

The Changing Aesthetic Standard and Affirmative Participation of the Filipina in the Event of Ideal Whiteness and the Commodified Beauty

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Abstract: The Filipino society's beauty preferences and conception underwent through several transformations and innovations. The emerging beauty trends, the expanding capitalist cosmetic and skincare market and industry, and our colonial past have largely contributed to the current definition of what is aesthetically likable to the general public. These factors necessitated and pressured the Filipinos to strive for a marketable and conventionally beautiful face. This study examined the conceptions and preferences of beauty among select contemporary Filipina from ages 15 to 30. Further, this illuminates different sociocultural and historical facets regarding Filipina beauty that evokes a dual standard within the society: the cosmopolitan 'white' and conventionally attractive mode of beauty, and on one hand, the diverse, inclusive, affirmative and cosmopolitan version of beauty. This study also identified how these women expressed and affirmed themselves in the convoluted capitalist space while being limited by the commodified aesthetics and the existing socio-cultural preferences for physical appearances within society. These women, in this redefined ideal and the capitalist market, are thus agents and active consumers with proactive choice and awareness, not solely as subjects of the beauty culture and its capitalist scheme.

Keywords: fresh-off-the-boat, body dysmorphia, cosmopolitan whiteness, informed choice, corporate social responsibility (CSR)

I. Introduction

The Filipino society's beauty preferences and conception underwent several transformations and innovations. The emerging trends, the expanding capitalistic

cosmetic and skincare market and industry, and the country's history have largely contributed to the current definition of what is aesthetically likable to the general public. These factors necessitated and pressured Filipinos to strive for a marketable and conventionally beautiful face. This study examined the beauty conception and preferences among select contemporary Filipina from ages 15 to 30. The researcher adopted purposive sampling and identified informants from the social space of stan twitter. This community includes a group of people who follow, support, and post insights and updates on series, films, celebrities, music, and hobbies. Beauty and aesthetics, in this study, shall be employed strictly in consideration of the physical appearances. Specifically, this research has answered the following questions:

1. What are the personal conceptions and preferences of beauty of the select Filipina?
2. How did these Filipina participate and affirm themselves within the beauty market and their respective sociocultural contexts?
3. What is the socially and culturally produced ideal face of Filipino society?

This study inspected and perceived the multiple definitions of the select Filipina regarding their active definition of beauty. After assessing the informant's participation in the beauty market, this study drew the participants' response and action towards the former beauty standard. These women have expressed and affirmed themselves in the convoluted capitalist space while they have been limited by this very societal and cultural set-up and the existing preferences for physical appearances. This illuminates different sociocultural and historical facets regarding Filipina beauty that evokes a dual standard within the society: the cosmopolitan 'white' and conventionally attractive mode of beauty, and on one hand, the diverse, inclusive, affirmative, and cosmopolitan version of beauty.

II. The Event: The Ideal Standard

Beauty has been defined in philosophy as "pleasure objectified, or unity in variety, or the ideal in sensuous form, or successful expression, or the rightful power to make the inner validity of spiritual life also valid for intuitive perception or something else" (Beardsley 1962). Beauty, in relation to material appearances, has been subjected to several pronouncements and contentions especially in determining the 'ideal' and likeability of one's physical face and body. It is something that may dwell on one's inner attributes, assets, and virtue. In this aesthetic discussion, the face and body are the major facets subject to both social and cultural meanings and concepts, and historical and philosophical processes and configurations. Thus, the procedures to care and modify the face and the body may show contrasts in different social and temporal contexts. When looking at the intricacies and nuances in a sociocultural approach, we can see how each culture has a specific social ideal for one's physical appearance that are transmitted through

cultural channels, internalized by the individuals (Neagu 2015). This is echoed by one of the informants, as Napay and Georgia (personal communication, March 2020) express that beauty differs from country to country and culture to culture.

