black Americans, it is their noses and lips (Davis, 2003, p. 89). It is the features that are highly differentiated from the White, European features which have come to constitute the standard of acceptability not only in America, but globally. The stance that this thesis takes argues that racial cosmetic surgery is not an act undertaken so as to change one's racial identity, to hide one's history, nor is it to mark one as belonging to a race or ethnicity that is different than one's own. Racial cosmetic surgery is more about making oneself racially or ethnically anonymous. That is, in erasing visible, physical racial features, individuals are able to demonstrate an identity that is less reliant or based on their particular racial heritage. Although

historical evidence points less to this notion, the current understanding of American culture points to racial acceptance and understanding of an individual's differences. In the following studies of particular racial or ethnic groups, the adherence to the norm of White, Caucasian physical features is demonstrated.

Asian Women and Cosmetic Surgery

First, looking specifically at East and Southeast Asians undergoing cosmetic surgery provides insight into the ways that racial difference on a physical level is problematic for many individuals. Both in America and throughout the various countries of Asia, racial cosmetic surgery has gained great popularity. Haiken explains how the popularity of cosmetic surgery for Asians, first in Asia and then in the United States, gained immense popularity in the years following World War II (Haiken, 1997, p. 200). The focus of such surgical alterations rested mainly on the eyes. It was the proliferation of American popular culture, a Western aesthetic, or model of beauty, as well as the increasing familiarization with Americans that helped to increase the interest in surgically altering Asian eyes. Although blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery) remains the most popular forms of cosmetic surgery for Asian individuals, it can be noted that rhinoplasty (nose surgery) and breast implants are also undertaken and can be understood as surgical practices which are racially linked (Gilman, 1999, p. 99).

Physician Khoo Boo-Chai, who practiced cosmetic surgery in Singapore, noted in 1963 that Westernization was greatly influencing Eastern women's desires to undergo cosmetic surgery. "Our Eastern sisters put on western apparel, use western make-up, see western movies and read western literature. Nowadays, there even exists a demand for the face and especially the eyes to be westernized," he noted (Haiken, 1997, p. 202). Khoo Boo-Chai has been credited

as the surgeon who developed the current method of double eyelid modification in the 1960s. A stitch along the eyelid creates a very fine line of scars which provide the appearance of a supratarsal fold on the eyelid (Gilman, 1999, p. 107). The effect of this surgery is to gain a double eyelid on an otherwise singularly folded eyelid, giving it the impression of being wider, more open, and less of a sleepy appearance. Most physicians that focus on blepharoplasty note that approximately 50% of all Asians are born with the "single eyelid" type (Kaw, 1991, p. 85). As such, there are contested beliefs and understandings as to whether this surgery is in fact indicative of Westernization or if it is a means by which Asians born with only a singularly folded eyelid can achieve the form of eyelid that other Asians naturally possess.

The Westernization and modernization of 'the East' had the effect of producing a desire for individuals to emulate the West as much as possible, as this was seen historically to be the epicenter of modernity. Although this is a grand generalization, it can be seen to affect many individuals throughout Asia. According to doctors like Boo-Chai, the reasons for Asian women wanting this form of racial cosmetic surgery (that involving the transformation of the eyelid) were great. First, in the economic sense, Western eyes were considered to be a status symbol, believed to be helpful in finding a job and potentially also a husband. Secondly, in the domestic sense, double-eyelid folds were thought to contribute to general happiness and tranquility in the home and social settings (Haiken, 1997, p. 203). The double-eyelid was seen as a physical indicator of what many people were striving for—modernity in the Western sense of the word.

The American involvement in Vietnam provided a medium by which American visual and popular culture became embedded within the Asian mindset. American GIs, it is understood, brought not only an internalized ideal of beauty, but also *Playboy* magazines and posters which depicted a very American, or Western, notion of beauty (Haiken, 1997, p. 203).

Vietnamese women sought out plastic surgery in greater numbers at this time. The general mindset behind cosmetic surgery in this part of the world seems to point to the belief that a change in appearance, to suit a Western ideal of beauty, would benefit a recipient's career as well as social life (Gilman, 1999, p. 103). For some women as well, cosmetic surgery that provided them with rounder eyes and bigger breasts helped them, they believed, to get better jobs as well as American husbands (Haiken, 1997, p. 204). It can be argued that the proliferation of racial forms of cosmetic surgery throughout Asia today reflects a globalization of a Euro-American ideal of beauty. The pervasiveness of such an image worldwide, as well as the moral and social traits that accompany it, enable this image to gain hold on many women, even if their natural image is not in-synch with it.

Amongst Asian Americans, the trend of racial cosmetic surgery has taken hold as well, particularly in places such as California which boasts a high participation rate in cosmetic surgery in general. The desire for 'Western eyes' is a trend that has prevailed amongst Asian American communities over the years. Since the post-war years, Asian American girls and women have been seeking ways to alter their eyes, if only temporarily. For some, double-eyelid surgery has become a reward for achieving 'straight A's' or is a graduation gift after high school or university. For others who cannot afford, or are not allowed, such surgery, cellophane tape is placed on the eyelid overnight which helps to create the double-eyelid look for the duration of a day (Haiken, 1997, p. 205).

Haiken describes the difficulties that Asian Americans have had in placing themselves into the community and culture of mainstream America. She explains how, in America, these communities have been described as "Oriental" or "east of and peripheral to an unnamed center" which is a notion that necessarily classifies these individuals and communities as outsiders

(Haiken, 1997, p. 205). The importance of appearance has been felt as a great part of this classification. Until recently, many of the images in popular culture demonstrated the hierarchical ranking of particular types of appearance: blonde over dark, curvy over flat, wide-eyed over narrow, and pale over 'coloured' (Haiken, 1997, p. 205). In this light, cosmetic surgery among Asian American women fits well with the racialized standards of appearance that reign over American culture. Eugenia Kaw (1991) presents an ethnography done in the San Francisco Bay area on Asian American women who undergo racial cosmetic surgery. Kaw argues that the forms of cosmetic surgery that Asian American women undergo are part of a response to persisting racial prejudices that are often correlated to their "ethnic" features. Women internalize feelings about their physical features and associate them with negative stereotypes. For example, Asian American women have come to associate their physical features of "small, slanty eyes and a flat nose with negative behavioural characteristics, such as passivity, dullness, and a lack of sociability" (Kaw, 1991, p. 75). The decision to undergo cosmetic surgery to alter these "ethnic" traits is encouraged in the way in which society perceives them. In order to clear themselves of racial stereotypes, which often denote submissiveness or of being a bookworm, Asian American women choose to rid themselves of such characteristic features.

What proves problematic in reading responses to interviews on the reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery that appears to be racial, is understanding individuals' true motives. Kaw believes that although many of her respondents, who underwent cosmetic surgery, described their pride in being Asian American as well as their lack of desire to look White, she remains doubtful that they are expressing their true motives. Many of these women, she explains, have incorporated a Caucasian standard of beauty (consciously or not) into the ways

that they look at others and at themselves (Davis, 2003, p. 94). This necessarily devalues the features of individuals of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Kaw believes that the acceptance of the Caucasian standard of beauty means the devaluing of not only physical features, but of individuals as well. If the alteration of physical features means that an individual looks less like others of her community and more like a dominant norm, this potentially leads to individuals trying to disassociate or distinguish themselves from their community and from their background.

Many cosmetic surgeons themselves support the Caucasian standard as a norm against which all individuals and communities can be compared, however this tends to be revealed more on a subconscious level than on the surface. Both within North America and across Asia as well, surgeons often times deny the Caucasianization effect of racial cosmetic surgery, and speak more to its normalizing and beautifying effects. A group of surgeons from Los Angeles, Seoul, and Fukuoka all explain the objective of the eyelid operation on Asians. They insist that it is not Caucasianization but "rather the creation of subtle, aesthetically pleasing supratarsal folds" (Haiken, 1997, p. 208). Kaw provides a reference to a press release by the American Academy of Cosmetic surgery which quotes a prominent surgeon who states that the procedures that racial and ethnic groups undergo are not about looking Western or Caucasian, but are about attaining greater facial harmony and a more open appearance (Kaw, 1991, p. 85). The explanations given by surgeons the world over typically claim that norms of attractiveness have little to do with race, yet they cannot escape the overwhelming fact that the hierarchical ranking of particular features is often quite racialized. The double eyelid fold is believed to make eyes look not only bigger, but more attractive. Facial harmony is often quoted, lending to the notion that a singularly folded eyelid, as occurs in 50% of the Asian population, does not help a face achieve

this harmony. It is the double-eyelid trait that is not only considered more harmonious, but more attractive and welcoming. As one surgeon explained, "the upper eyelid without a fold tends to give a sleepy appearance and therefore a more dull look to the patient" (Haiken, 1997, p. 208). The racial stereotypes and hierarchical classification is clear in this statement and thus the underlying racial motive behind undertaking such a surgical modification is clear.

Jewish Women and Cosmetic Surgery

One of the first groups of American immigrants to undergo a form of racial cosmetic surgery was Jews who did not like their noses. From the early 20th century on, the "Jewish nose" has been used as a medical term which describes a particular type of nose common among Jewish peoples. Both within American popular culture as well as the medical literature, there exists a common definition of the size and shape of a normal, or acceptable nose. One that is "over-large," "oversized," "excessively large," "humped," or "hooked" is a nose that clearly defies all cultural notions of acceptability (Haiken, 1997, p. 196). Such a nose is often treated as a deformity and as a physical trait that demands correcting. As with Asian American youth, Jewish youth have, since the post-war years, participated in a particular rite-of-passage of getting 'nose jobs' as graduation or birthday gifts (Haiken, 1997, p. 197). The overwhelming acceptance of the Jewish nose job points to the notion that the Jewish nose is in fact a trait which is unacceptable by Western society's cultural aesthetic. The idea that this term as a medical term has persisted throughout history is a sign that the Jewish nose continues to pose a problem for individuals in America. A 1996 manual that describes particular procedures for modifying racial or ethnic noses states that "correction of the Jewish nose requires a classic rhinoplasty with lowering of the dorsum, narrowing of the bony pyramid, refinement and elevation of the excessively long hanging tip" (Preminger, 2001, p. 4). This connotation of the problematic

Jewish nose perpetuates the stereotypes and the negative associations with Jewish peoples. Scientific credibility has been given to popular stereotypes about race and ethnicity through the persistent use of the term 'Jewish nose'. The nose itself has been made into a pathological condition for which individuals were instructed to seek help for its correction.

Two well-cited cases of the 'Jewish nose' are known throughout popular culture in America. The first involves the actress/comedienne Fanny Brice and the second involves the actress/singer Barbra Streisand. Each of these individuals demonstrates the pathological and deformative notions of the Jewish nose; however they both had different reactions to the stereotypes and media that surrounded them. Fanny Brice, a popular actress during the 1920s, decided to undergo modification on her nose in 1923. She said, "I wanted to look prettier and my nose was a sight in any language, but I wasn't trying to hide my origin" (Haiken, 1997, p. 182). Many critics and fans did not quite believe her cited reasons for her cosmetic surgery. Most people maintained that it was in fact the desire to look less Jewish that played a major role in her decision for surgery. As was discussed previously about Asian American decisions, in this case Brice had internalized a very Caucasian cultural aesthetic that deemed her 'Jewish nose' as ugly or undesirable. Looking 'too ethnic' went against American cultural standards.

