History of standards of beauty

We live in a consumer culture and we are bombarded with advertising, retailing and entertainment industry. It is forcing us to buy and consume products, promising us happiness and self-transformation. Media is ever present in our lives. We look to the media to help us define, explain, and shape the world around us (Kellner, 2003). We make comparisons of ourselves, those close to us, and situations in our lives after seeing images in the media. And as a result, after these comparisons we are motivated to try to achieve new goals and expectations.

" In the contemporary world, messages about goods are all pervasive-advertising has increasingly filled up the spaces of our daily existence… it is the air that we breathe as we live our daily lives" (Jhally, 1990: 250). The important thing is that we cannot avoid comparisons of ourselves to the images which we are surrounded with from media and most of us will find ourselves inadequate when we do this (Kellner, 2003). How many times have we after seeing some " beautiful" woman in a magazine or on TV, thought: I want hair, lips, body, breasts or something else like she has?! Media is our most important information source. But I think we are not educated by it. We believe in everything that media serves us.

This essay seeks to address so many women who feel they just don't measure up when it comes to their looks. Women who believe their thighs are too big, their breasts too small, their hair boring, their skin flawed, their body shaped funny, or their clothes outdated. We are surrounded with women who believe their life would improve if they could only lose 15 pounds; if they could afford contact lenses, that new perfume or anti-cellulite lotion; if they got a nose job, a face lift, a tummy tuck, etc, women who feel

shame or unhappiness when they think about some part (or all) of their body. In other words, every day we see there is a great majority of women who feel this way. We all want to be beautiful. But I want to write about what lies behind that, behind that beauty myth.

In this essay I will try to explore and to explain, how media plays a dominant role in influencing females' perceptions of the world around them, as well as helping them to define their sense of self. I will try to examine the influences that media has on females' feelings towards their place in society, sexuality, self-esteem and body image.

I hope will give some answers to some questions. What media does in terms of imposing the beauty myth? How standards of beauty changed over time and yet beauty for women is still compulsory? What can we say about pressure on women as opposed to men when it comes to looks? How is beauty being sold to women and what the consequences of these issues are? I will try to show you who is getting the profit in this non-ending battle. In other words I will try to answer these questions that at one point we all should ask ourselves.

STANDARDS OF BEAUTY THROUGHOUT THE PAST

The cultural standard of beauty, when it comes to body shape, is always changing. " Women's bodies is not what changed, it is the ideals" (Kilbourne, 1995). Advertising, retailing and entertainment produce notions of beauty that change over time. These notions place pressure upon women who try to be in vogue (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Between 1400 and 1700, a fat body shape was considered sexually appealing and fashionable (Attie and Brooks –

Gun, 1987). By the nineteenth century, the fat shape was replaced by voluptuous figure, centered at a generous breasts and hips and narrow waist (Fallon, 2005). The voluptuous shape for women persisted through the early part of the twentieth century, and eventually was replaced by the slender shape of the 1920s (Mazur, 1986). The curvaceous ideal continued through the 1940s and 1950s (Mazur, 1986). By the mid-1960s, however, fashions shifted once again towards the idealization of slender body shapes over curvaceous ness. Since then the only slight shift from extreme thinness as the feminine ideal was the muscularization of the still very thin body during the 1980s (Mazur, 1986).

We are bombarded today with images of the " perfect" woman. She is usually a gorgeous blonde, although brunettes, redheads and exotic women of color are also shown. She is tall and skinny, weighing at least 20% less than an average woman weighs. She rarely looks older than 25, has no visible flaws on her skin, and her hair and clothes are always immaculate (Kilbourne, 1995). In other words, one " perfect woman" looks pretty much like the next. Like Kilbourne (1995) said in Slim Hopes it is likely that these women we see are not real.

BEAUTY AND WOMEN

" The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called " beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's

beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless.

