

STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE BEAUTY: AN EXAMINATION OF PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, AND COMFORT LEVEL AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Based on the current standards of beauty, college students were surveyed to determine how attractive they rate themselves, where they turn to for standards of attractiveness and what their attitudes are regarding the different methods for altering appearance. The study found that students much higher regard for methods involving external efforts to alter appearance (e.g. diet, exercise) and were much more ambivalent about drastic surgical procedures (e.g., breast augmentation, face lift).

OVERVIEW

What is considered beautiful varies by age, time and culture. In the 1800s, women had to appear delicate to the point of "looking ill" (and in need of being protected by the male figure of the day). By 1890, voluptuous lusty-looking were the look of beauty (i.e., Lillian Russell or the Gibson Girl). In the 1920s, the boyish, flat-chested flapper look (Clara Bow) became the desired look (Solomon 2004, pp.180-1).

The concepts of attractiveness and beauty are learned beginning from a very young age (as young as 6) as part of the socialization process from childhood (Dove Study 2006, p.3). Further, it changes and evolves over time and may differ widely from culture to culture (Solomon 2004, pp. 180-1).

In many of the articles reviewed, the concepts of beauty and attractiveness were tied to our consumption of goods and services (symbolic consumption). Many industries are tied directly to beauty and attractiveness, such as:

Advertising & media	Exercise equipment
Cosmetics	Exercise clubs
Clothing	Exercise Trainers
Dentists and dental services	Fashion
Teeth whitening products	Entertainment

In America, not only are the values of what constitutes beauty learned by the social influences of family (for women it is Mom), but also through friends and the media. (Dove Study 2006, pp.15, 47). Advertising, publications focusing on beauty (there is a whole section on beauty at most bookstores) and programs on television and cable that emphasize attractiveness and beauty have an influence on framing modern

beauty values and self-image. This includes such programs as *Nip-Tuck*, *The Swan*, *Extreme Makeover*, *The Biggest Loser*, *Miami Ink*, *What Not to Wear*, *The Tyra Banks Show*, *Top Model* and many others. Included in this media exposure are the programs of beauty contests such as *Miss America*, *Miss Universe*, *Miss USA* and several others.

By the time one reaches college age (around 17-22), the various socialization processes have influenced how we see ourselves and how we may wish to "improve" and enhance our self-image and our physical appearance (college students have been socialized through the media and the entertainment industry to achieve physical and professional goals).

There are, however, cultural differences as to what is considered as beauty and attractiveness. Many of these cultural preferences impact on how beauty is evaluated within that culture. For example, in Nigeria, voluptuous, robust figures in women are viewed as beautiful and big women (200 lbs. or more) are respected and considered as beauties. This is also reflected in the status obtained by the family to which she belongs (Simmons 1998, pp A1-12; Solomon 2004, p. 179). Being large as a woman in this culture is also a mark of wealth and prosperity and being thin is often equated with illness and poverty (Simmons 1998, p. A1).

In Asian cultures, lighter skin tones are often associated with wealth and status and the darker skin tones with the laboring classes (Solomon 2004, p. 177). This parallels a previous American value in the early 20th century where pale untanned skin was preferred over tanned (while today it is reversed).

According to the Dove Study (2006), today's international standards of beauty most often reflect a more "modern" and westernized appearance. There are, however, cultural preferences for various areas of the body that may emphasize beauty and attractiveness (Dove Study 2006, pp. 20-23). In Brazil, Asia, and Saudi Arabia, ones hair (texture, length, color, etc.) is important; and in Japan, it's the shape of the eyes (Dove Study 2006, pp. 20-23). In western societies, the fear of aging (or, rather the fear of appearing older) is a cultural value.

In addition, physical beauty and attractiveness are often considered to be manifestation of other

desirable cultural values. Thus, someone who is considered attractive is perceived also to be of higher status, higher social standing than unattractive person. In men, these people are judged to be more powerful, wealthy and capable. Other areas ascribed to appearance include gender role identification, group identification and membership. Therefore, physical appearance has also been used as a means of expressing rebellion, milestones of life, and fashion statements (Solomon 2007; Dove Study 2006; Jerome 2000)

In a television interview with Brit Hume, Alex Kuczynski stated that in 2005 there were over 10 million cosmetic surgeries done and that this industry is over \$15 billion. She further cited that there were 3.29 million botox injections, 460,000 liposuctions, and over 360,000 breast augmentations performed in 2005 (Brit Hume 10/23/06).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Past research speculates that individuals view people whose traits are similar to our own more positively (Belk 1985). This study investigates a number of factors related to college students' attitudes towards beauty and attractiveness. In this exploratory phase of this study, a number of issues were included to provide insight into a better framework for a later study.