Barbra Streisand, on the other hand, gained popular status in the 1960s as a new star of the young generation. Her case gives evidence to the notion that "we have begun to deliver ourselves from the tyranny of such ethnocentric norms in the last decades of the 20th century" (Gilman, 1999, p. 202). Barbra Streisand, in her increasing fame, gained a reputation for pushing our limits of acceptability in looking Jewish, and in creating openly Jewish distinctions of beauty. Streisand's appearance has always been a popular topic of conversation due to the idea that she defied convention by refusing to surgically alter her Jewish nose. While it is

important to recognize the significance of her actions in legitimating alternative styles of beauty, it must be understood that this acceptance was not, and remains not, easy. Streisand's nose has been mentioned in almost every article that has been written about her. While the *New Yorker* chose to describe her nose as "acquiline," *Newsweek* and the *Saturday Evening Post* once called it, respectively, "absurd" and "the nose of an eagle" (Haiken, 1997, p. 197). The American preoccupation with Streisand's nose points to the notion that the acceptability of differences is a large feat to accomplish. The expectation that Streisand would alter her nose was so normalized as a part of American society, that her rejection of cosmetic surgery on it was what the American people found to be such an amazing thing about her (Haiken, 1997, p. 197). The contradictory nature of the American acceptance of Barbra Streisand and her nose points to the contradictory nature of our understandings of beauty, of acceptability, and of deviance in appearance. Americans have voiced over and over their admiration for those who resist the pressure to conform to society's Eurocentric, Caucasian standards of beauty, but at the same time, are slow to accept the beauty underlying those who look different, or ethnic, or 'other' than 'American'.

Black Women and Cosmetic Surgery

In understanding how individuals undergo cosmetic surgery so as to erase physical traits which mark them as 'Other', it is also interesting to examine Black and African Americans in the contemporary context. As has been described in the previous chapter which examines racial difference, Black Americans have historically been understood as the definitive 'Other'. Colorism[3] and racism have prevailed throughout North America and have systematically

[3] Hunter describes the differences of racism and colorism in understanding skin colour stratification. Racism is a system of "prejudice, discrimination, and insititutional power that privileges whites and oppresses various people of colour" (Hunter, 2002, p. 175). On the other hand, colorism is the privileging of lighter skin over darker skin in terms of a particular group of people in a given community. With colorism, whiteness is privileged "in terms of

oppressed those who do not fit with Eurocentric ideals and norms in terms of their physicality. For Black Americans, hair has historically stood as a political indicator of status and social acceptance, as well as of the adherence to culturally prescribed norms. For several decades leading up to the 1960s, most Black Americans, women and men, straightened their hair (Etcoff, 1999, p. 129). Black Americans historically incorporated the idea into their psyches that their natural, kinky hair was not beautiful, or socially acceptable, and that they had to 'tame' it. Hair straightening can be understood as one of the earliest signs of Black Americans adhering to a Caucasian American cultural aesthetic. The politics behind whether to straighten one's hair, to leave it natural and wear it in an 'afro,' or to wear dreadlocks or cornrows has spurred much debate (Etcoff, 1999, p. 129). The 'Black is Beautiful' movement helped to rid society of much racial stereotyping of Black characteristics, however, racial difference is still seen to affect many Black women and men in America.

As *New York Times* bestseller and well-known attorney, Lawrence Otis Graham points out, black skin is a marker that no amount of cosmetic surgery can hide (Haiken, 1997, p. 209). It is less easy for Black Americans to dissociate themselves from, or hide, their race or ethnicity than it is for other groups in America. Skin bleaching and cosmetic surgery may alter certain physical features in a drastic way, but individuals who undergo such procedures are still easily identified as Black. On top of this, they often face a larger stigma than individuals of other racial and ethnic groups who attempt to erase characteristic markers. Often, Black Americans who undergo a form of racial body modification, whether it is hair straightening, hair dying, bleaching the skin, sharpening the nose, or altering the shape of the lips, face an accusation that they are denying their heritage. On one hand, it would appear as though Black Americans are

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phenotype, aesthetics, and culture." Both racism and colorism are prevalent in the American context of cultural aesthetics.

given less of a chance to 'play' with their physical features and their appearance in the ways that women of other races and ethnicities do. When popular Black celebrities such as Naomi Campbell, Tyra Banks, or Tina Turner wear blonde hair, they are often criticized for exhibiting the Caucasian standard of beauty as well as showing that this standard must be adhered to in order to succeed (Etcoff, 1999, p. 128). The stigma of undergoing cosmetic surgery or other forms of body modification so as to adhere to a Caucasian, Eurocentric norm carries a lot of baggage with it for Black Americans. As *Essence*, editor Elsie B. Washington once noted, "the wish to acquire what we were not born with, to adopt the colouring that has for centuries been touted as prettier, finer, better, carries with it the old baggage of racial inferiority and/or superiority based simply, and simplistically, on physical traits" (Haiken, 1997, p. 214). Often the notion of self-hate and racial insecurity are touted to explain why Black American women would choose to undergo racial forms of body modification. Understanding the history of racism and oppression that Blacks in America have had to conquer leaves room for explaining why nowadays, showing pride in one's Black heritage is a feeling that is strong in many communities. Many people believe that by changing physical features which decidedly mark one as being Black, they are dismissing the hardships that they have overcome and refusing to show solidarity with the community.

In Black magazines, cosmetic surgery has, just like in many other popular magazines, been recommended as a positive form of self-enhancement. In the sense of creating equality, these articles and advertisements typically contend that self-improvement is a goal for all Americans, Black and White. Haiken explains how words like 'prettier' are typically used, rather than 'Caucasian' or 'White' to describe the ways one wishes to appear. She explains how desires of ethnic and racial minorities are typically framed in a way so as to cover the deeper

meanings that stand behind them. The meaning, however, is often clear in the cases of cosmetic surgery. She describes how "words like 'prettier' and 'better,' however are explicitly comparative in nature; they beg the question, 'than what,?' as well as the more complex question of how definitions and standards of appearance came to be" (Haiken, 1997, p. 213). The terms used to describe the 'deformities' of particular physical features share a path with terms used by individuals of all types of races and ethnicities. The constant which stands as the comparison is always a Caucasian, Eurocentric ideal. Words like 'too big,' 'too crooked,' 'too small,' 'too wide,' and 'not wide enough' all demonstrate a norm that is not consistent with all types of races. This norm inevitably places feelings of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with not only one's physical features, but also the features characteristic of one's racial or ethnic background.

As we saw with the example of the actress Fanny Brice, people in the entertainment industry have been noted to alter their physical features that they believed would place a limit on their professional careers. The most well-known and cited case of extreme forms of racial cosmetic surgery is that of Michael Jackson, who has managed, through cosmetic surgery, to transcend many notions of not only race, but gender as well. Jackson has had multiple surgeries and procedures which have drastically changed his face and body to a point that he is unrecognizable when compared to his former self. He has had a minimum of four rhinoplasties, including many "fine-tuning" operations which have left him with a fragile, pointed nose. He has had a cleft put in his chin, cheek implants, face lifting, and his lower lip thinned. On top of this, he has used many skin bleaching agents which have transformed his once-black skin into a transparent white (Davis, 2003, p. 95). Michael Jackson insists that he has a skin disorder called vitiligo and so the only reason that he uses white makeup is to cover up his skin depigmentation. However, the argument stands that others with this skin disorder have been known to darken

their white skin discolorations (Davis, 2003, p. 95). His use of white makeup is seen then as a choice that he is actively engaging in, in order to change his overall skin colour. Jackson has lost most of his characteristically ethnic features which once identified him as Black. The question of race is of great importance in the case of Michael Jackson. Although he claims that he is proud to be Black and that his only interest is to "look better" (Davis, 2003, p. 96), his true motivations remain unclear. Many Americans believe that Michael Jackson is trying to look less Black, meaning that his surgeries are in fact about his feelings on race. Critics of Jackson have commented that his bleached skin and disfigured Black/African features are a kind of "violation of nature, an unnatural act that entails negating his essential identity" (Davis, 2003, p. 96). They merely show his internalizing of Caucasian, Eurocentric ideals of beauty.

However, another understanding of Michael Jackson's body is necessary to the understanding of how racial cosmetic surgery can be read in contemporary American society. Davis notes that some post-structuralist writers have come to see Jackson as the "exemplary postmodernist actor," as he uses his body as a means to constantly transform his image and identity. Thus, his surgical processes are simply ways to transcend the categories and boundaries of race. In this light, "Jackson demonstrates in the most embodied way possible that 'race' really doesn't matter" (Davis, 2003, p. 97). This interpretation is an interesting point to consider, allowing for the deconstruction of racial categories and the subjugation of individuals in the groups into which they have been born. However, it remains that the 'look' that Jackson has moved towards is still consistent with the Eurocentric norm which has prevailed in North America and throughout the rest of the world as well. The postmodernist stance allows for the understanding that the reasons for undergoing racial cosmetic surgery can be about the

deconstruction or overcoming of cultural barriers. However, the means and the ends of these surgeries cannot be dissociated from the culture in which they are borne.

Perceived Problems with Racial Cosmetic Surgery: Women's Oppression or Emancipation?

The great dilemma of cosmetic surgery, and especially of racial cosmetic surgery, is that it assumes that there is a natural body which is unacceptable and that must be brought to order. It is predicated upon particular definitions of physical normality. As such, cosmetic surgeons are now given the authority to distinguish what counts as normal or abnormal bodies (Davis, 2003, p. 5). This natural body requires improvement or refinement as it is seen as biologically flawed (Brush, 1998, p. 29). As has been previously discussed, women's bodies have historically been seen as deviant and thus subject to change. The practice of cosmetic surgery necessarily involves an aesthetic judgment and a standard against which visibly 'different' individuals are evaluated. This can be considered as a type of normalizing gaze (Brush, 1998, p. 30), which breaks down the body into parts that can be judged and then transformed, if necessary, to approximate the ideal. Beauty and aesthetic ideals in America rest upon a Eurocentric, Caucasian standard which is taken as the norm. As increasing numbers of celebrities and individuals in our communities participate publicly in cosmetic surgery, the act itself is becoming normalized into this global society. Studies have demonstrated that this is happening more frequently and with a broad, worldwide scope. Modifying the body is moving away from being a vain quest for beauty and is becoming a normal means for controlling the natural life course and history of the body.

Cosmetic surgery as a practice problematizes the natural, biological body and instills upon it means of improvement that are socially and culturally sanctioned. Through the practice

of cosmetic surgery, "what comes to have primary significance is not the real given existing woman but her body viewed as a 'primitive entity' that is seen only as potential, as a kind of raw material..." (Morgan, 1998, p. 334). The discourse of cosmetic surgery presumes that individuals will come to recognize their bodily difference and deviance and understand that there are certain means of improvement so as to better fit in society. In the Foucauldian sense, the female and the racial body becomes a type of cultural text (Davis, 1991, p. 26). Particular categorical and classificatory ideals are instilled into individual consciousnesses through a variety of media, literature, and social interaction. As such, participating in the act of cosmetic surgery is a way of demonstrating an affiliation with cultural values by having them written directly on the body. As Brush notes, "Cosmetic surgery literally transforms the material body into a sign of culture" (Brush, 1998, p. 24). Women often choose to conform their bodies to approximate a norm that has been constructed by society. The results of most racial forms of cosmetic surgery are the socially endorsed, yet often arbitrary ideals of beauty (Brush, 1998, p. 24). The illusion of choice is what concerns most people with the act of racial cosmetic surgery. Asking whether women really have agency in deciding the shape and course their bodies will take demands problematizing gendered and racial imperatives for body modification and control.

Racial and ethnic features are often seen as obstructions to the achievement of beauty. Cosmetic surgery, through the modification of such distinguishable features, has the effect of allowing racial and ethnic women to achieve a sense of beauty as is reflected in the American Eurocentric ideal. Anne Anlin Cheng states that for racialized women, the possibility of "owning" beauty has very contradictory meanings (Cheng, 2000, p. 205). On the one hand, it is impossible for racialized women to achieve beauty, as in the Western philosophical tradition beauty has been defined specifically in White, Eurocentric terms. Whiteness itself has also been

defined as beauty. The two appear interchangeable in our society. However, the primacy of White beauty appears to drive those racialized Others who are most oppressed by it (Cheng, 2000, p. 194). The popularity of racial cosmetic surgery and other racialized forms of body modification such as hair straightening and skin bleaching demonstrate the power of this one particular form of acceptable beauty. Caucasian women also undergo cosmetic surgery, however their surgeries are never seen as racial as their bodies themselves are 'un-raced'. Being white in American society is often a situation that is taken for granted by many. White individuals are not induced into the same "state of conscious and permanent visibility" that racially Other individuals are as their physical characteristics, despite gender differences, suit society's ideals (O'Grady, 2005, p. 16). To those individuals who are not afforded the racial or colour blindness that Caucasians experience, race serves as a particularly salient fact of life in American society.

