(Re)dressing Cinderella: An Exploration of Women’s Engagement with and Experience of Makeover Culture

Esther Jane Pollard
ORCID ID 0000-0002-2063-9739

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2017

School of Social and Political Sciences
Faculty of Arts
The University of Melbourne
Australia
Page left intentionally blank
Abstract

Makeover is the self-imposed and self-directed action of the ideal neoliberal citizen. The body, the most visible expression of self, has become a fundamental tool of social acceptance; and work to normalise and perfect the body seems a logical choice to ensure validity and authenticity in society. The enlightened citizen of makeover culture acts on the demand for improvement directed at citizens through the transformational vehicle of the makeover media.

Through qualitative interviews and media readings, this research engages with contemporary body and gender theory and investigates current media and consumer practice within makeover culture. It investigates the everyday experience of a group of tertiary-educated, middle-class women, surrounded by the hyperperfect images that makeover media produces; a group often excluded from social sciences research for their very ordinariness, and yet a key target demographic for the makeover industry.

Framed by a discussion of the shift from beauty culture to makeover culture, this thesis asks how contemporary makeover culture differs from earlier modalities of beauty culture. It considers the emergence of makeover culture alongside postfeminism, neoliberalism and media culture and suggests that it is the convergence of these three that has allowed makeover culture to thrive. A hypothesis that this move is marked by a continuing focus on the body but is now discerned by three key differences—technology, perfectibility and contemporary femininity—is presented. The thesis argues that makeover culture forms a key site for the production of contemporary womanhood and femininity and explores how these key tenets contribute to a new regulatory frame for women and to experiences of contemporary womanhood as always already implicated in makeover culture.
Declaration

This certifies that

i. the work is the original work of the author alone, towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used, and a full list of references is given,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length exclusive of bibliographies and appendices.

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ________________________________

Esther Jane Pollard
Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time in the making. Eleven years of patient support from my husband, my family, friends and supervisors; three children born; local and international moves; and finally completed at a distance of 16966 kilometres from my home university the University of Melbourne.

Sincere thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr. Maree Pardy, for ongoing moral support and strong feedback, for always believing that I could do it, most importantly when I wasn’t sure myself, and for sticking with me through the good and the bad over such a long period of time. Thank you also to Dr. Kalissa Alexeyeff for stepping in to assist with the final push towards submission and for supporting me through examination and revision, and to Dr. Maila Stivens and Dr. Kim Toffoletti whose involvement early on in the project was both instructive and constructive. For constructive feedback which turned the thesis into something I could be proud of an extra thank you goes to my examiners.

Thank you to my PhD friendship groups, both the real, whose intelligent adult conversations over a shared love of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern food kept me going in the early days of balancing parenting and PhD study, and the virtual through the PhD and Early Career Researcher Parents Facebook group without whom I may never have got this far. Thank you finally, and perhaps most importantly, to my interview participants, who gave their time and their stories generously and openly, without whom this thesis would not exist.

I am grateful for the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship which enabled me to undertake this project.

Please Note: An editor has not been used in the development of the thesis.
## Table of Contents

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... iii

Declaration .................................................................................................................. v

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. vii

Table of Contents ....................................................................................................... ix

Table of Figures ........................................................................................................ xiii

Introduction  Once Upon a Time in Makeover Land ................................................ 1

  The Research............................................................................................................ 2
  The Context of the Study ........................................................................................ 3
  The Three Tenets ..................................................................................................... 9
  The Findings ........................................................................................................... 15
  The Research Approach and Scope of the Study .................................................. 21
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 27

PART I ....................................................................................................................... 30

Chapter 1  Literatures and the Significance of the Research ............................... 31

  Makeover Culture Scholarship............................................................................. 31
  Foucault and the Women Question .................................................................... 33
  The Gendered Body ............................................................................................. 39
  The Fat Body ........................................................................................................... 51
  Where My Research Fits ....................................................................................... 56

Chapter 2  From the Cult of Domesticity to Makeover Culture: A Brief History of
  Makeover Culture from the Pre-Industrial Era to the Present Day .......... 58

  The Cult of Domesticity: Function Over Form ................................................... 61

* * (Re)dressing Cinderella  *
“I think the media has a lot to answer for”: Interview Participants’ Perceptions of the influence of Makeover Media ................................................................. 183
Twenty-First-Century Body Ideals in Makeover Culture: In Which the Ever-Changing Range of Possibilities is Narrowed Exponentially .......................... 190
Making Perfect: Creating and Influencing the Perfect Body .............................................................. 193
“It’s just, oh God… it’s boring”: Interview Participants and the Media’s Ideal Bodies ................................................................................................................... 205
“God, I’d kill to have a body like hers”: Alternative Beauty Ideals and Older Role Models ................................................................................................................... 210
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 215
Chapter 7 I Once Was An Ugly Duckling: Interview Participants Experience of and Attitude to Makeover Practices and Technologies ................................................ 227
Before the Makeover: Looking, Seeing and Planning the Makeover ........... 229
During the Makeover: Experiencing the Makeover Process and its Technologies ............................................................................................................................... 241
After the Makeover: Responding to Makeover .................................................. 266
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 274
Chapter 8 “Curves. Curves, for definite”: Interview Participants Discuss Contemporary Femininity .......................................................................................... 277
Negotiating and Performing the Contemporary Feminine in the Media ....... 279
How has Femininity Changed? ........................................................................... 282
Contemporary Femininity as a Regulatory Force .............................................. 297
Femininity and the Shift from Oppression Of the Body to Oppression Through the Body ............................................................................................................... 299
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 302
Conclusion Happily Ever After: Discussion and Conclusions ......................... 304
Research Outcomes ............................................................................................. 304
My Contribution to Knowledge and Response to Literatures .......................... 307
Areas for Further Research .................................................................................. 310
Closing Thoughts .................................................................................................. 314
Appendices ............................................................................................................... 317
Appendix One: Interview Schedule ..................................................................... 317
Appendix Two: Sample of Data Analysis Table .................................................. 319
Appendix Three: My Body History ...................................................................... 323
Appendix Four: My Answers to Interview Questions ........................................ 328
Television/Video Media Sources ............................................................................. 331
Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 333
Table of Figures

Figure 1 Michelle Bridges on The Biggest Loser Australia. Available from: http://images.essentialbaby.com.au/2013/05/27/4441222/BiggestLoser_wide-620x349.jpg (accessed October 16, 2014) .................................................................7

Figure 2 Orlan. Available From: https://www.interaliamag.org/blog/the-future-of-the-body-with-performance-artist-orlan/ (accessed July 7, 2018) .........................12

Figure 3 Sarina’s Before and After on The Swan. Available from: http://thecampussocialite.com/7-reality-shows-that-never-should-have-aired/ (accessed December 6, 2016) ..............................................................................19


Figure 8 1950s Advertising Poster, Stor-Mor Freezer Magazine Advert, 1956. Available from: http://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/detail/25869/1/Magazine-Advert/Stor-Mor-Fridges/1950s (accessed December 4, 2016) ......................... 73


Figure 10 Michelle Bridges and Steve Willis (AKA The Commando) of The Biggest Loser Australia. Available from:

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
http://resources0.news.com.au/images/2013/05/05/1226635/658112-biggest-loser-trainers.jpg (accessed December 4, 2016) .............................................................. 106


Figure 13 Rachel’s Before and After on The Swan. Available from: http://girlpowerhour.com/unbridled-confidence-the-face-of-plastic-surgery-reality-television-shows/ (accessed December 5, 2016) ........................................................................ 120


Figure 16 Wellness Challenge. Marie Claire Australia Magazine, February 2013. 192

Figure 17 Fashion retailer H&M have used virtual models on their website. Available from: https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/12/on-completely-virtual-bodies/249634/ (accessed June 20, 2018). 195

Figure 18 The Original Lara Croft It is interesting to note that Angelina Jolie, who played Lara Croft in the live action Tomb Raider film, was suggested by interview participant Julie as the epitome of femininity. Available from: http://blogs.theage.com.au/screenplay/archives/006332.html (accessed September 21, 2016) ................................................................................................. 196

Figure 19 Megan Trainor shown at the 2015 American Music Awards is a perfect example of the ‘curvy’ body ideal expressed by interview participants. Available from: http://www.eonline.com/photos/17606/2015-american-music-awards-red-carpet-arrivals/535791 (accessed December 5, 2016) ............................................ 199

Figure 20 French beauty Sophie Marceau, no makeup, no retouching. French Elle magazine, May 2009. ................................................................................................ 202

Figure 21 Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan on the cover in the pre-Photoshop days. Smash Hits Magazine, December 1988. ....................................................... 203

Figure 22 Victoria Beckham on the cover. Marie Claire magazine, December 2012. ................................................................................................................................. 209

Figure 26 Deborah Hutton, “Incredible at 50,” on the cover. Australian Women’s Weekly magazine, January 2012. ........................................................................................................ 221
Figure 27 Mirka Mora. Available from: http://thedesignfiles.net/2014/05/interview-mirka-mora/ (accessed December 5, 2016). ........................................................................................................ 223
Figure 28 Feature on celebrity makeovers. In Style magazine, February 2012. .... 254
Figure 29 Michelle Bridges’ 5 Day Diet Plan. Australian Woman’s Weekly Magazine, January 2012. ........................................................................................................ 257
Figure 30 The Swans Transformed. Available from: http://jezebel.com/5085698/celebrity-swan-is-the-most-depressing-television-program-ever-conceived (accessed December 5, 2016). ........................................ 267
Figure 31 In The Swan the first mirror participants see is on stage, in front of an audience, when their final look is revealed. Available from: http://nypost.com/2013/02/20/rearview-mirror-the-most-sadistic-reality-series-of-the-decade-is-back/ (accessed December 5, 2016). ........................................ 268
Figure 33 Screenshot of Kim Kardashian’s Instagram Page. Available from: https://www.instagram.com/kimkardashian/ (accessed June 21, 2018). ................. 292
Figure 35 Angelina Jolie. Available from: http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/angelina-jolies-poignant-breast-cancer-5419978 (accessed December 5, 2016). ........................................................................................................ 295
No more photos. Surely there are enough. No more shadows of myself thrown by light onto pieces of paper, onto squares of plastic. No more of my eyes, mouths, noses, moods, bad angles. No more yawns, teeth, wrinkles. I suffer from my own multiplicity. Two or three images would have been enough, or four, or five. That would have allowed for a firm idea: This is she. As it is, I’m watery, I ripple, from moment to moment I dissolve into my other selves. Turn the page: you, looking, are newly confused. You know me too well to know me. Or not too well: too much.

—Margaret Atwood, The Tent, 2006
Page left intentionally blank
Introduction

Once Upon a Time in Makeover Land

I sit watching the television one evening shortly after the usual overindulgence of Christmas and the New Year. Puffing and panting sixteen contestants reach the end of a gruelling workout. I am distracted, half watching, feeling guilty at my failure to exercise this week. A debrief digs deep into the contestants’ motivations for coming on the show and putting themselves through this very public makeover process. It is positioned as an opportunity of a lifetime. They will achieve their goals of health, family and even love. The contestants reel off excuses; I know them all too well! They talk about their dreams and fears, their family history, their relationships or lack thereof, their inability to go it alone. I’m talking back to the television now, frustrated that they have got themselves into this situation, frustrated that I am not doing much better myself. The season has just begun. Ahead lie twelve weeks to discover their true selves hidden for so long under all the flesh. Who will stay and who will go, and who will ultimately win the title of Australia’s Biggest Loser.¹

Globally such lifestyle programming dominates not just daytime, but primetime television (Lewis 2008b, 450). This media format, directed largely at women, offers a fantastical and alluring, “sense of instant reinvention,” (Elliot 2008, 19) along with drama, education and emotional appeals. In 2012 The Biggest Loser Australia screened, free-to-air, on Channel Ten in a key evening slot five

¹ The Biggest Loser Australia, Series 7, Episode 3 (first aired January 25, 2012).
nights a week: up to a million viewers\(^2\) tuned in each week to watch their favourites’ progress. The existence and intensity of such programming is a fundamental aspect of a broad cultural imperative to improve body and self that I understand as makeover culture.

Makeover culture is understood and deployed here as the contemporary cultural context and regulatory framework within which bodies and lives are remade through a discourse of continual self-development, reinvention and improvement: from cars to office buildings, and finances to relationships, but focussing, in my research, on women’s bodies. This culture of striving resonates with what others have postulated as the neoliberal project of the self, wherein the body, and indeed life itself presents as a constant project requiring regular reinvention (Elliot 2008, Giddens 1991, 9). More than superficial beauty, this striving for perfection, to be the best that you can be, is a mode of living driven by a search for continued validity and authenticity. I argue for the existence of an enlightened citizen (Miller 2008, Weber 2009) of makeover culture who acts out, in both fantasy and reality, the desire for ongoing improvement that is ubiquitous in the media and society and, as I will illustrate, is directed at women\(^3\) through the transformational vehicle of the makeover television show or magazine makeover.

The Research

The three key aims of this research project are: to understand, through tracing the emergence of makeover culture alongside postfeminism, neoliberalism and media culture, how contemporary makeover culture differs from earlier modalities of beauty culture; to investigate how the regulative power


\(^3\) While the imperative to improve is directed at both men and women, and is not limited to people of a specific class or race, women are the predominant consumers of the makeover industry, for example men accounted for only nine per cent of cosmetic procedures in the United Kingdom in 2015 (BAAPS 2016), and represent fourteen per cent of procedures globally (Beghin and Teshome 2014), and even the quickest glance at the hair and beauty aisles in the supermarket show that the majority of the products there are marketed at women.
of makeover culture, rooted in a demand for women to be the best that they can be, takes hold; and to understand how this regulative power contributes to experiences of contemporary womanhood as always already implicated in makeover culture.

Through a consideration of the narratives of makeover media and of relevant recent academic research, Part I of the thesis builds a trajectory of makeover culture highlighting the shift in the regulation of women’s bodies and femininities between the era of beauty culture and the era of makeover culture. In explaining how women’s experience today differs from earlier generations, it considers that the body practices of beauty culture, while forming part of a gendered disciplinary routine, acted on the body only as part of femininity—even at times independent of femininity which was expressed more strongly through behaviour and dress, or bodily comportment. In contrast in makeover culture, the production and regulation of femininity occur through transformation of the body itself. This change from beauty to makeover culture is discernable through the three principal emphases, or key tenets, of makeover culture: technology, perfectibility, and femininity.

Analysis of selected media texts and a series of one-on-one qualitative interviews in Part II of this thesis foreground the experience of women and their responses to makeover in practice and in media. In reflecting on their experiences, it asks how do the key tenets of makeover produce a new regulatory frame for women’s bodies and behaviours. It seeks to understand how, surrounded by the perfected images which pervade contemporary neoliberal society, and are projected across screens and billboards across the globe, the makeover citizen finds herself implicated in this culture whether she realises it or not.

The Context of the Study

The makeover is not a new phenomenon; alteration, manipulation and decoration in the name of beauty are all part of the history and culture of
women’s bodies. The production of ‘woman’ through the body—such as face
paint, hair decoration, tattooing, ear and body piercing, skin-whitening and
tanning, dieting and exercise—has been key to the stabilisation (and conversely
attempts at destabilisation) of normative bodies, genders and femininities
throughout history. Chapter One introduces literatures relevant to the study of
makeover culture. Chapter Two presents a genealogy of makeover culture; an
account of the paradigm shift, in the last three decades, from the dominance of
the beauty myth (Wolf 1990) within a broader culture to an era of makeover
culture (M. Jones 2008a, McGee 2005) where makeover culture is the broader
culture of, as Miller (2008) and Weber (2009, 12) suggest, a “Makeover Nation.”

This chapter tracks the evolution from the cult of domesticity, or true
womanhood (Welter 1966), in the early industrial era, through the beauty culture
of the twentieth century (Friedan [1963] 1992, Wolf 1990) to the birth of
contemporary makeover culture in the 1990s (Lewis 2008b). It traces a complex
conjunction of social changes: on a political level the extensive ideological shift
from first and second wave feminism to a still contested contemporary feminism
or postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007, 163), wherein women appear to have
increased freedoms and choices but also increased responsibilities; on an
economic level the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial and then to a
neoliberal consumer society (Wolf 1990), with a strong emphasis on the
individual leading to the responsibilisation of the rational neoliberal citizen
including the makeover citizen; and on a cultural level a dramatic increase in the
volume of media and advertising directed specifically at women (Boyce Kay and
Mendes 2014), making women both the subject and the object of programming.
In short, I suggest that this collision of postfeminism, neoliberalism and media

---

* Body marking, both temporary (such as face paint, hair decoration etc.) and permanent (such as tattooing, scarification,
neck rings, ear and lip piercing) has long histories globally. Many such forms of body modification, for example Chinese
foothbinding (Ping 2000) have died out but a number of practices still occur amongst minority groups.

* Gill introduces the concept of postfeminist sensibility as follows, “What makes a postfeminist sensibility quite different
from both pre-feminist constructions of gender and feminist ones, is that it is clearly a response to feminism. In this sense,
postfeminism articulates a distinctively new sensibility. Some writers have understood this as a backlash (Faludi, 1992;
Whelahan, 2000; Williamson, 2003) but one could argue that it is more complex than this, precisely because of its
tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist discourses. Feminist ideas are at the same time articulated and
repudiated, expressed and disavowed. Its constructions of contemporary gender relations are profoundly contradictory.
One the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of ‘can-do’ ‘girl power’, yet on the other hand, their
bodies are powerfully reinscribed as sexual objects.” (Gill 2007, 163).
culture created social and cultural conditions that allowed makeover culture to thrive. I argue for a shift from women’s expected engagement with beauty practices in beauty culture, to their deliberate choice to engage with beauty and the production of contemporary femininities in makeover culture; with contemporary technologies such as control underwear and cosmetic surgery offering continued opportunities to alter and regulate women’s bodies. I propose that 1990/1991 is a watershed moment in the development of makeover culture with a move towards makeover shows on television and the introduction of Adobe’s Photoshop image processing software.

Chapter Three presents the makeover narrative through an analogy with the fairy tale genre and a reading of a variety of media texts. These include television shows The Biggest Loser Australia, Ten Years Younger in Ten Days and The Swan—chosen to showcase the diversity of makeover culture—and a range of women’s magazines collected during the period of the research. While there is no one single narrative, and the specificities of the narrative are affected by class, race, age, and target audience, there is a basic before/during/after linear sequence, a consistent transformational myth with a fairy-tale ending, that runs through all makeover stories. Within the media makeover we see a controlled environment, a holistic approach to the pathologised body, with psychologists, personal trainers, food doctors, image consultants, cosmetic surgeons—all “experts of subjectivity” who “transfigure existential questions about the purpose of life and the meaning of suffering into technical questions of the most effective ways of managing malfunction and improving ‘quality of life’” (Rose 1998, 151). Just looking good is not enough any more. Elias, Scharff and Gill talk about the demand for improvement as “not limited to the physical body but also involves personality, relationships, lifestyle and—crucially—social media use” (2017, 37). This subjectivity, the hopes and desires of the participant, is embodied in the physical and affective changes that they undergo. They hope that these changes will bring them contentment, will make them who they want to be, and that the experts, by changing their bodies, will return them to authentic subjects worthy
of respect. Cinderella is made beautiful, and this means that she is able to escape from an abject life of drudgery, and live happily ever after.

It is important to note that these television shows form part of a constantly evolving media landscape. While *The Biggest Loser* and *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* were both syndicated internationally and achieved some longevity, *The Swan* ran for only two seasons in 2004 and only in the United States. While it was no longer current at the time of my interviews, and is even less so now, it, and its contemporary *Extreme Makeover* have gained a place in popular cultural memory. These shows, first aired prior to the Global Financial Crisis, represent the apex of cosmetic surgical excess. They held a fascination not just for education, but the entire premise of the shows was engineered to create extreme reactions in viewers. One of my interview participants described watching *Extreme Makeover* as “like watching a train wreck”, impossible to tear her eyes away from it. And yet amongst extreme criticism from feminists and cosmetic practitioners alike both shows folded after only a short run. The Global Financial Crisis, as I will discuss later, made these shows seem increasingly superficial, and over time they lost their mainstream slots and are now only shown as repeats on lifestyle channels.

The chapter explores the powerful narratives of media makeovers and argues that they are a critical component of the regulatory force that creates and sustains makeover culture. It shows how these narratives rely on a paradoxical regulatory power similar to that of the fairy tale. As Weber explains, it is paradoxical that, to become the real you, and experience an improved sense of self, you must undergo a process of transformation (2009, 2). There is no irony intended when cosmetic surgeon Dr. Haworth comments in *The Swan* Series 1, Episode 6, first aired on May 10, 2004, that, “Kelly’s features really need to be refined, then her natural beauty will emerge,” but the paradox is evident. Within makeover culture, Kelly’s natural beauty will only emerge following cosmetic cheek and chin implants, a new nose and a high-impact weight-training regime. To lay claim to feminist credentials, makeover is promoted as an empowering choice for the participant, but only if she is willing to submit herself to the
experts’ judgements: “to be empowered, one must fully surrender to experts” (Weber 2009, 4), and then to their scalpels.

The chapter also discusses the narrative of the expert and considers the way in which the ideal is normalised through flesh examples; with writers, presenters and experts shown to embody the programs’ ideals. *The Biggest Loser’s* Michelle Bridges, seen here with two more of the show’s trainers, with her hard, muscular, low-fat body is the inspiration for contestants and viewers of *Australia’s Biggest Loser* as she puts her team through their paces.

Unquestionably female, is she athletic but not feminine, or athletic and feminine? Despite her muscles and ‘hard ass’ persona, she appears primped and Photoshopped in magazines and the Australian national press.

Chapter Four considers makeover culture as a regulatory framework. It discusses the direct and covert ways in which makeover culture works to construct and regulate women through the key constituents of this framework: the three tenets of technology, perfectibility and femininity; and notions of citizenship, class, shame and failure which will be discussed in detail. Citizenship, class, shame and failure inform both the development and the significance of the key tenets. Technology is both a source of and a counter to shame and failure,

* (Re)dressing Cinderella  *
with Photoshopped images influencing women’s perception of what they should and could be, and advances in beauty technologies purporting to alleviate shame by eradicating that of which we should be ashamed. Class and citizenship influence concepts of both perfectibility and of femininity with differing expectations across social groups as well as the perceived possibility of transcending class through performance of appropriate femininities.

As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this thesis argues for the existence of a makeover citizen within neoliberal society. Thought of as an era of self-control and self-surveillance, neoliberalism fabricates a notion of a neoliberal individual or culture of individualism (Elliot 2008) through the devolution of power from the patriarchy to the individual, marking the end of powerful centralised regulatory forces including religion and traditional morality (Foucault [1975] 1991). It creates a responsibilised citizenry accountable for their own health and success. However, Bartky suggests that, in the case of women, “as family and church have declined in importance as the central producers and regulators of “femininity,” the fashion-beauty complex has grown” (Bartky 1990, 39). As the regulation of normative female behaviour through a direct patriarchal gaze (J. Berger 1972, Mulvey [1975] 1989) gave way to active self-governance and an “emphasis upon empowerment and taking control that can be seen in talk shows, advertising and makeover shows” (Gill 2007, 153) the fashion-beauty complex worked insidiously to convince women that they chose to be beautiful. As “good citizens” of makeover culture (M. Jones 2008a, 1) women are now required to choose self-care and to constantly remake themselves to achieve their full potential. Despite postfeminist claims for agency this thesis argues that women continue to be subject to disciplinary regimes (Foucault [1975] 1991) created from a network of media, society and peer interactions, what Brown has termed an “interpellated citizenry” (Brown 2003).

Chapter Five, which outlines my methodology and methods, is discussed later in this chapter.
The Three Tenets

I have proposed three tenets that differentiate makeover culture from earlier beauty cultures—Technology, perfectibility and femininity. These tenets are visible in makeover articles in magazines and on makeover television. They both produce and are produced by makeover culture. Such terms are complex and I will introduce the debates and how I use the terms below.

Technology

"Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy" (Postman 1993, xii).

Technology makes our lives easier, but it has long been feared. Postman tells the story of Thamus, from Plato’s Phaedrus, who feared that the introduction of the technology of writing would make students ignorant as they would no longer have to commit their learning to memory (1993, 8-9). Now with the ability to ‘ask Google’ we don’t even need to write things down. Technology changes both life and language at a fundamental level,

New things require new words. But new things also modify old words, words that have deep-rooted meanings. The telegraph and the penny press changed what we once meant by “information.” Television changes what we once meant by the terms “political debate,” “news,” and “public opinion.” The computer changes “information” once again [...] And this is what Thamus wishes to teach us—that technology imperiously commandeers our most important terminology. It redefines “freedom,” “truth,” “intelligence,” “fact,” “wisdom,” “memory,” “history”—all the words we live by. (Postman 1993, 8-9)

Humanists such as Postman feared technological advances not just for robots commandeering our jobs, which did come to pass, but also for their negative social impact. He suggests that “the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living” (Postman 1993, xii). And it is true that technology has altered our social interactions in many ways, not always for the good.

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
Not everyone was negative about technology. Taking an anti-humanist stance Foucault was amongst those who saw possibilities for advancement. He uses the word technology to refer not only to technological artefacts, but also to the ways “in which modern social and political systems control, supervise, and manipulate populations as well as individuals” (Behrens 2013, 55). Foucault outlines four major types of technologies, those of production, those of sign systems, those of power and those of the self (1988, 18). As Gerrie summarises, “technology is not simply an ethically neutral set of artefacts by which we exercise power over nature, but also always a set of structured forms of action by which we also inevitably exercise power over ourselves” (2003, 3). In makeover culture these technologies come together to produce the women’s bodies that we see in magazines and on television shows.

In Chapter Four I discuss makeover culture as a regulatory force or technology of power that controls women’s lives, bodies and choices in line with Foucault’s use of the term technology “to describe exertions of power that are based less on overt violence than on the subtle manipulation of human behaviour - in which bodies are prodded in certain directions, molded according to particular norms” (Behrens 2013, 84). Technologies of power, those forces which govern the body and induce the “conduct of conduct” (Gordon 1991), include the media, which acts as both technological artefact and technology of power/self in makeover culture, influencing women’s decisions around their bodies. This power, Foucault argues, “is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power” (Foucault 2003, 29). The technology of power is not a thing, but the relationships between people.

In the second half of the thesis I will focus on the technological artefacts key to makeover culture. I propose that the advances in such technologies as

* “As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these “technologies,” each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” (Foucault 1988, 18)
television and cosmetic surgery form a key difference between makeover and beauty cultures. My media analysis and interview results show how such advances have brought about direct changes to the body itself: from clothing technologies like Lycra and heat regulating fabrics, to cosmetic surgical procedures such as Botox injections. However it is not always that the technological artefacts themselves have changed—indeed lipstick, tight clothing, makeup and hair dyes have been part of earlier beauty cultures—but the way in which they are used, received and normalised. That is to say, the way in which they have become instruments of the technology of the self, which insists that women must better themselves.

**Perfectibility**

“Beauty is equated with a sense of perfection” (Coleman and Moreno Figueroa 2010, 359).

My early thinking around perfectibility was triggered when researching Japan for my MA dissertation. In her book about the Japanese Kimono Liza Dalby compared the physical effect of such garments with Western dress, she wrote

> The body is almost infinitely malleable where clothing is concerned. Given enough time and experience with a garment, our bodies adapt themselves to its contours and familiar pressures. My great-grandmother grew accustomed to corsets, my grandmother became familiar with brassieres, my mother got used to girdles. Eventually our bodies come to expect the feel of our clothes, shoes, or hats, and to miss that constriction if it is absent. (Dalby 1993, 339)

I came to consider that while the malleability of the body through clothing was not new, a new malleability, that of the body itself, occurs in the era of cosmetic surgery where the body is again “almost infinitely malleable” and therefore potentially perfectible.

There are those, such as performance artist Orlan, who return to aesthetic surgery again and again in order to achieve their vision. Orlan’s idea of
perfection, while not conventional, is brought closer by each televised surgery she undergoes. Her carnal art radically challenges beauty ideals.


Perfectibility, or the notion of “the perfect” (McRobbie 2015) is the perceived capacity of the body, or the image of the body to be perfected. It is in the financial interest of the beauty industry to convince us that we are perfectible and to encourage us that perfection is a desirable goal. In particular “the cosmetic surgery industry needs us to be distressed about our aesthetically inadequate bodies and works to develop this distress – creating surgical subjectivity at the same time as it tries to control the less manageable, profitable or normative consequences of this subjectivity” (Heyes 2009, 88).
Coleman and Moreno Figueroa suggest that, “beauty is equated with a sense of perfection” and “that the girls and women experience beauty as temporal processes of displacement to the past and of deferral to the future” (2010, 359). That is to say that beauty or perfection are part of the “becoming” (M. Jones 2008a) of makeover culture, and that what we aspire to is always just out of reach. While we believe we may be perfectible, we can never be perfect. Coleman and Morena Figueroa found that for their participants the imagined post-surgery future, or for younger participants after their bodies finished growing, was one where they anticipated that what they see as wrong with their bodies “just goes away” (2010, 367).

In Chapter Six I discuss the digitally perfected images presented by the media and their place in a makeover culture where the perfectibility of the image and therefore of the body encourages women to improve themselves. My interview participants can all identify what they consider to be perfect features and ideal bodies. While the notion of a perfect or ideal body is not specific to makeover culture, it was not a potential outcome of beauty culture. While bodily improvement was always required of women, the belief in the literal perfectibility of the body comes with the advances in technology of the last few decades. The fact that the body is now conceived as perfectible, whether in line with some media ideal, or in line with a personal interpretation of perfection, drives women towards achieving it.

**Femininity**

“Femininity always demands more” (Brownmiller 1984, 15).

As I discuss in detail in Chapter Eight femininity is not stable or static but ever evolving. In medieval and early modern Europe femininity and beauty were linked not so much to physical appearance but to morality. They were, “tied to the twin notions of morality and moderation. The truest beauty was found in the ideal life of the virgin, with the wife who let her husband control her sexuality
also finding begrudged acceptance” (Lowe 1994, 28). That is not to say that physical appearance was not a consideration, since “outward appearance was a reflection of the inner self and, as such, needed to be maintained properly” (Lowe 1994, 28). Chapter Two describes the transition of the focus of femininity from morality, to domesticity, to behaviour and appearance to the body itself.

At any given point in history, femininity is the performance of what it means socially—whether through behaviour, presentation or physical appearance—to be recognised as appropriately female. It is through the “stylized repetition of acts through time” (Butler 1988, 521), in line with social expectations, that a person is considered feminine. Butler suggests that we “consider that a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a “natural sex” or a “real woman” or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another” ([1990] 2006, 191). She challenges the binary as a natural occurrence and claims femininity to be entirely socially constructed, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Eight. This binary concept of woman as feminine and man as masculine is rejected by Felski as a patriarchal construct, “the very idea of a single, common femaleness is a metaphysical illusion produced by a phallocentric culture [and that] all such visions of woman are contaminated by male-defined notions of the truth of femininity. […] Woman is always a metaphor, dense with sedimented meanings” (Felski 2000, 182).

The term “sedimentation,” used by both authors, suggests that the concept woman or feminine is built up of layers of social etiquette and expectations that have cemented particular images in our imaginations over time. In contrast there are those who argue that femininity is biologically grounded (Etcoff 2000, Morris 2005, Morris 2005)—a natural set of behaviours for those born with a pair of X chromosomes—a concept that struggles to explain changes in femininity over time. Biological differences are also challenged because, “it is (quite obviously) not that women’s bodies are messy, unruly and out of control and that
disciplinary technologies of repression and femininity have to be imposed upon them, and that men’s bodies are neat, clean and controlled and thus warrant no intervention; but rather these are the body’s discourses, their representations” (Holliday and Hassard 2001, 6, emphasis in original). It is clear that the bodies themselves do not have these characteristics; these characteristics are imposed on them by society.

Anti-femininity rhetoric was strong amongst radical second wave feminists who considered the requirement to be feminine to be part of the patriarchal concept of ideal womanhood and beauty holding women back, and that “the numerous exploitations of the fashion-beauty complex must be exposed at every opportunity and its idiotic image-mongering held up to a ridicule so relentless that that incorporation into the self on which it depends will become increasingly untenable” (Bartky 1990, 43). Brownmiller argues that “femininity always demands more” (1984, 15) of women, yet it was not just men who pressured women to aspire to femininity, but other women as well (Hollows 2000, 15).

However with the shift to postfeminism and choice based feminisms, as I will discuss in the next chapter, femininity has once again become an acceptable choice. Contemporary understandings of femininity can be seen clearly in women’s magazines and on makeover television shows. Makeover show participants openly aspire to femininity and are made over to increase their femininity as I will discuss in Chapter Eight. My interview participants felt this conflict between second wave feminist rejection of femininity, and their own appreciation of or desire for a femininity made available to them through contemporary modes of feminism. As such they didn’t recognise it as a patriarchal construct, but erred towards a biological explanation.

The Findings

Weaving together interview participants’ responses, analysis of media texts and contemporary theories around makeover culture, Part II of this thesis
presents an analysis of my primary research. The women I interviewed spoke candidly of their experiences within makeover culture. They reflected on their bodies and their desire for, or resistance to, change, as well as their reactions, including pleasure and shame, to makeover media in magazines and on television. My analysis considers the aptness of the three key tenets that differentiate contemporary body makeover from earlier modalities of beauty culture and asks how they contribute to women’s experience of contemporary makeover culture and the regulation of women’s bodies. The themes of technology and perfectibility are addressed throughout Chapter Six and Chapter Seven with Chapter Six presenting interview participants’ experiences of makeover media consumption and of the images in makeover media and Chapter Seven presenting their experiences of makeover practice. Chapter Eight addresses the theme of Femininity.

Discussions about how interview participants engaged with makeover media, presented in Chapter Six, informed my understanding of the extensive reach of makeover culture and the technologies of makeover media. I show that all interview participants have access to and sometimes consume makeover media and argue that they are deeply implicated in makeover culture, even as they are resistant to it.

In makeover media shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* and *The Swan* overt discussion of body ideals, body image and an open acknowledgement of the manipulation of both body images and actual flesh bodies through the use of surgery, clothing and exercise form part of a normative perfectibility project. The body is viewed as plastic, to be moulded to the perfect form whether digitally or physically. In magazines and newspapers, the use of Photoshop to perfect print images of already beautiful bodies is taken for granted. All interview participants were conscious of Photoshop and believed that they understood the extent of it (“it’s everywhere”) and were not duped by it, a claim that I question in my analysis. Their responses to questions about the bodies they encounter through the media provided important data for my understanding of the perfectibility of the body and its images.
I have drawn a parallel between the production of body norms through the art and technology of image manipulation in the media and the making over of physical bodies to fit the feminine norms produced. In her documentary *Wet Dreams and False Images*, released January 17, 2004, Jesse Epstein discusses media promotion of the worship and normalisation of “false” Photoshopped images, which encourage unachievable body ideals and help to create and sustain makeover culture. We see how the bodies created by soft technologies of makeover such as Photoshop carry through to the flesh changing body work within the hard technologies of makeover culture such as cosmetic surgery.

I contend that makeover culture continues to stretch the malleability of the body in both its computer-generated and material forms. Body imaging and body imagining technologies create the possible/impossible body of makeover culture, and the potential “could” body becomes the necessary “should” body through the weight of cultural expectation and demand. Valentine suggests a negative effect on women’s lives when, “idealized images of female bodily perfection and messages of perfectibility exercise control over women’s lives by constructing a self that is distorted and divided against itself, self-policing and self-destructive” (1994, 113). The body is perfectible, but by no means perfect, it is its perfectibility, or presumed ability to be perfected, that regulates, even though the point of perfection can never be achieved, causing distress for women.

Technology is central to the discussion of the experience of makeover practice, both in the lives of interview participants and in makeover media, as I discuss in Chapter Seven. While my use of the word technology throughout this thesis refers predominantly to tools or artefacts, as I discussed in the three tenets section above Foucault also applies the words technology, technique and techne for techniques used to manage people (technologies of power), and the tools we use to manage ourselves (technologies of the self) (Foucault 1988, 18).

Makeover culture technology encompasses widespread and easily available technologies that make change appear easy, from visualisation technologies and stomach-flattening knickers to diet shakes, advanced makeup formulas and cosmetic surgery. Compared with the limits of earlier low-tech beauty techniques
and the previous inaccessibility of surgical options, the easy accessibility of such
technologies supports the imperative for change—she can, and therefore she
should. We see these technologies at work in makeover television shows and
magazines where they are promoted and normalised. For example in the *The
Biggest Loser* house we see high-tech surveillance equipment policing contestants
every move, while cosmetic surgery transformation programs such as *The Swan*
and *Extreme Makeover* promote high-tech products and surgical interventions.
Both use visualisation technologies to show participants variable potential
futures, both the imagined result of surgery and the likely outcome if they ignore
the expert’s recommendations. As interview participant, Judith, said, “what has
been seen, can’t be unseen.” Once the makeover participant has been shown
what could be, that is to say the perfectibility of her body, she is shamed if she
resists the drive for perfection. Chapter Seven explores how these technologies
have therefore become powerful tools for the regulation of women’s bodies.

I suggest that advances in makeover related technologies and practices, as
diverse as clothing technologies like Lycra, medical technologies like Botox and
communications technologies such as online marketing have accelerated the shift
from the domesticity of the corseted woman of the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, to the consumer habits of the contemporary woman. In addition, I
argue that the increasing normalisation and legitimisation of modern makeover
technologies within tropes of postfeminist and third wave feminist culture are
produced by and produce new ways of regulating the female body.

I spoke with interview participants about their own makeovers and those
of their peers. They shared their stories of makeover, and I considered how they
experienced key narrative elements of makeover media such as the reveal and
how their real-life makeover experiences compared with media makeovers. I
looked at how the experience of makeover, whether from the point of view of
participants on television or the personal story of one of my interview
participants, is mediated by the technologies of makeover practice. Some were
hopeful, and others were fearful in the face of technology. I came across a high
level of resistance to invasive body transformation but less invasive technologies were sometimes welcomed.

In Chapter Eight, the third key tenet of makeover culture, I discuss femininity as a product of makeover culture, sold through television and magazine content and advertising, and used to sell thousands of products from lipstick to feminising makeover practices such as breast enlargements. Throughout the media makeover, femininity is presented as a key aim for female participants, for example, discussing the show’s participants in Series 1, Episode 6 *The Swan*’s surgeon Dr. Haworth says of Kelly’s rhinoplasty “the overall goal being to bring some feminine dimensionality into her face.” Dawn, it is recommended, in Series 1, Episode 7 will have dental work to “feminise her smile.” Greg, *The Swan*’s personal trainer says of Sarina’s reveal in Series 1, Episode 6, “when I saw Sarina walk in I thought she really looked feminine and beautiful.” Post makeover this hyperfeminised, glamorous woman—leggy, curvy, full-breasted, dressed up and made up—is posed for the camera in the most flattering way.

Figure 3 Sarina’s Before and After on *The Swan*. Available from: http://thecampussocialite.com/7-reality-shows-that-never-should-have-airred/ (accessed December 6, 2016).
Makeover media does more than disseminate images of idealised femininity, it defines and produces contemporary femininity through promotion of these stereotypical bodies. However after conversations with my interview participants, who felt that femininity was not a requirement of contemporary womanhood—just one possible mode amongst a range of options—I was left to wonder who is buying?

I present makeover culture’s new mode(s) of femininity, in particular the dominant message from my younger interview participants about the link between femininity and a curvy body shape. I argue that, where in beauty culture femininity was produced through the effect of external accoutrements and behaviours applied to the body, in makeover culture the core site for the production of the intensified femininity of the makeover citizen is the body itself. Through discussions with interview participants, I came to understand what normative contemporary femininity meant to them, and how it related to the images presented by makeover media. Although culturally femininity continues to be driven by norms of heterosexuality, we now see an overt narrative of femininity for its own sake, and as one of a range of possible versions of womanhood, with the attraction of a mate relegated to a sub-text.

As I talked to interview participants about the made over bodies presented to them, and, trying to resist prompting, waited for them to pronounce them, as I had seen them myself, as inherently feminine, I identified a strong generational shift in definitions of femininity. Older participants (over forty), who grew up in an era of beauty culture, made no link between the body and femininity, even denied that there was a link suggesting that femininity was not a body, but a performance. Yet, despite claims for multiple contiguous contemporary femininities (Gill and Scharff 2011) I found a clear emphasis on the curvy body from my younger (under forty) interview participants. I was fascinated by the change, in just one generation of women, from comparable social backgrounds.

---

7 Out of my seventeen participants seven were under forty, four were in their forties, and six were over fifty so splitting into ‘older’ and ‘younger’ groups at age forty split the group worked quite well. Although I myself turned forty towards the end of the project, I was in my mid thirties when I carried out the first interviews and I found that I identified most readily with the younger group.
and with similar education, from a definition of femininity as performance and
behaviour, to a definition of femininity as a bodily quality. This evidence supports
my analysis of recent writing on neoliberal and ‘new’ femininities, such as Gill’s
suggestion that, “a post-feminist sensibility includes the notion that femininity is
increasingly figured as a bodily property” (2011, 4). Alternative acceptable modes
of womanhood, such as sporty, were not considered to be feminine and some
participants aspired to them, in preference to femininity.

The Research Approach and Scope of the Study

My research into makeover culture arose from an interest in contemporary
womanhood; something upon which makeover culture, as a key cultural force,
has a striking effect. A study of contemporary womanhood suggested a
consideration of gender and feminist methodologies that led me to the
qualitative interviews that would form my “construction site of knowledge”
(Kvale 2007, 21). I felt that interviewing women about makeover culture would be
most effectively carried out alongside a review of the makeover media that I
expected them to consume and thus a multi-method empirical enquiry was
conceived. If, as I suggest, makeover culture is the vehicle which produces and
regulates contemporary femininity and a key site for the performance and
stabilisation of gender, then I wanted to investigate how women’s bodies are
central to makeover culture.

Earlier analysis of makeover and cosmetic surgery was, “primarily through
recourse to European social and feminist theories” (Elliot 2008, 30), which Elliot
finds, “surprising because European social theory, at least in the traditions of
thought of post-structuralism and post-feminism, was largely at odds with the
images of plastic perfection found in cosmetic surgical culture” (2008, 30). He
suggests that narratives of “cosmetic surgery addicts caught up in and subject to
negotiated discourses, mutilated bodies, policed identities and intertextual
pathologies” (2008, 30) do not take into account postfeminist arguments for
agency, singling out Davis (1995) as an exception whose work assigns her
interview participants full agency. This apparent conflict surrounding feminist research into cosmetic surgery is symptomatic of the shift away from second wave feminist interpretations into a period of negotiation of the terms of contemporary feminisms and postfeminisms. My own work suggests that while interview participants’ experiences of makeover do not align with the negative terms of mutilation and pathology utilised in much feminist research on the subject they are undoubtedly influenced by an external, but largely obscured, disciplinary control “the visibility of which is only found in the obedience and submission of those on who it is silently exercised” (Foucault 2006, 22), as they consume makeover media and internalise its imperative to change themselves.

Postmodern feminist research differs from earlier feminist research in that while second wave feminist research was aligned with male-centred positivist philosophy in its epistemology and methodology and was preoccupied with finding the one truth about women, “feminist post-modernists reject the notion of one privileged standpoint and challenge the belief that women’s experiences and identities are determined only by gender” (Allen and Baber 1992, 4). While postmodern feminist research practice is not dissimilar to other forms of research, it places women at the centre, asking questions which aim to legitimate women’s experiences and knowledge whether ordinary or extraordinary (Campbell and Wasco 2000, 775). With no one specific epistemological or ontological stance (Ramazanoglu 2002) it denies the possibility of objective research recognising that the researcher and the researched are both situated within the culture, either permanently or temporarily, and that both are affected by their own position of cultural, sexual and political specificity (Grosz 1994). It avoids over generalisation favouring in-depth qualitative research on the specific phenomenon being studied. Grounded in women’s experience (Ramazanoglu 2002) findings are localised and specific, and evidenced by primary research practice. My own research is influenced by this desire to give voice to my interview participants’ individual stories, considering the power/discipline regimes that affect them.
However, Allen and Baber caution that, “the danger of uncritically adopting feminist postmodernism is that as feminists uncover their differences, they risk sliding toward a depoliticized relativism where every viewpoint becomes equally valid and true” (Allen and Baber 1992, 6). Obviously within the scope of PhD studies some generalisation is required, but I worked to keep at front of mind the limitations of my project and aimed to keep generalisations relevant to my specific interview cohort, considering the fact that other groups might respond very differently to the same questions. In terms of my project this led to a narrow but deep understanding of my specific interview participants.

My aim was to produce an understanding of how interview participants explain or present their experiences of makeover culture. In sharing their experiences my interview participants also contributed to my understanding of my own experiences. As they talked about the conflict between the pleasure they took in reading women’s magazines and their fear that it was a waste of time I could not help but note how similar many of their experiences were to my own, but that is not to say that those experiences apply to all women, merely this particular subset of women amongst whom I counted myself. The encouragement of the inclusion of one’s own relationship to the phenomenon being studied, rather than the insistence on bracketing out personal “world views” for fear of bias (Grbich 2011, 86), and the encouragement of self-reflection and the relation of one’s own subject position to others involved in the project was important as I considered myself to be conducting research and creating knowledge from a position that I shared with my research participants, always already implicated in makeover culture (M. Jones 2008a).

We live in an era of reflexive modernity (Giddens 1991), where individuals are caught up in the pursuit of constant, self-imposed, open-ended projects of self-improvement, described by Jones as “a state where becoming is more desirable than being” (2008a, 12), and it is the omnipresence of the media that promotes this state and makes it impossible to be outside of the “ubiquitous cultural phenomenon” (Lewis 2008a, 1) that is makeover culture. Thus I began with a period of media analysis (2008-2009). I knew my interview participants to
be immersed in the fast flowing world of media culture, and to be regularly exposed to makeover content. As Jones explains, we cannot not be implicated in cosmetic surgical culture (or in my case makeover culture) whether active participants or passive or critical observers (2008a). This is the space that myself, and my interview participants found ourselves in, surrounded by and participating in makeover culture whether consciously by watching makeover television, or less obviously by reading celebrity histories in magazines or buying face creams at the beauty counter.

Within makeover culture we are regulated through a network of dispersed and often disconnected influences that are so normalised we barely notice them. My participants experienced this, or rather didn’t experience this, through media and peer interactions, but they were unclear about how they affected them. While some made the connection between media or peers and their desire to change their bodies, most insisted that any changes they made were self-directed, and for themselves rather than for others. It is clear that makeover culture exists independently of women, even though it influences them, and this is why they are frequently unaware that the influence is so strong, that they are in fact, inside it at all times. This also applies to the normalisation of standards and practices that previously would have been considered unacceptable.

Within the new moral code of makeover culture, the dissemination of messages through popular media provides a form of governance and a source of information that encourages viewers/readers to take care of their bodies and health and strive to be better citizens of makeover culture. I considered these narratives of transformation within makeover media, the ones that argue that looking better, more youthful, less tired, is good for one’s career, life and relationships and therefore, especially in difficult times, position work on the body as a rational, entrepreneurial action.
I chose Australian, US and UK television show *The Biggest Loser,* North American television show *The Swan* and UK television show *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days,* all available on television or DVD during the research period, and a selection of Australian and UK women’s magazines that featured highly in the ratings. To link interviews and the media analysis as closely as possible I collected a second set of magazines based on those that participants told me they had read (2012/2013) and reviewed them in the light of our discussions.

By the time I began starting my participant interviews towards the end of my second year (2009) I had been submerged in makeover media for over twelve months and had developed decided opinions about the bodies and imperatives put forward by the makeover media, particularly with regards to what I perceived as feminine imagery and narratives of transformation and social climbing. I felt I had a fair understanding of what my participants would be coming into contact with and had even made assumptions about how they might react to it. I undertook seventeen face-to-face qualitative interviews. My interview participants entered into the process enthusiastically and knowledgably. They were women with whom I had a great deal in common, white, middle-class, tertiary educated; we met as equals. This deliberate commonality between participants was key to my ability to look deeply within my target group and to achieve meaningful results from a moderate sample within a multi-method project. Common ground enabled us to quickly build rapport, from setting up the interviews through to them taking place. They expressed an interest in my project and talked intelligently not only of makeover, but of politics, art and the media—a great pleasure for me when set against the daily grind of study and parenting a small baby. As Skeggs, Thumin and Wood found when interviewing a

---

8 *The Biggest Loser Australia* which has been running on Channel Ten since February 2006 focuses primarily on diet, fitness and lifestyle and is unusual amongst makeover shows in that both men and women are represented equally. The winner is the one who loses the highest percentage of their starting weight.

9 US show *The Swan* ran for two seasons in 2004. It puts women through a program of invasive cosmetic surgery, diets and exercise routines and then pits them against each other in a beauty pageant format. All of the participants are women.

10 *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* began on UK television in April 2009. Participants are offered smaller cosmetic procedures and non-invasive procedures such as skin peels and cosmetic dentistry, they are taught to dress and have their hair done. The emphasis is on retaining and/or regaining youth. The makeover is judged a success if the public surveyed guesses the participant’s age 10 years younger at the end than they did at the beginning.

group of middle class women, they were very comfortable being interviewed “at ease with their shared status” (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008, 9). They were located across Melbourne, from Port Melbourne where I lived, to Carlton near the university campus, to Springvale; all affluent areas with good transport links to the CBD and pleasant local coffee shops where many interviews were held. I found that many of my participants did share my assumptions about makeover culture, although not all. Like me many enjoyed watching makeover television, but felt a degree of shame at doing so. They also made assumptions of their own, as Skeggs, Thumin and Wood suggested, “our middle-class participants also often assumed that the researchers would share with them the cultural attitude of derision towards ‘reality’ television” (2008, 9) and they confided and laughed and shared in-jokes.

My interview participants represented a narrow section of society when considering their class, relative wealth and educational status, and to interview women from a different class to my own, would be to consider them to be knowable through their appearance and behaviour (Lawler 2005, 442). I chose to work within a group that I felt I did know, rightly or wrongly and did so understanding that my results would therefore not be generalizable across race and class. The risk of reducing the other’s experience through your own viewpoint is high when researching as an outsider, and requires a specific set of skills, and I would argue, a certain personality. Skeggs, Thumin and Wood (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008, Skeggs and Wood 2012), working across different class groups, but with women closer in age than my own sample, explored the difficulties in achieving valid results from groups where you are the outsider, they found that their middle class participants opened up to them, where, at times, their working class participants questioned the value of their research. They quote one participant saying, “What you want to watch us watching TV and you’re being paid for it?” (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008, 12). I have used their work however when considering how my interview participants’ responses might differ from other groups. Instead of class I focussed on how the age of my interview participants affected their responses.
My analysis provides an informative review of how makeover media is received by the women I interviewed and how they experience makeover culture and its technologies, its femininities and its perfected body images through their consumption of media and their own body projects. I analysed interviewees’ experiences of makeover specifically through the ways that they intersected with magazine and television narratives.

The applied, practical approach to my work extended on the largely theoretical research of the 1980s and 1990s on the body and its governance by postmodern and cultural theorists (Foucault [1975] 1991, Giddens 1991, Rose 2001), and the subsequent feminist and postfeminist analyses of their theories (Bartky 1997, Bordo 1999, Heyes 2007a) as discussed above. I sought to understand more about the regulatory framework of makeover culture that my interview participants found themselves within, knowingly or unknowingly. I delved into motivations for, reactions to and experiences of makeover culture and discovered narratives of blame and shame added to the postfeminist claims for agency, which indicated that similar regimes of regulation are still at work today. I learnt about the women in my study, but equally about my own position as implicated in makeover culture and the field I was researching.

Conclusion

Makeover media presents a neoliberal self-body plagued by an underlying instability and a push towards perfectibility and femininity. This body can be made—in two senses of the word - both forced (regulated) and created—to meet the norms prescribed through the use of technology. I suggest that because it can, then under the neoliberal imperative it should be improved. However, the woman’s body is always in progress (M. Jones 2008a) and never arrives at this ideal and therefore requires on-going intervention.

In this thesis I argue that three key tenets differentiate makeover culture from beauty culture: the availability of technologies including the media and other tools of makeover that make perfection possible; the strong regulative
power of perfectibility which demands you ‘be the best you can be’ in an era when perfectibility is increasingly theoretically possible, if indefinable; and a contemporary mode of femininity produced through the curvy body.

Modern technologies support our attempts to make our bodies-selves over into the perfect, feminine images that we are bombarded with daily in magazines and on television. We consume makeup, cosmetic surgery, expensive gym and beauty equipment; all today considered standard technologies in the creation of the beautiful self. I argue that through the normalisation of media and medical technologies, and of makeover in every day life, makeover media extends and deepens the regulative power of makeover culture. In the words of contemporary singer-songwriter Lily Allen from her 2009 song “The Fear”, “I am a weapon of massive consumption/And it’s not my fault it’s how I’m programmed to function” (2009). Allen’s words border on Foucauldian, suggesting that we are “programmed” or regulated by an external authority. This concept of compulsory consumption12 (Cronin 2000, 273), or compulsive consumerism (Elliot 2008, 215), is integral to neoliberal society and this thesis argues that this regulative power is experienced through the model of the ideal makeover citizen, subject—despite postfeminist claims for agency—to a Foucauldian disciplinary system and a consumption imperative created through a network of media, society and peer interactions.

The message rings clear in popular culture: consume or be consumed. For women this switch from being an object of consumption, to being an agent of consumption has brought with it conflicting problems. As Allen goes on to tell us, “Life’s about film stars and less about mothers/It’s all about fast cars and cussing each other/But it doesn’t matter ‘cause I’m packing plastic/And that’s what makes my life so fucking fantastic”13 (2009).

12 Cronin explains that, “Women and Western consumerism have long had an ambiguous relation in which women have been seen as both the subject and object of consumerism, both agents and a commodified currency in capitalist exchange.” (Cronin 2000, 273). I argue that the balance is shifting towards subject and away from object, when it comes to the makeover media participant – she is both subject and object of the makeover show.

13 Allen refers to carrying credit cards as “packing plastic”, a play on the American term packing heat, meaning to carry a gun.
Back in *The Biggest Loser* house, at the first weigh in of the competition the discussion becomes heated. Participants are warned that they will need to earn respect, to earn love, to earn the right to be considered worthy through work on the body—you get what you deserve, is the implication (*The Biggest Loser Australia* Series 7, Episode 2). According to Michelle Bridges, fitness trainer on *The Biggest Loser Australia* and owner of the multi-million dollar makeover business *Twelve Week Body Transformation*, life is all about being ‘the best version of yourself’. For now, the television shows continue. In the penultimate episode of *The Biggest Loser Australia 2012*, first aired on May 6, 2012, we see the contestants new belief in the worth and authenticity, of their made over selves, when Margie, who goes on to win the show, says, “I am worthy, worthy of love, this is my life and I am going to OWN it!”


---

14 Michelle Bridges, personal trainer on *The Biggest Loser Australia* runs an online 12 Week Body Transformation program at www.12wbt.com. “Be the best version of yourself” is one of her catchphrases.
PART I

Makeover Culture has a long and complex genesis, and the first half of this thesis develops an understanding of its origins and contemporary iterations. Grounding makeover culture in history and in current literatures on the topic forms the basis for interpreting the data in the second half of the thesis, where I discuss the findings from my interviews and media analysis in relation to contemporary makeover and its regulation of women’s bodies.

This first part of the thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter One discusses important literatures in relation to makeover culture. Chapter Two outlines the socio-historical context within which makeover culture has developed. Chapter Three introduces the makeover narrative within makeover media. Chapter Four locates makeover culture within a framework of regulation and citizenship. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the methodology and methods that have influenced my primary research.
Chapter 1

* Literatures and the Significance of the Research *

Makeover Culture Scholarship

As an academic area of study makeover culture is a relative newcomer to the social and cultural studies scenes. When I began my research in 2007, it was still a new area of study. In ten years it has grown into a flourishing area of research with undeniable media and personal appeal. Almost all writing on the subjects of makeover television (Heller 2007, Weber 2009), cosmetic surgery (Blum 2005, Davis 1995, Elliot 2008, Heyes 2007a, M. Jones 2008a, Pitts-Taylor 2007) and reality television (Ouellette and Hay 2008, Pozner 2010) has been published in the last twenty years, the majority in the last ten. Kathryn Fraser recollects that her spell checker didn’t even recognise the word makeover when she first started writing about makeover in the mid-1990s (2007, 179).

The earliest academic use of the term makeover culture that I have found is McGee’s writing about self-help culture thirteen years ago (2005). She introduced the concept of makeover culture as a broad category encompassing social aspects like drug rehabilitation and neighbourhood regeneration as well as personal aesthetic projects. Similarly Miller (2008) discusses makeover in the contexts of religion and psycho-pharmacology. Jones takes a narrower focus in her research into cosmetic surgery practices (2008a). She suggests that cosmetic surgical culture is also part of a broader makeover culture and that whether we go under the knife or not, we are, always and unavoidably, surrounded by and
implicated in this culture just by reading celebrity histories in magazines or buying face creams at the beauty counter, or even catching a glimpse of an advert on a passing train. Heyes suggests that, “Makeover culture has become a major fetish in western cultures” (Heyes 2007b, 20). Likewise, Weber (2009, 7), who viewed over 2500 hours of television makeovers when writing her book Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship and Celebrity, is supported by Jones (2008a) and McGee (2005) when she situates the television makeover within the “larger makeover culture:” what Miller (2008) and Weber (2009) call “Makeover Nation.”

This notion of “makeover nation” ties in with the concept of a makeover citizen as I discuss further in Chapter Four. The makeover nation, although nominally in Miller’s terms based on the United States, is not geographically bounded, and its citizens are found across the world regardless of state and country lines. Its spread matches the spread of neoliberalism from which it takes its core direction to ‘be the best that you can be’. This encourages women to self-manage to conform to the neoliberal ideal; the predictable, regimented, disciplined body (Frank 1991).

Under neoliberalism the body is presented as both the site, and the effect of regulation—regulation which I argue, now falls under the regulatory framework of makeover culture. Although McGee suggests that while no one is safe from the critical gaze of makeover culture, the gendered nature of neoliberalism contributes to feelings of insufficiency. She suggests that the makeover media “defines its readers as insufficient, as lacking some essential feature of adequacy – be it beauty, health, wealth, employment options, sexual partners, marital happiness, or specialized technical knowledge – and then offers itself as the solution” (2005, 18). The notion of perfectibility or “the perfect” (McRobbie 2015) persistently promoted by makeover media surrounds us.

Many of these works situate their research within the frame of a postfeminist media culture (Van Zoonen 1994) constituted by the makeover paradigm (Gill 2007, 156, Gill 2008, 441). In extending on Gill’s “makeover paradigm” I argue that not only does all contemporary media fall under this banner, but all of culture can be viewed through the lens of makeover culture.
Gill describes the makeover paradigm as an aspect of the “postfeminist sensibility” (Gill 2007, Gill and Scharff 2011) pointing out the inherently postfeminist nature of makeover culture, which presents women as agentic beings with choices to make. As Gill suggests, “notions of choice, of ‘being oneself’ and ‘pleasing oneself’, are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary western media culture” (2007, 153). Makeover culture rejects the strictures of second wave feminism, encouraging women to create bodies that they love, to focus on domestic happiness instead of or as well as career if they choose, and not to have to accept themselves as they are. I look at the way in which women, as makeover culture’s biggest consumers, experience and respond to makeover culture, and consider how they negotiate their place within makeover culture. I consider this particularly in relation to the way in which makeover culture, as a broad cultural category or regulatory framework, produces women as its citizens, and is produced by the (postfeminist) contemporary lifestyle media that has such a significance in my interview participants’ lives.

**Foucault and the Women Question**

Here I consider makeover culture as a new incarnation of disciplining the subject (Foucault [1975] 1991), creating her as the ideal, neoliberal, makeover citizen through a network of forces, which includes the three tenets, citizenship, class and shame. As no substantive scholarship has yet ousted Foucault’s theoretical work around regulation, academics continue to reinterpret his theories in the light of current understandings, applying them to gender, race and class divisions.

Feminist and gender theorists, many working at a similar time to Foucault, and within similar poststructuralist and postmodern frameworks, highlighted Foucault’s failure to thoroughly consider gender in his work on power, discipline, sexuality and the body (Bartky 1990, Shildrick and Price 1999, 433). During the 1980s and 1990s, in transition from second wave to contemporary feminisms,
feminist and gender scholars drew heavily on Foucauldian philosophies to illustrate the effect of male dominated society on women’s self-concept, social standing and physical being (Bartky 1990, Bartky 1997, Bordo 1997a, Bordo 1999, Butler 1989). They apply these theories to women’s bodies and the lived experiences of women. Bartky, for example, argues that gender difference is an important factor in “the production of the body as a site of domination, struggle, and resistance” (Giroux 1991, 44). While Foucault and Bartky aren’t generations apart, their different approaches also hint at a change in the status of women in academia around this time.

Many have credited Foucault with bringing the body back to philosophical study (Brook 1999, Shilling 1993, Turner 1984) through writings on sexuality ([1976] 1998) and discipline ([1975] 1991). Brook claims explicitly that feminist theories of discipline derive from Foucault (1999, 75). Indeed the roots of so much recent literature is attributed to texts such as Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1991) that it is easy to forget the importance of psychoanalysis, existentialism and structuralism, as well as earlier anthropological research, in promoting contemporary body discourse. Bordo comments that everyone credits Foucault with revived interest in the body. While she agrees that he is influential, she credits earlier feminist theorists and activists for the rise in popularity of body studies (1993, 17). She highlights gaps in Foucault’s work such as the disciplinary regimes of beauty culture, dieting, thin body ideals and fashion.

Foucault, influenced by Nietzsche, developed his theories through observation of and historical research into institutions of power including the penal system, the church, the mental asylum and the school. In his genealogy of the development of the modern prison ([1975] 1991), he looked at how the bodies of prisoners were disciplined and turned in to “docile bodies” by the gaze of the guards. He suggested that “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” ([1975] 1991, 136). Foucault argued that, believing himself to be under constant surveillance, the prisoner learns to discipline himself physically and socially, normalising his behaviour. Following Foucault’s framework, parallels have been drawn between the surveillance of prisoners and...
the drive for conformity that the media gaze exerts on female bodies. Susan Bordo, who has written about body image and anorexia (1993), suggests that surveillance of women’s bodies has a great impact, “not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity” (1997a, 91). She echoes Foucault in naming these female bodies, controlled by an external gaze, as “docile bodies [...] bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement”” (1997a, 91). Bartky suggests critically that, “in contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: [like Foucault’s prison guard observing the prisoners] They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment” (1997b, 140). She considers that this gaze, now internalised, means that women are judged not only by others, but also judge themselves and find themselves lacking.

Where Foucault sees the gaze as having a positive effect on prisoners, Bartky suggests that if women spend all of their energy improving their bodies to suit this gaze they won’t escape the pressures of patriarchal society and achieve true equality. On the contrary Heyes, who describes her relationship with Foucault as “diffident” (2007a, vi) finds, like Foucault, that the disciplinary power of the panopticon can have a positive effect, creating bodies which are more able and more appropriate in the eyes of society.