The informants for this study have provided diverse definitions and conceptions of beauty. Resurreccion, Perez, and Del Mundo (personal communication, March 2020) define beautiful as something that can be associated with feelings of happiness, appreciation, and fascination. Being beautiful can also be associated with being comfortable and confident on one's own skin (Reese, Gabilan, Vee & Yam, personal communication, March 2020), having a clean and pleasing look (Ronders, Lyn, Antonio & Santiago, personal communication, March 2020), exhibiting an obvious glow (Georgia, personal communication, March 2020), and having a proportionate facial feature (Legaspi, personal communication, March 2020). It can also be identified as somebody being conventionally attractive (Justine, personal communication, March 2020). Even though the 'conventionally attractive' concept is still subject to relative preferences, the most common metric of beauty can be evaluated in one's skin color, appearance of the face, and ideal shape and form of the body. This relative definition of beauty, being 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' also came as a strong definition by the select Filipina.

Reese, Lady, Cabunoc, and Thurein (personal communication, March 2020) have asserted that beauty can be defined not only through one's physical appearance but also through the inner self, one's existential uniqueness and/or even personality. Cabunoc points out that being beautiful is not only limited to women but encompasses people of all genders. Moran (personal communication, March 2020) has perceived beauty beyond the physical aspects of a human being. It somehow exhibits some form of transcendence that challenges the very materiality of aesthetics and appearances.

Most of the informants' conception of beauty has been largely influenced by the prevalent beauty standard. Thus, the societal pressure remains intense as these women feel the need to conform and align their physical appearance to this measure. According to the informants, the existing beauty standards in the Philippines are disposed to fair and flawless skin (*mestiza*), straight and silky hair, thin or petite body, high-pointed nose, slightly slanted eyes (*chinita*), and chiseled facial features. Any skin imperfections like pimples, scars, wrinkles, and discoloration are generally seen as unpleasant (Resurreccion, personal communication, March 2020).

For Asian American groups, people still try to embrace the white American standard to assimilate with the dominant culture and to avoid looking like a fresh off the boat (FOB). Although, there is little pressure to achieve lighter skin (Justine, personal communication, March 2020). Many Asian American students experience pressure from cultural conflict, conformity to racial stereotypes, and racial

discrimination thereby pushing them to modify their appearances in order to adapt to the foreign setting (Singson 2017).

One of the usual standards in the Philippines is the inclination to whiteness or fairness of the skin. This standard has largely deterred the Filipina's natural skin color and has privileged the "perfectly thin white girl" image (Gabilan, personal communication, March 2020). Whiteness has become the ideal model for the beautiful. Whiteness is historical, social, and multifaceted concept. This comes from the perpetuation of the homogenized Caucasian and neocolonial beauty. Procedures to lighten skin is overtly advertised in television, films, and advertisements in social media. The lack of representation of the people-of-color (POC) and limitation on their shades for lipsticks, foundations, blush ons, concealers, and highlighters are prejudicial and restrictive to these women.

The yearning for fairness can be seen as an internalization of white supremacy values (Glenn 2008). Skin lightening is a lucrative industry in the Philippines, which includes a vast majority of skin care necessities with bleaching and whitening properties (Resurreccion, personal communication, March 2020). Every store has shelves of whitening products and are everywhere in any market (Reese, Ronders, Napay, personal communication, March 2020) both underground and official.

"Whiteness" has become an indicator of social prestige and a tool for acceptance. Fair skin becomes a form of symbolic capital which can be associated with one's attractiveness, desirability, social mobility, and even life chances (Glenn 2008). It has caused a visible division in the sociocultural aspects of the society. "Whiteness" has become *kutis mayaman* (complexion of the wealthy ones). "Whiteness" could be an imperialist and racialized value or a source of symbolic capital as said by Bourdieu (Li, et al. 2008). This extends to the discourse of race, colonization, and oppression. An example of such exclusion today is shown in an interview with tattoo artist Steve Tefft where he expressed that "I don't want the dark canvases. They take away half your skill sets. My stuff is dark and creepy. I don't wanna go that dark-on-dark skin. This is not the canvas for me" (Yzola 2019).