The fact that particular features of the face and body are racialized, and thus seen as deviating from the norm, allow for race and ethnicity to be "objective" grounds for surgery (Dull & West, 1991, p. 59). Both surgeons and patients allow for racial features to act as signifiers of a problematic appearance. Oriental eyes, Jewish noses, and Black lips are all terms that are imbued with very set social meanings. They are problematic features that do not fit with how American culture has the tendency to see beauty.

Foucault's theoretical framework of self-discipline serves as a means for understanding how surveillance and the 'power of the norm' help to reinforce racial cosmetic surgery as a social response to racial and gendered oppressive discourse. His theories also provide a framework for understanding how dominant identity and aesthetic norms are supported by actions that individual women take upon themselves. The idea of self-surveillance, as represented by the image of the Panopticon (refer to explanation of the Panopticon in Chapter 1),

has been said to induce in the individual the notion that they are constantly in a state of visibility and must work at controlling their behaviours and their appearances so as to assure the functioning of power (O'Grady, 2005, p. 15). As has already been articulated, for women and for racially identified individuals, this state of conscious visibility is a fact of American society and is particularly significant in the field of aesthetics.

According to Foucauldian perspective, the locus of control rests on the individual. It is the individual who responds to dominant societal ideals and stereotypes surrounding the body and controls or modifies her or his bodily habits or forms in response. This self-policing works in a way that has been described as the "modern imperative towards sameness and the pathologizing of difference" (O'Grady, 2005, p. 18). As disciplinary power works through the characterization and classification of individuals, Foucault states that this form of power, as it works around a particular norm, "hierarchize(s) individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate(s)" (Foucault, 1977, p. 223). As individuals feel the disciplinary regime working upon their bodies, they submit themselves to a particular form in order to maintain a particular status in society. It is the racial and gendered necessity to fit with society's ideals and norms that necessitates the participation in acts of cosmetic surgery. This fits in line with Foucault's notion of the 'power of the Norm' and the means by which it has emerged as an instrument of power that is used to discipline and control the behaviour of individuals. The Norm essentially demands a homogeneous ideal to which all individuals in society are felt pressured to conform (Brush, 1998, p. 34). This pressure arrives from the hierarchical ranking of individuals and the racialized stereotypes that perpetuate throughout society. Difference seems to be acceptable as it occurs in slight deviations from this norm. The rise of cosmetic surgery helps to enforce this normative ideal in that the possibilities for change

that are desired by individuals, and also suggested by surgeons, rest in this particular curve of minimal deviations from this one ideal.

The result of a society that calls for self-discipline as a means of control is the emergence of what Foucault calls a 'docile body'. This body is the body that is transformed, subjected, and manipulated by the forces of society in order to adhere to social understandings of power and social adhesion in Western society. This notion of a docile body, however, leaves little room for individual agency and for understanding the multitude of motives that stand behind an individual's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. Foucault's idea of docile bodies only speaks to one understanding of agency, and that is an individual working within a specific set of cultural values. Individual choice is really individual conformity. It is easy to see that in many instances of cosmetic surgery, racial and other, the desired results are part of a very homogeneous ideal. Agency is an extremely relevant idea that must be deconstructed in relation to the act of cosmetic surgery in order to see how it is that racially Othered women negotiate their place in American society and to see how normative ideals of beauty affect their lives.

There are many different views on agency as women elect to undergo racial cosmetic surgery. According to Morgan, women are protesting against the constraints "of the 'given' in their embodied lives and seeking liberation from those constraints" (Morgan, 1998, p. 335). She warns, however, that while liberation can be sought by erasing their racial characteristics and bringing their bodies more in line with society's ideals, these women are making themselves even more vulnerable to the power structures that enforced these ideals in the first place. Davis also argues that cosmetic surgery, while not the optimal outcome for an individual's life, is a way for women to make a choice for themselves yet work within the limitations of their lives (Davis,

1991, p. 22). She argues against viewing cosmetic surgery in terms of a 'false consciousness' perspective where, simply, women mistakenly believe that cosmetic surgery will help their lives.

Another form of agency that must be taken into consideration is that women are consciously choosing to conform their bodies to Caucasian ideals as they see a material, economic advantage to doing so. Kaw explains how some of the women in her study saw the aesthetic results of cosmetic surgery as a means for them, as racial minorities, to attain a better socio-economic status in American society (Kaw, 1991, p. 81). The surgeries were seen as investments in one's future and as a necessity for future careers. By conforming to an appearance that seems to hold more prestige in American society, the Asian-American women in Kaw's study demonstrated how society devalues their natural racial physical characteristics. By defining and describing their physical features as problematic, these women actively chose to adjust their appearances to a more normalized, more prestigious one that they believed would help their advancement in American society. This is a means of demonstrating a form of agency; however it takes place through the conformity to social norms and ideals. Cosmetic surgery "is an ideological battlefield where women grapple actively and knowledgeably with opposing cultural constructions of femininity, beauty, and what should or should not be done about the female body" (Davis, 1991, p. 23). Racial cosmetic surgery, while not an optimal choice, is a choice that women make, given their situations and the society in which they live, to empower and liberate themselves from the constraints they feel upon themselves and, particularly, their bodies.

Beautification or Normalization?

Most ethnographic examples citing the reasons that women undergo racial cosmetic surgery provide an argument that these procedures are less about being beautiful and more about normalizing their appearance. Essentially, the erasure of ethnic markers is often seen not as an attempt to exemplify Caucasian beauty ideals but more so to rid oneself of those features which outwardly signify an individual as being differently raced or ethnic. Herein lies the contradiction. Individuals are removing or erasing physical traits which they have learned to see as ugly or as deviating from the norm. The alteration of their perceived bodily differences inevitably leads them to believe that they will be more beautiful as it is these racial traits which have impeded them in the past. Patients overwhelmingly cited the goal of "ethnic anonymity" as their reasons for undergoing racial cosmetic surgery (Haiken, 1997, p. 186). The goal was not to become something that they were not or to even pass as something else. They wished to remove all notions of race or ethnicity from their identification. What was most interesting about the comments given by individuals who had undergone racial cosmetic surgery is that they wished, through the erasure of their racial and ethnic features, to be recognized as individuals and not as a part of a particular group (Haiken, 1997, p. 189). In an attempt to rid themselves of the stereotypes that are associated with their particular ethnic and racial features, these individuals are willing to give up one identity and take on another. Although many claim they are aiming for ethnic anonymity, the erasure of particular racial features often means the Caucasianizing of one's face. It appears as though the belief is that to be an individual means to not be racially marked, or to be seen as generic, Caucasian. Normalizing the body in American society inevitably means reducing it to terms set out by a Eurocentric ideal. Therefore, the wish to be

known as an individual often becomes synonymous with a very historically rooted notion of the norm—that is, Caucasian.

What this means for One's Identity

Another central factor in understanding how racial cosmetic surgery impacts an individual's life is in analyzing its role in the creation or re-creation of identity. Individual identity is of great importance in contemporary America as it is through our identity that we know ourselves and allow others to know us. Cosmetic surgery takes on meaning for identity when we examine how bodies, and individuals' efforts at bodily improvement, are established as an essential part of the self. The physical body is often seen as both detached and vital to the whole self. Vital, in that our material bodies cannot be separated from the whole individual. Detached, in that there is often a discord between how one appears and how one believes they should appear. Racial characteristics often set an individual apart despite that person's belief that they are just the same as everybody else. In this sense, individuals often modify their bodies so as to better suit their desired position in society and sense of identity.

Kathy Davis conducted a study on women in the Netherlands who chose to undergo cosmetic surgery. Results of her interviews demonstrated that many women felt that they were suffering in the bodies they had been given and therefore decided to change themselves. Davis explains the ways in which these women believed that their bodily characteristics were so out-of-the-ordinary, or different from the norm, that they could no longer stand themselves. She says, "They didn't feel 'at home' in their bodies; this particular body part just didn't 'belong' to the rest of her body or to the person she felt she was" (Davis, 2003, p. 76). These women all felt that the particular characteristics that they embodied did not fully show who they truly were. Their

dissatisfaction was rooted in their society's beliefs and ideals of womanly aesthetics. Although the surgeries that Davis presents are not of the racial variety, the discourse surrounding bodily ideals is relevant to this study. The discourse of normative bodily aesthetics proposes that there are certain prescribed ideals in a particular society and that those who fail to meet such standards are considered deviant in a way. Individuals can internalize such feelings of difference and inferiority due to their deviation from a particular norm.

Cosmetic surgery is not only an alteration of a woman's appearance, it is a transformation of the entire self. In this sense, cosmetic surgery is "an intervention in identity" (Davis, 2003, p. 82). Identity is then taken as a performance. It is the way that an individual chooses to live and appear in society. Davis explains how identity involves the ongoing integration and development of different perspectives and ideas of personhood in order to construct an appropriate sense of self. This involves various life narratives that an individual chooses for the self in order to determine the course her life will take (Davis, 2003, p. 83). Identity, as a reconstruction due to cosmetic surgery, is an accordance with who a woman wants to be and how her external appearance suits her needs and wants.

However, while cosmetic surgery allows for a woman to renegotiate her identity, it also constrains her. The constraint becomes clear when we realize that the appearance that most women strive for is an ideal that is constructed under Eurocentric historical and contemporary norms. Cosmetic surgery is often seen as the only solution to women's problems with their appearance. In our culture, cosmetic surgery is both available and socially acceptable (if not applauded) as a means to demonstrate one's accordance with social aesthetic codes. Cosmetic surgery requires a post-modern society such as that of America where the "technological fix" is understood as a means to remake our bodies; where there still exists a dualistic conception of

mind and body, in that surgery allows for the dislocation of our bodies from our wholes; and where gender and racial power relations are enacted through women's bodies (Davis, 2003, p. 84). Women's bodies are the means through which they must negotiate their identities. For racially Othered women, racial and ethnic characteristics are simply more problems to overcome in order to suit society's demands.

Understanding the ways that individuals make sense of identity in the context of cosmetic surgery requires a return to the concepts of postmodernism and performativity/phenomenology that were outlined at the beginning of this thesis. As postmodernism negates set meanings in our society and problematizes the ways that we have come to classify and categorize individuals into groups, this theoretical perspective can help illuminate the ways that individuals understand their personhood throughout the process of body modification. Postmodernism and poststructuralism allow for new, dynamic ways for women to interact with and understand their bodies. The breakdown of notions of race and gender allow for women to continuously negotiate their identities on a basis that seemingly holds no barriers as given by the biological, natural self (Bordo, 2001, p. 122).

Most important is the notion of the body as 'cultural plastic' which is a term used to denote the ways that the body is held and interpreted in contemporary Western culture. The emphasis on plasticity allows for the freedom to choose how one wishes to live in one's body. It is, "a construction of life as plastic possibility and weightless choice, undetermined by history, social location, or even individual biography" (Davis, 1995, p. 17). The notion of cultural plastic in terms of the body is fuelled by the postmodern condition where fantasies of limitless change and improvement, and the means to achieve it disseminate throughout society. The plastic body is seen as erasing signs of history, mortality, and even the sheer materiality of the body

(Grimshaw, 1999, p. 92). Bodies are used, especially by women in American society, as vehicles for self-expression. In this way, modifying the body allows for individuals to create their own sense of identity. As racial cosmetic surgery has widespread participation, the idea of the plastic body comes to serve as an impetus for women to choose to change their bodies, however, the end results do not always fit in line with the original notions of plasticity. Individuals are led to believe that they can be anyone they want to be, through the modification of their bodies. The erasure of ethnic and racial markers, however, demonstrates the pervasiveness of a Caucasian, Eurocentric ideal. Although the possibilities are limitless, the actual actions of individuals do not reflect this. The body that most women seem to want is actually a highly normalized one (Grimshaw, 1999, p. 93). The dominance of a particular bodily type, as well as a hierarchy of races and social stereotypes that run throughout cultural discourse, are all too reflected in the choices individual women make about 'who they want to be'. However there is no denying the fact that by choosing to undergo racial cosmetic surgery, a woman is able to establish a sense of identity for herself. She is actively negotiating her role in society through the modification practices on her body.

