Social and Cultural Components of Beauty in Both Sexes and its Functions from the Perspective of Male Students

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Judgments regarding one’s beauty typically take place based on their faces. Symmetry, youth, succulence and familiarity are the important aspects concerning biological standards of beauty. The results of studies show that a beautiful face is coded in our brain in a way that children, even during the first week after their birth, would gaze upon a beautiful face for a longer period of time. Beauty criteria regarding women’s faces are not of much difference in various cultures. Beauty standards are mostly under the influence of economic-social features in a society. The attractiveness of a man or a woman from the view of opposite sex is thought to bear implications of being healthier. The views of social constructivism assert that beauty standards are subject to social ideals which are represented through mass media as well as the fashion industry. Beautification of body and face is an approach for raising social acceptance for oneself. One of the undeniable consequences of dissatisfaction towards one’s body is the desire to alter the form of different body parts as well as changes in one’s weight and height. Such discontent toward one’s body may result in one’s inclination to inappropriate and unhealthy methods of weight change such as consumption of steroids along with weight loss and gain pills.

2. Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu regards body capital as a type of cultural capital or a form of cultural resource invested within the body. A beautiful face or body may act as a place for exhibiting one’s cultural capital. According to Bourdieu’s views, physical capital refers to human body being under the influence of society by means of exercising, attendance, etc. Giddens considers body as a part of the action system. Awareness towards body conditions in order to fulfill every moment of life, perfectly, is of essential importance and in fact, logical sequence of monitoring sensory input from the environment as well as supervision towards states and situations of body’s main organs and the body itself, is considered as a complex notion.

The concepts of control and power which are seen repeatedly in Foucault’s theories are used to analyze people’s efforts towards body beautification. Socialization of body is what Foucault had

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proposed as social control over body. Foucault analyzes human body in connection with the mechanisms of power. Erving Goffman’s concept of scene management shows how people desire to manipulate real conditions as they please and deem appropriate to exhibit towards others. Even though Bourdieu, Giddens and Goffman, each has looked at the body problem and the increasing tendency for changing it from a different angle, the important point is that all of them somehow demonstrate how individuals living in a society, would be influenced by social pressures on changing one’s body, regardless of their tendencies towards finding individuality as well as maintaining and presenting one’s personal identity.

3. Methodology

The present study employs grounded theory which is among qualitative research methods. Participants in the study include male students of Shahid Bahonar University. Selection of the students has been done with regards to the importance and sensitivity of identity formation and youth. Purposive sampling has been done in order to select the participants. The main technique used to collect data was in-depth reviews. Three in-depth interview techniques proposed by Pathon were employed for data collection. The main structure of data analysis in Grounded Theory is based on three coding methods including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which is also applied to this study. In order to reach reliability in this research, three techniques were used; First, validation through member check in which participants were asked to evaluate the overall findings and express comments regarding their accuracy. In the second technique, i.e. analytical comparison, we have referred to raw data in order to compare and analyze the theory structure with raw data. The third and final technique was auditing, during which writers had contributed in various phases of coding, conceptualizing and extracting the issues.

4. Results and Discussion

Following the extraction of initial, secondary and intermediate concepts, five main issues were identified which includes: 1. Fitness and balance regarding the multiplicities of beauty for men; 2. Sexual orientation and perception of beauty; 3. Simultaneous adherence towards conventional and unconventional sources of defining the norms concerning beauty and attractiveness; 4. Beauty based on lower cost, lesser continuity; 5. Achieving and reinstating power and dignity. From all the extracted concepts and issues, only one foundational or core notion has been obtained as: the continuity of traditional foundations in modern beautifying behavior.

5. Results and Suggestions

The present study shows that the dominant criteria in a patriarchal society would shape men’s attitude toward women’s attractiveness as well as their own; it is also demonstrated how such criteria can direct men to apply prevalent criteria of beauty and attractiveness, actualizing their tendencies toward maintaining power and dignity as a result. According to the participants’ views, a handsome and attractive man possesses softness and strength at the same time. The most important factor which has caused male students pay special attention to their bodies as well as comparing them to the ideal body type, is using visual media in which the ideal male body type are presented through athletes, actors and models. The participants in this study, regardless of being young along with their presence in a modern scientific-cultural setting such as university, have remained faithful to traditional and
conventional beliefs regarding women’s beauty to a considerable extent. Although paying attention to one’s body, especially among men, is a problem escalated from today’s society, yet we may see the fact that men would attempt to reinstate their traditional position (superiority of power and dignity) in the society through such means.

Key words: Beauty, Attractiveness, Men, Power, Dignity

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