The model of a “docile” body forms a useful starting point for analysis of makeover culture, offering insights into the power of the gaze to regulate bodies. Foucault’s theories were based on his conception of ‘the body’ as a social construct. He believed that “nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (1984, 77-78). This instability of the person and the body allows for moulding the individual to suit prevailing norms and ideals. Through surveillance—the surveillance of the makeover participant on a television show—the body becomes a malleable, “docile” body ([1975] 1991), which disciplinary forces can subject to a
productive power turning it into a useful body, one that complies with social norms, a successful citizen of makeover culture. As Akass and McCabe suggest, the body does not simply exist but is in the grip of stringent networks of discursive power that impose on it restrictions, rules and requirements. This power is not something certain groups or individuals possess. Nevertheless, it produces and normalizes bodies – in a calculated management of its movements, gestures, attitudes, and behaviours – to serve as well as make sense of specific historical formulations of dominance and subordination. Uninterrupted and constant subtle coercion act upon the body rendering it obedient and, in turn, useful to the prevailing social order. (2007, 121)

In makeover culture this discipline is intensified through a demand, (uninterrupted, constant and coercive), for profoundly modifying not just behaviour, but the flesh of the body itself. As Heyes observes, “how we look has become more, not less important to how we understand ourselves” (2007a, 6).

In his later work Foucault moved from consideration of external systems of power—he distinguishes between disciplinary power (technolgical systems used for controlling individuals), and biopower (technologies used for managing populations, births, deaths, reproduction and illnesses)—towards consideration of the more intimate experience of technologies of the self. Writing in 1988 he says, “perhaps I’ve insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self” (Foucault 1988, 19). Discussing ancient Greek self-care practices and Christian confession Foucault suggests that while both suggest taking care of body and soul, a shift from “take care of yourself” to “know yourself” came about as, due to a “profound transformation in the moral principles of Western society. [...] We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules. We inherit the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation” (Foucault 1988, 22). As religious and sovereign powers declined, the ethic care of the self returned under neoliberal governance (Brown 2003, Elliot and Lemert 2009), passing responsibility of care from the state to the
individual. The development of new technologies, techniques and tools of the self enables individuals to transform them selves to attain the quality of life to which they aspire.

In *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1991) Foucault describes the shift from sovereign power, vested in the individual of the King; to disciplinary power around the time of the Industrial Revolution; to a governmental society whose members are actively involved in their own self-governance, where power is decentralised and hard to trace because it originates from multiple sources. This results in self-discipline which, “makes bodies docile by submitting them to the regulation of an individual conscience” (Behrens 2013, 81). Foucault suggests that this “historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, not at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely” ([1975] 1991, 137-138). Alongside this useful docility, with the shift from top down, to bottom up governance and individualisation (Behrens 2013, 81) Bartky notes a “darker counter-movement, [and] the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body” (1990, 63) and in particular, she feels, the female body. However she complains that Foucault considers this power shift only in relation to masculine, or gender-neutral institutions such as prisons, schools or hospitals. She goes on to argue that, “he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (1990, 65). In contrast Bartky looks at how this theory of networks of power applies specifically to women’s experience suggesting that we should consider his work in the light of feminist challenges to the status quo as well as neoliberal ones (Bartky 1997, 132).

The broad concept of freedom as “X not being prevented by Y from doing Z” (Gray 1991, 82) is complicated, as Gray explains by a variety of conceptions of freedom: absence of impediments, availability of choices, effective power, status, self-determination, doing what one wants and self-mastery (1991) making it a complex and “multi-textured concept” (1991, 81). Because power is invisible (no
longer vested in a visible being) individuals now have, or believe they have, a degree of autonomy or agency in their decision-making. However the intensification of surveillance with the emergence of digital technologies, and outside influences such as media and peer relationships—themselves undoubtedly under the influence of societal expectations—still strongly influence their decisions. Foucault suggests a decoupling of agency and power that means that, “the subject is [...] always subsumed or determined by power and apparently unable to step outside itself to unmask or deface this power” (Caldwell 2007, 775). That is to say that within the regulatory framework of the society he or she lives in, the individual believes that he is free to make choices, and it is through this freedom—which Rose suggests is “is an artefact of government, but it is not thereby an illusion” (Rose 1999, 63)—that he is managed and manipulated into conforming with societal expectation because, “on the one hand, the ‘public’ activities of free citizens were to be regulated by codes of civility, reason and orderliness. On the other, the private conduct of free citizens was to be civilized by equipping them with languages and techniques of self-understanding and self-mastery. Freedom thus becomes inextricably linked to a norm of civility” (Rose 1999, 69). He is never entirely free from power, but he cannot see it from his position as implicated in it.

In contrast Barkty argues that Foucault’s lack of interest in the individual agency of the person/body under surveillance, particularly in his earlier work, misses the fact that the body acts as a site of resistance, the importance and role of which is detailed in postmodern feminist writing. Indeed makeover culture, overtly resists the notion that women are “docile bodies” to be worked on or “cultural dupes” (Davis 1995) at the whim of government or media. My interview participants were adamant that they understood makeover media’s manipulation of images and bodies, that they actively chose to consume makeover media, and that any actions they took to change their own bodies were their own decisions. In line with this Elias, Scharff and Gill propose replacing beauty culture with a notion of aesthetic entrepreneurship, which is “important in explicitly refuting accounts of beauty work in terms of ‘docile bodies’ or ‘passivity’.
‘Entrepreneurship’ captures not only the labour involved but also the agency and creativity with which people go about styling, adorning and transforming themselves” (2017, 39). Encapsulating the notion of agency, entrepreneurship presents women as literally, the boss of their own bodies.

However, what Bartky might have considered resistance—to patriarchal pressure to conform, as well as to second wave feminist insistence that body does not equal self—can also be viewed as compliance to a new regulatory regime. The made over body continues to be a regulated body. While my interview participants enjoy looking at beautiful people and Photoshopped images in fashion, beauty and lifestyle magazines, they believe they are making these choices for themselves and disallow anyone who says that they shouldn’t enjoy them. They feel that the effect makeover culture has on them is either negligible, or productive, in that it teaches them how to look or dress to feel good, yet they feel that it has a negative effect on other vulnerable groups and individuals. Indeed this is makeover culture’s success, the neoliberal double gesture that gives us responsibility for ourselves then takes it away.

The Gendered Body

My study of makeover culture as a culture of physical transformation relies on an understanding of the place of the body in philosophical and cultural studies research and particularly the study of female, feminine and gendered bodies. I draw from feminist work on the body and modifying bodies that considers operations of gendered power. Descartes famous declaration in the seventeenth century, “I think, therefore I am,” and his belief that it is through the mind, not the physical senses, that we obtain knowledge, influenced a separation of mind from body, which persisted in philosophy and sociology for three centuries. As well as leading to a fascination with the mind, at the expense of interest in the body, the popularity of what became known as the Cartesian Split helped to perpetuate the dualistic thought which has dominated Western theory. Earlier even than Descartes, Spelman discusses Plato's dualism suggesting, “his
negative views about women were connected to his negative views about the body, insofar as he depicted women’s lives as quintessentially body-directed” (1982, 119), hence the body became synonymous with the female and the mind with the male.

In academic circles, the privileging of mind over body continued largely unchallenged in philosophical and social studies in the West until the mid-twentieth century. The revival of interest in the body has roots in the existentialism of the 1940s and 1950s when philosophers such as Sartre and de Beauvoir challenged the mind/body dualism developing an understanding of the body as part of the concept “existence precedes essence;” that is that the body (or existence) comes first, and the essence (what we do with it) is controlled by us later. This is demonstrated in makeover culture by a process, which Weber describes as revealing not creating (2009, 7) where the person hidden behind the abject exterior, is revealed through makeover.

In the field of sociology Turner’s The Body and Society (1984) filled a gap providing a useful history of the body in social theory studies as well as commentaries on the body in politics, religion and medicine. Bodies which do and do not fit social norms have been explored by Terry and Urla in their collection Deviant Bodies (1995) including Urla and Swedlund’s piece, “The Anthropometry of Barbie” (1995) which is interested in the construction of artificial female body ideals and is therefore relevant to my consideration of Photoshop and cosmetic surgery. Contemporary bodies are the focus of Featherstone’s, “The Body in Consumer Culture” (1991), which explores the effect of modern consumer culture on the construction of bodies. Gimlin has argued that the body itself is, “a medium of culture. It is the surface on which prevailing rules of a culture are written [...] revealing cultural notions of distinctions based on age, sexual orientation, social class, gender, and ethnicity” (Gimlin 2002, 2). This is seen particularly clearly in makeover culture.

Usefully, Turner references his predecessors in this field, “Of this recent eruption of studies, the most pertinent are The Political Anatomy of the Body (Armstrong, 1983), Bodies of Knowledge (Hudson, 1982) and The Civilized Body (Freud, 1982),” but he still identifies a lack of work in this area, “This recent sprinkling of books on the human body does not constitute a theoretical movement and therefore there is still a strong justification for arguing that the body is absent in social theory.” (Turner 1984, 7).
Feminist and female writers have discussed the body and its gendering; from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, originally published in 1792 ([1792] 1992), to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* originally published in 1963 ([1963] 1992), Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Susie Orbach’s *Fat is a Feminist Issue* ([1978] 1984) and Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (1990). Such writers have witnessed and documented the transition, particularly in the last three decades, from an understanding of the oppression of the female body through femininity, to the production of femininity through the body.

The text that launched the second wave, Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, met with success because it shared the “experiences of white middle-class women - the very group that were to form the majority in the new women’s movement” (Whelehan 1995, 9). In the United States, many of these white middle-class women participated in rallies, appropriating the tools of the civil rights campaign to change women’s lives through action (Adam [1975] 2011, 300). Direct action focused on the politics of the individual, with issues such as, “paid housework, abortion, contraception, the family, and the sexual division of labour” (Whelehan 1995, 11) high on the agenda. Second wave feminists recognised that gender inequality existed at an institutional level (Whelehan 1995, 4) and produced an important body of work despite later claims for its obsolescence (Faludi 1991, Wolf 1990). Insisting on a woman’s right to control her body, particularly around issues such as sex, contraception and abortion, activists named beauty as a form of patriarchal control. Attempting to erase the body from gender debates they argued for a separation of the female body from the female self and desired that women be valued for their merit, not their appearance. However, under the banner of second wave feminism women were shifted from one set of conventions to another as feminist activists demanded certain behaviours from others claiming feminist status.

The fear that feminists would “take something from ‘ordinary’ women, rather than give them something, […] alienated women who might otherwise have profited by identifying themselves with the women’s movement” (Whelehan
1995, 12). But feminism did not hold the same appeal for all women. In aiming for “that transformation of society through the empowerment [...] and emancipation [...] of women” (Grbich 2011, 96) feminist scholars failed to recognise the historical context of their own positioning and that of others less able than themselves to become empowered (Nicholson 1989, 1) leading to rifts between feminist groups. As feminist scholars grew apart, some continued down the direct action path, and others retreated into theory. Ebert complains that towards the end of the second wave, feminists “of the book”—she references Irigaray, Jardine, Suleiman and Haraway—got lost in abstract theory or “ludic feminism,” stalling progress. She believed that there was still a need for active, materialist feminism to combat the asymmetrical distribution of power according to gender (1993, 5).

The much-touted end of (second wave) feminism came about in part due to infighting between different feminist groups, which made space for the rise of postmodern feminist and postfeminist thought, and in part as a result of an increasing challenge from minority groups. These groups accused the second wave of a tendency towards universalising theories (Felski 1995), which regarded women’s experience as essentially gender based. In trying too hard to find common ground, the second wave imploded. As Gill suggests, “feminism was deemed to have lost its way when it tried to impose its ideological prescriptions on a nature that did not fit: what was needed, such literature argued, was a frank acknowledgement of difference rather than its denial” (2007, 158-159).

And yet we must also avoid generalising difference since, “even in purporting to accept difference, feminist pluralism often creates a social reality that reverts to universalizing women” (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996, 323). Many women—black, lesbian, fat, working class or disabled for example—felt that the exclusion of their separate experiences from feminist theory made them invisible, affecting both their lives and their bodies. Though elements of their experience were common across groups, their differences were also significant. As Holliday and Hassard suggest, “if working-class, female, black and disabled bodies, and bodies configured as queer, are all coded and read as inferior, then
this in turn produces effects upon those bodies” (2001, 3) leading them to embody the attitudes of others towards them.

Minority groups challenged the feminist establishment through the 1980s and 1990s developing new forms of intersectional feminism which took differences into account. Butler suggests that, “the feminist “we” is always and only a phantasmic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent” ([1990] 2006, 194). She calls for a wider variety of voices to be heard in gender studies.

In *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women in Feminism*, hooks challenges those white, middle class women who claim to speak on behalf of ‘American women’ as a whole and suggests that until women from all backgrounds work together there will be no equality for all, “if women want a feminist revolution—ours is a world that is crying out for feminist revolution—then we must assume responsibility for drawing women together in political solidarity. That means we must assume responsibility for eliminating all the forces that divide women” (hooks [1981] 2015, 157). She also writes about the problems of representing race in media and society, discussing the exclusion of women of colour from the many narratives of feminism. Spivak’s “subaltern” in “Can the Subaltern Speak” is an individual living at the margins of society, a person without a political voice and her concern is how to allow him or her to be heard (Spivak 2010). In “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” Ahmed looks at, “how whiteness is lived as a background to experience” (2007, 150), an experience which holds primacy over all other experiences and is hence the starting point for all other work. She describes her experience as “not white” in what Collins describes as an “outsider” or “outsider within” position in relation to the experience of men and middle class white women (1999). Both Ahmed and Collins suggest that black women are prevented from becoming full members of the academy on the double count of their gender and their colour, despite the value that they add because their distinctive take on issues is formed from their very marginality (Ahmed 2007, Collins [1997] 2009).
As with feminism, Collins accuses many postfeminist accounts of “relegating racism to the dustbins of the past” (Collins [1997] 2009, 53).

The popularity of intersectional feminism has led Davis to suggest it has become a “buzzword,” which “touches on the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism - the long and painful legacy of its exclusions” (2011, 45). While acknowledging the importance of addressing difference she problematises the ability of intersectional analysis to produce reliable and valid results given the number of categories needed to carry out intersectional analysis. Nicholson suggests that the success of intersectional feminist analysis depends on stopping points since theorising can’t go on in ever decreasing circles, and “that for feminists an important theoretical stopping point is gender” (1989, 8) without which one is “dangerously inviting the abandonment of theory” (1989, 9). However, Davis goes on to argue that in fact “the success of intersectionality can be explained by the paradox that [...] the concept’s very lack of precision and its myriad missing pieces are what have made it such a useful heuristic device for critical feminist theory” (2011, 50).

The move from second wave to contemporary feminism paralleled the change from modernism to postmodernism and is crucial to feminist politics and theory. It is aligned with the shift from externally imposed structures to internally imposed discipline, which ties in with the shift from beauty culture to makeover culture. While the second wave feminists challenged the male/female binary by attempting to prove that women could do anything a men could do, the postmodernists and poststructuralists deconstructed the concept of gender altogether, breaking down binary divisions “endemic to western thought” (Brook 1999), challenging the two sex model (Butler [1990] 2006), and opening up increased discourse around the body. Much feminist writing in the 1990s involved a re-theorisation of established categories such as gender asking, “what difference does it make in the constitution of my social experiences that I have a specifically female body?” (Flax 1987, 635-636). What if, Bordo asked, “the imperial categories which had provided justification for those accounts—Reason, Truth, Human Nature, Tradition—now were displaced by the (historical, social)
questions: Whose truth? Whose nature? Whose version of reason? Whose history? Whose tradition?” (1989, 137). McRobbie describes this change as, “an anti-foundationalist form of anti-social theory – that is a form of criticism which interrogated and exposed the (cruel) foundations upon which modern social thought had been based” (1994, 4-5). The big picture model of society crumbled. However, I suggest that makeover culture is inherently structural and resists both second wave feminist rejections of beauty culture and poststructuralist deconstruction of gender norms. It is grounded instead in a push for normalisation rooted in a neoliberal drive for self-regulation and self-improvement. While women are constructed by the social and cultural milieu they find themselves in, ideals of femininity change with the social environment. Social constructionists argue that the body itself is constructed through pressure to achieve a normative body, and there is no clearer example than the made over body which is overtly and publicly constructed again and again in line with current norms and ideals.

Social construction theory has roots in existentialism, as illustrated by de Beauvoir’s famous line “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” ([1945] 1997, 295). It explains the femininities of contemporary culture that the second wave feminists fought against. De Beauvoir’s claim that being a woman is not innate, but a constructed or learned experience, has prompted further investigation of just what makes a man or woman in the twentieth/twenty-first century. Butler expands on de Beauvoir to suggest,

When Beauvoir claims that ‘woman’ is a historical idea and not a natural fact, she clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (1988, 522)

Butler’s focus on the corporeal diverges from the more traditional concept of femininity as seen through external adornment and behaviour, proposing that
the body itself is socially constructed, altering its physical form to more accurately perform its gender and comply with social norms—or alternatively to resist and challenge them.

The term social construction was coined by Berger and Luckmann (1966). They suggest that the body is controlled by society, disciplined into conformity by a panoptic gaze. Foucault describes the effect of the Panopticon as prison as, “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” ([1975] 1991, 201). Extending this concept to contemporary society we see that bodies are similarly affected by their visibility within current power structures. No longer based in a single centralised location, “power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes: in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (Foucault [1975] 1991, 202). As I will show in later chapters, the power that affects bodies today comes from sources including government bodies, media organisations and peer relationships.

Where the second wave feminists rallied against beauty culture as a symptom of a controlling patriarchal society, later feminists argued for a woman’s right to choose to participate in beauty culture. Academics including Bartky, Bordo and Butler wrote extensively around sexual difference and what it meant to be a woman during this period, and while they agreed that a move away from the patriarchal society of the industrial era was both desirable and necessary, their approaches differed. Bartky, writing from a poststructuralist standpoint, suggested that, “we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine” (1997, 132). Our appearance is constructed by societal expectations, “femininity is an artifice, an achievement” (1997, 132), and women who do not participate in practices which enable them to achieve this ideal will be branded as failures (1997, 144). She says that women’s shame at failing to be feminine, “is a measure of the extent to which all women have internalized patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability” (1997, 145) and she notes that it is women themselves who enforce the practices of femininity. In order to stay “up to date” they become self-
policing subjects (1997, 149). For Bartky femininity is a combination of a slender body, a limited range of physical behaviours—small restricted movements for example—and adornment of the body in line with social expectations.

Bordo supported the second wave argument that body does not equal self, drawing on the history of philosophy and its understanding of the dualism of mind and body to reinforce this view. However she rejected the “political categories of oppressors and oppressed, villains and victims” (1997a, 92) that the second wave laid down, suggesting collusion with and resistance to patriarchy as different points on a scale, previewing the contradictions of contemporary feminism. She argued that the body is not entirely a text, constructed or inscribed by culture, but also the product of its embodied experience. For example, experience of pregnancy informs the experience of being female in a way that cannot be experienced by a man and that is also experienced differently by trans men (Charter, et al. 2018, Greenfield 2017).¹⁶

Butler supported the social constructionist argument, saying in an early paper that the body, “ontologically distinct from the process of construction,” must be “prior to construction.” She goes on to ask, “does the existent body in its anonymous universality [i.e. prior to social construction] have a gender, an unspoken one?” (1989, 601) and suggests that this body, despite claims for a biological sex, is also subject to social and cultural influences. She considers the body to be a (thoroughly postmodern) text to be inscribed, reducing it to language,¹⁷ and both gender and sex to be constructed and performed (1993). To her, lived experience overrides embodied experience with gender and sex constructed within discourses which regulate bodies, and disciplinary regimes which assign a natural gender to certain bodies. For Butler the feminine “cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained

---
¹⁶ An obvious exception here is the experience of trans men during pregnancy, trans men often find themselves faced with maternity services unprepared for and without the language to appropriately communicate with them. Whilst physiologically they go through the same process, for many issues around isolation, body dysphoria, and parenting identity are increasingly complex.
¹⁷ Feminist poststructuralists including Butler, Spivak, Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous engaged with the power, identity, difference and social construction of gender by reducing it to language. Their linguistic deconstruction of gender rejected dualist notions and explored the possibility of a women’s language as seen in works like Marie Cardinal’s Les Mots Pour Le Dire (1975)—literally translated as The Words to Say It which explores the lack of language to discuss women’s health issues through the fictional account of a women suffering from poor mental health.
repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject” (1993, 95).

Suggesting that beauty is socially constructed and in service to patriarchy Wolf (1990) calls for women to be allowed choose how they want to look without being judged as failing—note that this is not the same as later postfeminist and third wave arguments which encouraged women to follow whichever ideals they chose, enticing them to engage with beauty in terms of fun and pleasure (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 21). She suggests that despite second wave advances beauty standards have become more restrictive with an increase in anorexia (Bordo 1993) and cosmetic surgery occurring in parallel to rights gained by earlier feminists. Wolf’s standpoint clearly questions the possibility of agency that subsequently became key in postfeminist thinking. Elliot critiques Wolf, and fact that he is a man, critiquing a feminist attack on a supposedly male imposed beauty standard, and suggesting her stance is extreme and outdated, indeed alarmist, immediately flags dangerous territory but he negotiates it forcefully, suggesting that her error is, “critics have sought to detail an all-inclusive general formula accounting for the rise of cosmetic surgical culture” (2008, 31). He suggests that in blaming the rise of cosmetic surgery on patriarchal values, critics like Wolf miss other key influences such as celebrity, consumerism and the new economy.

Moving away from second wave feminist arguments that viewed women as victims of patriarchy, Heyes (2007a, 2007b), writes (after discussing her discomfort in doing so) about women as active participants in the makeover process. She describes a concept of discipline based on normalisation which, “both constrains (by compelling compliance with the norm) at the same time as it enables (by making certain forms of subjectivity possible)” (Heyes 2007b), and suggests that women use this discipline to their advantage. Likewise Davis makes it explicit that although her feminist roots make it difficult for her to condone cosmetic surgery, she wishes to avoid labeling women who do undergo it as cultural dopes, allowing for their agency in the matter (1995). More recent writing on the gendered body appears less conflicted (Gill 2007, M. Jones 2008a) with
choice and agency central to postfeminist discourse (Gill 2007, 153). In theorising, and contesting, postfeminism Gill suggests that the neoliberal subject acts in the belief that she has choice, but that it is limited and dictated by a regulatory framework whether she is aware of it or not (2007, 155).

While in retrospect, first and second wave feminisms can be defined, despite the different factions within the waves, contemporary feminism is still difficult to pin down. As postmodern critiques attack the universalising theories of modernism, postfeminist critiques “cast doubt on a singular and uniform conception of the feminist movement, emphasising instead the multiple and varied ways of being ‘feminist’” (Genz and Brabon 2009, 28). With origins in popular culture, rather than academia, the study of the postfeminist period requires a consideration of media culture alongside theory. While postfeminism has been defined both as what comes after feminism and as a further wave of feminism and “critics have claimed and appropriated the term for a variety of definitions ranging from a conservative backlash, Girl Power, third wave feminism and postmodern/poststructuralist feminism” (Genz and Brabon 2009, 1), Budgeon suggests two separate key directions for feminism following the second wave: postfeminism, which assumes the end of feminism and denies the need for further feminist action because equality has been achieved (2011, 281) or has been discredited as a goal of feminism and replaced by choice; and third wave feminisms, which assumes another surge of feminism.

Critical to the development of makeover culture, “post-feminism foregrounds agency: it recognizes the unfairness of gender relations and seeks actively to redress them” (Holliday and Sanchez Taylor 2006, 190). It is considered okay in postfeminist times to choose to change one’s body, indeed self-improvement is encouraged as an empowering act. Third wave feminists claim that this choice is not contraindicated by feminism but that choice is feminism; that body choices that second wave feminists declared to be tools of hegemonic patriarchy and non-compatible with feminism such as veiling, polygamy and extreme beauty practices can now be considered feminist actions if freely chosen (Budgeon, 2011, 281). After a decade of proclamations that feminism
was dead, contemporary feminisms are multiple and multiplying. Third wave writers such as Levy (2005) and Valenti (2007) have developed feminist pop-culture manifestos, calling young women to fight on issues that still affect women’s bodies extensively including (globally differentiated) access to contraception and abortion, body image and expectations of motherhood. As Budgeon suggests, “in contrast to claims that feminism no longer retains currency in late modernity, third-wave feminism asserts that feminism continues to be both possible and necessary” (2011, 279).

There is even talk of a fourth wave—framed in the media as a new generation of feminists (Gill 2016, 612) and “increasingly signified within the mainstream media as “cool”” (Gill 2016, 611). However if for this new generation feminism is, as she suggests, just a “cheer word” (Gill 2016, 619), “not angry, contentless” (Gill 2016, 618), it is unlikely that makeover culture has much to fear. Moreover, Gill goes on to argue that this new move is not in opposition to postfeminism, but entirely compatible with critical postfeminist analysis. In an age where “it is striking to see how just about anything in the mainstream media universe can be (re)signified as “feminist”’” (2016, 619), and often is, definitions of feminist and feminism are continually contested. When anything can be claimed as feminist it becomes difficult to differentiate between feminist and anti-feminist arguments as we see in makeover media.

Looking at makeover media we can see that while postfeminist media culture incorporates many aspects of feminism, it also “works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer,” (Tasker and Negra 2007, 2). However, in assuming an economic freedom for women it reinforces the notion of postfeminism, like second wave feminism, as white and middle class. Thus, while “postmodernism nominally calls on feminists to relinquish their foundational goals and focus on the differences between women” (Genz and Brabon 2009, 29), like feminism it ignores many of the intersectional elements of theory (Tasker and Negra 2007, 15).

While such texts are considered pop culture, they offer an up-to-date understanding of issues concerning women today. None of it is new though; it recycles work such as Wolf’s The Beauty Myth, which in itself largely recycles the old arguments of Greer’s The Female Eunuch, or Millett’s Sexual Politics or any number of earlier feminist writers.
The recent resurgence of biological determinism (Etcoff 2000, Morris 2005), corporeal feminism (Grosz 1994) and new material feminism (Hekman 2014, McNeil 2010) has revived interest in embodied experience and the role of biological sex in determining gender. As Warin suggests, “material feminism attends to the ways in which bodies interact with and are radically open to other bodies, different spaces, histories, technologies and environments” (2015, 51). This ties in with the femininity expressed by my younger participants, which featured the predominance of a curvy body and my older participants focus on the link between such curves and a woman’s sexuality or reproductive capacity as I will discuss in Chapter Eight.

The Fat Body

Fat Studies is a new field within Social Studies which merits inclusion here because both the makeover media and my interview participants talk widely of the size and shape of bodies and of weight loss. Shows such as The Biggest Loser focus almost entirely on issues related to weight. Contemporary discussions of weight loss and weight loss surgeries will be discussed alongside examples from interviews in Chapter Seven, so here I will discuss the broader field of Fat Studies, whose scholars challenge the, “ongoing fatphobia [which] is a result of prescriptive regimes of normative gendered body aesthetics” (Cooper and Murray 2012, 131). Fatphobia is driven by media reports of a global obesity epidemic deriving from legitimate healthcare and government sources, and “emerges as a moral panic which is driven by ideology, and which is interpolated through the social relations of gender, class and race” (Throsby 2007, 1562). Fat and body positive activists challenge, “two key assumptions [that] underpin the moral evaluation of the fat body in contemporary western society. The first of these is that obesity is a medical, financial and social problem, and that this problem threatens individual, national and global well-being. […] The second […] is that obesity is a problem which is both preventable and treatable” (Throsby 2007, 1562).
Fat is considered preventable, treatable and knowable. Fat people are judged by those who, “read a fat body on the street, and believe we “know” its “truth”” (Murray 2005a, 154). Murray has personal experience of fat, as do many Fat Studies researchers, “every time society reads my fat body, it lets me know that I am defective. Society “knows” my body, as a site of undisciplined flesh and unmanaged desires” (Murray 2005b, 265). Just by looking, observers “know” that this person is lazy, gluttonous, unhealthy and has no willpower. Fat activists challenge this knowingness about fat and health through zines, blogs, self help sites and discussion groups (Lupton 2013, 82). Fat Studies literature challenges the knowledge that the fat body is dysfunctional which is reinforced by biomedical research, and proposes alternative ways of considering fat bodies (Cooper 2010, 1026). I have grouped my observations of Fat Studies literatures into three sections: Fat as a feminist issue, fat as a health issue and fat as a moral issue.

In 1978 Orbach published her successful book *Fat is a Feminist Issue* ([1978] 1984). She proposed that feminists should be concerned about the pressure to be thin. Saguy suggests that Orbach’s approach, while valid, focuses on “risks of obesity rather than the social and health costs of weight-based discrimination” (2012, 600). She argues that Orbach’s focus on obesity incorporates the societal expectations of the time that fatness was unacceptable, supporting a link between fatness and disordered eating and suggesting that women need to relearn how to eat in order to loose weight (2012, 600). Like the scientists, healthcare professionals and government agencies Orbach conflated overeating with obesity and obesity with ill health. Fat continues to be a feminist issue today, suggests Saguy, not because fat is inherently bad, but:

i. because fat women are subjugated to bias, discrimination and abuse precisely because they are fat women,
ii. because fear of being fat terrorizes so many women, many of whom suffer from poor body image and some of whom succumb to anorexia or bulimia,
iii. because women are held to higher standards of thinness and suffer greater penalties if they fall short, compared to men. (2012, 601-602)
Fat activism began in the US in the 1960s, “as part of a turn towards politicizing structural inequality and mobilizing for civil rights in other marginalized social groups” (Lupton 2013, 81). Nowadays, contemporary fat feminism, requires individuals to ‘come out’ as fat in order to challenge fat phobia, to receive acceptance from other fat activists and to promote acceptance within society. To want to lose weight is considered both anti-feminist and anti-fat. Consequently an emphasis on health and strength is employed in ‘healthy eating’ and ‘fat fitness’ narratives to avoid discussions of reducing size (Lupton 2013, 86). The Health at Every Size (HAES) movement, though criticised for allowing people to be fat, stresses the importance of focusing on health regardless of body size in preference to aiming for a particular body size (Lupton 2013, 84).

To come out as fat is an all or nothing thing, “ambivalence about fat pride is not encouraged or accepted in fat activist discourse, for it is seen as giving in to the prevailing negative discourses around fat embodiment” (Lupton 2013, 92. See also Murray 2005a, Murray 2005b).

However, much Fat Studies literature acknowledges and describes the difficulties in accepting one’s own fat body. Warin identifies the conflict of interest in her experience as a feminist scholar who champions fat acceptance in others, while desiring to be, and being, thin (2015). Murray explains that the existence of fat acceptance communities does not, “dismantle dominant cultural ideals about the body and ideal bodily aesthetics” (2005a, 161). She argues that the need to “forget the dominant discourses that shaped my understanding of my body, that I lived out corporeally in every interaction, every gesture” led to a disconnection with her body (2005, 270).

From a medical point of view healthy weight is measured in terms of Body Mass Index (BMI), and a BMI of above thirty automatically triggers a diagnosis of obesity. As Cooper suggests, “fat is a fact” (2010, 1020). However as an objective measure BMI doesn’t take into account other factors such as fitness, muscle versus fat mass, build and physique and thus is imprecise in describing the health of individuals described as overweight or obese. Obesity is assumed to be the cause of ill health by health departments, governments and the broader media.
whose, “(bio)medical knowledges occupy a privileged discursive position and therefore are widely believed to reveal an essential and irrefutable “truth” about fat bodies” (Longhurst 2012, 873). Fat, it is believed, is a matter of choice and, “a key indicator of responsible self-management.” (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, 415-416).

Fat activists argue that it is not fat in itself that puts a person at increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, but wider social issues such as poor nutrition, lack of exercise or hereditary factors (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, 417), and that health, physical and mental, is about more than just body shape and size (Longhurst 2012, 881). They argue that losing weight by dieting, exercise and surgery can be harmful and futile (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, 417). In addition, Oliver cites a study from 2005, which found that “moderately “overweight” people live longer than those of a “normal” weight [...] a number that is even smaller than those who are estimated to die from being “underweight.” Weighing “too much” is less dangerous, it seems, than weighing “too little”” (Oliver 2006, 3-4). Cooper suggests that critics aim to “debunk obesity science, by showing that it is a product of a social context in which fat hatred is endemic and profitable” (Cooper 2010, 1022). In fact slim patients are put at risk by this emphasis on fat as well since within this context doctors advise fat patients on diet and exercise but not those assumed to be healthy because they are not overweight (Jutel 2005, 123).

Fat is a moral issue; a sign of the “deleterious effect of the modern (read: the American) influence on the body” (Gilman 2008, 7). Where historically thinness was equated with illness, and flesh on the bones with health, “today, corpulence, rather than thinness, is portrayed as a liability [...] obesity has become an epidemic of international proportions, and overweight is now identified as a disease entity rather than a statistical observation” (Jutel 2005, 114). That is not to say that fat did not exist in pre-modern times, though it is believed to have been less prevalent than today, but that obesity as disease is a modern concept. Murray introduces a Dr McLester who in 1924 suggested that in his medical opinion a fat female isn’t suffering herself, but is causing suffering to
others, “at the heart of Dr McLester’s attitude towards the fat female body is that its threat lies in the aesthetic affront it presents to society” (Murray 2008, 214). McLester pushed the moral burden for fat onto the individual woman, not considering her health, but purely criticising her appearance. Today, with an emphasis on the costs of and to her health, she shares that burden with government departments and big business. Critiquing the moral panic (Gilman 2008, 9) surrounding fat, Fat Studies scholars suggest that, given the link between social status and obesity, “governments and health policies should invest in and support wide interventions that change the socio-economic circumstances of women’s lives” (Warin 2015, 64). In makeover culture, this governmentatisation of the burden is achieved through the responsibilisation of the individual. Fat people are not excused by any delegation of responsibility to the state, fat mothers are shamed by the link between their own weight and their children’s (Warin 2015, 65-66), fat women are pathologised for “excessive desire” and “refusal to regulate one’s needs and impulses” (Murray 2008, 216).

By contrast at the heart of fat activism is a push for fat acceptance, Murray explains her initial delight and hope on discovering the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), “I felt that this movement could offer me a new way of experiencing my fat body, and to intervene in the way my fatness was experienced by others” (2005b, 267). Hoping to learn the secrets of self acceptance she says, “here were people who actually seemed to be happy to be fat: I had thought for so long that as fat women we were to be punished with our own misery for our fatness, for transgressing social codes of beauty and desirability” (2005, 269). Similarly Donaghue and Clemitshaw describe a “sense of resignation, as well as relief, that comes from no longer hoping to be thin” (2012, 423).

Certainly such alternative accounts challenging the dominant discourse attract criticism and backlash. Writers uncomfortable with fat acceptance continue to argue that weight loss is the key to improved health for fat people. Within Fat Studies it is also considered problematic that, “fat politics still privileges the thin body and attempts to imitate it. [...] While fat politics seems to assume that the very existence of the fat body is subversive, events such as fat
pool parties and fat lingerie parties only reproduce the obsession with the visible
an the power of aesthetic ideals” (Murray 2005b, 161). And Fat Studies carries its
own moral burden. Throsby and Evans ask, “Must I seize every opportunity”
should the fat feminist or activist be promoting fat acceptance at every

Where My Research Fits

Like those for whom primary research has been part of the analysis of the
female and ‘new femininities’ (Gill and Scharff 2011, McRobbie 2007, Skeggs and
Wood 2012), through the frame of a postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007, 147), my
work involves first hand discussions with women about makeover culture. It
coheres with a growing body of work on the experience of womanhood,
femininity and the female body in contemporary culture within Feminist Media
Studies, Gender Studies and Cultural Studies (for example Elliot 2008, Gill and
methodologies (qualitative research) methods (face-to-face interviews) and
epistemology (feminist research) and adding another set of data and
strengthening the argument that femininity is increasingly seen as a bodily
quality.

I differentiate my work by combining media analysis and participant
interviews, I look at a precise demographic and a different age range to other
researchers. My work looks uniquely at the concept of makeover culture as an
overarching regulatory framework for considering women’s bodies in the current
moment and engages with Foucault’s theory that regulation occurs through a
network of influences, in this case the three tenets of makeover culture as
discussed above, as well as citizenship, class, shame and failure which will be
discussed in Chapter Four. Where others are talking to younger women about
makeover, my interview cohort has a much higher average age. I found that
compared with the research on younger participants (Currie, Kelly and
Pomerantz 2011, Press 2011), my interview participants engaged critically with
television and magazine content related to makeover and were aware how unrealistic it is.
Chapter 2

From the Cult of Domesticity to Makeover Culture: A Brief History of Makeover Culture from the Pre-Industrial Era to the Present Day

The long history of altering and decorating the body in the name of beauty is part of the story and culture of women’s engagement with the body in both real life and fantasy. Western women’s bodies have been regulated, amongst other things, through fashionable tight-laced corsets and high-heeled shoes dating back to the late Middle-Ages (Thesander 1997, 26). Fashion as we understand it dates from the mid-fourteenth century (Breward 1995, 4) with the emergence, in the United Kingdom, of clothing over and above the essentials, suggesting a disregard of economy and a “heightened sense of differentiation afforded to gender roles,” (Breward 1995, 8). This thesis argues that contemporary technologies such as control underwear and cosmetic surgery offer new opportunities to alter and regulate women’s bodies within a regulatory framework of makeover culture. This chapter responds to the first part of my research question asking how contemporary makeover culture came about and how its relationship with women’s bodies differs from earlier beauty cultures. I argue that changing social conditions and expectations for women, particularly over the last thirty years, along with a recent shift towards neoliberal governance, and the idea of an empowered and responsibilised neoliberal subjectivity or “do it yourself society” (Elliot and Lemert 2009, 3), have led to a shift from beauty
culture, which showed women the possibility of what they could be, to a makeover culture, which tells women that they should try to ‘be the best version’ of themselves, with the moral responsibility for regulation shifting from the patriarchal state to the self-managing citizen (Elliot and Lemert 2009, 13). I propose that exposure to makeover culture is key to the constitution and experience of contemporary womanhood.

This chapter offers a genealogy of makeover culture, locating my research within a historical trajectory of the regulation of women’s bodies. As a history it is necessarily partial, as—although the influence of contemporary makeover culture reaches across geographical, class and race boundaries—it maps broad historical trends that involved predominately white, affluent consumers, much like my interview participants, and these are the women I refer to throughout this chapter. As Buckley and Fawcett suggest in the introduction to their book on the history of women’s clothing, the purpose of a history is not to produce a complete review but to, “add new ways of seeing” (2002). My new way is to consider how social and political conditions, as well as body, media, technology and consumer culture intersect to create makeover culture.

From a consideration of women’s bodies in the preindustrial era I move chronologically to the present, following the progression from the cult of domesticity or true womanhood (Welter 1966) to the emergence of beauty culture (Friedan [1963] 1992, Jeffreys 2005, Wolf 1990) and its transition into makeover culture (Gill 2007, M. Jones 2008a), each with their own attitudes to beauty and to women’s bodies and examining the changing role of the three tenets of makeover culture. This progression occurred alongside fundamental social transitions on three levels: on a political level the evolution from first wave to second wave to contemporary feminisms; on an economic level the evolution from a pre-industrial to an industrial to a neoliberal consumer society; and on a cultural level a dramatic increase in media and advertising culture.

Two key histories have informed my writing here: Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth (1990) and Marianne Thesander’s The Feminine Ideal (1997), these are supplemented by further texts about the fashion and beauty industries. Wolf’s
approach is feminist and heavily critical of beauty pressures. Thesander provides a sociological history of women’s bodies, more factual, less emotive, and focusing specifically on changing definitions of femininity over time. While both attribute the demands on women to make themselves beautiful to the prevailing values of the socio-cultural environment, Wolf’s aggressive feminist rhetoric is one of blame and violence against women. In one of the last critiques of beauty culture, she presents a feminist challenge. Focusing predominantly on the period after the publication of Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* she discusses how the beauty myth came to dominate women’s lives after they cast off the “mystiques” of domesticity, motherhood, chastity and passivity (1990, 11, 16). She describes the intensification of pressure on women to focus on their physical appearance in the 1970s and 1980s as a backlash (1990, 10) against the success of the second wave feminists, one that is “destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically” (1990, 19). For Wolf, in order to escape the beauty myth, we must understand that it is not about beauty, but about social control. “Just as the beauty myth did not really care what women looked like as long as women felt ugly, we must see that it does not matter in the least what women look like as long as we feel beautiful” (1990, 272). If women are unable to understand this, then deconstructing the beauty myth will only result in it being replaced by some new form of control. Her work has been critiqued for its rejection of agency, and for revisiting what had been said many times before by feminist spanning the previous three decades, but it was well received, hitting the bestseller lists at the time of publication in 1990. Clinging to second wave feminist criticism of beauty culture, she struggles to integrate the third wave insistence on agency. I ask whether Wolf could have written *The Beauty Myth* any later and been able to avoid the topic of makeover texts in the media and makeover practice. I don’t believe that she could, and this supports my suggestion of 1990/1991 as a turning point between beauty and makeover cultures.

Thesander provides a more systematic review of ways in which the female body has been physically coerced into conforming with the feminine ideal of the
times, particularly considering the period from 1880 to 1980. She focuses on, “the feminine ideal, the physical ideal, the alteration of which is closely connected to the changing position of women in society” (1997, 9). Her writing is not politically motivated like Wolf’s but presents a more objective history of femininity, as such the combination of these two texts has provided a broad understanding of this issue. She discusses the differentiation between male and female bodies and the special nature accorded to female bodies due to their reproductive capacities (1997, 7) and agrees that the desire to maintain this differentiation has led to ongoing expectations of women’s bodies.

The Cult of Domesticity: Function Over Form

In the pre-industrial era, and in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, marriageability, the key marker of her success as a young woman, was based on her ability both to work in the home or on the land contributing to household income, and to fulfil her domestic role as homemaker. In medieval and early modern Europe the concept of beauty was, “not so much a physical trait as a behavioral one, tied to the twin notions of morality and moderation. The truest beauty was found in the ideal life of the virgin, with the wife who let her husband control her sexuality also finding begrudged acceptance […] outward appearance was a reflection of the inner self and, as such, needed to be maintained properly through behavior modification” (Lowe 1994, 26). Within this cult of domesticity (Welter 1966), sexual modesty, strength to carry out physical labour, running a home, raising children and caring for extended family mattered more than aesthetic beauty.

What limited technology existed was predominantly productive. The spinning wheel, the handloom and the plough were instruments of production, not of leisure. Technological advances were rarely applied to beautification, and

---

99 The Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography defines the Industrial Revolution as “A period between the late 18th and early 19th centuries during which key sectors of English industry achieved remarkably higher and sustained levels of productivity. These were associated with technological innovations and working practices that later diffused more widely throughout Europe and North America.” (Castree, Kitchen and Rogers 2013).
even medical technologies were limited. Although early examples of corset like garments have been traced to Minoan Crete, until the 1800s clothing technologies such as tight-laced stays and corsets were limited to the aristocratic classes (Haiken 1997). While a pair of stays would be found in the wardrobe of the seventeenth-century noblewoman, it was not until later that this filtered down to the growing middle classes (Thesander 1997, 29) and the corset became essential in the construction and discipline of a socially acceptable ‘normative’ femininity. Makeup as a technology was for theatre girls and prostitutes and didn’t come into common use until the late nineteenth century (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, 17, 20).

Two essential precursors laid the foundation for a slow transition in women’s lives from the cult of domesticity to makeover culture: firstly the way in which industrialisation in the nineteenth century led to increased commoditisation and commodity fetishism; and secondly mechanisation and advances in medical science which led to a tendency to visualise the body as a machine or productive unit made from a series of replaceable parts (E. Martin [1987] 2001). One hundred and fifty years ago Marx expounded the concept of commodity fetishism in his essay, *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof* (Marx [1867] 1977). As he explains, in a consumer driven culture, certain items become valued over others—for example, gold and pearls over horseshoes—regardless of their functionality or worth. I identify this as an important precursor to the development of makeover culture as it forms the basis for the modern fashion and beauty industries, with contemporary media culture defining values and promoting such fetishism of one consumer brand over another, promising not just a practical solution, but an improved sense of happiness and belonging. In makeover culture this extends to areas such as cosmetic surgery, where the concern is primarily for the aesthetic of a new breast or nose, not its function, and fashion, with its emphasis on looks, not comfort. Furthermore, the visualisation of the body as machine or industry, especially in medical terms, led to the breaking down of the body into its constituent parts, encouraging the legitimate commodification of body parts for medical purposes and an increasingly fragmented concept of the human body.
Martin suggests that the roots of fragmentation are in the separation of the public and private spheres ([1987] 2001, Sharp 2000). Sharp suggests that the focus on embodiment leads to a separation of body and mind, which leads to commodification. Body parts became trading commodities and organs began to appear on the international black market for transfer. With the body no longer considered as a whole, parts of women’s bodies became increasingly and overtly fetishised and sexualised in the public sphere (Kunzle 1982, Steele 1985) and by the late twentieth century a price could be set, not only on those organs of the body which were essential to life, but also on new breasts, teeth or noses.

The development of a beauty culture in the second half of the nineteenth century marked a shift from function (ability to work and fertility) to form (adherence to beauty ideals) and was the result of complex social changes (Chernock 2009). Until the late middle ages women were responsible for all stages of garment manufacturing from processing raw fleece to hand stitching of garments, however this began to change in the first half of the thirteenth century, as male-dominated guilds and apprenticeships emerged, whereupon women “became excluded from participation in trade, industry and public affairs in favour of a role that prioritised women’s status as keepers of the household and visible symbols of patriarchal wealth and standing” (Breward 1995, 30). However it was not until the industrial revolution several centuries later that the traditional home unit changed fully in nature from a working unit where all members contributed to the productive output and livelihood of the family, to a patriarchal unit where the male was drawn out of traditional cottage based industries to work outside the home to support the family in the new mechanised mill or factory (Wolf 1990).

For a newly middle-class woman, this meant that as her productive, income generating potential reduced, her value and position in the family unit and in society declined, and she was restricted to the domestic sphere.

---

20 Prior to the emergence of and growth of the middle class around the time of the industrial revolution there were only two classes, the ruling class and the working poor, so the majority of the population had no time for beauty and leisure. With the arrival of the professional middle class, or bourgeoisie, and the financial capital that they brought, women’s leisure time increased. Wolf talks about 1830 as a turning point. (1990).
Conveniently shackled to the confines of the home, her place was secured, and her femininity constituted, through her domestic role in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Welter 1966). Welter argued that home and church were central to women’s identity in the first half of the 1800s. It is worth remembering however that while this may have been the case for white middle-class, protestant women in the United States, it was not universal.

Throughout the late modern period, when the ideal of the self-made man was taking hold, and the twin concepts of globalisation and individualism reigned (Giddens 1991, 1), women were externally regulated by a patriarchal system. There was no provision for them to be seen as individuals in their own right; they belonged to the household. Until the mid 1800s, under the laws of coverture, which, “denied married English and Welsh women control over their own property or affairs” (Chernock 2009, 86), a woman had no right to own property or have her own money once married.

As middle-class women’s need to work decreased they tightened their corsets and the purpose of lacing shifted from practical support of the body and modesty to beauty. The corset modified and regulated the body to meet the social and beauty ideals of the period as presented in the new women’s magazines where “the regular collapse of entertainment into instruction” was witnessed (Beetham 1996, 24). Magazines promoted the use of these technologies of beauty culture (corsets, makeup) to improve the body, but not yet to perfect it (Summers 2001). The corset continued in its popularity because the shape of the corseted body was, “an intelligible symbolic form, representing a domestic, sexualized ideal of femininity” (Bordo 1997a, 103). The corset constricted and weakened women, underscoring their husbands’ ability to support such frail and delicate creatures. As Summers suggests, “indeed, it was held that tight lacing actually increased among women as its ill effects became more widely known. This may have been because ill health, or at least an appearance of ill health, was fundamental to the mainstream construction of nineteenth-century femininity” (2001, 107). Women were physically reduced to the role of “exquisite slave” (Roberts 1977, Wilson 1993, 10). The corseted body was, Bordo suggests, in
Foucault’s terms a “useful” body, because it clearly corresponds to the expected aesthetic norm, yet is rendered unfit for any other consideration bar the on-going maintenance of male domination. The longevity of the practice of corseting is attributed to a patriarchal desire to keep women in place as the accessories of a successful man’s leisured lifestyle (Davies 1982; Daly 1990), the argument around patriarchal dominance is countered (although never completely overturned) by writers such as Kunzle (1982) and Steele (1985) who argue that the sensuality of the corset and the feeling of control and power that it gave to women, as well as its usefulness in winning a husband were equally important in its longevity.

Thesander also suggests that, “it was certainly partly of their own volition that women wore tight-fitting corsets, and yet it cannot be called a free choice. There were very few alternatives to marriage for women. The upbringing and education of girls was geared towards marriage and child-bearing. And if they wanted to be noticed on the marriage market, they had to be attractive” (Thesander 1997, 41).

The commoditisation of the corset in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries allowed for mass control of the female body much like diet and exercise technologies do today.

The change in fashions during the nineteenth century results from both a “sense of the modern” and a shift in attitudes towards acceptable masculinity and femininity (Breward 1995, 183). Gender, and the clear demarcation of male and female public and private roles, was now indicated more clearly than class through the use of corsets and bustles and, “reflected, in symbolic terms, the dualistic division of social and economic life into clearly defined male and female spheres” (Bordo 1997a, 103).

From the late nineteenth century, first wave feminists fought for basic emancipation, some of them challenging such physical regulation alongside their political aims. Both the early suffragettes and later the second wave feminists demanded the right to control their own bodies and used their bodies to achieve their goals (Walters 2005, 83, 110). From the early dress reformers’ challenge to the debilitation caused by the corset in the late 1800s and early 1900s, to the use of hunger strikes as a tool in the fight for the vote, to the mythology surrounding

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
the burning of bras\textsuperscript{21} in the 1960s (Brownmiller 1984), the body itself became a key site and tool of resistance.

The Transition to Beauty Culture: Release from Domesticity

Broadly speaking, following suffragist challenges to male power centres, women in the West were granted limited access to power in the public sphere—however, aside from wartime responsibilities, there remained a limited need, before the 1960s and 1970s for middle and upper-class women to work outside of the home (Wolf 1990, 21). In the run up to the First World War and during the first half of the twentieth-century women loosened their undergarments as they took up a (slightly) more active role in public life (Thesander 1997, 112-113). They embraced the burgeoning women’s media and the new technologies it proposed. New vanity technologies emerged: the invention of nylons, the elastic girdle, which replaced the whalebone corset, early health foods and advances in makeup (Thesander 1997, 210-212). Less physically restrictive clothing enabled women to drive and ride bicycles, and they did in large numbers. However, while they might have begun to cast off their whalebone and metal stays, the new streamlined shape of the 1910s required foundation undergarments of its own (Best 1991) and Paul Poiret’s famous designs included the hobble skirt which, drawing its influences from the Japanese Kimono, practically tied a woman’s ankles together, thereby regulating her movement (Vinken 2005). Women’s bodies were freed from one constraint only to be regulated by another, preserving their difference from men.

\textsuperscript{21} Brownmiller explains that, “No one in the women’s movement ever burned a bra in public protest, yet as soon as feminists began to march, the myth of bra burners spread like wildfire in the nation’s media, and the flames were fanned by journalists who should have known better. As near as I can figure out, the legend may have started innocently enough by some feature writer searching for a clever phrase. Militant war resisters had burned their draft cards at public bonfires, so it was laughably imaginative to apply the metaphor to militant feminists, some of whom indeed were braless. Bra burning suggested a wanton, fiery destruction of safe, familiar values. The imagery symbolized the feared feminist assault on all established tradition that kept women and their sexual nature confined and contained in an orderly fashion” (1984, 45-46).
From a historical perspective it is useful to consider, as Entwistle has done, that the shift in the way that clothing disciplines the body which occurs from the nineteenth century onwards can be matched with the shift that Foucault notes from the ‘fleshy’ body that was the subject of capital punishment prior to the eighteenth century, to the ‘mindful’ body of the modern watched prisoner (2000, 284). The technologies disciplining the body are constantly evolving, from the corset to breast augmentation, but not only have the technologies changed, the whole understanding of body discipline has changed. Modern self-discipline needs to be “more powerful and more demanding” (Entwistle 2000, 285) than the corset because it cannot simply be laced tighter to create the desired shape.

From the early part of the twentieth century, the beautification and making over of women’s bodies held a timeless media attraction with magazine and television beauty segments and beauty product advertising dating from the early days of both formats, in what Friedan called the “sexual sell” (Friedan [1963] 1992). It is interesting to note also a shift from the marketing of beauty products sold as “enhancing natural beauty” toward marketing them as part of a “general grooming” routine, bringing us closer to what we understand as the beauty industry today (Black 2004, 33-35). At this time makeup became popular and acceptable, no longer just for showgirls, and was subject to increased advertising.

Fraser suggests that, “prior to the makeover’s familiar appearance, it was at least already implicit in the new era of advertising in the 1920s made possible by the proliferation of cosmetics in the marketplace and a growing emphasis on personal appearance” (2007, 179). Media culture continued to grow, with an increasing number of women’s magazines and movies presenting women with fashion images and advice about the new beauty ideals (Black 2004, 33).

Beetham, whose research describes women’s magazines between 1800 and 1914, suggests that,

throughout its history, the woman’s magazine has defined its readers ‘as women’. It has taken their gender as axiomatic. Yet that femininity is always represented in the magazines as fractured not least because it is simultaneously assumed as given and still to be achieved. Becoming the woman you are is a difficult project for which the magazine has

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
characteristically provided recipes, patterns, narratives and models of the self. (1996, 1)

Beetham talks about the magazine as a “feminised space”, marked by difference from male interests such as politics and economics and this is still the case today with women’s magazines focusing predominantly on fashion, beauty and celebrity. Beetham considers magazines productive, rather than oppressive and suggests that, although less powerful than the (often male) writer, the reader can “resist meanings the writer produces” (1996, 2-3). She offers a Foucauldian argument, similar to that discussed by Heyes (2007a, 8); that discipline, while it still regulates, can provide access to skills or technologies of the self. Breward adds, “if there is one important lesson to be gained from the study of fashion promotion and diffusion in women’s magazines in any period from the nineteenth century on, it is a realisation of their power not just in selling products, but in suggesting, reflecting and sustaining lifestyles” (Breward 1995, 212). Interview participants Julie and Rebecca both talked about finding inspiration in terms of what to wear, or what look to aspire to, in magazines, considering them to have a positive impact. Central to the production of a natural femininity across class and time, magazines, “not only defined readers as ‘women’, they sought to bring into being the women they addressed” (Beetham 1996, ix), they sought to regulate them.

As technology advanced, photography replaced hand drawn images in magazines and advertisements and was instrumental in showing women how they compared to the ideals of the time (Thesander 1997, 128, Wolf 1990, 15). As magazine ideals became embedded in the imagination of society, women’s increased awareness of their own inadequacies, once they could see images of fashions on women’s bodies rather than on the manufacturer’s illustrations, fuelled a booming beauty industry. Consumption of beauty products increased, and beauty culture came to dominate women’s lives. With the continued development of print media, photography and the advent of film in the 1890s and television in the 1920s, women’s status as something to be looked at (J. Berger 1972, 46) was confirmed by the proliferation of screen idols and pin-up girls,
from the Gibson Girls in the first decade of the 1900s to Greta Garbo in the 1920s and 1930s, Betty Grable in the 1940s, Sophia Loren in the 1950s and Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s and 1960s.
While during the early years of the twentieth century magazine content shifted increasingly towards fashion, during the mid-thirties, this ideal model turned back towards “a ‘traditional’ view of femininity that prioritised home and family above personal pleasure and fashionability” (Breward 1995, 212). Again, after the Second World War, as men returned to work, women were expected to relinquish their wartime posts and return to the kitchen and the hearth (Adam [1975] 2011, 95, 227). Following an extended period of rationing from 1942, where “strict controls were applied to the production and consumption of clothing”
(Breward 1995, 190), there was a brief return to tightly corseted waist and generous skirts, as epitomised by Dior’s ‘New Look’ (Crane 2000, 156), which suggested that women no longer needed their practical wartime clothing and could go back to wearing things that used large amounts of cloth, regulated their movement and required more effort both to construct and to wear. The middle-class, mid-century woman was increasingly required to look good, her aesthetic form again superseding her functionality and her physical appearance increasingly serving as a point of regulation.

The happy domesticity of the mid twentieth-century housewife, as presented to women by the advertisers of the period, was dependent not only on their competent management of the home but increasingly on their looks. With their washing machines, refrigerators and electric ovens, amongst other time-saving gadgets, technology became a fact of life and leisure time increased, not just for the “leisure class” (Veblen [1899] 1993) but also for middle and even working class women.

With increased leisure time patriarchal society suggested that she fill this gap in her life with the new beauty culture, thereby taking control of her body and her femininity (Wolf 1990). That, coupled with increased access to the images produced by the print media with its developing interest in beauty ideals, led to an expansion of the discourse around femininity across the classes, to include an increasing emphasis on physical attributes that were aesthetically pleasing to others. By the 1950s the woman of the house was expected to be both competent and beautiful. The emphasis on the beautiful and dutiful wife, and all that was required to become and remain one became fundamental to the definition and practice of womanhood.
Figure 8 1950s Advertising Poster, Stor-Mor Freezer Magazine Advert, 1956. Available from: http://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/detail/25869/1/Magazine-Advert/Stor-Mor-Fridges/1950s (accessed December 4, 2016).
Gradually, women gained increased access to the external spheres of politics, society and work both through working outside the home, and the movement of public life into the private sphere as access to print and television media increased. By the 1960s and 1970s, makeup was de rigeur and exercise technologies catered to a new interest in exercise and health (Thesander 1997, 201-202). Second wave feminists “identified the pressures within male dominance that caused them to feel they should diet, depilate and makeup. [...] “Beauty” was identified as oppressive to women” (Jeffreys 2005, 1). They suggested that any pleasure that women take in beauty “expose[s] the deep structures that underlie captivating surfaces, to show that fleeting experiences of enchantment and delight spring from long-standing histories of suffering and subordination” (Felski 2006, 273). There was however a contest within feminism around beauty ideals, which still exists today. Hollows compares the practices that the second wave feminists found to be oppressive, or considered as a form of “bondage” such as girdles and high heeled shoes, with contemporary criticisms of the fashion and beauty industries around ultra thin models and the link with eating disorders (2000, 140-141). Much of the debate focused on sexuality, gender and beauty as a patriarchal construct designed to control women and keep them docile. Radical feminists shamed those who chose beauty for spending their time applying makeup and not fighting for equality. Others, such as Freidan, argued that mainstream acceptance of feminism would never happen while feminists rejected beauty. This was reminiscent of the first wave feminists’ rejection of dress reform for being too extreme, instead choosing “to represent true womanliness to counter the popular image of the “shrieking sisterhood.” The fashionable dress of the suffragettes, wildly impractical in a violent fracas, implied conformity to contemporary dress codes and emphasised their femininity” (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, 44). Neither generation of feminists managed to attract the following they needed without complying with social norms and beauty ideals.

Women ventured out into the world in increasing numbers and beauty culture and its acute form of patriarchal regulation followed them there. As Wolf
tells us, “as women released themselves from the feminine mystique of
domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to
carry on its work of social control” (1990, 10). Friedan called it a Feminine
Mystique ([1963] 1992) Wolf called it the Beauty Myth (1990), and Bartky called it
the Fashion-Beauty Complex (1990). Whatever it is called, according to feminist
critique, beauty culture was another form of male domination: the perfect tool to
enable the patriarchal order to regulate women’s lives and bodies, keeping them
docile and submissive and, under the guise of social expectations of women,
preventing any challenge to the patriarchy. Wolf argues that the further women
advanced in the job market and the public sphere, the more the beauty myth
tightened its grip, viewing it as a backlash against second wave feminist advances
in women’s rights. As Elias, Scharff and Gill explain, “this historical contingency
is evident in Faludi and Wolf’s analyses which link key moments in US feminist
history (e.g. achieving suffrage, the development of the contraceptive pill, the rise
of the women’s liberation movement) with intensifying pressures in fashion and
beauty—including images of female desirability that became thinner and thinner
the more advances women made in public life” (2017, 9). As women broke away
from the myths of domesticity, motherhood and homemaking, the beauty myth
expanded to take their place. This backlash, a result of women gaining power in
the workplace, resulted in a “third shift” of beauty practices to prevent them from
becoming too successful (Wolf 1990, 12-11).

For the postfeminists, explained Faludi (1991), the backlash demanded that
women use their own judgement and agency to make choices about their bodies,
even if they chose to comply with cultural norms of femininity and domesticity.
Without this backlash, if second wave feminist goals to destroy beauty culture
had succeeded, makeover culture could never have happened. Makeover’s
culture, with its emphasis on being the best exposes the failure of second wave
feminisms attack on beauty culture.

As women attempted to balance greater involvement in the outside world
with a continuing expectation that they should remain marriageable in the eyes
of the male gaze—juggling societal expectations, household duties and beauty
practices—they continued to come under an external disciplinary regime that controlled both their bodies and their time (Bartky 1990, 39-40). Competing increasingly with men for work opportunities, they began to gain the financial independence and disposable income that ought to have released them from the need to make themselves beautiful in order to attract a husband. Yet, as industrial culture waned and the structure of the economy began to change, with more opportunities to work in the new service industries, better technologies, and more spending money, beauty culture went from strength to strength (Wolf 1990, 10). Women’s personal income meant an increased market for beauty product manufacturers who, alongside the media, were realising the power of beauty ideals in advertising and recognising the increasing spending power of the female consumer as they watched their profits soar (Wolf 1990, 65). Women in turn came under even more pressure to submit to beauty ideals. Bartky (incidentally writing pre-Photoshop) comments,

Overtly, the fashion-beauty complex seeks to glorify the female body and to provide opportunities for narcissistic indulgence. More important than this is its covert aim, which is to depreciate the woman’s body and deal a blow to her narcissism. We are presented everywhere with images of perfect female beauty – at the drugstore cosmetics display, the supermarket magazine counter, on television. These images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. (1990, 39)

After giving so much of their time over to maintaining a pleasing appearance, on top of domestic duties, women’s advances in the workplace were restricted by both their lack of time and their continuing status as something to be looked at (J. Berger 1972). Thanks to the efforts of both first and second wave feminists they now had their own money, rights over their fertility, their body, their choices and their education but they were still influenced by beauty ideals presented by the male dominated media, the male dominated beauty product manufacturers and a patriarchal society.

While the second wave feminists fought to break down the pillars of femininity—domesticity, motherhood, chastity—or feminine mystiques (Friedan [1963] 1992) they failed to break down the mystique of feminine beauty (Wolf
As they attempted to disrupt feminine beauty ideals their efforts were frustrated by women’s own reluctance to relinquish beauty culture.

The Transition to Makeover Culture: Form Over Function

The transition from beauty culture to makeover culture ran alongside the three key social transitions I identified earlier in this chapter: first wave feminism to postfeminism, pre-industrial society to neoliberal society and the rapid increase in media culture. During this time the structures that regulated women and their bodies and femininities changed. While society remained highly patriarchal there was a perceived shift from the disciplining power of the male gaze to a neoliberal emphasis on self-discipline coupled with the disciplining power of the media which “simultaneously diffuses and amplifies the government of everyday life, utilizing the cultural power of television (and its convergence with books, magazines, the web, and mobile media) to assess and guide the ethics, behaviors, aspirations and routines of ordinary people” (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 2). Neoliberalism, a political and economic system dependent on the development of free trade and a market economy unfettered by government interference, as applied by Thatcher, Reagan and their peers in the 1980s led to an era of prosperity and a relative sense of freedom for many (Elliot and Lemert 2009, 39, Gill and Scharff 2011, 5). As one of the originators of neoliberalism as a political movement, Margaret Thatcher became a symbol of neoliberal female subjectivity. She rejected feminism, even saying that feminism was dead, and insisting that her position should be based on merit, not gender. While it is unclear whether she ever said this in real life, in the film The Iron Lady, released in 2012 Thatcher’s character, played by actress Meryl Streep, is shown saying “it used to be about trying to do something. Now it’s about trying to be someone.”