The ways that women actively establish their identities through the modification of their bodies is an elaboration of the phenomenological approach to performativity. As has been established by theorists such as Judith Butler (2003), bodies are constantly in the process of negotiating and re-negotiating their ways of being in the world. The body does not exist as dissociated from the discursive processes in society. Rather, it is "a locus of production, the site of contested meaning, and as such fluid and unstable" (Shildrick, 2002, p. 10). The individual ekes out a sense of identity dependent on the parameters of bodily forms of acceptability that are established in society. As we attempt to deal with racial stereotypes and hegemonic bodily

ideals, one's sense of identity as it relates to their body, becomes dependent on establishing the self as an accepted member of society.

Conclusion

Racial cosmetic surgery is a field that has been shown to be wrought with many contested and contradictory meanings and purposes. Racial cosmetic surgery typically is a move for women to modify their bodies in order to have them fit in more with a Caucasian, Eurocentric ideal. Many individuals who have undergone such surgeries claim that their motivations for changing their bodies were not racially inspired. Rather than to become White or Caucasian, the common motive is more to erase outward visible racial or ethnic characteristics. In this way, individuals hope to be seen more as individuals and less as members of a racial or ethnic community. Anti-racist discourse in America points to the importance of treating people as individuals. As such, those who are undergoing surgery can be seen to also be transcending racism and not merely race. By re-creating themselves as individuals they are illuminating how racism affects their lives. Ideas such as racial hatred or embarrassment do not seem to permeate the discourse surrounding this phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery, although it remains to be seen if there are underlying motives that individuals do not wish to discuss. Racial cosmetic surgery is generally seen in a semi-positive light, in that women are seen as working within a particular form of power and enabling themselves to live their lives to the fullest. However, understanding this phenomenon through the lens of Foucault's concept of self-discipline, allows us to understand how agency might not be as real as we imagine. Although these women are actively choosing to modify their bodies, can this really be seen as agency as they are working within a very narrow definition of beauty? What does this say about choice if the end products all happen to be the same?

What remains still to be answered on this topic is the opposite side of this spectrum—that is, women who do not choose to undergo cosmetic surgery (or those who never even consider it). Why and how do these racial stereotypes and hierarchies affect some women and not others? We might argue that a Caucasian standard of beauty is diminishing in our society, but it has left behind a considerable trail of ideals which remain embedded within the consciousness of many.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Industry

Having analyzed the field of racial cosmetic surgery in contemporary North America, the question that begs to be asked is, in what ways the beauty and cosmetic surgery industries themselves influence individual desires and motivations in undergoing cosmetic surgery? An analysis of these industries is necessary in order to understand how the messages of ideal, normative, racially anonymous bodies are proliferated throughout society. Today's consumer culture takes a large part of the responsibility in providing a particular discourse and message to North American consumers. This chapter will first provide an introduction to the current state of consumerism and the body in our society which is necessary in order to understand the framework from which the rest of the discussions will follow. This will be followed by a two-part analysis of the cosmetic surgery industry, dealing with websites and magazines which directly advertise cosmetic surgery procedures. This will demonstrate both physician and consumer attitudes and beliefs regarding cosmetic surgery, racial cosmetic surgery in particular. Secondly, an analysis of recent and current television programming on cosmetic surgery within the realm of 'reality TV' will further demonstrate how the discourse of the ideal body is reproduced throughout our society through the popular medium of reality television programming. The state of consumer culture that we find ourselves in provides a basis for understanding how individuals 'buy in' to certain ideals and act upon them in the modification of their bodies.

America has long been known as the 'land of opportunity'. This notion has extended to the present where individuals believe that any goals can be achieved with the right mindset and actions. Advertisements and the media help to define our needs and wants and influence our

decisions in helping us buy into these produced dreams. They influence consumers into believing that we can have it all if we so choose. The notion, then, of agency is prevalent in society (Blum, 2003, p. 50). In some ways we appear to be active in our consumption decisions. We actively choose products and services which we feel will best suit our needs. However, our own desires have been influenced and directed by the media and other powerful forces in society which help to define what we should or should not have/want in our lives. As such, American culture thrives on a sense of conformity and uniformity. As Kuczynski notes, "we are a nation of follow-me consumerism. We all wear the same clothes, eat at the same restaurants, and drive the same SUVs" (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 109). Although individuals assert their individuality in various ways, even individuality is often rooted in ideal identity structures. Differences that are pronounced by individuals often follow along the lines of what society deems as acceptable behaviour, personality, or aesthetic deviations from the norm. The margin of acceptability in differentiation is slight. The mentality that prevails is that there is a certain norm, an expectation for one's life, which must be followed in order to appear successful. This notion, that individuals in American society are seeking sameness and uniformity, is reflected in the ways that individuals sense, treat, and modify their bodies. Certain ideals and bodily norms proliferate throughout cultural discourse as well as the means, and the necessity, to achieve them.

Commercials and advertisements have the effect of steering our desires in a certain direction. Many contemporary advertisements send a message of empowerment through consumerism. The general discourse tells us to 'Just do it!' or 'Go for it!', or 'Know no boundaries!' (Bordo, 1997, p. 30). The underlying message is to take your destiny in your own hands. In this way, individuals often think that they are making individualistic decisions, in that the normalizing discourse of advertising uses individual, self decision-making images and texts.

Consumers are told that they are bold and innovative, while buying into a normalized perception of society's needs and wants. Advertisers must "exploit or create a perception of personal lack in the consumer" in order to influence the consumer's decision-making process. As Bordo claims, the way to achieve this is to make use of preexisting cultural norms and values (Bordo, 1997, p. 30).

The relation of this consumerist attitude to the body is that the advertising industry catering to cosmetics, body modifying products or services, and cosmetic surgery, all exploit postmodern contemporary American ideals in order to gain the consumer's trust that such products and services are not only good, but necessary for their lives. Race, age, and class-based norms are perpetuated in advertising campaigns which help to further define and describe ideal bodies in American society. In a society where blondes with blue eyes are part of a dominant bodily ideal, the market for hair dye, blue coloured contact lenses, etc. demonstrates how individuals buy in to these ideals.

American society has long been known as a 'melting pot'. It is the place where individuals from all cultures, ethnicities, races, religions, etc. come together and assimilate in hopes of all becoming 'American'. Being able to choose one's physical features is understood as a part of this melting pot society, where racial and ethnic differences can be erased so as to ensure equality and normative identities for all. Conformity and adaptation are a part of the demand of the assimilative American landscape (Das, 2007). The alteration of racial features allows individuals to fully integrate themselves into mainstream American society. However, the understanding that it is a particular type of physical feature which is ultimately encouraged to "melt" away (Bordo, 1997, p. 49) leaves the practice of racial cosmetic surgery in a contradictory realm within American consumer culture. The surgeries that are often undertaken reflect the

adherence to a Caucasian norm. People don't often get their noses reshaped to look more Black or Jewish, nor do they get their eyes altered to look more Asian. Individuals in American society can be seen to be buying in to a particular, Eurocentric bodily aesthetic which inevitably reflects upon the choices we make, and those that are available to us in this consumer-driven society.

Cosmetic surgery takes an interesting place in American society as it provides a means by which individuals can purchase a particular type of bodily form. Cosmetic surgery in general is a part of a capitalist, postmodern society in which individuals feel that with the right amount of money, any bodily aesthetic dream can be achieved. As the practice of cosmetic surgery is increasingly normalized into American society, the decision to undergo it has come to be seen as a commercial transaction. The negative cultural and medical effects are typically glossed over by surgeons and consumers alike who argue that it is everyone's right to look good (Blum, 2003, p. 57). This industry thrives on the notion that aesthetics can (and must) be bought, that differentiation is only acceptable if it is slight, and that the dominant ideal is worth buying into. The body and face of each individual is now seen as a means of advertising one's identity. The cultural importance of cosmetic surgery demonstrates that to have a face and body which fit our cultural ideal is to demonstrate one's success in attaining the American dream.

The frequently cited example of medical tourism provides a clear case in demonstrating how our society has come to view cosmetic surgery as a commodity (being a new body) to be purchased. Medical tourism has gained popularity since the 1970s and contemporarily, a growing number of Americans are seeking plastic surgery vacations in tropical locations outside of the United States. The inexpensive procedures offered in these countries around the Caribbean, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the southern regions of Africa come in packages tailored to the individual. Often these surgical packages are taken because it provides a cheaper

means than surgery performed in one's home country although this is not the sole reason. As Kuczynski notes, certain countries worldwide are known for their cosmetic surgery specialty (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 22). The intersection of exotic vacations coupled with cosmetic surgery provides a way of looking at the medical procedure as just another status symbol. These trips are luxury items to be purchased, where the individual is detached from her own society, 'fixed,' and then re-introduced as a better version of herself. Individuals often choose to partake of such medical tourism because it is a means of demonstrating one's wealth, status, and cultural connection or one's affiliation with particular cultural ideals.

The normalization and acceptance of cosmetic surgery as a part of American society has raised standards of aesthetic acceptability and has in fact led people to expect bodily perfection, and nothing less. We are habituated to images which depict an aesthetic standard that is devoid of defect; of race, of ethnicity, of age, of fat, and of class. Certain standards of beauty and our general expectations for individual appearances have come to be rooted in this culture where cosmetic surgery is so popular. Often, failure to emulate cultural aesthetic norms is seen as a failure on the part of the individual. Those who do engage in normative cultural practices such as cosmetic surgery become part of a dominant group of people who are all actively engaged with the American way of life. Increasingly, admitting that you've undergone some kind of cosmetic procedure is seen as a status symbol, rather than something that is shameful. The twenty-first century consumer is meant to believe that it is their moral obligation to adhere to normative cultural aesthetics and to indulge in self-maintenance routines so as to fit one's body properly in society (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 199). As cosmetic surgery comes to be the standard means for taking control of one's body, the standard aesthetic becomes one that is fabricated and manipulated by surgeons and through the influence of the media.

The effect of this is that beauty culture in American society takes on a paradoxically coercive, yet liberating force (Blum, 2003, p. 52). Its coerciveness lies in the notion that as cosmetic surgery is increasingly available for everyone to take part in, more individuals feel the need to submit their bodies to the knives of surgeons in order to fit the cultural normative aesthetic. Those individuals who fail to demonstrate an adherence to such norms are ridiculed, stereotyped, and dismissed as failing to take control of their lives. As Morgan notes, "natural destiny is being supplanted by technologically grounded coercion, and the coercion is camouflaged by the language of choice, fulfillment, and liberation" (Morgan, 1998, p. 337). While in the past emphasis was placed on one's natural beauty, the normalization of cosmetic surgery has normalized a body that is devoid of negative signs or stereotypical associations. As the normalization of the body is seen as an individual choice, the onus is on the individual to have her body reflect society's ideals.

The increasing popularity and influence of cosmetic surgery has a liberating effect as well, however, as the discourse that accompanies it often speaks to the notion of taking one's life into one's own hands, and individuals often feel that the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery is an individualistic one. It is a decision that is not influenced by outside forces, but is for oneself only. Individuals thus find it liberating as they find themselves freeing themselves of previous constraints they may have previously felt in their lives. Many women who undergo cosmetic surgery are quoted as stating "I'm doing it for me" (Bordo, 1997, p. 31). The 'me' in this construction is typically understood as an authentic part of the self. What these individuals may fail to recognize is the fact that their desires and their decisions to fulfill these desires are rooted in our cultural ideals, often ones that are oppressive to particular groups and individuals in our society.