The aesthetic value of the skin color can be historically derived from the legacies of colonialism. Spain had effectively justified racial disparity between Caucasian men and the "brown" men. This ostentated racial hierarchy, colorism, and discrimination against the indigenous and native people and has separated groups of people into civilized and uncivilized. In the Philippine Reservation at the 1904 World's Fair, the Americans exhibited 1,200 Filipinos who showed "radically disavowed claims of a unified Philippine national identity through extensive, racialised display of disparate Filipino 'tribes'" (Grindstaff 1999). The Filipinos had been subjected to being a cultural and anthropological display that contrasts them to the "civilized" Americans and converts. This further encouraged Anglo-American

racial and cultural superiority. Due to these racial hierarchies, the Americans produced a typology of these native societies for their own ethnology that viewed them in the so-called process of evolution (Rafael 2000). Beauty, then, operates at a level beyond values by sociocultural economies and institutions, and has become a tool for exhibiting racial ideology (Cheng 2000).

Another similar event happened at the Philippine Exposition in Madrid in 1887. This exposition showed the difference between the “non-Christianized tribal” people in a reconstructed natural set-up (Kintanar-Alburo 2012). The racial superiority has perpetuated in the discourse of aesthetics and even in sociopolitical representation: “The embodiment of norms and creation of identity was made through a series of exclusions and negations (Christian/pagan, civilized/wild, enlightened/ignorant); enforced by a whole motional complex of shame, fear and guilt (and in time, habit and desire)” (Mojares 2002).

Our colonial past has actively influenced what we chose to value today. Inclination towards a fairer skin can be seen in the idealization in Asia regarding the “white,” fair, and/or light perfection in physical appearances. This contributes to internalized racism, and social rejection and discrimination of people on the basis of skin color. Colonialism has shaped how our ancestors compose, design, use, and cover their bodies; it has controlled the native body through royal decrees, circulars, and codes of conduct (Mojares 2002).

In the Philippines, the skin whitening industry is a huge portion of the beauty market. It has become a major market for multinational corporations which use their appealing means to create and manipulate needs (Glenn 2008). Whitening products have become marketable especially in a society with a high inclination for fairer skin. As similarly seen in India, “the illusionary and transformative power of fairness products becomes the testimonial for propagating a general consumerist ethos” (Jha 2016). The products have effectively manipulated people, as such, promote false consciousness and the consumption thereof becomes a way of life and feeds to the emerging pattern of one-dimensional practice and thinking (Marcuse 1991).

Marketing strategies and advertisements often demonstrate fast results (e.g., “in seven days”) of skin whitening with appealing slogans and fake promises of a smoother skin. The comparisons and transitions from a dark-skinned individual to a fair-skinned person are prominent in such promotions. Even billboards blatantly advertise the “fairer is better” adage (e.g., GlutaMax Your Fair Advantage) (Moran, personal communication, March 2020). These how-to’s endorse skin lightening specialists to pressure people to “fix one’s dark skin” (Gabilan, personal communication, March 2020). Even feminine washes have a whitening characteristic (Perez, personal communication, March 2020). People with darker skin have also become a laughingstock in Showtime and Eat Bulaga (Santiago,

personal communication, March 2020). Dark-skinned people are always subject to demeaning and insult even in the public space.

Most of the lightening soaps and goods contain glutathione, kojic acid, papaya, arbutin, turmeric, and hydroquinone. Skin whitening products aim to suppress the production of melanin, a pigment which gives the skin, hair, and eyes their color. In Mendoza's study (2014), skin whiteners are disproportionately located in Metro Manila and majority of them are for women. The users, as confirmed by the study, desire to lighten their skin due to different perceptions of beauty, youthfulness, and appeal, and advantages for improved economic opportunities, class, and social network. Responding to this "lightening" necessity, glutathione drip and glutathione capsules with collagen are also getting more favored than by solely using whitening soaps and lotions.