METHODOLOGY

An instrument was designed to explore several issues that relate to a person's perception of beauty and attractiveness. Since studies have shown that culture, media, peers and family are the predominant structure that one uses to frame their perceptions of beauty, this study focused on the influence of peers, media and culture. Therefore, items were generated for the questionnaire that included, where students get their information about beauty products, who they consider attractive, how they feel about their own body, if there are particular physical features that they are drawn to in other people, how important they feel physical appearance can be and their perceptions of people who employ various beauty enhancement strategies.

Each respondent was given a questionnaire in which they selected high-profile personalities that they perceived as attractive. Respondents were also asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 (1= hate my body and 10 = very happy with my body). Three open-ended questions were asked: 1) My best feature is __, 2) When you meet an attractive person, the first thing you notice is __, and 3) Where do you get information about grooming products to buy?

Respondents were given a five- point Likert scale to rate how important appearance was to their career,

personal life, and to themselves. Then, respondents were asked how they perceive people who have used beauty enhancement strategies/procedures by rating them on a five-point scale, with 1 = superficial/ "plastic" and 5 = smart/wise choice. Demographic information on respondents' gender, age, ethnicity, and grooming practices were also included.

Who is perceived as a cultural ideal?

Analyzing a cross-section of media and identifying some of the high-profile personalities that continue to appear, a list was drawn up to include those who seemingly appeal to the college age group (by virtue of popularity) (Solomon 2007, pp.176-78). These individuals were utilized as "benchmark" of what constitutes an attractive or beautiful person. An attempt was made to include personalities from diverse ethnic groups and age groups. These were:

Jennifer Lopez	Brad Pitt
Lindsey Lohan	Tiger Woods
Tyra Banks	Antonio Banderas
Paris Hilton	Denzel Washington
Angelina Jolie	Tom Cruise
Eva Longoria	Leonardo di Caprio
Catherine Zeta-Jones	Sean Connery
Heidi Klum	Pierce Brosnan
Halle Berry	Jet Li
Selma Hayek	50 Cent
Cristina Aguilera	Wesley Snipes
Penelope Cruz	Other male, please specify
Molly Simms	
Petra Nmcova	
Other female, please specify	

Beauty Enhancement Strategies

According to Solomon (2007, pp. 176-77) research has shown that physical features that were most often considered as attractive and glamorous for American women consisted of the following:

- Big round eyes
- Tiny waists
- Large breasts
- Long (usually blond) hair
- Light colored eyes
- Fair complexion (flawless)
- Pleasant smiles with nicely shaped white teeth

For men, it was the following:

- Clean-shaven
- Muscular but not overly developed – (not skinny)
- Taller than most women, without being too tall
- Tan, clear complexion
- Neatly dressed

As a result, technology, the cosmetics industry and medical science have developed various techniques and procedure to enable those who consider themselves "less than perfect" to modify or enhance their appearance. Various sources have resulted in the following listing of procedures (Solomon 2007; Dove Study 2006, p. 8; Jerome 2000):

- Waxing to remove body hair
- High heels (over 2½) – cause knee/hip problems and foot problems
- Liposuction
- Cosmetic botox injections
- Collagen injections
- Starvation diets to maintain overly thin body frames & androgynous look
- Unhealthy practices to keep weight down
 - Induced vomiting
 - Overuse of laxatives
 - Overly strenuous exercising or compulsive exercising
 - Severe fasts
- Body deviation
 - Tattoos
 - Piercing
 - Permanent makeup
- Overuse of dangerous weight loss drugs, bulky meds
- Incorrect unbalanced eating habits (unhealthy)

FINDINGS

Respondent were students in marketing classes at a western public university, during the Summer and Fall 2006 quarters. There were 68 respondents, 36 female (52.9%) and 32 male (32%). Ethnic group breakdown was as follows: 33.8% Caucasian, 17.6% Hispanic, 1.5% Black, and 47% Asian. Forty-four percent were in the age group of 17-21, while 43.6% were 22-25, 10.3% were 26-30 and 2.9% were 31-35.