The media has an incredible influence on individuals' decisions surrounding their bodies. Consumerism as a social force carries a multitude of contradictory messages which make it difficult for individuals to notice their own submission. Advertisements tell us that we are able to achieve anything; however we must make our achievements by using their products and services. We are told that we are beautiful, but media-generated images typically only display a very narrow perception of beauty. We are told to age gracefully, yet graceful now means a face-lift every ten years. We are told to embrace diversity, but only in the mildest sense of the word. The contradictions within the media revolve around dominant culturally constructed ideals and show us the instruments needed to have our bodies accurately reflect them. For many individuals in the United States that are not considered White, the message that is carried across the media is also a contradictory one. While beauty is said to be celebrated over a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, the reality is that non-White bodies are typically missing from the media landscape (Blum, 2003, p. 65). This lack of representation is one of the greatest forces in leading individuals to believe that to look, or even to be, White is generally more aesthetically advantageous. Those individuals who do not see themselves represented in the media may recognize that the most culturally-sanctioned way to fit their bodies to our cultural ideal is in fact through various forms of racial cosmetic surgery. Although not all women respond in the same ways, there are many individuals who feel that beauty is a necessary goal in their lives and will go to great lengths to achieve beauty, as defined by society.

The Cosmetic Surgery Industry: Surgeon and Consumer Viewpoints

The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS, 2008) is considered the main authoritative governing board of certified plastic surgeons in America. Their website provides in-depth details on potential surgeries that individuals may be considering, advice on

seeking out board-certified surgical specialists, a question-and-answer section, and a media centre where articles relating to plastic surgery are shared (ASAPS, 2008). As with many other healthcare websites that provide information for prospective patients, this website is both professional and authoritative on the advice it offers. The ASAPS website is straightforward, informative, and holds a rather positive outlook on cosmetic surgery. Other similar websites provide a clear biased message of cosmetic surgery being a powerful tool to change one's life.

The ways in which the procedures are detailed on such websites points to a lack of commitment in discussing the potential racial reasons behind an individual's partaking of cosmetic surgery. Such considerations are often glossed over with vague terminology. This is most likely due to the unease with which many people discuss racial aesthetic issues and the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery. On the ASAPS website, procedures for eyelid surgery and nose reshaping, two of the most frequently racialized procedures, are suggested for individuals who do not feel that their specific body part is in harmony with the rest of their face. In terms of eyelid surgery, the ASAPS site details that it is typically considered for people who wish to "correct problems that are a result of aging, while others have inherited traits that cause them to seek treatment as early as their twenties or thirties" (ASAPS, 2008). The language that accompanies the description of this procedure echoes the typical discourse associated with Asian eyelid surgery. Those who often undertake such surgery do not speak of the Westernization effects but tend to speak in vague terms about looking more wide-eyed, rested, or alert. This parallels the rationale stated by Asian Americans who undergo cosmetic surgery. As was described in Kaw's article on Asian eyelid surgery, participants held the same ideas that eyelids without the double crease indicate particular negative behavioural or intellectual characteristics (Kaw, 1991, p. 79). Participants in studies like this on racial cosmetic surgery often portray the

notion that these personal characteristics that accompany racial physical traits can be eliminated through the normalization of one's features. Often the terminology employed by individuals in describing their reasons for undergoing racial forms of cosmetic surgery follows the same vague descriptions as well as using stereotypical notions that are often attached to racial features.

The ASAPS description speaks to the same desired effects for nose surgery. Race is never mentioned but discretely underlies some of the 'inherited' reasons for undergoing the surgery. The descriptions for nose reshaping surgery describes 'problem' noses as ones that are often too large for the face, too wide, or with nostrils that are excessively flared (ASAPS, 2008). There are different stereotypical noses for each of the racial or ethnic groups considered in this study. While Asian American noses are often seen as too small or flat, Jewish noses are stereotyped as too big or crooked, and Black noses are often described as too wide. This notion of being 'too' different speaks to the perception that there is an ideal, or a norm, against which all facial features are judged. Those features that go against the norm are seen as problems for which the individual must seek professional help in order to have a "nose that looks natural and blends harmoniously with your other facial features" (ASAPS, 2008). The belief in a norm which should be adhered to gives those with deviant features the moral responsibility to change and improve upon themselves. The belief that beauty is available for everyone (with a few minor surgical procedures) is a way for these professional websites to influence, in a non-coercive way, individuals to seek solutions to their aesthetic 'problems'.

PlasticSurgery.com is one such website where the message that comes across is one of self-empowerment and of the impact of beauty on one's life. This website states that they are one of the most respected and well-known healthcare websites. As an organization based in California, Plasticsurgery.com represents hundreds of surgeons across America and will assist

potential clients in finding the right surgeon for them. They have a stated mission of excellence in "the provision of broad-based, business information solutions to elective, health care professionals, ultimately improving patient-provider synergy" (Plasticsurgery.com, 2006). As a web-based community, this site brings together patients, doctors, supply manufacturers, and ancillary support providers. Although this site provides detailed information for the consumer as to how to find the right surgeon for them, this site does not provide additional details about their procedures for selecting surgeons to support or whether these surgeons are board certified. The general theme of this website is that a beautiful or enhanced appearance gives an individual the confidence to effect other necessary changes in their lives. As is noted, "plastic surgery leads to life changes that are far more than skin deep" (PlasticSurgery.com, 2006). These types of websites detail, in a positive manner, the ways that men and women can empower themselves through the undertaking of cosmetic surgery. Health and safety are noted as important considerations by both physicians and patients in undergoing cosmetic surgery. By allowing individuals to make informed decisions about the procedures they are considering, these websites encourage the notion that the individual herself is in control of her decisions and is acting for herself and for no one else.

The message of empowerment comes across as one of the most salient features of the decision-making process for cosmetic surgery. As individuals learn more about the industry and feel as though they are making rational, informed decisions, they are able to feel good, not only about their decisions but about themselves as well. The idea of taking one's life into one's own hands is a theme that runs through a lot of cosmetic surgery discourse. It is a way for individuals who are not happy with themselves to be able to effect change in their lives, and thus it is empowering to make the decision to change. Cosmetic surgery information websites use this

theme of empowerment as a way of allowing potential clients to understand that they can achieve their goals in life through the alteration of their bodies.

These general information sites such as the ASAPS site and plasticsurgery.com hold archives of articles which tend to detail the state of cosmetic surgery in North America today as well as some positive, and a few negative, aspects of these procedures. Racial and ethnic issues relating to cosmetic surgery are typically spoken to as a point of consideration; however the general mood tends to be celebratory in that cosmetic surgery, with its increased use of technology and ethnic specifications, is available for everyone to partake in. Each of these websites contains articles stating the positive phenomenon that increasing numbers of ethnic groups and individuals are seeking plastic surgery. The common theme running through such articles is that in the past cosmetic surgery among racial and ethnic groups was unfavorable as it changed their ethnic features too much. However, current innovations have allowed for procedures and training which help to retain such ethnic features. These articles speak to a fear of losing one's ethnicity through the alteration of physical features which are typically indicative of a particular racial or ethnic background. Surgeons are cited as stating that an awareness of cultural differences is about an understanding of how individuals can enhance their natural ethnic beauty (ASAPS, 2008).

There is a perception that ethnic and racial groups who seek surgery on their distinctive physical features are improving upon their natural features and not ridding themselves of their own racial or ethnic identity. However, this message about the preservation of ethnic identity is contradictory. While many articles speak to the preservation of ethnic identity, they later detail the types of procedures that ethnic and racial groups typically partake in. In describing a procedure known as "Asian blepharoplasty" or "double-eyelid surgery", one surgeon says that

the purpose is to give a more open-eyed look while still retaining the traditional shape of the Asian eye (PlasticSurgery.com, 2006). If a large percentage of 'Asian eyes' only have a singularly-folded eyelid, it begs to be asked how creating a double-fold in an eyelid is a means of preserving one's racial features. There exists a strong theme running through physician discourse on the topic of racial cosmetic surgery that ethnicity should be preserved. It is important to call into question the real meaning behind such a statement in order to understand the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery as a part of North American society today. The cosmetic surgery industry itself and the surgeons who stand behind it strongly enforce the preservation of racial and ethnic identities, as differently-raced Others are still considered as a type of minority in American society. This discourse on the preservation of ethnicity indicates that one's ethnicity is in fact rooted in one's physicality and therefore, the alteration of racial or ethnically-charged features needs to be done in a way that does not rid the individual of their ethnic appearance.

However, as procedures such as double-eyelid, nose, and lip surgeries are often associated with particular racial or ethnic groups, it becomes clear that these procedures are in fact removing or neutralizing many racial or ethnic features. An individual's physical appearance and their race or ethnicity is often intertwined with other aspects of the self, such as notions of tradition, history, and morality. Thus, the alteration of racial or ethnic features does not necessarily signify the loss of one's racial or ethnic identity. The questioning of the use of the term 'preservation of ethnicity', is a means by which to analyze the discourse put forth by surgeons and the cosmetic surgery industry on the issue of racial cosmetic surgery. As this notion persists throughout much of the industry literature, it becomes clear how contradictory the

message is in itself and how the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery is a great point of contention in American society.

I analyzed fifteen websites[4] belonging to cosmetic surgery clinical practitioners from across the United States, with five each taken from the areas of Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. The format of each website follows a standard composition. Each site features information on and descriptions of the surgeons themselves, their credentials, and their practices. There is a section that details the procedures that they conduct at their facilities, including frequently asked questions and guidelines for each procedure. Most websites showcase 'before' and 'after' photographs so that prospective clients can gain a sense of the skills and methods of the surgeons as well as the perceived possible outcomes for their own surgeries. There exist differences among the websites as the prospective clients of these practices are often representative of the particular location and culture in which they are found. Those websites for surgeons in the Los Angeles and New York areas are very interactive. They provide inspirational quotes and their language leads one to believe that the clients are truly doing something amazing by undergoing cosmetic surgery. Rodeo Drive Plastic Surgery claims that they "treat everybody like a celebrity" (rodeodriveplasticsurgery, 2008). Other websites share the claim that they are looking to help improve an individual's life. Cosmetic Surgery of NY states that they believe that the improvement and restoration of one's looks will enable self-confidence and allow for women and men to "face the world on their own terms through plastic

[4] There were fifteen websites surveyed. These websites were found online on February 27, 2008. Using the Google search engine, a search for cosmetic surgery practices in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago was performed. The first five websites to appear on the search engine were analyzed for each geographical region. The following is a list of the websites analyzed:
www.marinaplasticsurgery.com, www.rodeodriveplasticsurgery.com, www.la-plastic-surgery.com, www.drrobertrey.com, www.drfpalmer.com, www.drphilipmiller.com, www.csnycosmetic.com, www.antell-md.com, www.drzevon.com, www.newyorkfacialplasticsurgery.com, www.drdayan.com, www.drturowski.com, www.lipodoc.com, www.bodysculptor.com, www.northwesternplasticsurgery.com

surgery and cosmetic surgery" (csnycosmetic.com, 2006). By bringing people closer to their perceived or desired self-image, the practice of cosmetic surgery allows for individuals to empower themselves to complete their life transformations.

The physical is seen as the first step to total self- and life-transformation. The choice is up to the individual whether they wish to improve their lives through the improvement of their looks. This is the message that these websites use in order to guide people to make the right decisions for themselves. The interaction of internal feelings and external appearances is greatly emphasized as these surgeons wish to emphasize that they are not 'beauty doctors' but are interested in helping everyone explore their options that will enable them to feel and look their best.

The notion of being treated like a celebrity runs throughout most of these websites. Two of the websites for New York surgeons boast a "top-secret list of actors, models, and social elite" as their customers (drphilipmiller, n.d.). This type of discourse allows for the patients to believe that they are taking part in a prestigious form of body improvement; that they are on par with celebrities and other elite individuals. Patients are made to believe that they are entering into a kind of elite club by using these surgeons for their procedures. It is this type of commoditizing of cosmetic surgery that makes it so appealing for individuals; this is how it is being normalized in our society. With financing and discounts being offered for individuals interested in undergoing cosmetic surgery, more and more individuals may feel that they have access to the American Dream by buying into these body ideals and by modifying their bodies.