Gill and Scharff offer a useful definition of Neoliberalism, “Broadly speaking, it is understood as a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision that rose to prominence in the 1980s under the Reagan administration in the UK and Thatcher’s premiership in the UK. It expanded its economic reach globally through international organizations such as the IMF, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. Equally significant as its geographical reach, however, was its expansion across different spheres of life to constitute a novel form of governance.” (2011, 5).
Whether she actually said this or not, it elegantly, though not intentionally, sums up a key difference between beauty and makeover cultures. The 1980s saw the privatisation of public services, a decrease in welfare spending, and investment in international trade relations. An increase in personal wealth for those able to take advantage of the strong economic climate led to a return to a more strongly, and differently, classed society and greater disparities between rich and poor in OECD countries (Savage 2015, 3). The patriarchal male gaze as a centralised or disciplinarian force, though nominally defunct, continued to make its influence felt through the media. While the power of patriarchal institutions such as church and state decreased, the governmental power of the media increased, or rather, the state technologised in order to maintain control through the media (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 10-11). That is to say that the state, rather than being a technology of power in itself, reached out through other technologies, including technologies of the self in a more subtle show of power. It was still women’s lot to be looked at, and now that scrutiny had intensified, coming from both external and internal sources. Feminist critics suggest that, “our sense of what it means to be a woman, of how women look, talk, think, and feel, comes from the books we read, the films we watch, and the invisible ether of everyday assumptions and cultural beliefs in which we are suspended. Rather than subjects producing texts, in other words, texts produce subjects,” (Felski 2000, 181) and these texts, are still suffused with patriarchal messages.

The move away from patriarchal governmentality, towards the decentralisation of power and the internalisation of discipline and regulatory networks (Foucault [1975] 1991) set the wheels in motion for the shift from beauty culture to makeover culture. As Rose notes, “the contemporary state does not ‘nationalize’ the corporeality of its subjects into a body politic on which it works en masse [like it did in the past]” (2001, 6). Today power over the body is assigned to the individual citizen who, “must now become an active partner in the drive for health, accepting their responsibility for securing their own well-being” (2001, 6), with the state seen as “the enabling state, the facilitating state, the state as animator” (2001, 6). As the separation of the individual from the state increased,
second wave feminists demanded that women be considered as subjects in their own (equal) rights, rather than as objects of male control. Yet they still fell under a style of discipline where beauty, or the correct behaviour and presentation of women, remained a disciplinary technology.

As discussed in Chapter One feminist approaches (Bartky 1990, Bordo 1993) insist that beauty is used to discipline women, even when women claim that they are choosing to partake in beauty practices of their own free will (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 7). Asking, “not what beauty is, but who is in charge of the standards and definitions of beauty and what their motives are for maintaining them” (Holliday and Sanchez Taylor 2006, 180) they challenge beauty ideals and the fashion and beauty industries. Yet as with feminism Holliday and Sanchez Taylor note that not everyone has equal access to beauty, “working-class and black women have more frequently been denied the ‘luxury’ of beauty, and instead have been concerned with earning their living in dirty and sometimes dangerous conditions [...]. While beauty may have been experienced as a constraint for middle-class women, for ‘other’ women achieving beauty meant attaining the ‘respectability’ that signified enhanced status” (2006, 184).

Neoliberalism, not through direct policy, but through its ethos, provided the drive for the shift from beauty culture to makeover culture. As Raisborough suggests, “for many critical commentators the specific imagining of the self as requiring transformation cannot be divorced from a prevailing social, political and economic rationality generally referred to as neoliberalism” (2011, 11). In return, makeover culture serves a neoliberal government. It calls its viewer-citizens to continuously improve themselves. To be their own perfectible best. Sender explains,

The iron fist of the juridical state has been increasingly replaced (in relatively stable, Western democracies) by “government at a distance.” Subjects increasingly wear the velvet glove of their own, internalized understanding of good citizenship. Reality television, media scholars have argued, utilizes surveillance techniques to encourage citizens to monitor and reform themselves in ways compatible with neoliberal government and generation of capital. (2015, 38)
The citizen continues to be regulated through the norms of society (Foucault [1975] 1991). Foucault offers the example of the soldier, conditioned to perform a precise set of practices in line with the rest of his regiment. Neoliberal society is a society governed through freedom, or perceived freedom and choice, with, “freedom as a set of practices, devices, relations of self to self and self to others, of freedom as always practical, technical, contested, involving relations of subordination and privilege” (Rose 1999, 94). The end result of such freedom, like Foucault’s soldier, is a disciplined body that falls in line with the norms of society. Philosophers debate to what extent our lives and actions are pre-determined, and to what extent we have free will (Honderich 2002) while social scientists and humanities scholars consider freedom as a constructed concept which takes into account both political liberty and an “individual person’s control over their own actions” where “if what you do really is within your control, then you can be said to be free to act otherwise than as you actually are doing” (Pink 2004). Within makeover culture, freedom to act otherwise is enshrined within postfeminism’s claim for agency, yet it is the neoliberal freedom described by Rose above, a freedom of practices which empowers the individual to conform.

Makeover operates under a different moral code to beauty culture. The 1950s housewife was expected to comply with the expectations of patriarchal society and her moral duty was to do her best to make herself appealing to her husband through her dress and presentation. The moral subject of makeover culture lives in more complex times, where she is morally obliged to make choices (Giddens 1991) which will enable her not just to do her best but also to be her best, and her moral duty, she is told, is to do this for herself.

For women, choice, which took the place of more overt coercion or compliance, emerged from a combination of second wave feminist battles and neoliberalism. These drew attention to beauty culture as a form of patriarchal control in which the body itself came under greater scrutiny but was required to remain passive. While freedom is a nineteenth century concept (Rose 1999, 67-68), in a neoliberal consumer society we believe we have freedom and choice, but the confusing of social and market values counters that chance of freedom.
Aside from this we suffer from an excess of choice, a “puzzling diversity of options and possibilities” (Giddens 1991, 3) from which we have to “reflexively” make our decisions. We are expected, indeed we are under a moral imperative, to be “endlessly preoccupied with the kind of life one wants to live” (Salecl 2009), adding to the regulatory framework a kind of paralysis when it comes to decision-making. Choice, rather than replacing coercion or compliance became coercive in itself as the moral requirement of the responsible neoliberal subject. Rose (1998, 2001) argues that we are now governed through and by choice since governing too much counters the natural laws of civility and relationships (Rose 1999, 70). Under neoliberalism, “public peace was to be maintained not through an exhaustive code of sumptuary laws and prescriptions, but through shaping the conduct of free individuals in the direction of civility” (Rose 1999, 73).

Where it gets complicated, is that to counter the rhetoric of choice offered to women, the penalty for this supposed freedom is that she has no choice but to choose (Cronin 2000, 279, Giddens 1991, 81). While there are both right and wrong choices in the search for perfection she cannot not make a choice either to participate or not to participate in a culture in which she is always already implicated. As Cronin contributes,

An individual is defined by the ‘innate’ capacity of ‘free choice’ and this choice expresses the inner authentic individuality of that person. The abstracted notion of ‘choice’ becomes an inherent ideal as well as the route to the expression of individuality. Yet within this politics of choice, we have no choice but to choose if we are to express ourselves as individuals [...] individuality is not an option but rather the compulsory route to selfhood. In these politics of choice Just Do It is not an invitation, but an imperative. (2000, 279)

Therefore, “not choosing” (as differentiated from ‘choosing not to’) becomes a logical impossibility, a discursive blank space or kind of non-being” (2000, 279). A woman who might have been considered, by second wave feminists, to be a victim of beauty culture is now required to be an active participant in makeover culture. The makeover citizen is not a body passively made beautiful, her body is presented as strong, active, powerful and importantly, consenting and agentic. Women today are held responsible for their choices and their actions as they
research procedures, compare advertisements, ask questions and seek the recommendations of peers on online forums.

The early 1990s were a time of intense social and political change and I suggest 1990/1991 as the turning point between beauty and makeover cultures. In 1990 the reunification of East and West Germany marked the end of the Cold War, and the theatre of international politics shifted its focus to the Middle East with the start of the Gulf War in 1991. Meanwhile, the Western economies grew in wealth and power as the neoliberal politics of the late 1980s and beyond supported market economies and increased privatisation of previously public utilities and services. The new society was fed by the social and cultural shifts of the 1990s and on to the 2000s with substantial increases in the number of women in Western cultures working outside the home. Social and personal change was prevalent too. When the movie *Pretty Woman* hit the big screen in 1990, Julia Roberts’ transformation offered the regular (female) consumer an inkling of the neoliberal promise of makeover that was to come; the fantasy that anyone could be what they wanted to be given the desire and the financial wherewithal to consume the appropriate products. It was a modern day Cinderella story. At the same time the Tiger Economies\(^{23}\) flooded the market with cheap products, and cut-price fashions from Indonesia deluged the stores of Western cities. The masses could now buy into the dream.

At the same time there was a shift towards feminine flesh itself, as opposed to creating the preferred feminine shape with corsets and girdles, which aligns with makeover culture’s obsession with the body. Thesander describes the ideal body as makeover culture approached,

> At the end of 1989 a new, curvaceous feminine ideal with a full bust appeared on the fashion scene, in keeping with the tendency to accentuate female sex identity. Women proudly showed off their attributes, demonstrating their newfound readiness to express themselves in a feminine way with also a little more warmth and eroticism. The big-busted feminine ideal arrived on the scene in the same year as the bra celebrated its 100\(^{th}\) birthday. (1997, 218)

Significantly, in 1991 came the first official proposal for the World Wide Web (Stacy 2017), a technology that was to become critical in the practice and longevity of makeover culture. The technologies that enabled increased access to print and screen media and the addition of online and social media meant that women were bombarded with messages extolling the virtues of aesthetic form over function and pushing them to choose to be the best that they could be to an extent that they never had before. I am certainly not suggesting that the Internet in any way caused makeover culture, indeed, in its early days its appeal was to technology geeks and gamers; the marketers got on board years later. Rather, that with the access it provided to experts, ideals and information, it was suited to such introspections and self-surveillance as encouraged a makeover mindset, rendering it a key technology of makeover culture.

As I will discuss further in the second half of this thesis, social media, which followed, was to have a profound impact on beauty culture and makeover culture, as Jones describes in relation to cosmetic surgery, “the Internet and other media have created new landscapes for cosmetic surgery. The vast amount of free information available to those in the over-developed world means that the distribution of agency and the human actors within cosmetic surgery have been dramatically altered in the last ten years” (2012, 186). The power of the consumer has increased through the ability to add and share content online and to communicate with providers and other users to gather information about the products or procedures that interest them. In addition the growth of communities around issues such as body modification, cosmetic surgery, fat acceptance and beauty has, as Jones suggests, altered the power balance between consumers and providers in a market economy.

Femininity is a recurring theme throughout this thesis, and the paradigm shift from the more passive femininity of the mid-twentieth century, through second wave feminists’ troubled engagement with femininity and attempts to

---

24 In 1989 Tim Berners-Lee was working at the CERN institute developing a system to link and access important documents on a computer system using hypertext. The information was placed on a server and was accessed and read internally until 1991 using a software tool that he developed known as a browser. In August 1991, the world’s first website was made available on the larger Internet. (Stacy 2017)
disrupt feminine ideals, to a more active engagement with femininity in the early twenty-first century parallels the shift to a contemporary feminism which advocates choice. There is a shift from femininity as an expectation in beauty culture, to femininity as a compulsory choice in makeover culture. At the same time, we see a change in the definition of femininity: a move from the production of femininity as a performance to the production of femininity through the body itself. During the 1980s the increasing emphasis on the body itself led to dispensing with undergarments that modified the shape of the body, and instead modifying the body itself through exercise and diet to suit the prevailing fashions (Thesander 1997, 201). There was a growth market for exercise videos, with Jane Fonda promoting a combination of her aerobic exercise plans and healthy eating as a quick route to the ideal body (Thesander 1997, 211).

As I discuss in Chapter Eight, although women’s bodies were always part of their femininity, and the body has always been important in beauty, a key feature of makeover culture is that a feminine body itself is prized. Gill suggests that, “one of the most striking aspects of postfeminist media culture is its obsessional preoccupation with the body. In a shift from earlier representational practices, it appears that femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one” (2007, 149). Femininity has become central to the regulation of the body itself.

As Bordo (1997a, 91) and Bartky (1997, 130) discuss, theories surrounding the disciplining of women’s bodies shifted from understanding discipline as external under structuralism, coming from a patriarchal power source, to internal, through poststructuralism and the individualism of neoliberalism. The self-discipline demanded by neoliberalism led, not to a relaxing of standards of beauty, but an intensification, and a search for continual self-improvement. However, the dualism of an internal/external divide is contentious. In neoliberalism responsibility for discipline is turned on the self, but in order to manage the self the makeover citizen seeks out and internalises external sources of information such as those provided by the media. The external source therefore continues to wield a coercive power and we cannot claim full agency.
Although in looking back we consider practices such as tight lacing and footbinding to suggest that men were cruel, sadistic woman haters, contemporary beauty practices are often covered with the maxim no pain, no gain and accepted as part of modern beauty routines. Despite strong calls for agency in the choice of body and beauty practices from postfeminists and third wave feminists, a minority of voices still speak out against beauty practices. Jeffreys likens beauty practices such as cosmetic surgery to cultural practices like foot binding and genital cutting that have been defined by United Nations as oppressive to women because they are, “understood to be damaging to the health of women and girls, to be performed for men’s benefit, to create stereotyped roles for the sexes and to be justified by tradition” (2005, 3). She argues that, “western beauty practices from makeup to labiaplasty do fit the criteria and should be included within UN understandings. The great usefulness of this approach is that it does not depend on notions of individual choice; it recognizes that the attitudes which underlie harmful cultural practices have coercive power and that they can and should be changed” (2005, 3).

More recently McRobbie has suggested that,

the compulsion to compete for perfection and the requirement to self-regulate are forms of violence, and also an anti-feminism masked by meritocratic ideals which reflect the new practices of gendered governmentality or the feminine ‘conduct of conduct’. The perfect suggests that it is only viable to compete against other women. It thereby intensifies those gender differences which might otherwise be at risk of being dissolved. (McRobbie 2015, 16-17)

Like Jeffreys, she has identified the pressure on women to change themselves, and feels it comes from an external form of control that affects women in particular and affects them aggressively. In an earlier article McRobbie described the participants on makeover shows such as What Not To Wear as victims of symbolic violence as, “public enactments of hatred and animosity are refracted at a bodily or corporeal level” (McRobbie 2005, 101). This suggests that, despite their contemporaries’ insistence that women should be free to choose, they consider women who choose beauty practices to be, to some extent, cultural dupes, still under the power of a patriarchal regime.
Where does this leave us as women if we are told that good feminists should not bow to beauty practices, but that they should aspire to be the best that they can be, that a real feminist would want to make the best of her body but that her body shouldn’t have anything to do with her success? Almost paradoxically, makeover culture has been co-opted as a tool of postfeminism—symbolic of the neoliberal freedom of choice—while various parts of feminist discourse are co-opted by makeover media. In line with the concepts of postfeminism developed by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2007), Budgeon provides a useful definition where “feminism is both incorporated but simultaneously reviled” (Budgeon 2011, 281) as we see in postfeminist media culture, where feminist traits are assumed to be a part of life, seen as a source of power, and also seen as a source of comedy and ridicule.

The Age of Makeover Culture: ‘Being the best you can be’

As postmodernism marked a theoretical break from modernism, I argue that makeover culture marked a cultural break from beauty culture. Beauty culture had evolved as far as it could, stifled by second wave feminism. The new culture offered fresh aspirations and techniques of endless renewal. As the highest earning actress of the decade Julia Roberts repeatedly remodelled herself on-screen and off-screen for the world to see. In the music world, mononymous pop stars Madonna and Kylie were chameleon queens of makeover; indeed their ability to adapt to a changing culture means that they are still around today in their fifties. They presented to the media as strong, desiring and flexible women: in short as makeover citizens.

I argue that today makeover culture extends beyond media culture, makeover culture is contemporary culture, and not just a collection of practices within it. It is ingrained in the customs and belief systems of modern women’s lives. In today’s social environment, where neoliberal values dominate the middle-class paradigm, and the neoliberal imperative for self-improvement is key to the development of a valuable self (Elliot and Lemert 2009), the shift from
beauty culture to makeover culture, where we are encouraged to 'be the best version of yourself', to admire the perfect/perfectible body and to actively seek perfection ourselves, is symbolic of change in a wider culture that would previously have suspected those wanting to look their best of being vain and shallow.

Although the term makeover only came into common usage in the 1970s and 1980s, the earliest known use of the word in the media dates back to 1860, with *Vanity Fair* magazine’s character “Miss Angelica Makeover” (Miller 2008, 1). Later, in 1936 *Mademoiselle* magazine published what is recognised as the first magazine reader makeover (Fraser 2007, 177). This first Cinderella article caught on and soon magazine editors were rushing to respond to women’s feelings of inadequacy and desire for self-improvement with instructional articles. Today’s equivalent, women’s glossies, use print technologies and image manipulation to present body ideals and how-to guides that reflect the history of the genre. As for the original television makeover, the program *Queen for a Day*, which began on the radio in 1945 and moved to television in 1956, took an ordinary woman, made her over, and took her out for a special day (Sender 2005, 131). The makeover slot then became a staple of the daytime show. Russell also identifies the 1980s fitness video such as Jane Fonda’s *Workout* as a pre-cursor to makeover television (2007, 68). With the shift from beauty culture to makeover culture, contemporary television makeover developed into hour long and series long makeover projects. The makeover narrative altered from the quick change makeover of the beauty culture days, done to the participant, to an emphasis on the process; reflecting the increased importance of becoming, and of the participant’s active participation in makeover culture.

---

25 Miller provides an overview of the earliest magazine makeovers. “The New York satirical magazine *Vanity Fair* (unrelated to its latterday lounge-lizard/coffee-table/hairdressing salon namesake) ran from 1859 to 1863. Page 215 of the October 27, 1860, edition earned the periodical enduring fame, because the first known use of the word “makeover” appeared there, in a notice headed “Adornment.” It referred to a fictional figure: “Miss Angelica Makeover. The men like her and the women wonder why.” Angelica’s gift was the ability to transform her “coarse” hair “into waves of beauty” through “miracles of art and patience.” Her “eyes were by no means handsome, but she . . . learned how to use them,” utilizing “art and culture” to pass “for a fine woman” (“Adornment” 1860). The word “makeover” reappeared in women’s magazines of the 1920s and 1960s.

26 In 1936, *Mademoiselle* magazine offered what has been described as the first formal makeover of an “average” reader, who had asked for tips on how to “make the most” of a self that she deemed “homely as a hedgehog” and “too skinny” (quoted in Fraser 2007: 177). The article turned into a regular feature, and the term “makeover” entered routine parlance in the 1970s.” (Miller 2008, 1-2).
Lewis (2008a) dates the birth of modern makeover television from 1996, with the introduction of the programs *Ground Force* (1997–2005) and *Changing Rooms* (1996-2004), and the rash of copycat shows that followed. Lifestyle and body makeover shows debuted in the early 2000s, including: *What Not to Wear* (2001-2007), *You Are What You Eat* (2004-2006), *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* (UK - 2004-2009) and *The Biggest Loser Australia* (2004-present). *Extreme Makeover* was the first major success in the US market venturing into extreme cosmetic surgery in 2002 and was followed by *The Swan* in 2004. With twenty-five free to air television channels in Australian cities27 up from the original three in the 1950s, and the main pay television provider, Foxtel, advertising over 200 channels,28 the makeover citizen can watch lifestyle television all day every day. In the ten years that I spent on this project makeover media changed significantly. *The Biggest Loser UK* finished in 2012, although the Australian and American versions still continue for now, and the UK version of *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* ended in 2009. *The Swan* ran for just two series in 2004 and while other shows have emerged, most have been short lived and many have now been relegated to daytime slots, or lifestyle channels.

Makeover media reflects the changing status of the women it is directed at, with television makeover shows and contemporary women’s magazines espousing empowerment and choice. Hermes, whose research was carried out amongst British and Dutch women in the 1990s, proposes that the magazine provides an ideal to aspire to (1995, 49). In comparison with beauty culture, women are no longer objects of consumption, prepared by their mothers for the marriage market. Now they are considered to be key audiences in film, television and magazine promotion (Boyce Kay and Mendes 2014, 124). They are presented as active consumers of leisure products in their own right; agents of consumption equal to, if not more powerful than, men. However, they are at once told that they are in control of their bodies, and targeted by Photoshopped advertisements promoting the perfectible body as a (heavily regulated) choice, available to all.

Jones points out that makeover culture “valorises the process of development rather than the point of completion. It is closely related to renovation and restoration and includes elements of both, but where renovation and restoration imply achieving a final goal or a finished product” (2008a, 12), the body in makeover culture can never be finished, this is why it is has become culture, and not just a collection of practices. She goes on to say, “it is important to remember that, ‘make-over’ – used either as a noun or verb – is in the present tense. Despite appearances then, makeover culture is not about the creation of a finished product – whether houses, psyches, bodies or gardens – rather it is about showing subjects, objects and environments being worked upon and improved” (2008a, 12). McGee, more negative about makeover, describes it as, “a cycle where the self is not improved but endlessly belaboured” (2005, 12). This impossibility of ever being finished is key to the regulatory power of makeover culture and the constitution of contemporary womanhood. It keeps women (and men) in a continual state of not quite good enough: believing that perfectibility is possible and striving to be the best.

If postfeminism delivered the choice to make over and neoliberalism the motive, the dramatic increase in media provided the knowledge required and the model for improvement. The convergence of postfeminism and neoliberal deregulation served as a breeding ground for postfeminist media culture such as Ally McBeal, Sex in the City and Bridget Jones, alongside swathes of cheap to produce lifestyle shows (Hearn 2008, 502). Through these shows, “feminism, in a paradoxical manoeuvre, is both erased and omnipresent” (Toffoletti 2014, 106), and we experience, “the impossibility of differentiating between feminist and antifeminist themes amid the implosive forces of a virtualized significatory and political economy” (Toffoletti 2014, 105). Postfeminist media culture presents female characters who represent the woman who has all that past generations of feminists fought for, she has her career, often in a male-dominated industry, she is in charge of her own money, property and sexuality, she can dress as she chooses and date whomever she wants. At the same time she aspires to
femininity, to marriage and to motherhood, models that the second wave feminists railed against.

While makeover culture presents as an imperative, intensified version of beauty culture, the key difference is this: where beauty culture claimed that women could be beautiful if they made the effort, makeover culture, under the influence of neoliberal governance, tells us that they should. The shift from could to should is linked to the availability of technologies that enable change to an extent that was not possible before. There are no excuses. The makeover narrative tells them how lucky they are to have access to technology and that they owe it to themselves to use it because, as L’Oréal has been telling women for over forty-five years now, “you’re worth it” (Verner 2011).

It is significant that makeover is not experienced as a single practice with a clear end point; it is a culture of continual self-improvement and reinvention. This repeated transformation marks makeover culture as different from beauty culture. It is an existential journey of self improvement, which has become a moral project centred on individual insufficiency. My interview participants were conscious of this when they talked about constantly watching themselves, and not measuring up.

Makeover culture recommends that a woman, as a disciplined neoliberal subject, should try to be the best that she can be (using whatever techniques and technologies are available to her). The focus of the best is increasingly linked to the body. Rose argues that, “selfhood has become intrinsically somatic—ethical practices increasingly take the body as a key site for work on the self” (2001, 18). Selfhood is increasingly based on conformity to social ideals rather than individualism and “the notion of normality [...] is the linchpin of this mechanism. In popular discourse, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the term ‘normal’ had come into common usage to describe things that are regular, usual, typical, ordinary, conventional” (Rose 1999, 75). The normalisation of the body is facilitated by discipline and the access to “technologies of the self” (Foucault

---

29 Cosmetics manufacturer L’Oreal debuted their “Because you’re worth it” advertising campaign in 1971. The campaign celebrated its fortieth birthday in 2011.
1988, Heyes 2007a, 8) that discipline enables. Following Foucault, Heyes posits power as a constructive force and takes a positive view of women's agency suggesting that disciplinary power “at the same time as it manages and constricts our somatic selves, also enhances our capacities and develops new skills” (2007a, 7). Through media culture discipline is both internalised (women are told that they are responsible for their own bodies and lives) and externalised (women are presented with narratives of perfectibility and femininity).

The factors that have encouraged makeover culture are broad—the regulation of women through increased self-surveillance, extensive surveillance over intimate spheres of life and a focus on psychological analysis of the interior life (Gill 2007, 155)—meet with three “crucial forces”—Celebrity; Consumerism and the New Economy (Elliot 2008, 9). These do not contradict each other they valorise different aspects: Gill the internal, personal elements, and Elliot the external political and social drivers. My own three—technology, perfectibility and femininity—are features that distinguish makeover culture from earlier iterations of beauty culture. Gill’s factors form the how, Elliot’s the why and mine the what of makeover culture.

Globalisation and the Future-Proofing of Makeover Culture

The form of early twenty-first-century individualism has been influenced by three decades of global neoliberal politics, changing social values and expectations and more recently by cataclysmic changes in world politics and the global financial climate. Globalisation and makeover culture have been factors in the Westernisation of women’s bodies across the world. Elliot argues that, “the new individualism of instant change promoted by cosmetic surgical culture is shaped by, and is reshaping, wider institutional changes associated with globalization” (Elliot 2008, 41). Tanning practices in Europe and North America contrast with skin whitening practices in Japan and other parts of Asia where blephoplasty (eyelid surgery), which make eyes appear wider is also popular. African noses are supposedly narrowed. Brazil, the home of the bikini body, is a
leading consumer of liposuction. China has the fastest growing cosmetic surgery industry in the world by volume, though not yet by procedures per capita, motivated by a competitive job market where discrimination based on looks is rife. High incidences of cosmetic surgical procedures per capita also occur in places as varied as Greece, Italy, Korea, Brazil and Colombia (Beghin and Teshome 2014). 2016 figures from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery suggest that the top five countries in terms of volume of surgeries were USA, Brazil, Japan, Italy and Korea (ISAPS 2017). Interestingly, China, mentioned above, doesn’t appear in the top five, or even the top twenty.

While Heyes discusses ethnic cosmetic surgery in her discussion of existing literatures she complicates the assumption that surgeries such as eyelid surgery (Asian Blepharoplasty) are inherently racist or westernising claiming that, in the same way that post/third wave feminism insists that white women must be allowed to choose cosmetic surgery without it being seen as a sign of their oppression as women, we must not write off Asian women’s own claims that their decision to go under the knife is not racially motivated (2012, 194-199). Further she suggests (in common with Gilman) that all cosmetic surgery is ethnic, including that undergone by white women, and that it is important to consider also issues around the cultural appropriation by white women of attributes more commonly found amongst ethnic groups. She suggests that, “Gilman is the best-known proponent of the view that the modern history of cosmetic surgery needs to be understood primarily as an intervention into racial psychology and ethnic belonging, rather than only as a form of gender normalization or beautification” (2012, 192). Talking about cosmetic surgery in the United States, Menon proposes however that surgeons in the West rely on a “white look or standard” when developing techniques to suit both white and ethnic patients. She suggests that, “in the development of ethnic specific ideals, the standardization of ethnic niches implies a standardization of whiteness” (2016, 604) and that the characteristics of one ethnic group’s body parts become noticeable only in comparison to other ethnic groups.
In contrast, research into cosmetic surgery in South Korea shows, “that the meanings and practices of aesthetic surgery represent a process of negotiation between multiple discourses concerning national identity, globalized and regionalized standards of beauty, official and non-official religion, traditional beliefs and practices [...], as well as the symbolic practices of coming of age, caring for the self, marking social status and seeking success” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 59). That is to say that they argue against whitening or westernisation as the key influence in cosmetic surgery decisions for people in Korea and support a more nuanced decision making process. They explain that during the Global Financial Crisis, “the government sought to protect this important source of GDP by temporarily allowing its citizens to claim tax credit for the cost of cosmetic surgery” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 61) and as a result of this and other factors “cosmetic surgery is perceived as a worthwhile and understandable investment in the body, rather than a sign of vanity” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 61). It is neither appropriate, nor possible to generalise from research into minority populations in the United States when considering populations in other countries. Reading non white bodies as westernised is disingenuous because features sometimes considered Western, such as pale skin, often figure across different indigenous cultures, and while “the existing literature has a tendency to reify globally mediatized bodies as western, [...] the globalized body is already ‘mixed’ and bears little resemblance to actual women in either the West or the East” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012, 75).

Cosmetic surgery tourism (destination surgery) is growing fast to meet the demand for cheap alternatives to surgery in patients’ home countries, with destinations including Thailand, India and South Australia (Tebbel 2000) as well as Belgium, Spain, Poland, Czech Republic, Malaysia, Tunisia and South Korea (Holliday, David, et al. 2014). Globally the industry is unregulated leading to inequalities in service provision and surgical skill and limited comeback for patients who return home with complications. The international *Sun, Sea, Sand and Silicone Project*, based at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, found that while 98% of patients interviewed experienced positive outcomes, 17%...
experience complications with 9% requiring further treatment after returning home. This leads, particularly in countries with nationalised health provision, to the criticism that cosmetic surgery tourism creates an additional burden on local services. Cheaper surgery costs are the greatest influence on patients’ decisions to travel abroad (Holliday, David, et al. 2014, 8) with social media and social networking highly important in information seeking and decision making, the report suggests, “websites are key to this industry, providing information on surgeries, destinations, surgeons’ qualifications, and patient testimonies” (Holliday, David, et al. 2014). Overall they found that patients saw this as an important decision, one they took seriously, “patients were keen to tell us this is not a holiday. The label cosmetic surgery tourism was rejected by many patients because of its whimsical connotations of beauty and relaxation. They pointed out that surgery is serious and painful. There were no beaches and bikinis in our study” (Holliday, David, et al. 2014, 16).

But as in Korea the industry across the globe was affected when neoliberal politics began to crumble with countries going bankrupt, industry sectors failing and financial institutions predicting doom. Here I look briefly at how makeover culture has survived the Global Financial Crisis. Elliot and Lemert offer a useful interpretive frame for the Global Financial Crisis (2009) suggesting that narcissistic individualism magnified to a global scale was the cause of the global financial collapse—the same neoliberal individualism that I argue is one of the factors in the growth of makeover culture. They suggest that personal, corporate and governmental greed leading to debt turned to insolvency and inability to pay, increased borrowing, and financial difficulties at all levels of society from the individual to the national. But this does not signal the end of individualism. Somewhat paradoxically, considering the cost of makeover products and procedures, the imperative to makeover, the search for self, has continued during the recent time of global economic uncertainty. Elliot situates the discussion in the context of contemporary culture seeing, “cosmetic surgical culture [...] as a screen onto which people project their discontent. I want to suggest, too, that people increasingly turn to cosmetic surgery when socio-economic circumstances
link deeply with melancholic aspects of identity” (2008, 131-132). Figures from the United Kingdom and United States professional bodies representing plastic and cosmetic surgeons\(^{30}\) show that following an initial dip in the number of surgical procedures between 2008 and 2009 the cosmetic surgery market continued to grow and the take-up of minimally invasive procedures stayed strong throughout.

Manufacturers, advertisers, publishers and governments all have their stake in our continuing consumption. Consumption is marketed as the responsibility of the neoliberal citizen. As the Global Financial Crisis hit home the United States and Australian governments paid out bonuses to families and individuals as part of stimulus packages that they hoped would bolster struggling economies and help keep retailers and services in business long enough to avoid the worst of the crisis. “Just doing my bit for the economy,” my friends and I would joke if we treated ourselves to a little something over and above the necessary from time to time. Economic crisis aside, the tyranny of choice (Salecl 2009) and the impossibility of satisfaction are at the core of consumption and makeover cultures, bringing us back to Jones notion that the body in makeover culture is never finished (2008a, 1) and the fear of the beauty industry that if we were satisfied we would stop consuming.

While cosmetic surgery shows decreased in popularity, makeover shows on television did not, but found different backers, different avenues to explore. It remains the case that “[U.S.] television is inundating viewers with imperatives about self-appraisal, self-critique, and self-improvement” (Weber 2009). The makeover television genre simply made itself over as Raisborough suggests,

Lest we think that the recession and subsequent credit crunch, which first took hold in 2007, should limit its ability to remain relevant to our cash-strapped lives, lifestyle media ensures its own survival with such self-help titles as *Happiness on $10 a Day: A Recession-Proof Guide* (Wagner, 2009) and programming like *The Home Show* where a house is viewed less as a financial investment (a popular pre-credit crunch theme) and re-positioned as a site of family-based relaxation – as an emotional

Home buying shows changed to home renovation shows while times were tough in the housing market and makeover shows emphasised the importance of makeover for personal and financial success and remaining valid in difficult economic circumstances. The makeover citizen did not stop aspiring.

Conclusion

Beauty culture and makeover culture have many commonalities since for women, “beauty has always mattered — in a personal way, and as an inevitable, and underlying sociopolitical framework, for how they operate in the world” (Brand 2000, 5-6). Now, as then, women look to the popular media for information on how to conform to society’s ideals.

Women in both beauty culture and makeover culture have used clothing, makeup and hairdressing to beautify themselves; but in makeover the intensity of the consumption imperative has increased. Makeover citizens have closets stuffed with clothes and toiletries as shops change up their fashions on a weekly basis, not a seasonal one. Modern fabrics such as elastane changed the nature of clothing, and the boning of the corset is no longer essential to the containment of the unruly body. New makeup technologies, combined with instructional articles and YouTube videos mean that expectations around making up today are much greater and makeup is more widely used and accepted. Women continue to self-discipline, increasingly through changes made to the body itself—with dieting, exercise and cosmetic surgery—rather than to the dress that covers it.

The substantial growth of the beauty industries, especially the cosmetic surgery industry, was, in line with the apparent success of neoliberal free market policies, entirely understandable during the affluent late 1990s and early 2000s. While historically cosmetic surgery was imagined to be the domain of the very rich, the impetus to constant self-improvement led to a surge in the number of cosmetic procedures throughout the developed world and increasingly in the developing nations. The neoliberal emphasis on the self, and in particular the
betterment of the self and the responsibility for the self, was easily equated to financial investment in the body and personal presentation at a time when the financial capacity to make changes was available to so many.

The unique genealogy presented in this chapter demonstrated my understanding of the growth of makeover culture during this period of intense change. It brought together the three factors—the transition from first wave to second wave to contemporary feminisms; the evolution from a pre-industrial to an industrial to a neoliberal consumer society; and the dramatic increase in media and advertising culture—that I suggest were essential to the genesis of makeover culture. It developed a framework of background information, which supports the rest of the thesis, showing how the regulation of women’s bodies has changed with the shift from beauty to makeover culture.

Understanding makeover culture’s historical origins and drivers enables us to understand better why, for example, some interview participants feel that femininity is a matter of behaviour, and others that it is a bodily property, or to understand their responses to makeover media. Importantly my genealogy shows how the move to neoliberal governance, which has promoted a broad culture of self-improvement, combined with postfeminism, which has encouraged women to feel that they have the right to choose what they do with their own bodies, and the influence of media culture, has provided the knowledge and motivation for women to perform ‘the best they can be’.

Makeover culture, however, has turned out to be more resilient yet than the neoliberal culture that spawned it. Not only does it cross national and cultural boundaries that neoliberalism has struggled to overcome, appearing in communist China for example, but while the tenets of neoliberalism were attacked one by one as the Global Financial Crisis, or Great Global Crash (Elliot 2010b), shook the developed world, makeover culture continued to thrive, as evidenced by rising cosmetic surgery numbers particularly in non-invasive procedures and the continued existence of makeover shows on television.

To be clear, as per the introduction my definition of makeover culture is as follows: by makeover culture I mean the contemporary cultural context and
regulatory framework, within which bodies and lives are remade through a discourse of continual self-development, reinvention and improvement. I argue that, despite neoliberalism’s questionable position in the current moment as we witness a return of conservatism and materialism (Hekman 2014, McNeil 2010), makeover culture now permeates every aspect of our lives and has become, a dominant force. Contemporary culture is makeover culture. What used to be part of the lifestyles of the rich and famous—cosmetic surgery, personal shoppers, personal trainers—now appears to be in the reach of average people.

As this advertisement for a Sydney cosmetic surgery clinic suggests, today a large proportion of people in the developed world can afford cosmetic procedures such as Botox™ at ‘only’ $99 a go for forehead wrinkles. The makeover concept sells everyday products such as whitening toothpaste or anti-dandruff shampoo. Prices have been driven down by competition both at home and abroad. If patients cannot afford it outright, cosmetic surgeons offer payment plans and people are taking out personal loans to pay for their surgery justifying it as an investment in the future. As Holliday, David et al. suggest in their report on their research into cosmetic surgery tourism patients are “ordinary people on modest incomes,” they do not fit the faded stereotypes of early of cosmetic surgery (2014, 3).
Chapter 3

The Fairest of Them All and the Happily Ever After: ‘Being the best you can be’ in the Makeover Narrative

Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.

—Neil Gaiman, Coraline

The makeover narrative is a transformational myth with a fairy-tale ending. It exhorts the participant directly or indirectly to take this opportunity to become the best version of herself. This drive to be the best—to marry the prince and live happily ever after, like in the fairy tale—has become the leitmotif that forms the key to the regulation of women’s bodies in makeover culture. In order to extend our understanding of the regulatory power of makeover media, this chapter considers the makeover narrative, particularly as played out in magazine and television formats, through the metaphor of the fairy tale. The chapter expands on the notion of fairy tale as a lens through which to analyse both the narratives of makeover culture and its role in the education (and regulation) of the viewer. Just as no two fairy tales are the same, there is no one single makeover narrative, and the specificities of the narrative are affected by class, race, age, and target audience; however all narratives follow a similar linear pattern and all narratives direct the viewer to a degree of introspection and self-discipline. It also considers how tropes of neoliberal empowerment and choice
come to the fore in the narrative illustrating the makeover’s claims to feminist status and how basic troubling of the surface of these claims reveals the paradoxical nature of makeover in the twenty-first century.

The connection between the fairy tale and makeover television is particularly pertinent. Bratich proposes that, “RTV [reality television] takes up the mantle left by the ancient function of the fairy tale” (2007, 17) and whereas he applied this comparison to great effect in relation to reality television more broadly, unlike other reality television, such as Big Brother or The Osbournes with its focus on lifestyles and celebrities, makeover television focuses on the direct and deliberate transformation of the subject.

I further develop this engagement with the fairy tale, extending on the metaphor by aligning the narrative of makeover culture with the unfolding narrative of the fairy tale. I also contribute to the discussion of the similarities between the makeover narrative and the traditional fairy tale, showing how each provides not just entertainment but also a form of governance through education and morals training. As Bratich suggests, “the fairy tale’s social function was not primarily representational. The narratives had an ethical function - namely to transform the recipients of the stories” (2007, 18). The oral tradition of the fairy tale, like the oral/visual makeover media, controls the message and passes it directly to the recipient.

In both the fairy tale and the makeover show the protagonist is transformed, and so is the reader or watcher. This analogy offers a useful insight into the regulatory force of makeover media, which, while seeming on the surface to be pure entertainment, has a powerful message to share. Increasingly the makeover is not just a social project, but an individual, moral one. I suggest that the moral project of makeover media is far more overtly stated than that of the fairy tale, and that it includes two separate strands: responsibility for the self and the moral duty to help the deserving other.

To consolidate this background knowledge of makeover, and to help us understand the experience of makeover show participants and the messages received by/experiences of interview participants, this chapter is structured
around the chronological narrative. It illustrates the basic before/during/after narrative sequence that runs through all makeover texts and stories, showing the makeover participant’s transition from abject, to object, to subject-citizen of makeover culture. Each makeover story begins with an exposition of the participants’ histories, their not-good-enough bodies and lives. Then we meet the experts and hear their views on the deserving object of makeover and observe their power to transform lives. Next, we follow the makeover participant through their experience observing any procedures and labour undertaken including a period of recovery. Finally, we glimpse the happily ever after—a reveal of the after body, the fully-fledged citizen of makeover culture.

Once Upon a Time: Considering The Makeover as Fairy Tale

The fairy tale, or folk tale, originated from an oral tradition: entertainment aimed largely at adults. Many years later fairy tales morphed into moralistic tales, and still later they came to be thought of as children’s entertainment, education, instruction on morals and self-improvement (Warner 2014, xvi). As Bratich suggests, “be it training in gender relations, in warning against demonized activities, or in learning lessons about the limit and expansion of the possible, fairy tales were a technique to modify conduct” (2007, 18) and they are still considered as such in Catholic education today (Guroian 1996). Makeover media can be considered to serve similar goals. Post makeover the media makeover participant is put forward as an example of a desired behaviour, in this case a body ideal and way of conducting the self, prompting self-awareness and self-discipline in the reader or watcher. Indeed the message in makeover culture is far less subtle than in the fairy tale.

One of the earliest published collections of folk tales was that of Charles Perrault in 1697. The Brothers Grimm published their collection of folk tales between 1812 and 1815 and when they discovered that they were so popular with children they rewrote a selection of them to make them more suitable for young minds and republished in 1825 (Warner 2014, xiii). Since then fairy tales and their
variants have been rewritten, or made over, many times for many audiences in accordance with the morals of the day. Contemporary makeover allows for a similar rewriting, but this time it is the rewriting of the body, making it fit the current body ideals proposed by the media.

While makeover media is clearly aimed at adults, and not children, makeover programming frequently includes overt references to fairy tales. The show *The Swan* takes its name directly from Hans Christian Andersen’s story of the Ugly Duckling and phrases such as, “it’s like a dream,” “it’s a fairy tale,” can often be heard from participants (Weber 2009, 249). At the heart of the fairy tale we find the powers of transformation; both magical and practical, centred on stories of makeover and modification (Bratich 2007, 17). The fairy tale protagonist, like the makeover participant, must work to be the best that they can be. We can see that the moral project of transformation has origins which, although they far pre-date *Ground Force* and *Changing Rooms*, were very obviously reinforced in the charity case style of makeover that these programs often ran when they made over deserving families homes and gardens, and pushed forward the message of the moral project to empower one’s self and to be the best.

Since the advent of the television makeover show the makeover process has become increasingly important to the narrative. Indeed, in contemporary makeover texts it is the process that adds substance and captures the audience’s imagination, so much so that over the past two decades, makeover media has moved from the margins of popular culture to centre stage (Lewis 2007, 291). The format of makeover television has expanded from a quick snippet within a daytime television talk show—makeover participant is presented as in need of makeover (abject), taken backstage and then portrayed as makeover miracle (object) at the end—to full episode-long (*Ten Years Younger in Ten Days, Extreme Makeover, How To Look Good Naked, The Swan*), and season-long (*The Biggest

---

* Written by Hans Christian Andersen *The Ugly Duckling* was first published in 1844.
Loser, Ladette to Lady, Australian Princess) transformations with the participants achieving subjecthood/citizenship on successful completion of their journeys.

As with the quest of the fairy tale protagonist, the contemporary makeover participant is often described as undertaking a “journey” of transformation where the makeover experts grant her wishes. This journey forms the global narrative of makeover media and like the fairy tale the standard makeover narrative is linear, based on a before/after dichotomy. Consider Pinocchio: the abject, failing and passive before object turned into the successful, appealing, active after subject-citizen through a search for an authentic self. The dragon is slain, as we knew he could be, and the princess is made fit for her prince, the best she can be. Like Cinderella’s transformation from rags to ball gown, or the Little Mermaid appearing in human form, the before/after provides the basis for all makeover narratives from the earliest magazine makeovers to contemporary television programming as I will discuss further in Chapter Six.

Like Little Red visiting her grandmother, sometimes the makeover television participant undertakes a physical journey of discovery, visiting people and places from her past, or undertaking physical or psychological challenges in order to change her attitude. In The Biggest Loser, for example, participants are taken on hikes, physical challenges and even international journeys, but often the journey is a metaphorical one. Along the way she will experience difficulties: a modern day Red Riding Hood meeting her own metaphorical wolf, or Hansel and Gretel dealing with the temptation of the gingerbread cottage and then meeting the witch on their path to redemption. Just as we discover the dark undertones of the traditional fairy tale barely hidden below the shining Disneyfied (Giroux 1995) surface created for us in the last eighty years, we watch as she faces her own fear, doubt, struggles and loss on her high-tech journey from abject, to object, to bona fide neoliberal feminine subject-citizen and her inevitable happily ever after life of perfect beauty, the best she can be.

---

32 Walt Disney Production Company’s first feature length ‘fairy tale’ was Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, which premiered on December 21, 1937.
A Cinderella in Rags: Examining the Abject Before Body

The whole premise of the makeover show is that the before body of the participant is abject and must be made over (Elliot 2008, 138). She is not good enough. The journey begins with our Cinderella in rags. Failing to meet the standards, struggling to get by, misshapen, inappropriate, unlovable. But abjection, emblematic of failure, is not an acceptable state for a (neoliberal) citizen of makeover culture. As Atwood Gailey has said, “if female subjects fail to meet society’s rigid standards of beauty, thinness, youth or ‘hotness’, they are redefined as dysfunctional and their bodies sites of pathology” (Atwood Gailey 2007, 117). Her wardrobe, hair and body are criticised and pathologised; she may be overweight, she may have lost touch with fashion, she may or may not be physically unusual. Even her family, who have sent her name to the show’s producers or supported her application, despair of her, but having friends and family think you’re a lost cause is only the beginning of the humiliation, or symbolic violence (McRobbie 2005), of the makeover show. Here we see a key narrative subtext—that the object of the makeover is not good enough in her raw state and that she has a moral duty to improve. The makeover media establishes that she suffers from a certain “insecurity” or “precariousness” (Hearn 2008), an on-going unstable and unfinished state. Although it is not often openly stated, with the narrator preferring to concentrate on what she could/should be rather than what she is, it is easy to read in both her own language and body language, and the imagery used of her dejected face at first weigh in or being observed by the experts, that she understands and feels the shame of her failure. And she should be ashamed. Makeover citizenship is marked, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, not by achieving the unobtainable Disney-style fairy tale of perfection, but simply by not being abject. Mediocrity is normal. As long as she tries to be the best that she can be, achieving it is not expected.
The Fairy Godmother: Wherein ‘The Expert’ is Presented to the Audience and we are Suitably Impressed

Successful citizenship requires appropriate display of taste and behaviour and taste can be learnt, and therefore anyone can, and should, have a go. Redden describes the focus of makeover programs as “a moral evaluation of taste,” where participants are encouraged to “improve their taste literacies” (2007, 158). Having established that the participant needs help to develop their taste literacies, we are introduced to the hero of this fairy tale, the fairy godmother of makeover culture, the expert/surgeon. (Or in the case of the show How To Look Good Naked, self-proclaimed “Fairy Gok Mother” Gok Wan). Throughout the makeover narrative, the leading role switches between the participant (the leading lady) and this expert/surgeon along with a presenter and a supporting cast of lesser experts responsible for physical transformation, mental well-being, social etiquette and moral support: as Weber describes them, “magicians of the rich and famous” (Weber 2009, 43). To the expert/surgeon, variously advisor, supporter and critic, the abject body becomes the object that he must use his considerable power and authority—while the presenter can be female, the surgeon in makeover television is almost exclusively male—to transform into an enlightened, empowered subject-citizen of makeover culture.

She on the other hand—the makeover participant is predominantly female—is poked, prodded and undergoes “extreme rituals of humiliation and sacrifice, beginning with confessional narratives and—most crucially—public exposure of their (pathological) bodies” (Atwood Gailey 2007, 115). She self-defines as abject and confesses her self-hatred to the camera offering an intimate body history for all to see. She says that she wants to find the real her, hiding under the abject exterior. She considers the end result she aspires to her real self, not what she is right now. As we see over and over again, in Cinderella, The Frog Prince and many other fairy tales, there is a search for a true self, which is eventually found or revealed. There is hope for her. Like the fairy-tale protagonist she can be saved. Lewis talks about the way in which, “we as individuals can be reduced down to a mappable set of “problems” that can be addressed through

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
recourse to various types of expertise, and in turn can be made “better” through the makeover process” (2008b, 68). The various experts analyse and pathologise her body and lifestyle and decide what needs to be done in what Atwood Gailey calls “ritualistically brutal scenes, along with humiliating, near-nude shots of ‘overweight’ female subjects undergoing inspection by their doctors” (2007, 117).

In case we, or the participants, are in any doubt of what they must achieve, we are presented with the body of the presenter or expert early on in the makeover show. Their authority relies on their appearance, on them conforming to the ideal. *The Biggest Loser Australia*’s trainers Michelle Bridges and Steve Willis have the fit bodies needed to inspire their charges. It would seem from looking at them that they are living the dream.

![Figure 10 Michelle Bridges and Steve Willis (AKA The Commando) of The Biggest Loser Australia. Available from: http://resources0.news.com.au/images/2013/05/05/1226635/658112-biggest-loser-trainers.jpg (accessed December 4, 2016).](image_url)
The glamorous Amanda Byram, presenter of *The Swan* is everything her participants aspire to be.

Likewise, the surgeons, dentists and hairdressers must all be well presented and an excellent advertisement for their trade. They must undergo their own form of “aesthetic labour” (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017). Together they form a literal, as well as metaphorical body of expertise.

Throughout the media makeover we see an underlying narrative of authority and authorship. The surgeon-expert-fairy-god-person, vocally supported by a team of lifestyle experts, wields authority over the body of the makeover participant in the broadest sense. Since abjection is morally unacceptable, and he, with his digitally manipulated vision of future her, has the power to regulate it, she has no choice but to submit if she wants her happily ever after. He is both authoritative—his knowledge and skill lending him the right to make recommendations to the participant whose final decision is controlled by his authority; and authoring—he is the author/(w)riter quite literally writing the changes onto the body in ink. He authors the new body with the tools of his trade: marker, scalpel and anaesthesia. As Atwood Gailey explains,

The recent proliferation of reality television (RT) programming – and shows focussing on cosmetic surgery ‘makeovers’ in particular – lend new meaning to the notion of the body as inscribed with social significance. Shows such as *Extreme Makeover, Plastic Surgery: Before & After*, and *Dr 90210* depict female bodies as they are probed, painted, suctioned, carved with surgical instruments, and stuffed with foreign objects. (2007, 107)

His authority is increased through his position as a professional surgeon, evidence of his personal taste literacy and education, and reinforced through the support he receives from the other experts, the participant’s family, his access to the technologies of makeover, his history of successful surgeries and happy customers, his marketing materials (websites, glossy brochures, YouTube channel (2015), television appearances) and, significantly, through his own appearance and demeanour. This is strengthened by his celebrity status; as interview participant Emma said, “People have gotten to be celebrities in their own right, 

---

33 A Study by Nainan Wen et al. found that of a sample of 1000 YouTube videos dealing with cosmetic/plastic surgery 60.9 per cent were uploaded by cosmetic surgeons or clinics (2015, 937).

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
for having these TV shows, for making over the celebrities and things like that, it’s interesting.”

One could argue that the contemporary makeover participant authorises the work being done and has an opportunity to co-author and therefore (re)claim authority over her own body. The historical surgeon/patient relationship, where the surgeon held the knowledge and therefore the power, has shifted to a surgeon/consumer relationship (Heyes and Jones 2009, 1) where the consumer has informed herself as to her options even before her first consultation. As Jones suggests,

The doctor’s eye, once the primary diagnostic and aesthetic tool in cosmetic surgery now competes with the patient’s increasingly critical and knowledgeable eye and an all-encompassing media eye. Surgeons express both pleasure and dissatisfaction with this state of affairs: they mourn loss of autonomy and status but acknowledge that stronger patient knowledge and wider dissemination of information about cosmetic surgery equals more business and larger profits. (2012, 185)

This consumer also gets to override the surgeons expertise as in the case presented by Heyes and Jones of Toni Wildish, who challenges her surgeons preference for a natural looking breast augmentation with her desire for the large spherical breasts that she believes will help her aspiration to become a glamour model, and eventually gets what she wants (2009, 1-2).

Paradoxically, it is clear however, that in the case of the television makeover participant—who’s importance in the promotion of cosmetic surgery is significant, and whose example the consumer may take with them to the surgeon’s office—her authority, her right to write her own body future, is overwritten by that of the surgeon-expert, as well as that of the media producer whose motivation is ratings, not necessarily the preferred outcome for the patient. While cosmetic surgery consumers outside of the media spotlight are free to shop around for a surgeon who will do what they want, and strongly expect the surgeon to make them as natural or unnatural as they choose the experience is different for the media makeover participant. There is a contradiction between the message that women should be actively monitoring
themselves and the makeover show participant who is just doing what she is told and not even given the tools to monitor herself.

She surrenders her body—the before body—first conscious and then unconscious, unable to resist such convincing authority, delegating her own moral responsibility to him. In addition her decision-making authority is further diminished by the way that his choices are inevitably made subject to the judgements of the viewers, chat-room fans and blog readers tuning in to critique the outcome of the surgery. Her surrender is in direct contrast to the importance given, in the narration, to the active role of the participant. While overtly expounding a postfeminist rhetoric of choice, the makeover process consistently undermines and influences the participant’s choice process and regulates the body though information provided by biased experts. From the moment that she walks through his door she is expected to bow completely to the expert’s will. It appears that she has freely given her permission, but unconscious while the surgery takes place she no longer has the power to decide.

In both real life and makeover media the relationship between surgeon and consumer varies. Jones further complicates the dr/patient dyad reminding us that there are other actors in the process, from media, to Botox. She says, “the doctors I interviewed were acutely, painfully, and sometimes angrily aware that there were networks larger than themselves at play, that theirs was an industry being recreated by other industries, particularly by the popular media” (2012, 186).

Once the participant has seen the possibility of the new body, proposed by the surgeon-expert and confirmed through visualisation technologies, she is unable to unsee it. If she refuses to go through with the surgery her relationship with her body will be influenced by the memory of the perfect body that she could have had. She has failed in her moral duty to improve herself. Heyes suggests, “once one ‘knows’ that cosmetic surgeons can evaluate a body in a way that exceeds one’s own aesthetic judgements, it’s possible to develop yet more paranoia about the possible flaws with which one is not yet preoccupied” (2009, 81).
The regulation of the female body trickles down to the makeover media audience. Although many of us will never meet the surgeon-expert face-to-face, his authoritative vision/visualisation of the participant’s could-be/should-be body, and by extension all of our could-be/should-be bodies, as presented to us via the media frenzy of makeover culture, leaves an invisible but indelible mark. The surgeon is not only writing the participant’s body future, surgical or otherwise, but also, whether we accept or reject his claim to authority, our own.

**Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Watching the Body in Progress**

The next part of the makeover narrative is the process of makeover—the during. Whether the fairy tale is traditional Grimm Brothers or Disney Princess we follow the protagonist through the process of being made over. On full, hour-long, or season-long makeover shows we see the participants shopping, exercising, in counselling and being prepared to go under the knife. Our fairy-tale princess has been subdued, Briar Rose and Aurora are fast asleep; beautiful but vulnerable, unable to defend themselves, waiting for their prince to rescue them. Jones (2008a, 144, 2008b) suggests that this sleep, in parallel to the fairy tale, offers an opportunity to sidestep the pain—in the fairy tale avoiding the difficult relationship to the evil step mother and surviving the teenage years, in cosmetic surgery avoiding the labour of changing the body or living with the existing body—and reawakening as the new you. Aurora falls asleep for a hundred years, and when she wakes she is fully-grown, perfect, and ready to marry the prince (M. Jones 2008b).

In surgery the expert presides over a medical sleep, his anaesthetised patient helpless. Programs such as *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* show surgery in great detail; relishing and lingering on the bruised and bloody surgical and post-surgery body. Interview participant, Amy, commented that,

---

*34 Snow White and Sleeping Beauty*
[...] one of the interesting things about these shows is that at least... before you never saw the kind of the actual transformation, the actual process of transformation. You actually see pictures of surgery, ... or like, that map of transformation. You used to just see the before and the big reveal but actually no one ever showed the process in between. [...] It puts the cards on the table, like, you will have to go and be put under, someone will cut into your body, there will be pain, there will be blood, but now we’re at the point that that is sort of acceptable.

This second, visibly abject body is on the way to being fixed and is therefore excused the sin of abjection. It is normalised and rationalised more so than the natural, before body. The acceptable, mediated in progress body is about to be revealed.

Ten years ago Gill suggested that it was seen as important to hide this work in beauty culture, saying that women’s bodies are, “rendered into ‘problems’ that necessitate ongoing and constant monitoring and labour. Yet, in an extraordinary ideological sleight of hand, this labour must nevertheless be understood as ‘fun’ or ‘pampering’ or ‘self-indulgence’ and must never be disclosed” (2007, 155). That suggests that undergoing makeover should be considered an act of self-indulgence. Yet in makeover television the work is no longer hidden, indeed it is celebrated. Weber suggests that this makeover media participant is shown in a situation of conflict, at once hidden away from the outside world, from her friends and family and cut off from her day-to-day life, and publically displayed on television for all to see (Weber 2009, 44). And Skeggs adds,

Feminists have known for a long time that women’s ‘domestic’ labour has been central to the reproduction of capital but that it has been made invisible, surplus and naturalised and is rarely taken into account in theories of value. Yet we are now in a bizarre historical moment wherein a format has emerged (reality television) in a major capitalist industry (the media) that is premised upon spectacularly visualising women’s labour in all its forms, especially through its focus on relationships, dispositions and emotional performance. (Skeggs 2010, 29)

And what was once termed self-indulgence, or vanity, is as likely to be positively reframed today as self-care, an important part of the neoliberal imperative to look after and improve the self.
More recently Gill, working with Elias and Scharff, describes a “‘turn’ to labour” (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 34) in sociology which is exploring the range of labours, from aesthetic, to creative, to psychic. These make up the neoliberal drive for improvement which they term ‘aesthetic entrepreneurship’ where, “preoccupations with appearance, beauty and the body are turned into yet another project to be planned, managed and regulated in a way that is calculative and seemingly self-directed” (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 39). This calculated, managed beauty work is no longer hidden; it is required of not just the beauty worker but also of the everyday makeover citizen.

Compared with the compulsory labour experienced by fairy-tale protagonists—work frequently related to survival rather than any moral imperative; spinning gold, cleaning the house, telling stories—or their miraculous transformations, the labour in the makeover is represented as chosen and driven by the moral imperative for self-improvement. However, the case of makeover media is somewhat different from the everyday experience of makeover. As the during part of the makeover becomes increasingly important to the narrative, the participant is presented as both actively working herself towards her transformation and passively worked on. The makeover narrative emphasises the importance of her labour/work, or at least the edited, rosy version of work that is shown in the media, all the while showing the work that others are doing to her body. As I will discuss, we must consider how the exploitative nature of work in the fairy tale can be seen mirrored in the makeover media where the participant, because she can and therefore she must, has no choice but to comply with the experts recommendations, the work is less her own than it is his.

**Cinderella, You Shall Go to the Ball: Admiring the After Body**

The show begins with an imagining of a better future, if not why would the participant even be there. As Raisborough suggests, “the happy ending incorporates a certain imagining of a past and present self, as a self in need of
change, with a certain imagining of a future, happy self. These imaginings circulate particular knowledge about the self and about citizenship” (2011, 2). It ends when that imagining comes true.

After participants have submitted to the experts and their technologies and have undergone the process comes the grand reveal. A perfect climax of suspense and melodrama, a dramatic conjunction of cinematography and anticipation (M. Jones 2013, 517), where, just like
Cinderella entering the ballroom, the participant is revealed to the audience, and often to themself as the glamorous and feminine after body. They are presented as exceptional. The after image proves the success of the project.

As in the fairy tale narrative, the revealing of the true, idealised self—Cinderella being found by the prince, Pinocchio turning into a human boy—is the reward for the process that the participant has been through and for their
good behaviour and appropriate moral choices. The pain and difficulties are offset by the positive outcome. The Little Mermaid decides that the loss of her voice, or the dagger-like pain of walking, is a price worth paying to win her prince. The audience too are rewarded by the happy ending. As Raisborough suggests, “it’s hard to dismiss the tangible feel-good factor when, for example, a participant emerges from her (it is mostly women) journey of transformation to experience her happy ending in a makeover shows’ final reveal – isn’t that one of the reasons we so enjoy the makeover show?” (2011, 10).

It is an emotional moment for all involved: for the participant a reminder of their labour—physical, emotional and affective; for the experts proof of their expertise/authority; and for the viewer encouragement to consider their own body in the light of the transformation. In *The Swan*, participants, who are not allowed mirrors during their makeover, are revealed to the viewers before they see themselves; like the ugly duckling, who doesn’t know he is beautiful until he sees his reflection in the water. Participants see only the before and the after, and it is the audience who see the process. The makeover show ends with the participant almost universally happy with the fairy-tale outcome, free from her failed past, her imagining come true.

The narrative suggests that she has assumed responsibility for her own appearance. Now she must show that it was worth it. To demonstrate her newfound beauty and her own authority over the makeover process the participant is encouraged to have pride in what she has done and to take credit for her work; to reclaim her authority from the experts. Now it is the work of the expert that is hidden, minimised and turned back on the woman participant.

Yet although she may now have got away from her past, in order to be so she has sacrificed her autonomy, that is to say that the decisions have been made by someone else. As Atwood Gailey suggests, “emerging from the ritualized ordeal of surgery, they are, paradoxically, both liberated from and reinscribed with their own subordination. Having shaken, at least temporarily, the stigma of otherness, they present themselves as advertising icons for freedom and happiness. Yet theirs is a liberation requiring utter submission to social
authority” (2007, 117-118). In television makeovers, as we see particularly in *The Swan*, she cannot be considered fully the author of her own body. Morgan talks about this ‘paradox’ of “Liberation into Colonization” whereby in searching for their freedom women are further constrained by those that they ask for help, as the surgeon and experts put their own expectations on to them (2009, 58-59). As I will discuss further in Chapter Four, the second wave feminists would question if she is actually in control or is she just doing what patriarchal society—in the guise of the experts—white, middle class and frequently male—tells her she should do.

While vanity is despised as a characteristic in fairy tales (Mother Gothel in Disney’s Tangled, Cinderella’s ugly sisters, Snow White’s evil stepmother), in makeover shows it is considered a positive thing to want to look better, to want to be a better version of yourself as per the neoliberal ideal for self-improvement. We see that, “when Snow White’s stepmother asks “who is fairest of all?” she is not asking simply an empirical question. In wanting to continue to be “the fairest of all,” she is striving, in a clearly competitive context, for a prize, for a position, for power” (Morgan 2009, 55). Makeover participants are very much aware of the power that beauty brings: looking better is the prize. If fairy tales are moral projects, aimed at changing the listener or reader’s conduct, as Elliot suggests, “the message of popular culture is that personal makeover is progressive even beneficial. The consumption of cosmetic surgical culture is the celebration of personal change” (2008, 92). And more than a celebration of personal change it is required of the makeover citizen. This new morality around the perfectibility of the body, which has taken shape in neoliberalism is reflected in contemporary makeover culture; as *The Swan* host Amanda Byram tells us, “Sarina underwent an aggressive surgical plan to be the best that she could be” (*The Swan* Series 1, Episode 9). This continual striving to ‘be the best version of yourself’ is an important focus of the moral project of makeover culture demanding a program of constant self-improvement through health, healthy eating, fitness, fashion and cosmetic surgery and a disciplined and highly regulated perfect body.
In the search for both authenticity—that is their true selves, and validity—that is a self that is considered by makeover culture to be valid/worthy, normative and generally feminine, the freedom to govern their own bodies, so recently claimed by second wave and later feminists to have been conceded to women as individuals through feminism, is taken away by neoliberal imperatives towards self care and self improvement. This authenticity, paradoxical in itself, is hard earned; but the hard work is necessary since prior to the makeover the participant has “no claim to legitimate selfhood within the makeover’s constitution of identity” (Weber 2009, 13). This is the moment that they achieve successful citizenship.