Students were presented with a list of celebrities and asked to indicate which one/s they found attractive. Opportunity was provided for specifying others not on the list. Of those females listed, Angelina Jolie was considered attractive by the most number of respondents with 56 percent, 46 percent for Eva Longoria and 41 percent for Catherine Zeta-Jones. Among the males listed, Brad Pitt received 49 percent, followed by Tom Cruise with 19 percent and Leonardo di Caprio with 16 percent.

When asked to rate how they felt about their bodies, ratings had an overall mean of 6.4 on a Likert scale (1=hate my body and 10=my body is perfect, I am very happy with it. A cross-tabulation of this item against ethnicity showed that Hispanics recorded that highest mean of being happiest with their bodies (7.04), followed by Caucasians with 6.48, then Asians (6.2) and Blacks (5.0). According to the Dove Study

(2006), Hispanics and Blacks were the most comfortable with their bodies. Given that only one respondent self-identified as Black or African American, we were unable to obtain a valid measure.

When asked what their best feature was, 25 percent reported their eyes, followed by 10 percent reporting their smile, and 7 percent reported their personality. However, when asked what they noticed first when meeting an attractive person for the first time, 29 percent reported the face, followed by 19 percent reporting the smile, and 12 percent reported eyes.

Students rated the importance of appearance to their career, their personal lives and to themselves. Table 1 shows the results by gender, using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = very important and 5 = not important at all.

**TABLE 1
MEAN IMPORTANCE OF APPEARANCE
BY GENDER**

Important for	Overall Mean	Males	Females
Career	2.03	2.13	1.94
Personal Life	1.94	2.13	1.78
Themselves	2.00	2.31	1.72

Overall appearance is considered most important for careers and self, although there seems to have no real significant difference. Males regard appearance is all three categories significantly less important than females.

Table 2 shows responses to the question on what they thought of people who had different enhancement procedures done, using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = person who is superficial or "plastic" versus 5 = a person who is smart and makes wise choices. As expected, low invasive procedures ranked highest. For example, exercise classes reported the highest mean of 4.23, followed by professional trainer with 4.0 and weight-loss programs with 3.74. At the bottom, perceived to be done by people who are "artificial or plastic" were invasive procedures including drugs, injections and surgery, as well those perceived to be extreme like starvation diets.

Cross tabulating these results according to gender shows that females saw the "use of professional trainers" more favorably than males, as well as "hair color," "hair replacement," "wrinkle removal," "tattooed makeup," "stomach tucks," "face lifts," "skin whitening" and "lip enlargement." The only item that males reported a slightly more positive perception on was "weight loss programs."

The table also contains a cross-tabulation of responses according to ethnicity. Because there was only one respondent who self-reported as Black, this

was not included in the table. The table shows no major differences between the groups. However, there were individual items where one group scored higher or lower than the other. For example, Caucasian responses seem to parallel the overall means. Hispanics generally followed the same pattern, however, scored significantly lower for items regarding exercise, dieting, tanning, and wrinkle-removal. Asians also generally followed the overall pattern, except for items like skin whitening, face-lifts, stomach tucks, and the use of laxatives.

Cross-tabs were performed on information sources of grooming products and rating on different beauty procedures. Students provided responses in an open-ended question. Of the different information sources cited, magazines and friends ranked the highest, which is consistent with the literature.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlights personalities that today's college students find attractive. It also shows that students demonstrate a slightly positive image of themselves in

the way they rate how happy they are with their bodies. However, scores of 6 out of 10 show that there is a lot of room for enhancing body image among young people.

Respondents are more in favor of less invasive/natural procedures to enhance beauty. Although they perceive the more invasive procedures less favorably, they do not seem to be entirely against their use. This is exemplified by the personalities perceived as most attractive having the most natural beautiful image in the media.

Findings are not significantly different from the popular literature for this age group. This study provides insights into designing advertising and promotion directed to today's echo-boomer college students. Future studies should include a much larger sample and a wider variety of age groups. Studies should also address the influence of family on the formation of the perceptions of beauty.