None of this is true…" (Wolf, 1990: 12)

In the near past as the new wave of feminism emerged women have broken trough many of the material and legal obstructions. And finally they got out of their houses and became emancipated. But then more " strictly and heavily and cruelly" images of female beauty have come to burden upon us (Wolf, 1990). And now we are in the middle of a strong reaction against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement and success.

According to Wolf (1990) " beauty" is a money system. Like economy it is determined by politics. It is not about women at all, it is about institutional power. I will show you later where the money goes. It seems like we are a good way to make money. We are vulnerable when it is about our self-worth and self-esteem.

The ideal of women's beauty contradicted women's freedom and power by moving the social limits to women's lives directly onto our faces and bodies (Wolf, 1990). And the consequence is that we now ask the questions about our bodies, skin, hair, clothes etc, which women a generation ago asked about their place in society. After so many years fighting to get our rights to everything, we are now prisoners of our body. And beauty image presented in time is our " tormentor". Once again we have to fight for our rights and freedom of choice. Throughout the years, there have been forces in culture that attempt to punish women who tray to succeed in their lives, in other

words to get control over their lives and environment (Wolf, 1990). There is a strong cultural reaction against women that uses images of female beauty to keep women " in their place". And we have to ask ourselves where men in that strong reaction against women are.

MEN AND WOMEN

Media pressures women to strive for the very thin look. For example, magazines for women celebrate the very thin look, but magazines for men do not do that. In fact, there are not so many that skinny women in men's magazines. Women have low self-esteem because they are surrounded with male idea of beauty that is linked with media representations. We all think that men want to possess the beautiful women we see every day in magazines or on TV. That is the thing that Wolf (1990) claims to be the beauty myth. We all have to strive for beauty because men want to possess women who have it. In other words women are being sold to themselves in order to achieve a self whom the men in the future might choose. But Loaded magazine said that women do not have the difficulty of living with the male idea of beauty shown on the catwalk. John Perry in Loaded magazine stated: " No, men fancy models because they have beautiful faces, not because they look like they've been fed under a door. Sleeping with a supermodel would be about as pleasurable as shagging a bicycle. The truth is it is women themselves who see these freaks as the epitome of perfection" (2002: 79). We all think that men want to possess ' beautiful' women like the ones shown on TV and in magazines. And the key point is that a woman's sense of her body actually has not been hers but man's view of her body.

Women see themselves trough men's eyes. But Berger (2005) notes that this is not an equal and opposite phenomenon.

Men are pressured to be thin and well-toned too. But they can get away with imperfection as long as they have charm and humor (Gauntlett, 2002). Levels of skinniness are irrelevant. Almost all of the ' beautiful women' in both women's and men's magazines are thin, not fat, and this must have an impact. Magazines impose us standard of beauty and women feel inadequate after seeing men longing for some perfect woman represented by media with flawless face, big breast, narrow waist, long legs, beautiful tan etc.

Our culture teaches women they can't be happy unless they are " beautiful," but I have to emphasize that it also teaches men they can't be happy unless they are rich and/or powerful (Wolf, 1990). But the difference is that rich and powerful men come in all shapes, sizes, and ages. Men can get away with every small imperfection. But when Julia Roberts was seen to have armpits at the premiere of Notting Hill in 1999, the world's press went crazy with excitement over this (wholly natural) ´outrage´ (Gauntlett, 2002). So we have to face the fact that there is a difference between media representation of women and the one of men. We all are pressured because media does not just reflect our world but also shapes it. And it sells us all kind of solutions to improve ourselves.

SELLING BEAUTY

We are all bombarded every day with messages from television shows, movies, advertisements, magazine articles that we need to look a certain way in order to be accepted

(Kilbourne, 1995). For many of us, these images are neither realistic nor achievable. The result is that we feel bad about ourselves if we don't measure up. This gives a sense of insecurity among women, and this drives sales in the beauty industry. In Slim Hopes Kilbourne (1995) argues that some could say we cannot blame only advertisements, but they are the most persuasive aspect of media power to influence us culturally and individually.