At first glance makeover culture appears to sit in opposition to authenticity: taking what is there to make it new, but Giddens suggests, “the moral thread of self-actualisation is one of authenticity (although not in Heidegger’s sense), based on ‘being true to oneself’. Personal growth depends on conquering emotional blocks and tensions that prevent us from understanding ourselves as we really are” (Giddens 1991, 78–79). Clearly post-surgical bodies must be inauthentic, false, but can the “new her” actually be more authentic than the old, the supposedly natural body, which didn’t feel how she thought it ought to be? If it is natural to desire to be beautiful—as per the arguments of biological determinism and the desire for a suitable mate for reproduction—is she now being true to herself. If, as Weber suggests, makeover is about revealing the “real” you, then although the “you” may exist, these stories suggest the “better you” can only be achieved through the makeover (2009, 7).

Cronin suggests that, “in these multiple temporalities, the potential of the self is always already located in the inner depths of the self or unique individuality of that person. Yet simultaneously, the self’s potential is located beyond the imagined interiority of the self as a future projection which always shifts out of reach” (2000, 276). The authentic is waiting to be revealed, but as per the rules of makeover culture, the authentic self is an ongoing project, one which is never quite finished. To explain such paradoxes Weber suggests that, “one of
the makeover’s more critical premises is that it does not construct, it reveals. That is to say, the makeover does not create selfhood, but rather it locates and salvages that which is already present, but weak” (2009, 7). Maybe weight loss reveals the authentic body under the flab while cheekbones, hidden away under dull skin might be revealed by a skin treatment, a better diet and a touch of highlighter in just the right places. Meanwhile teeth, straightened or veneered, return the mouth to what it used to be, hiding years of neglect. Throsby suggests that authenticity comes into question in the case where weight loss has been achieved through surgical means suggesting that, “the restorative discourse of ‘finding the real me’ is highly contingent and slippery, particularly in the context of weight loss, which is deeply entrenched within a potent nexus of moral prescriptions for the care of the self through the meticulous surveillance and disciplining of the body” (2008, 119). The requirement to constantly discipline the body in order to achieve the desired ideal does not concur with it being the authentic or natural body because through surgery, one can be considered to not have lost the weight oneself, “weight loss outside of the normative rubric of diet and exercise, therefore, risks rendering the ‘new (real) me’ always potentially inauthentic” (2008, 119).

Atwood contrasts two different meanings of plastic to make a point about authenticity and self-expression, “there is clearly a real tension in the way we understand the use of transformative techniques to indicate authenticity. While the body is increasingly seen as plastic and hybrid, something we can mould in order to express the self—instances where this is deemed to be unsuccessful are understood as plastic in the sense of being fake” (2014, np). As we move beyond the natural malleability of the body itself to an infinitely malleable, increasingly plastic, artificially and purposefully modified, but not necessarily inauthentic body, then it is theoretically possible to achieve perfection, if only one could define it. Gimlin, in her research on the changing narrative of breast enhancement surgery, found a swing towards the conceptualisation of the obviously augmented breast as desirable both as a form of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen [1899] 1993) and as a demonstration of investment in and
‘work’ on the body (Gimlin 2013, 914). This visibility of ‘work’ as I will discuss in Chapter Six was also seen as attractive by some of my interview participants who aspired to a body that, rather than appearing seamlessly authentic, looked like it had been worked on through exercise.

The contestants on *The Swan* understand the paradox, and they want the new look, authentic or not. “I don’t look anything like that girl,” declares Rachel, eventual winner for the series, deftly separating herself from her past, from “that girl,” the abject other (*The Swan* Season One, Episode One), but she loves the new “me” that she has become. This, according to the show’s narrative, is the path to authenticity, “you started this journey as self-described ugly ducklings, and as in the fairy tale your true selves have finally emerged,” says Amanda Byram to the three finalists, (*The Swan* Season One, Episode Nine). They have fulfilled a neoliberal fantasy and achieved acceptability.

The narrative of the contemporary makeover show also uncovers a postfeminist paradox; it lays claim to postfeminism’s right to choose while depoliticising the second wave feminists’ arguments against beauty culture. It
emphasises the participant’s involvement in the decision process and her strength and commitment to the program. We are told that she is doing it to and for herself, not for others and that she is in control of the decision-making. Feminist, anti-surgery claims that cosmetic surgery is a form of aggression against women (Jeffreys 2005) are denied while the shows claim feminist credentials through the purported agency of participants, arguing that the participant has a right to do what she wants with her body, to choose beauty, to choose to be the best. The television show participants understand this from their position within makeover culture. Atwood Gailey explains, “unwilling or unable to acknowledge the social context in which they do so, they invariably describe surgical intervention as intrapersonally motivated […] Yet they inadvertently reveal their interpersonal motivations in stories relating social stigma, sexual dysfunction, and embarrassment resulting from others’ reactions to their ‘deviant’ bodies” (2007, 118). The slogans and sound bites imprinted on their memories are parroted out for the cameras, “I want to find the real me”, “I want the old me back”, “I’m doing this for myself”, “I want to be the person/wife/lover/mother I used to be”. They are looking for a body lost through the physical changes that life brings (Gimlin 2013, 913) or a body aspired to but never achieved. Bordo suggests, “to add insult to injury [the physical injury of the needle, as well as just the turn of phrase], the rhetoric of feminism has been adopted to help advance and justify the industries in anti-aging and body-alteration. Face-lifts, implants, and liposuction are advertised as empowerment, “taking charge” of one’s life. “I’m doing it for me” goes the mantra of the talk show” (2003). If they have done it purely for themselves, then what does it matter what their family and friends think when they parade in front of them at the end?

While the overt narrative tells us that makeover media participants are doing it for themselves and making their own choices, they are not allowed to opt out of the process once they are inside it. When participants fail to adhere to the routine they are treated like naughty children. “Marnie is having trouble sticking to the program,” Amanda Byram, host of The Swan tells us in Season One, Episode Seven, first aired on May 10, 2004. Makeover participants are expected to

* (Re)dressing Cinderella  *
make sacrifices to be the best that they can be, to “generate value for themselves, for their own edification, but also signify their value to others in the social contexts of their lives” (Allon and Redden 2012, 386). Cajoled, bribed and bullied, makeover television participants learn that in order to exercise their choice to be beautiful they must submit to the experts, the higher regulatory force.

**And They All Lived Happily Ever After: Conclusion**

In expanding on the notion of the makeover as fairy tale, this chapter discussed both the narrative, and the pedagogical and regulatory function of the media makeover. Through the narrative message of ‘be the best you can be’ we begin to see how the regulation of women’s bodies through makeover culture takes effect. It described the consistent linear progress of makeover, with the makeover participant moving from hating her body, to desiring a change, to making a change, to being revealed as a successful after body. It showed that all makeovers follow a similar path, from abjection and failure to citizenship and authenticity (or appearance of authenticity) and like the fairy-tale protagonist the participant moves from the margins of society to being a fully integrated and authentic member of that society: scullery maid to princess, frog to prince.

The chapter highlighted the regulation of the body through the narrative and introduced the ideals of makeover media that we will discuss in Chapter Six. The fairy tale’s obsession with youth and femininity (Snow White, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast) is reflected in the makeover narrative as the experts outline the process that will help participants to be the best that they can; that is to conform as closely as possible to contemporary female beauty ideals. The “after body” (Weber 2009, 5) in makeover culture is, or must appear to be, young, middle class, white and compulsorily heteronormative. Racial and class differences are erased temporarily or permanently with good management of bad teeth, badly kept hair and poor taste in clothing.

The media makeover serves to educate/govern the citizen of makeover culture offering instruction as to the actions they should take and the products
they should consume. I argue that the narrative points to the existence of a successful neoliberal subject, or makeover citizen and the possibility of becoming one and the following chapter will discuss the production and regulation of the makeover citizen within the regulatory framework of makeover culture.
Chapter 4

Regulating the Makeover Citizen: Framing Makeover Culture

Investigating makeover culture and the made over woman through the lens of a postfeminist, neoliberal, media rich cultural framework has proven useful in articulating the social and political environment within which makeover culture thrives. The framing notion for this thesis—the shift in the female situation from subject of beauty culture, bound by the feminine ideals of patriarchal state and society, to citizen of makeover culture with rights, responsibilities and accountability to the makeover nation—is, as discussed in Chapter One, enveloped within the broader societal changes of the late twentieth century: from first and second wave feminism to postfeminism; from industrial to neoliberal society; and the ongoing growth of media culture, and in this chapter I argue that this shift has produced makeover culture as a new regulatory framework.

Having established that women’s bodies fall under this regulatory frame, this chapter investigates how makeover culture works to construct and regulate women’s bodies, in order to better understand the position that interview participants find themselves in. It argues that the three tenets—technology, perfectibility and femininity—are key to the regulatory framework and are joined by class, shame, failure and citizenship in regulation.
The “good citizen” of Makeover Culture

I expand on the notion of a theoretical makeover citizen; an ideal, neoliberal, feminine subject, mentioned in earlier writing (Jones 2008, Miller 2008, Weber 2009), considering how she fits within the regulatory framework. This notion of the makeover citizen is useful to my research because it positions women as full and valid members of makeover culture and also gives a sense that they belong to the culture. Jones explains the role of the “good citizen[s] of makeover culture” who “effect endless renovations, restorations and maintenance on themselves and their environment, stretching and designing their faces, their bodies, their ages and their connections with technologies and other bodies. In turn, nothing is ever complete or perfected: everything and everyone is always in need of a literal or metaphorical facelift” (M. Jones 2008a, 189). Problem citizens suffer from surplus embodiment, especially those excluded through race, class and gender (M. Jones 2008a, 145); in order to prove their citizenship they must show that they are in control of their unruly bodies and lives (M. Jones 2008a, 142). Weber houses her makeover citizens within a “Makeover Nation” where “makeover TV articulates a new imagined nation of beautiful, self-assured, and self-confident people whose lifestyles, appearances, domiciles, relationships, and cars signify happiness and material security that leads, ultimately, to widespread confident visibility.” The citizens of her Makeover Nation “merit and bask in the gaze, [and] those who eschew being looked at denaturalize themselves as worthy citizen–subjects” (Weber 2009, 38).

As Alejandro suggests, citizenship is not a fixed concept. Contemporary citizenship is “an extremely flexible concept” and in seeking out new definitions of citizenship he declares traditional citizenship an impossibility, “disconnected from its traditional justification” (1998, 9-10). In the case of makeover culture, for example, the term citizen, traditionally used to denote country of birth or adopted country, is used to suggest membership not of a geographical region, but of a culture which crosses international borders. While women are considered the ideal subjects or citizens of makeover culture it has only been in the last hundred years that women have had any right to citizenship at all. “Citizenship
has existed for nearly three millennia; with very minor exceptions, women have had some share in civic rights in the most liberal states for only about a century” (Heater 2004, 120) so it is fitting that new forms of citizenship have met the acknowledgement of women’s status as persons with rights of their own. Just as we are born citizens of a country, I argue that we are born citizens of makeover culture, part of the “Makeover Nation” (Miller 2008, Weber 2009, 12).

Cultural citizenship (Hermes 2007, Miller 2007) is presented through popular culture as open to all, a popular culture which, quite simply, “makes us welcome and offers belonging” (Hermes 2007, 3). Although we are always already citizens, we have to choose what we do with our citizenship. Citizenship “recognises the contribution a particular individual makes to that community, while at the same time granting him or her individual autonomy” (Faulks 2000, 5). It is a reciprocal concept with the citizen giving and receiving within a “social framework, which includes courts, schools, hospitals and parliaments, [and] requires that citizens all play their part to maintain it. This means that citizenship implies duties and obligations, as well as rights” (Faulks 2000, 5). Successful citizenship has its own boundaries and requires a particular kind of “cultural capital” (Miller 2007) bringing us back to the double gesture of neoliberal freedom: that we can choose to be or not to be good citizens, but we cannot not choose at all.

To help understand what it means to be a makeover citizen in an era of neoliberalism, I consider Jones’ (2008a) research on cosmetic surgical culture and the “good citizen of makeover culture” through the lens of Brown’s (2003) analysis of neoliberalism as the end of liberal democracy. Both Brown and Jones identify success in the area of self-care as a marker of citizenship or belonging within neoliberal and makeover cultures, and this active participation is key to success in makeover culture. Such responsibility to and for the self means that the good citizen of both neoliberal and makeover cultures is held to account for their own situation and “rationally deliberates about alternative courses of action, makes choices, and bears responsibility for the consequences of these choices” (Brown 2003, 17). The successful makeover participant provides concrete
evidence of his or her good choices within neoliberal expectations, and therefore his or her status as citizen, and “entrepreneur of the self” (Lemma 2013, Weber 2009), first through health and capacity building, and further through participation in cosmetic surgery and other beauty procedures.

In order to be good citizens, the moral discourse of neoliberalism tells us that we need the self-discipline to look after our own health and welfare (Petersen 2007) and to continuously improve ourselves. As Ouellette and Hay suggest, “the citizen is now conceived as an individual whose most pressing obligation to society is to empower her or himself privately” (2008, 2). Within the context of makeover culture this means that we have a responsibility to take control of our lives and particularly our outward appearance. Makeover citizenship becomes a form of regulation, because one who aspires to successful, or good citizenship must comply with the rules thereof.

But makeover culture proffers only a limited definition of acceptable selfhood and “people who are explicitly marked as “too ethnic” or outside the middle class are given makeovers expressly to make them feel “normal”” (Weber 2009, 12). Probyn suggests that, “the shame of the cultural outsider is fed by a deep desire to fit in and an abiding interest in being able to do so [...] the more interested you are in fitting in, the more you are likely to feel ashamed” (2005, 39). Makeover culture offers possibilities that mitigate such shame, because “transformation from the aberrant to the normative is meant to increase confidence and wage-earning potential, both critical components of the makeover’s conception of valuable selfhood” (Weber 2009, 12). Makeover is a respectable choice because within neoliberal society it is positioned not as vanity, but as a logical step toward self-improvement.

As an added motivator, self-care and ageing well, physically and mentally, reduce the burden on national health provision and on personal finances. Interview participant Julie makes this point when discussing her gastric band procedure. In light of this the decision to go under the knife is not difficult to rationalise, and once rationalised “because neoliberalism casts rational action as a norm rather than an ontology” (Brown 2003, 16), the decision to have cosmetic
surgery is then normalised. Being an involved consumer of makeover culture, being “flexible and always-in-progress,” including prevention of aging, looking better (not just younger) and providing visible evidence of self care are now required of successful citizens. As Jones suggests, “in makeover culture a face altered by cosmetic surgery is proof of a developing and improving self” (2008a, 90). To fail as a citizen would be to resist improvement.

Towards a New Regulatory Framework

An emphasis on the last thirty years led me to consider how the broader regulatory framework has changed since the 1980s with the development and application of neoliberal social, political and economic theories, and the rise of post and third wave feminisms: specifically how these changes relate to the makeover citizen. In Chapter One we saw that makeover culture was produced at the convergence of neoliberalism, postfeminism and media culture, now we will look at how it produces, literally and figuratively, the makeover citizen.

Foucault changed our understanding of regulation ([1975] 1991) from the sovereign power of feudal times centralized in a specific individual or group to governance through “the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain” (Bordo 1997a, 92). In the case of this research, makeover media, peer pressure and what Foucault has named “technologies of the self” (1988), or “those practices whereby individuals, by their own means or with the help of others, acted on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state of perfection or happiness, or to become a sage or immortal, and so on” (Martin, Gutman and Hutton 1998, 4) form the network. This network, which has sometimes been incorrectly interpreted in postfeminist conversation as a lack of any external power resulting in free will, acts invisibly on women’s bodies, offering a mediated freedom rather than a genuine one. Raisborough suggests that “Foucault is adamant then that governance is not about forcing individuals ‘to do what that governor wants’
(Foucault, 1993, p.203), rather, governance speaks to the cultivation of the self which is encouraged and fostered by various governmental agencies” (2011, 16). He states that, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault [1976] 1998, 86). The forces which govern women’s bodies have changed from an external, and visible, patriarchal regime at the time of beauty culture, to—after second wave feminist challenges—a discourse of individualism, responsibilisation and neoliberal self-discipline which pushes women to actively choose to cultivate themselves and to make themselves over; a force that cannot be seen, as it is not located in a single person or thing. This form of governance depends on “a heightened individualism” and rather than a deliberate strategy of neoliberalism has come to be an ideology [of rationality], adopted by liberalism (Raisborough 2011, 13). What is important is not that this regulation has been internalised, but that we now believe that we are acting of our own free will.

Jones shows how many of her interviewees have made rational and calculated decisions, looking at the risk/benefit scenario, researching the costs and the practitioners that they wish to use and having realistic and modest expectations for the outcomes of their cosmetic procedures (2008a, 89). If a rational economic (neoliberal) argument can be made for cosmetic surgery, as part of a program of self-care, then this rational argument trumps the earlier moral arguments against cosmetic surgery for purely aesthetic reasons. As Brown explains, “in making the individual fully responsible for her/himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it relieves the discrepancy between economic and moral behaviour by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits and consequences” (Brown 2003, 15).

The neoliberal politico-economic environment and the neoliberal self/body are plagued by an underlying instability. This body is seen as requiring regulation, preferably self-regulation in order to become stable and knowable, but it works towards a moveable goal. Jones points out that, “the ideal self in makeover culture is unstable compared to the contained self of modernity. [...]

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *

129
The makeover culture self, although not fickle, is flexible and always-in-progress” (2008a, 127). Reflecting the instability of neoliberal society he/she is regulated and produced by “intensified policing in every corner of American life [...] a policing undertaken both by official agents of the state and by an interpellated citizenry” (Brown 2003, 30). This “policing” includes the policing of the body/body image which has been delegated away from official medico-legal channels and is now mediated through the broader influence of makeover media texts and peer level interactions. I suggest that if the old plastic surgeon is the meddling sovereign or socialist government setting the rules of acceptability, the new aesthetic practitioner is governed by the influence of the neoliberal free market. The once powerful medical gaze now competes with the media gaze; the old official agent—the surgeon—has been replaced by an, “interpellated citizenry” in the form of networks of media and peer group expectations. The overwhelming presence of the media acts as a source of inspiration and increasingly a new externalised source of governance continuing the regulation of women’s bodies.

So how does the makeover citizen fit within neoliberalism? This neoliberal rationality results in a form of self-governance that drives citizens to self-care because it makes sense on both personal and societal levels. On makeover television shows surgery is presented as reward over risk, the logical solution. Looking better, more youthful and less tired is good for one's career. It is thought to be an advantage in securing and maintaining work in a competitive and unstable job market, especially in the entertainment industry where the body is work and therefore work on the body is clearly a rational, entrepreneurial action.

The neoliberal admiration for the entrepreneurial spirit where “all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of market rationality [...] conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction” (Brown 2003, 9) is, in neoliberal culture, extended to apply to “formerly non-economic domains” (Brown 2003, 15), such as the body as we see in the case of cosmetic surgical and makeover cultures. The entrepreneur or makeover citizen who takes responsibility for himself conforms to a neoliberal ideal which “figure[s]
individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self-care”” (Brown 2003, 15) and thus under neoliberalism, the overt display of labour required by makeover culture offers an opportunity to demonstrate value by showing how we are taking responsibility for self and body.

Indeed the emphasis is on the value of work more than the resulting body itself. When interview participants defined their ideal bodies one that looked like it had been worked on came up multiple times. The participant arrives at “valuable selfhood” only after a lot of work. The more work the more valuable and legitimate the after self. As Weber suggests, “those who are sloppy, cluttery, overwrought, overdrawn, and overweight can lay no claim to legitimate selfhood within the makeover’s constitution of identity” (2009, 13).

There are a number of other important parallels between neoliberal culture and makeover culture. Particularly significant here is a trend towards reduced possibilities both political—Brown says that the model of the continuum (from Left to Right) reduces “the variety of political possibility in modernity to matters of degree rather than kind” (2003, 15)—and also aesthetic—centred on a stretched middle age where both younger and older women are required to meet the ideal (Raisborough, Barnes, et al. 2014). This is compounded by a reduction in acceptable bodily presentations and lack of key non-mainstream options. Those undergoing makeover must conform to the ideals passed down to them as the only rational choice and not use cosmetic surgery as “a way to open possibilities for staging alternative cultural identities” (M. Jones 2008a, 28), as seen in the example of Orlan in the Introduction. The unstable economy and society, as commented on by Brown, mirrors Jones’ suggestion that this is reflected in an unstable view of the self. She offers as an example that, “Pamela Anderson’s unstable breast implants show that all femininity is a movable mask, a performance” (M. Jones 2008a, 28).

Gill identifies the relationship between neoliberalism and gender as a gap in current research, although she sees “a powerful resonance between postfeminism and neoliberalism. [And states] that postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism but also a sensibility at least partly constituted through the

* (Re)dressing Cinderella *
pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas.” With women self-managing and self-disciplining more so than men she asks, “could it be that neoliberalism is always already gendered, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?” (2007, 163-164). Here I hope to offer a small contribution to this discussion through the example of the makeover citizen. Postfeminism offers a narrative of agency and choice and my interview participants fully believed this narrative, denying that they felt any pressure from external sources to make themselves over, claiming that they were doing it for themselves. Even Susan, who talked about making the world a better place by making an effort to look good, saw it as her choice to present herself that way as an artist. While second wave feminist writing on cosmetic surgery refused the claim that women were choosing cosmetic surgery freely, supposing them to be under patriarchal control, in the 1990s—the early days of makeover culture—this began to change. Davis carried out some research in the late nineties with a group of women in the Netherlands who were undergoing, or hoping to undergo cosmetic surgery (1995). She took the stance of “taking women at their word” and argued that they were not cultural dopes for wanting to undergo surgery. She was criticised for this stance, which ignored the social context of their surgery choices (Gimlin 2013, 915), yet more recent research carried out with cosmetic surgery patients has found similar narratives (Elliot 2010a, Powierska 2015).

During a period of political and social change, the increased frequency of makeover content in women’s magazines and on television not only reflects how fundamental the concept of making over has become within neoliberal western society, but is instrumental in promoting the imperative to change oneself through the consumption of products in order to remain current (Bratich 2007, 6). As the neoliberal subject/makeover citizen consumes her way to self-actualisation, media culture provides the tools. To consume and be consumed is a central message of makeover media, aimed not only at the participants but also at the viewers, thereby having a knock on effect on the construction of wider contemporary social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). I argue that makeover media points to the existence of a makeover citizen and is influential in the
development of bodies and body ideals. As Weber suggests, “at best, shows create mediated environments that are benevolent dictatorships, in which the demands of fitness coaches and style gurus must be followed if the subject is to pass into what it posits as the normative iterations of the citizen-subject (Weber 2009, 40). Governance through media has been discussed by a variety of people (Bratich 2007, Ouellette and Hay 2008, Palmer 2008) and this use of technology to set expectations and indirectly suggest improvements is part of the role of technology as a key tenet of makeover culture in regulating the body. From magazines where, “women were at one stroke informed how to be acceptable women and sold the product to deliver them themselves” (Wykes and Gunter 2006, 42), to The Swan, accused of being a blatant promotional vehicle for cosmetic surgery (Elliot 2008, 50), women are encouraged to be the best they can be through the promotion of consumerism. Makeover media participants, with us alongside them, are educated and empowered. They become experts in their own bodies. They are educated about what looks good, about good health, how to eat, how to exercise, we learn from their mistakes, and we also learn about makeover techniques, how to dress for our body shape, how to train our bodies how to buy the ideal.

**Makeover Culture as a Regulatory Framework**

Makeover is considered the ideal self-imposed and self-directed action of the responsible neoliberal citizen. But despite its self-directed nature it is suggested that makeover culture is a new iteration of the patriarchal regime (McRobbie 2007). In describing makeover culture as a regulatory frame in itself I signify the role of makeover culture as a broader force in contemporary life. As discussed earlier I argue that within the regulatory framework of makeover culture three key elements stand out from the rest—technology, perfectibility and femininity—which contribute to the regulatory regime producing (feminine) subjects in particular ways. In addition, although not exclusive to makeover
culture, shame, failure, class and citizenship are also at play in the regulation of women’s bodies.

The neoliberal individual can be in part defined through a narrative promoting the miracle of modern technology. He/she is flexible and always becoming (M. Jones 2008a) and has access to the range of makeover technologies required to achieve citizenship. Leading those technologies is the contemporary makeover media, which sits within the neoliberal framework of the last three decades and forms a key component of broader postfeminist media culture and makeover culture. Gill goes so far as to suggest that makeover and postfeminist media culture are inseparable. “More broadly, it might be argued that a makeover paradigm constitutes postfeminist media culture” (2007, 156).

Ouellette and Hay argue that, “TV as cultural technology of self-actualization operates as a form of citizenship training” (2008, 15) in this section I will discuss the role that it plays in the regulation of women’s bodies. If we consider the origin of public broadcasting as an instrument for public service with its long history of overt and covert education through television from documentaries, public service broadcasts, Open University courses and outright propaganda, we can see that makeover television is faithful to its roots (Nicholas 2014). Rose suggests that,

Perhaps the most important [technology], at least in the United Kingdom, was public broadcasting. [...] the invisible medium that would unite the humble highland crofter and the metropolitan city dweller in a single community of citizens. The civilizing message of the public broadcasting services was both universalizing – it was addressed to everyone – and individualizing – it addressed each person as an individual in his or her own home, in relation to his or her own problems, [...] playing its role in installing the little routines of social citizenship and civility into each ‘private family’, implanting ‘social’ obligations into the soul of each free citizen. (Rose 1999, 82-83)

Post World War Two, transition from a public service to a private, for-profit and self-regulating service required the production of diverse and quality materials (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 26). The old service was out-dated and “in order to maintain its status and justify its funding model lifestyle television became one site where public service blended responsible citizenship with enlightened
consumerism” (Palmer 2008, 2). Television became a powerful regulator of both time, space and acceptable behaviours, driving citizens to be the best that they could be. Governance through television was no longer state generated propaganda, but a response to neoliberal self-discipline and the demand for information and instruction, paradoxically serving to externalize regulation once again, although this time to the media, not overtly to the patriarchal state.

Just as the second wave feminists argued in the 1970s, Bordo suggests that the body becomes a “locus of social control […] Not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity” (1997a, 91). Aspiring to be the best takes time, money and hard work and “the perfect […] acts to stifle the possibility of an expansive feminist movement” (McRobbie 2015, 3). I argue that in fact it is not perfection that regulates, but perfectibility. The fact that the body has the potential to be perfected, like the Photoshopped images of bodies seen in fashion and beauty magazines, is what regulates. While the successful makeover citizen reflects back the ideals she sees in the media, despite the logical fallacy that with modern technology she should be able to, she cannot actually achieve perfection. So she adjusts to her own ideals, she strives to be the best that she can be, using her time and money to get ever closer to, but never achieve the end point.

However, the narrative doesn’t start and end with the ideal, as Redden points out, the key is “constructing final value as consisting of what is ‘right for the person’” (2007, 159), so while I argue that perfectibility is a key tenet of makeover culture, perfection is not. As rational people, the majority of my interview participants don’t aspire to the perfect bodies they see in the media, but to a version more suited to them. It is not about being the best, but about being the best version of you.

Femininity, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Eight, is the third, and most controversial of my three tenets of makeover culture. Its definitions have long been ambiguous and multiple, yet in terms of regulation, as shown by the
overt expressions of femininity flooding makeover media, it requires a very specific performance from women. While postfeminist agency offers women the choice to be feminine or not, “those who do not comply with such beauty constituents are placed outside of the discourse of feminine identity represented in much of our culture. For them there is exclusion to the dark zone of non-conformity” (Wykes and Gunter 2006, 50). We can see that, femininity becomes most visible at the point where a woman fails to be feminine. Interview participants struggled to define femininity precisely because it is defined largely by what it is not, rather than what it is. It is never achieved and is always contingent, provisional and subject to failure.

**Class in the Makeover Paradigm**

As a key regulator of women’s bodies, class was for many centuries divided into the rich and the working poor. The introduction of a middle, or bourgeois class in the late eighteenth century (Wolf 1990) lead to increased pressure on women to conform to the rules of class. The development of a beauty culture, particularly pertinent to the middle classes, “is the result of a historical process in which the bourgeoisie became a ‘class for itself’ through distinguishing itself from its twin others – the aristocracy and the poor” (Lawler 2005, 430) and a key way of doing this was through their bodies. As Lawler argues, body beauty (smooth, white skin) was utilised to mark out the middle classes as different from the working classes: they invented their likeness to rich and difference to poor through presentation of body and etiquette as markers of their taste (2005).

With the introduction of a middle-class, class mobility became something to aspire to. This meant having or acquiring the appropriate cultural capital to fit into a different class group. As Fraser suggests, “in this, there is the assumption that good taste or distinction is both natural and unnatural: it can be learned by anyone because, paradoxically, despite surfaces, we ‘are all the same’, and it is this promise of sameness that makes the makeover so appealing” (2007, 190). So while makeover culture sends out the message that everyone can, makeover
shows continually present those who need outside support in order to do so. Not everyone has access to the tools necessary to climb up the social class rankings alone. Skeggs explains that, “it is a model of how class difference comes into effect through the divisions that can be drawn between those who can add value to themselves and those who cannot” (2010, 32). It is easier for those who already have class to get more.

While we are far from living in a classless society in the early 2000s (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008, 6, Tyler 2008), class is a less clear concept than it used to be. The Great British Class Survey in 2013 led to a claim for seven different classes in contemporary Britain (Savage 2015, 4-5). It is easier now to cross the boundaries and pass for a different class as a number of reality television shows demonstrate (Faking It, Australian Princess) and, in promoting class mobility, makeover media plays a critical role in both the desire to change class and the fluidity of class boundaries.

Ringrose and Walkerdine suggest that the changing politics and economy of neoliberalism have had a direct effect on class mobility,

The sets of political and economic changes which have led to neoliberalism [...] have emerged alongside a set of discourses and practices already well in place, but in which certain discourses and practices of class which stress class as oppositional have been replaced by those which stress the possibility of upward mobility, particularly for women. Here a narrative of escape from traditional familial and domestic arrangements bolsters a neo-liberal dream of reinvention through education and work-based identities. (2008, 229)

In makeover media we see the not good enough, mainly working class, makeover media participant who, with her inappropriate pre-makeover body, lacks the necessary taste and class to succeed in a contemporary society which legitimises the values and aspirations of middle classness. She needs help from those who, “endowed with this appreciation are able to legitimately claim a place as properly human, while those who are seen as unable to appreciate what they ought to appreciate are rendered disgusting” (Lawler 2005, 440). The makeover participant, trying her best, is often deliberately misrecognised by the experts, and looked down upon for her disgusting body. As Angela McRobbie describes,
“the public denigration by women of recognized taste (the experts and presenters) of women of little or no taste, brings a new (and seemingly humorous) dimension to this kind of primetime television” (2005, 99). The abject before body is treated with scorn and made fun of.

The working class woman is featured (and studied as both participant and as viewer) more frequently than any other category in makeover media. As Ringrose and Walkerdine suggest, “the central object of regulation in the shows is the abject working class woman who fails as subject/object of desire and consumption, and lacks requisite qualities of self-reflexivity necessary for reinvention” (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008, 228). So class and aspiration to class mobility is central to the makeover paradigm.

The ability to move from one class to another is largely a matter of taste, a concept at the centre of research around class and class mobility. Bourdieu’s notion of taste or “cultural capital” as something that is inherited from family, in addition to economic capital depends on “certain cultural tastes and preferences being seen as superior – more legitimate – than others” (Savage 2015, 49). The makeover media play an important role in the development of appropriate tastes, bestowing fresh cultural capital on participants, and in addition, enabling watchers to accrue a little extra themselves as they see how class should be done.

Media is central to the distribution of these messages and an example of cultural capital is shown clearly around food. In *The Biggest Loser* and *You Are What You Eat* participants are shown standing behind a week’s worth of the food they have eaten to get themselves to the position that they need a makeover. Mountains of poor quality food are piled on a table representing the protagonist’s failure to care for themselves and intended to disgust not only the audience but to shame the protagonist themselves. They lack the knowledge and the ability to make good choices around food and by implication in other areas of their lives.
At the end of *You Are What You Eat* their food makeover is shown alongside their physical makeover.
Because physical appearance is the clearest marker of class, class mobility is a key driver within makeover culture, as it has been in regards to previous body and beauty cultures. Probyn describes the body as, “a repository for the social and cultural rules that, consciously or not, we take on. Our bodies can also tell us when we have stumbled into other people’s history, culture, and beliefs of which we are ignorant” (2005, xvi). It is significant that this embodiment of class, learned from childhood, is recognised. The equalising potential of makeover culture means that we can now buy social status through the body, escaping the shame and failure of classedness, whether by moving away from a working class body or successfully performing a middle class one. Skeggs suggests that working class women, those who cannot naturally or easily, “acquire the requisite capitals to continually convert into value” and are therefore “constantly misrecognised as pathological, and hence deemed without value across a range of sites” still continue to spend “an enormous amount of time attempting to attach value to themselves through the performance of respectability, using gendered values to block class misrecognition” (2010, 33). They are regulated through the neoliberal imperative towards improvement that pervades makeover culture, or the beauty imperative (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 25).

Makeover media suggests that these boundaries can be broken down given the right instruction and finances, it offers its bounty to all comers. Cronin notes that not everyone can be class mobile, speaking of those excluded from “potential” due to class, race or gender who, “do not have this privileged access to the discursive status of individuality” (2000, 277). However, broadly the increased promotion and availability of makeover related products and practices have contributed to the democratisation of beauty, both emphasising and blurring class boundaries as is demonstrated in Skeggs and Wood’s analysis of makeover television (2008, 2012). Lewis suggests that makeover television is a democratised form of address, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, in that it is widely accessible and it proposes that anyone can, and should be made over or make themselves over in order to improve their social standing (2008a).
It is interesting to note that in Skeggs and Woods’ interviews with women of varying socio-economic groupings (2012) they observed a difference in response to makeover media between the middle and working class groups. They found that the working class groups celebrated the success of makeover television participants as one of them, while the middle-class groups (like my interview participants) were embarrassed to admit that they even watched the shows and actively distanced themselves from the class of the participants. Lawler suggests, “what is implied here is a recognition of (and horror at) sameness – that one could be like all those who lack taste, that one could be otherwise. […] If those who lack taste could (and should) be otherwise, then those who (are seen to) have taste could, similarly, be otherwise. Hence, this sameness must be defended against in the form of barriers between the classes” (Lawler 2005, 442). Middle class women’s sense of shame was rooted in their classedness and their fear of being seen as outside of the class that they felt they belonged to. Working class women were proud of the participants’ aspirations to and apparent success in achieving class mobility. There is also evidence that younger women react differently than older women. Press discusses how the younger women that she interviewed responded to America’s Next Top Model, “much of what the girls express here is their awareness that there are social class and other obstacles which the show represents in certain ways, and the connection that the show makes, for women, between mastering the accoutrements of femininity, and achieving upward mobility. […] The theme of America’s Next Top Model is simply the classical Cinderella story writ large” (Press 2011, 125). Although Press doesn’t discuss her participants in terms of their class, many are college students making it more likely that they would come from middle class backgrounds. Like the working class women interviewed above, they too aspired to maintaining or achieving middle classness.
Shame and Failure as Regulatory Forces

Closely related to class, the body is also regulated through its experience of shame and failure. Bartky describes shame as, “the distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished” (1996, 227) or “of oneself as a lesser creature” (1996, 229); in other words, in the case of makeover culture, failure to maintain appearance in line with societal expectations and ideals produces shame. Rose suggests that such cultural norms are, “enforced through the calculated administration of shame” (1999, 73). As well as a purely primal, visceral response to shame—blushing, covering the face, making the self appear smaller (Probyn 2005, 3)—Dolezal argues that the body itself is quite literally produced through shame (2015, 123). We see that shame can be considered both a negative force, and at the same time a productive one (Bartky 1996, 15, Probyn 2005).

A Foucauldian reading of shame as a positive force is also offered by Sender, who suggests that makeover media promotes—in both its participants and its viewers—a “functional shame” (2012, 2). Talking about the body of the condemned, Foucault argues that the contemporary prisoner is punished through shame rather than physical punishment and this propels him to improve their behaviour ([1975] 1991). Likewise shame towards the abject before body propels the participant of the makeover show into action, and in my interviews I heard from a number of participants who felt ashamed of their bodies and therefore wanted to change them. In such cases cosmetic surgery can serve to “alleviate chronic body shame” (Dolezal 2015, 124).

We see the kind of reintegrative and restorative shaming, that Probyn describes, in makeover media (2005, 91), as the experts subject participants to a shame that aims not to exclude them, but to change them so that they can be included. Participants are frequently shamed for not looking after themselves. The solution, of course, is to take them shopping. Dolezal proposes that, as an effect of neoliberalism, shame drives the “machinery of the insecurity-consumption cycle” (2015, xiv). The more ashamed we are, the more we spend, shame thus contributes to the consumption imperative.
The suggestion of shame as an affect of the gendered body goes some way to explaining why the large majority of makeover participants or consumers of makeover culture are female. Bartky argues that men and women experience shame in different ways and for different reasons (1996, 226), and that shame is central to the “disciplinary project of femininity.” She says that, “the disciplinary project of femininity is a “set-up”. It requires such radical and extensive measures of bodily transformation that virtually every woman who gives herself to it is destined in some degree to fail” (1997, 139). While the woman is shamed by her failure, her failure is somewhat inevitable due to her lack of power. Even apparent success is often, as we see in people’s repeated efforts to lose weight, followed by further failure. Fear of failure acts as a powerful regulator.

The kind of hopelessness that failure leads to is one that Brown proposes is symptomatic of neoliberalism. She argues that neoliberalism provides direction but no meaning and that people mistake direction for meaning (2003, 20). The direction, or in the case of makeover culture the process, is continuous and yet the end goal or meaning is often undefined and unobtainable. While the becoming, is key to makeover culture, risk of failure, not enjoyment of the process, is what keeps the participant moving forwards. Similarly Jones tells us, “makeover culture is a state where becoming is more desirable than being” (2008a, 12). She says, “broadly, I suggest that in makeover culture the process of becoming something better is more important than achieving a static point of completion. ‘Good citizens’ of makeover culture publicly enact urgent and never-ending renovations of themselves” (2008a, 1). In contrast to Brown, Jones is more positive, seeing value in constant striving for something better, even if failure is a likely, but it is clear either way that makeover culture perpetuates and is perpetuated by and from within neoliberal culture.

**Resistance**

And what price resistance? Is choosing not to be made over, though an active use of individual agency another type of failure? Despite the postfeminist
support for choice, which was relatively new around the time she was writing, as Morgan suggests, “refusal may be akin to a kind of death, to a kind of renunciation of the only kind of life-conferring choices and competencies to which a woman may have access” (1988, 339). The possibility, or even probability of failure regulates, and he or she who resists cosmetic surgery risks being labelled as “not looking after [them]self” (M. Jones 2008a, 189). Those unwilling participants in cosmetic surgical culture are subject to “compulsory ‘explaining and resisting’” (M. Jones 2008a, 189) and it is increasingly difficult to rationalise the decision not to have surgery. Bartky adds, “furthermore, since a properly made-up face is, if not a card of entrée, at least a badge of acceptability in most social and professional contexts, the woman who chooses not to wear cosmetics at all faces sanctions of a sort which will never be applied to someone who chooses not to paint a watercolor” (1997, 138-139). However since I have suggested that citizenship is a given, rather than something to be earned, those who resist are neither successful, nor exactly failing as makeover citizens, provided that they have made an active choice.

Conclusion

I have argued for the existence of a makeover citizen and for an understanding of makeover culture as a regulatory framework. The birth of the makeover citizen is part of the move from femininity as a form of disciplining the body to the active production of femininity through the body. Our body, our most visible expression of self is now a fundamental tool of social acceptance and therefore work to normalise and perfect, or regulate, the body according to media and class ideals is seen as a logical choice within neoliberal society and has become critical to our perception of happiness and personal worth.

Through discussion of the neoliberal imperative for improvement we see that this makeover citizen is, “performing perhaps the ultimate act of the ‘self-made’ subject, women who undergo cosmetic surgery on these shows not only personify the exercise of political power through women’s bodies, but reveal
themselves as paragons of the neoliberal doctrines of self-help and self-sufficiency. They are, in every way, then, ‘self-made women’” (Atwood Gailey 2007, 118). The post makeover self is “understood as worthy, sexy, empowered, confident, gender congruent, and stable” (Weber 2009, 6) in short she is a successful citizen. This drive to become worthy and valid is what Raisborough calls, “recognition as alloy.” To be worthy, to be some body, not just any body, and to belong within normative understandings of social value in makeover culture she suggests, accounts for “our seduction into practices of transformation and our desire to be transformed” (Raisborough 2011, 19). Makeover is a transformation; it takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.

This chapter expanded on the notion of the makeover citizen and considered that if we are all already implicated in makeover culture, then we are all born makeover citizens. To become good citizens we must acquire the relevant cultural capital. I argued that the regulatory frame of makeover culture is constituted through a combination of the three tenets—technology, perfectibility and femininity—and the role of class, shame, failure and citizenship. To understand how my interview participants are located within this regulatory frame provided in Chapter Seven I will discuss their experiences of makeover, including experiences of cosmetic surgery.

Makeover culture shames women into striving towards narrow, ever changing ideals, a constant process of evolution in which one can never quite be good enough. This failure to achieve the ultimate goal, to be the best and meet the ideal, is a strong regulatory force. In this respect, makeover can be viewed as an ongoing performance and as Butler would suggest, the power of performativity is that we are never able to live up to our ideals. She states that, “heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome.... that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved” (Butler 1993, 125). There is a constant failure, an inability to ever achieve the ideal, and it is the constructive power of this failure that drives forward the process of becoming. Butler is talking about drag here, but this can be applied in a similar way to the performance of makeover and the achievement
of gendered beauty ideals. She suggests that, “I want to underscore that there is no necessary relations between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms” (Butler 1993, 125). Likewise makeover both denaturalises the body of the participant and creates new norms of beauty.

As Jones offers, “in makeover culture success is judged on the display of the never-ending renovation of the self” a “display of on-going change and labour” (2008a, 12). In successful citizenship it is the overt display of labour that is rewarded in a neoliberal culture that, “does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to such a calculus, rather it develops institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision” (Brown 2003, 9). Success as a citizen requires correct interpretation of institutional practices and makeover is positioned as deserving of citizenship because it “requires motivation, something that tough and hardy people with a strong ethic of self-improvements consider: it becomes an act of courage, bravery and self-determination” (M. Jones 2008a, 54).

I suggest that women are returned to, or more probably never got away from, an external source of control, a network of influences, which while no longer entirely patriarchal, is experienced through a requirement to choose, or choose not to follow the dictates of the media. The woman effectively becomes the cultural dope denied by Davis (1995), believing that she has free will because the postfeminist media at once tells her that she has a choice, and at the same time takes it away.
Chapter 5

Qualitative Interviews and Media Readings: A Mixed Methods Approach to Discovering the Experience of Makeover Culture

This project occurs at the intersection of Gender and Cultural studies; interdisciplinary in nature, it uses techniques from different disciplines to develop new material around women’s experience of makeover culture. Segal discusses interdisciplinary studies stating, “the rise of cultural studies encouraged interdisciplinary efforts to blur the demarcations between distinct disciplinary sources of knowledge, strongly supported by most (but not all) feminist scholarship” (2000, 38).

My research questions required me first to map the differences between earlier beauty cultures and contemporary makeover culture through an understanding of their historical context; secondly to consider the regulation of women’s bodies through an analytical consideration of feminist studies and values, neoliberalism and the media rich cultural framework that makeover culture exists within; and thirdly, through qualitative and reflexive investigations, to develop an understanding of the experiences of interview participants in relation to makeover media and makeover culture. Although widely criticised as being unscientific (Kvale 2007, 142-143), qualitative research produces individual, in depth results the benefits of which outweigh the negative criticism.
Through qualitative interviews and media analysis, both popular in social research, I sought to examine the way in which women experience makeover culture, how they come to know/engage with makeover culture for example in what they read, watch or do, and how they talk about their bodies in the context of makeover culture.

This chapter introduces the methodologies that have inspired my research design including an overview of how the research question and the scope of the project have driven the overall research methodology from an epistemological point of view, a reflection on how the choice and design of the primary and secondary research methods and tools work to maximise data usefulness within the project scope and a discussion of the analysis and presentation of my research.

**Designing a Mixed Methods Research Project**

While academic literature and textual analysis added value to my research it was the audience response to makeover culture that helped to close the feedback loop with an explicit discussion of interview participants’ experience of makeover culture. Hermes stresses the importance of not only analysing texts but also considering audience response, “the value of popular culture, whatever its textual qualities, is in what audiences do with it” (2007) and this is what my research aimed to address. During my analysis of existing literature I identified a need for more first hand stories and experiences of current standard practice within makeover culture. This is not surprising given when I started in 2007 it was a relatively new area of study. Limited available data meant that my work would benefit from a range of primary research methods in order to work towards closing that gap.

My desire to learn more about women’s experiences within makeover culture demanded a qualitative rather than a quantitative research approach. Paired with feminist research’s insistence on in-depth qualitative information on the phenomenon being researched, and on the merit of first hand information
from interactions with people who had experienced it, it led to designing a primary research approach that would support a need for “validation through practice” (Kvale 2007, 21). I felt that a mixed methods research project, collecting data from both interviews and media analysis, would lead to a broader understanding of the complexities of makeover culture. Likewise, talking about the similar topic of cosmetic surgery Heyes and Jones suggest, “indeed, cosmetic surgery is among the most interdisciplinary of topics and thus feminist analysis needs to start from a variety of disciplinary perspectives” (2009, 2). Therefore, after considering literature and statistical information on the subject, I carried out seventeen in-depth face-to-face interviews, gathering personal narratives and body histories (including details about interview participants’ experience of their bodies as children, as they grew older, any history of changing their bodies and personal accounts of life as citizens of makeover culture) giving most weight to the voice of the interviewee. I set these alongside media texts from a selection of women’s and lifestyle magazines and television shows.

Conscious that the risk of using mixed methods lies in insufficient depth and inconclusive results due to inadequate time dedicated to research in any one area, I made sure to clearly state the basis of my research to make clear any biases. Data was validated through triangulation between different data sources (media, interview participants, statistics, secondary sources), looking at common themes across sources and discussing media sources with interview participants.

To support my findings, in addition to academic literature, I used a range of secondary data including magazine circulation figures and television viewing figures, which helped to substantiate claims that makeover culture was on the rise, to justify my decision to study this area and to support my choice of media. I also considered statistics from relevant governing bodies for cosmetic practitioners in the UK and in the US to illustrate the growth of cosmetic surgery. Statistical data for Australia were harder to find, but some figures have been reported in the newspapers that reflect the global trend with an SBS article suggesting that Australians spend over one billion dollars a year on cosmetic procedures, forty per cent more per capita than in the United States (King 2016).
Ethics

An awareness of the ethical issues of interviewing (Kvale 2007, 23-31), raised when putting together my ethics application, was beneficial throughout my project. My ethics application was considered low risk. After explaining my project, I secured verbal consent from interview participants to the interview, the recording and the use of the data collected, and I stored the interview recordings and transcripts securely on a private computer. I transcribed interviews in full to ensure that transcriptions were loyal to the original. To ensure participant anonymity in my written work, I changed interview participant names to pseudonyms chosen from the top ten baby names of their birth decade. I also considered possible consequences of the study for the participants—stress during interviews, and changes in self-understanding—in discussion with supervisors prior to applying for ethics. No issues arose during my project.

Interviews

The qualitative interview, as the “construction site of knowledge” (Kvale 2007, 21), allows the interviewer and the interviewee to construct new understandings of localised phenomena, in this case, experience of makeover culture, makeover media, consumption of makeover products, response to makeover, technologies of makeover, perfectibility and femininity in makeover culture. I chose empirical techniques to understand my interview participants’ engagement with makeover media and makeover practice, how their experience of makeover differed from the portrayal of makeover in the media, their attitudes to makeover culture and whether I could identify a degree of shared experience amongst them. My seventeen interviews were designed to better understand women’s experience within the frame of makeover culture but outside of the media spotlight. I took, as a basis, Jones’ assertion that women are implicated in cosmetic surgical culture (2008a, 3) (or in my case in makeover culture), whether they are active participants or passive or critical observers, and the impossibility, in a reflexive modernity (Giddens 1991) of being outside of makeover culture. I
felt that this could be evidenced by how much makeover culture my interview participants came into contact with in their normal lives. My research interviews enabled me to understand the context within which women, through immersion in media culture, social interactions and personal experience, are situated within makeover culture in their everyday lives.

Designing the interview process to obtain the desired information, whilst ensuring both the validity and reliability\(^{35}\) of the data collected, was achieved by ensuring an understanding of the critiques of qualitative research (Walter 2008, 12). I developed a semi-structured interview schedule to collect personal narratives (Appendix One). After obtaining verbal consent to the interview and the recording, each interview started with a brief overview of my topic and how the interview would proceed. A series of open ended questions were used to trigger conversation around specific areas of interest, designed to keep my interview format open enough to allow conversation to flow freely and to allow me to follow the discussion where it led, but using a loose schedule to help in the collection of reliable, relatable data.

The development of interview questions was an iterative process; preliminary data analysis, which began during the interview process, helped to highlight issues with the original questions as well as providing an initial overview of participants’ response to makeover culture. Through experience I refined questions if it became apparent that they might appear ambiguous or confusing, for example, some women were very clear in their minds about what I might mean by makeover culture, others found the concept new or even improbable, needing further clarification as to what exactly I was asking.

The questions covered a number of discrete areas that I hoped would lead directly to a thematic analysis of the data. Firstly I gathered information about interviewees’ consumption of makeover media and their response to it, their perception of its impact on body satisfaction and bodily aspirations (perfectibility), the range of acceptable bodies in the media, beautiful/perfect

\(^{35}\) Validity “is the extent to which our data or results measure what we intended them to measure,” and reliability “is the consistency of our data or results. If we repeated the data collection or analysis, would we consistently get the same results?” (Walter 2008, 12).
bodies in the media and the perceived impact of media makeovers on women’s bodies in every-day life. Secondly, I asked questions about interviewees’ experience of makeover practice (technology), from their own desire to change/makeover their bodies, to their personal experience of makeover techniques, and their experience of makeovers that they/others they know have undergone and how they/others responded to that experience. Thirdly, following on from my own observations of the made over body/media body ideal being a feminine body, I was interested in interviewees’ thoughts on the feminine body (femininity). Intrigued by the theory that femininity is becoming increasingly corporeal (Gill 2007) and multi-faceted (Gill and Scharff 2011, McRobbie 2007) I asked my interview participants to define femininity and whether they thought that femininity was a desirable quality in the twenty-first century.

**Finding Interview Participants**

In terms of demographic profile my participants were white, Australian born or long-term permanent residents, tertiary educated and middle class, all except four (Anne, early fifties; Lisa, early thirties; Amy, mid twenties; and Jessica, mid twenties) had children at home or grown, with disposable income to spend on magazines and makeover products. The age range of my participants was the greatest variable, ranging from mid twenties (Jessica, Amy) to early sixties (Susan, Christine). Four participants were in their twenties, three in their thirties, four in their forties, four in their fifties and two in their sixties, and this led to some interesting outcomes especially when discussing femininity and attitudes to cosmetic surgery. I targeted this population because they make up a significant part of the general population and, falling within the frame of the idealised neoliberal feminine subject, they have the class, the appropriate “taste literacies,” the social capital, the funds and the ability to negotiate social situations and if they so desire to perform the made over body. They appear, in short, to be the perfect consumer within the neoliberal constructs of aspirational womanhood; and yet, as we will discover in the second half of this thesis, I found
that they lack the aspiration to class mobility often shown in makeover media. Indeed their, sometimes vocal, resistance to makeover culture suggests that they are already that which the frequently working class women of makeover media aspire to be. They aspire to self-improvement, and yet they do not aspire to the media ideal, although some admit that they were more drawn to that ideal when they were younger. While on paper they fulfil many of the attributes of the women in the television commercials, having the tools and money that it might take to achieve the proposed ideal, they lack the desire. This means that although they might seem to have the greater potential for success they are not actually consuming makeover culture in the way that working class women might.

My study will look at how this potentially perfect consumer target group responds to the imagery and imaginary of makeover culture. While previous studies have focused on working class women (Skeggs and Wood 2008), teens (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2011, Press 2011), and college aged young people (Press 2011) as well as mixed groups (Skeggs and Wood 2012), my chosen target group contributes one more alternative point of view to the overall research as well as considering how responses differ across a variety of age groups.

Initial participants were recruited through personal contacts (Susan, early sixties; Patricia, mid fifties; Belinda, late thirties; Amy, mid twenties), with additional participants recruited via the online forum essentialbaby.com (Amanda, early thirties), a mothers’ group (Rebecca, mid thirties; Jennifer, mid thirties; Melissa, early forties), online blogs (Karen, early forties; Nicole, early forties; Judith, early fifties), a quilting guild (Emma, early thirties; Julie, early fifties; Michelle, late forties) and word of mouth recommendations (Jessica, mid twenties; Anne, late fifties; Laura, late thirties). The majority of people I approached were enthusiastic about participating in my research. Some worried they wouldn’t have anything to contribute saying that they had no interest in makeover media from the outset (Belinda, Anne). I decided to go ahead with these interviews anyway and found that their interview responses did not always reflect this and their responses turned out to be particularly interesting because of this.
All of the women were based in Melbourne, Australia, and therefore broadly situated within a similar interpretive framework, with access to similar television, similar magazines, and exposed to similar advertising and online content. They included three women originally from the United Kingdom (Jessica, mid twenties, Amanda, early thirties and Jennifer, mid thirties) and two from the United States (Amy, mid twenties and Lisa, early thirties). I found that they had a broad knowledge and experience of the context, enabling them to approach makeover culture/media not only for pleasure but also from a critical standpoint. Despite the fact that makeover culture is an increasingly global phenomenon, I believed that retaining commonality within my research group and between my texts was key to my ability to look more deeply and to achieve meaningful results while carrying out a multi-method project. My participants’ lives in a modern cosmopolitan city clearly affected their experience of makeover culture in specific ways as it does my own. Looking at this as a contemporary Western phenomenon, albeit one with cross-cultural significance, allowed me to draw deeper understanding from a group of my peers. Working with this group allowed me to analyse data using my own knowledge, avoiding, as Skeggs and Wood (2012) point out, the considerable risk attached to researching groups that fall outside of your own cultural situation.

In the end, the narrowness of my interview participant sample was both a strength and a weakness of the study. My research focussed on a group less frequently researched because of their ordinariness, their lack of racial difference, their middle classness and their level of education. It enabled me to closely investigate the experiences of interview participants, who had a lot in common, but it did not allow me to inquire into the experience of women from different cultural and social environments.

**Carrying Out The Interviews**

The seventeen one-on-one, face-to-face interviews lasted between forty minutes and one hour and twenty minutes. They were held at mutually agreed
locations, usually suggested by the participant, such as their home or a local cafe. Interviews were recorded digitally where possible, to allow me to give full attention to each participant, and later transcribed in their entirety to provide accurate documentation.

The interviews were carried out in small batches between 2009 and 2011. During that time there were changes in my research area and changes in makeover culture that affected my questions, but I found that one key to ensuring the reliability and validity of the data collected was to retain similarity between interviews, with the majority of questions consistent even where new questions were indicated during the process. Although useful insights could be, and were, gained by following the conversation where it led, it was also important to retain control of the topic and ensure key questions were answered so as to be able to compare between interviews. Writing up my analysis after several years break I was aware that the views expressed during the interviews may not always represent the most up to date thoughts and opinions within contemporary society, but I feel that they captured the essence of my interview participants’ understanding of and beliefs around the topic of makeover culture. My analysis represents my participants’ views during a period that makeover media was increasingly present in all media channels. While makeover culture might change rapidly, especially with the unprecedented development of social media in the last decade, social norms within peer groups change more slowly and I believe that the majority of my interview participants’ views would still hold true at this point in time. Any research can only represent the understanding of its topic in a single period in history, and my research is centred on a fascinating period, which included significant international happenings events including the Global Financial Crisis and the Brexit vote, both of which affected makeover culture and are discussed in this thesis.
Collating the Data

Transcriptions of each interview enabled me to look in detail at each individual narrative and helped to provide a clear audit trail. To keep the interview transcriptions simple I have used ... to indicate a pause, hesitation, erm, mmm or other verbal tic. In citing transcriptions, throughout this thesis I have used [...] to indicate that a word or words have been excluded to improve the readability of the text.

To allow detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, when faced with the volume of transcribed data it was necessary to condense the results in order to create usable information/narratives. Collecting ideas together was done using a block and file approach (Grbich 2011, 32) grouping answers to similar questions together and looking for natural meaning units (see Appendix Two for a sample). I was looking for indicators that themes were emerging including: repeated words and images; direct and indirect references to makeover culture; references to cosmetic surgery; references to image manipulation; references to celebrity and expertise; references to advertising; references to personal change. I noted any anecdotal evidence that would support and illustrate my research questions. I was able to identify repeated themes, but dealing with how people interpreted the questions in different ways, due to the qualitative nature of the interviews, added a layer of unforeseen complexity to the process of collating and analysing the data. Because interview participants could answer as they wished some conversations veered off along interesting but tangential threads. While these answers were incredibly valuable in adding depth to the collective interview outcomes, and they offered some fascinating personal narratives that were invaluable to my work, the lack of structure made it more difficult to categorise, summarise and analyse results.

Between collation of the raw unstructured data and analysis lay a number of important decisions of what to include and what to exclude. Although generalisability was not my goal, but rather I looked to evaluate the way in which my interview participant related their personal experiences, I still needed to evaluate the credibility and generalisability of the data (Silverman [2000] 2007,
I found it useful to discuss my research with peers and supervisors at this stage as it helped me to explore my data and validate some of my conclusions. Not all interview questions turned out to be as useful as I had originally thought, so some were dropped during the research.

**Media Texts**

All interview participants spoke of reading women’s magazines or watching makeover television and my media analysis was designed to understand what they were confronted with each time they opened a magazine or turned on the television and found makeover content. Through my engagement with the texts, I gained an understanding of how the media presents women in makeover culture as needing makeover/deserving of makeover, as consenting and non-consenting bodies, acceptable and non-acceptable bodies which helped to contextualise interview responses and relate them to the media makeover narrative. I also wanted to understand how the fairy-tale media makeover compared with the every-day experience of interview participants.

Choosing a population of texts for analysis can be done in two main ways; probability or non-probability sampling (Neuendorf 2011, 281). A large-scale quantitative media analysis would aim for a large probability sample such as all magazines published between certain dates, or a year’s worth of issues of a certain number of magazines, to provide a representative subset allowing for results to be generalised to a wider population. In cases such as mine, Neuendorf suggests such “non probability sampling techniques as convenience, purposive, or quota might be necessary” (2011, 281). A limited project scope (convenience), and specific requirements (purposive) in terms of the data I required from the texts led me to a number of quite deliberate, non-probability, decisions when it came to choosing texts to study. These decisions were consistent with my choice of methodological framework.

Small but clearly defined and largely homogenous datasets facilitated comparison between media analysis and interview responses. In order to validate
my data findings and to show how ubiquitous makeover culture is, I searched for commonality between texts. I searched out media that was likely to be readily available to my participants to ensure potential exposure and included Australian, North American and British television shows aired on Australian television or available on DVD during the research period and Australian and British magazines available at the time. In a first round of magazine analysis (magazines collected in October/November 2008) I looked at magazines chosen based on highest circulation figures\(^\text{36}\) of women’s glossy magazines. I felt that the best-selling magazines would offer me the best opportunity at repeatable, reliable results.

This first stage of media analysis is what Neuendorf calls “immersion in the message pool.” She suggests that, “In addition to reviewing the research literature on the topic of interest, the content analyst should also take a practical approach and seek additional clues from a thorough examination of the pool of messages constituting the defined population” (2011, 280). In my case reading a range of women’s magazines and watching makeover television, as well as watching for other indicators of makeover culture including looking at a small sample of other magazines such as home decorating and health magazines to confirm my expectation that makeover content was situated more broadly than just women’s magazines. I even looked through the *Time* magazine archive\(^\text{37}\) of a similar period where I found many examples of the term makeover in contexts from companies to buildings to economies. This stage started as I started my thesis and continued informally in parallel with interviews and beyond.

Looking at the language/imagery chosen in detail reveals often-conflicting discourses such as the feminist/anti-feminist claims for makeover culture, which can then be applied to the interpretation of the text/image. I looked for direct and indirect references to makeover on the cover, in the contents pages and in the magazine articles, for reader stories and celebrity makeovers, and compared


that against the total number of articles in the magazine, however, I did not
record this information in any systematic way. This gave me a clearer idea of
what to expect my interview participants to be exposed to in their everyday
reading and watching, and enabled me to get a first impression and a feel for the
overall tone of the media. When it came to my early magazine analysis, I found
that it gave me only a broad feel for makeover in the media and I wished I had
developed a more systematic collection of this data such as keeping a scrapbook
of media clippings.

What proved more useful was the media information collected following
my interviews, which allowed for a more critical analysis of images/texts in
relation to key themes and directly linked to interview participant experience.
This second, smaller set of magazines (collected in December 2011/January 2012)
was based on what my participants told me they read or watched. After the
interviews I picked up copies of many of magazines that interviewees reported
having read, from *Harpers Bazaar* to *Runner’s World*. I looked at each magazine,
searching out makeover texts. Looking out specifically for writing and images
about the celebrities, issues and types of bodies that interview participants had
talked about, confirming the influences I had expected to see in their lives. I used
post-it notes to colour code different themes and areas of interest, hoping to
narrow down information on body ideals and femininity and how makeover/the
makeover narrative is presented in the media. I was interested to see how my first
impressions were borne out by deeper investigation and to what extent I could
identify body ideals, feminine ideals and the extent of makeover culture in the
media in order to compare what the magazines were offering with the responses
from interviewees on similar issues.

To look at makeover narratives within makeover television shows and how
the experience of makeover as indicated on television related to how interviewees
talked about their own experience of makeover I sought out popular shows with
prime time slots, social media presences and advertising, I chose three programs,
*The Swan* (US), *The Biggest Loser* (Australia) and *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days*
(UK). I felt that these shows demonstrated the diversity of the genre from *The
Biggest Loser which focussed almost entirely on weight loss, to Ten Years Younger in Ten Days which involved wardrobe makeovers as well as frequent use of less invasive cosmetic procedures such as cosmetic dental work, chemical skin peels, injectables and fillers, to The Swan where the focus was heavily geared towards aggressive cosmetic surgical procedures but with a secondary interest in weight loss, gym training, comportment, psychology, hair and dress. I was able to map these diverse choices to the reactions of my interview participants to different types of makeover. The horror with which they reacted to extreme examples of cosmetic surgery such as those undergone by participants on The Swan, was very different to the respect that they showed towards the efforts made by participants on The Biggest Loser. I also referred to Weber’s wide-ranging analysis, which offered many examples (2009).