References Available on Request

**TABLE 2
PERCEPTION OF PEOPLE WHO HAD PROCEDURES DONE
BY GENDER AND ETHNICITY**

Procedure	Overall	Males	Female	Caucasian	Hispanic	Asian
Exercise Class	4.23	4.26	4.21	4.61	3.64	4.10
Professional trainer	4.00	3.83	4.15	4.05	3.82	4.10
Weight Loss Program	3.74	3.81	3.68	3.96	3.36	3.70
Teeth Whitening	3.68	3.68	3.68	3.74	3.36	3.70
Body Building	3.55	3.55	3.56	3.26	3.45	3.80
Eye Makeup	3.49	3.06	3.88	3.78	3.00	3.40
Low Cal Diet	3.43	3.29	3.56	3.65	2.91	3.40
Hair Color	3.31	2.90	3.68	3.57	3.0	3.20
Hair Replacement	2.77	2.39	3.12	2.87	2.55	2.70
High Heels	2.56	2.37	2.74	2.96	2.00	2.40
Body Piercing	2.54	2.42	2.65	2.78	2.27	2.40
Compulsive Exercise	2.44	2.48	2.39	2.35	1.50	2.80
Tanning Procedures	2.40	2.10	2.67	2.61	1.90	2.40
Tatoos	2.32	2.23	2.41	2.35	2.09	2.40
Fasting	2.32	2.23	2.41	2.14	2.30	2.50
Chemical Peel	2.30	2.10	2.48	2.48	2.00	2.30
Wrinkle Removal	2.20	1.81	2.56	2.04	1.64	2.40
Compulsive Exercise	2.10	2.10	2.09	2.17	1.30	2.30
Tatoood Makeup	2.05	1.90	2.18	2.00	1.82	2.20
Laxatives	1.92	1.90	1.94	1.87	1.44	2.10
Collagen Injections	1.86	1.78	1.94	1.87	1.50	1.90
Stomach Tucks	1.85	1.56	2.12	1.61	1.91	2.00
Face Lift	1.78	1.32	2.21	1.57	2.00	1.90
Breast Enhancement	1.76	1.56	1.94	1.83	1.58	1.70
Weight loss drugs	1.75	1.67	1.82	1.65	1.40	1.90
Skin Whitening	1.74	1.47	2.0	1.35	1.33	2.20
Liposuction	1.71	1.50	1.91	1.57	1.45	1.90
Botox injections	1.68	1.43	1.91	1.61	1.22	1.80
Lip enlargement	1.63	1.23	2.00	1.57	1.73	1.70
Starvation diets	1.55	1.45	1.65	1.35	1.70	1.60
Lip enlargement	1.48	1.23	1.72	1.32	1.45	1.60

CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SEARCH ENGINES, AND THEIR USES IN INTERNET MARKETING – THE CASE OF FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

It has been studied that approximately 71 per cent of all commercial web pages focus primarily on advertising. Therefore it is problematic that in numerous studies it has been proposed that the general attitude towards web advertising forms such as banner advertisements and pop-up advertisements is low. To counter this decreasing trend, companies have opted in using search engines as one marketing channel to their products and services.

This study presents a phenomenon called search engine marketing (SEM), and an empirical study on how Finnish consumers perceive it and what role do search engines play in consumers' online buying processes. SEM is most usually divided into search engine optimization, which focuses on achieving high rankings in search results, and paid placement, which is basically an advertisement space sold by search engines. Empirical data with 314 responses was gathered from several Finnish online communities in order to gain understanding about the following issues: 1) How do consumers use search engines to gain knowledge about the products they desire? 2) What are their attitudes towards search engine marketing? 3) What is the search engine's role in the purchase process?

The findings from this study propose that search engines are very commonly used tools in information retrieval, and that they play a major part in the online buying process as well. The study at hand acknowledges the fact that since consumers usually view only a fraction of all the available search results, it is imperative for companies to be able to position themselves so that they can gain the maximum exposure. The results show that consumers do not tend to trust in the paid placements as much as they do in normal, organic, results, which poses yet another problem for search engine marketers.

Additionally, it was discovered that navigational searchers (i.e. searchers who know the exact URL to the desired page, but still navigate there via search engine) may produce errors when measuring web traffic from search engines and making assumptions from those figures alone. Navigational searchers may boost up the incoming web traffic rate from search engines which needs to be accounted for when evaluating the success of company's web sites. Managerial implications and conclusions are provided by the basis of the results.