In their descriptions of blepharoplasty and rhinoplasty, which are often regarded as the two main forms of racial cosmetic surgery, each of the websites differs in the extent to which

they discuss racial and ethnic 'issues' revolving around the surgeries. Three out of the fifteen websites discuss blepharoplasty specifically in relation to the correction of 'Asian eyes', while the rest of the websites hint at such racial characteristics by using the term 'inherited traits'. Marina Plastic Surgery Associates is the one practice that actually refers to blepharoplasty as "Asian Eye Surgery" in the title. The rest of the description, however, uses the common explanation of drooping eyelids which make an individual look tired. The website explains how, "every year thousands of Asian women and men choose eyelid surgery to help restore a more energetic and youthful appearance" (marinaplasticsurgery, 2008). What is interesting about this description is the use of the word 'restore'. Asian eye surgery typically involves creating a crease that was not there before. The use of the word 'restore' suggests that through such a surgery the individual is able to regain something that is natural to her body, but was lost.

Other websites stress that the creation of an upper eyelid crease on Asian eyes, or the alteration of 'inherited traits' will not erase evidence of an individual's racial or ethnic heritage. The importance on preserving one's ethnicity remains at the top of the discussion for ethnic and racial issues concerning cosmetic surgery. Only one of the sites referenced racial and ethnic issues in their description for rhinoplasty procedures. Stressing that "cookie cutter" approaches rarely work well, this site detailed how rhinoplasty works to achieve a facial balance overall, while preserving one's ethnic appearance (rodeodriveplasticsurgery, 2008). Again, the emphasis on the preservation of ethnicity remains prevalent in the discourse surrounding racial forms of cosmetic surgery. What remains as a question is, if a particular racial or ethnic group is physically characterized by particular eye or nose traits, then how does the alteration of these traits actually preserve an ethnic appearance? For example, if Jewish people are characterized by large noses, or Asian people characterized by small eyes, then the modification of these

particular features to a style that is characterized as Caucasian must in some way erase one's visibility in that racial or ethnic group. Otherwise, if ethnicity is social and cultural rather than physical, an essential question to consider is why the preservation of racial or ethnic physical traits is seemingly so important in the discourse of cosmetic surgeons.

The discourse of ethnic cosmetic surgery has led to the increased democratization of the practice itself. While in the past cosmetic surgery was the sole providence of the rich and famous, it has, over the years, gained popularity amongst people of all classes, races, and ages. Increasing advertising, celebrity stalking, and television programming on cosmetic surgery has brought it into the realm of the everyday. Doctors, in noting the increasing democratization of cosmetic surgery note that individuals have come to view it as "a coveted yet attainable luxury purchase, on par with products like Louis Vuitton handbags or flat-screen TVs" (Singer, 2007). The medical industry itself has responded to this shift in cosmetic surgery by marketing it as such, as a high-profile service available as yet another commodity. The overall increase of nonwhites partaking in cosmetic surgery has been noted by surgeons across America.

A decision by the Federal Trade Commission in 1979 allowed physicians to advertise their products and services, as it was decided that the medical industry was no different than other consumer services that were allowed to advertise (Kuczynski ,2006, p. 10). This has had an incredible effect of turning medicine and surgery increasingly into products for consumption. Due to the influx of advertising and feature articles, consumers are well aware of the variety of products and services available to them through purchase for the modification, or enhancement, of the self. In today's popular culture there are a variety of books, magazines, and radio and television shows which are aimed at allowing the consumer to make informed decisions as to the procedures they wish to undergo. Advertisements for cosmetic surgery can be found in

staggeringly different mediums of communications, from the glossy fashion magazines like *Audrey*, which is focused towards English-speaking, young, Asian-American women, to newspapers such as the *Viet Nam Tu Do*, an immigrant-focused Vietnamese publication (Man, 2006). Three main cosmetic surgery magazines are available in North America: *Skin Deep, New Beauty* and *Elevate*.

The main focus of these magazines is generally to educate and enlighten readers and potential consumers of cosmetic surgery about the various products and services available for their use. Both *Skin Deep* and *New Beauty: The World's Most Unique Beauty Magazine* claim that they fill a significant place in society. *Skin Deep* magazine adds that their motivation is to educate and empower their readers, with their main goal being to help readers feel good about themselves so that they will then look good as well (Martello, 2008, p.6). While *Skin Deep* claims to focus on both internal and external qualities for their readers to learn about, the underlying theme rests on image. A series of advertisements that run throughout the magazine state the importance of having prestigious cars and places of residence "because image is everything" (*Skin Deep*, 2008, p.148). The association of driving a Mercedes-Benz or living in Trump Tower and cosmetic surgery is that they all aid in attaining a certain image that can be conveyed to the world. It would seem as though the magazine is focused on an individual's external image, which, once enhanced, will help them feel good on the inside, and not the reverse, as they so claim.

Such contradictions point to the notion that the proponents of such publications are still self-conscious about their place in society. They feel the need to defend their place of importance in society. Claiming to work first on internal qualities allows for more acknowledged legitimacy by the general population as opposed to the industry's otherwise vain

associations. *New Beauty'* s stated goal is to fill an important void in the field of cosmetic enhancement by reporting on all of the latest, most up-to-date innovations in the field (New Beauty, 2008). The general message that is being expressed by these magazines is that the pursuit of beauty is an important aspect of any woman's life. The theme of taking control of one's life in order to fulfill all of one's goals is a key aspect of these magazines. The imperative is to sell these products and services and the best way is to make known all available surgical and other procedures so that consumers can decide what exactly they need to better themselves. Therefore, consumers should educate themselves in order to be able to receive the best, newest, and most innovative (not to mention popular) products and services available.

These magazines all contain several feature articles which deal with important issues in the field. In the anniversary issue of *New Beauty*, for example, articles focused on surgical safety, following the death of popular artist Kanye West's mother; the latest Botox breakthroughs; how to stop the first signs of aging; recovering in style; self-esteem and surgery; surgery versus diet and exercise; and how to achieve the perfect nose (New Beauty, 2008). In the magazine and on the website for *New Beauty*, the notion of racial cosmetic surgery is discussed in passing.

In the article entitled "Can you achieve the perfect nose?" a discussion on balancing your ethnic features arises. Citing examples of 'ethnic' celebrities of Hispanic, Asian, and Mediterranean origin who encompass Jewish, Persian, Italian or Greek heritages, explanations of frequent 'ethnic' complaints are given. Models signifying these racial or ethnic groups are displayed as well. What is questionable about the use of the models (who are in fact popular celebrities) is that while they can be considered representative of their ethnic backgrounds, they do not fit the stereotypical appearance of individuals from such racial or ethnic groups. The

model for Hispanics is Salma Hayek, the model for the Mediterranean group is Natalie Portman, and the model for Asians is Lucy Liu (New Beauty, 2008). These three women can not be considered prototypical of their associated ethnic groups, and thus their use in this article as representative is suspect. These women, while ethnically rooted in a particular form of identity and bodily type, do not have the stereotypical physical characteristics that are associated with their particular racial or ethnic groups. Their appearances fit more in line with a Caucasian ideal. It can be argued that their success as beautiful celebrities lies in the fact that their appearances allow for more of a racial or ethnic anonymity or ambiguity rather than being distinct. What these images do is demonstrate the Caucasianizing of racial and ethnic groups to fit the ideal in American society. While these celebrities may not have undergone cosmetic surgery, their appearances demonstrate how limited racial and ethnic diversity in terms of aesthetics is accepted in American media and culture.

The article explains the importance of cosmetic surgery, as is typical of all discussions on ethnicity and race, and that the desired outcome is in fact the preservation of ethnicity. One surgeon, Dr.Azizzadeh is quoted as stating that "ethnicity is paramount because the nose plays a huge role in the overall look of the face, and special attention needs to be paid in order to maintain ethnic characteristics while helping the patient achieve his or her goals" (New Beauty, 2008, p. 138-150). That ethnicity should be preserved is an idea that is echoed throughout media coverage of racial cosmetic surgery. As individuals choose to alter their stereotypical racial or ethnic features, the outward ethnic appearance dissolves into an appearance which helps to prove that America really is a melting pot society. While internal feelings of race and ethnicity remain, the outward appearance shows that there is an overwhelming desire to appear as similar to the norm as possible.

Celebrity popular culture is reflective of our views on society in general when it comes to cosmetic surgery. The contradictions inherent in the above discussion speak to the fact that most individuals are still unsure of how to approach the topic of cosmetic surgery. Popular magazines are responsible for indoctrinating the public into gazing at and judging celebrities on their bodies. Our body-obsessed society requires that celebrities keep their bodies looking fit, thin, young, and beautiful and we admonish them if they fail to meet our standards. At the same time, we mock them for undergoing multiple forms of cosmetic surgery, in order to keep up their appearances (Givhan, 2007). With the acceptance of cosmetic surgery becoming more widespread, popular culture pushes people more and more towards an ideal. However, when they fail to meet our expectations, when their surgeries are botched, result in worse appearances, develop into an 'obsession', or even result in death, our society mocks and scorns these people. There is a great expectation for people to be perfect, despite the acknowledgement that this notion of perfection is fleeting and unrealistic. The discourse of cosmetic surgery that proliferates throughout popular culture encourages people to strive for these unrealistic expectations. To change the body is a means to change the self. To modify one's appearance to fit the American aesthetic ideal is a way of actively negotiating one's role in society.

Television and the Perfection of Bodies

The recent influx of television shows that focus on cosmetic surgery points to the increasing acceptance and normalization of such procedures in our society. Talk shows have until recently been the mediums through which individuals put themselves on display and confess their darkest secrets, fears, and deviances and allow others to help them change their bodies, fashions, and minds. The Makeover shows, where individuals put themselves in the hands of others in order to change the self, have moved away from the standard talk show

format. Most television programming on cosmetic surgery now is of the 'reality TV' type, where individuals participate in makeovers. The work of reality-TV shows such as *Extreme Makeover* is a means of publicizing the field of cosmetic surgery while defining bodily changes as life-altering and as a means to take one's life in one's own hands.

Reality television and the makeover have consistently been intertwined. Western popular culture is overwhelmingly concerned with changing the self, whether through diet, exercise, changing fashion, hygiene or grooming habits, and even changing behaviour and personality. The televisual makeover has caused a change in makeovers, as the flesh itself is now permanently being transformed (Heyes 2007:20). *Extreme Makeover* has been the most popular and the longest-running of all cosmetic surgery reality television shows. It will thus be used as a prototypical example of reality television cosmetic surgery makeover shows. *Extreme Makeover* ran from 2002 until its cancellation in 2007 (Extreme Makeover, n.d.). The show aimed at changing individuals' lives through the transformation of their bodies. The discourse behind the body modifications performed exploited a fantasy narrative which helped individuals believe that their inner self and outer self could be brought into line with each other (Heyes, 2007, p. 21). The show's participants had bodies which did not reflect their inner, moral selves and so through the use of cosmetic surgery, they were able to become more beautiful, but more importantly, the show's participants were actually able to become their 'true selves'.

Cosmetic surgery as a part of reality television empowers certain notions of the body, of transformation, and of cosmetic surgery in the minds of the general public. The breaking down of the body and the notion that an individual can change their physical appearance so as to effect change in the rest of their lives is important in luring the public to an acceptance and approval of such procedures. As the show's website reveals, success is measured as "lifelong dreams and

fairy tale fantasies come true" (Extreme Makeover, n.d.). The purpose of the show was to grant people their dreams of becoming who they are really meant to be. With the help of the "Extreme Team", a group of surgeons, dermatologists, dentists, etc., the show enabled these life transformations for a few lucky individuals.

What is most interesting about the show is the way in which the makeover is presented as a way of transcending boundaries that were previously barriers in the individual's life. Age, class, and other 'hardships' were believed to be wiped away with the arrival of a new body and face. In this way, a new identity was eked out for participants of the show, an identity which undermined history and sought out fantasy (Heyes, 2007, p. 22). The fantasy was, more often than not, a fairly normalized one, where the individual could establish her new self as one that society deemed acceptable and even beautiful in some respects. Such fantasies work as the viewing public is shown the psychological suffering that the participant has gone through due to the mismatch between her inner character and her outer form (Heyes, 2007, p. 18). Such psychological trauma provides the perfect rationale for undergoing cosmetic surgery, which is often otherwise unnecessary due to the patient's relative health. Such a rationale of eliminating psychological suffering works as cosmetic surgery comes to be seen as the only means to cure the pain of the individual. The individual's social problems become medicalized and are seen to require surgical treatment.