Common lightening agents have potential side effects. Kojic acid may cause contact dermatitis; hydroquinone tyrosinase may cause irritation and exogenous ochronosis; and arbutin may cause skin irritation (Mohiuddin 2019). The surveillance of the Cosmetic Control Group of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in Thailand has found that some cosmetic products in the Philippines contain ammoniated mercury (Cabuenas 2019). As stated in the prohibited substances in the ASEAN Definition of Cosmetics and Illustrative List by Category of Cosmetic Products, mercury and its compounds, except in special cases, must not be an ingredient of beauty products (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2008). Mercury, which is a component of many skin whitening products, could have "adverse neurological, psychological and renal effects" (Mohiuddin 2019).

Despite the lack of assurance to the safety of these products and the perpetuation of misleading information in the market, many users continue to consume these products. These products have potential health risks. These dangers from skin whitening goods and services must be considered in the production in the market especially in the teen demographic. The government's intervention in transaction and institutionalization of third-party partnerships is needed to address the health risks and harms from skin whitening procedures and products (Mendoza 2014). The Philippine government must strengthen their policies regarding the ingredients of skin lightening products and procedures in order to secure the well-being of the Filipino consumers.

Beauty is not only driven by the capitalistic mechanisms within the market. But it is also largely motivated by the representations and promotion in the media. The popularization of skin lightening products and the inclination for light-skinned people in media representation have also furthered the "white" standard. As members of stan twitter, Ronders and Vee (personal communication, March 2020) have noticed that due to the Hallyu wave and the consumption of Korean drama and pop, some fans and consumers wanted to be like the artists they admire.

Overall, these apparent beauty standards in society have been largely derived from several factors. These include colonial mentality (Resurreccion, personal communication, March 2020), classicism, racism, colorism, and lack of representation (Santiago, personal communication, March 2020), and neocolonialism (Reese, personal communication, March 2020). These can be seen deeply embedded in the discourse of “whiteness” in the Philippines. Colonial mentality has enabled the arrest in our native cultural forms and diversity in appearances. This phenomenon is due to an internalized cultural inferiority brought by experiences of being colonized. This can be apparent in the denigration of the Filipino culture and body in which anything Filipino is inferior to White, European, or American (David and Okazaki 2006). The Philippines has been affected by Western ideology and culture through Spanish and American colonization which valorize whiteness (Glenn 2008).

This struggle of women in the cramped beauty culture is not exclusive to the Filipina but also to all women-of-color (WOC). Through our cultural norms, history, and narratives of struggle, the society can witness how our faces and bodies become disoriented in the span of time. History has played a huge role in this aesthetic institution: “History... reconstitutes body as site and medium for meaning, power, pleasure” (Mojares 2002). POC have been restrained not only in beauty culture but also in our socio-political realities. Filipinas have been constantly idealized and subjected to the orientalist view and excluded from the areas in which they can express themselves in their own ways.

Microaggressions against POC involve subtle comments, remarks, and discrimination on the basis of skin color and blatant racism (e.g., instances of stereotyping, racial profiling, bullying along the lines of conversations). Here is a quote from Bianca Gonzales on her experience when she was a kid: “10-year-old-me to bullies calling me “negra” be like... Fast forward to me in my 30s, and haters still bully me ‘negra.’ Na-insecure din ako nung bata ako, until I discovered my talents and built real friendships and realized skin color doesn't matter” (Dabu 2016). WOC are susceptible to unfavorable appraisals about their physical appearances. They have struggled to navigate through the white standards of beauty and cultural attitudes regarding their bodies (Winter et al. 2019).

The consolidated ideal appearance of the informants includes the neat and tidy, effortless, comfortable yet stylish and fresh look. Most of them wish for clear and flawless skin and a clean face. Simplicity is also highlighted to be one of these ideals. Another ideal is to have a skinny physique with right bust and butt size and trimmed waist (Reese, Gabilan, Georgia, & Thurein, personal communication, March 2020). Overall, the ideal appearances of the Filipina have been their respective standards (Ronders, personal communication, March 2020), a personal metric (Georgia, personal communication, March 2020), a goal for improvement (Carmela, personal communication, March 2020), and an attitude to practice

(Cabunoc, personal communication, March 2020) in their lives. To visualize the general preference of some Filipinas, the informants provided that Liza Soberano and Kathryn Bernardo are the ideal face of the country.

