



Reflecting on Beauty Demands: The Case of the Cosmetic Surgery Experiences of Young Thai Women



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Feminism and Beauty

The binary of *top-down male dominating power* and *female empowering power* is to be eradicated.

- Female cosmetic surgery recipients claim to be rarely pressured by their husbands or male surgeons. (1)
- **Female empowerment** is defined as how women falsely represent themselves as freely choosing as though there were no patriarchal structures in society.
- Women are socially compelled to regulate their own appearance more significantly than men. (2)
- **Digital technologies** reinforce self-beautification.
- Women judge other women based on looks. (3)

Postfeminism

- **Postfeminism** is described as a celebratory term about women's individual successes after the rise of second-wave feminism. (4)
- This PhD project views postfeminism as **partly problematic**, as the term presumes that gender inequality no longer exists.
- The white Western-centrism of postfeminism ought to be further challenged. (5) (6)
- **This project seeks to critique the Western-centric postfeminist focus** to examine the Thai cosmetic surgery phenomenon amongst young women.

Aesthetic norms are so strong that non-conformity to them is devastating for many women despite some psychological benefits of beauty. (7)

(1) Davis, K. (1995) *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*. New York: Routledge.
 (2) Gill, R. (2007) 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (2), pp. 147-166.
 (3) Riley, S., Evans, A., and Mackiewicz, A. (2016) 'It's just between girls: Negotiating the postfeminist gaze in women's 'looking talk'', *Feminism and Social Psychology*, 26 (1), pp. 94-113.
 (4) McRobbie, A. (2009) *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.

Why Thailand?

- **The popularity of cosmetic surgery in Thailand** compared to other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia.
- In Thailand, the common procedures include double eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, and breast enhancement.
- **Social hierarchy** has provoked Thai women's preoccupation with consumer culture as a way of raising social status. (8)

Race and Ethnicity

Challenging absolute white-centrism

- Many celebrities in Thailand are **either partially white** (American, English, German etc.) **or of East Asian descents** (Chinese, Japanese, Korean etc.).
- **Korean popular culture** has hugely impacted on beauty standards in Thailand.

Thai people of Chinese ancestry have become viewed as better-looking than ever.

(5) Butler, J. (2013) 'For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion', *Feminist Formations*, 25 (1), pp. 35-58.
 (6) Dosekun, S. (2015) 'For Western Girls Only?', *Feminist Media Studies*, 15 (6), pp. 1-16.
 (7) Widdows, H. (2018) *Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
 (8) Chintanalert, J. (2018) *Dynamics of Luxury Consumer Culture and the Transition towards Post-Consumerism: A Study through Luxury Brands with Alternative Consumption Activities in Thailand*. M.A. Dissertation. Goldsmiths, University of London.

Focusing on subjective views

The more interpretivist end

Logic of Inquiry:
Abduction

Moving from deduction (using theoretical frameworks) to induction (looking at surprising data)

Methodology

Young women are the main sample.

Samples:
Young Thai women and cosmetic surgeons

Snowball sampling

Semi-structured interviews via Zoom

Thematic and narrative analyses

Research Questions

Sub-research questions

- What are the learned narratives of young Thai women regarding cosmetic surgical alteration?
- Which **particular beauty standards**, such as white, South Korean, and/or Thai, shape these learned narratives?

Main research question

How does cosmetic surgery undergone by young Thai women connote the connections between **female self-pleasing** and **gendered oppression**?