

How the pressure to conform to society's and media's standards of beauty leave wo...

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Akin to the unattainable but romanticized historical icons in visual art, readers and audiences of the present are invited to emulate modern media role models such as celebrities, supermodels and socialites of the past and present. Patterns of exposure to media and social media trends continue to change, so does the frequency of cosmetic surgery procedures. The upholding of an influencer is an aspect of continuity that exists within my chosen topic.

“China’s tortured beauties: make me look Western” documentary talks about contemporary Chinese female beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery. The documentary explains how cosmetic surgery has become common practice in China and it underlines how it seems to have a direct impact on women’s social and professional opportunities. This also shows that women have interiorized Western beauty ideals that appear to be impossible to attain naturally, and I believe this brings up important questions. How have Chinese beauty ideals come to be constructed in such a way? – Why is it that Chinese women chose to put themselves through expensive, dangerous and painful cosmetic surgery in order to reflect certain beauty ideals? This documentary uncovers the secrets of plastic surgery in China, a culture of which that can be compared and contrasted to our western society. When the facts are presented visually it creates a much deeper impact and has greater effects on the viewer.

Women in both past and present generations continue to be expected to regulate body image and femininity through beauty practices. Beauty is being idealized by society and media. Female identity has been tainted

causing women to face “ acute tension between assertions of individualism and the demands of conformism”. Beauty trends, traditional and contemporary, are not only harmful to the health of women, but they also create stereotypical femininity. This can include waxing, threading, hyaluronic fillers and dyeing hair to alter their personal image. Therefore the image of the ideal beautiful woman is captured with “ the concept of provocateur which is a form or a hollow shell representing the female figure and accepted attractiveness”

With the growing demand for the modern-day “ elixir of youth” now available over the counter in stores around the world, global anti-ageing product market is predicted to not only “ reach US\$115. 4 billion by 2010” but now targets younger consumers before the signs of ageing set in when they entering 30’s and 40’s. Cosmetic surgeons and beauty experts attempt to find a safe, non-surgical methods to correct wrinkles without spending hours in surgery.

For the majority of the 20th and 21st centuries, symmetrical, toned, white, and thin women have been advertised as the “ ideal” by mainstream media. Increased visibility for diverse body types has ramped up significantly in recent years, showing that there isn’t just one kind of female body that’s beautiful. Millennials raised by the internet, having access to a wide diversity of different body types in the spotlight of social media provides hope for general body positivity.

Continuity and change in the way in which society conforms to beauty ideals plays a large role in our “plastic” culture in which we live today. This influences the way in which different generations feel pressure to conform and become the “ideal” beauty in which society has created. Western and Non Western contexts as well as society in both the past and present have been consistently exposed to idealized images of beauty. The rise of social media in the 21st century has created scope for wider distribution of these ideals. As a result, this advocates unrealistic idealized beauty to flourish within society which is now much more wider spread due to the prominence of social media in a Westernized 21st Century society.

Why is it occurring?

Society's changing values and lifestyles have created a large “plastic” culture, a generation of females who strive each and every day to conform to values and ideals that our culture has established. Hyaluronic acid filler, like those used in lip injections, also represent a growing segment of non-surgical cosmetic procedures. This could be predominantly evident in cases such as Kylie Jenner, who has made headlines for her fuller lips. Exposure to such images creates an unrealistic desire to achieve unnatural beauty and conform to ideals, as social media grows as an influence on young females, exposure to “perfect” body images are becoming more and more prominent.

Power involves a capacity to influence others to follow a course of action or point of view they would not otherwise follow. Not only has female rates of cosmetic surgery risen significantly but also the male rates of cosmetic

procedures has rapidly increased overtime. Are males being more exposed to beauty ideals in a modern day society to influence them to also conform to society's "perfect" image? Does this mean that the people we follow on Instagram and long to be hold great power as well? This power has come from the use of social media platforms and the exposure that pictures are receiving which create so much influence on society. Technology is, in addition to this, a large influence on society and the access to social media platforms plays a role in this. As the age of exposure to society's beauty ideals lowers so does the age of conformity and the rapidly growing rate of conformity to ideals set out for us by society.