When considering televisual texts I examined them particularly for evidence of a clear makeover narrative (as discussed in Chapter Three) including before/after presentations, language used, power relations between makeover participant and expert, the stated aims of the makeover and what was considered to be a successful makeover, presentation of concepts of beauty and the ‘ideal’ and ‘feminine’ bodies presented/created through makeover process. I wanted to explore the connection between the people that I was talking to and the media images/bodies/celebrities that they were seeing or reading about. This sample was representative of the media that interview participants were consuming.

Analysis and the Need for Reflexivity

A consideration of “meaning as shifting and uncertain” (Grbich 2011, 9) is essential to my interpretation of theory and primary data, as, especially with qualitative interviews, there is no one right answer. Harvey and Gill remind us that, “by conducting a textual analysis we do not assume a homogeneous reading of the text. We are mindful of the potentially diverse readings and patterns of consumption of television (Bragg and Buckingham, 2004; Morley, 1992) but consider that a feminist textual analysis provides important points of discussion
about the changing construction of feminine sexual subjectivity” (2011, 57). This can be applied to both textual analysis and interview analysis. In my work, given the similarity of my participants, I found a number of shared interpretations of makeover culture, but it was also important to be on the look out for alternative views and not to assume too much.

I settled on a broad, postmodern, feminist approach, but, as there is “no ontological or epistemological position that is distinctly feminist” (Ramazanoglu 2002, 16) what makes this research feminist is its grounding in women’s experience, rather than its precise methodology and method. As discussed in the introduction, feminist methodology encourages a focus on first-person experiences favouring descriptions over “grand theoretical frames” (Grbich 2011, 85-86) and describing over analysing (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2008, ix). My research, into the differences between earlier beauty cultures and makeover culture, required me to speak to individuals and to consider the media and makeover culture environment in addition to the embodied experience in order to produce evidence for these differences.

In postmodern feminist research the subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged and encouraged as part of the puzzle, engaging broadly with the subjectivity of knowledge and the creation of knowledge as a collaboration between the researcher and the researched (Marshall and Young 2006). This belief, that a person’s experience of an event differs based on their cultural circumstance, rejects the possibility of entirely objective research and remembers that the researcher—me—is always already situated within the culture being researched, either permanently or temporarily researching from her own position of cultural, sexual and political specificity (Grosz 1994). The interview process and subsequent analysis of interview data are inevitably influenced by the interviewer's relationship with the interviewees.

Although I approached interviewees on an equal basis, some were uncomfortable opening up, particularly if concerned that what they had to say was not interesting or relevant. As elements of my topic were quite personal (asking questions about their bodies and experiences of makeover) I found it
useful to open interviews with more general, neutral questions before delving deeper into personal feelings, and in some cases to offer my own personal anecdotes and discussion of my project findings in order to encourage interviewees to speak more openly. Cosmetic Surgery in particular evoked strong feelings and I found that I would have to spend more time on it as a specific issue than I had originally intended, indeed as a lot of my interviewees were keen to discuss this area in detail it ended up contributing a large part to my analysis as well providing quality data for the theme of technology.

It is important to take into account the effect of interviewer bias which occurs throughout the process, from writing the questions to carrying out interviews, to the interpretation of research data. The entire process requires a degree of “reflexive subjectivity” (Grbich 2011, 10). I took into account my own position as implicated in makeover culture but with a critical consciousness of it. Marshall and Young suggest that, “a self-reflexive understanding of one’s identity is a necessary part of understanding the impact of one’s presence and perspective on the research. The question, Is this objective truth?, in the hands of a feminist researcher, becomes, Is this faithful enough to some human construction that we feel safe in acting upon it?” (2006, 72).

To help understand issues of subjectivity and intersubjectivity postmodern feminist research methodology encourages analysis of the researcher’s own relationship to the phenomenon being studied and offers self-reflection as a tool designed to acknowledge and appropriately signpost researcher bias (Grbich 2011, 100). I considered my own position as a makeover citizen, within makeover culture and how it might influence my research. Creating my own personal narrative—in postmodern research methodology there is no one claim to reality (Ramazanoglu 2002, 3), truth is contingent, personal truth is considered valid—as a starting point for my research involved me writing my own body history (Appendix Three), in order to clarify my own position as researcher on this issue and to understand more clearly both my interview process and the subjective frames (extratextual and intratextual) from within which I carried it out. Grbich suggests that, “self-reflexivity involves a heightened awareness of the self in the
process of knowledge creation, a clarification of how one’s beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction, data collection and data analysis in the research setting” (2011, 10). As the word count rose and the pages filled I began to realise how deeply implicated I was in the culture I was researching. Given the long duration of my project, I updated this twice, once after the birth of my first child and once towards the end after two more children and with a significantly different body. This helped me to understand my own subjective position in relation to those I was interviewing, and also that my own position was far from being fixed. I answered my own interview questions retrospectively (Appendix Four) after interviews had been carried out. To reduce the risk of being influenced by interviewee’s words a degree of critical self-reflexivity was necessary. I also wrote personal reflections on the three tenets and on media culture, which informed my later writing. Understanding my own personal frame of reference allowed me to analyse others’ narratives more critically.

With each interviewee it was also important to consider their knowledge of makeover culture and their degree of personal experience as well as their own history and personal situation. Despite using open-ended questions, minimal interviewer interruption, a flexible interview schedule and encouraging the flow of consciousness and persistent observation during the interview process, I still needed to consider, “the problems of intersubjectivity: how do we know when we have accessed other people’s minds?” (Grbich 2011, 8). It was necessary to consider the interview transcripts critically keeping in mind what was known about the interviewees’ frames of reference to make decisions as to what extent to believe and report what they said as what they actually felt: do they say what they mean and mean what they say? It was also necessary to ensure that I wasn’t missing things that were there while looking for information that I wanted to be there that maybe wasn’t. In order to find a balance I have reported interview participants own words and tried to be clear where their words end and my own thoughts intervene.
Interpreting and Presenting the Data: Combining Interviews and Media Readings

Feminist methodologies, though varied, all prioritise research about women’s personal experiences. Whether looking at theory, which they consider in the light of women’s lived experience, or practice, where they emphasise women’s words and thoughts, women’s experience is central. Tools such as self-reflection, and mining data for first person narratives to give voice to women help in both the planning and analysis stages of research. They are premised on the researcher constructing knowledge together with the researched. Radtke and Stam explain, “captured by the well-known phrase ‘the personal is political’, in practice this has meant examining the details of women’s lives as told by its participants. Through analysing the experiences of ‘ordinary’ women, feminist scholars have developed theoretical frameworks that are often at odds with those traditionally adopted within their disciplines” (1994, 11). But it doesn’t just stop at individuals’ lives,

Scholars have gone well beyond simply documenting women’s realities (which is in and of itself an important accomplishment). Rather, feminist research has worked to expand narrow understandings, to deconstruct distorted assumptions about women, to valorize activities such as teaching that are commonly associated with women, and to ‘expose’ the important contributions made by women, their perspectives, and their work. Far beyond the ‘add women and stir’ response, feminist researchers have enriched the research field epistemologically, ontologically, and methodologically. (Marshall and Young 2006)

So it is not only the words spoken, but it is in what we do with them that feminist methodologies play a part. My research sought to examine the way in which women experience makeover culture, for example in what they read and watch and in their everyday lives. I analysed and sorted the interview data manually, isolating individual narratives, personal histories, anecdotes and evidence of collective experience related to the personal experience of makeover and media consumption. These helped to shape the rest of my thesis, and I used them to construct the kind of mini-narratives favoured by postmodern research "which provide explanations for small scale situations located within particular contexts
where no pretensions of abstract theory, universality or generalizability are involved (my bold)” (Grbich 2011, 10). This approach suited my project as it offered me a frame, or non-frame, within which to discuss the personal narratives I collected during my research interviews, as well as an avenue to consider the overall narratives of makeover culture. It enabled me to identify how my interview participants responded to makeover media, which was valuable because even a wide ranging media analysis can only show what the media producers think people want to watch or want them to watch, not what they actually want to watch. Therefore the combination with audience interviews produces richer more valuable data.

Developing the spoken narratives of individuals into readable, interesting and sustainable written narratives and weaving together interview outcomes and media analysis with my own personal observations, was done throughout this thesis in a number of ways. I wished to use the data to tell a story as suggested by Gabriel, “generally, qualitative researchers will arrange their data with a view to telling a story. In telling this story, they will weave together the literature they have read, extracts from their primary data, and their own thoughts and interpretations of the data before them” (2008, 357). I reported the stories told to me by interview participants, often providing, “extended quotations (two or three sentences) from one or two interviewees to illustrate a particular point, rather than short sound-bites from lots of interviewees […] to explore the meanings people ascribe to particular things or situations, rather than to show how many people hold the same attitudes” (2008, 358), giving significant space to my interview participants own words.

The choice of voice in the reporting was important. Both feminist and postmodern research methodologies insist that the voices of those being researched be given significant exposure. Grbich recommends that “it is assumed that interaction between you and those researched will serve to produce a constructed reality and, in order that your interpretations do not dominate, the voices of the researched are usually given fairly substantial display” (2011, 9). In order to emphasise the importance of the voice of interview participants, I
developed body histories for my participants and I share many of their stories in the second half of this thesis. Some stories were told in the interviewees’ own words; some were paraphrased, often extracting the key points and distilling the information into a more usable form. Drawing together similar narratives with media analysis helped to construct a strong overall picture of makeover culture.

My own awareness, even as a low-level consumer of makeover media, my own involvement in “body snarking” (Seligson 2008) and “fat talk” (Britton, et al. 2006, Nichter and Vuckovic 1994), in short, my own immersion in makeover culture, affected every step of the process. Although my voice as researcher dominates the analysis, and I had no intention of annihilating my own subjective voice in this research, postmodern research demands a degree of conscious decentring and a transparency regarding whose voice is being heard. As Grbich suggests, “[a] postmodern position (except where a highly subjective orientation was being pursued) would decentre your voice in favour of a polyphonic display of voices of the researched, here your voice will only be one of many” (Grbich 2011, 19). I was mindful and reflective of my own position as a citizen of makeover culture and my chosen methodologies allowed me to include my own thoughts as long as they were clearly identified as such. This form of mild ‘bracketing’ of my own suppositions enabled me to be clear what was my voice and what was the voice of my participants and where my voice influenced them. I came to consider myself an insider, a participant in makeover culture as a result of my own cultural and historical situatedness and even more so as a result of my involvement in this research project.

I was concerned with avoiding reductionism in the analysis stage due to the limits of the sample. To prevent this, in my reporting, I gave weight in particular to the individual narratives as well as the range of narratives found in my media examples. Postmodern research methodologies do not require me to prove beyond doubt or even claim universality of my outcomes and therefore the use of mixed methods allows for a degree of triangulation between datasets in order to support and validate research results. I applied methods including cross-referencing between types of texts/images, cross-referencing with academic
research, cross-referencing with interview outcomes and a degree of bracketing out or clearly stating my own and interviewees’ possible biases to ensure validity, reliability and objectivity. I found that the data provided a richness that when worked together enabled me to develop my discussion of the key differences between beauty and makeover culture. My analysis has tended towards an emphasis on cosmetic surgery because that was the first thing my interview participants fixed on when I asked them about makeover media. That is what they assumed I was talking about but I have also included analysis of other types of makeover from wardrobe, to hair, to weight loss (or gain) makeovers.

**Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the methodological underpinnings to my research project and the tools that I used to collect my data as well as the way in which I have chosen to present the data. It provided detail about interview participants and media sources as well as other primary and secondary sources. Feminist research methodologies were deemed most appropriate for my research in order to produce an understanding of women’s experience through qualitative information such as stories and anecdotes. Reporting interview data in my participants’ own words and clearly acknowledging my own interpretation of them is important in this approach which considers that it is how interview participants remember, relate and express their experience that matters. It is not a case of taking them at their word but rather, respecting their memory and expression of their experience, which is based on their own situatedness within makeover culture. It is important to acknowledge both their, and my understandings of their position within that. It is not truth—it might not even approximate truth, but it requires a deeper reading of the situation. For example, many claimed that makeover culture doesn’t affect them, but they went on to talk their continued participation, a double gesture towards makeover culture which illustrates the power of the media which operates by convincing people that they are not convinced.
Research is an iterative process, whereby the researcher moves between collecting data, interpreting data, and writing about their topic. In my case using multiple methods/tools meant an increased complexity to the back and forth process, but it was in the writing that my topic began to come together. Writing is constitutive, in that it shapes how the author and the audience understand the topic; as the separate threads of information were brought together in my thematic analysis I began to understand how the different areas of the subject fitted together as groups of information and trends emerged from previously seemingly disconnected data. The chosen methods produced rich data; interview responses provided me with unique stories, which helped me to respond to my initial research questions. Combining media analysis and interviews, together with personal reflections helped me to share stories of the experience of makeover culture, making a fresh contribution to this topic.
PART II

The purpose of the second part of this thesis is twofold. First to present the data collected, both from media review and from the interview process, with a focus on where the two datasets cross paths (interview participants’ responses to questions around the media, similarities and differences between media makeover and their own experiences). Second to demonstrate through examples in the data, the significance and prominence of the three key tenets—technology, perfectibility, and femininity—that, I argued in earlier chapters, make makeover culture different to earlier beauty culture, highlighting the role that they play in regulating women’s bodies.

This part of the thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter Six, introduces the data collected, presenting interview participants’ body histories and media consumption habits and identifying their response to narratives drawn from media texts. It considers the role of the media in perpetuating the idea of the perfectible body through the use of Photoshop and similar technologies, alongside interview participants’ discussions regarding perfect bodies in their own lives and in the media. As discussed in Chapter Six media selections included magazine and televisual texts, which provide a rich source of makeover narratives. Interview data, with a focus on interview participants’ varied interactions with makeover media—from Karen, who considers herself a “gracious consumer” of women’s magazines and blogs, and Julie who watches, “sort of crazy ones,” to Jennifer who only reads Runner’s World Magazine—
provides an insight into the interview participants’ experience of and response to makeover media.

Chapter Seven, introduces interview participants’ narratives of their own experiences of, and responses to, makeover practices. Bearing in mind the earlier discussion of the postfeminist neoliberal subject—or makeover citizen, and assigning interview participants to this category, this chapter contributes to a broader understanding of the current lived experience of makeover through their personal histories, and specifically, their experience of makeover told largely in their own words. It includes a deeper discussion of the technologies and techniques of makeover culture, including cosmetic surgery, in the context of interview participants’ experiences.

The focus of Chapter Eight is a discussion of femininity in makeover culture, exploring interview participants’ definitions of femininity and the attitudes to femininity within the media. It argues that magazine and television makeovers, in presenting a homogenous, feminine ideal, contribute to the regulatory imperative of makeover culture, which continually exhorts women to ‘be the best that they can be’, and considers how interview participants respond to this.
Chapter 6

You Are What You Watch: Interview Participants as Consumers of Makeover Media, its Technologies and its Perfectible Bodies

“So horrifying that I had to watch it every week, it was like watching a train wreck.” Interview participant Nicole discussing the show Extreme Makeover

Thumbing through a stack of women’s magazines, or watching episodes of makeover television, it quickly becomes evident that there are many ways in which the media, as a keen observer of women’s bodies in the early twenty-first century, is also a key technology in the regulation of those bodies; influencing women’s perceptions of their bodies and the actions they take to conform to media-influenced social expectations. The first part of this chapter expands on my hypothesis that technology is a key tenet of makeover culture, to provide a context for interviewees’ experience of the high-tech environment of makeover culture. It makes explicit the relationships between technology and makeover culture, considering how the always-on technologies of media, with an authoritative gaze (Hearn 2008), contribute to the global narratives of makeover culture, and showing how makeover technologies are used and represented within media texts. In the digital age, twenty-four-seven television channels, Internet and social media outlets disseminate the messages so widely that common beauty narratives have developed across global borders and age groups.
While these technologies narrowly pre-date makeover culture I contend that they have been critical in its assimilation. John Lasseter suggests that “the art challenges the technology, and the technology inspires the art.” Driven in part by advertising revenues, this intersection of technology and culture led to prolific production and consumption of media and advertising content. In return makeover culture supported the production and expansion of new media technologies such as image and video manipulation software.

Building from the theoretical discussion and context setting of the first half of this thesis, this chapter introduces two key aspects of my original interview data; contemporary experiences of makeover media, and its technologies. In engaging with the seventeen women I interviewed about media consumption—exposure to, attitudes to and personal experiences of makeover media and its technologies—whether intentional or incidental, I wished to better understand their experience of makeover media and their perception of its influence.

My interview participants were all intelligent women ranging from mid twenties to early sixties, from middle-class backgrounds with the privilege of a tertiary education. They had the knowledge and language to engage with makeover content on multiple levels. My findings concurred with Ouellette and Hay’s argument that, “most makeover programs also allow for multiple and fairly complex viewing strategies that range from emotional identification with the fashion victim, to taking on the rehabilitation work of the experts and judges and possibly judging oneself above the people who are being made over, to ironic detachment” (2008, 102).

I discovered the broad reach of makeover culture amongst my participants and I show that consumption of makeover content goes beyond actively reading beauty magazines and watching makeover shows and includes television dramas not explicitly about makeover, active and passive consumption of advertising messages and those casually placed magazines on offer at the dentist’s office. I

---

38 John Lasseter is the Chief Creation Officer at Pixar Studios and Walt Disney Animation Studios. He is quoted in an article written for Harvard Business Review by someone working at Pixar - https://hbr.org/2008/09/how-pixar-fosters-collective-creativity
propose that my interview participants, as consumers of makeover media and makeover citizens, are unavoidably always already implicated in, and therefore regulated by, makeover culture. Despite this, their responses, often ambiguous and ambivalent, but also sometimes passionate and well informed, suggest an unacknowledged confusion around the topic of makeover culture. While they argue for their postfeminist right to enjoy beautiful images, they also encounter varying degrees of shame in discussing them. I discovered that attitudes of pleasure and shame attending media consumption, sometimes both at once, were part of the shared experience of my participants.

As discussed in Chapter Four, a sense of shame, including shameful feelings towards the body, acts to drive makeover practice. Sender's research with makeover television viewers suggests that shows like The Biggest Loser promote a functional shame that pushes participants to action (2012, 2). And this sense of shame, whether directly attributed to makeover media or not, also pushes my interview participants to act, as I will discuss in Chapter Seven. However, in this chapter, I will show that interview participants are not only influenced by the media, but also by a wider network of influences including peers, family, advertising and celebrities, much like the distributed networks that Foucault suggests have come to replace centralised power. Foucault argued that, "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" ([1976] 1998, 93). We come to makeover media already primed to act by this "complex strategical situation in a particular society" ([1976] 1998, 93), or complex framework of regulatory power.

I consider the ideal bodies presented in the media and how they contribute to the gendered routine and continued focus on the body in makeover culture. I argue that Photoshop is a key technology of makeover and that, as Balsamo (1996) observes, the creation of digitally produced or edited images of bodies, is limited only to the imagination, and “has been transformed into the very medium of cultural expression itself” (1996, 131). I investigate interview participants’ responses to media images and discuss how promotion of one perfect body type over another, supports the development and continuation of
makeover culture as well as the normalisation of the act and technologies of makeover. Those same technologies render the body perfectible, influencing women, as makeover citizens, to continually strive to ‘be the best’. To conclude, in talking about interview participants’ ideal bodies and how they compare with media ideals, and about the search for alternative ideals for groups underrepresented in the media, I explore the significance of the media in the generation of beauty ideals.

When not used to create fictional characters from scratch, Photoshop is used to create images of images. It causes well-known real faces to disappear leaving impersonal clones. Often there is a degree of dissonance when we see, for example, a celebrity in the flesh. Author Margaret Atwood explains:

No more photos. Surely there are enough. No more shadows of myself thrown by light onto pieces of paper, onto squares of plastic. No more of my eyes, mouths, noses, moods, bad angles. No more yawns, teeth, wrinkles. I suffer from my own multiplicity. Two or three images would have been enough, or four, or five. That would have allowed for a firm idea: This is she. As it is, I’m watery, I ripple, from moment to moment I dissolve into my other selves. Turn the page: you, looking, are newly confused. You know me too well to know me. Or not too well: too much. (Atwood 2006)

The superfluity of media images, body ideals, femininities, sexualities and realities within makeover culture both strengthens and threatens the effect of ‘the image.’ When a magazine publishes a picture of Atwood, we see the digital version that we believe to be Atwood, but if we see her on the street, will we recognise her? In order to match the image we hold in our minds she must perform Atwood, the Atwood we ‘know’ through her media image.

Makeover Media as/and Technology

This section examines the makeover technologies that mediate my interview participants’ experience of makeover culture and how they differ from the technologies of beauty culture. I argue that makeover culture and technology
are produced by, and produces each other. This symbiotic relationship is significant in the existence and growth of makeover culture.

Makeover media is a technology in itself; sold to magazines, television stations and consumers with a promise of a better future for participants and, by extension, audiences. Without advances in media technologies makeover culture would not have the reach that it does. These technologies, always present, always on, produce and contribute to the global narratives of makeover culture. Just as technology enables makeover to be broadcast across the globe, it also enables knowledge and invites the reader or viewer to imagine themselves inside of it. Advances in technology since the time of beauty culture are the source of both the global expansiveness and the intimate introspection of makeover culture.

As well as the physical machinery of television we also see technology frequently foregrounded on set within makeover shows. The Biggest Loser Australia features a range of highly technical equipment: hidden cameras and gym equipment, as well as tools for age assessments, body fat monitoring and health profiling. When participants weigh in every week, their numbers flash up on giant screens; they prepare and eat food in their high-tech kitchen with food supplements and food preparation equipment; they communicate with loved ones; they record video diaries and they take part in game show type activities. Then they are made over, with hair products, scissors, dyes, control undergarments and clothing technologies. In The Swan the explicit focus is on the technology of cosmetic surgery, surgical equipment is ostentatiously on show both in pre-consultations and throughout the surgery itself. Again hidden cameras, gym equipment and communications equipment dominate the scene.

Another significant technology of makeover culture, one I hinted at when linking the timing of 1991’s first formal proposal for the World Wide Web with early makeover culture, is the Internet, and particularly social media, which came into existence with the 1997 launch of the site Six Degrees. A detailed discussion of makeover texts within social media is beyond the scope of this thesis but, as a fascinating and contemporary subject, it deserves acknowledgement. Social media provides a pervasive source of images and information that profoundly
affects adults and teenagers in the Western world. It extends the availability and accessibility of makeover culture on a global scale. In June 2017 Facebook had an average of 1.32 billion daily active users, and 2.01 billion monthly active users, with an increase of 47% in advertising income in Q2 2017 compared with Q2 2016.39 Another key source of information in the makeover industry is YouTube videos, such as those about cosmetic procedures, uploaded predominantly by Cosmetic Surgeons and Clinics, but also by patients telling their makeover stories (Wen, Chia and Hao 2015, 939).

Links have been drawn between media and the rise in cosmetic procedures (Wen, Chia and Hao 2015, 933-934), with twenty-four-seven access to information, images and advertising—including that directly related to makeover from fashion, style, beauty, as well as broader makeover culture—illustrating our failings and exhorting us to improve. The fact that all interview participants had experience with social media illustrates its importance. Indeed, I met Amanda through a parenting forum and Karen and Nicole through their blogs. Mums in the group frequented parenting forums such as BabyCenter and Essential Baby, and all but three interview participants used Facebook or Twitter regularly.

Social media has altered the makeover landscape allowing multi-way communication between suppliers, consumers and manufacturers of makeover culture and makeover products. It has encouraged discussion, promotion and critique of techniques, practitioners, consumers and outcomes. Paired with other media sources, social media contributes powerfully to the regulation of women’s bodies both promoting the imperative to change, and offering the ability to interact directly with magazine articles and television shows, their people and their producers through official and unofficial social media platforms including related blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and more. While mass media communicates on a one to many basis, with media producers selecting the message and, to some degree, the audience, social media is a participatory culture, where the many take charge of both the production and the reception of

---

media (Fuchs 2014, 52). Participants spread and share information and contribute to brand building for themselves and for their preferred suppliers. As a participatory quasi-democracy social media offers almost equal access to all its adherents (Fuchs 2014, 54). Attwood Gailey describes this as a “mutually reinforcing dialogic exchange” (2007, 107). Social media extends on the mutual dialogue allowing for instant access to peer support and critique as well as providing instant feedback, facilitating consumers’ self-education with regard to providers and procedures and enabling them to become knowledgeable consumers of makeover technologies. Indeed Powierska suggests that, “the internet has become an inseparable element of production and distribution of television content and paratexts accompanying it: in the age of the “meme culture” those frequently become more popular than the programs themselves” (2015, 19). A quick Internet search brings up a multitude of possible blog entries, tumblrs or Instagrams from people undergoing makeover processes sharing their experience as and when it happens. Friends, family and total strangers can follow the micro-documentation of an individual’s makeover process. It has transformed the consumer landscape, changing power relations between consumers and sellers or service providers. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter mediate users “cultural expression”, increasing consumer power as they constantly share and create content (Fuchs 2014, 56).

For makeover practitioners web presences and social media have changed consumer relationships and this has led to fear of social media amongst cosmetic surgeons in particular. However, research found that while online feedback about physicians “can potentially diminish physician authority, changing the doctor-patient relationship […] in practice this effect is minor, and that many cosmetic surgeons interpret reviews as a greater threat to their authority than is actually the case” (Menon 2017, 1) and increasingly practitioners are learning to manipulate social media for themselves.

Not only is technology an overwhelming presence on screen, without media technologies, makeover culture would not have become a global culture, and without such popularity, other techniques such as cosmetic surgery,
Photoshop and even medical imaging might never have been developed in the ways that they have been.

“I’m a pretty gracious consumer of magazines”: Interview Participants as Consumers of Makeover Media

I interviewed seventeen women aiming to discover more about their relationships with makeover culture. I put no numbers on their media consumption, but rather wanted to hear how they felt about their own consumption. During face-to-face interviews, I asked questions such as: What do you watch? Who do you watch with? What are your favourite programs? I wanted to know what makeover media texts they were coming into contact with and how they were experiencing them. Were they serious consumers of makeover media or were they largely disinterested? I found that all interview participants had frequent access to and sometimes consumed makeover media. I heard that their attitudes towards makeover media, while varied, were for the most part positive. They expressed pleasure at seeing beautiful images and watching people get their happy endings on makeover television, but at the same time, those who enjoyed the shows and images often expressed a degree of embarrassment about enjoying them, and those (the minority) who didn’t watch could be scornful of others who did, or of the shows themselves. Hermes, in interviews with Dutch and British women about reading women’s magazines, concluded that the value of magazines was that the allow readers “to fantasize about being well-organized, perfect women who keep the tips they collect in handy files, who can find the right recipe or tip whenever they want to” (Hermes 1995, 49) in other words, the value of magazines (or television shows) is as much in what it lets women imagine, as what it teaches them.

A number of interview participants self-identified as big consumers of makeover media. Karen described herself as, “a pretty gracious consumer of magazines.” She had read women’s magazines since her teens but now prefers sewing magazines. She also watches quite a lot (in her estimation) of makeover
shows but doesn’t take them seriously, “I love a good makeover actually, I love the whole before/after transformation thing but, I’ve always taken it with quite a grain of salt as well, so yes I watch it, Trinny and Susannah, they’re an example I suppose.” Here we see a dissonance, which was highlighted frequently in my interviews. She loves them, but reality television has nothing in common with her own life. She detaches herself from being duped by the media. Interestingly Skeggs et al. discovered that this was a key difference between their middle-class and working-class participants. Working class participants were more likely to see themselves in the position of the reality television participant (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008, Skeggs and Wood 2012).

While the overall response to makeover media was positive, the negative judgements that my middle-class interview participants made were fascinating, often a double judgement of both the show and of themselves for watching. This sense of shame and embarrassment was directed towards different elements of the experience of consumption. Some, like Karen, judged the outcome of shows like *What Not To Wear*, which she otherwise enjoyed watching. Her comment, “I think they put any woman in high heels, and... it’s makeover within a limited palette,” suggests that outcomes are too narrow, indicating her awareness of strict media ideals. Others judged the broader concept of a show. This experience is not uncommon; Sender highlighted similar shame and judgement from interview participants who, aware of the negative attitude towards reality television and those who chose to watch it, confessed to their consumption expecting criticism (2015, 43). She explains, “whatever people might enjoy in private, these women acknowledged risking shame by openly approving of some elements of the makeover shows” (2015, 48). Skeggs and Wood reported similar responses, particularly from middle-class women (2012). This fitted with my expectation that such shows might be considered a guilty pleasure. Probyn suggests that this shame is rooted in our desires, that “whatever it is that shames you will be something important to you, an essential part of yourself” (2005, x). Perhaps if we feel shame in looking at beautiful images it is because we desire to be like that ourselves and know we are not. The visceral response to such images
is because, “shame is the body’s way of registering interest, even when you didn’t know you were interested or were unaware of the depth of your desire for connection” (Probyn 2005, 28). Interview participant Nicole describes the experience of watching *Extreme Makeover* as, “so horrifying that I had to watch it every week, it was like watching a train wreck.” Drawn to watch it, against her better judgement, she displayed the conflicting emotions that I came across frequently in my interviews. Emma, in saying, “I have seen the *Ladette to Lady*, or whatever that one was, I’ve seen a couple of episodes of that one and was suitably horrified,” is judging both the show and herself for watching it, and yet she watched it more than once. By suggesting that her horror at the show is “suitable” she establishes herself as capable of making an appropriate judgement, one socially acceptable to her peers, or to me interviewing her. Karen, who otherwise enjoyed makeover media, also used the word horror in relation to shows about cosmetic surgery or other invasive procedures or extreme behaviours. She said, “those programs on television... horrify me.” The strength of the word indicating intense judgement of these shows in particular. This suggests a hierarchy of shame ranging from cosmetic surgery shows which attract the greatest amount of scorn and the most embarrassment from those who admitted to watching them, to body positive shows such as *How To Look Good Naked*, and shows which focused on fashion and makeup such as *What Not To Wear* which drew a positive response from interview participants.

It was significant that these value judgements were offered instantly and voluntarily, for example, the simple question, “what do you watch or read?” received an immediate shame-faced response of, “a fair bit of daytime crap” from Nicole who went on to tell me about a makeover that she had seen on daytime television show *The Circle*. Without prompting she offered a preemptive judgement, which assumed my own attitude towards the show would be negative, defending her choice of show as good because it presented lots of different women’s bodies as beautiful. Jessica also judged her consumption negatively, she admitted, sounding slightly embarrassed, “I am someone who loves to look at gossip magazines, can’t help it, it’s celebrity gazing I guess, and I
am actually a huge fan of women’s magazines. I think I did want to go into writing at one point, so that’s why. [...] I like Grazia, mainly because it is cheap.” She saw it as a guilty pleasure, admitting to its addictive qualities, but justified it as research for her potential writing career to give it an air of respectability. Again Skeggs and Wood heard similar responses from their middle class participants, with the participants seeing the relationship with the interviewer as one of equals, confidants, or partners in crime (Skeggs and Wood 2012).

The most frequently mentioned show, current at the time of interviews, was Channel Ten’s The Biggest Loser Australia. Kylie said, “I do like watching it and seeing the before and after pictures like Weight Watchers in the magazines.” It seemed that The Biggest Loser was acceptable viewing because it contestants were shown improving their lives through hard work. Weight loss, as an obvious form of labour, was considered a good choice. Labour helped to remove the stigma of being overweight because the contestants were trying to improve themselves. Surgery on the other hand could be considered avoidance of labour, and therefore potentially shameful. Anne however disagreed, she cast her harsh judgement on the show with an evident note of sarcasm in her voice saying, “I want to know what programming genius put “the stupid” [The Biggest Loser] just before So You Think You Can Dance.”

None of my interview participants claimed to consume makeover media in a healthy way; it was either an admittance of the excess they read/watched, whatever they considered excess, or an insistence that it meant nothing, or very little to them. Either way there was an element of shame or judgement, suggesting that there was, in their opinion, no acceptable way to consume. Whether against makeover media like Judith, who stated, “I don’t really spend much time watching that; if it came on the TV I might watch for a second or two and then move on,” or simply disinterested like Jennifer, “I don’t consciously avoid it, it’s just... I have absolutely no interest, the closest I’d get would be if I’m in the doctor’s surgery or waiting room and I’m waiting to see someone and there happens to be a copy of Vogue or Marie Claire,” they brush it off as unimportant. Anne only reads in the dentist’s waiting room as well, and Emma’s comment was
quite damning, “unless I’m going to sit somewhere for hours on end like on an airplane and something like that and I want to just stare at pictures and let my brain go numb then yeah [laughing].” She clearly does not consider women’s magazines to have any more value than light entertainment.

A certain shame is inherent in the enjoyment of girly things such as gossip, chick lit and glossy magazines, which are devalued in patriarchal society. Participants who were not fans of makeover culture frequently talked about other, more acceptable, less strongly gendered, forms of media that they enjoyed. Jennifer’s interest in fitness meant that she enjoyed reading Runners’ World magazine and health related magazines, but she didn’t regularly read women’s glossies, likewise Emma had a collection of National Geographic magazines and surfing magazines, and Judith said, “if I read at all I read Vanity Fair, I read Gourmet Traveller and stuff like that.” These were considered respectable alternatives.

My interview participants’ ambiguous feelings towards makeover media are the most significant finding of this section. They all engage with makeover media, but with different degrees of pleasure, shame, embarrassment and judgment, whether towards themselves or others. While the fact that they all consume makeover media in some way, many with a significant degree of enthusiasm, points towards the pervasive regulatory power of makeover media, their feelings of shame towards their enjoyment challenge that power. Importantly, they question the authority of the images thrust at them, and as we will see in the next chapter, this affects the practices that they take part in. Practices which help them to reconcile their attraction to the images, with an acceptable version for themselves; one which allows them to remain authentic but still aspire to ideals inspired by, although not the same as, those they see on makeover television. In the next section I will show how the awkward expressions of their engagement with makeover media, the contradictory relationship between their love of beauty and their resistance to the notion that it controls them, suggest that the regulatory force is still present and strong.
Driven by Photoshopped media images and the promise of the miracle of cosmetic surgery we internalise ideals and aspire to perfection because we see our bodies as enabling or blocking our happiness and our achievements (Etcoff 2000). Atwood asks, “how transformative techniques have become part of an interruption of ideas about how girls and women should look and behave” (2014, 270), we see that these techniques, “threaten to blur the boundaries between real and artificial, and the gap between ordinary and ideal bodies” (2014, 275). Now that we can recreate the Photoshopped ideal, we are less able to distinguish between ‘real’ bodies and ideal ones. Wykes and Gunter confirmed this media influence through a survey of twenty years worth of experimental studies, which showed women images from magazines and reported on their response, investigating cause-effect between media images and body image and confirming the direct link between the two. They also discovered that there is a tendency for individuals to seek out media that reflects their ideals. (Wykes and Gunter 2006, 174-175).

I wanted to understand how my interview participants experienced these images. Did they feel, as suggested by the research, that the images in the print and television media strongly influence their body image or satisfaction and their perception of what is normal? Interview participant Jessica shared her feelings of, “not being thin enough, not being pretty enough,” which fits with the argument that if a person were thinner, prettier and younger, they would be a better, smarter, more successful, happier person as taken up by Neo-Darwinists such as Etcoff, who agrees, “we expect attractive people to be better at everything from piloting a plane to being good in bed. We guess that their marriages are happier, their jobs are better and that they are mentally healthy and stable” (2000, 51). However, interview participants largely rejected the suggestion that they were directly influenced by media images. In opposition to the Neo-Darwinist argument Wolf suggests that beauty is a currency system, a belief system that “keeps male dominance intact” and is formed through power relations which
force women to compete on an uneven playing field (Wolf 1990, 12). She challenges the claim that women’s desire for beauty is based on a natural evolutionary process, and argues that it is socially constructed to benefit patriarchal ends.

If the perfect body might facilitate the achievement of life goals, did interview participants desire this perfection or feel pressure to achieve it? I investigated their perceptions of the influence that makeover media had on women’s bodies, particularly their own. While my participants could easily find examples of bodies that met the media ideal, leading me to conclude that they were not immune to media culture, even if they first claimed to be so, there was an outspoken and almost universal rejection of makeover media’s ideal bodies. But this was not an outright rejection of all media bodies, an exception was made for positive role models—often those with bigger bodies—and all interview participants could offer examples of celebrities in the media who they considered beautiful even though they did not fit the ideal.

I have suggested that makeover culture presents an imperative for change, and although most interview participants denied that media images drastically influence their own body image, most did admit to some degree of influence. As a mainstay of prime time scheduling makeover shows captured audiences with a mix of drama, intrigue and ordinary people’s dirty laundry. Offering, as Raisborough suggests, “an amplification and melodramatisation of the ways that ordinary life may be done.” She continues, “it’s this grip on the ordinary that allows successful reality TV to be seen and felt as ‘real’ and authentic” (2011, 3). Interview participants were aware of this ‘ordinariness,’ Julie suggested that, “we look for evidence that they are like us.” This belief that it happens to people like us, that we are looking at “consumer culture lifestyles through case studies of the actual lives, homes, bodies of citizens in all their situational detail” (Allon and Redden 2012, 383) is an important part of makeover media’s appeal and of its regulatory power. It offers the message that anyone can, and therefore should change their lives. Given the very different responses to reality television from
different class groups (Skeggs and Wood 2012), it is possible that the greater the similarity between participant and viewer, the greater the regulatory power.

A few participants, such as Julie, who was trying to change her image, acknowledged the media influence. She felt that she had learnt what she wanted, and perhaps more importantly what she did not want, from makeover media and an extensive collection of self-help books about image, fashion and dieting. As Hermes suggests, “popular culture is a domain in which we may practice the reinvention of who we are” (2007, 20), a low risk place to dream and experiment with ideas without having to actually put them into action. Julie said, “yeah I do, I watch sort of crazy ones, I watch the Extreme Makeover and the one with Sonia Kruger40 in it. We don’t have Foxtel at the moment, so I’m probably missing out. I’d probably look at other ones if we had access to them […] I also have to say when I open magazines and there’s a makeover section I’m always very drawn to it.” Julie sees the influence as positive in helping her to develop her new look. It is not that she aspires to one media ideal, but that she is negotiating her own ideal through the media.

In fact, Julie uses the media as it was intended, as a source of information to support her self-governance. She said, “when I see images of people who have got a look that I like I sometimes cut them out to remind me that that’s one way of choosing to look like. But it’s not that I need to be like that person in order to be okay.” She feels that the media inspires her thought process, but that she filters out more extreme examples to find the right solution for herself. Rebecca also suggested that makeover media might be helpful, but did not see it as the only influence for herself. “Well, I’ve always been conscious of my body image and I try and stay fit and healthy, so shows like that maybe help in giving ideas of what to do to maintain a good body image.” Like Julie she can accept that the media has some influence, encouraging her to aspire to better herself and to keep fit, but she does not feel tied to media ideals.

40 The Australian version of Ten Years Younger in Ten Days
Elliot suggests that we come to know ourselves through media culture saying, “if knowing the world suggests immersion in the mass media and popular culture, knowing oneself involves this equally, if not more so” (2008, 64). In contrast my interview participants largely played down its influence or displayed a confusion and conflict when defining their own relationship with the media. The majority of interview participants were unclear as to the level of influence makeover media had on them. Nicole avoided the question of whether television influences her own desire to change, saying “I don’t know that it necessarily changes my perception of myself,” but went on to say that she would love a makeover like the ones on television, indicating that she is more heavily influenced that she would admit at first. Likewise, Belinda first said the media doesn’t influence her but then contradicting herself saying, “not really, I have watched [...] Extreme Makeover, and it really makes me feel like getting everything done.” Even those who claim they aren’t at all interested in makeover media can still talk about it, demonstrating that even if they are reluctant consumers, they are still implicated in it. This ambiguity demonstrates the power of the media, as part of a network of regulatory forces, to influence while at the same time convincing viewers/readers that they act autonomously.

We see that media technology, however significant, is only one facet of makeover culture “not solely responsible for constructing gender norms and values and that the slender-is-sexy norm would only be ‘saleable’ if it fitted into wider concepts of gender and identity” (Wykes and Gunter 2006, 67). One part of the broad network of influences (Foucault [1976] 1998, 93) that combined have the power to change bodies. To my interview participants familial and peer influences are as, if not more important in decision-making. For example, Melissa talked about getting her nails sorted out and fitting back into her uniform before returning to work after having her son as she was worried what her work colleagues might say, and Jessica, whose body history I share here, talked about losing weight before going home to see her family.
Jessica’s Story [Mid twenties, British born, living in Melbourne.]

“looking at those images and going, oh my God they’re perfect... so I thought why are you perfect?”

Jessica admits to enjoying ‘celebrity gazing’, but it was her family that influenced her formative experience of her body, in particular her sister, a model, and seven years older than Jessica. “I do remember definitely having a bad body image, a bad relationship with my body when I was younger, mainly in teenage years. It didn’t help that I had a family who seemed very vocal in terms of saying if you’d put on weight or anything like that. I had a particularly annoying uncle... who would always sort of make comments... completely humiliate you or embarrass you in front of everyone just so that [he] could get a laugh... Another influence is my mother, definitely, she’s always had an issue with her body weight, [...] I suddenly became very aware of my own body image when I was seventeen, eighteen when everyone started going out, and I would say it definitely held me back. I was very shy, I probably put everything down to my body not being thin enough, not being pretty enough, having too many spots... I think it definitely had an impact and... I was always a fan of women’s magazines as well, and yeah, the lack of knowledge in looking at those images and going, oh my god they’re perfect... so I thought why are you perfect?

She said, “one person who has probably had a huge influence on me is my sister. She became a model when I was probably about fourteen, and the constant comparison to her was fun... [sarcasm] [...] she went through a very difficult time when she became a model because... everything was about how she looked, what size she was. She was quite difficult to live with at that time.” Getting older now she says, “I would say now I have... definitely got a better attitude you know, I know about keeping fit, I know about not starving yourself; I’ve gone on so many diets over my time, mind you, I went on a ridiculous detox last year because I knew I was having my graduation and I wanted to lose a few pounds, it was very scary.... It’s still very much there. And there is still an undercurrent of belief, my confidence
I have intended these body histories to offer a window into my interview participants’ lives, telling their stories largely in their own words, with minimal interruptions. Jessica described how her relationship with her family affected her own body image in complex ways. Her body insecurity and fear of not measuring up was influenced by her relationship with her sister and her family’s attitude to physical appearances, but Jessica also talked about reading fashion magazines and other influences outside of her family. Looking at these examples we can see that although the makeover media participant may appear as a blank slate to be worked on, women’s bodies are regulated not through one single site of influence, but on an on-going basis and through a web of influences.

Where peer influence has always been a part of the regulatory framework influencing women’s bodies—indeed we see peer influence inside makeover media as people present their friends and family members for makeover on shows like *What Not To Wear*—I would argue that media is a relatively recent addition to the network of influences, and that the balance has shifted very strongly in its favour; especially if we take into account that peers and family are influenced by media in their turn. Having said that, women come to the media already primed, through peer networks, towards certain body ideals: towards a perfection which is reinforced by the ideals produced and reproduced by makeover media in its presentation of makeover participants. So while it might be true that in watching *The Biggest Loser Australia* we learn something about ourselves that is not the only influence.

Participants also played down the influence of makeover media by locating consumption of content in their past. Melissa talks about reading magazines as something she doesn’t do anymore, “I used to read [*Marie Claire*] when I was in my twenties for sure, that’s where you get your ideas,” but now, “I only read it at the doctor’s surgery, and even then...” Likewise, Belinda said, “I used to read a lot more, like you know, *Cosmopolitan*, and even *Dolly* magazine,” but she doesn’t...
have the time or the desire to read anymore. They suggest that they have grown out of such pastimes. This adds to their conviction that it is others that are affected by makeover content and not them. This is interesting in relation to the findings of Press’s research amongst school and college aged women, which suggested that women were more strongly influenced by the media than my findings indicated (Press 2011) and strengthens my argument that makeover culture influences women differently as they age.

While interview participants positioned themselves as knowledgeable about the messages portrayed, they were convinced that makeover culture affected others negatively. They identified young people in particular as vulnerable in this respect. Jennifer singled them out saying, “I guess it can have a pretty significant effect, particularly again, I guess at the general age range that a lot of these magazines are aimed at, the sort of late teens, particularly when bodies are changing, hence... girls going whoa, I’ve got boobs, what do I do with them, and again you don’t seem to see anything other than very slender, very attractive girls.” Nicole, differentiating between the influence on bodies and the influence on the perception of bodies, summed up a popular position when asked what she thought of the media effect on women’s bodies saying,

in general I think it’s been horrendous well not on women’s bodies, well in some cases yes on women’s bodies, but in most cases it’s on women’s perception of their bodies and other women’s bodies, I think the media has an awful lot to answer for when you look at eating disorders, and a lot of teen depression, suicide. I think there can be some finger pointing at the media and how it makes young women in particular.

That didn’t stop her from reading women’s magazines and watching makeover media and it also links in with her, and other interview participants’ belief that while the influence on others might be negative, any potential influence on themselves is negligible or positive. They raise themselves above this potential influence as older, or wiser. This ability to transcend the negative influence of the media and its idealised images marks them (in their minds) as holding the correct cultural knowledge and cultural citizenship and negates the shame of consuming makeover media.
Twenty-First-Century Body Ideals in Makeover Culture: In Which the Ever-Changing Range of Possibilities is Narrowed Exponentially

This part of the chapter discusses the idealised images presented in the media and the use of Photoshop in creating them, before introducing interview participants’ experiences of bodies, images and ideals in the media. As discussed in Chapter One, female beauty ideals have changed throughout history with the body changing from an object to be adorned in beauty culture, to the body itself as fashion in makeover culture. In the West, this has frequently meant a rejection of a natural body shape in favour of a fantastical silhouette, which exaggerates, or disguises, the breasts and the waist (Thesander 1997). Fashion is, “always reinventing the body, finding new ways of concealing and revealing body parts and thus new ways of making the body visible and interesting to look at. In addition, dress and fashion mark out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinctions in terms of class and status, gender, age, sub-cultural affiliations that would otherwise not be so visible or significant” (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, 4).

From the corseted young women of the late nineteenth century, the 1920s flapper and the 1940s curvy pin up to the 1990s gamine chic, the female body has been disciplined and reconstructed to conform to female ideals of attractiveness. While women no longer feel compelled to bind their bodies in whalebone stays, the legacy of the legendary sixteen-inch waist produced by the Victorian corset can be seen in the desire for an implausible body shape, a continuing regulation of the body, an obsession with measuring, comparing and reducing, and an attitude towards the malleability of the body, which, despite the odds, encourages women to believe they can, with the correct discipline, attain the new ideal. We can note that neither the Victorian drive for the tiny waist, nor the current trend for size zero takes into account that women have different starting builds from which to achieve the ideal.

*Much like today’s size zero, Steele explains, “Certainly, the famous 16-inch waist should not be regarded as the Victorian norm. As we have seen, most corsets were produced in sizes of 18 to 30 inches, with larger sizes readily available.” (2001, 109).*
Makeover culture’s normative female body is disciplined by a dispositional engagement with the dominant narratives driven by contemporary media. As interviewee Karen suggests, “they’ve always presented idealised images, that’s how it works, isn’t it? That’s how we aspire.” However, much like the reduced range of possibilities Brown (2003) identified within neoliberalism, the contemporary media presents a reduced aesthetic. The media discourse which constructs the perfect body, whether a celebrity body or a member of the broader public, does so through the repetition of similar simulated images across multiple platforms, framing the ideal ‘normal’ body within a narrow field of acceptable options. A highly feminine presentation is normalised: a body that is primped, preened and made up, no stretch marks, no blemishes, no extra fat, tanned but without sun damage. Signs of childbearing, weight gain and ageing are erased. The body must be thin, but there must be curves, it must be sexual, but not pornographic. Hard to define, the female body ideal never truly settles on one single type, or not for long, so we can only speak of the current fantasy and acknowledge that a year from now, or even a day from now the ideal might have changed. This is part of the ideal body’s regulatory power, and how it fits with makeover culture’s always-ongoing project of beauty.

Magazines promote this body through model shoots and features, but also through “wellness” and weight loss plans, workout programs and other DIY health and life makeover features. Marie Claire’s ‘8 Week Fit and Fabulous Challenge’ presented readers with a slim, toned, healthy ideal to work towards. This is what we expect from women’s magazines, as McRobbie suggests, “I found myself acknowledging, rather than confronting, the generic features of the magazine format, which seemed to be set in stone, the centrality of the fashion-and-beauty complex, for example the dominant heterosexuality, the hermetically sealed world of feminine escapist pleasures” (McRobbie 2009, 5). She seems to accept it for what it is, without trying to change it. Likewise many of my interview participants’ views enjoyed reading magazines as they are, and didn’t call for them to be changed.
Figure 16 Wellness Challenge. *Marie Claire Australia* Magazine, February 2013.
Making Perfect: Creating and Influencing the Perfect Body

Driving the erasure of faults and blemishes and the push towards perfectibility is a new technology of makeover and a new verb, which has recently entered the vernacular, producing perfection one pixel at a time. The verb to Photoshop, with a capital P, originates from the eponymous Adobe photo-manipulation software and means to, “alter (a photographic image) digitally using Photoshop image-editing software.” Can it be a coincidence that Photoshop, ubiquitous since Adobe’s first release, was released in 1990, just one year prior to the 1991 watershed year I identify as the turning point between beauty and makeover cultures? On the cusp of the transition from analogue to digital, I argue that Photoshop allowed the print media to lead the drive for perfect images and by association perfect bodies. The female image became easily disciplined and perfected. Digitally made over. While the manipulation of images is not a new thing; from the beautification of painted portraits to the airbrushing of pin-up girls, manipulation in today’s media has reached a point where we mustn’t take any image that we see for granted.

In a postmodern, post-industrial society, with an increased emphasis on the image, visual media plays a significant role in the construction of makeover culture’s body norms and ideals. Where previously scholars talked about representations of the female body in art, the media, film and television, as we have moved away from beauty culture these representations have been replaced with simulations of women, constructed images, composite beauty ideals based on a combination of surgical techniques and post-production magic. I refer to them as composite images because they are composed from beauty ideals taken from a variety of sources, and Photoshopped to meet the ideal with lips plumped, tans faked, breasts lifted, jawbones highlighted, tresses teased, skin smoothed and eyes widened—whether digitally, surgically, or both. Baudrillard explains the difference as, “representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the

---

sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference” (1994, 6 emphasis in original). So where the representations of women seen in beauty culture were based on real bodies as models, the simulated bodies of makeover culture deny the real. Poster suggests that, “culture is now dominated by simulations,” that these objects “have no firm origin, no referent, no ground or foundation” (1988, 1). He explains that, “a simulation is different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself” (1988, 5-6).

There is no real, even the long believed truths of history have been called into question as cultural historians, considering history from the point of view of women (postmodern feminists included) or other minorities, and not just from the point of view of white men, found that, “like historical documents, the historian’s discourse was itself another more or less elegantly composed transparent meditation” (Poster 1997, 5). Just as what we once thought to be true no longer is, the images we see in makeover media are not real. They do not even represent the real. They are based in fantasy and yet they meet our expectations of what real media images should be in what Baudrillard has called the Hyperreal. Baudrillard suggests that, “the hyperreal is the abolition of the real not by violent destruction, but by its assumption, elevation to the strength of the model” (1983, 84). This notion is summed up by Poster who suggests that they, “configure what they point to, and they are configured by it” (1988, 9). This notion is particularly pertinent to makeover culture where images, configured through simulating bodies, contribute to configuration of the bodies themselves, the (re)configuration of the original in line with the model.

Taking this to extremes fashion retailer H&M trialled using computer generated models to showcase clothing on their website. Starting with the clothes on a mannequin they altered the image of the mannequin to simulate a human model and added a human face to complete the image (L. Jones 2011).
Rosen asks whether these bodies look any different from the Photoshopped bodies that we are used to seeing and concludes that to her eye they don’t (2011). These bodies, though they bear limited resemblance to human bodies, are coded as real bodies. They no longer re-present women, they (re)create or reconfigure them. Such images show not what women are but what women could be; creating new expectations within the regulatory framework as bodies are coded and recoded as female/feminine through digital manipulation. The image needs only to be read by the viewer as a female body, but we are left to consider whether she would actually be able to function if she were made of flesh and blood. Like Barbie whose critics suggest that scaled up to human-size she would be unable to support her height and body shape on her tiny feet (Urla and Swedlund 1995), could Lara Croft,43 the original simulated woman, really have fought like she did with those breasts?

---
43 Lara Croft is the sexy archaeologist protagonist of the Tomb Raider video game series created by British gaming company Core Design, first released 25 October 1996.
Whereas much of the art in photography used to be in the hairdressing, makeup, lighting and other sleight of hand interactions that go into the composition, now, increasingly, the artistry of image production occurs in the post-production phase. Any problems during the take can be Photoshopped out. Wrinkles, freckles and stretch marks can be removed, a waistline can magically
appear, a slender thigh made thinner, wonky teeth straightened and shadows removed allowing a degree of perfectibility not previously possible. Interview participant Susan, who uses Photoshop in her artwork, said, “Photoshop does a good thing, and you can make a woman have a nice slender waist just by drawing a line and deleting it, it’s easy.” A discussion of Photoshop and the act of creating perfect/perfectible bodies brings together two of my three key tenets of contemporary makeover culture: technology and perfectibility.

Images today are further from the original than they were in the days of beauty culture. Interview participant Julie showed me a picture in one of her style guides of a 1960s fashion model, flawed but beautiful, open pores visible on her skin. In contrast the images of makeover culture are flawless. These images are, “constant, everywhere, no big deal. Like water in a goldfish bowl, barely noticed by its inhabitants. Or noticed, but dismissed: “eye candy” – a harmless indulgence. They go down so easily, in and out, digested and forgotten. Just Pictures” (Bordo 2003, np). When I read this my instincts shouted, “no! We notice! We know that it’s not harmless. We don’t forget.” But Bordo’s comments, however ironically they may have been intended in this journalistic piece written for The Chronicle were borne out again and again in my discussions with participants about their awareness of and attitude towards photo manipulation. Yes, there were those, such as Nicole and Anne, that wanted to come down hard on the producers of these images like I did, blaming them for body image issues, anorexia, self-harm and teen suicide, but while I had expected that looking might be considered a guilty pleasure, even they admitted to the pleasure from looking at the often hauntingly beautiful images produced. I spoke to smart, confident women who were relaxed about the manipulation of images, who like to see beautiful things and also to believe in the underlying imperfection of beauty icons who need to be manipulated to achieve perfection.

In the same way that we might devour a work of fiction in literature or revel in the stories told in a fantasy film, as voracious consumers of visual images we enjoy the beautiful fictions created by the post-production artists who work on the photographic images that follow us everywhere we go. Every woman I
have spoken to acknowledges that the images we see in fashion and beauty magazines, are no more accurate a representation of the truth than the photographs we take ourselves. They border on the surreal, yet Jones comments that despite Photoshop “we still hold on to a cultural belief that photography offers a direct link to the real,” (2013, 19). We credit them with being based in the real in the same way that we look at an artificially enhanced body and recognise it as a body. We see digitally manipulated images of modified bodies and yet though the breasts may be as fake as the smile on the model’s face, the body still pertains to the real and the image still meets our expectations of what a body should look like. Like the family snapshot, that stays bright and clear as the memory fades, replacing the memories of the day with the image, repeated exposure to these images can distort our concept of what bodies looks like.

All of my interview participants are conscious of the extent of Photoshop used in magazines. As curvy girl Meghan Trainor sang to us in All About That Bass (2014) all Summer long,

I see the magazines working that Photoshop
We know that shit ain’t real
Come on now, make it stop
If you got beauty beauty just raise ‘em up
‘Cause every inch of you is perfect
From the bottom to the top.

But when I talked to interview participants about negative Photoshopping, asking them whether they thought that the ‘bad hair day’ and ‘cellulite’ or ‘too thin’ celebrity shaming photographs might not be Photoshopped to look worse, they were shocked at the idea. There were limits to even their belief that all images were Photoshopped.

Their comments on Photoshop were animated and energetic, showing none of the confusion attendant on their thoughts around their own media consumption. Many participants participated in a version of postfeminist rhetoric, asserting that it is okay to look and enjoy looking. Jessica, who had earlier shown some negativity with regards to how much makeover media she consumed, said, “yeah, there’s definitely an element of escapism there, but it’s
also, a bit more, but just the whole process of looking, that sort of viewing of other people, looking at, I guess, looking at beautiful objects.” I agreed. I enjoy
reading magazines, looking at fashion photo shoots in exotic locations, reading about beautiful people and places. I found it difficult to separate my personal experience of Photoshopped images from my academic knowledge of the issue. Even those who were resistant to makeover culture were able to reconcile their discomfort at the manipulation of images with their desire for beauty. Fully cognisant that they are buying a fiction, they neither expect nor desire the pictures in women’s magazines to be unaltered. Indeed, some articulated that they would be disappointed and let down if they opened a magazine full of spotty models with their hair all wonky and gaps in their teeth. Anne, who had been so negative in her critique of makeover media, said, “I don’t want to look at myself, I don’t deliberately avoid the mirror, but you know... I know I look like a bag of washing, but I don’t want to look at someone else that looks like that as well. I want something pleasant to look at.” Anne suggested something I hadn’t considered. She suggested that there was nothing more to Photoshopping than to choosing the best of a bunch of pictures. She said, “I always thought it was more like putting your best face forward... that one’s the least unattractive I’ll keep that one, I’ll ditch the rest... I don’t think it’s a deliberate... I think anyone who doesn’t know that they’ve been airbrushed, if you bought a straight up photograph, I think you’d be more likely to struggle to believe that it’s a straight up photograph.” So, rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive, she saw using Photoshop simply as part of striving to ‘be the best’ and as such she did not experience Photoshopped images as a source of shame in the way that others did because she neither used them as a measure of her own success, nor felt guilty for enjoying looking at them.

The strong resistance I had expected to find to the manipulation of images was overwhelmingly absent amongst my interview participants, as though a universal truth—that all beautiful photographic images are airbrushed—means that as long as you know, then you aren’t being duped at all. They claimed that knowing that all photographs in women’s magazines are Photoshopped means that such media does not affect them, or at least has a negligible effect on them. But are they cultural dupes, as Davis wonders of her interview participants when
they discuss their experience of cosmetic surgery (Davis 1995)? They claim not, but at the same time they suggest that others might be. Julie said, “I think it’s really, really, really important that that’s always reinforced and shown, before and afters, I think because we have to start seeing those images as just art for want of a better word. Or images that exist in their own right without really reflecting reality.” She was clear that these images affect people’s attitudes to their own and to other people’s bodies and distort their concept of what is normal.

The fashion and beauty media pay lip-service to critiques of image manipulation. From time to time women’s magazines claim that they are rejecting beauty stereotypes and putting more ‘real’ women in their magazines with swimsuit spreads with beautiful size twelve women called in to represent the heavier (ordinary) women and sometimes even pictures of celebrities showing their curves, freckles and stretch marks. French Elle released a May 2009 edition including an article, “Stars sans Fards,” or stars without makeup with photographs of French beauties such as Sophie Marceau taken by Peter Lindbergh who argued in the New York Times that, “heartless retouching, should not be the chosen tool to represent women in the beginning of this century.”

Australia’s favourite teen magazine, Dolly, issued a retouch free issue the following month. Although advertisements and some content was delivered to the magazine ready Photoshopped, in-house images were not touched by the digital brush. Pages were clearly marked with a retouch free zone sign. I wondered when did Photoshopping images aimed at young people, vulnerable teens, begin. Were my old copies of Just Seventeen and Smash Hits from the 1980s and 1990s Photoshopped? I searched out an old image showing Kylie and Jason on the cover of a 1988 copy of Smash Hits Magazine, the year I started high school.

---

Figure 20 French beauty Sophie Marceau, no makeup, no retouching. French *Elle* magazine, May 2009.
The image shows Kylie Minogue, her hair a little frizzy, her smile slightly too wide, her eyebrows uneven. Airbrushed maybe, and some definite soft focus, but not manipulated in the way it would be in today’s makeover culture.

While it is encouraging that magazines are listening to fears surrounding the effect of media images on vulnerable women, particularly young women, is it really better for our self-esteem, knowing that so many images are retouched, to see pictures of genuinely beautiful women, who despite having just spent hours in hair and makeup, are so naturally beautiful that they don’t need retouching?
Political commentator Matthew Yglesias of *Think Progress* says, “I think this might actually be a step back. A lot of people have done a lot of work over the years to get people to understand that images you see on magazine covers are not images of actual human beings. They’re complicated collaborations between photographers, hairstylists, makeup people, and digital image-retouchers that use real people as an important element of source material.” He describes the results as having a “hyperreal” quality to them, and says that no one should expect to look like a computer-retouched image. As MJ comments, “I think somebody who’s even worked in that, you need to be reminded all the time this is not real and they need to have proof, like the before and after, you need to show that the waist has been nipped in and the legs went... but even the most famous and beautiful people are not good enough to be in their own selves.”

My interview participants had a strong grasp of what they felt to be real, but despite all this I was left with an uneasy feeling that most women probably still aren’t aware of the extent of image manipulation that goes on. I suggested that as well as the positive Photoshopping discussed above, creating the beautiful images we enjoy, there is also Photoshopping to fake images for advertising purposes, and negative Photoshopping to make something seem worse than it really is. Nicole suggested that the falsification of images might be used in promotion of makeover, or advertising more broadly - “half the time you see makeovers, the before and after, and it almost looks like the same photo, they’ve just taken a photo and squeezed it or they’ve played with the lighting in Photoshop or they’ve manipulated the same image and said this is before our product and this is after our product and it’s the same shot. So I think if people aren’t aware of that they are naïve.” Such images promote an impossible (or at least improbable) ideal. Poor lighting and positioning in before shots such as those at the back of women’s magazines promoting cosmetic surgeons and procedures and adverts for diet products is contrasted with the well lit and well posed after photo. This spills over to television, for example on *The Biggest Loser*.

---

45 *Think Progress* is an online news blog. Available from: https://thinkprogress.org/ (accessed 21 December 2012).
Australia where they take their before shots with the women in crop tops and tight shorts, the men topless, belly flab hanging over in folds, thighs bulging out in all the wrong places, pale skin, no makeup; then after, bodies covered up, dressed glamorously (with control underwear no doubt), hair and makeup done. I wonder how much of the impact is due to this ‘makeover’, and how much is down to the weight they have lost?

Worse than this, one moment the fickle media is showing our favourite celebrities in all their Photoshopped splendour, and the next criticising them for being too thin, for having bad cosmetic surgery or for showing their cellulite. I suggested that, quite probably, not only the model perfect pictures of their favourite celebrities had been touched up, but also the “stars with cellulite” type pictures; that the media cry of “too thin” in relation to Victoria Beckham, Kallista Flockhart and many others could have been emphasised through the judicious use of photo manipulation. I discussed this with Jessica:

“E: how do you know that the Photoshop guy hasn’t made those bags under her eyes just a little bit darker.
J: Mmm, that’s true...
E: I keep saying this to people and they get really quite erm...
J: No, it’s true [sounds a bit taken aback]
E: I feel bad for saying it... but how do you know...
J: You don’t, [laughing] you just presume I guess, you presume that when they look brilliant they’ve been touched up and when they look sick well that’s how they normally look.”