While the show's stated objective was to alter the body so as to allow individuals to negotiate their own sense of identity, and to bring an individual's external appearance to match her/his internal state of being, *Extreme Makeover* had other far-reaching effects. According to press statements issued by the ASAPS and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), in 2005, the tremendous rise in the number of surgical procedures performed in 2004 has been

attributed to the trend of cosmetic surgery reality television programming and to the media coverage of cosmetic surgery (Tait, 2007, p. 123). As more people are exposed to cosmetic surgery, as they see its liberating effects, a message that is transmitted through these television shows, more individuals see this as incentive to undergo cosmetic surgery themselves.

Reality television has the effect of spectacularizing and domesticating the body as a surgical subject (Tait, 2007, p. 120). Such television programming works on the post-feminist notion that individual empowerment can be achieved through consumption rather than through cultural transformation. Post-feminism is the term used to describe how feminism's agendas and goals have been achieved and thus a new form of feminism is emerging. This new feminism dismisses the notion that American society is patriarchal and oppressive to women. There is a new movement towards a feminism which celebrates beauty, body, and fashion ideals as ways for women to express themselves. The logic of post-feminism which underlies much of reality television on cosmetic surgery is apparent "where a celebration of the body, the pleasure of transformation, and individual empowerment function as a justification for a renewed objectification of female bodies" (Tait, 2007, p. 120). Individual empowerment is seen as a woman's right to self-determination, to effect change in her life, and as an answer to her own liberation. Individual transformation is now seen as the answer to our social ills, rather than the transformation of social, ideological structures (Tait, 2007, p. 122). On the issue of race and ethnicity, however, reality television is often more cautious and conscious of the ways in which individuals' bodies are displayed and the meanings behind their makeovers.

People of visible racial minorities are only occasionally selected for a makeover in the context of cosmetic surgery television programming. *Extreme Makeover* maintains the standard discourse that the makeovers and surgeries undergone by visibly raced women are not about

race, or the concealment of ethnic features and identities, but merely about beauty and proportion (Tait, 2007, p. 127). However, the reasons cited by these women for undergoing such surgeries, are based upon experiences of racism and difference. In Season 2, episode 12 of *Extreme Makeover*, Angela, an African-American woman, was given a makeover. She wanted her lips and nose reduced but maintained that she feared the alteration or loss of her African-American identity. She was assured by her surgeon, an African-American himself, that cosmetic surgery does not have to erase one's ethnic identity (Extreme Makeover, n.d.). It remains, however, that cosmetic surgery is guided by Caucasian norms in that the features that are altered are ones that deviate most from this normative ideal. Angela received surgeries which diminished her stereotypical racial features and her appearance became one that was in accordance with a Eurocentric, Caucasian ideal. That cosmetic surgery reality television shows address racial issues demonstrates how despite their claims otherwise, the practice of cosmetic surgery itself is in fact guided by White norms which define a standard of beauty in American society.

As a postmodern reflection of American society, such television programming encourages the body to be rendered as cultural plastic. By showing bodily alteration as a form of entertainment for the masses, as makeover candidates are often representative of average people in society, such television shows democratize the discourse of cosmetic surgery by demonstrating how it is available for use by everyone. It also makes a clear statement that "personal transformation is the first and most necessary step in self-improvement and, thus, to a sort of sublime American entitlement" (Weber, 2005). The discourse surrounding ideas of the American Dream allow for personal growth in any ways possible. The message that comes across is that there exists a narrow definition of beauty in American society and that individuals must adapt their bodies so as to achieve it. Differences in appearance cause pain and hardship,

and so it is up to the individual to decide whether she wishes to elevate herself out of this state of being.

The language that often accompanies cosmetic surgical decisions on these reality television shows is that the individual is choosing to undergo surgery for herself. The makeover must be seen as authentically motivated (Heyes, 2007, p. 24) so that both the participants and the viewers can legitimize these decisions. By demonstrating that one is undergoing cosmetic surgery for oneself, the individual is showing her sense of agency in negotiating a place in society for herself. The individual is choosing to modify her body so that it fits with society's ideals. They are in fact working under a power system that has established an ideal type of bodily form, and are self-regulating their own bodies so as to fit. There exists a disciplinary gaze, reinforced by the surgeons themselves, who agree that these individuals should be modifying their bodies. They acknowledge the imperative for body modification so that these individuals can function as successful, and fully integrated, members of society. While individuals feel as though they are deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery as a treat to themselves, the very idea that they are 'choosing' to undergo such procedures brings to question why they are choosing to do so in the first place. Society deems certain bodily forms as normative and all others as deviant and subject to modification. Those individuals who do not fit the norm are merely choosing to uphold these normative ideals. They are choosing to fit in society, and to not remain on the outside, or as a minority identity.

Identity is one of the main concerns with cosmetic surgery. Throughout the discourse on cosmetic surgery reality television, there reigns a notion that the participants are bringing their physical presence into sync with their sense of identity. An individual is free to choose how she wishes to be perceived and identified as a member of society. Cosmetic surgery reality

television allows for individuals to demonstrate the mutability of bodily distinctions, as grounded in gender, race, class, socio-economic status, etc. By modifying their bodies to fit their desired identities, these people are demonstrating to the viewers of these shows that there is no need for individuals to be tied down by their bodily constraints. The alteration of their bodies signals the alteration of their lives and of their personal identities. These television shows add to the American desire to better oneself and to make the best of one's life.

Conclusion

The cosmetic surgery industry is thriving in our consumer-oriented culture. The potential for individuals to transform themselves into ideal types is translated into both a right and a necessity for today's consumer. People buy into bodily ideals because this is the main way to show one's affiliation with societal moral responsibilities, not to mention it has become a way for individuals to demonstrate social status through their adherence to social norms. Advertising works as individuals learn about their choices for their lives and the ways by which to go about achieving their dreams. Advertising works as it prescribes individuals in American society with certain expectations and ways to lead successful American lives. The cosmetic surgery industry is influential in that it leads individual desires towards a set normative ideal. In our society, people are surrounded by a discourse that normalizes particular Caucasian physical characteristics as ideal for bodies and that prescribes cosmetic surgery as the means to achieve this ideal body. However, it is not a particular Caucasian ideal that is described through the discourse of racial cosmetic surgery. A crucial aspect that arises in this discourse is that the norms are not particularly seen as Caucasian but merely as normative. The normalizing discourse of body modification encourages individuals to take control of their lives and to admonish those who do not. Advertising itself is an extremely influential medium of

communication in contemporary American society. Not only does it establish normative ideals and standards for individuals to aspire to, it provides countless means by which individuals can educate themselves and make decisions 'for themselves' as to what paths to take in life. The influence of the advertising is extensive in establishing bodily ideals and perpetuating the discourse of cosmetic surgery as a means to achieve it.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Women's body image has persisted as a highly problematic symptom of women's oppression, not only in American society but throughout much of the world. The insistence upon a particular ideal body allows for the subjugation of women's bodies in the realms of gender and race, not to mention age, class, and socio-economic status as well. The focus of this thesis has been the ways in which women submit their bodies to racial bodily aesthetic ideals, the reasons behind such adherence, and the means by which women construct meaning from such actions. The actions specifically examined have been racial cosmetic surgery and several other non-permanent means by which women modify their bodies to suit a racial ideal. Women's bodies have come to be understood as cultural symbols in that they reflect many of the values of dominant society. As this thesis shows, the dominant ideal in American society rests in a Eurocentric, Caucasian aesthetic standard.

The three theoretical perspectives used in this thesis have been the postmodern body, the disciplined body, and the phenomenological or performed body. Both racial cosmetic surgery and women's understandings or explanations of this phenomenon have been discussed through the light of these perspectives. However, these perspectives are not all-encompassing and neither are the studies that have been performed thus far on racial cosmetic surgery. This chapter will now evaluate the relevance of these theoretical paradigms in helping to explain and decipher the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery in American society. It will also review both the cosmetic surgery industry and the popular media in order to explain how the decision-making process is affected by the ideas revealed through these paradigms. This thesis will close with an

evaluation of the implications of the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery for the lives of women in America.

The Postmodern Body

As has been illuminated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the notion of the postmodern body rests upon the idea that there are multiple modes of subjectivity and thus multiple ways for individuals to interact with and understand their own bodily forms. The strength of postmodern theory as applicable to the current study rests upon the idea that with the individual experience of subjective mutability, body modification practices, including cosmetic surgery, come to make sense for the individual. The alteration of one's body is a means by which one can determine one's own bodily self and identity. Identity and the ways that others perceive an individual are always subject to the means by which the self is presented to the world. Individuals are free to modify their bodies and their behaviours so as to allow themselves to be seen in a particular light. As such, notions of gender and race should come to be of less importance as we come to understand how such ideas are merely cultural categories which rest upon oppressive binary oppositions. As the binaries rest upon the domination of one term over another, certain modes of subjectivity are valued or favoured over others. This ultimately means that individuals will often choose to associate themselves with a more positive or highly valued mode of being. The increasing participation in cosmetic surgery means that women are choosing the body they want. However, the trend that has persisted for years is that the body most people desire is based on a Eurocentric, Caucasian ideal.

Throughout the social sciences and in popular discourse, the notion that race is a constructed category reigns. Such a notion, while true, does not help to alleviate the

stereotypical negative associations that individuals may hold about race. Understanding that race is a culturally constructed category means acknowledging the illegitimacy of racial distinctions and stereotypes, and the insensitivity to the oppression that individuals endure daily due to such distinctions. It calls into question how and why such distinctions exist and the roles that they play in our society. Throughout this thesis, the idea that race is a constructed category has allowed us to deconstruct its historical basis as well as its endurance in contemporary American society. Such a notion also allows for an understanding that the alteration of racial or ethnic features can potentially have little meaning for one's identity, if such categories are not considered legitimate. This will be further discussed in conjunction with the theoretical paradigm of phenomenology and performativity but it is worth mentioning here in order to reiterate how difficult it is to judge racial cosmetic surgery as an act of racial change. As many individuals who undergo racial cosmetic surgery do not particularly view their procedures as racial, this is a difficult concept to consider. It does allow, however, for the understanding that the meanings behind such alterations are not particularly racially charged for the individual. What remains though, is the way that society interprets such actions in the contexts in which they arise.

By claiming that race is a constructed category we may run the risk of taking away from the lived reality that individuals experience as racial Others. Racial stereotyping, oppressing, and judging still exist in American society. To claim that the categories of race are not real can potentially mean that we are not acknowledging the ways in which individuals that are deemed racially or ethnically Othered experience life through their bodily subjectivity. It has the ability to deny the hardships that raced individuals endure due to particular physical features which mark them as different. It also may fail to acknowledge that body modification practices such as

racial cosmetic surgery are often seen as ways for individuals to elevate their social and economic statuses. Racial ideas are often rooted in the distinction of self versus other. Subordination in American society has typically worked upon the oppression of those racial Others who do not fit Caucasian norms and ideals. Most specifically, women have borne the burden of this oppression through and in their bodily selves. Racial bodily ideals have historically associated Otherness with notions of immorality, disease, uncleanliness, and other negative attributes. These distinctions have carried through to contemporary times where racial attributes are often identified with negative moral characteristics.

The postmodern notion of cultural plastic (Bordo, 1993) has proven to be crucial to the study of racial cosmetic surgery and its meaning in and for American society today. Cultural plastic is the term used to explain the postmodern condition of a sense of freedom from bodily determination. Cultural plastic is spurred by a society driven by a consumer culture where freedom and consumption are intertwined. The fantasy of transformation which is ever-prevalent in the popular media allows for individuals to assume that the body should be an expression of the self and thus by transforming the body, they are taking control of their lives and showing their true selves to the world. It is the individual's right, privilege, and sometimes requirement, to bring the body in line with cultural ideals and norms. The main drawback to the notion of cultural plastic in relation to racial cosmetic surgery is that it does not take into consideration the extent to which the bodily ideal that is often cited and displayed in popular culture as well as the one that is predominantly requested through various forms of cosmetic surgery, rests upon a Caucasian, Eurocentric ideal. It is questionable, then, whether we can truly understand an individual's self-transformation and self-determination as an act that attempts to transcend cultural constraints and motives.