The informants strive to meet these measures by setting goals for their face and body. Some of them want minimal modifications for their body shapes and sizes while others intended to transform them through a series of diets. Do-diet is a healthy eating discourse that frames restrictions as positive and informed choices while still emphasizing discipline, knowledge on food, self-control, and improvement (Cairns and Johnston 2015). Although it has provided a space for women's informed choice, it has drawn us away from the structures of naturalized fatphobia, gender inequality, and stratification of health outcomes (Cairns and Johnston 2015). Nonetheless, different forms of eating habits and diet, such as “healthy eating,” intermittent fasting, ketogenic diet, and others, can either help them in adjusting their body sizes and altering their body forms or further heighten body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and the pre-existing notions and stereotypes surrounding fatness, and physical well-being if diets become pervasive enough.

Technology has also played a role in this beauty culture. It has enabled people to construct themselves in their own terms and to take control of representation through flexible digital reimagining. Although, it still warrants a digitized dysmorphia of female bodies, inflate an expectation and measure of beauty for the women, and extends the gendered aesthetic contradictions and inequalities (Coy-Dibley 2016). Today's opportunities in the digital world equip women to choose what they want to be and to arbitrate notions on gendered beauty and hegemony on aesthetics and material bodies. However, there is no guarantee for a reality free from deeply rooted societal expectations.

Women are pressured to enhance their appearance to be able to fit in the social parameters. These women, although largely involved in the society of needs, are inevitably repressed by the very standard and definition of “worth.” The female body has become a battlefield of concepts, regulations, values, worth and modifications, a site on issues, notions, and pressures on beauty and body image, and a subject of the society and technology that divulge a dysmorphic perception of it (Coy-Dibley 2016).

III. The Event: The Capitalist Mechanism

Women within the cramped beauty culture remain tied to the shackles of the capitalist beauty market. In the advent of cross-cultural intervention and economic integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and increasing globalization, the beauty market has hastened the commercialization of caring for

the physical appearance. The Southeast Asian region alone holds 32% of the beauty and personal care global marketplace (Tan, 2019).

In parallel with the booming cosmetic and personal care industry, social media influence, and increasing access to shops and information, the Filipina's purchasing power and agency have been increasing exponentially. They are confronted by the tension to step up in the beauty game while they demonstrate their purchasing power and affirmative vision to look physically attractive.

Expanding beauty market in the Philippines is apparent in the new modes of retail and shopping through Shopee, BeautyMNL, Beauty Beat, Lazada, Sephora, Althea, and Freyja. These online channels are open for both selling and buying opportunities. Consumers are also attracted to deals and offers of cashback, free shipping, discounts, vouchers, and low prices. Online shops have allowed the consumers to save more money, time, and energy as compared to the physical stores. The research respondents usually buy their skincare products and cosmetic goods from malls, drugstores, and online shops. Twitter online shops and Instagram retailers are also new channels to purchase affordable and legitimate Korean products.

Online shops also provide access to those who live in the provinces with limited local physical stores and lesser varieties and cosmetic selections (Resurreccion, personal communication, March 2020). They also have a wide range of available beauty products and alternatives for the Filipina. This internet retailing paved the way for enabling small-scale sellers and local businesses. Online shops, however, are not guaranteed to stray away from the schema of scammers, inauthenticity, long shipping periods, cancellations, and wrong items.