" Girls are extremely desirable to advertisers because they are new consumers, are beginning to have significant disposable income, and are developing brand loyalty that might last a lifetime" (Kilbourne, 1999: 259). Girls of all ages get the message that they must be flawlessly beautiful and thin. They get the message that with enough effort and self-sacrifice, they can achieve this ideal. And the result is that young girls from the early start to feel bad about them.

Kilbourne (1999) argues that these images of " perfect women" that surround us would not influence us so much if we did not live in a culture that imposes us the belief that we can and should remake our bodies into " perfect" ones. " These images play into the American belief of transformation and ever-new possibilities, no longer via hard work but via the purchase of the right products" (Kilbourne, 1999: 260).

Magazines represent a strong insistence that women of all ages must do their best, and that they must spend their money in order to look as ' beautiful' as possible. Some of their content is the ' fashion and beauty' material, which takes up many pages in the magazines. But women's magazines today construct women in a social way too. As Beetham and Boardman say, " magazines not only address women as consumers but also as readers, as in search of entertainment or in need of instruction in various social roles" (2005: 41). We can say that magazines for women took the task of defining what it meant to be a woman, or what it meant to be a particular kind of woman. Through advertising women are told clearly what women should be, and what particular product they could use/buy to help. Women are suggested an identity and told they are not good enough being " natural". We can say that women are asked to buy themselves. As Berger puts it, " the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product" (2005: 43).

A massive worldwide industry is eager to tell women that there are products for sale which can improve their looks. And we all buy them, don't we!? And the worst part is that identity is understood as something that could be reworked, improved upon, and even dramatically changed.

There are so many magazines that promised every girl the chance to get a stylish and attractive look that fashion models and famous women have. Spending money on clothing, cosmetics, and accessories are presented as necessity if we want to construct a desirable self (Ouellette, 1999). How many times have we as we read some magazine or watch TV advertisement and thought " I have to have that"? We all have products in our homes that

we bought because of some add on TV or magazine article that told us that it is the best product for our hair to be astonishing , for our face to be immaculate, our figure to be fit, our lips to be attractive etc.

And the important thing is that it seems like women get the messages/promises from magazines full of articles telling us that if women use these product they will improve their looks and, they'll have it all-the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex, and a rewarding career. But actually there is no link between these things. I think that it does not mean that we will be happy in our life if we try to change our looks using some product.

One of the most powerful disciplinary practices for women is that of dieting. By dieting women are disciplining their bodies to only consume a certain amount of food. By doing this women feel they are becoming more like the image of the perfect (properly feminine) woman. Media activist Jean Kilbourne concludes that, " Women are sold to the diet industry by the magazines we read and the television programs we watch, almost all of which make us feel anxious about our weight" (Kilbourne, 1995). Many women tend to over diet which leads to anorexia and women who don't diet are mocked by society or they feel guilty for not doing that. After filling up the women audience with images of super-thin models, television networks then proceed to show hours and hours of commercials on weight-loss, dieting and fitness programs (Kilbourne, 1995). We can se that this is a marketing strategy. Firstly, media makes us feel bad about ourselves by showing us stereotypes of beautiful women that we are not and then they offer us the

best solution to improve ourselves, to change our looks into prefect commodities of beautiful women.

Another disciplinary practice that is given by the media is that of skin care and make-up. A woman's skin must be soft, hairless, and smooth and ideally it should not show any sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought. Magazines can give you page upon page of " makeup tips" and " skin care strategies" that women should follow in order to conform to the universal feminine standard (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Cosmetic products are being sold to women to achieve those attributes that makes a women desirable. An unwrinkled face, thighs without cellulite, and large breasts have become the metaphor for female success because reaching these female symbols needs a lot of sacrifice, hard work, and self-control (Wykes and Gunter, 2005).