Who better to ask than those who are constantly exposed to the media and the beauty industry. Those who feel pressures to conform and become someone completely different in the public eye to who they may be behind closed doors. From the 100 respondents to the survey; 56.9% were 16 to 20 years of age, 7.8% 21 to 25 years of age, 5.9% 26 to 30 years of age, and no evidence was provided for the 31 to 35 age group. A further 3.9% were 36 to 40 years of age, 2% 41 to 45 years of age, 7.8% 46 to 50 years of age and the remaining 15.7% were over 51 years of age. The survey results show that only 8 of the 100 women surveyed have engaged in cosmetic procedures. This shows that not everyone is taking drastic measures such as cosmetic procedures in order to conform to idealized images of beauty. 51% of respondents expressed that they did feel pressure to look differently to whom they were due to social media. 58.8% of respondents said that they

have not considered surgical/non-surgical procedure and only 41. 2% have considered procedures.

This shows the large cosmetic culture that causes the rise in conformity to beauty ideals in our society, due to social media influencers that society looks up to. Beauty influencers are used to endorsing products, setting the beauty standards for others to strive for whilst increasing product sales and boosting brand popularity. Women see influencers as the ideal image of beauty and strive to achieve looks similar to them whilst using the products they endorse.

Questionnaires are an integral aspect of primary research methodology. In using a questionnaire to research into the lives of prominent social and beauty media icons, it provides conclusions to be drawn relating to the widespread use and misuse of images of beauty and influences pressuring women into surgical and non-surgical cosmetic surgery. Responses from Rachael Brooks, an Australian beauty content creator and makeup artist who boasts 38 000 Instagram followers and 33 000 YouTube subscribers, Sarah Jane Stephens, an Australian Lifestyle Blogger and Youth Worker who boasts 34 900 Instagram followers and Maddison Rose Smith, an Australian Blogger and YouTuber hosting 11 000 Instagram followers and has received almost 60 000 views on YouTube. This showed how they experienced the pressures that society have placed on their choices and appearances, and shifted the way that they deliver content to their audiences

Whether or not the women felt pressure from social media to look differently to how they did, all three influencers expressed feeling pressure although also realizing the importance of encouraging followers to stay true to themselves. Rachael Brooks said that, " Yes and no I think social media has a huge impact on how people should look or dress! But at the end of the day I do social media for myself and to promote who I am as an individual and I will always stay true to myself and not change unless I want to change something about myself." This supports the hypothesis, that there is a strong rise in conformity to beauty ideals due to the influence of Social Media. These women are the role models that young women look up to for inspiration and strive to be and look like, yet they themselves are, in addition to this, influenced by the media.

All three influencers have expressed that they feel highly influenced by social media when making fashion and beauty choices, this shows that although people are influenced by their image in the media this cannot be defined as clearly their own choices as they feel highly influenced by the media also. Therefore it is difficult to conclude who creates the first influence in which a domino effect occurs through society and groups that engage with social media and influencer endorse images of ideal beauty.

In an interview with Chloe Morello who boasts over 1 million Instagram followers and over 2 million YouTube subscribers expressed concerns towards conformity, stating that " I for sure feel very pressured to fit in, but I probably struggle most with the fact that I am the contributor of the " perfect" image for many young women." Pressure is not only felt to conform

to society's ideals, but also to become the "ideal" women to influence others. Women are being judged and pushed to be something they are not, something society deems to be "perfect". Supporting the hypothesis that influencers too are feeling the pressure to be the "perfect" image for followers and young women to look up to in a social media driven society.

Chloe also expressed, "We're in a time where the influencer space is pretty saturated, and getting yourself heard as a new voice in the deafening roar of online personalities is not only difficult, it's near impossible". This further illustrates that pressure that is placed on beauty influencers to become a popular image and become someone who young women can look up to and strive to mirror. This greatly influences products influencers use and endorse on their social media platforms.

The pressure which is felt by media influencers creates bias and greater influences which predetermine the material which young women are exposed to in the media and changes the way in which social media is utilized by influencers. Social media and the influencers in which society follows have great influence on the rise in conformity to beauty ideals within society and the rise of "plastic" culture. This is the main reason why there has been such a rise in conformity to beauty ideals in society today. The pressure felt by influencers creates a more unrealistic image to be fostered by social media. This is affecting mental health, physical health and social wellbeing in teens and other members of society today. The spread of idealized beauty images is negatively impacting upon self-worth and is

resulting in many members of society taking drastic measures in order to conform.