We have come to see beautiful images as constructed, and therefore by contrast we assume that ugly ones must be real. My participants seemed disappointed that the one thing in magazines that they had assumed was real could equally easily be manipulated, and confused because it prevented them from knowing which is real, and which is Photoshopped.

“It’s just, oh God... it’s boring”: Interview Participants and the Media’s Ideal Bodies

Whether they admitted to consuming makeover media or not, interview participants could answer questions about what body models they saw in the
media and whether they aspired to those bodies. Some felt that the range of acceptable bodies seen in the media was on the increase. Jessica (mid twenties) suggested that, “you’re not confined as much, I think it’s the idea of femininity in the 1950s, and it was very weight conscious and women have to look like women [...] you couldn’t be a body builder, you couldn’t be a runner and things like that,” and Nicole (early forties) said, “I think that it’s changing. The program I watched this morning, The Circle, where there was a whole range of bodies... the four or five women who present that program, they are all gorgeous, and they are all portrayed as gorgeous women, and they are all different shapes and sizes.”

The majority however singled out one limited media ideal. Julie (early fifties) describes the makeover show as a “sausage machine,” pumping out women with “cleavage to show that they’ve got a nice stereotypical female shape, hair’s got to be long and wavy, and the lip gloss, and the eye makeup and the high heels, and it’s just, oh God... it’s boring.” She continues, “sometimes they take people’s individual qualities and just dumb them down, or sort of bland them down into a sort of acceptable look.” Judith (early fifties), who takes her cues from soap operas and refuses to watch makeover television feels, “it’s very limited, you basically have to be skinny, with decent sized boobs, I think there’s a certain size of breast that’s ideal too, so there’s not much of a range there either, and you know, the size of your waist... that’s all very much determined and with skinny skinny, skinny legs like you’ve got nothing on them.” And Karen (early forties) suggests, “it’s very homogenous what’s considered to look good.” Broadly, interview participants cited thinness, youth, health, whiteness, middle/upper class, femininity, beauty and glamour as qualities presented by the media as desirable; closely matching the dominant body ideals of makeover media and the celebrity bodies seen in the broader media. While there were some conflicting opinions, the idea that there was a narrow media ideal dominated amongst all age groups. However they personally aspired to a more individual image and didn’t want to be, as Julie suggested, “boring.”

In The Swan, all women, regardless of social background and race, have similar surgeries, undergo similar exercise and diet routines, and are dressed up...
and have their hair and makeup done in similar ways. As McGee suggests, “the phenomenon of “extreme makeover” television presents a conformist vision of aesthetic preoccupations in which the lines and wrinkles born of individual experience are erased to yield as generic an image of beauty as possible” (2005, 20). Research participant Karen commented on this erasure of class and race to conform to an ideal, “I think the whole makeover, makeover to look a particular way, if you’re African American your hair will be straightened automatically [...] everyone ends up pretty similar, and I do find if I glance at the cover of magazines I often can’t tell which celebrity is on the front.” We can see that within makeover media there is a limited ‘perfect’ body ideal and that the body is considered perfectible, and able, with the right expertise and technologies, to be manipulated to meet the ideal. While historically research on cosmetic surgery has argued that we see a consolidation of race and an emphasis on white beauty ideals in the West, more recent work has suggested a broader range of racialised beauty ideals or “niche standardisation [where] Ultimately, whether differentiated by biology, culture or both, patients are seen as existing in distinct types that can be standardized and then treated in different ways” (Menon 2016, 600) moving away from the complete erasure that Karen suggested. Menon, who surveyed both academic articles and plastic surgery organisations’ publications, suggests, “cosmetic surgeons effect categorical alignment by using physical measures alongside sociocultural stereotypes” (2016, 600). So while there is no single ideal in cosmetic surgery practice, she identifies a variety of racialised ideals.

While some interview participants rejected the thinness of the media ideal, others felt it had undeniable appeal. Amanda, Jessica, Judith and Christine all suggested a thin ideal or commented that they would like to be, or had previously been thinner. Judith said, “Halle Berry, is just to die for, I was just watching the Emmys last night and who was it who came up that looked absolutely drop dead gorgeous, you know, that kind of toned, slim, firm kind of shape, good skin, small.” Judith explained that she had aspired to a thin body when she was younger but was now much more accepting of her body, however
she still very definitely noticed thin celebrities when watching television.

Amanda, who also talked extensively about her experience of dieting, admitted,

> I kind of look at skinny celebs and think, oh my God I’d love to have your body, but I know in reality that it’s not attainable for me, and I know what they go through to get it, but things like, Cheryl Cole, I just think she’s amazing, yeah she’s a bimbo but she doesn’t have vomit on her shoulder and spinach in her teeth, so people like that. Posh Spice I think is just revolting. Who did I see the other day, now this is quite embarrassing, I was watching the Graham Norton show, Jordan - Katie Price - take the boobs off, her body is actually quite amazing as well, quite curvaceous, so much for the boobs, and, [...] her legs are really long, and she’s been training for marathons so she’s toned and heaps of muscle definition... who else is there, I can’t think, everything I watch, what do I watch, and I think, oh my god, I’d love that body... but sadly, I agree probably that more when I see, not the anorexic skinny celebs, but more the skinny, slim stars, and I know I shouldn’t and I know I’m just... but...

Like others, she has taken the impossible media ideal and adapted it to something that she feels she ought to be an attainable goal. But she is one of the few to admit openly that she does aspire to such beauty ideals. She speaks negatively about her desire to be thin “I know I shouldn’t”, knowing she could be criticised for feeling that way and wondering if she should just be happy to be healthy after her recent health issues. She admits to being embarrassed at the kinds of bodies she highlights as desirable. Jordan’s ‘porn’ breasts mean she is broadly looked down upon, but as Amanda points out “take the boobs off” and she actually has a body that it would be more respectable to desire – she ‘excuses’ the breasts because she is fit and toned with “heaps of muscle definition.” The effort put into her marathon training body makes it respectable, although still, like her inflated breasts, not natural.

> Amanda also makes a clear distinction between anorexic skinny = bad and slim skinny = good and suggests that as with breast size, surgically altered or natural, there is a line between acceptable and unacceptable modifications. It was interesting that even those who aspired to thinness expressed a marked distaste
for those who had taken skinny too far. Victoria Beckham, who Marie Claire Magazine described as “fashion’s unlikely icon” on the front cover of their December 2012 edition came to fame as ‘Posh Spice’ in the band *The Spice Girls* and was particularly disliked by interview participants for her extreme thinness. As a successful fashion designer, long-time married to a heartthrob footballer, a mother, an advocate for numerous charities and recently recipient of the OBE for her service to fashion and her charity work, Beckham doesn’t really deserve our scorn, a lot of which must be put down to our jealousy of an ordinary girl who has made such a success of herself, but her thinness is a tangible thing to hang our dislike on.
If makeover media is to be shown as acting on, or regulating women’s bodies and minds, producing strict ideals, it should lead to women becoming increasingly critical of their own bodies, creating the sense of dissatisfaction that is essential to makeover culture’s consumption imperative. But from the point of view of my interview participants, only a few openly aspired to contemporary media ideals. As I discuss in the next section, actively searched out alternatives.

“God, I’d kill to have a body like hers”: Alternative Beauty Ideals and Older Role Models

While some interview participants shared how media ideals contributed to their desire to improve their bodies, some denied that they were influenced by media ideals. However their discussions frequently betrayed a desire for improvement, even if not to meet the ideals of media culture. In the search for alternative bodies or alternative modes of womanhood two particular aspects raised were age and body shape. The most popular ideal amongst my younger interviewees was an athletic body, with Jennifer, Rebecca, Amy, Michelle, Emma and Belinda all describing it as a desirable body. Jessica said, “well, I guess we have a more pro fit body type, as in a healthy, you know, someone who’s active, clearly got muscles and ... things like that [...]. That’s what I would say, [...] I like fit women... people who are naturally active [...] I like Drew Barrymore, she seems to be a good role model, [...] Sort of outdoorsy, someone who’s fit, not someone who looks like they could break.” Although this ideal isn’t one that interview participants identify with makeover media, if we look particularly at The Biggest Loser, the focus is on fitness as well as diet and building muscle tone/mass as well as losing weight. Participants on The Swan are also seen working out in the gym, so it is present, but not dominant in other makeover media.

Here Jennifer talks about her own athletic body and striving for something better,
Jennifer’s Story [Mid thirties, British born, living in Melbourne.]

“Athletic, could be slightly more athletic maybe but, athletic.”

Jennifer is a distance runner and a mum, she talks about her early recollection of her body, “I think I became aware of my body probably in my early to mid teens, and at the time I probably didn’t have that great body image... I spent a lot of time dieting in my sort of teenage years, and it was only in my late teens, early twenties that I sort of became happy with my body, and I have been ever since but then I suppose because I do a lot of sport, I find that’s how I now stay comfortable with my body.” She describes her body as, “athletic, could be slightly more athletic maybe but, athletic” and says, “yeah, I’d probably be put into that category, but I’d certainly never use significant cosmetic procedures to achieve that. I’d rather be more athletic looking, even looking at athletic body shape, at what point does training your body to have a certain shape become as unnatural as having cosmetic surgery.” Here she makes an important point, opting out of the media culture ideal does not mean taking the easy option.

Although she likes her body generally, she identifies parts that she would like to change, “my feet and my nose, I’d like straighter longer toes, and I’d like a slightly less Roman nose.” But she doesn’t think that that comes from external influence. She comments that thin people get criticised as well as fat people.

“Yeah, and you can have the stick thin girl who is like that because she’s got stick thin parents or really tall parents, and at the same time she gets a load of stick for being so thin and people say, you need to eat more, or, go and have some chocolate, or... but that’s normal for her. Maybe it’s a case of bringing a bit more diversity into the media.”

We talked about weight, and Jennifer said, “my weight’s been all over the place over the years, I mean at one time I went down to about seven stone and then by the time I left university I was pushing ten, and now I’m back down to sort of eight and a half.”
Jennifer’s aspiration to an athletic body was one that was common amongst my interview participants. She exercises most days but while she mentioned changes in her weight she still claimed to be naturally thin. She said that her media of choice was running and fitness magazines; magazines with even more obvious body focus than fashion magazines, clearly defined body ideals and plenty of information on how to achieve them. I found it interesting that she mentioned those that criticise thin bodies. While it is well recognised that people with overweight bodies receive a lot of judgement and negative opinions it is less so with critiques of thinness and yet, as we see with regards to Victoria Beckham mentioned above, there is significant pathologisation of very thin and anorectic bodies in the media as well.

The model of the athletic body has been around since the 1980s as an alternative to femininity, when the “cult of the body” (Thesander 1997) saw an increased interest in body shaping and bodybuilding for both men and women in a literal interpretation of internal discipline. Fashion Historian Wilson offers the following analogy,

It is perhaps something of a cliché to state that the whalebone, canvas and steel corset of the nineteenth-century (discipline enforced from without) has given way to the corset of muscle produced by exercise and diet of the twentieth century (discipline internalised and produced from within). From this point of view the nineteenth-century tight-laced corset—almost always denounced as a direct form of coercion and restriction, and as key to the creations of the Victorian woman as ‘exquisite slave’—was less morally and psychologically coercive than the contemporary obsession with diet and exercise to replace the traditional whalebone of old and maintain the desired slim body shape. (Wilson 1993, 10)

As Jennifer suggests above there is work involved in whatever body ideal is chosen. The athletic body requires self-discipline and time. Several interview participants included the idea of a body that had visibly been worked as part of their ideal. Belinda, who was uncertain about much of what we discussed, said that she did see role models in the media, she said “I wouldn’t look at skinny necessarily as attractive, but someone that looks like they’ve worked at their body,” so the ideal body to her is one that has been worked on, her role models have deserved their success. From this, as with the earlier discussion of the value
of labour, we can see that work done to regulate the body has value to interview participants.

Rebecca also enjoyed a physically active lifestyle. Her body idols are her surfing heroes. She said, “so my body image is more, I’m more into, looking at a surfing magazines and, you know, she looks good riding that board, you know, I wish I could surf in my board shorts rather than wearing a wetsuit, so I’m more of down that... in terms of body image, that sort of sporting image rather than picking up a fashion magazine.” Like Jennifer, while she consumes some makeover content, she looks elsewhere for her role models.

Emma linked the healthy body with the rejection of skinniness, “I think for me the perfect body type is, yeah, that kind of healthy one, it’s got a decent hourglass figure, you know what I mean, someone who obviously eats, but that athletic look, I don’t know why, I think that’s because that’s the shape that I probably would like to see for myself.” This comment, as with other interviewees responses, implies an impulse to reject media bodies, but to search out an ideal which, while sharing common ground, is less extreme, slim rather than thin, toned rather than muscular, worked on but not trying too hard, and not, as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, overtly feminine.

In direct opposition to the skinny models of the media, several interview participants proposed the curvy body as an ideal. Christine, Nicole, Emma, Melissa, Susan and Julie all offered up the curvy body as appealing. While Christine approached this from an artistic/aesthetic point of view, “I think to me the Rubenesque is probably ideal. Because I draw women in the nude all of the time, [...] I think a curvy woman is more pleasing to the eye than skinny,” others conflated it with being larger than the skinny ideal, a voluptuousness, as much as a curviness. I argue that while my participants rejected the makeover media ideal, they do not reject all media ideals, the alternative ideals that they seek out, while not dominant, do appear in the media.
Celebrity ideals included women such as Sophie Dahl who was mentioned by Emma, and who famously modelled as an Australian/British size fourteen,

and Kate Ceberano of whom Nicole said, “God, I’d kill to have a body like hers.” She described her as a “gorgeous curvaceous, solidly built woman who looks totally healthy,” and she felt they have, “probably similar body types, soft and round and hourglass shape, which I’m thrilled with, and I think she has a really nice example of that.” Neither of these women meets the skinny media ideal.
In the celebrity world, there are also those who challenge the ideal, Beth Ditto is one example who cuts a rather Rubenesque figure and openly rejects stereotypical female body ideas. Journalist, Hattenstone said of her in an article in *The Guardian* newspaper that, “her reluctance to conform to the vanilla notion of what was attractive was viewed as an obstacle” to her success in the music
industry (Hattenstone 2006). In an eighteenth century painting she would have been considered (rich and) beautiful (Wykes and Gunter 2006, 36), but now she’s just fat. Such fatness challenges both media, and interview participants’ ideals.

But like some interview participants, Ditto (2008) herself felt that popular culture didn’t offer a wide enough variety of ideals saying, “because I didn’t have any queer, lesbian, female role models I hated my own femininity and had to look deep within myself to create an identity that worked for me. Pop culture just
doesn’t hand us enough variety to choose from.” So she refused to comply, to the delight of Germaine Greer (2007) who stated, “the NME had enough courage to put the coolest woman on the planet on the cover, and Beth Ditto has given them the kind of picture they can use: attention-getting but certainly not obscene”.

The importance of such alternative role models is significant and explains the popularity of shows such as How To Look Good Naked which valorise alternative bodies and support women outside of the media ideal in negotiating their own bodies. How To Look Good Naked is “based on the empowering rhetoric of ‘loving one’s body’. It appears postfeminist in the sense that the programme seemingly advocates the feminist demand to abandon beauty norms and asserts that all kinds of women can be considered beautiful. Nevertheless, it also continuously constructs women as discontented with their bodies” (Kolehmainen 2012, 187). It falls into the body positive movement researched by Sastre who looked specifically at a selection of websites “dedicated to nurturing bodily acceptance and challenging the normalization of thin toned bodies” (2014b, 929), which provide space for alternative performances of self/womanhood/femininity. However it, “problematically positions body positivity as an echo of, rather than a radical break from, the contemporary makeover and celebrity culture it ostensibly positions itself against” (2014b, 936).

The body positivity movement, which features heavily across social media with hash tags like #EffYourBeautyStandards, #PlusSizeDiva, #DareToWear and #CurvyPinup is part of a movement towards fat acceptance. Like Fat Studies scholars those involved in the body positive movement challenge the obesity = unhealthy model proposed by medical science. They argue that it is not fat in and of itself that is the cause of increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer in overweight people, but the lifestyles which lead to overweight such as poor diet and lack of exercise, and that health issues should be tackled from that angle and not through the demonization of fat (Stearns [1997] 2002, 83).

Proponents include academics and fat activists (some of whom are both); celebrities such as Lady Gaga, who has admitted to struggling with body image issues her whole life and set up her Little Monsters web presence as an inclusive
community of fans; and body positive bloggers who contribute to what has been called the Fatosphere, an online blogging community where fat is accepted and celebrated. Similarly within the sewing community groups such as the Curvy Sewing Collective work through social media to promote sewing to women who often size out of standard ready to wear clothing and commercial patterns and refuse any negativity around body size and shape, using terms such as sassy booty, curvaceous hips and athletic arms to describe body parts that require specialist fitting. Not so much about celebrating size, but about working with what you have and getting the best fit possible. Safe within these groups, “participants also described the benefits of belonging to a supportive community, and improvements in their health and well-being. The Fatosphere provides an alternative pathway for obese individuals to counter and cope with weight-based stigma” (Dickins, et al. 2011, 1671).

The body positive movement has been criticised firstly by those who accuse it of encouraging women to have unhealthy bodies, discouraging the dieting they consider a solution to the disease of overweight. They argue that fat acceptance movements don’t consider the health burden on society. Secondly it has been criticised from within by scholars such as Cooper and Murray who suggest, “this kind of self-authorship assumes a whole range of cultural capital, privilege and social status that enables this kind of individualised venture. So in this way, I find these ‘feel-good’ discourses tacitly exclusionary and reductive” (2012, 137). In addition, the requirement of such discourses to love yourself unambiguously, to ‘come out’ as fat, and not want to diet necessitates a rejection of societal conditioning, that Murray declares, at least for herself, to be impossible (2005a).

Comparing my results with Press’s interview outcomes with a much younger cohort of women and girls from teens to early twenties I found that age has a significant bearing on the response to media ideals. She said, “the girls understand this contradiction fully well. They accept the ideals and they want to be perfect according to these standards” (2011, 126). Her young women understood that the images were manipulated but they still wanted that image,
whereas mine, older and believing themselves to be wiser, were active in looking for alternatives. Nicole expressed a sentiment that came up repeatedly in interviews, “I notice with myself that it becomes less and less, so the older I get, the less I give a shit about how I look.” That is not to say that they didn’t have an appreciation for the ideal beauties of the media, or that they didn’t want to look good, but that they feel they have moved on from their regular magazine reading days and come to aspire to something more realistic.

Many participants talked of finding suitable role models for growing older. Six interview participants were over fifty years of age and they talked about their changing bodies and attitudes as they were getting older. Susan explained that her body had changed shape, and mourned the loss of her waist in her late forties for example. Bordo suggests, “‘aging beautifully’ used to mean wearing one’s years with style, confidence, and vitality. Today, it means not appearing to age at all. And – like breasts that defy gravity – it’s becoming a new bodily norm” (2003, np). Now ageing beautifully is synonymous with aging technologically. Jermyn suggests that ageing itself has had a makeover, with older women “increasingly positioned as credible fashion consumers and arbiters” (Jermyn 2016, 575). Interview participants talked about this change in cultural expectations, but many claimed that with age they had become more confident. Karen and Nicole, both in their early forties, expressed that they were less bothered about their appearance as they got older. Likewise, Belinda (thirties), Emma (thirties) and Judith (fifties) all felt that media ideals used to affect them more than now. Emma said, “I think of when I was younger perhaps I put a lot of pressure on myself, but, just growing older, it isn’t as important as other things.” Judith said that, “I used to aspire to that and wish that I could be like that knowing that I never could... [...] but I know when I was younger, in my twenties and thirties, even in my forties, when I was less sure of who I am, that image was more important. Then really it determined how happy I was in myself.” Despite the makeover show’s insistence on looking younger, they feel that they have grown out of it. Bordo talks about delaying ageing and her personal experience. She says, “this collusion, this myth, that Cher or Goldie or Faye Dunaway, unaltered is
what 50-something looks like today has altered my face, however – without the benefit of surgery. By comparison with theirs, it has become much older than it is,” (2003, np) and likewise Patricia, who had a similar experience, says,

"I do still get impressions, that, people that I know are around my age and I see them, if they’re newsreaders or something, and they just look twenty years younger than me, and you know, a lot of people you know, they’ve got professional people making them up before they go on camera and maybe if I saw them as they got out the shower they’d look much like me, but I still am aware that, you know, someone like Mary Kostakidis looks twenty years younger than me and she’s actually two years younger than me.

This “stretched middle age” (M. Jones 2008a, Raisborough, Barnes, et al. 2014), or extensification of beauty pressure (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 31), blurs boundaries and expectations. However, like Ditto exposing her fat, celebrities who choose not to have surgery as they age are marked out as “brave” (M. Jones 2008a, 91). Jermyn suggests that this move puts older women back in the spotlight at an age where traditionally they would have been released from the pressure to perform, often with a sense of relief. “Indeed, there is an established thread running through some feminist accounts of ageing which speaks of the liberation that “invisibility” can bring older women, of some women’s relief at no longer having to dodge catcalls or constantly moderate evaluations of their appearance” (2016, 580). However within the rules of makeover culture, if they wish to remain valid citizens then they must continue to perform youth and beauty. This dissonance contributes to the difficulties that interview participants had in recognising how their own experience of beauty ideals fits with the media’s ideals. Ideals that are laid out for us in magazine features such as The Australian Women’s Weekly’s “The Body Issue” issue’s article on Deborah Hutton states, alongside naked pictures of her looking slim, blond, Photoshopped, and decidedly not fifty, that at fifty “I feel better about myself than ever before” (Australian Women’s Weekly, January 2012, 52).
Caring less about other people’s opinions does not translate into not caring about their appearance at all. Patricia suggests, “I put more care into it now than I used to and suppose that others, not trying to look young, but at least not trying to get into a way of thinking oh well, I’m so old it doesn’t matter.” She feels it is important to stay current, to continue to appear well put together.
Raisborough, Barnes, et al. propose that “we are encouraged to blame women, ourselves, for ‘having let ourselves go’” (2014, 1070). This “letting go” Julie calls “matronly”, describing the current ideal for the older body as, “not skinny, not fat, sexualised, ah, not allowed to be unsexual at any stage of your life, and that ties in with, it’s not just you, it’s sexuality, you know, images of your classic forty or fifty-year-old woman from say two generations ago…. [A] matronly figure. I think that’s the thing that’s most forbidden now, just don’t be matronly.” She talks about trying to redesign her own image to avoid matronliness but feels she has fallen into a shameful trap of slovenliness. We discussed searching out older role models to aspire to in the media. Julie said,

*I’ve got a couple of pictures in my mind, I can’t think of actual names. I’m thinking of Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, people like that who are possibly a little bit too the same, funny because my mind is always switching over to older women, who are strong and have personality and are who they are. Like Ruth Cracknell, the actress and Mirka Mora the artist and people like that who are just them.*

Personality and individuality, for Julie, are as, if not more important than appearance but she is still conscious of how she looks. Other older interview participants including Judith (early fifties), Christine (late fifties), Patricia (mid fifties and Susan (early sixties) also expressed an interest in looking as good as possible whatever their age and a lot of beauty product marketing is now aimed at women this age. The conflict between their claims that they care less what others think as they get older, and their continued desire to look good suggests that the marketing works, even if on a subconscious level.

In contrast, Jennifer and Rebecca, both in their thirties, talked about not having a makeover, their conscious “choice not to choose” (Cronin 2000, Giddens 1991). For them peer influence was stronger than media influence, so if their friends are not focussed on physical appearance then neither are they. Rebecca said that amongst her friends it’s really not a big deal, “maybe it’s just the people I see or… because if you genuinely only hang out with people you feel comfortable with, you are similar to… and … most of my friends are probably happy to go out
without makeup on and... tracky dacks [tracksuits].” Jennifer said, “no, I have very
daggy friends, we are all daggy together, [pauses, laughs]... sometimes I think I

Figure 27 Mirka Mora. Available from: http://thedesigndes.net/2014/05/interview-mirka-mora/
(accessed December 5, 2016).
would like to wear more makeup and be more glamorous but it doesn’t bother me enough to actually do it.” She went on to indicate that she assumed that her friends felt the same way, saying, “I reckon I would be a bit surprised, erm, particularly with most of my friends, I think they’re all great as they are so if they suddenly came out with... with these massively inflated lips or something... or enhanced bosoms or something like that, or some wacky makeover, I think, I would just think they were crazy.” Amy also comments on the financial situation of her peer group. “No, all my friends are poor [laughing]. So no one can afford surgery, I have lots of friends who are worried about their weight or have tried to lose weight at some point in their lives, like I think we’re still slightly too young to be having surgery.” Aside from the media these women are not experiencing additional external pressure that would make them dramatically change their bodies, which strengthens the earlier argument that neither media, nor peer influence alone cause people to change their bodies.

**Conclusion**

This chapter first argued that the symbiotic nature of the relationship between makeover culture and technology underpins the expansive, global coverage of makeover media and promotes the development of new technologies of makeover. Makeover culture and media technologies are intertwined; produced by and productive of each other. While in beauty culture a woman was limited by the technologies she had access to—clothing, diet, hair curlers, makeup—as a key tenet of makeover culture, technology opens up countless new possibilities for physical change. The rapid development of not only those technologies previously available, but also cosmetic surgery, non-invasive procedures such as Botox, diet foods, body control clothing and media technologies including the internet and social media has occurred largely in the last twenty-five years. What had previously been considered impossible or at the very least impractical when discussing the improvement of bodies, is now possible.
I discussed the response of my interview participants to makeover media, arguably the key technology of makeover culture, both as artefact and as a technology of power and of the self. My interview participants admitted that they enjoyed reading a wide range of glossy magazines and gossip magazines and watching a broad cross-section of makeover content on television. I was concerned with how they experienced and related to makeover media and found that they largely claimed not to be influenced by it. However I felt that their ability to reference specific, often limited, scenarios that might influence them, or specific images of glamour, attractiveness or femininity that they admired contradicted their initial responses.

Acknowledging that all interview participants are implicated in the consumption of makeover media, this chapter found that makeover programming on television or in magazines forms the critical core of makeover culture. As discussed in Chapter Four, makeover culture forms a technology of power in itself, supported by and filtered through a network of influences including friends and family, the whole grounded in a broad cultural imperative towards improvement in all areas of life. It was clear that makeover culture and media influence even those most resistant, making them feel, if not bad about their own bodies, certainly very much aware of them, of the acceptable choices presented by the media and of what they do and do not want.

We talked about the ideal bodies presented by makeover media, and discussions around Photoshop highlighted this intimate relationship between technology and makeover culture. In exploring interview participants’ experience of Photoshop I heard that a perfect body still pervades the pages of women’s magazines, bending to the whim of the creative director and the digital artist. With the media increasingly implicated in the creation of technologically modified bodies, we don’t know what is real anymore, and it would appear we don’t really mind. Interview participants explained that they liked looking at edited images, acknowledging that the unmanipulated originals might even disappoint them.
I argue that my interview participants do not feel compelled to meet the media ideal, and much as they enjoy the images themselves, their own ideals do not match the skinny, tanned, full-breasted, but not pornographic ideals Photoshopped by the media. Nor do they see themselves as part of the market for cosmetic procedures that would enable them to meet those ideals. They define their own models of womanhood as more attainable but still not easy options, the athletic body, the curvy body, the worked on body; influenced by, but not the same as, media ideals. They cite the support of similarly minded peers, interests and hobbies in developing their ideals. While many interview participants felt a sense of shame related to both their consumption of makeover media and to their feelings about their own bodies, the shared experience between them and their peers and the lack of expectation outside of the makeover media meant that for the majority of them any shame was not converted into action as I will discuss in Chapter Seven.

The most interesting finding was that interview participants found it difficult to relate concepts around makeover to themselves—from defining makeover culture, to acknowledging its influence on them—yet when it came to talking about makeover media outside of their own lives, whether on television, or in relation to friends and peers, they were much more certain in their opinions. This was evidenced by their certainty that media had a negative effect on other people particularly young people, but not on themselves.

In the following chapter I will investigate how my interview participants’ understanding of makeover media, compares to their experience of makeover practice.
Chapter 7

I Once Was An Ugly Duckling: Interview Participants
Experience of and Attitude to Makeover Practices and Technologies

“I’m not really seeing myself as the plastic surgery type, but at the time I thought it was going to solve all my hang-ups. So there you go, pretty big hang-ups.” Interview participant Patricia talking about her rhinoplasty

If, like the ugly duckling, we are unhappy with our appearance, then as contemporary makeover citizens, immersed in the saturated environment of digital cultures and technologies which regulate women’s bodies with reminders of the neoliberal imperative, we are driven to ‘be the best we can be’ by any means possible, even surgical. In order to understand how this regulatory force plays out in women’s lives I asked the seventeen women in my study if they had made any attempt to make themselves over or if they knew people who had. I wanted to learn about their motivations—which ranged from vanity, to health, to mental health—for makeover and their experience of the process and its aftermath. Many offered up stories from weight loss, to shopping for new clothes, to cosmetic surgery and through their experiences and body histories I consider how the regulative power of makeover culture contributes to the experience of contemporary womanhood as always already implicated in makeover culture. This chapter is split into three sections reflecting the before/during/after
narrative of the makeover to help facilitate a comparison between makeover media and interview participants’ experiences.

First I consider the looking, seeing and planning that takes place prior to the makeover through a discussion of the motivations and technologies involved. These intimate technologies—media, mirrors, visualisation technologies and surveillance—influence the vision of the body as cultural plastic: malleable and full of potential, and we see how the potential “should”, or perfectible body, contributes to the regulatory framework. The media’s unproblematic representation and reimagining of bodies as infinitely malleable and perfectible, and the presentation of makeover as a normative activity, inspires women to mechanically alter their bodies through extreme dieting, exercise and cosmetic surgery, implying that bodies can be, and therefore should be perfected. The potential demonstrated by these technologies and the push to achieve that potential leads to feelings of shame and blame that can drive individuals, including interview participants, to makeover.

Next I explore interview participants’ experiences of and attitudes to makeover practice and ask does real-life makeover, as experienced and witnessed by interview participants, reflect the fairy-tale quality of the makeover media narrative? Is there a happily ever after for them too? I learnt that the two experiences were very different, with interview participants’ experiences of makeover somewhat messier. I discovered that, for my interview participants, makeover didn’t end with the initial process they underwent, but was on-going, as suggested by Jones (2008a), especially in the case of weight loss. I also consider the most significant technologies of the practice of makeover—offering interview participants’ experiences of cosmetic surgery, exercise and diet. In addition I look at the ways that the normalisation and legitimation of makeover practices produce new ways of regulating the female body.

Finally, I discuss interview participants’ responses to the after bodies of makeover, as well as other people’s responses to interview participants’ own transformations. I found that the presentation of made over women on makeover television as exceptional differs from the somewhat anticlimactic/ambivalent
experiences reported by some interview participants: People not noticing (Patricia); people refusing to acknowledge it (Susan's mum); people not recognizing them (Rebecca); or feeling too embarrassed to talk about it (Nicole). My interview participants’ experience of makeover was not like television. I argue that not all makeovers are perceived to be equal, with exercise and dieting considered to be positive forms of makeover due to the obvious effort/labour involved but surgery often looked at negatively as the lazy option. Indeed many of my interview participants had strong negative views on the use of cosmetic surgery.

**Before the Makeover: Looking, Seeing and Planning the Makeover**

In the makeover media, before the makeover begins we see abject bodies in the planning of their makeovers. Like a modern day panopticon (Foucault [1975] 1991), the constant monitoring and selective editing of candid camera style surveillance is used to observe and regulate participants’ behaviour. Sometimes surveillance comes in the form of simple technologies dating from beauty culture and earlier, such as mirrors and tape measures used to examine the body, and markers used to draw changes directly on to the skin; other times, through the intensified scrutiny of the technologically advanced television makeover format. In shows like *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* and *How To Look Good Naked* the abject body is figuratively and sometimes literally put under a microscope in a form of forensic surveillance (Elias, Scharff and Gill 2017, 26), with extreme close-ups of skin damage from earlier abuses of the body, x-rays of teeth and photographs which show the participant from all angles and in great detail. Shock tactics include ageing photographs to show the participant’s future if they don’t change their lifestyle (*Ten Years Younger in Ten Days*) and physical age assessments (*The Biggest Loser*), which show that because of their unhealthy behaviours participants’ biological age is much higher than their actual age, terrifying them into complying with the experts’ recommendations. As part of the symbiotic relationship between makeover and technology, some of this
technology has been developed for makeover media, designed by media set developers as well as by technicians.

These are the kind of technologies that Foucault considers “technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (1988, 18). Foucault argues that these technologies of power and of the self are not necessarily destructive or oppressive but can be used productively (1988, [1975] 1991). They enable the individual, supported by team of experts, to improve themselves. Computer manipulated before and after images are used to design, visualise and materialise the post-makeover body—the after body—in two and three dimensions, enabling prospective patients to view their future before surgery is carried out, helping the surgeon to fine tune the design to the customer’s specifications and to set expectations. Cronin explains that, “this materiality of the body is framed as the raw material in the processes of self-transformation in which the body is a site of potentiality in non-specified aims of self-materialisation or transformation. [...] Self-control and will-power shape the future body” (Cronin 2000, 277). This potential is linked to what I have called the perfectibility of the body and I argue that the fact that the individual has, and knows that they have potential acts as a strong regulator of the body.

While some interview participants were motivated by appearance when considering a makeover, such as Susan who had cosmetic surgery on her nose and joked that it would have been a good nose on a man, others attributed their motivation to physical or mental health. Karen wanted to improve her fitness because she had back problems and knew that going to the gym would help. Laura told me (in a private communication) that she had her post-pregnant tummy fixed for her children because she didn’t want them to see her unhappy with her body like her own mother had been, inferring psychological hardship caused by her mother’s and therefore potentially by her own dissatisfaction, and happiness as an outcome of surgery. As Lemma suggests, “the makeover show
exists in what we might regard psychoanalytically as a paranoid-schizoid
universe. The rhetoric of the makeover show frames feelings of sadness or
depression as states of mind that can be overcome – indeed can be eliminated –
through the manipulation of the body’s surface” (Lemma 2013). In Susan’s case,
introduced below, while she doesn’t claim that her appearance caused
psychological hardship, she suggests that her rhinoplasty was motivated by her
desire to fit in.

Susan’s Story Part I [Recently turned sixty, Australian born, living in
Melbourne.]

“I was always holding a mirror and looking sideways.”

Susan had her nose operated on when she was in her twenties and
admitted that her motivation was aesthetic, driven by her desire to appear
normal. She grew up with poor body satisfaction, “I was a very small person and
very aware of how I looked and I made my own clothes and I was very fashion
conscious but I had a very large nose—my father had a very prominent Jewish
nose—and as I matured it seemed to get bigger and bigger, and probably my
perception of it got bigger as well and I was always holding a mirror and looking
sideways.” She said that she just wanted to be like her friends, nothing special;
she considered peer influence to be more important than media influence. She
said, “it wasn’t the media necessarily, it was my desire to be confident in the way I
presented to the world.” I was interested that Susan said that she wasn’t
influenced by the media but then went on to tell me that it was reading about
women having nose jobs in magazines that convinced her that she could do it
too. “I remember in my early teens I used to buy these magazines, I used to buy the
Australian, no the English Woman’s Weekly, which to me was something I bought
every week [...] But reading about other people that had had nose jobs done made
me determined that I was going to do something about it somehow.” This
contradiction is similar to that which the interview participants showed (in
Chapter Six) when considering their own bodies, and personal goals compared with their confidence in critiquing others. Susan paid for her daughter’s nose job when she was in her late teens, and joked about saving up for her granddaughters’.

While many interview participants, such as Susan and Patricia, who also had her nose altered in her twenties, were open about their desire to look better, others discussed experiences of shame or indicated blame for a situation outside of their own control. This is the shame that Probyn suggests is productive, that leads to a rethinking and remaking of the self and the body. She suggests that, “through feeling shame, the body inaugaurates an alternative way of being in the world. Shame, as the body’s reflecting on itself, may reorder the composition of the habitus, which in turn may allow for quite different choices” (2005, 56). Amanda blamed injury for her weight gain, and Nicole, whose journey I will discuss in the next section, didn’t tell her friends about her weight loss surgery for a year out of embarrassment. This was a common reaction amongst Throsby’s interviews with weight loss surgery patients (2008, 127). Julie, whose story follows, felt both shame and guilt at her inability to lose weight without surgery and felt the need to defend her decision. Like Nicole and Julie, Chernin says of her own experience and that of the women that she interviewed about eating and weight, “our obsession is veiled in shame, profound feelings of guilt, a sense of uneasiness about the behavior of our body and our appetite. When we scratch the surface of this obsession with weight and food we enter the hidden emotional life of woman” ([1982] 1994, 1). She characterises the relationship that she and women like her have with food and their bodies as problematic and shameful.

**Julie’s Story [Recently turned fifty, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]**

“*Extreme sloppiness is almost a metaphor for complete laxity and lack of discipline.*”
Julie talked about her long-term desire to change her body, paired with a degree of apathy and a certain resistance to change. “When I was in my thirties, I had booked an appointment to see someone about my droopy eyelids, and chickened out, because I felt really that it was a stupid thing to do. And perhaps also, well I was going to use the word immoral, but that’s a bit strong.” She felt bad for considering cosmetic surgery.

Her weight had been a constant battle and this year she had gastric band surgery. She said, “I realise that part of me is a little bit ashamed, [...] it’s a shame that it’s happened and it’s very much a reflection of our abundant society that I’ve resorted to that, but having said that it’s a good thing, it’s a health thing and in the end it possibly will save—from a cost standpoint—one less person with diabetes needing to be treated.” She admitted her shame at needing surgery but claimed that her focus was on her health, not on her appearance.

Julie was struggling to manage the ongoing diet required to make the surgery successful and she blamed her lack of discipline, both with food and with presentation. She talked of, “the excessive sloppiness as evidenced by my feet, [pointing at slippers falling apart]. Extreme sloppiness is almost a metaphor for complete laxity and lack of discipline.” She could describe what she wanted to achieve, “the balance between comfort and freedom and some sort of strength. [...] I guess I want my clothes to say that I’m, what’s the right word, ‘don’t mess with me’ [...] that I’ve got self-respect and dignity because of that aspect of the clothing. I can stand up tall because it fits well, and I acknowledge my body underneath, don’t apologise for having a rounded middle, or being five foot three,” but she couldn’t quite get there by herself. In fact, as discussed in Chapter Six she sees makeover media as a source of inspiration.

Probyn suggests that shame is related to attraction; that because we like the idea of being thin, we feel shame about our fat bodies and because we are attracted to the idea of a quick surgical escape from fatness we feel shame surrounding that too. Julie’s shame is multiplied because firstly she came to a point where surgery
was the only option—indicating her failure as a dieter—and secondly after the expense and risk of surgery she is still struggling to become the thin person she would like to be. In addition she wonders if she should accept herself as she is and shouldn’t strive for thinness at all. While accepting society’s critique of fatness as failure of self-control, she blames herself, not society and the messages it sends.

As with my interview participants, both appearance and health are offered as drivers for change in makeover media and likewise blame and shame feature strongly in the narrative (M. Jones 2008a, 92). It is interesting, given that makeover media is considered part of postfeminist media culture, and blame and shame are not part of the postfeminist narrative of choice and agency, that women who are otherwise being told to make the most of themselves without feeling bad about it, are at the same time put through shaming rituals for their failure thus far. The postfeminist narrative suggests there is no need for shame as long as the woman is making a free choice and is working towards her ideal goal. Gill says, “it is difficult to overestimate the extent to which discourses of choice, agency and empowerment have become central to neoliberalism and postfeminism” (Gill 2008, 436) and my interview participants felt, for the most part, that as long as the decision was freely made they could accept that a television participant or friend would choose to be made over. However the shaming continues, as Boling suggests, “this focus on individual redemption and change reflects a powerful tendency in contemporary American culture to understand people’s problems or situations as fundamentally their own responsibility or fault, and open to choice, control, and change provided they are sufficiently disciplined and put enough effort into transforming themselves” (2011, 111). When considering the motivation for makeover in The Swan, blame for participants’ failure to conform to beauty ideals is laid elsewhere, with childbirth, ill health, poor nutrition or family life. In contrast in Ten Years Younger in Ten Days the participants are shamed for their own failure to conform, with smoking, drinking and other lifestyle choices criticised.
If there is a hierarchy of beauty and makeover technologies, running from most laudable to least acceptable then cosmetic surgery sits at the bottom. It drew the strongest, most negative reactions from my interview participants, and was often the first thing they mentioned when discussing makeover culture. The question of agency and cosmetic surgery is also more problematic than weight loss, fitness and fashion makeovers for many academics writing on the subject (Davis 1995, Heyes 2007a). Torn between the contradictory arguments of the second wave and contemporary feminisms—that women should not be defined by their bodies and feel pushed into cosmetic surgery, but that they should have agency in deciding to have it if they choose—they find it difficult to either fully support or condemn women’s decisions to undergo cosmetic procedures. When researchers actually spoke to women about cosmetic surgery they discovered a positive discourse of choice replacing arguments for the improvement of psychological health touted as the keys to choosing cosmetic procedures (Davis 1995, Elliot 2008). They conclude that women feel empowered to make such choices, however problematic it may be to earlier feminist arguments and yet question whether this choice is not a choice, but a new form of coercion or regulatory framework as discussed in Part I of the thesis.

The normalisation of cosmetic surgery required a significant shift in perception of cosmetic surgery away from what was historically considered to be “highly unnatural not just because it involved physical transformation but because it corrupted the normal, and even biologically driven, coding of a person’s character on the body.” (Pitts-Taylor 2007, 17). Alongside the shift from beauty culture, to makeover culture, the shift reflects a change from thinking of the body as given, to the body as earned. An example of this is the case of ageing as discussed in Chapter Six, where instead of considering the marks and scars of ageing as a person’s history and character written on the body, it has become acceptable, indeed normal, to actively try to delay the effects of ageing and erase the person’s history through diet, exercise, fashion, beauty routines and surgery (Jermyn 2016, Raisborough, Barnes, et al. 2014). No longer the domain of the rich and famous, cosmetic surgery is now openly, publicly discussed and even
acclaimed as an empowering life choice for older women. If not then you have deserved (or earned) all the wrinkles that you have got.

To aid in the normalisation of makeover and cosmetic surgery, while the makeover television participant is unconscious on the surgeon’s table the viewer is reassured throughout the surgical procedure by the expert (surgeon or commentator) whose constant commentary serves to calm the watcher’s gut reactions to the violence being performed on the body and the graphic images of invasive surgery. To an extent the viewer is duped with a clean, warm fuzzy version of the surgery with the expert narrator responsible for keeping the viewer on the side of the expert. Cosmetic surgery makeover television programs such as The Swan discuss tummy tucks and nose straightening in the same way as the original What Not To Wear hosts Trinny and Susannah talked about the cut of clothing or control underwear. Procedures are normalised as we see things intimately that we would never have seen before unless we were going through it ourselves. As a normative activity its regulatory power is increased. Interview participant Karen commented,

I think people are becoming very used to cosmetic surgery now, [...] I think that the more you see something the more normal it becomes, yeah, we’re talking about different to before and I think that’s the case with things like cosmetic surgery, that the more you see of it, or the more you hear about it, the more people you know who’ve had it done, the more acceptable it becomes, the more it’s part of the general society and the whole culture of image is part of that as well.

Karen’s insightful commentary demonstrates just how ‘close to home’ cosmetic surgery is becoming. While younger interview participants often stated they didn’t personally know anyone who had undergone surgery, Karen talked about work colleagues in their forties who had gone for Botox or at the very least talked about it. Talking about the popularity of cosmetic procedures, Anne laughed and joked, “but the Kaths and Kims are all getting it done, you know, it’s out in Bogan land, it’s all the go, it’s not people I know,” acknowledging that while it wasn’t something her friends were doing, it was commonplace, and hinting at the classed nature of surgery choices. Australian sitcom Kath and Kim, about a working class mother and daughter, originally aired on the ABC TV network
between 2002 and 2007. It portrays the banality of the lives of the eponymous pair with their stereotyped dress, behaviour and life experiences and Kath and Kim can be understood from Anne’s comment as shorthand for working class Australian women’s experience, suggesting that cosmetic procedures are becoming a common part of life for them. Anne is also casting judgement on the ‘type’ of people who would choose to undergo surgery reflected in the superficial nature of the television characters themselves. The people she chooses as her friends, she feels, know better than to make such choices.

This normalisation of surgery is problematic not just for individuals and academics but also for professionals within the industry,

It is with regard to this portrayal of surgery that cosmetic surgery associations have expressed concern. Both the American Society for Plastic Surgeons (ASPS, 2004) and the British Association for Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS, 2004) have stated that these types of programs send the wrong message to viewers saying that they may raise unrealistic expectations and that “the public is being lulled into a sense that there are no real risks or complications in cosmetic plastic surgery” (Rod Rohrich, ASPS president, 2004). (Ashikali, Dittmar and Ayers 2014, 142)

Such normalisation affects the attitude of individuals towards cosmetic surgery practices. Elliot talks about “a new emotional climate in which people are increasingly seduced by drastic head-to-toe surgery” and the ability to “restructure the self” (2010a, 466). My participants’ attitudes to cosmetic surgery varied but it was clear that in comparison to makeover television’s unproblematic and normalised presentation of cosmetic procedures interview participants felt conflicted. Some stated that they would never consider surgery, others only under certain conditions. Younger participants delayed the question, as something they might consider in future. Some would consider non-invasive procedures like Botox but not invasive surgeries. Or they might consider surgery to combat ageing, or improve health but not for vanity. On the other hand, a couple did say that they would like a ‘boob job’ if they were brave enough or well off enough. Amanda said “I’d love a boob job!” and Belinda agreed, “oh definitely, definitely. I think if I had the money, if I had a stronger desire for it... maybe if I
was single and cashed up.” Amanda went further, and openly admitted to the influence of makeover media,

I’d love to lose weight, but since having the baby I’d love to have a bit of lipo on my tummy, I’d love to have that sucked out, I’d love to get rid of the Bingo Wings, I’d just like someone to come and shave off, like, the outer wobbly bits, I always remember, was it Ab Fab\textsuperscript{46} oh my god, inside me there’s a thin person just trying to get out..., just the one laugh it was... that’s sometimes how I feel.” She went on to say, “I would like to... I love, you know, those extreme makeover programs where they take some ugly nag and do them up, and \textit{Ten Years in Ten Days}, I love those programs and I watch them all of the time.

Another source of motivation for interview participants was that of being watched or looked at. Interview participants talked about the ways in which they monitor their own bodies. Emma said, “I’m starting to see all those things that make me feel a little bit older, I’ve got, you know wrinkles, and bags under the eyes, today I’m wearing no makeup as you can tell and it’s like, it’s just... I think of all the little splotches and stuff and I think, now I remembered even the first time I noticed a permanent little wrinkle here on my face, just around my lips.” She acknowledged that her detailed and critical self-assessment was influenced by similar assessments carried out in makeover media and went on to say, “it’s like, huh, so maybe I should go and get that, you know, that anti-wrinkle cream, that Oil of Olay, and then I read a blog of course that was just like ranting about how horrible these products were that don’t actually do anything they are purporting to do and I thought wow, I’ve just been totally manipulated into thinking that my face needed some sort of regeneration.” They also talked about being seen by others. Melissa talked about losing weight so her work colleagues don’t comment, and Jessica talked about her family’s obsession with thinness and beauty to which she attributes her ongoing body issues. Karen, whose story follows, is very aware of her body and observes herself so that she can make clothes to fit, even though she isn’t standard size. She is conscious of being \textsuperscript{46}Absolutely Fabulous was a 1990s UK television comedy about growing old disgracefully, written by Jennifer Saunders and starring Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley.
looked at, and sees herself in a way that most people don’t when she posts pictures of the clothes that she makes on her blog.

Karen’s Story [Recently turned forty, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]

“I certainly didn’t fall into any of the categories.”

Talking about her younger body Karen said, “I was quite thin until puberty and then those hormones kicked in and things changed…. I didn’t have very good body image as a teenager, I was thin, I hit puberty late, I didn’t have boobs until way after many of the other girls.” She explains how her attitude changed over time to a focus on health rather than appearance saying, “I think I used to be more critical of it than I am now, I now appreciate what my body can do. I think having children has probably influenced that, [...]. I’ve got rheumatoid arthritis, [...] and it’s basically in remission now, so that’s twelve/thirteen years... I wasn’t focussed on how it looked at that point, I just wanted it to work and be pain-free.”

Karen’s interest in sewing means that she looks carefully at her body, measuring and fitting the clothes that she makes, photographing, editing and blogging finished pieces. “My body has never been standard, that’s why I think I’ve always looked at the makeover shows and read the makeover articles for things and they always, initially had three, or [...] four base types of figure, [...] I certainly didn’t fall into any of the categories [...] I’ve tried to reframe my own body in terms of just how it is, it’s not faults, it’s just how it is [...] I would never change anything about it. [...] The fact that I can sew probably does make a difference now that I think about it, because I can make what I want, in the size that I want [...] it’s about knowing your body, I know that my waist is thicker so I know what I have to do to accommodate that, I know what things that I really make, or what styles I wouldn’t bother making because they would need so much adjustment that I don’t have the time for.” She talks about an experience she had putting swimwear on her blog. “I was really interested by the response that I got when I put my bathers on my blog...
[...] the main comments were “aren’t you brave,” and I did think twice before putting it there, I mean it looked nice, but I thought hang on, I blog everything I make, if I would wear it in public, which I will be, then why am I not blogging it because it’s me in a pair of bathers, what’s wrong with me? There’s nothing wrong with me... [...] I found it really interesting because to me that was a general reflection of how people just are not comfortable with their bodies.”

In comparison to media images Karen’s amateur photography is neat but minimally edited. She doesn’t Photoshop out what she perceives as her faults but leaves them to help blog readers similar to herself see how she has made adjustments to the garments she makes and to encourage them to be brave as well. While interview participants, especially Karen, do experience an external gaze that influences their desire to change their bodies, television makeover participants are subject to an intensely public gaze. As Karen has experienced putting her own images out to a public, albeit positively biased, audience, the public image is immediately, and irrevocably exposed to critique. She knew that once she had put the images of her swimsuit on her blog it could not be taken back. In contrast to the majority of my interview participants who don’t like to have their photographs taken if they can avoid it, an unnerving intimacy enables the viewer to know the body of the media makeover participant better than their own. We see the intimate details of the participant’s life: sleeping, under anaesthetic, spilling their guts metaphorically and with their guts spilling out on the surgeon’s table. Even while talking about not wanting to take their clothes off in front of children or lovers participants strip for the cameras and the gaze of experts and viewers. They are shamed and told they have failed at self-control and therefore need to be watched by an external agency, an authoritative media gaze (Hearn 2008, 499).

Theories on the gaze date back to existentialists such as Sartre and de Beauvoir who argued that the gaze of the powerful could control those weaker than themselves. Berger suggests that this male gaze, increasingly internalised in contemporary society, means that “a woman must continually watch herself. She
is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself” (1972, 42). She
must monitor herself and present herself as something to be looked at by men,
but may not look at men herself. These gazes have been interpreted by feminists,
such as Mulvey ([1975] 1989) who wrote about the cinematic gaze, as part of the
patriarchal regulatory force and Bartky who suggests that women have learned
not to look or stare, and to avert their own gaze under the scrutiny of a man
(Bartky 1997, 135).

In contemporary neoliberal culture we are told that we should be gazing at
ourselves, self-monitoring and self-disciplining (Elliot and Lemert 2009), yet, in
makeover culture, an overt, external and technological surveillance comes in to
play. Its expensiveness, its up-to-the-minute-ness and its exclusiveness, all help
to contribute to the authoritative gaze of the expert or surgeon and thus the
regulation of the participant’s body through that authority. The technological
gaze of visual media plays a key role in creating dissatisfaction and driving the
desire for constant improvement. Surveillance is key. Ouellette and Hay suggest
that, “What Not to Wear relies on strategies of close supervision, humiliation, and
surveillance only as a means to an end, which is the creation of a self-governing
subject” (2008, 110). If this constant surveillance turns participants into
productive, self-governing subjects, it also has a regulating effect on the viewer. It
reminds us that outside of the media fantasy we are expected to watch ourselves
as well.

**During the Makeover: Experiencing the Makeover Process and its
Technologies**

At the heart of contemporary makeover culture is the field of cosmetic
surgery, and it was discussions of cosmetic surgery that elicited the most visceral
responses from interview participants. Developed to repair bodies disfigured by
accidents and birth defects (Haiken 1997), plastic surgery stretches the bounds of
plasticity and perfectibility. In the post World War II era plastic surgery experts
found ways of applying skills they had developed to treat injured soldiers for
profit (Gilman 1998). Although there is much more to makeover culture than cosmetic surgery—from fashion, to weight loss, to fitness—cosmetic surgery was the first thought of my interview participants when asked about what makeover media they consumed and what makeover practices they had undergone.

Cosmetic surgery and non-invasive cosmetic technologies feature prominently in a wide range of television programs, including *The Swan*, *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* and *Extreme Makeover*. During the process graphic images of surgery or other procedures—images that no longer shock us—flood the screen, zooming in on a particularly gory moment, the voice of the expert droning reassuringly in the background. We feel for the participant, their painful recoveries make them seem deserving of success and praise yet our common sense tells us that cosmetic surgery is highly invasive, involving scalpels and anaesthesia, and carries not only considerable physical risk to the patient but also the psychological risk of success or failure of the surgery. I argue that despite all this, radical surgical makeover shows, while their limelight on mainstream television was only short-lived in the early to mid-2000s, live on in the popular imaginary as I heard from my interview participants who could still talk about them and provide examples from them 10 years later. The normalisation of such procedures through this genre of media, has encouraged women to take these risks in increasing numbers as we see in the statistics that follow.

While Elliot suggested in 2008 that, “Cosmetic surgical culture promotes a fantasy of the body’s infinite plasticity” (2008, 91), I suggest that ten years later the malleability of the body is no longer a fantasy. Likewise Bordo, in 1993, talked about the plasticity of the body, “in my 1993 book Unbearable Weight, I described the postmodern body, increasingly fed on, “fantasies of re-arranging, transforming, and correcting, limitless improvements and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and, indeed, the very materiality of the body. In place of that materiality, we now have cultural plastic” (2003). 1993 was after my watershed moment of 1990/1991 but before the rapid growth in popularity of makeover media—Lewis dates makeover television from 1996 (2008a)—and, as Bordo goes on to suggest twenty years later, or now, in 2018, thirty-five years later
the “fantasies” that she and Elliot speak of are no longer fantasies. As Bordo noted, during the years she spent collecting data the number of cosmetic procedures performed increased by about twelve and a half times. In the last decade that figure has increased by the same factor again (ASAPS n.d.). In that short period the transformation to a culture of makeover, a culture of continuous self-improvement, has had a huge influence on both the statistics and attitudes to cosmetic practice. As I claimed earlier about Wolf’s Beauty Myth (1990), I don’t believe that Bordo could have written what she did today without referring to makeover culture.

Today, seen as another quick fix solution to our body image issues, popular surgical technologies include liposuction of the stomach, bottom and thighs, abdominoplasty and correction of sagging skin post weight loss (often as a prize or celebration for the achievement of weight loss). Breast augmentations, liposuction and abdominoplasty have superseded rhinoplasty as the graduation present of choice. In the US in 2016 13,654,349 cosmetic procedures (invasive and non-invasive) were carried out at the cost of over $15 billion – a $1.5 billion increase on the previous year. However, it is the astonishing growth rate of more recently developed minimally-invasive technologies such as Botox, collagen injections and acid skin peels which rejuvenate the body and face which clearly demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between makeover culture and the development of technology—from 740,751 procedures in 1997, to 11,674,754 in 2016, an increase of more than 15 times in 19 years (ASAPS n.d.).

Looking at the change in the balance of surgical versus minimally invasive technologies there has been 154 per cent growth in minimally invasive procedures between 2000 and 2014, against a twelve per cent drop of surgical procedures giving an average of 111 per cent growth or from 7,401,495 to 15,622,353 procedures in total: many of the minimally-invasive procedures weren’t even in use fourteen years earlier (ASAPS n.d.).

Elsewhere, in 2015 in the UK the British Association of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons reported that a record 51,000 people underwent cosmetic surgery (invasive procedures) showing growth continuing beyond the post global
financial crisis dip in numbers (BAAPS 2015, BAAPS 2016). However, uncertainty over the Brexit vote led to a twenty per cent drop in procedures in 2016 (BAAPS 2017) dropping below 2007 levels for the first time, strongly suggesting that economic insecurity affects figures in the short term especially for more costly procedures. As mentioned in the introduction, Australian figures were not readily available.

The following discussion of interview participants’ experience of and attitude to cosmetic procedures highlights the differences between the fairy-tale media makeover and real-life makeover. Five out of my seventeen interview participants talked about surgical procedures that they had undergone. Patricia, whose story follows, underwent several makeovers including having her nose surgically altered.

**Patricia’s Story [Late fifties, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]**

“At the time I thought it was going to solve all my hang-ups.”

Patricia worried about her weight and appearance, always making an effort to dress well. She recounted an incident that happened when she was very young which had an effect on her body image in the longer term. “Oh, well, when I was a very young kid... I was only about fourteen months old... but I think I had a bit of an accident at home, put hot water on myself... and I put quite a large scar on my chin and my mother who probably felt quite embarrassed that it happened in the first place was always encouraging me to wear clothes that didn’t reveal that. And I think as a result of that I have kind of always felt a bit inclined to cover up as much as possible and put makeup on anyway. And with time, plastic surgery became more common probably I could have had it operated on, but at the time it happened, [...] nobody ever had plastic surgery done [...] I don’t care anymore, but it probably did influence my perception for a long time.”

She went on to tell me about her experience of losing weight. “In my teens, my mid to late teens, I put on a lot of weight, and even though I’ve lost it since, I’ve
never really got used to the fact that I’m not fat anymore. I wasn’t obese, but I was definitely overweight, and now always, I am always anxious, if I put on one or two kilos, If I have... my back has been out of action and I haven’t been exercising, I sort of start freaking out and thinking I’m on the way to being really heavy again.”

She also had cosmetic surgery on her nose in her twenties, “the only other thing was, erm, my nose used to really bother me, it was very straight and I never thought of myself as the plastic surgery type but I did have my nose modified, it hasn’t turned into a beautiful nose, as you can see, it’s better than it was, but I was quite disappointed at the time that the change wasn’t more dramatic, and when I found out how much I went through for quite a long time after it happened, I thought why did I ever bother with that, and now I’m just embarrassed that I did it because you know, I’m not really seeing myself as the plastic surgery type, but at the time I thought it was going to solve all my hang-ups. So there you go, pretty big hang-ups.”

As per Jones (2008a) suggestion that makeover is a state of on-going improvement, Patricia’s surgical makeover wasn’t the fairy-tale ending to her desire to improve her body. She still sees maintaining her weight and her appearance as an on-going project. She was also influenced by her mother’s preference that she hide her scar from an early age and this affected her confidence in the longer term. After her experience with her nose she certainly didn’t feel that further cosmetic surgery to hide the scar was an option for her, even though she suggests that today, a young person with scarring like hers would be given that option. She was negative about the idea of cosmetic surgery in general. It was also interesting to hear her talk about her experience of being overweight and how her body image is still rooted in that time. While I judged her to be very slim, she still doesn’t think of herself as thin.

Weight loss was a major concern for my interview participants with two participants—Julie, whose story I told in Chapter Six and Nicole, whose story follows—having undergone weight loss surgeries. Such surgeries are often considered medical rather that aesthetic because if someone is struggling to lose
weight then the benefits to their health are argued to be substantial. Throsby suggests that for patients the narrative of anticipated health benefits “enables them to actively resist representations of those undergoing surgery as lacking in sufficient discipline to exercise control over the body through the redefinition of surgery as the act of taking responsibility, rather than abnegating it” (Throsby 2008, 123). While Nicole and Julie both agreed that the boundaries between medical need and cosmetic choices can be and frequently are blurred—just as Davis discusses with regards to her interview participants decision making around cosmetic surgery (Davis 1995)—they claimed that their procedures were carried out with health in mind, rather than aesthetics. Nicole, who lost twenty-five to thirty kilograms in the year after her surgery, considered her surgery to be very successful, despite the side effects. Julie still hadn’t quite come to terms with the post surgery lifestyle and as a result her weight loss had been far slower. The side effects and consequences of weight loss surgery are often challenging for patients and working towards a healthy weight can frequently affect their physical and emotional wellbeing, challenging the “presumed positive relationship between health and slimness that governs the ‘war on obesity’” (Throsby 2008, 118).

Literature on weight loss surgeries approaches the topic from two key angles, Medical/Health Studies and Fat Studies. While extensive medical literatures discuss the technical aspects of surgeries, risks, methods and outcomes, the Weight Loss Studies literatures that I consider here are interested in the motivations for, and experience of, weight loss surgery. Discussing the portrayal of weight loss surgeries in periodicals, Drew found four leading discourses surrounding the choice to undergo surgery – 1) risky, 2) extravagant, 3) taking the “easy way out”, 4) acceptable when multiple other weight loss techniques had been tried and failed (2011, 1232). Nicole argues that her decision came as a last resort after many years of dieting and trying to lose weight in other ways. Indeed, the criteria for accessing weight loss surgery is not only obesity, but the patient must also show evidence of exhausting other options first.
Nicole explains that her relationship with her body stems from being a fat child. She can’t remember a time when she was not on a diet. She’s tried everything and, despite the risks, she hopes that this will solve her weight problems permanently. Nicole’s story is similar to many others who have run through the “hierarchy of weight loss interventions” (Throsby 2009, 202). While diet and exercise are looked upon as socially acceptable methods for weight loss, “both drugs and surgery are distinguished from the morally privileged ‘lifestyle’ interventions of diet and exercise, and become categorised pejoratively as technologies which act as substitutes for willpower” (Throsby 2009, 206). There is a frequent moral judgment against the self and others, which considers surgery as cheating. This is particularly intense when surgery is performed under a national health care scheme, with a horror of a failure that would be considered a waste of public money (Throsby 2012b, 10) often coming from the patient themself. This is countered by weight loss surgery supporters and by patients with a responsibility narrative, which presents the potential future saving to the healthcare system (Throsby 2012b, 10) as well as the potential health benefits for the patient.

Throsby suggests that critiques of weight loss surgery need to take into account not only “those negative experiences which conform to a critical view, but also those positive ones which do not” (Throsby 2012a, 111). She demands that critics listen to the voices of the patients themselves and rejects the portrayal of patients as “victims of a monolithic power structure against which there is no meaningful resistance, or as lost in a fog of false consciousness where anti-fat rhetoric has been absorbed uncritically” (Throsby 2012a, 109), suggesting that such a model “overlooks the complexity of the embodied experience of obesity” (Throsby 2007, 1563). We can see that patients challenge the critiques of weight loss surgery and “the media’s portrayal of WLS as an “easy way out” by talking about their post-surgical health-oriented body work. Specifically, almost all respondents characterized their post-surgical diets as arduous” (Drew 2011, 1235).