But I have to mention one thing that could lead us women to a completely different era when it comes to beauty. There's a very different approach from Dove with its revolutionary campaign for real beauty that has received enormous publicity by using women of all shapes and sizes wearing white bra and pants to advertise their products.

" The whole point is to make beauty more accessible, as accessible as it can be," explains Alessandro Manfredi, vice president of Dove. " So by widening the definition of beauty, we believe that more women will gain the confidence, because they will see beauty is closer to them than the beauty of a supermodel that is so far, and people could give up… …We don't want women to give up, we want to tell them; beauty, it's at your reach" (Austen, 2006).

Dove is launching a major initiative in order to encourage discussion and debate about the nature of beauty. The Campaign for Real Beauty asks women to give serious thought about beauty issues such as society's definition of it, the quest for " perfection," the difference between beauty and physical attractiveness, and the way the media shapes our perceptions of beauty.[1]Dove has established the Dove Self-Esteem Fund to raise awareness of the connection between beauty and body-related self-esteem. The Dove Self-Esteem Fund in the US helps build self-confidence in girls ages 8-14. The Dove mission is to make women feel more beautiful every day by challenging today's stereotypical view of beauty and inspiring women to take great care of themselves.[2]But we have to face the fact that Dove, is the No. 1 personal wash brand nationwide. One in every three households uses a Dove product.[3]That includes bar cleansers, body washes, face care, anti-perspirants/ deodorants and hair care. Dove is available nationwide in food, drug and mass outlet stores. So we must ask ourselves, is it really about women or again some beauty industry is manipulating us and making money from our pockets?!

BEAUTY AS PROFIT

All this beauty selling leads us to the question: who benefits from this ' beauty market'! Is it really about women or are we tricked by those who have the power? Media and beauty industry including diet, surgery and cosmetic industry is manipulating us by making us throw our money on reworking our looks.

That leads me to one conclusion that it cannot be about women, for the " ideal" is not about women but about money. We should ask ourselves how

much money we spend on " the best thing" that will make us desirable and beautiful. The cosmetic surgery industry in the United States takes $300 million every year, and is growing annually by 10 percent (Wolf, 1990).

One reason why media is so influential is that advertising is 130 billion dollar a year industry. The average American watches 30 hours of TV a week and spends 110 hours a year reading magazines (Wolf, 1990). It is very unfortunate that the media influences society to the point that it defines the " ideal woman".

Advertising is a powerful force in our culture that informs us but does not educate us. Economics is also a significant factor in the development of the ideal image. There is a wealth of businesses that depend upon the American desire for thinness to survive (Wolf, 1990). Exercise and diet companies are an example. In order to create a market for their product, they attempt to make women feel inadequate about their own bodies through advertisement. According to Wolf, the diet industry has tripled its income in the past 10 years from a $10 billion industry to a $33. 3 billion industry. When we compare some results with UK we can see that there is also a lot of profiting going on. The UK beauty industry takes £8. 9 billion a year by selling products to women.

Magazines are financed by the beauty industry (Greer, 2002). They start with young girls and teach them how to use the right product and they establish loyalty that lasts a lifelong (Greer, 2002). We all probably have one cosmetic product that we use for so many years. Cosmetics for teenagers are relatively cheap but within a few years more cultured market will persuade

the most rational woman to throw her money on the right product that promises to defend women from their own weakness

So we can see that the economy depends on manipulating consumers to buy as much as possible. And we can link the beauty industry and mass media, it is as Wykes and Gunter say " symbiotic relationship", because beauty industry depends on mass media and vice versa. It seems there is no limit in how one can be beautiful, or how much money can we spend in order to feel beautiful, completely disregarding our health. And the consequences are harmful or sometimes even devastating.

CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION

" Women learn to reconstruct themselves. It is second nature to disguise them, dress them and decorate themselves with a huge range of materials. Over the past 30 years they have gone further than ever before in this process. They can re-arrange some of the organic material that is their body- sometimes without any harm, sometimes with devastating consequences."(Wykes and Gunter, 2005: 48)

A research by the British Medical Association has shown that eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of all psychological illnesses, and that the level of skinniness enforced by fashion models is both ' unachievable and biologically inappropriate' and gives a wrong picture of an ideal body to young women (Gauntlett, 2002). However, we cannot blame media influences to directly cause eating disorders. There are some others components that play an important role with these consequences. Report notes that eating disorders are caused by genetics, family history and

cultural environment (Gauntlett, 2005). But for those who are psychologically and genetically predisposed to anxiety when it comes about body image, media plays an unhelpful role.

The American research group Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. reports that one out of every four college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of dieting, including fasting, skipping meals, extreme workouts, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting.[4]The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute notes that girls even at age of nine are trying to control their weight. Research in the US gives similar results. In 2003, Teen magazine reported that 35 per cent of girls aged 6 to 12 are using at least one kind of dieting, and that 50 to 70 per cent girls of normal weight girls think they are overweight.[5]

Cosmetic surgeons are making a lot of money with women doing cosmetic surgeries for every imperfection that we can imagine (Wolf, 1990). Women get the message that normal, round women's bodies are too fat; that soft women's flesh is really cellulite; that women with small breasts aren't sexy; that women who don't have the " perfect" face aren't attractive; that a women over 30 who in their faces have sings of their ageing are ugly. No wonder women are thinking about or doing cosmetic surgeries in order to be " beautiful".

In conclusion, what is the result of this sought for " perfection"? One out of every 4 college girls has an eating disorder. A psychological study in 1995 found that 3 minutes spent looking at models in a fashion magazine caused 70% of women to feel depressed, guilty and shameful. 50% of American

women are dieting and 75% of " normal" weight women think they are too fat (Wolf, 1990).

All these arguments lead us to one conclusion: to view one's body from the outside, that is, to put center onto physical attractiveness, sex appeal, measurements, weight, face characteristics has many harmful effects-feelings of shame, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, development of eating disorder.

CONCLUSION

The traditional definition of beauty, based only on physical appearance, is powerfully communicated through the mass media and has been assimilated through popular culture. It is this ideal that many women measure themselves against and aspire to attain. According to the narrow-minded society we live in, there just doesn't seem to be a limit on how beautiful one can become. Well, someone has given us a definition of beauty that is superior to our mind. Can we hope for a day when ' mind in body' will be a notion of beauty?

I hope I have showed that by media presentation of an ideal difficult to achieve and maintain, the cosmetic and diet product industries are assured of growth and profits. I hope I have proved that in our society media has created an environment so image obsessed that those with power(and by those I mean beauty industry and media) have caused emerging of a generation of women so self conscious about their body image, that it is affecting their health. However, women around the world would like to see media change in way it represents beauty.

We have to face the fact that wearing makeup, losing weight, having surgeries, dressing up etc, will not change who we are. Our identity is what makes us unique. We should not want anymore to look like someone else. There is nothing wrong in doing things that makes a woman feel good about her as long as we have a choice of doing that because of ourselves not because someone told us it is proper thing to do for a woman in order to be beautiful. So I have to emphasis that I in this essay I did not try to attack wearing make up, having surgeries, working out, dieting etc, as long as we do not feel shame, guilt or anxiety when we don't do these practices.

We have to speak out for ourselves. It is wrong to use our looks as our voices. It is not the look that should do the talking. Beauty shouldn't be our weapon for success in life, but also it shouldn't be media and beauty industry weapon against women themselves.

Media is always going to be present in our lives, but we have to realize that not everything we are exposed to by the media is real.

So what can we do? We can take their power. We can reject political manipulation. Like Wolf (1990) said, we should turn away from them, and look directly at one another. We should look for the beauty in female subculture; try to find music, films, biographies, plays that illustrate women in three dimensions. And perhaps then we will unveil the beauty myth and find the truth about beauty.