In addition, the postmodern notion of cultural plastic of the body seems to deny the legitimacy of a natural, given body. The more cosmetic surgery is normalized into our society, the more natural, non-modified bodies will be considered the deviant form. In terms of racial cosmetic surgery specifically, the erasure of racial physical markers in increasing numbers suggests that individuals are increasingly striving for the same sort of appearance. The aesthetic that currently reigns in American society is of a sort of hybrid of features allowing for racially Othered individuals to display themselves as ethnically or racially anonymous, a category previously held by Caucasians. As the trend continues, individuality becomes lost in an aesthetic of exotic sameness.

The Disciplined Body

The purpose of this study was to illuminate how and why women in America conform to, or resist, societal ideals surrounding the body. Through this, an understanding of what this means for women's lives has been illuminated. The dichotomy between emancipation and oppression has been deconstructed to allow for new means of understanding agency and the roles that individuals take in having control over their lives. Racial cosmetic surgery can not be seen as resting at either end of this spectrum, of oppression and liberation, as there are a multitude of individuals who partake in the phenomenon for a wide variety of reasons. While many individuals feel that by submitting their bodies to cosmetic surgery they are partaking in an action of their own choice, it must be recognized that such actions exist as a part of a disciplinary form of power that is prevalent in our society. There are reasons that women in American society believe that certain bodily types and characteristics are deviant or defective and must be changed. Understanding that our decisions are informed by the culture in which we live means

that individual actions must be deconstructed from a point of view that takes these cultural ideals into consideration.

Michel Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon (refer to Chapter 1 for explanation) allows for the recognition that individuals are participating in acts of self-discipline so as to fit in line with the dominant society's ideals. Racial cosmetic surgery provides the perfect example of such self-discipline as those racially Othered individuals have defined deviant physical features and thus 'choose' to alter them so as to fit with the dominant aesthetic in American society. Throughout Western society specifically and as often denoted in the media, racially Othered individuals are excluded from the dominant aesthetic ideal. Although this has been changing over the years, with increasing numbers of 'racial' or visibly ethnic models being used, the dominant aesthetic fails to incorporate large degrees of difference from the Caucasian norm. Thus, individuals who do not fit this aesthetic are considered deviant in their features. They are judged by their deviation from the norm. As women in American society are overwhelmingly valued through their appearance, individuals feel the need to conform to a prescribed beauty ideal.

This form of self-discipline functions as individuals, who notice their deviation from the norm, undergo racial cosmetic surgery so as to fit themselves with society's ideal. The belief, however, is often not that one is forced under some higher power to conform, but that the individual is doing it so as to bring their bodies in line with the normative ideal in society. Individuals are responsible for their own self-determination; however they do not always realize that they are in fact working or practicing under a specific function of power. This is what Foucault has described as a 'docile body' (Foucault, 1977) as it is a body that is a function of disciplinary power as it is manipulated by cultural and societal forces so as to suit the ideals of

the dominant powers. In a capitalist society such as America, the docile body exists as a product of consumerist trends and of the postmodern belief of self-transformation and self-definition through the body.

Such a notion seems all-encompassing in its power. As individuals feel that they are in control of their fate, they continue to work towards emulating societal ideals. The main problem with the concept of biopower is that it fails to take into account the ways in which individuals may react against societal norms, or the ways in which individuals may demonstrate agency through the incorporation of such norms. Although aesthetic ideals are ever-powerful in contemporary American society, there are multiple ways for individuals to succeed in society without fully submitting themselves to these ideals. In addition, there are ways for individuals to demonstrate agency as a way to both incorporate societal ideals while also choosing values which are important to the individual. Not all women in American society can be seen as a coherent group with the same values and goals; nor are all women striving for a sense of aesthetic sameness. Individuality is a goal that is ever-prevalent within American society. The means by which some people may strive for individuality must be seen as a reaction to social norms, but within a prescribed set of rules and ideals. It is necessary to understand that the adherence to certain cultural norms is often perceived as an unquestionable goal. Individuality and difference are aspects of individuals that are valued in our society, but only to a certain extent. If individuals were to not show adherence to certain cultural norms and ideals, they would be outcasts as those in society would question their disassociation from the group.

The Phenomenological/Performed Body

As individuals are constantly performing and manipulating their own sense of identity, phenomenological and performance theories work well in evaluating how individuals make sense of the practice of racial cosmetic surgery. It is a means by which individuals are coordinating their embodied selves with a societal ideal. Performance theory leads to the notion that an individual performs her identity through the constant articulation of societal ideals. There is no set sense of self, yet an ever-changing, ever-evolving form of identity as it is played out through the individual. If one's embodied self is not in sync with the norms of the dominant group, one often changes herself, her appearance, or her demeanor, so as to better fit. So, gender can be thought of as a performance, as Butler notes (Butler, 2003), as it is an unstable category as individuals are constantly working at fitting with the current trends which define gender. So too can race be thought of as a performance as it is open to interpretation and change. The individual's body is problematically seen as defining the self in American society. The matter of appearances and aesthetics is great in a society that judges individuals at first glance. Racial differentiation signals an internal differentiation of the self. Therefore, to note an individual's physical features as raced or ethnically charged, society tends to deem these individuals as different and therefore their bodily forms as less valued, than the norm. If we consider that race is a cultural construction, then the alteration of one's body so as to erase outward physical markers, is merely a way of reinstating one's accordance with a dominant norm. Adhering to Butler's notion that "the personal is political" (Butler, 2003, p. 523) we can see how racial cosmetic surgery is a means of politicizing one's affiliation with the dominant norm in society. Adjusting one's appearance in permanent, dramatic ways is a way for individuals to demonstrate their affiliation to a particular set of ideals and social conventions.

A phenomenological approach to racial cosmetic surgery allows for openness in an individual's negotiation of her/his place in society. The alteration of an individual's body is often regarded as a means towards self-determination and in the creation of a unique sense of identity for the self. If a woman feels that her racialized body does not suit her individual sense of identity and how she wishes to be represented to the world, cosmetic surgery allows for her to create an embodied sense of self that fits her personal intentions. If race, like gender, is a performative aspect of the self, then cosmetic surgery can be seen as a way to transcend such categories; to blur the line between 'American' and 'Other'.

Such an approach can be problematic, however, as individuals increasingly become homogenized. American society boasts its melting-pot mentality where individuals are encouraged to look, act, and be the same—American. Individuality, differentiation, and history are erased as racial cosmetic surgery becomes the norm. We are often told to honour our ancestors, learn our histories, and accept one-another's differences; however the beauty industry and the popular media tell us otherwise.

Conclusion

Racial cosmetic surgery as a contemporary American phenomenon is wrought with many contradictory rationales and explanations. The three theoretical paradigms used in this thesis have enabled a more holistic approach to the study of racial cosmetic surgery and its underlying meanings for women who engage in it. Although these perspectives are not perfect, they enable an analysis of the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery that takes into account the cultural context in which it developed and continues to thrive.

The notion of the postmodern body is effective in establishing the notion of the body as cultural plastic and thus open to an individual's self-determination and multiple modes of subjectivity. The postmodern body exists in a consumer capitalist society such as that of America where individuals feel that they can live out their dreams through bodily self-determination which allows them to be anyone they want to be. The main problem that arises from such a notion is that such praise for bodily self-determination often fails to take into account what type of body most individuals strive for and the reasons that this body is a fairly homogenous type. The postmodern drive towards body modification and change can add to the oppression that certain gendered or raced individuals experience in their lives as they strive to fit their bodies to the dominant ideal. However, as the postmodern paradigm denies a natural body, such a notion allows individuals to freely alter their bodies without the constraint of a set racial classification.

The disciplined body is an approach that recognizes that the form of power in society, disciplinary power, is reinforced by individual self-discipline. Those individuals who are visibly raced in American society are made aware of their deviation from the normative bodily ideal and may feel that the one way to establish themselves in society is to modify their bodies. Their bodies become docile as they are manipulated into a particular form that is established by the dominant powers. Individuals may feel as though they are exerting a form of agency as they are making individual choices about their bodies and lives. However, this agency is a function of the oppressiveness of the discourse of the body in general. Individuals only feel their deviance as their bodies are shown to be different from the norm. The problem with this perspective is that it does fail to take into account alternative acts of agency and the ways that individuals may even demonstrate agency through their conformity to the norm.

Phenomenology and performativity add to the discussion of racial cosmetic surgery as these perspectives allow for the consideration of how individuals establish a sense of identity through their bodies and through body modification practices. In American society, the body is often seen as defining the self, and so individuals are constantly performing their gendered, racial, class, etc. selves through their bodies. Such a notion leads to the impression that categories such as gender and race are open to consideration and transgression. As individuals are free to develop their own sense of identity, there still exists physical characteristics which establish set ideas about the individual. Racial physical characteristics can potentially be constraining for an individual who wishes to establish themselves as something more than just their racial or ethnic heritage. The phenomenological and performative perspectives allow for the establishment of a sense of self, and with the addition of racial cosmetic surgery, the body can be brought into line with how the individual wishes to be perceived. What this thesis has established is the idea that as more individuals partake in such body modification practices, this society is becoming increasingly homogeneous as individuals are choosing to alter their bodies in ways that make them racially and ethnically neutral or anonymous. Diversity and differentiation are being usurped by the perceived need to be like everybody else. However, as much as individuals want to achieve racial anonymity, this is never truly achievable through cosmetic procedures. Racial distinctions remain a poignant and socially significant fact of American society.

The field of racial cosmetic surgery continues to grow as it becomes increasingly normalized in our society. Further research is crucial in order to understand the additional implications this phenomenon is having in American society. Most studies that have previously been conducted on racial cosmetic surgery are homogenous in their methods and explanations.

In all of the studies that were read for this thesis, the explanations given by individuals undergoing racial cosmetic surgery were that they were doing it for themselves, to make them feel prettier or to help advance their careers or social lives. The general tone of all studies conducted on racial cosmetic surgery is that these individuals are not trying to change their race but they are merely trying to look the best that they can. What is missing from these studies are follow-ups to determine how individuals feel, racially and socially, post-surgery. It is important to gain a perspective on why these individuals wish to modify their bodies; however, it is also important to see how these individuals come to see themselves, how they reconstruct a sense of identity for themselves, after undergoing racial cosmetic surgery. Was there backlash from their family, friends, or community? Did they feel that others perceived them differently? How was race an issue or a consideration in their lives after surgery? These questions are crucial to a fuller understanding of what this phenomenon means for the individual undergoing cosmetic surgery.

The implications for American society are something to consider as well. What does this mean for the future of race in America? Will such a practice lead to decreased racial discrimination or an increase, as there will be fewer individuals with ethnically or racially-charged physical characteristics? Finally, what does the future hold for aesthetic ideals in America?

Racial discrimination has historically been a large part of American society, as has been seen through the labeling and differentiating of individuals, colonization practices, slavery, civil and human rights battles, assimilation practices, and cultural aesthetic ideals as seen through popular culture and media. The question that begs to be asked is whether the phenomenon of racial cosmetic surgery is a means for our society to overcome such prejudice, and why this is

seen as a way to overcome discrimination and oppression. Racial acculturation and assimilation are natural processes of the American way of life. However, the permanent modification of racial bodies to suit a Caucasian ideal, speaks to the fact that America remains a society where racial ideals hold immense power over individuals, in their bodies, and in their lives. What is important to consider in this study is a broader understanding of inequality in our society. Racial cosmetic surgery, as has been discussed, allows for an approach to inequality that seems best solved through the possibility of mobility and change of social structures rather than equality under pre-existing ones. Equality for all individuals in a given society can only be achieved through the delocalization of set understandings and with the allowance for social change that is guided through individual agency.

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