More frequently Fat Studies literature approaches weight loss surgery as a target for resistance. As well as returning to the anti-beauty arguments discussed in Chapter One which ask why do we define thin bodies as beautiful and why
should women feel they need to lose weight to meet beauty ideals these literatures challenge the inherent dangers of surgical intervention. Weight loss surgeries are seen as “contentious, disturbing and problematic” for those in fat activist groups who remind us that these surgeries are “invasive, drastic and often dangerous” (Cooper and Murray 2012, 130). Given fat activists’ claim that obesity is not in and of itself a risk factor for increased illness, then surgery does not guarantee a ‘cure’ for an illness, which often, such as with diabetes or heart disease, turns out to be and underlying issue or genetic predisposition unrelated to the individual’s weight. Following this claim Fat Studies activists complain that weight loss surgery, like cosmetic surgery, involves the harming of perfectly healthy bodies. Morgan tells the tale of fictional Josephine, “the day of metamorphosis, the day of rebirth came (Throsby 2007a). Josephine descended into a drug-induced, deep deep sleep, closing her eyes with a sense of anticipation of the resurrection of the body she had always yearned to have. The robot introduced multiple laparoscopes into Josephine’s abdomen, amputated 90 percent of her stomach, and permanently destroyed her healthy digestive system—so that she could be reborn” (2011, 194). While the narrative of rebirth is popular in weight loss (and other cosmetic) surgeries the violence of this passage demonstrates the anger felt by critics of such surgeries. Cooper and Murray, agree that, “WLS surgeries are underpinned, it seems to me by a highly flawed cause-and-effect logic where a fat body (always already read as pathological in our culture) is literally damaged (often irreparable) in order to (allegedly) make it ‘well’, ‘healthy’” (2012, 130).

Another point of contention is industry greed. Critics argue that the marketing of weight loss is about business, not health. Talking about Body Dysmorphic Disorder Heyes shows “how cosmetic surgery generates the psychological states it then diagnoses” (2009, 78). That is to say that in promoting a cure, the cosmetic surgery/weight loss surgery industry creates an awareness of fat as a disease with a potential cure, increasing demand and increasing the incidence of diagnosed cases requiring intervention. The marketing, suggests Morgan, “promises to liberate the thin TechnoSwans living
in but suppressed by the unruly appetitive behavior and digestive tracts of fat American ducklings and drakes. It promises liberation to these potential TechnoSwans who suffer from the insidious dynamics and domains of fat hatred.” (2011, 189).

Nicole’s Story [Early forties, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]

“It’s interesting to me just listening to myself talk, that it’s all about weight loss because that’s been my bugbear.”

At the time of the interview, Nicole had recently left her office job to start her own business from home and she admitted she had been watching a lot of daytime television. She criticises the media’s “emphasis on how the bodies look rather than how they function and how healthy they are” but says that she does watch makeover shows. Of the broader media she says, “I think there’s this sort of whirlwind of mutually influential cycles going on... [...] there’s more stuff being thrust at us through the media than ever about being, looking gorgeous and having the right body and all the right stuff and yet as a society we are getting bigger, we are getting less healthy.”

She talks about her early experience with her body, “I grew up unbelievably conscious of what people thought of my body and my eating, and I was always an overweight kid... for me it was always about weight and how I looked, and I’m trying unbelievably hard not to put that on my kids but at the same time to encourage them to have healthy bodies and active bodies [...] and eat lots of different colours but not just fruit loops [...] and it’s interesting to me just listening to myself talk, that it’s all about weight loss because that’s been my bugbear.” She went on to explain, “I had gastric banding surgery, that was it, and that was after a lifetime of dieting and, you know, my version of attempting to exercise and gym memberships and those sorts of things, so lots of attempts I think, from when I hit puberty but that has been the most drastic.”
In common with many of my interview participants Nicole had experienced a period in her life where she saw herself as overweight. This influenced her own current self-image, as well as her relationship with her children. Her decision to undergo surgery to help her lose weight came after years of diets, exercise programs and self-consciousness around her weight but she still hadn’t entirely come to terms with her new, thinner body.

Interestingly, having surgery hadn’t necessarily made interview participants pro-surgery. Some, like Julie, who underwent a gastric band procedure, and Patricia who underwent rhinoplasty, were unsure; the procedures didn’t change their lives in the way that they thought they would. It didn’t mark the end of the process for them, indeed Patricia was ashamed of her decision and wondered, thirty years later, why she had had it done at all. Julie, who considered her surgery to have been carried out for medical purposes, didn’t think she would have surgery for purely cosmetic purposes, but then again, maybe she would, “I don’t think I would do anything... having said that I have had some laser on my face for rosacea and really strong redness, [...] I couldn’t see myself going for breast implants or anything else, then again I say if I lost weight and had a really big tummy area that was causing me... you know overhang to the point that you’re getting rashes in summer, then I may consider that.” Again we see the lack of certainty when the issue is personal, alongside the defence that surgery would be for health benefits not for the aesthetic benefits, excusing any desire for surgery.

Some interview participants felt that cosmetic surgery was for others, but they understood if others wanted it. Emma said, “I wouldn’t want to do it, but if there was somebody in my life who legitimately, who had really, you know, concerns about their breast size or you know their arms or something like that and really wanted to get that done, then as a woman I don’t think I would be able to not support them through that, you know. But at the same time you kind of wonder why did they care so much about that particular thing.” As we saw in Chapter Six such conflicted expression of feelings was not uncommon. She went on to say, “you can’t say, all makeovers are bad, you can’t say that, because, in
some cases it really does matter to that person, but it also matters to ultra
wealthy people too, that they have to fit that stereotype you know, it’s a
reinforcing, like a self-perpetuating cycle, isn’t it.” Likewise, Amy felt that, while
she would try not to judge a friend who wanted to undergo surgery, she thought
it unnecessary. Her next comment hinted at the idea of cosmetic surgery tourism
as I discussed in Chapter One, “I don’t know. If some of my friends said I’m going
to go to Thailand, I’m going to get a tummy tuck and a breast lift then... I’d
probably go and say, you probably don’t need that or whatever but at the same
time I kind of understand why women would do that.” Interestingly she didn’t
mention the risk factors commonly associated with the idea of cosmetic surgery
abroad.

While most women were accepting of other’s decisions to have surgery,
even if they themselves wouldn’t consider it, Anne, Judith and Karen were
strongly opposed to the idea. As far as Anne is concerned, “unless that’s sort of a
functional thing like they had an accident or there was an injury, and
reconstruction or someone had breast cancer and had a reconstruction. I can’t
imagine anyone I know... such a separation of society, there’s no one I know.”
Karen said,

I’m anti it, I think it’s wrong and I work in healthcare so I know that
people undergoing anaesthesia, the risk that is inherent in something that
is not actually medically necessary, I find that completely unethical really
in many ways, and even, what’s considered the gentler things such as
Botox. Putting needles into your face, you know, it’s something that we do
into contractions for children with cerebral palsy, fantastic, that’s what it’s
for, [...] but for appearance, no, but our ideas of what’s normal I think are
quite skewed.

This brings us back to the difference between medically required and elective
surgeries. Karen, who earlier suggested that cosmetic procedures have become
broadly normalised in society, explained that her dislike of the use of medical
procedures for purely aesthetic reasons is based on her personal experience
working in a hospital setting. She asked, where do you draw the line between
surgery to correct a recognised defect, and surgery aimed to improve a person’s
looks, and suggested that our concept of what is normal and acceptable has
changed as we have become accustomed to seeing cosmetic procedures, that would previously have been considered extreme, as normal and even desirable. In comparison with Anne, who admitted to being repulsed by the idea of surgery but without being able to articulate why, Karen is quite clear in her ethical stance opposing surgical intervention in otherwise healthy bodies. Anne relates it to her Catholic upbringing and her mother’s attitude to beauty. She explains her mother’s response to her being unhappy about her appearance as a child,

“I don’t know, that I’ve actually got used to the look of my face as it is, never mind change, because, when I was younger I was bullied, I was really bullied, and part of it was like name calling and so on, and I was obsessed with, I thought it was because I was ugly and plain, I wasn’t beautiful, against a measure, and I was quite aware of that [...]. But it was just one of those things, oh well I’m not beautiful, that’s too bad, I just had to get on with it. And when I would speak to my mother about that, when I was quite young, must have been when I was about 7, she would say oh well you know “my face I don’t mind it, for I am behind it, it’s the one in the front gets the jar” 47 [...] so when I look at photographs of myself, I don’t always recognise myself, I don’t think that, looks like me, and sometimes, it doesn’t always match.”

While only a few interview participants had actually gone under the knife most had had experienced makeover through exercise and diet. Weight loss is not new to makeover culture, it long pre-dates even beauty culture, but modern exercise and diet technologies offer participants the opportunity to redesign their bodies in a slower but more sustainable way than cosmetic surgery.

The history of dieting is littered with odd nutritional regimes and ‘health’ food fads, including the early marketing of cereal products such as Corn Flakes as health food. Stearns contrasts early interest in weight loss with increased consumption in the early 1900s, the more people shopped, the thinner they wanted to be. By 1910 they were being told by marketers and health professionals to worry about their weight and they were (1997] 2002, 66). Weight control came

---

47 Anne is referring to the poem For Beauty I am not a Star by Woodrow Wilson.
*For beauty I am not a star
There are others more perfect by far
But my face I don’t mind it
For I am behind it
It is those in front that I jar.*
to be considered a sign of good discipline and character and weight loss products proliferated ([1997] 2002, 67). Beyond the 1950s the gender bias in dieting became stronger and by 1970 seventy-two per cent of all dieters were women. Aesthetics now came first, health second in discussions of dieting ([1997] 2002, 82). Stearns notes the anomaly that over the time in which diets have become commonplace women’s weight has gone up ([1997] 2002, 127).

In the past thirty years the market for diet products has increased significantly. From scientifically developed diet and exercise programs, whether face-to-face like Weightwatchers or found in a book or on the internet, to calorie-counted products lining the supermarket shelves, the technologisation of dieting has promised further avenues for controlling bodyweight and shape. In makeover media, because changing the body through exercise and diet takes time, it is series-long transformations such as we see in *The Biggest Loser Australia* that include this focus. In comparison with surgery, exercise and diet are considered a positive choice; losing weight is marketed as an achievement and shows that focus on weight loss rather than surgery are viewed more positively by interview participants.

Celebrities as well as ordinary people are lauded for their weight loss, as long as they don’t take it too far with magazines frequently featuring before and after shots of their makeovers whether of dress, hair, body or surgery.
While the lure of advertising is attractive, an obsessive practice of exercise or dieting is required to gain or maintain the coveted skinny figure and the long-term effects on the body can be severe. The extreme approach to weight loss/body image has been taken up by number of television ‘shock-you-mentaries’ including writer and actress Dawn O’Porter’s television documentary SuperSlim Me—a name which nods to film producer Morgan Spurlock’s successful 2004 film on fast food and obesity Supersize Me—first aired on the BBC on February 7, 2007, and Louise Redknapp’s The Truth about Size Zero first shown on ITV on March 12, 2007. O’Porter (née Porter) also wrote an article on “My Quest For Size Zero” in the Daily Mail (Porter 2007). They both investigated the demands and effects of the zero diet with already slim celebrities garnering media attention by dieting to achieve size zero in a short period of time. The documentaries initially present their bias against the size zero, criticising the fashion and beauty industry that promotes it and talking about the health risks. Both documentaries follow a makeover style format, we are introduced to the protagonist, who shares her expectations for the project, we see her commit to
the process, go through the required diet and exercise routine, and then hear all about the end results. Both films also offer a sneak peak into their personal lives, including filming undertaken at their own homes. Redknapp, singer, television presenter and wife of former Manchester United footballer Jamie Redknapp, admitted that she understood the appeal of extreme thinness. Speaking direct to the camera in candid footage, parts of the narrative act like a confessional: the snack they shouldn’t have eaten, the cravings they suffer from and the difficulties the extreme dieting causes in their relationships with others. Redknapp tells us that she found the buzz of being thin and the constant feeling of emptiness became addictive, but she was glad when the experiment was over. O’Porter reported in her Daily Mail column of her experience, “what they’re doing to achieve this kind of thinness isn’t healthy. The Hollywood size zero is just a designer label for an eating disorder” (Porter 2007). These documentary style reality shows, strongly educational in expressed intent, add another dimension to the regulatory force of the makeover media. As in makeover television programs we are presented with a wide range of experts, from the diet gurus and personal trainers supporting the quest, to the medical professionals discussing the risks of extreme dieting. However, even with the best of intentions both documentaries ultimately glamorise extreme thinness, reinforcing the thin beauty ideal, showing the slimmed down protagonists slipping into size zero couture and serve as a source of information and inspiration for those who prefer a very thin aesthetic.

Interview participant Christine understood this experience. She told me that she was terribly thin when she was younger and more recently she lost a lot of weight with Jenny Craig. Her family reacted badly saying she looked too gaunt and were worried that she had cancer. She said that she found it almost addictive, “I really liked being skinny, I felt quite superior, which is sad,” judging her behaviour with a conflicted mixture of shame and pride she went on to say that she felt she was verging on anorexic in mindset. Ever down-to-earth, Anne reminds us that marketing thinness as an answer to all of our issues is problematic, “it’s like saying if you drink Coca Cola you’ll become more popular. No! If you’re fat and you’ve got no friends and think if you lose weight you’ll
become more popular again, no, you’ll just be thin and have no friends,” and yet, as true as this is, the media as a strong regulatory force tells us otherwise. Anne’s comments were very perceptive, somewhat sarcastic and often quite funny, here she shows her understanding of how many women genuinely believe that being thinner/changing their bodies will make other areas of their lives better. This belief is the crux of makeover culture’s power to govern bodies by making us believe that a simple change will have such a great effect. And while it is true that people might gain confidence from their new appearance it is not certain, and can be short term.

Out of all of my interview participants only Belinda and Michelle, both very slim, didn’t mention a focus on losing weight and Amy talked about being praised for gaining weight, but many interview participants talked about dieting as a constant: Nicole said she “tried everything” before resorting to surgery; Amanda talked about always watching her weight; Judith would like to be thinner, and used to be thinner; Susan weighs herself every day and alters her eating in line with her weight; for Karen weight is important to her self-esteem; Melissa wants to lose weight to fit back into her work clothes before returning to work after baby and Jessica said, “I’m always, forever trying to lose a few pounds, just always am, and whether it’s something I always say, you know, I don’t know what I... there’s always an aspect of me always trying to be a size ten.” The constant thinking about thinness and fitness and weight is part of makeover culture’s constant “becoming” (M. Jones 2008a). Even those who were already thin and didn’t feel they needed to diet were constantly aware of their size. Heyes comments on the positive feedback women receive for losing weight as another form of motivation, “it is a feminist commonplace that many women’s achievements go unrecognized or are invisible. Losing weight, however, provokes ready congratulations; it is tangible, and can be graphed and tracked; it has setbacks and successes that seem clear-cut” (2006, 142).

Diet is also a constant in women’s magazines with four different diet plans in my small magazine sample, two of them in the same magazine, reminding us
constantly of the need to diet especially around Christmas and the New Year.

Figure 29 Michelle Bridges’ 5 Day Diet Plan. *Australian Woman’s Weekly* Magazine, January 2012.

We have established that medical professionals, government agencies and media organisations currently consider obesity to be a global epidemic. But dieting itself is not a recent phenomenon. While controlling food intake has precedents in religious fasting to combat sin or achieve spiritual fulfillment,
Gilman suggests that dieting as we recognise it today began in post-Copernican times as both scientists and the lay population began to think of the human body as a machine (2008, 6). He proposes that, “fat, however, is truly in the eye of the beholder. Each age, culture, and tradition has defined acceptable weight for itself, and yet all have a point beyond which excess weight is unacceptable, unhealthy, ugly or corrupting. Today we call this ‘morbid obesity’, and it is always seen as an issue of health” (2008, 3). Contemporary ideas of slenderness, especially relating to young women, date from the 1890s when, “dieting or guilt about not dieting became an increasing staple of private life” (Stearns [1997] 2002, 3). Stearns suggests three sites of American interest in dieting, “shifts in fashion for women and men alike, a host of new fat-control devices, and the rise of public comment on fat” ([1997] 200211). From this point on obesity became stigmatized, fad dieting became common and businesses realised that fat could equal money from diet foods and programmes, exercise equipment and gym memberships and medicalised diet support. Manipulating the market with their advertising they underscored their campaigns with information from the medical profession, which began to take an interest in fat around the turn of the century. Yet, in keeping with a rising beauty culture, Stearns linked women’s rising shame about obesity not to concerns about their health but to fashion, to the rise of the department store in the 1930s where they were, for the first time, asked to try on clothes in a public place ([1997] 2002).

Heyes, using herself as subject, considers modern day diet practices such as the weight loss program run by Weightwatchers (founded in 1963). In a Foucauldian analysis, she presents dieting bodies not just as “docile bodies” constructed “through attention to the minutest detail,” but as bodies whose capabilities are extended by the discipline of dieting and the power relations they come under as they gain control of their appetites through a series of “enabling acts of self-transformation” (2006, 128). Through these acts of self care (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, 416) women watch themselves into being as disciplined subjects. They circulate within a dietary Panopticon known for, “requiring that one evaluate the “Points” value of everything consumed. Members
must write down in a food journal everything they eat, along with its Points value, and are also expected to check off six glasses of water, two servings of milk products, and five serves of fruit and vegetables per day” (Heyes 2006, 134).

Heyes explains that she speaks from the contradictory position of both dieter and diet resister. Like Saguy, who contends that fat is still a feminist issue (2012), she argues that such research is important because, “until we recognize the power of this discourse, especially as cultivated by commercial weight-loss programs, I argue, feminists will be ill equipped to understand the perennial appeal of a self-disciplining practice that almost always fails its ostensible goals” (Heyes 2006, 126). She suggests that, “intent on characterizing dieting as an oppressive disciplinary regime, feminists may have elided the details of the capabilities it can develop” (2006, 137). She shares this experience with Longhurst who also talks about the paradox of being a feminist scholar working in the area of fat studies while losing weight (2012). She talks about the feeling of being judged and also the sense of guilt from betraying her theoretical beliefs. This is like interview participant Emma who’s comment “I know I shouldn’t” in relation to her desire to be thin like the celebrities she reads about demonstrates her awareness of feminist arguments against fat hatred.

While most interview participants were conscious of or self-conscious about their weight and admitted that they would like to be thinner/slimmer Amanda was the only one who admitted that she really aspired to extreme thinness and that she considered her eating habits to be problematic. She explained her experience to me,

**Amanda’s Story [Early thirties, British born, living in Melbourne.]**

“I remember going holy crap, that’s obscene so I went to Weight Watchers for a year.”

Amanda is a busy mum with a small child whose concern with her weight goes back to her early twenties, “my body has been a disaster, that’s probably the
best way to describe it, when I was in my teens, when I was about fourteen, fifteen, I played hockey for the county in Cumbria, and I was extremely fit [...] I had muscles to die for and would go out wearing hot pants, the works [...] very physically strong and slim, and eating things like mars bar cake to keep my energy up and then at the ripe old age of nineteen or twenty I got a back injury that stopped it... and really hadn’t worked out the correlation between eating and sports and burning energy so I carried on eating and basically exploded into this huge thing, well not that huge but quite big by my stature... I went through quite a difficult period of eating, by no means kind of bulimic or anorexic but just not very comfortable with my body and how it looked and to be honest that probably carried on until I was in my thirties. When I was thirty-two/thirty-three my weight actually went up to seventy-six kilos, I remember going holy crap, that’s obscene so I went to Weight Watchers for a year and [...] my weight went down to about sixty kilos, sixty-one kilos and I felt ace, exercised, ate really healthily, got rid of all the demons and felt really good about myself, not too skinny, not too fat and managed to carry on at that weight until we tried to conceive and we couldn’t conceive naturally so started IVF so all the drugs were just a nightmare so I started gaining weight, started to get quite unattractive... eventually did get pregnant and I just let my weight go completely and didn’t really care about it so when I gave birth I was seventy-four kilos, not too bad but I wanted to get back down to sixty-eight... went to see my parents for Christmas and came back from Europe not feeling very well and when I was in Europe I had taken a few pictures of myself and thought it was actually quite clear that I’m gaining lots of weight, came back and I weighed myself and I weighed eighty-four kilos, went to the doctor and my thyroids were severely underactive, body was shutting down basically and I had gallstones, so I went on medication for the thyroid and have been on the fat-free diet for the gallbladder since end of January, and now I’ve lost about ten kilos since then and now I’m going like hallelujah, now I finally feel like I’m regaining a bit of control back into my life and that’s really my body history, so I’ve kind of fluctuated... the only time I’ve ever actually really loved my body was when I was mid-thirties, after Weight Watchers.
My mum had a lot of issues around food and there’s a long history there... that’s just actually where it comes from for me.”

Amanda specifies, “I did Weight Watchers, and that was probably the biggest thing that I’ve ever done, but I’ve also gone through bouts of exercising quite seriously as well and that has also helped, I had a personal trainer as well to help get rid of the wobbly bits... I’ve never actually stepped over into plastic surgery, I think because I was always like, the other side of 30 or 35, whereas now I’m on the other side I’m actually thinking maybe a bit of surgical help may not be such a bad thing [...] but yeah Weight Watchers, that stint of Weight Watchers was the biggest thing I’ve ever done.”

Amanda’s sudden weight gain in her late teens left her feeling out of control, and later her sudden realisation “holy crap, that’s obscene” of her weight gain in her thirties led her to go to Weightwatchers to do something about it. This kind of “fat talk,” critical discussion of weight and eating habits, is common amongst women regardless of their weight. A term originally found in the work of Nichter and Vuckovic (Nichter and Vuckovic 1994), “fat talk” or self-degrading is considered a normal practice amongst adolescents and college age young women (Britton, et al. 2006). Evidence suggests that it is even common amongst young female athletes (Britton, et al. 2006, 247). Reasons offered for engaging in fat talk include to fit in with the norm, to appear modest and for impression management (Britton, et al. 2006, 248). Fat talkers expect, and find, that the person they talk with, most frequently responds in kind. In line with my interview participants’ claims that they personally were not negatively affected by beauty images in the media, the college students interviewed saw themselves as relatively invulnerable to this common practice (Britton, et al. 2006, 252). Some women engage in fat talk with a positive intention, in order to make other women feel better about themselves (Mills and Fuller-Tyszkiwicz 2018). Women—like Amanda in my study—who demonstrate high levels of body dissatisfaction, are more likely to engage in fat talk, and the more they engage in fat talk the more likely they are to suffer poor body satisfaction, yet they believe
that it actually makes them feel better about themselves (Salk and Engeln-Maddox 2011, 18).

For Amanda, getting back down to a weight that she considered “not skinny, not fat” was the first time she felt back in control, not only of her body, but of her life. This assessment of herself as just average, in between skinny and fat is interesting. Very often the average body is measured in terms of its body mass index, a clumsy and inaccurate measure used to equate thinness with health. It assumes that anyone within the healthy range for BMI is healthy, and pathologises those who are outside it whether healthy or not. It doesn’t take into account an individual’s build, body fat percentage or activity level, all of which contribute to the discussion.

Amanda blames certain events in her life for her weight gain—her sporting injury, IVF treatment and thyroid issues—she did admit elsewhere in the interview that at times her eating bordered on disordered, but only really talked about the food she ate in relation to the fact that as a sporty teenager she could get away with eating whatever she wanted. Her emphasis on weight and appearance over health is clear. Even now, when she has been put on a fat free diet in order to manage a health problem, the main benefit she can see is the ten kilograms that she has lost. She equates thinness with control. At thirty-five She also considers herself to be moving towards the age where she might consider cosmetic surgery to combat ageing which ties in with other younger participants’ statements that cosmetic surgery wasn’t something that they would consider now, but was something that they wouldn’t rule out for the future.

Emma also talked about weight and dieting and the effect of lifestyle changes on her body. Her concern also went back to her school days, she said, “I remember, when I was a kid in high school never wanting to walk around with a bag of chips because I thought people would think I was fat, you know, regardless of what I looked like, I thought the chips alone made me look fat.” Emma told me about her desire to change her body over the years, “before I got married, I joined a gym, terribly exciting [sarcasm], it was a women’s only gym, but I wouldn’t really call it like a makeover process, I mean, right now I’m trying to lose weight,
as I’ve said, because I’ve got to start my new job, and so I’ve got all these clothes
in that closet that no longer fit me, and so I have to, because I don’t have tons of
money or anything.” I found it interesting that while I included the weight loss
show *The Biggest Loser Australia* as one of my media texts Emma said of her
experience “I wouldn’t really call it a makeover process”, suggesting that to her
weight loss alone didn’t make a makeover. For my interview participants the
concept of makeover frequently related to new clothes or cosmetic surgery. It is
as though weight loss alone is just part of everyday life, it does not in and of itself
constitute a change but works as part of a package of changes in the creation of
‘new’ you.

Similarly for Susan weight control was an on-going consideration which
she contrasted to the new hairdo and clothes that she considered part of her style
makeover. Although Susan indicated that she worried less about her body as she
got older, she likes to keep fit and admitted to being concerned about her weight.
She talked specifically about weighing herself to control her eating and her body,
she uses daily weighing as a tool, “I can modify what I eat to modify my weight,
and I would like to lose a few more kilos but I know that I’m going to have to eat
less and I’m going to have to exercise more, and probably using these jolly thick
shakes could be helpful because I’ve never done that and that could be a helpful
thing,” she said, “but I find by weighing myself and breaking rules anyway but by
having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much
yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know, you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a
week.” The conflict between her claim to worry less about her body now she is
older, and weighing herself on a daily basis to control her weight is very clear.
Similar to Emma’s denial that her weight loss is a makeover process Susan’s
considers regular weighing more to do with the day-to-day management of her
life, than with the image she chooses to project. While she worries less about
what other people think of her choices, she is still concerned with the image she
presents as an artist.

We can see that weight is a constant theme for the majority of my
interview participants. A key regulator of women’s bodies, since the need to
constantly think about weight takes away from other parts of life. However participants were also concerned with the presentation of their bodies in other ways. Susan also told me about the image makeover she did on herself after her mother died a few years ago.

**Susan’s Story Part II [Recently turned sixty, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]**

“We can make a contribution, even by looking nice when we walk down the street.”

Susan had recently turned 60 and she talked about the various significant changes she had made to both her lifestyle and her appearance. As a child she was the smallest in her class and didn’t reach puberty until late. She was very unhappy with her body and wanted to be like her friends. As discussed earlier, when she was twenty-one she had cosmetic surgery to change the nose that she said “would have looked good on a man.”

Here she talks more about her journey, “I remember when I was younger and I knew I looked fantastic, I was vain and I heard someone make a comment ‘oh look at her’ and I thought oh, I think maybe I’ve got the wrong attitude. But I was swinging between being too confident and being unconfident, finding this comfortable place and knowing that you look good, knowing that you can meet anybody and be proud of who you are which is different from thinking oh I’m not going to talk to that person they are too important. But we can make a contribution, even by looking nice when we walk down the street.”

Her mother had died four years earlier and she said, “when my mother died I was grief stricken like most people are and I thought I’m going to change the way I look a bit. And also I wanted to present myself better as a visual artist because you have an image no matter where you go or what you do, and I started exhibiting in a professional gallery and I thought right, what am I going to do, so I decided to grow my hair longer and have it bleached, you know, streaks of colour, and I find that’s
an image I am very comfortable with now. People say oh that’s Susan, you know
that that’s her because no one else has got hair like her, my hair is now quite a mop
of curls and blond streaks in it and I [...] feel as though I’ve got a different identity,
it makes me feel better. I was surprised because it gave me much more confidence
and when it sometimes got a bit out of order I didn’t mind, because it sort of echoed
the kind of rebellious nature that I had, although I seek to conform all the time. [...] 
I don’t fit in a particular mould and that is the kind of person I feel I am on the
inside.”

Susan showed me her passport picture, the short dark hair she had before her
makeover into Susan the Artist. She was full of contradictions, rebellious yet
seeking to conform. Growing up in the 1960s she was strongly influenced by the
feminist movement, and yet still carried the expectation that a woman’s
behaviour and presentation as feminine is important to her sense of self. She is
proud of the changes she made and feels that they have increased her
authenticity.

Exercise is another popular route to body makeover and from my
interviews I found that participants’ motivation for exercise differs. Two interview
participants in particular, claimed that they exercise because they enjoy exercise,
Jennifer is a runner, and Michelle loves the more social setting of the gym. Both
are extremely active, exercising five or more times per week, and both claimed to
be naturally slim; blessed with a slim body and genetically programmed to be
that way, as evidence of this Michelle says her sisters are the same and Jennifer
says she’s like her mum. Michelle and I even met for her interview in the coffee
shop at her gym where she was about to attend an exercise class. By comparison,
Karen told me that she sees the gym as a necessary evil. She says that she
exercises for health reasons and because she feels physically uncomfortable when
she gains weight and emphasises the reduced physical discomfort over the
aesthetic improvements gained by exercise. She said,

I loathe exercise, I do have to say that, I don’t enjoy it at all, but I like what
it does for me, I like feeling strong [...] I’ve been going to the gym for the
last year. And I joined it because I was becoming so unhealthy and I’ve lost weight and I’m happy about that but that wasn’t what it was all about, it was because my back was killing me [...] but yeah, I’ve been pleased with the side effect of losing weight and toning up with that definitely.

Like Karen, Belinda likes the effect on her body, although she doesn’t have time to go to the gym so much now. She said,

Belinda: Yeah, I used to go to the gym when I was single and a bit younger. I used to be a bit more focused on what my body did look like and I guess, I used to go to the gym regularly every second day to every day...
Me: So was there any particular motivation behind that?
Belinda: Yes, to improve my body shape and I guess ‘cos I had more time as well I was interested in improving... what I looked like basically.

Amy talked about her experience of exercise as a positive thing but admitted that it’s not entirely about pleasure for her. “Oh yeah, like sure, every time I’ve done exercise, like I think even though I enjoy being athletic, there’s always, an undercurrent of trying to change something about myself, or, you know, if I’m stressed or something I exercise more so it’s fully something I do to kind of manage my life, when I’m not in control.” Like a good neoliberal/makeover citizen, she uses exercise as a way to regulate her own life. Like Julie’s earlier comment about the state of her falling apart slippers as representing her lack of control, Amy, who talks also about being extremely thin as a teenager, recognises that controlling her body is linked to the control she feels in other areas of her life. She suggests that successful control of the body can be seen as a measure of success, and that the body is an area of life that she finds easy to control.

After the Makeover: Responding to Makeover

After the completion of the media makeover there is a ‘reveal’. The participant is presented as a success, exceptional, in glamorous evening wear. She is no longer the ordinary person the viewer relates to, but the model to aspire to. However I discovered that the real life experience is different. I spoke to interview participants about their experience post makeover and their responses
to other people's makeovers hoping to understand how they experienced the makeover reveal and what life was like post makeover.

In *The Biggest Loser*, the winner is the one who has lost the greatest percentage of his or her starting bodyweight. In *The Swan*, the winner is the one judged to have had the greatest transformation. In *Ten Years Younger in Ten Days* the participant ‘wins’ if the public guesses their age ten years younger than they guessed it at the beginning of the show. *The Biggest Loser Australia 2012* participant Margie lost forty-six per cent of her starting weight to claim the title and swan Rachel was chosen from a parade of plunging necklines to be crowned the series winner.

![Figure 30 The Swans Transformed. Available from: http://jezebel.com/5985698/celebrity-swan-is-the-most-depressing-television-program-ever-conceived (accessed December 5, 2016).](image)

The *The Swan* reveal is made more dramatic because participants do not have access to mirrors during their transformations.

While the reveal is the pivotal and final moment of the makeover show, that is not to say that the labour of the makeover is trivialised. The more visible and dramatic the change, the more emphasis on the labour required to ‘perform’ the makeover—both to carry out the action and to perform the new body—the greater the difference between the before and after bodies, the greater the credit given for the transformation. While the expert receives accolades, and the eternal
gratitude of the participant, makeover culture emphasises the participants’ labour, confirming their active involvement in the process.

In *The Swan*, host Amanda Byram tells participant Kelly, “you know, you have the experts to thank, but you also have yourself to thank,” (Season One, Episode Six first aired May 10, 2004). Throughout the series it is reaffirmed that the swans have worked hard to achieve their transformation; and no doubt they have: strict diets and gym routines on top of recovery from gruelling surgery. Such active labour of transformation is a key difference between beauty culture and makeover culture. Active participation in the process, and the hard work shown, excuses the vanity and shallowness of the show’s focus on beauty and glamour.

Outside of the media limelight the real-life reveal is somewhat less dramatic. Interview participants had varied experiences of revealing themselves, some positive, but others ambivalent or even negative, which suggests that attitudes to change are inconsistent and not fixed. There is not always a reveal at all because we are not separated from the every day while going through the
practices of makeover. With long-term processes like weight loss the change can be so gradual that those closest to us barely see it. Revealing the truth often elicits confused feelings of pride or shame. While Nicole is proud of her weight loss and pleased with her new body, and she found people reacted “overwhelmingly positively,” she had reservations about telling people the whole story. She said, “people have been incredibly positive about it, and it wasn’t until about a year after I’d had the surgery that I was confident telling people how I had lost the weight... and there are people who have been taken a bit aback, and there are people who’ve just been, well if that’s what has worked for you then that’s fantastic.” Whereas on the makeover show the shame is supposedly wiped away in the final reveal, in real life it can still linger.

Weight loss was mentioned most frequently and most openly and, on the whole, interview participants found that people responded very positively unless they lost too much. Patricia found that while people didn’t notice, or didn’t mention, her nose, they commented positively on her weight loss. She said, “when I lost weight they [reacted] in a positive way, and told me that I looked better and so on. [...] I suppose other people didn’t really notice my nose, people just saw me black and blue while I was recovering from it.” Jessica’s family were very positive about losing weight and looking thin. They reacted, “very positively, especially my family, I always... the best way, one of the best ways to please the O’Neils is to be thin, look good, because they are an incredibly vain bunch.” Amanda received mixed feedback when she lost weight, including a few rude comments reminiscent of the negative reactions to super thin celebrities like Victoria Beckham, “quite amazingly actually I found that suddenly I went from being quite a comfy type of person, to suddenly getting a bit more attention [...] suddenly it was just oh Amanda’s putting it out there a bit more, it wasn’t that I changed how I dressed. I had quite a lot of friends who were quite jealous, quite envious, especially girls, not from boys, but from girls, it was a like a certain amount of bitching went on behind my back.” This kind of jealousy is not unusual. Amy, on the other hand, was criticised for being overly thin, and then praised for gaining weight, “I used to be really thin when I was like maybe
fourteen to twenty-two, I was vegan, I looked ridiculously thin, and [...] then I sort of gained more weight and was not a good deal bigger, [...] I was praised for looking better.” Weight loss, or gain where required to meet body ideals, as a form of labour, is generally considered deserving of praise.

As in Chapter Six interview participants were more confident talking about makeovers in the media than about themselves. Karen talked about the narrowness of the outcome in makeover media, “I think they put every woman in high heels, any woman that has a bit of a bust gets a low-cut top, it’s all of those kinds of things, it’s quite, it’s very formulaic. I think that most of the women look fantastic after they’ve done their little makeovers, but it’s makeover within a limited palette.” She was also negative about the health risks, “that’s why I tend to take it with a grain of salt yeah they look fantastic in those high heels but who could actually wear them, and well, lots of women do wear them and lots of women have serious foot and back problems and I have issues with that.” She also commented about teeth, “what I took away from Ten Years Younger get your teeth done, teeth make a big difference to everybody, men and women, so, look after your teeth, it’s a basic thing, so the ones that had revolting teeth, they looked fantastic, after they’d had their teeth done, and teeth are another thing, it’s hard to define, what’s medical and what’s cosmetic.” Her thoughts are two-fold here, firstly that something like teeth could be classed as medical as it would improve health, and also that better teeth actually have a greater impact than extreme cosmetic operations. She questions the value of cosmetic surgery when less invasive solutions can be highly effective. She sees surgery with no medical benefit as both unnecessary and going too far, a social judgment, which was not uncommon among my interview participants.

Gok Wan’s program, How To Look Good Naked aroused a more positive response in many interview participants. They were pleased by the message that a woman can love her body and be beautiful without resorting to drastic measures. It was a favourite for Susan who said, “and these girls are taken and they’ve shown them how to buy nice clothes that make them look better and they are shown themselves in the mirror and their hair’s done and they show them how to
sit... and they do look beautiful.” However she showed concern that this might be promoting an attitude that it’s okay to be fat and therefore unhealthy, suggesting that she has internalised the body weight standards of makeover culture and the health messages that are disseminated around them.

My interview participants see themselves as savvy readers of reality television and makeover culture, and not cultural dupes. At the same time they engage with makeover culture and cosmetic surgery in ways that indicate its normalisation to a great degree. Melissa was positive about the overall outcomes, describing them as an emotional as well as physical success, “so I think when your makeover gives you a feeling of self-respect, that you fit in, there’s, I think that that’s very beneficial... they’re the shows I like, they’re the people I like to see.” Her sister had had a breast reduction, and she found that, “it made her feel a lot more confident within herself, she has such a small frame, she had big, really massive boobs, and she was five foot, she actually went back three times to get it done, getting smaller and smaller.” Belinda and Jessica both had friends who had had breast augmentations and found, that after years of being very self conscious, and being called names like surfboard, it had resulted in them being significantly more confident, Jessica even said, “and it was actually, I suppose that changed my mind a bit then about cosmetic surgery, because up until then all you know about it, is people like Pamela Anderson [...] she just felt so much better in her self because she had a body that she wanted for so long, and consequently from there she was doing lots of other things...”. This acceptance of cosmetic surgery stems from its increasing normalisation in the minds of many of my interview participants.

Nicole could see that there would be benefits for the makeover recipient, but she had her doubts about the results.

There were times [...] where I thought they looked better beforehand to be honest. They looked natural and gorgeous and they were just made to look plastic... and tizzy and tacky. I think the genuine experience of it... [...] is that women, or men for that matter, at the end of it do feel great and that shows itself in how they hold themselves and their facial expressions and they’re smiling and ... I think that that influences how they look and how they are presented. I’m sure there’s lots of... for your before shot can you

* (Re)dressing Cinderella  *
not smile so much and can you squint so that we can see your crow’s feet and in the after shot it’s you look great smile like you’re a film star... I’m sure there’s plenty of that but my sense is that in terms of the experience for that person it’s a wonderful transformation, they feel good, whether it’s been a horrendous extreme, you know, we’ve made you look tizzy and horrendous and like a whole new person... but they feel good.

Calling them “tizzy and tacky” and “tizzy and horrendous” clearly challenges the authenticity of the makeover participant post makeover and the value of the makeover. She explains that she is sceptical about both the actual results—suggesting they might be manipulated—and the benefit to the participant. She does however state that at the end of the day it is what the participant feels about it that matters, not what she thinks. Interestingly Anne, despite her negativity towards surgery, and her earlier claims that makeover media didn’t influence her, was somewhat a fan of makeover television, but not, however, a fan of cosmetic surgery.

Actually, some of them I really like, I was thinking about this... that one with Sonia Kruger\(^48\), who I think is a stunning looking woman, but I think she’s had some work done now, which becomes a problem, disappointing, that Ten Years Younger, I was watching the other night and I saw the reveal and I thought, it looks like he’s had his eyes done... and Guess what, he had had his eyes done! Which I don’t think makes you look ten years younger, it just makes you look like you’ve had your eyes done.

She talked about how shocked she was when she realised that an old school friend had undergone cosmetic surgery. Her reaction was extreme, while she was able to rationalise it in her mind because the friend was in the public eye, she felt so repulsed by the idea that she could no longer be friends with her.

A girl I went to school with, we were best friends at high school, used to trade magazines... and... she has married someone fairly high profile who’s often in the media and we’ve kind of lost touch... and recently something came up, for some reason she was on my mind and I was wondering how she was going and I actually Googled her, to see if any photos came up, and I thought she has had some work, I mean I know her, we’ve known each other since we were twelve, but it occurred to me that she’s had some kind of facial surgery... I was really disappointed.

\(^{48}\) The Australian version of Ten Years Younger in Ten Days
Strong reactions like this were common amongst my older interview participants, Judith (early fifties), who refused to watch makeover television, didn’t express her resistance to cosmetic surgery as strongly as Anne (early fifties) but her overall negative attitude to it was evident too. She talked about a friend,

Yes, I have a friend who has had at least two nose jobs that I know of, God knows what else she might have had, but yeah I know that she’s had two nose jobs... the first one was like, oh, but it looked all right so it was ok whatever, but her nose did change quite a lot... but then she had another nose job at it was ugly, kind of like more like Michael Jackson, I was thinking like you’ve now made a bugger job of your face.

This level of judgement suggests that they feel cosmetic intervention shameful. And this potential for shame influenced some interview participants’ attitudes towards talking about cosmetic surgery. Melissa (early forties) said she didn’t think people would want to talk about it, “I don’t think people will brag about it, I mean if you’ve got your hair coloured and you’ve got your hair and people go, oh your hair looks great, people aren’t going to... oh your eyebrows look good, or oh, you’ve got rid of that line on your face [...] I think cosmetic surgery... I don’t know that anyone would ever talk about it, something like a tummy tuck or something.” Patricia (mid fifties) talked about not mentioning someone’s rhinoplasty and no-one mentioning hers and wondered if that was due to the stigma attached, “and I remember never mentioning it to her because it felt really rude to say wow, your nose looks better and maybe people did notice mine and didn’t like to say so, or maybe thought that I would prefer they seem not to notice” which shows that normalisation is not complete. Younger participants seemed more surprised than repulsed at the idea that their friends might choose surgery.

Susan, after her own experience, was positive about the benefits of cosmetic surgery. She talked about her daughter’s rhinoplasty, which she encouraged and paid for, wanting her daughter to have a very different post surgery experience to the one she had herself.

My daughter, when she was about seventeen she had some really major health problems, like life changing health problems and she wanted... and I said how would you like to have a nose job done because she was
inheriting the nose that I had and I knew how I felt about it so I said how would you like to have a nose job done, she must have been about eighteen I suppose, maybe nineteen, and so we found a plastic surgeon and we arranged for her to have plastic surgery and I visited her in hospital and I gave her a teddy bear with a bandage across its nose, and when everything was stabilised, ‘cos your nose swells up you know, you get black eyes, and then she was very happy and she became much more confident, and I bought some really nice clothes for her and it was interesting to see the transformation.

She laughs, “Well it was a bit of a joke actually because people told us how much we looked alike and there was no attempt to have the same nose made, so we still laugh about it... and now she has got two little girls and I think should I be starting to save up.”

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the practice of makeover through the eyes of my interview participants comparing their experience with that of participants in makeover media. It considered the three stages of makeover, the before, the during and the after. Three main points emerged.

Firstly that real-life makeover has very little in common with media makeovers: the before part of the process is far more private and personal; the during is much more messy and open ended, often taking place over months or even years compared with the fixed period of time allowed in makeover media; and the after rarely includes the grand reveal of makeover television because life does not stop during the makeover process, and there is rarely a single point of completion. As Jones (2008a) suggests makeover is, an ongoing process with no end, a process of becoming rather than being. My interview participants find themselves in this space of constantly working on their bodies.

Secondly as part of my investigation into technology as a key tenet of makeover culture the chapter focussed on the technologies of makeover that my interview participants experienced or saw in makeover media. I argue that advances in technology are critical to the shift from disciplining the body through the external application of clothing, to the body itself as a cloth to be
manipulated by the diet expert or surgeon to suit the prevailing fashion and that their normalisation contributes to the regulatory framework of makeover culture. The practices of makeover culture mediate between body and technology through visualisation technologies (imaging equipment, computers, CCTV); media technologies (television, magazines, Photoshop/image manipulation software, Internet); medical and surgical equipment (implants, anaesthetics, laser machines, pain relief, surgical tools, Botox, machinery, beds; diet (diet foods and pills, food preparation equipment, special diets); exercise (gym equipment, shoes); fashion (body control garments, underwear, high-tech fabrics, clothing design) and beauty products (makeup, rejuvenating products, hair dye) and that makeover culture is not only produced by these technologies, for example in the performance of the act of makeover, most obviously the performance of surgery but it also produces new technologies. In the case of cosmetic surgery we see full integration of the body and technology, as the technology becomes body with permanent implants left below the skin and the imprint of technology remaining on the body. In the case of dieting technologies permanent traces can also be seen on the body as the post diet body never returns to what it used to be before weight loss but is left with excess skin, wrinkling and stretchmarks.

Thirdly that my interview participants held a range of contradictory attitudes to makeover, particularly to cosmetic surgery. Surgery is considered to be largely normalised within our society, yet a number of participants were still strongly against it, some thought that it was ok for other people, but not for them and others had found their own experiences of surgery to be a source of on-going shame. I also found clear indicators that not all makeovers are perceived to be equal. Exercise and diet were considered worthy of praise such as in the case of Jessica, praised by her family for losing weight, or the contestants on the Biggest Loser who were celebrated for their success. Although attitudes were becoming more accepting of cosmetic surgery it was not praised in the same way, as experienced by Susan whose parents refused to even acknowledge her surgery and by Nicole who had been reluctant to disclose the details of her surgery to her friends.
The final chapter of this thesis will discuss the importance of femininity within makeover culture.
Chapter 8

“Curves. Curves, for definite”: Interview Participants Discuss Contemporary Femininity.

“I think the feminine body type is probably the classic one, the hourglass figure, or the pear shaped with the small waist and the bigger hips and all those things that I’m the opposite of.” Interview participant Karen discussing femininity

Femininity has been a much discussed and much-contested category in historical and philosophical thinking. The first part of this chapter discusses the emphasis on femininity in makeover media and media more broadly, and looks at the ways in which femininity is negotiated and performed on screen and off in makeover culture. I argue that femininity is produced and reproduced through female body makeovers, and contributes to the regulation of women’s bodies in the broader environment.

As identified in the first part of this thesis contemporary femininity is the third key tenet that distinguishes makeover culture from earlier beauty cultures. The second part of this chapter deals with changing modalities of femininity and feminine ideals from the traditional understandings of beauty culture to the contemporary iterations of makeover culture. To elaborate on this shift, which occurred alongside the development of makeover culture, I look at the changing definition of femininity over the last thirty years and explore the new corporeal femininity of the twenty-first century. Asking interview participants, ranging
from their early twenties to sixty-five years old, to define what makes a person feminine produced an intriguing insight. Alongside a number of shifts introduced throughout my writing: such as from first to third wave feminism; from domesticity to makeover culture and from pre-industrial to neoliberal societies, in line with the claims of other scholars (Gill and Scharff 2011) in this area I identified evidence of a clear generational shift in the definition of femininity. Where an elegant and feminine presentation was important in beauty culture, makeover culture celebrates the malleability of the body itself (Bartky 1990, Gill 2007, Gill and Scharff 2011), with skin as clothing and breasts as accessories. I was fascinated by the shift, in just one generation of women from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, from a definition of this feminine situation as a performance requiring certain behaviours and costumes, to the definition of femininity as produced directly through the body and the conflation of femininity with sexiness, sexuality or hotness.

The final part of this chapter seeks to better understand how femininity acts as a regulatory force. If neoliberal female subjectivity is regulated through compulsory heteronormativity and femininity (Butler [1990] 2006, Gill 2007), and being successfully female in neoliberal/post-neoliberal times requires the display and performance of outward signs of femininity (against second wave feminist arguments that feminine looks/behaviour shouldn’t be considered a measure of a woman’s success), I asked my interview participants whether they wanted to be feminine and whether they felt it was expected of women today. I wanted to better understand how they negotiate their own femininity in a time when the cacophony of media sources contributes to “re-traditionalizing gender” (Kolehmainen 2012, 180). I conclude that while femininity is a regulatory force, it is not experienced as such by my interview participants because they believe that they are free to choose or dismiss it as part of their body ideal. Which reminds us again that the power of makeover media is that it regulates while encouraging us to believe that our choices to comply are freely made.

49 Deliberately not specifying ‘body’ or ‘woman/lady/female’.
Negotiating and Performing the Contemporary Feminine in the Media

As we observe the subject/object of makeover television, we see that femininity has become, an ideal, “bourgeois, yet coded universal, normal and attainable for all” (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008, 228). Through the making over of ordinary people, makeover media provides an always-on manual of how to do femininity, helping to produce contemporary femininity and presenting normative performances of femininity at every turn. With changing modes of femininity, women, particularly those young women “constituted as the ideal subjects of neoliberalism” (Gill and Scharff 2011), negotiate femininities influenced by media culture and incorporate them as a critical part of their identity as individuals. As we saw in Chapter Six, though not the sole regulatory force at play, media forms a basis for the structures regulating women’s bodies: it is where we look for information and it encourages conformity by presenting us with ideals centred on the importance of achieving a conventional gender/femininity in whatever way possible (Weber 2009, 16). As Palmer suggests, “subjection to a model of normative femininity is presented as the acme of empowerment, a perfect expression of the choice maxim that defines lifestyle television” (2008, 8). Makeover media tells us to watch ourselves to make sure we measure up. I argue that makeover media does not just spread images of femininity, but acts to construct contemporary femininity, through the promotion of such images, as the top selling product of makeover culture.

Throughout the makeover show The Swan, femininity is a frequently voiced ideal. Participants often include it as a preference in their application videos and it carries through in the experts’ pre and post transformation narratives. In series 1, episode 6 of The Swan, first aired May 10, 2004, Sarina is introduced to the experts as a self-described “ultimate plain Jane.” From the initial critique and surgical consultation to the final reveal, the search for her inner femininity is on. Dr. Dubrow explains how he will perform liposuction on her calves and ankles to “make her legs really feminine,” and he rejoices at the reveal that, “the surgery has really brought out her feminine side.” Such overt
expressions of femininity, and the ability to create femininity in a person lacking it, form part of this regulatory force. Similarly, shows such as *Australian Princess*, or *Ladette to Lady*, make femininity the explicit focus of series-long transformations.

Paradoxically television makeover participants are presented unproblematically as negotiating or navigating their own feminine identities while in fact these identities are crafted for them by the experts and what is required of them is an appropriate performance of this identity. Such programs foster the perception that there is such thing as an authentic femininity and that a woman can take control and create it, she can buy/buy back her femininity, and thus it follows that the female body is regulated through its femininity because femininity is a commodity that can be bought.

A performance of femininity, as seen in performances of burlesque by celebrities like Dita Von Teese, who interview participant Emma suggested as feminine, and Lady Gaga, can also be seen in the female presenters and experts of makeover media. With the exception of gay male presenters, for example on *How To Look Good Naked*, the male experts are presented in opposition to this parade of femininity. And as Kolehmainen points out, “the gay expert is managing femininity as an area of expertise, as something that can be perfectly learned, taught and controlled” (Kolehmainen 2012, 193); as something that must be able to be learned by a woman, because it has been learned by a man.

Women emerge from their media makeovers hyper-gendered (Weber 2009, 4), with clear physical markers of contemporary femininity: breasts enhanced by surgery, waists narrowed, hair extensions and makeup, accessorised, glamorous and sexy. Atwood Gailey explains, “a particularly hyper-feminine version of this fetishized body ideal (in this case, huge breasts, tiny waists, and baby-like facial features) is also clearly on display on ‘misogynist TV’” (2007, 109). So that we are left in no doubt of what constitutes appropriate femininity in media makeovers women are almost universally put into skirts or dresses and
high-heeled shoes and long hair are encouraged. Even for the grand finale of The Biggest Loser Australia 2012, first aired May 8, 2012, a show where the emphasis is nominally focussed on weight loss and health, not outward presentation, the contestants are dressed up in glamorous outfits, made up, with their hair done. While on How to Look Good Naked we see truer renditions of womanhood than are generally seen in the media—ones that do not necessarily meet the media ideal for thinness in particular—and a push towards instilling body positivity in participants, participants are still feminised, and the idealised look is still
conventional (Kolehmainen 2012, 190). Although the bodies are different to the
thin media ideal, the markers of femininity are similar, curves are emphasised
with waists cinched and breasts uplifted, hair and makeup done and clothing
chosen to flatter the curvy body.

How has Femininity Changed?

As discussed in Chapter Two, it has been widely theorised that femininity
is not, as it was in the time of beauty culture, demure, elegant behaviour and
dress (Thesander 1997), but rather it is, in the time of makeover culture,
corporeal and sexy and focused on the body itself (Gill and Scharff 2011). My
interview data supported this theory. The older interview participants were, the
more tightly they associated femininity with behaviour or presentation. Growing
up prior to makeover culture participants over forty largely defined femininity as
how a woman carried herself, how she behaved and how she adorned herself;
rejecting the suggestion that femininity was anything to do with the body. Anne,
a participant in her fifties suggested, “the concept of cultivating a feminine body,
well I don’t know what that is for a start, and for second, you know, how would
one go about it, I just think it’s a really weird, with all due respect, a really weird
concept.” She went on to say, “I think it’s personality that makes a body feminine
I don’t think it’s a physical shape itself [...] how they use their body, and what
mannerisms they do with their body, and, you know, verbal things like the tone
that people use, that can be feminine.” Julie agreed that, “it’s not about the body,
and less about behaviour, and more about attributes.” Christine suggested,
“maybe it’s an attitude? Because I suppose when a woman comes across as very in
your face or loud or brash or whatever you don’t think about her as feminine like
someone who is quiet or gentler. I think it is to do with the way people behave
rather than the way that they look.” These suggestions from three women in their
fifties at the time of interview strongly suggest femininity as an abstract quality; a
set of behaviours or attributes, easy to recognise, but difficult to define.
Others made a distinction around hair and dress. Femininity is important to Susan, in her early sixties, who talked about getting dressed up, making an effort and wanting to look good. Although she struggled to define femininity in the abstract, she could describe what concrete actions she would take to appear more feminine using a mixture of behaviour and dress. She said, “I think it’s also the way I sit, the way I, well now I’m sitting and I’m not straight but if I was sitting in a restaurant I make sure I sit up straight, I make sure that my dress is sitting properly and I want to be feminine so, I wear jeans some places but if I want to go somewhere and I want to look nice I wear a dress, and I’ll be feminine.” She doesn’t aspire to be feminine every day, but frequently, and definitely for special occasions. For Patricia, just turned fifty, her own femininity is very much tied up in her hair, which she keeps short, but not too short. She says,

I suppose the big thing for me would be hair because you know, I had my hair rather short for a while and the reason I’m growing it is that [...] the hairdresser was getting carried away and making it way too short, and I find that when it is too short, I had the impression that I really looked like a dyke, and I mean I’ve got nothing against dykes but, it’s not what I want to look like, and it didn’t seem to make any difference how much I said to the hairdresser, just take a little bit off, still they always get carried away.

These arguments separate femininity from the body and link it with external presentation. Karen, in her forties, who has two young daughters, defined a feminine way of dressing, “I tend to think of Barbie, you know, the fairy princess sort of Barbie [...] and pink, lots of pink, lots of ruffles, and I do think of feminine in that traditional sense, someone who is very feminine as someone who is... girlie.” The commercial obsession with pink is for girls is underlined in this statement. While a couple of other interview participants suggested that ‘pretty’ clothing, such as florals, skirts and pastel colours might be considered feminine this attachment to the idea of ‘girly’ and pink femininity was less common within my interview cohort.

In contrast to the older participants, younger participants, those whose formative teenage years coincided, as mine did—I was fifteen in 1991—with the beginnings of makeover culture, identified contemporary femininity as a bodily
quality linked closely to sexuality. Curves or womanly body shape came up in nine separate interviews. Amy said, “I guess like big breasts and curves and things like that.” Emma said, “yeah, I think, mmm, you need curves, but you also need muscle tone... well maybe that’s more what I like, rather than... [...] The other thing is, maybe not, being too heavily made up, a bit more natural looking.” Belinda suggested, “probably the curvy voluptuous figure is feminine.” Jennifer was adamant. “Curves! Curves in the right places, well not necessarily in the right places, it depends, say... depending on... in general I would say curves, a sort of shape...” Melissa said, “curves, for definite,” and Karen, who had also talked about frills and fuss said, “I do, I think the feminine body type is probably the classic one, the hourglass figure, so, or the pear shaped with the small waist and the bigger hips and all those things that I’m the opposite of.” The contrast with older interview participants was so stark, the responses were so specific and so similar that I considered arguing for a single key to contemporary femininity within the group.

Echoing the resurgence of interest in Darwin’s theories around the adaptation of species and how that relates to human reproduction as mentioned in Chapter Six (Etcoff 2000, Hekman 2014), Nicole related curves not just to breast and hip, but also to hair, fertility and pregnant bodies,

I think femininity is a lot about curves, whether that’s curves in the body or the curl in your hair, you know, there’s something about curves and roundness that is feminine... probably coming back to pregnant bellies and breasts and round hips... and there’s something very feminine about the fact that we can have babies... what happens to a girl’s body when she reaches puberty, it becomes more curvy, that to me is what femininity is about.

She was not the only one to make this argument. Julie, in her fifties, was an anomaly among my older interview participants in making an overt link between femininity and a curvy body, possibly influenced by watching makeover shows with her daughter, who is in her early twenties. She explains the differing definitions of femininity between generations as,

That’s the problem because they are younger and still in the fertile time of their life and the overtly sexual time of their life, whereas when you get to...
be an old fossil like me, I guess you have to look at, and you know that your femininity is not over but you have to redefine it and you see it right through to the end. You see older women who have still got that different from the male thing really strongly expressed.

This suggestion, that certain bodies are considered beautiful because men are attracted at a primal level to women who’s bodies suggest a good reproductive capacity, with full breasts and broad hips, is a somewhat simplistic explanation of the idealisation of the curvy feminine body, but whether the desire for a curvy body is biologically or socially driven my interview participants kept coming back to curves as a marker of femininity. In line with the growing strength of conservatism this emphasis on the body in femininity reflects a recent turn towards a more material feminism (Hekman 2014), one which recognises biological differences between male and female bodies and reduces the work of poststructural feminism (see for example Butler [1990] 2006) to ‘just words’ which don’t take into account other constitutive factors (Hekman 2014, 148).

Lynne Segal has argued that “the return to Darwin” suggests that “the continuing shifts and disruptions in gender relations, gender practices and identities, alongside persistent feminist questionings, have encouraged an enthusiastic reception for new theories endorsing genetic origins for normative investments in sexual difference” (2000, 31). It has become a lively debate within academia and popular sociology (Etcoff 2000, Morris 2005).

By the contemporary, bodily, curvy definition of femininity and by dint of the theory of biological determinism, ageing cannot be feminine. Curves erased by the thickening waist of middle age, as mentioned by Josie, hormonal changes, increased facial hair and the decline of fertility should all, biologically speaking, contribute to an end of femininity, but Judith argued for an alternative femininity for older women. She suggested that because older women don’t need feminine bodies anymore for reproductive purposes they appropriate the more traditional symbols of femininity—behaviour and dress—to remain feminine. Indeed as discussed in Chapter Six we have seen a revival of interest in older women in the media with actresses such as Meryl Streep and Helen Mirren lauded for retaining their beauty, whether naturally, or surgically. The extension of beauty beyond
middle age within the broader population is a peculiarly modern occurrence (Jermyn 2016, M. Jones 2008a, Raisborough, Barnes, et al. 2014), but traditional definitions based around behaviour and presentation have meant that femininity has been available to older women in the past.

Judith said that she did feel that her body was important to her femininity when she was younger, but now she is no longer looking for a mate and to reproduce she doesn’t need a feminine body anymore.

It kind of makes sense if you think about it, because what are young women concerned with... the... what’s the word, the continuation of the species, what they are concerned with primarily is sex and procreation, their genes, [...] who am I going to mate with that is going to give my genes the best shot of continuing down the line, and as you get older that’s no longer... I mean I’m not thinking about babies, I’m not thinking about, well maybe for my children, but for me I don’t have to consider that anymore, whether consciously or subconsciously, I’ve already taken care of that...

In her body history below she talks about when she became aware that she no longer attracted the gaze of passers by, and how that baton had passed to the younger generation.

Judith’s Story [Mid fifties, Australian born, living in Melbourne.]

“As I’ve got older and you know, started to put on weight, there was a time there when I noticed that I stopped turning heads.”

Judith was not happy with her body, she never had been, “I don’t know how specific you want, but I’ve always been unhappy with my boobs... because even when I lose weight, because I was big as a teenager, when I lost the weight I lost all the conditioning in my boobs... and then I breastfed three children... I wish I had better thighs, I wish I had better tone and strength, I’m much happier with me from the neck up than from the neck down. There have been times when I have been really thin and I’ve lost a lot of weight and I’ve been very happy and been wearing a size eight and I still would never go out in a bikini or anything like that.” She pays
attention to how she looks, “fitness training and things like that, I used to work out with a personal trainer until I broke my foot and now I want to go back to him but he doesn’t have time for us anymore, lovely guy... so I’ve just started yoga and I’m doing that also, not just for the relaxation aspect but to develop some strength and flexibility and to help hopefully tone my body because I’m desperate, not quite driven, I mean you can tell how driven I am eating this [points at the cream cake she has chosen]...”

Judith talked about physical beauty from an evolutionary perspective, saying that what is now considered feminine is linked to fertility. She says that how she sees her body has changed over time. “Sure, oh god, I mean I was shocking, I was a shocking flirt, I was always checking out that I was with the right guy and maybe I should have chosen someone else. I mean [M] and I started dating when I was fifteen so we were always together but there was, there always was, I think he was sexier, maybe I should have gone with someone more like that. And I thought a lot about myself, about how do I look, about how other young girls would see me, and I tell you something, as I’ve got older and you know, started to put on weight, there was a time there when I noticed that I stopped turning heads, you know when I was younger I used to turn heads... but I just kind of knew myself back then, it was just kind of how it is, and then that stopped happening and I noticed it, and I remember walking with my daughter and I could see a guy’s head turning and I realise that he was not looking at me, he was looking at her, my turn was gone, and that was a disappointment for a while, you know, I had to rethink who I am, of course, there was no... when I really came to it, it wasn’t a real issue for me, it was just the next part of my life. I think I’ve been, most women would go through, different stages of how they perceive their sexuality and as a woman.”

Judith felt that in her twenties she would have had a different definition of femininity herself. She conflates sexuality and femininity to explain why younger women would define femininity as a bodily property. She feels that she lost that bodily femininity as she got older, and has attempted to replace it with a more feminine way of presenting herself through the way she dresses and carries
herself. Similarly Julie isn’t ready to write herself off just yet either. She says “I reckon the challenge at my age too, I mean I’m fifty-one, is to keep looking for good role models. Well, I think it’s a challenge at every age.” She argues for an age appropriate version of femininity, and looks in the media and in her day-to-day life for examples more along the lines of the traditional femininity of beauty culture, where elegance and dress is the focus: a separate feminine norm suggested by the social surveillance of her peers. So while the curvy, youthful body is significant in contemporary femininity, if you can’t achieve that body, there are other ways of appearing feminine as you age.

However, while the curvy body strongly dominated my younger interview participants’ relatively narrow definition of femininity, Gill and Scharff in their book *New Femininities*, published as I came to the end of my interviews, suggest that there is no single definition of femininity (2011). Gill talked previously about new subjects and subjectivities, such as “the midriff” (2009) as an alternative presentation for young women used frequently in advertising, suggesting that “this figure is notable for opening up a novel vocabulary for the “sexualized” representation of women in advertising, which aims to banish the emphasis on passivity and objectification in favour of a modernized version of heterosexual femininity as feisty, sassy and sexually agentic” (2008, 438) and this edited volume presents a range of such interpretations as contemporary femininities. What is key to them all though, is that, “[a] postfeminist sensibility includes the notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways that (some) women are represented; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a ‘makeover paradigm’” (2011, 4).

It was true that some of my younger interview participants, such as Jessica, considered the possibility of alternatives to a curvy femininity, “mmm, I guess it depends, I mean I would, I would have said it’s a woman, and there’s a definite shape there, so I don’t know really, I mean, there’s certainly not one look...” and Amanda said, “yeah, I think, I think oftentimes too it’s interesting when
somebody doesn’t fit the feminine kind of stereotype that I have, so it’s like, if you see somebody who’s got a lot of tattoos or something like that there’s a different style of femininity, that I also think is quite attractive.” Rebecca felt that femininity was less restrictive than in the past when there were, “just one or two images to respond to” going on to explain that, “there’s much more variety now, so it’s, you can be, it’s not just the one image that they’re kind of aspiring to so you can be... so being feminine is not one image, it’s a whole range of things, and it’s not the only thing either.” Emma, in her early thirties, acknowledged a feminine body shape but felt that there was more to it than that, “I guess you can go with the easy kind of answers, somebody who’s pretty, somebody who’s elegant, somebody who has a female figure... yeah, I think that for me it’s, if I was to aspire to a certain femininity I think in myself it would be to aspire to somebody who’s got poise.” Belinda, in her mid-thirties, talked about the feminine body but also talked about dressing in a more feminine way, “like if your hair’s down you feel a bit more feminine. I think. Well I do, I can feel, I mean with maybe high-heels and a skirt rather than jeans and jumper,” but this aspect of femininity through dress and adornment was stated less firmly by both older participants who felt femininity was more closely related to behaviour, and younger participants who saw the body at the core of femininity. Jessica identified the split as a generational divide saying, “my mum would say that it’s about, yeah, how a woman acts. [...] I guess, immediately I would say yes it’s definitely to do with shape, with your body shape and I would imagine first of all it would be, I guess a young body shape.”

Their responses suggested this multiplicity of potential femininities, challenging my hypothesis that contemporary femininity was about the curvy body, but I still felt that these alternatives should be seen, not as alternative femininities, but rather as alternative and acceptable presentations of womanhood like those discussed in Chapter Six. A number of interview participants made the distinction between femininity and other acceptable presentations more clearly, Amy argued for example, “[I] don’t think the fit body is a feminine body, curves is feminine. As long as you are thin you can get away
with it.” Here she is suggesting thinness and athleticism as appropriate alternatives to femininity. Indeed she suggests that her preferred alternative isn’t actually feminine at all. She says, “the big body, the curvy body is feminine, the perfect body isn’t feminine. [...] it’s really about fatness or not being fat, women are good when they’re thin, then they’re sexy.” Within a bodily definition of femininity she separates out femininity and sexiness. She also makes a link between large breasts and femininity, but goes on to say, “I don’t think... that a feminine body is really prized now. I actually don’t think that that is the standard now... I think that most celebrities don’t really have big breasts like the porn star type genre.” She emphasises the focus on thinness in society, that while a person is feminine if they are curvy, they don’t have to be curvy to be sexy, just thin. Too big breasts however are “porn” breasts, attention seeking breasts, and not the kind of look that she and my other interview participants are striving for.

Linking breasts and femininity is not a new thing, Young wrote in the 1970s about the experience of breastedness as part of the lived experience of being female (2005) and Yalom wrote an extensive history of the breast (Yalom 1997). Gimlin’s research with women who had undergone breast enhancement discussed the cultural significance of breasts that are “too good to be real” (Gimlin 2013, 913) and the increasing preference amongst women that their breasts should appear to have been ‘done’ rather than natural. Elliot brings up Pamela Anderson’s breasts again, talking about the connection she makes between her breasts, her femininity and her celebrity status, “as Anderson commented in an interview ‘my implants are definitely one of my biggest assets. They increase my femininity and make me more noticeable.’ Her comment is remarkably explicit in drawing a direct connection between enhanced breast size/enhanced femininity on the one hand, and heightened levels of public attention on the other” (2008, 55). I would argue that a reference to Pamela Anderson, while on topic, is now somewhat dated in this context, and that she represents an earlier brand of femininity given that her notoriously large breasts bounced across the beach on *Baywatch* between 1992 and 1997, back in the
earliest days of makeover culture. I see this as an example of the constantly evolving definition of femininity, even within the period of makeover culture.

While a multiplicity of definitions of femininity doesn’t necessarily diminish its power—in fact, the layering of multiple options increases the number of individuals touched by femininity—my interview results hinted at a dominant definition. The notion of a range of femininities (Gill and Scharff 2011) is important, as is the notion of a strongly defined singular curvy femininity which has come to dominate in the current moment, and it is the point at which these two meet that the regulatory power is the strongest with curvy femininity figuring as part of other models. Like Gill and Scharff, Wykes and Gunter suggest that, “the opening up of women’s lives has equally opened up a range of femininities each of which has its own aesthetic and a market to support that. The ideal woman was once knowable and relatively stable now she is ever-changing and elusive” (2006, 51). I argue that while the definition of femininity is changeable, what my interview participants are experiencing is one dominant femininity at a time, as opposed to multiple equivalent definitions and the current dominant definition is all about curves. However femininity is not static. In order to retain its normative power femininity must be a stable enough concept for women to aspire to in any given moment and yet gender norms must not be so visible that they become something to fight against. The regulatory power of femininity is maintained precisely because it keeps changing. One cannot fully achieve it; therefore one has to keep striving for it, a concept that is central to makeover culture (M. Jones 2008a, McGee 2005). It is fairer to define femininity as a normative imaginary, rather than a type, one that, over the longer term, maintains its grip through constantly being changeable and elusive.

Indeed, a look at the most recent media confirms that the ideal is constantly changing with today’s Pamela Andersons, people like socialite and reality television superstar Kim Kardashian, “lauded by her fans for promoting an alternative to the ideal of extreme thinness, and vilified by critics who denounce her as superficial and manipulative of her body for profit” (Sastre 2014a, 124) offering their own brand of femininity. Currently the twelfth most followed
person\textsuperscript{50} on Twitter, with over sixty million followers, and the fifth most followed person\textsuperscript{51} on Instagram, with over one hundred million followers, Kardashian performs her highly public, curvy, indeed voluptuous, but very slim body as natural and authentic.

Yet the Kardashian we see is brand first, person second, notably managed by her mother, her own sense of agency is unclear. She sells diet pills and workout videos “as if an artificial regimen is a normal part of the requisite self-maintenance process” (Sastre 2014a, 130). Kardashian also represents a racialised beauty ideal, as Sastre suggests,

Kardashian’s butt, and the public’s fixation on this body part, reflects the historic treatment of black bodies in the media. Despite the process of controlling her body that reflects a history of whiteness, the emphasis on her butt, from the lingering opening shots of her reality show to the barrage of websites that compare it to other celebrity figures, also places

\textsuperscript{50} Available from: https://twittercounter.com/pages/100 (accessed May 22, 2018).
Kardashian squarely within a history of the exoticised, ‘othered’ body. (Sastre 2014a, 131)

And this focus is also part of her claim to authentic femininity, her ‘butt’ is, she claims, ‘real’, no implants!

In terms of my interviewees, it was clear that they were grappling with a diverse range of body/beauty models and trying to decide whether they felt they were feminine or not. Karen said, “that’s a really difficult question I think... because of the difficulty I have in actually defining femininity... and working out what it means to society as a whole.” Like the difficulty they had measuring the effect of makeover culture on themselves that we saw in Chapter Six, they found it particularly difficult to define femininity in relation to themselves but somewhat easier to identify feminine women amongst their friends or in the media. This created some confusion and some questioned whether femininity was desirable at all. They did not feel restricted by the social and cultural demands of femininity, which was experienced as a positive thing. Yet they were not sure if they wanted to be considered feminine or not. The possibility of multiple modes of femininity was attractive to them, but they still frequently narrowed femininity down to one dominant option—curves—which could then be added to alternative acceptable modes of womanhood.

Despite comments like Amy’s from earlier that femininity is not required, I do believe that the media demands that (female) celebrities preserve youth and perform appropriate feminine stereotypes. Interview participants recognised that a feminine ideal pervades the pages of women’s magazines and features highly in makeover media. They could easily identify celebrities that they felt were feminine. Again finding it easier to define femininity in regard to celebrities or others’ bodies than their own. Interview participants talked about celebrities that they felt met their own definition of feminine. Karen suggested, “Kate Winslet I think is a very feminine body type. I don’t know what you call that, but once again, lots of curves... although that’s always hilarious too, when they talk about curves, curves are back, curvy women are back and it’s like, no you just actually mean breasts are back with small waists you’re not actually talking about any
other variation on that.” Christine suggested Marilyn Monroe, and also suggested, “I always think of Nicole Kidman as very feminine and I think she dresses that way probably as well [...] It is more an attitude and the way they behave... not so much brash and in your face.”

Julie suggested Angelina Jolie, “most of the femininity that’s just mass media would it be ... Angelina Jolie, the archetype, the pillow shaped lips, long hair, the buzzies [breasts], and lots of kids.” And Jolie is recognised as the gold standard for beauty in the United States with her “exaggerated, almost cartoon-like lips, eyes and cheek bones” (Elliot 2010a, 469).

Figure 35 Angelina Jolie. Available from: http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/angelina-jolies-poignant-breast-cancer-5419978 (accessed December 5, 2016).
Karen, despite earlier acknowledging a feminine body shape came back to the pink, girlie definition that she began with saying, “Gwyneth Paltrow actually comes to mind, wearing the pink Oscars dress.”

The fact that my interview participants could isolate individuals that they saw as feminine demonstrates that the definition of femininity is clear in their minds. These images show the variety of definitions of femininity offered by my
interview participants from the Barbie pink dress and presentation of Gwyneth Paltrow to the voluptuous body of Angelina Jolie.

**Contemporary Femininity as a Regulatory Force**

I asked my interview participants if they wanted to be feminine, if femininity was something that they sought out or felt was a requirement today. I wanted to understand whether they might be knowingly or unknowingly regulated by femininity. Amongst the majority there was a strong dissonance between their ability to identify a dominant mode of femininity as attractive in others, and their lack of desire to be feminine themselves. And even amongst the minority of interview participants that did aspire to some degree of femininity, none felt it was socially required to be feminine. I found that my older participants, those who defined femininity as a performance rather than a bodily thing were more likely to aspire to femininity seeing it as part of being well put together. Patricia said, “desirable... I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it, I mean, I don’t know whether it’s desirable,” yet as we saw with her hair, she personally didn’t want to be seen as unfeminine. Christine, who while she aspired to be feminine, felt she failed, said that it was “not necessarily [a desirable quality] I don’t think it matters one way or another.” Susan was able to articulate why she wants to be feminine. She said,

I think as females we have a message to give that we can soften the world that we live in, because the world is pretty harsh. There’s lots of awful things happening out there. I think by being feminine we can present maybe an image of confidence in something beyond all that. That we can maybe in our own way present beauty to a world that is lacking in beauty in many respects and I’m not saying that I am beautiful as you know but the way you present yourself can enhance where you are [...] if you go and you try and look nice you’re really making the world a better place.

Susan’s comment on enhancing the environment by enhancing the self was fascinating. As an artist she had come to see herself and her presentation as a part of her art, but also felt compelled to make herself look good for other people’s benefit. Regulated by her ideas of femininity, and her desire to present as
such to the world she made an effort with her appearance, particularly for special occasions. Judith, in her fifties, talked at length about her desire to appear feminine and the work required do so. Like other interviewees she argued that femininity is not a natural state, but requires constant work and performance. Describing a mutual friend she said, “there are some women that you look at and you can see that they are just gorgeous, they could be absolutely drop dead gorgeous ... but the way they dress themselves, the way they hold themselves the way they do their hair... just their whole occurrence... so, they don’t occur as feminine, they don't occur as womanly.” She suggested that since, in her eyes, femininity was about the way you dress and act, anyone could appear feminine if they chose to, and that unfeminine women simply didn’t care enough. She believed that femininity was about more than just a body, a woman with a curvy body can choose not to be feminine, and conversely one without can choose to be feminine. Likewise Belinda, who also said she would like to be more feminine suggested “feminine is something you can create—you can be feminine at some times and not at others.”

Femininity is increasingly tied to consumption, “femininity has become systematically represented almost entirely in terms of fragmentation as well as objectification, so that the ‘self’ has become a collection of disparate body parts to be endlessly worked on or even replaced as part of the plenitude of consumer choice” (Tincknell 2011, 86). Femininity is a choice, available for sale. This understanding of femininity contrasts awkwardly with my argument that contemporary femininity is about a physical body shape, since changing the fundamental shape of the body is more difficult that dressing in feminine clothing. However we see that the emphasis of many media makeovers is to change the body itself through diet or surgery, or at least control undergarments, flattering the body to emphasise curves in the right places and de-emphasise parts that don’t fit the ideal, to create at least the illusion of the feminine body. We see the performance of gender, the acquisition of femininity through whatever means surgical or otherwise and the performance of the feminine, made
over after body occurring in the same way as the performance of femininity through behaviour and dress in the past.

I argue that although femininity is a regulatory force, the majority of interview participants did not consciously experience it as such because they, like Judith above, believe that femininity is a choice, even if not something they choose themselves. Moreover, if they aspired to be athletic, or healthy looking, they didn’t see that goal as feminine, and often saw it as in opposition to femininity, a choice that they had made over femininity; a body-positive alternative (Sastre 2014b). They did also allow that a woman could choose to be, for example athletic and feminine, just by adding curves in the right places, or dressing the part; the two were not mutually exclusive, but they were not one and the same thing.

**Femininity and the Shift from Oppression Of the Body to Oppression Through the Body**

There are two factors to this short discussion, firstly that, as I have argued, there has been a shift from the production of femininity through the effect of external accoutrements and behaviours in beauty culture, to the production of femininity through the body itself in makeover culture and secondly that there has been a parallel transition in feminist theorists’ understanding of the regulation of women’s bodies from an oppression of the body, to an oppression through the body. In proposing womanly curves, breasts and sexiness my younger interview participants evoke a clearly corporeal femininity, and it is interesting to note that where they do not seek out femininity for themselves, the alternative desirable modes of womanhood that they suggest are bodily, confirming the importance of the body, feminine or otherwise in makeover culture and offering alternative routes to the control and regulation of women’s bodies which are expected to appear not just curvy, but muscular, worked on and strong.
Back in 1977 Young suggested that femininity was determined by “a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves,” and not “a mysterious quality of essence that all women have by virtue of their being biologically female” (2005, 31) and this concept developed into an argument that separated biological sex and gender, proposing that gender was entirely socially or even linguistically constructed (Hekman 2014, 148). Femininity, within this construction, became a performance (Butler [1990] 2006) that could be applied to bodies that were either biologically male or female. Further to this Butler suggests that “such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” ([1990] 2006, 185). That is to say that gender is an identity made distinct only through an individual’s performance in relation to societal expectations. Because gender is not a “mysterious essence” but is performed, the body can be used to comply with or to resist the expectations of patriarchal society and its performance, considers Butler, is a “strategy” carried out in, “the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs” ([1990] 2006, 190) and, “compelled by social sanction and taboo” (1988, 520). So like Young, Butler argues that gender is not biologically determined, but socially constructed and that women come under pressure to perform gender in line with certain norms. This would seem, at first glance, to exclude the contemporary corporeal definition of femininity that I have discussed above; can one perform the body itself? But Butler explains that the body is not in process, it is the process. “One is not simply a body, but, in some very keen sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well” (1988, 521). The body itself comes under pressure to perform, and can be made to
perform correct femininity through the use of (or performance of) gesture, diet, clothing and even permanent alterations through surgery.

While second wave feminists called for women to use their agency to reject the patriarchal pressure to present their bodies as feminine and attractive to men, the following wave of feminists argued that if women truly had agency then they could choose how they performed the feminisation and sexualisation of their bodies, and to use their bodies as powerful tools without considering it a submission to patriarchy. Bartky in particular sees agency—in this case the choice to develop the corporeal self—as lying in resistance to patriarchy (Bartky 1990) however it is expressed.

In the 1980s and 1990s for academic authors such as Bartky (1990, 1997) and Wolf (1990) writing about Beauty Culture, femininity was one element of beauty, alongside behaviour and adornment. Now femininity is at the core of makeover culture and is increasingly redefined as a purely corporeal object. My interview responses show what Bartky recognised twenty years ago when makeover culture was in its infancy: that the corporeal has become increasingly important in contemporary society. “Women are no longer required to be chaste or modest, to restrict their sphere of activity to the home, or even to realize their properly feminine destiny in maternity: Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centred on woman’s body” (Bartky 1997, 148-149).

As contemporary feminism developed, gender and femininity, performed via constantly changing culturally dictated constraints and expectations, was seen increasingly as a matter of choice. With the revival of interest in biologism and material feminism, it has been suggested that femininity in the current moment is produced by a combination of biological sex and social factors (Hekman 2014). So while today’s femininity is different from the 1970s and 1980s because the structures that form it are different, it still acts as a strong regulator of women. Bartky suggests that “the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular” (1997, 141). However my interview participants argue that one can choose to present as feminine, using the technologies and
techniques available to shape the body or one can reject femininity and choose an alternative version of womanhood and yet, as discussed, one cannot not make a choice. This has all occurred alongside a revision of understanding within feminist theory that recognises that regulation has always taken place through the body. That is not to say, necessarily, that the mode of oppression itself has changed, but that it has become clear in recent times, with the very obvious and radical manipulation of the body itself, that the body has always been subject to technologies and tools of regulation.

Conclusion

Though femininities have changed over the decades, each era has seen a highly desirable version of femininity. The shift from the traditional femininity of beauty culture to the contemporary femininity of makeover culture followed the shift from function to form identified back in Chapter Two. As evidenced by my older interview participants who grew up within late beauty culture, traditional femininity was performed through behaviour and dress; softly spoken, demure and elegant with perfect manners. Contemporary femininity, on the other hand, defined by my younger interview participants, is corporeal and curvaceous, emphasising a full breast and an hourglass waist. The shift signified a critical change from an understanding of the oppression of the body through the accoutrements of femininity to the production of femininity through the body itself and the continued regulation of the body through this new femininity.

Much of the recent writing in this area proposes a plurality of femininity in contemporary culture. Defining and developing alternative ways of embodying femininity, particularly for young women, authors suggest an extensive repertoire of femininity from tomboys to girlie girls (Gill and Scharff 2011). If I had only interviewed women under forty I would have challenged this claiming a single definition of femininity. However, my older participants’ insistence, for the most part, that femininity and the body are, for them, separate issues led me to acknowledge the existence of multiple femininities. Yet I argue that makeover
culture presents only a narrow definition of femininity, that a stereotypically feminine body is produced by the repeated motifs of curves, long hair, slimness and high-heeled shoes. I suggest that while alternative femininities may be available, one mode, the thin but curvy femininity expressed by both the makeover media and by my younger interview participants dominates the others and that this is the mode that my younger interview participants expressed as the media’s feminine ideal, but rejected for themselves.

I propose that, despite younger interviewees claiming that femininity wasn’t something they desired except for special occasions, femininity is still key to the experience of makeover culture: the (body) ideal of makeover media, sold through television and magazine content and advertising campaigns, and used to sell products across the globe. Makeover culture’s media-centred obsession with the perfect body promotes an intensified, bodily femininity, and my interview participants’ resistance to femininity is part of their resistance to wider makeover culture and to being told what they should think and do. That is not to say that there are not numerous acceptable ways, in their eyes, of being a woman but while interview participants suggested alternative desirable bodies, such as a sporty body, they did not feel that these were feminine modes. It is possible that the current moment sees a return to a more stable, single definition of femininity, that it was for a while multiple, and its return to more stable definition means it is more able to regulate women’s bodies again.
Conclusion

Happily Ever After: Discussion and Conclusions

Based on a mixed methods investigation into women’s experiences of contemporary media culture, this thesis asked, what is contemporary makeover culture and how does it differ from earlier modalities of beauty culture? Through a consideration of the history of makeover culture and a discussion of three key socio-historical factors in its development—neoliberalism, feminism and media culture—contemporary makeover culture was defined as the contemporary culture of constant reinvention and improvement applied to almost all areas of life.

Research Outcomes

Differences Between Beauty Culture and Makeover Culture

The research concluded that the convergence of neoliberalism, postfeminism and advanced media culture resulted in the ideal conditions for makeover culture. Neoliberalism and its concept of a responsibilised, self-disciplined, self-made individual striving to ‘be the best that you can be,’ provided the why; postfeminism rejected feminist strictures that a woman’s body must not determine her worth and argued that as long as she believed it was her choice to change it then she should be allowed to use all the tools at her disposal;
and advanced media culture demonstrated the makeover process over and over again on deserving subjects, normalising makeover and transmitting information to a wide audience.

This study identified and provided evidence for three key differences between (neoliberal) makeover culture and earlier modalities of beauty culture—an emphasis on the perfectibility of the body and images of the body, high levels of dependence on technologies, and an overt focus on an ideal bodily femininity, which I have called the three tenets of makeover culture. The second half of the thesis used the outcomes of primary research to illustrate these differences. The three tenets are shown to be causative of makeover culture and also, alongside class, citizenship, shame and failure, to contribute to the regulation of women’s bodies in makeover culture through a complex web of interactions.

In earlier beauty cultures, technology such as media technologies and visualisation technologies were limited, femininity was differently defined and perfection was not achievable for the average woman. However, living as we do right now, at the interface between the body and technology, the first key tenet of makeover culture, it is impossible to imagine a body separate from the technological artefacts that create, maintain and control it: from medical and communication technologies to clothing and food technologies, the twenty-first-century body is ‘always already technologised’ (Sullivan 2006). Today women are no longer simply objects of beauty culture but they actively embrace the use of technology to produce the bodies they desire. My interview participants experienced these technologies in the media they consumed, the products they bought and the procedures that they underwent. They were largely considered a fact of life, with the exception of the technologies of cosmetic surgery, which continue to arouse a good deal of suspicion and resistance.

The second key tenet of makeover culture, perfectibility, is driven by the first. The technologies of media culture present images of perfect or perfectible, predominantly feminine, bodies and the means to create them. The soft technology of Photoshop influences the hard surgical technologies of makeover; thus technology is critical to both defining and achieving perfection.
The belief in perfectibility, which motivates makeover in the first place, and the emphasis on femininity in female body makeovers is seen broadly in the media and especially in makeover media, in both Photoshopped and un-retouched forms. The presentation of these perfected bodies influences women’s attitudes to their own bodies and others’ bodies and, over time, manifests in changes to the bodies themselves. It is the ability through technology to potentially achieve perfection that is the difference between beauty and makeover cultures. What was surprising, when I considered the interview data, was how acceptable Photoshop was considered by participants, who claimed that they would be disappointed by non-Photoshopped images of the models and celebrities in magazines because they read them as a form of escapism and enjoy the beautiful images they present.

The third key tenet of makeover culture is femininity, one that features strongly in makeover media, and my interviews discovered that the definition of femininity changed depending on the age of my interview participants from a quality of behaviour or dress amongst those over forty, to a curvy body shape amongst those under forty. This tied in well with the suggestion that femininity is increasingly considered a bodily thing (Gill 2007). However what was most interesting from my interview data was that my interview participants claimed that they did not feel compelled to be feminine. They saw it as one choice amongst a variety of alternative expressions of womanhood.

**Makeover Culture as a Regulatory Frame**

The thesis goes on to discuss how makeover takes hold as a new regulatory frame for women’s bodies. While there is little space set aside for normative discourse around bodies in the beauty/makeover media, makeover media texts speak to audiences from an authoritative position. The demand for makeover media texts is therefore driven not only by the reader/viewer but also by the advertiser who wants to piggyback on this authority to drive sales. Driving the fluid, fragmented twenty-first-century body is a strong economic force. Our daily
consumption of bodies and body products is motivated by the digitally manipulated images that we see in the media and advertising industries, those that have been Photoshopped and altered to meet the expectations of producers and readers, and when it comes to makeover media, Heller suggests, “today’s televisual makeovers emphasize physical change and material/service acquisition as the paths to genuine expression of one’s inner self and better nature” (Heller 2007, 2). Increased exposure to makeover culture through the use of the before/after paradigm in both advertising and product placement reinforces the constant message of neoliberalism that because you can improve yourself you should.

The advent of makeover culture coincided with an increasing tabloidisation of media and the growing popularity of lifestyle and makeover television shows within a postfeminist media. We can see that all media functions in some ways as makeover media: when the crew of the Starship Enterprise begin a new mission; when The Doctor is born again; when Thomas the Tank Engine underwent modernisation, all contributing to the ubiquitous, and therefore increasingly regulatory, nature of makeover culture. Like makeover culture, postfeminist media culture is about being bigger and better, an improved version. It is the neoliberal push to ‘be the best that you can be’ that is the crux of the disciplinary power of makeover culture. While women are unavoidably implicated in makeover culture it is the demand to ‘be the best’, to strive for perfection, which means the body can never be finished since perfection can never be achieved/maintained and therefore makeover never ends. This ever-unfinished state keeps women striving for more, regulating their time and their bodies, whether they accept the overt messages of the makeover media, or are influenced by more subtle messages from alternative media sources and peers.

The concept of makeover has also been exploited extensively to promote the consumption of countless beauty and lifestyle products. Beauty appeals to a mass consumer market, which holds the purchasing power for leisure products and non-essential goods. Magazines, television shows and advertisements all sell the product ‘makeover’ to women, who are told that they are not good enough in
their raw, abject state. John Berger suggested back in 1972, “the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product” (1972). This was the case before Berger, and still is. The 1950s woman was targeted with advertising for the new tools that could make her life easier and the beauty products she needed to win and keep her man, but in makeover culture this has intensified as both the technological products on sale and the technologies responsible for disseminating the messages and products have developed. The intensity of media programming and advertising which focuses on the body and its improvement today has increased enormously from the days when there were only three television channels and the constant, inescapable reminder of the many ways in which we don’t measure is a key difference between makeover culture and beauty culture.

Makeover citizenship, which I argue contributes to the regulatory framework of makeover culture, requires its citizens to make the right choices, within a narrative of freedom associated with neoliberalism, and we see, in the global nature of makeover culture, the bifurcation of the world in to the free and the unfree. In comparing the relative freedom of choice available to women in western, postfeminist cultures today with the more controlling regimes of earlier patriarchal societies, makeover culture appears as part of the West’s progress, not only is it feminist, but also about choice and expanding the modalities of being woman, or of being a feminine woman.

**The Regulative Power of Makeover Culture and Experiences of Womanhood**

The move from earlier modalities of beauty culture to makeover culture is described in the introduction to this thesis as, ‘a paradigm shift in women’s lives from the dominance of the beauty myth, within a broader culture, to an era of makeover culture, where makeover culture is the broader culture’, and the thesis illustrates the ways in which makeover culture marks a break with beauty culture.
This thesis considered that while makeover culture continues to regulate women’s bodies, it is no longer about being beautiful, but about striving to ‘be the best you can be’ in all areas. I agree with Jones who says that we are all implicated in cosmetic surgical culture whether we are aware of it or not (M. Jones 2008a, 3)—and extend that to makeover culture. My interview participants provided evidence of this through their keen awareness of makeover media. I found that many of them enjoy makeover culture, they are not conflicted by it and experience it as a form of escapism, even if, like Anne who says she doesn’t read magazines but admits to enjoying thumbing through them at the doctors or dentists, they rarely access it. Although some claim that it does not influence them, I found that there was no collective resistance among younger women because they see it as normal, and no active resistance among older women because they believe that they are immune to it. They do however worry about their children, young people and other vulnerable groups, showing how they apply the critiques of makeover media differently to themselves, compared to others. They are sure that others are affected, but they place themselves above that.

The only thing we, as consumers, know for certain is that we shouldn’t take any of the images we see in the media today as fact; whether we are looking at beautiful pictures of women, smoothed, stretched, trimmed and polished beyond recognition, or the bad hair day and cellulite photos of our favourite celebrities at their worst. In terms of our own body image, we have strayed so far from normative bodies in the media images that we consume, that it becomes difficult to distinguish what is real and what is not and this is increasingly reflected in our desire to change our bodies.

My interview participants, in line with neoliberal expectations, express a desire to improve their bodies, however they do not choose the narrow ideals proposed by makeover media. They do not fear makeover culture or feel a strong attraction to its models, because they do not immediately identify with makeover media subjects. They make their choices based on a network of influences, including a strong peer/family influence. Skeggs and Wood found that their
working class participants were more likely to relate makeover television to their own lives, while middle-class participants distanced themselves from the content, seeing watching as a guilty pleasure (2012, 120). My interview participants see themselves as older, or wiser, or less vulnerable in some way than the participants in makeover media. They respond differently when discussing makeovers that they have seen on television, and makeovers that friends have undergone. However, while most deny that the media influences them to change their bodies it came out in the interviews that they are affected to a certain extent. It may be that they look at a more specialised area of the media, rather than mainstream—i.e. they write off mainstream magazines and television but they are still influenced by other magazines, Judith reads Harpers Bazaar rather than what she considers trashy magazines, Karen enjoys sewing magazines, complete with their own makeover stories where the clothes are still modelled on extremely thin models, Jennifer reads Runners’ World which also follows the thin aesthetic with Photoshopped images—but they are still able to pick out ideal bodies and discuss makeover ideals. Julie was the only one who admitted outright that she watched makeover television looking for inspiration for her own transformation.

My Contribution to Knowledge and Response to Literatures

My work contributes to the literature on makeover culture by developing a history of makeover culture, and contributing to an argument for the dominance of makeover culture (M. Jones 2008a, McGee 2005, Miller 2008, Weber 2009). In addressing how women experience and respond to makeover culture through an applied, practical approach, I contribute first-hand experience and primary research to a body of theoretical literature developed through the 1990s and 2000s and add to a growing body of primary research into different elements of makeover culture and femininity (Blum 2005, Davis 1995, Elliot 2008, Gill and Scharff 2011, Heyes 2007a, Lewis 2008a).
I contribute to the theory that femininity has become a bodily device (Gill 2007, Gill and Scharff 2011) by looking at how, when and why it changed and how it is related to makeover culture. This research extends on current research on femininity offering evidence from my interviews for a marked generational difference in definitions of femininity and here I tentatively suggest a parallel between those who were in their late teens and early twenties as makeover culture began to take hold in the early 1990s, as I was myself, and this generational shift in interview participants’ attitudes to femininity.

I consider the multiplicity of femininities suggested in recent works (Gill and Scharff 2011, McRobbie 2007) that suggest there is no universal truth when it comes to femininity today, reflecting the postmodernist rejection of meta-narratives. They claim that is no one way of being or looking, that we build our desired look as a composite of the images that are thrust at us in the media, and that is true, but my research proposes that there is a core femininity, one presented as desirable by the media, which overshadows other alternatives suggested, many of which, while considered viable, and even desirable modes of female engagement by interview participants, do not fall within their definitions of femininity, and yet, are not mutually exclusive of femininity. Femininity is like a cloak which can be draped over a variety of modes of female existence such as athletic + feminine, skinny + feminine, or older + feminine.

My research found the difference between beauty culture and makeover culture is that my interview participants no longer feel compelled to strive for a feminine ideal. Some like to be feminine, some save it for special occasions, but they do not see it as a requirement, rather as a choice. They still have ideal bodies in mind, but outside the media today’s body/beauty goals are more varied: a healthy, athletic look, rather than a feminine look or a skinny look. Rather than the fabricated, intensified femininity of makeover media inspiring femininity in its consumers, it is as though the collapse of femininity into the physically implausible combined with the proliferation of alternative body images in the broader media, especially in television and online formats, has released women to consider alternative body ideals.
I also expand on the concept of the paradox within makeover, firstly the paradox of the technologically generated natural body, whereby in order to reveal her natural beauty, a woman must submit to a makeover process; secondly that while claiming her feminist right to change her body she gives herself over to the will of the expert, and thirdly that my interview participants, while denying that makeover media affected their own decisions regarding their bodies, were certain that others were negatively affected.

I find that it is ironic and again paradoxical, that as more effective technologies of the body are developed, such as cosmetic surgery and surgical slimming techniques, making it technologically more possible than ever to achieve a single desired look, it becomes harder to define the ideal we wish to achieve due to the multiplicity of acceptable options, thereby ensuring that the ideal remains an impossible dream, that we are always, as Jones suggests, a work in progress (M. Jones 2008a, 1). Extending on Jones concept my work engages with the importance of the perfectibility of the body or potential of the body to become perfect, as a driver in makeover culture. I look at how the body is influenced by the Photoshopped and manipulated perfect and perfectible images of media culture and also by neoliberalism’s drive for self-improvement and what McRobbie (2015) has recently called “the perfect,” which she defines as “a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the 'good life'”. The—always in progress of makeover—body, what I have called the perfectible but never perfect body, is always working towards a perfection that it knows exists, but can neither define, nor reach.

**Areas for Further Research**

My work provides a snapshot of a particular audience of makeover media, considering their experience of, and response to makeover culture and as such will be valuable to others looking at makeover culture in particular, and looking at contemporary womanhood more broadly, especially those addressing issues around femininity and the regulation of female bodies. I offer an insight into
women’s experience, and as such my research makes a useful comparator for further work. Following my study I have identified a number of areas where further research might be conducted into women’s relationships with makeover culture. Gaps that I feel would merit addressing include:

I. A deeper discussion of questions around race: (addressed in some detail by Weber) within Western television (Nely Galan of The Swan identifies as Latina and the role/race of hosts and experts would make a complete study of itself). The Swan includes a number of non-white participants and it would be valuable to look at how their makeovers differ from white participants.

II. A study of the global implications of makeover: the international effect of makeover culture, and study of international media within the “Makeover Nation” (Miller 2008, Weber 2009). Although, like me, Weber focuses largely on makeover media and practice in the USA, makeover isn’t exclusive to Western culture. China has the fastest growing cosmetic surgery industry in the world (Elliot 2008, Tebbel 2000) motivated by a competitive job market where discrimination based on looks is rife.

III. Further contributions could also be made to Skeggs and Wood’s discussions around class (Skeggs and Wood 2008, Skeggs and Wood 2012): looking, for example, at how makeover culture offers a fantasy of social climbing and the hope that looking better might get you a better job, more money, a richer husband or a better class of friends.

IV. Age was also an area discussed by interview participants and one that I would particularly like to investigate further: issues range from eating disorders amongst older adults, the pressure to continue to look good beyond age forty (Jermyn 2016, Raisborough, Barnes, et al. 2014) and the physical and psychological issues that this causes older women, to the struggle
to ‘grow old gracefully’, particularly the change from ‘growing old gracefully’ to hiding signs of ageing.

V. Research into the implications of makeover culture for women’s health: considering how women are influenced in terms of healthy lifestyles, healthy eating, weight loss and the athletic ideal as opposed to creating an image at any cost.

VI. The importance of peer influence: an area of particular significance would be looking at friends and family responses to makeover/surgery, and the balance of peer influence versus media influence. I talked to interviewees about friends and families’ responses to their changes, and also their responses to other people’s changes. We also see the families’ responses on television makeover shows. This could take the form of interviewing family pairs—mother/daughter, or sisters—and developing their life histories.

VII. Methodology/methods: future research could extend interviews over a wider range of ages and social groups. There is also a need for online/netnographic study on the subject as online media is significant in terms of the images that it produces and the way in which it encourages women to critique those images as well as sharing their experience.

Closing Thoughts

One of the greatest lessons of my research came right towards the end of my project. Early on, watching The Biggest Loser and other makeover television from my position of white, middle-class privilege, I was, I felt justifiably, concerned by the narratives of makeover television. Who were these people who felt that they had the right to interfere with another person’s appearance? And why do all of these women come out looking the same with their long slender legs; cinched in waists; shiny flowing hair; augmented breasts on display; curves;
and whiter than white teeth, despite arguments for increased diversity of what is called beautiful? Despite my critical stance I could feel myself being pulled deeper into the narrative. I had to admit that I was drawn to the pretty pictures, but at the same time disappointed and a little jealous that I would never be like that. From an intellectual point of view, I could rationalise what I saw, consciously compartmentalise it and deny its power over me, I was pleased with myself, smug in the knowledge that I wasn’t duped by the narrative, that I didn’t feel the need to change just for ‘them’. Well, that was until I moved back from Melbourne to the United Kingdom, and I found myself amongst a different set of women. The Wilmslow\textsuperscript{52} school mums, yummy mummies, bottle-blond, glam and always up for a Prosecco fuelled night out, were very different to my university peers and my mum friends in Melbourne. Finding myself suddenly sharing space with people who would freely discuss to striving for perfection and aspiring to the fairy tale happily ever after, who exercised to look good, not to feel good, who would have their hair, nails and makeup done professionally for an event that wasn’t their own wedding, I came home from school mums’ nights out feeling like I needed to go out and get a whole new wardrobe of clothes (after I lost a dozen kilos). I really wanted a makeover. I realised how out of place this all made me feel but it also clarified the difference between seeing it at a distance on television and seeing it up close and personal and the importance of peer influence overshadowing media influence. I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland, on the outside, looking in, never quite fitting in. It was much harder to evaluate makeover culture as I experienced it in my own life than it was on television. If I judged these people, then didn’t that make me as bad as those television experts, manipulating women’s bodies to meet an ideal? This experience broadened my outlook and my work is stronger for it, as it reminded me how deeply I was always already implicated in makeover culture.

\textsuperscript{52} Wilmslow is an affluent, upmarket town in the North West of the United Kingdom with a variety of rich and famous—as well as aspiring rich and famous—residents.
Appendices

Appendix One: Interview Schedule

This project involved a semi-structured interview with 17 women who were asked to take part in one-on-one face-to-face interviews covering a number of key areas:

Makeover Media

- Makeover media (television and magazines) interviewee responses to questions around media, body satisfaction and aspirations?
- Tell me about the television shows and magazines that you watch/read and their treatment of the concept of makeover?
- In what way do you think that the media influences your desire to makeover your body?
- What are your thoughts on the media impact on women's bodies in general?
- What do you think about the range of acceptable presentations of bodies in the media?
- What judgements do they make on the women's bodies involved?

Body Image – perception and expectations, fragmentation

- How would you describe your body?
- How do you feel about your body?
- Who/What would you like to look like?
• Tell me what you would like to change about your body?
• What sort of beauty practices do you undergo on a regular basis?

Makeover – concept and practice

• Tell me about any attempts that you have made to makeover your body?
• How did the outcome compare to your expectations?
• How have people reacted to the changes you have made?
• What is your experience of friends undergoing a makeover process? In what ways does it change the way that you see them?

The feminine body

• What do you think makes a person feminine?
• How desirable is it to have a feminine body/be feminine in the twenty-first century and why do you feel that way?

The changing/evolving body in the twenty-first century

• How do you imagine the ideal female body will look in future?
• How do you imagine the average female body will look in future?
## Appendix Two: Sample of Data Analysis Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Makeover Media Consumption</th>
<th>Body History/Story</th>
<th>Useful Anecdotes/Makeover</th>
<th>Makeover Technology</th>
<th>Femininity</th>
<th>Perfectibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>I was interested that J claimed that she wasn’t influenced by the media, when from her responses I felt that she was. – she used the example of reading about people who had nose jobs making her more determined to have one herself. She also her comments about Biggest Loser and not wanting to be that fat. She also brought to light some interesting points around the ageing of the body and the loss of the waist/curves that she considered to be markers of femininity. J’s desire for surgery when she was in her early 20s appears to have been driven by her desire to appear normal (cf Kathy Davis), she doesn’t feel that her choice was influenced by a desire to create a particular image, just to feel confident. She talks a lot about self-esteem and</td>
<td>Susan was the smallest in her class at school and didn’t develop until later on. She suffered from this. Concerned about her weight, weighs herself every day and adjusts her diet to suit. J: Yes, I’m not as young, as I mentioned as I’d like to be and my waistline seems to be larger than it used to be, but I think the rest of me isn’t too bad and I even have thought about having liposuction to try and get rid of my stomach roll, which probably came as a result of having a couple of children. E: Can you tell me about any particular attempt that you have made to makeover your body or change your body? J: Yes, when my mother died I was grief stricken like most people are and I thought I’m going to change the way I look a bit. And also I wanted to present myself better as a visual artist because you have an image no matter</td>
<td>After a difficult time in her life Susan made some significant changes including to her appearance – emphasising her blonde curly hair etc. This fit in well with her persona as an ‘artist’ exhibiting etc. J: My daughter, when she was about 17 she had some really major health problems, like life changing health problems and she wanted... and I said how would you like to have a nose job done because she was inheriting the nose that I had and I knew how I felt about it so I said how would you like to have a nose job done, she must have been about 18 I suppose, maybe 19, and so we found a plastic surgeon and we arranged for her to have plastic surgery and I visited her in hospital and I gave her a teddy bear with a bandage across its nose, and when everything was stabilised, ‘cos your nose swells up you know, you get black eyes, and then she was very happy and she became much more confident, and I bought some really nice clothes for her and it was interesting to see the transformation. E: So did you feel it changed the relationship between you...? J: Well it was a bit of a joke actually because people told us how much we looked alike and there was no attempt to have the</td>
<td>Can I describe how I felt about myself when I was in my teens before I had plastic surgery on my nose. I was a very small person and very aware of how I looked and I made my own clothes and I was very conscious but I had a very large nose. My father had a very prominent Jewish nose and as I matured it seemed to get bigger and bigger, and probably my perception of it got bigger as well and I was always holding a mirror and looking sideways. When my parents decided to go to the UK for a year I decided to have a nose job done I found a plastic surgeon and when I came back people said I like your nose and I felt so much more confident after that, so when I met this plastic surgeon he was very encouraging, very kind and he understood</td>
<td>She also brought to light some interesting points around the ageing of the body and the loss of the waist/curves that she considered to be markers of femininity. E: What about femininity and the body – do you think that there are certain things that make a body feminine... J: Yes I do, I think my nose makes me more feminine, because it would have been a great nose on a guy. But I think it’s also the way I sit, the way I sit, well now I’m sitting and I’m not striking like or...? E: Was there any sort of role model that you followed for your body? J: Well, seen as I’m not as young as I’d like to be I really admired Audrey Hepburn, but I didn’t want an Audrey Hepburn nose. I think I trusted my plastic surgeon because plastic surgery in the UK was quite advanced because of the second world war and that facial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Re)dressing Cinderella  

319
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Makeover Media Consumption</th>
<th>Body History/Story</th>
<th>Useful Anecdotes/Makeover</th>
<th>Makeover Technology</th>
<th>Femininity</th>
<th>Perfectibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| J: Who was the stupid person, who was the sucker, I wouldn’t do that with people that were overweight. So there’s a lot out there in the media, it presents problems particularly for young teenagers and they become bulimic. E: Or overweight and depressed J: Or anorexic, I don’t remember when I was young, I didn’t have anorexia existing. E: I had one friend who was a bit borderline... J: I’m a lot older than you though and it’s really anorexia... and I wouldn’t make a fairly bold statement and say that it’s maybe to do with the media. E: The media is so much more pervasive J: Especially for young people. E: I mean we watched a bit of television but not as much as young people today. J: We didn’t have television, but I had a twiggy figure and if I’d listened to the same nose made, so we still laugh about it... and now she has got two little girls and I think should I be starting to save up... E: Hopefully they’ll inherit daddy’s nose. J: Well daddy’s nose isn’t too crash hot either. E: Do you watch any of the TELEVISION shows or read magazines about body and makeover and that sort of thing? J: Yes I do. I think it’s really interesting but because it’s the way... I think if you feel that you look good you feel better. I know theoretically we’re supposed to feel good inside and that’s the thing but I don’t think that. I did a big makeover on a friend when I was a nurse ... can I talk about this... and she was frumpy. She was... I won’t tell what her name is because... I don’t think she’ll ever find out, but I went to the hairdresser regularly and I made my clothes. I designed my clothes and I was always conscious of the way I looked... but this woman, this girl didn’t. There was a guy that was very kind and he understood very well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel
| think it’s generally desirable in the twenty-first century to have a feminine body, not necessarily for yourself. But is that the general...? I mean you see a lot of pictures in the media, the very thin almost masculine female bodies, most of them not that many curves... do you think it is still desirable for women to look feminine? J: I think as females we have a message to give that we can soften the world that we live in. Because the world is pretty harsh. There’s lots of awful things happening out there. I think by being feminine we can present an image of confidence in something beyond all that. We can maybe in our own way maintain beauty to a world that is lacking in beauty in many respects and I’m not saying that I am beautiful as you know but the way you present yourself can enhance where you are, that if you go and you’ve spent time on yourself doing
| deformities people had had as a result of the war so when I met this plastic surgeon he was very encouraging, very kind and he understood why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel... why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel... why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel
| deformities people had had as a result of the war so when I met this plastic surgeon he was very encouraging, very kind and he understood why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel... why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel... why I wanted to have my nose reconstructed so I had confidence in him E: I think you have to really want change in order to achieve it and make it stick. J: But I find by weighing myself, and breaking rules by having the scale out there and weighing myself I can think I ate too much yesterday... it’s unhealthy I know you’re supposed to weigh yourself once a week, but actually the stuff from Weight Watchers that we got from when we bought the new scales said if you are losing weight, if you’re actively trying to lose weight then only weight once a week but weigh more often if you’re maintaining weight, well I know I go a bit over the top... and I don’t weigh actually every day, but if I keep a close watch on the weight that I am I can think I shouldn’t have eaten quite as much as I did yesterday. E: So does that make you feel
**Anecdotes/Makeover**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Media Consumption</th>
<th>Makeover Technology</th>
<th>Femininity</th>
<th>Perfectibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>media I would have thought...</td>
<td>I've got this twiggy figure...</td>
<td>I've used to buy my early teens</td>
<td>guilting about what you eat though...</td>
<td>your hair, I don't do my nails because they never look nice they've always got paint in them or something, but if you go and you try and look nice you're really making the world a better place. It's a contribution, I know it sounds vain. It's not vanity, vanity is something, and at times I remember when I was younger and I knew I looked fantastic, I was vain and the people, and I heard someone make a comment 'oh look at her' and I thought oh, I think maybe I've got the wrong attitude. But I want something between being too confident and being unconfident, finding this comfortable place, and knowing that you look good, knowing that you can meet anybody and be proud of who you are which is different from thinking oh I'm not going to talk to that person they are too important. But we can make a contribution, even by looking nice when we walk and how to be beautiful the fatter women get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: I just wanted to be like them and have boobs, because...</td>
<td>E: you didn't want to be like Victoria Beckham you wanted to be like your best friend.</td>
<td>E: Do you think it's difficult, I mean obviously you've changed your image, do you find it difficult to maintain... do you find it difficult to maintain that because obviously there is work involved?</td>
<td>J: Well I'm trying to monitor my diet so that I don't have as many artificial things in my diet, and I bet those thick shakes could be helpful because I've never done that and that could be a helpful thing. E: I don't like milkshakes, never have.</td>
<td>J: Well I hear someone make a comment 'oh look at her' and I thought oh, I think maybe I've got the wrong attitude. But I want something between being too confident and being unconfident, finding this comfortable place, and knowing that you look good, knowing that you can meet anybody and be proud of who you are which is different from thinking oh I'm not going to talk to that person they are too important. But we can make a contribution, even by looking nice when we walk and how to be beautiful the fatter women get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: That would be an interesting question to ask younger people though.</td>
<td>E: Maintaining that motivation. Do you think that the media had an influence on your desire personally to change your body.</td>
<td>E: Do you think it's difficult, I mean obviously you've changed your image, do you find it difficult to maintain... do you find it difficult to maintain that because obviously there is work involved?</td>
<td>J: Well I wouldn't be surprised, I think there is two reasons for that. One is, when you go out, they give you enormous servings on your plate, enormous, we go to pubs some times and they bring us a great big portion. I'm Max and I share it because we don't want to get fat.</td>
<td>E: And I guess once you see that as the norm then you start serving that sort of sized food at home and then...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: No, I don't think so, although I remember in my early teens I used to buy this magazine, I used to buy the Australian, no the English feel I am on the inside. E: How did other people react, people who knew you or...</td>
<td>J: Well because it was a slow process, it was fairly short, my mother died about 4 years ago, and I think she would have had a fit if she'd known I would have bleached my hair because she was very religious and very conservative and you know, beauty of the woman is from within philosophy so... it was a slow process, it grew and then I had it bleached a bit and then suddenly people thought, ah, she's got long hair, it's frizzy and it's blond. E: Long blond hair.</td>
<td>E: Do you think it's difficult, I mean obviously you've changed your image, do you find it difficult to maintain... do you find it difficult to maintain that because obviously there is work involved?</td>
<td>J: There is work in my hair, and putting make up on but it's part of my day, it's part of my routine, I know that if I don't put conditioner in my hair it's going to go like string... but I regard that as... I mean other people have to look at me, I don't look at myself... and I like to look nice so that other people can like to look at me. E: Certainly, that's the thing I find difficult, it's very easy to do, to a certain extent... just to go and do something, and to go and have your hair done... but actually maintaining it afterwards, J: It's an everyday thing, that's the problem for me. E: It's the same with diet, you lose the weight and ... it's doable, it's not difficult, but once you've lost it how do you keep up the motivation.</td>
<td>J: And Max says to me you're giving me too much food, put less on my plate and we weigh ourselves every day, I know you're not supposed to weigh yourself every day but if I weigh...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Makeover Media Consumption</td>
<td>Body History/Story</td>
<td>Useful Anecdotes/Makeover</td>
<td>Makeover Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman's weekly, which to me was something I bought every week... I was aware of my nose, I was also very small for my age... and I was ridiculed quite a bit... I was always the artist, that was my refuge I suppose because I was good at art. But reading about other people that had had nose jobs done made me</td>
<td>nose when she was 21. Her daughter has the same nose, she paid for her daughter's surgery to cheer her up when she had been unwell. Jokes about saving up for her granddaughters when they get older.</td>
<td>J: And how do you stand up straight when your stomach sticks out, you forget.</td>
<td>to find their own path, and its individual for everybody. E: It's what works for you.</td>
<td>down the street. E: I've been thinking about the way that the female body is evolving in the twenty-first century so what we see as feminine is changing from what was considered feminine in the 1950s or the 1980s... my self every day or every few days I think I'm eating too much I need to eat less, I need to eat less and I exercise more... I think that that is one reason and the other reason is, women see the slender figures everywhere and they are patched up, and they are patched up not only by photograph but Photoshop does a good thing, and you can make a woman have a nice slender waist just by drawing a line and deleting it, it's easy, so you've got...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Three: My Body History

As part of my research I collected body histories, which I hoped would help me to develop an understanding of my research participants’ motivation and desire to implement changes in their bodies.

I started by writing my own, I made 3 separate entries over the period of research, in 2009, 2013 and 2016 which showed a change in attitude as my body changed shape.

An early draft of this body history appears on my (long neglected) blog The Makeover Concept where I spent some time figuring out my writing style.

2009 - I guess my earliest memories of my body are of doing gymnastics around the age of 8 or 9, I wasn’t very good at it, I couldn’t jump the horse or walk the high beam, but I was better at that than I had been at ballet, my mother tells the tale of the ballet teacher telling her that I was never going to be any good at it so I might as well go and do something else (hence the gymnastics). But I tried hard and worked through the junior grades and have the certificates to prove it. In fact, I was never really any good at sport, or at least that was my perception. Again my mother challenged the physical education teacher when I was about 13 who gave me a D grade on my report card. I mean I could swim 5000m without stopping and I ran 4 or 5 times a week, but that D stuck with me, I was awful at ball sports, anything requiring hand eye coordination, and that, according to my school, was what mattered.

I was tall in primary school; I was taller than the headmaster, tallest in my year by a long way. I did gymnastics in a green leotard – oh so fashionable – oh so Bonnie Langford, with my leg warmers and everything – and I was called the jolly green giant. It was a friendly nickname, nothing malicious about it, I didn’t mind, my friends were tiny in comparison. The first year at senior school, again I was tallest, for most of the first and second years in fact, then everyone started to
catch up. I only grew 3 or 4 centimetres after starting senior school, by the end I was probably in the bottom quarter height wise.

I matured early too, got my periods while still at junior school and started wearing a bra before anyone else. It never bothered me. I was still the only girl in the class who didn’t run to the toilets to change for sport, and it never really changed. I never had a problem stripping off for a poolside change (towel strategically draped if there were boys around).

I have no recollections of feeling shy of my body or hiding my body at all. It was just a body after all. I’m still the same now, communal changing rooms aren’t fearful places for me like they are for some people, although I’m a little more wary of full-length 360-degree mirrors than I used to be.

At 17 I worked as a pool lifeguard, shorts, t-shirts, not a great look, but I wasn’t exactly big. I ate chip butties all summer and supplemented my diet from the chocolate machine (which regularly spat out free bars which of course I ate as well) and the older girls used to say, “just wait until you hit your 20s you won’t be able to eat like that anymore.” The summer before I went away for university I worked at the pool again, 12 and 14-hour shifts if I could get them, I went to the gym during my lunch breaks, ate badly, lost weight and started university lighter than I had been for a long time. I was confident, outgoing and had lots of fun.

As I went through university and beyond I gradually got heavier, but it never bothered me, I went to China for a year and ate out every night with obvious consequences. I always say that I was 8 stone 11 pounds when I met my husband and 11 stone 8 pounds when I married him 7 years later, I’m lighter than that now by half a stone, but nowhere near my lightest weight.

After university I went on my first diet. It started on New Year’s Day as all good diets are supposed to do. Lost a stone and then got bored, gradually put it back on again. Dieting was never really my thing. When I was getting married I refused to lose weight, why should I have to lose weight just to look good on one day. I still felt fantastic in my dress, looked good in the pictures, and had a wonderful day.
I moved abroad, did lots of exercise and got down to 68kg, so that’s about 10 stone 10 pounds, what does 68kg mean for me, it means I can run (as opposed to plodding), it means I can crack 60 minutes for a 10K race (I know it’s not fast but it’s good for me). Then I got bored, and gradually put it back on again, hovered around 73-75kg for a few years and then fell pregnant.

Now, I loved my pregnant body, never once did I feel that I had to control my body during pregnancy, never once did I worry about looking fat. I was pregnant, I was supposed to look fat, or at least bigger than usual. In fact, my legs and bum got smaller when I was pregnant, my arms were less saggy, my face was slimmer, it just had this great big bump out front, not a pretty football up the jumper bump, no teenage boy pretending to be pregnant look for me, a proper fleshy, female, pregnant bump, never mind a cushion up the jumper, I looked like I’d got the whole duvet shoved up there.

Post pregnancy my body has been of less concern to me in a real-life setting, but increasingly of interest from an academic point of view, hence the fact I’m thinking about it now. I’d like to get back to 68kg, but there’s no sense of urgency. I don’t feel that I have something to prove. I promised myself a new pair of jeans when I hit 68kg because mine keep falling down but it’s not making it come around any faster. I just don’t care enough.

It’s not that I lack awareness of my body, I don’t wear a bikini, I don’t flaunt my body in public, I’m just more comfortable in my body than the average person. I’d like to care, I just don’t.

2013 - What has changed since I last wrote? I’ve had two more children, has that changed my attitude to my body? I certainly have less time, and I would say less care for what I look like. I thought it was a logical thing to do, to undergo my own makeover process, given my research topic. Not willing to go down the surgical route I wondered if I was going to have a makeover what should it entail? I figured diet would be a good place to start, I could do with losing 10-15kgs, 20 wouldn’t be too much. Between babies, I took part in Michelle Bridges 12 Week Body Transformation, and online health and fitness program, I did a lot of
exercise, squeezed into the cracks in the early morning between breastfeeding the baby and the older ones waking up. I felt really strong and healthy, I ate well, but I found it difficult to sustain. I wondered why, given the multiple motivations for makeover generally, the effect of being overweight on my health, plus the added motivation of doing it for academic purposes, did I find it such a difficult thing to do?

My body history isn’t terribly interesting, I’ve had no major issues or obsessions in my past, just like I guess most people’s histories are fairly ordinary. I was afraid of stopping breastfeeding for a long time, not sure how my body would end up afterwards. Being pregnant 3 times within 4 years I was very conscious of the new standards for pregnant beauty. Tyler describes it as “pregnant beauty is a shining embodiment of this post-feminist ideology of ‘having it all’. Pregnancy has been reconfigured as a neoliberal project of self-realization, a ‘body project’ to be directed and managed, another site of feminine performance anxiety and thus ironically a new kind of confinement for women” (Tyler 2011, 29). In a culture saturated with idealised images of pregnancy the market for pregnancy clothing, and post-partum treatments has continued to grow.

I wrote in my original body history, a few years ago, that I was happy with my body during pregnancy, and I think that this was true in my first pregnancy especially – but maybe in the last one I wanted a bit more, to be the glamorous pregnant lady, as I knew it was my last chance. But given most of my maternity gear was on pregnancy number three that was never going to happen. I’ve never really felt I ‘glowed’ during pregnancy, but I’ve had three easy pregnancies so often never even thought about the fact that I was pregnant at all. I found it interesting when talking to other women (I was in the thick of interviews during my second pregnancy) that they often expressed that they were happy with their bodies during pregnancy and that they enjoyed other ‘benefits’ of pregnancy such as increased breast size while breastfeeding.
2016 – As I get towards the end of this project I wanted to think about what has changed in my own body image. I never lost the baby weight after my third child, and have gained slowly ever since. With three growing daughters, I have become increasingly conscious, not only of my body but also the effect that my body image might have on theirs. I’m the heaviest I have ever been, to the point that it is preventing me from doing things that I enjoy, like running and going riding with my girls. I keep pushing it back. When I finish the thesis I will lose some weight and get fit and get my life back in order. My motivation is definitely to regain a feeling of fitness and health, and also to set a positive example to my children with both food and exercise. My wardrobe is limited, a real mum wardrobe of jeans and t-shirts, but I don’t feel good in dresses and skirts at the moment, maybe next Summer.
Appendix Four: My Answers to Interview Questions

Makeover Media

- Makeover media (television and magazines) interviewee responses to questions around media, body satisfaction and aspirations? *My gut reaction is that media generally has a negative impact on women’s body satisfaction. Although I do feel that I’m quite immune to it, I’ve always been confident in my own body even as a teenager. I’ve also got a strong sense of the fact that the images we see are heavily manipulated. I never considered the people in the magazines to be ‘real’ people.*

- Tell me about the television shows and magazines that you watch/read and their treatment of the concept of makeover? *I watch surprisingly little makeover television outside my work on this topic. I have always enjoyed reading magazines, since I was in my teens, although now I often choose parenting or house magazines over fashion and beauty ones. I do sometimes read health and fitness magazines such as running magazines, or Weight Watchers magazine. I remember watching the early days of What Not To Wear and enjoying seeing the makeovers a lot, and also all of the early home makeover shows.*

- In what way do you think that the media influences your desire to makeover your body? *I think that the media makes me consider my body in some ways, but I have always liked it, well until I started to put on weight, I have always stayed relatively fit and healthy and that has been my priority, but without being over the top in any way. I’m generally very moderate in that way. I say that I have never managed to lose a lot of weight because I just don’t care enough, I guess because I was never seriously overweight so it was never a priority.*
• What are your thoughts on the media impact on women’s bodies in general? *I think there are certain high-risk groups that are badly affected by the media images. Younger people, and those who are not comfortable in their situations.*

• What do you think about the range of acceptable presentations of bodies in the media? *I think magazines present a very narrow range of bodies, probably 90 per cent of the images in magazines are of tall thin models with sulky looks on their faces. When they put fatter women in there then they tend to shout about it, making it even more obvious that that isn’t the norm. You do see some different types of bodies, particularly on television where it’s more difficult to airbrush them.*

• What judgments do they make on the women’s bodies involved? *I do judge women’s bodies in the media – the too thin models, the ‘desperate’ people who don’t love themselves as they are. I try not to, but I do.*

**Body Image – perception and expectations, fragmentation**

• How would you describe your body? *My body has never been a worry to me, until after I had my third child and then gained weight because I lacked motivation to eat well and exercise.*

• How do you feel about your body? *Right now I don’t love it, but it works, it isn’t something I feel I have time for right now.*

• Who/What would you like to look like? *I’d like to look like Nigella Lawson when I’m 50, she looked fab, soft, comfy but very elegant.*

• Tell me what you would like to change about your body? *I’d like to be slimmer and to have clearer skin.*

• What sort of beauty practices do you undergo on a regular basis? *None*

**Makeover – concept and practice**

• Tell me about any attempts that you have made to makeover your body? *I have done Weight Watchers a couple of times to lose weight, never managed to*
keep it off, but I was pleased with the results at the time. I’ve also run, gone to the gym and swam a lot but never with a ‘body’ goal, just with fitness and speed goals.

• How did the outcome compare to your expectations? I was pleased when I lost weight, but it didn’t last. I like food too much and am not very disciplined.

• How have people reacted to the changes you have made? Positively

• What is your experience of friends undergoing a makeover process? In what ways does it change the way that you see them? My friends ‘makeovers’ are probably limited to haircuts and occasional weight loss, it doesn’t really change how I see them but I mix with a group of pretty confident, positive women.

The feminine body

• What do you think makes a person feminine? When I think of a feminine person I think of an hourglass figure, a little bit girlie or sexy.

• How desirable is it to have a feminine body/be feminine in the twenty-first century and why do you feel that way? I don’t think it is a requirement in the twenty-first century, but I sure would like to have that body myself if I had to choose one. I do have the boobs and the hips though, so I just need to tone up a bit.

The changing/evolving body in the twenty-first century.

• How do you imagine the ideal female body will look in future? I think the thin ideal will have to go, it’s a cycle, and we’re due a return to softer, cuddlier ideals. I do think it will continue to be Photoshopped though, so perfect skin, nicely toned, maybe an emphasis on boobs over stomachs etc.

• How do you imagine the average female body will look in future? I think we’ll continue to get fatter, but women will also increasingly take advantage of cosmetic procedures to control their bodies, to get slimmer again, but then it might become dangerous because they can’t maintain it.
Television/Video Media Sources


The Iron Lady. UK Film. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Produced by Damian Jones. Written by Abi Morgan. 20th Century Fox, January 6, 2012.


Bibliography


BAAPS. “SUPER CUTS ‘Daddy Makeovers’ and Celeb Confessions: Cosmetic Surgery Procedures Soar in Britain.” *British Association of Aesthetic Plastic*


Donaghue, Ngaire, and Anne Clemitshaw. “I’m totally smart and a feminist...and yet I want to be a waif: Exploring ambivalence towards the thin ideal within the fat acceptance movement.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 35 (2012): 415-425.


—. ““Too Good to be Real”: The Obviously Augmented Breast in Women’s Narratives of Cosmetic Surgery.” Gender & Society 27, no. 6 (2013): 913-934.


* (Re)dressing Cinderella *


Lewis, Tania. “‘He Needs to Face His Fears With These Five Queers!’” *Television New Media* 8, no. 4 (2007): 285-312.


* (Re)dressing Cinderella *


—. “Towards a Radical Body Positive: Reading the online “body positive movement”.” Feminist Media Studies (Taylor & Francis) 14, no. 6 (2014b): 929-943.


Sullivan, Nikki. “Somatechnics, or Monstrosity Unbound.” *Scan Journal* (Macquarie University) 3, no. 3 (2006).


Throsby, Karen, and Bethan Evans. “‘Must I seize every opportunity?’ Complicity, confrontation and the problem of researching (anti-)fatness.” *Critical Public Health* (Routledge) 23, no. 3 (2013): 331-344.


Tyler, Imogen. “‘Chav Mum Chav Scum’ Class disgust in contemporary Britain.” (Taylor & Francis) 8, no. 1 (2008): 17-34.


Author/s: 
Pollard, Esther Jane

Title:
(Re)dressing Cinderella: an exploration of women’s engagement with and experience of makeover culture

Date:
2017

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/219322

File Description:
Final Thesis, Some images redacted for copyright

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.