The informants often use local brands like Detail Makeover Cosmetics, Careline, Ever Bilena, Belo Cosmetics, Human Nature, Celeteque, Vice Cosmetics, Blk, Greencross, Myra, Human Heart Nature, Happy Skin, Milcu, BEVi and Ellana Minerals. They also consume products from Korean (Face Shop, Etude, Innisfree, VT Cosmetics, Cosrx, Mediheal, Missha, The Saem, Klairs, Hera and Nature Republic), Japanese (Senka, Shiseido, Biore, and SK-II), Chinese (Ciga Long Beauty and Focallure) and American brands. Today, we can see that the online buzz in the Southeast Asian region is focused on J-Beauty products with 58.7%, above Korean Beauty with 21.9% and Chinese beauty with 19.4% online engagements (Chua 2019). Korean skincare and make-up are getting more popular among beauty enthusiasts. One of the routines includes a ten-step process in order to achieve a glass-skin look.

Social media paved the way to introduce several standards of beauty from each country and to access information about foreign goods (Antonio and Moran, personal communication, March 2020). It has allowed dialogues regarding experiences in cosmetic products which sometimes lead to making a product a

subject of hype (e.g., Anastasia brow dip) and of criticism (e.g., Kylie Jenner's exfoliator) (Justine, personal communication, March 2020). It served as an avenue to set trends. Some of these recent trends include faux freckles, neon makeup, pastel nails, cruelty-free products, and expanding shades of cosmetics for the POC (e.g., Fenty Beauty).

Influencers also play a part in promoting beauty products. They are often sponsored or commissioned to use or endorse a product on their respective accounts which have high amounts of followers and engagements. Through their influence, the promoted goods will reach a wide and diverse range of potential consumers and followers. Social media has become an arena of expression, an avenue for promotion and reviews, and an interactive space for market relations and objectification of appearances. At the same time, it has also allowed large capitalist beauty industries to prosper and further profit from the trends.

Even with the higher purchasing power of women in the market, the society cannot remove from the grasp of the dominant ideal beauty standards in the society: "Though some women perceive self-modification procedures as emancipatory, they are ultimately still confined within the constraints of societal approval and conventions of beauty" (Yeung 2015). The conventions of beauty among the general public are still tied in the society's unrealistic body standards. People are exposed to society's beauty standard which we are "brainwashed" to want to aspire to (Perez, personal communication, March 2020).

In the contemporary period, we can witness how beauty has been largely commodified. As observed by one of the informants:

Because society and culture, at large, assigned value to a person's appearance and created social hierarchies resulting from such assignation, people seek to remedy their positions in society as need be and as they see fit through whatever means they possess. This creates an opportunity for people to make money out of making such remedies. This perpetuates the social hierarchies that created the need for these remedies in the first place and creates a cycle that commodifies beauty (Moran, personal communication, March 2020).

Today's beauty culture has effectively endorsed a specific measure of beauty and inclined to a pervasive version of attractiveness and goodness. The capitalist beauty market then reinforced this existing social and aesthetic hierarchies and preyed on the manufactured ideal standards.

Select Filipina have recognized how our beauty culture is commercialized:

It's a multi-billion industry! The make-up industry alone is insane. Then, there are cosmetics like soap and facial washes that are essential in every household... It's commercialized; and you can see it on the way the products are made for. We value having fair-skin, so there are a lot of products that will make your skin lighter. We like straight hair better than curly hair; so we have shampoos for that (Napay, personal communication, March 2020).

One of the informants has seen that the continuous demand for beauty products is a way for the capitalist to think of the ways in which they can gain profit and that the capitalists made similar products look different in order to let everyone think that they are consuming different goods and variants of the cosmetic goods (Lady, personal communication, March 2020).

The multinational beauty industry both responded and created a demand to materially improve the self. The commitments on sustainability, inclusion, diversity, and personal well-being are thus far motivated by the capitalistic cultural consumption. In the cases of skin lightening, “consumer choice now fashions lightening as a form of human agency, where the surface of the skin can be manipulated to conform to, or resist global and local beauty standards. Capitalism is thus implicated in the process of commodification identity politics” (Mohiuddin 2019).

Even if the Filipina consumers assert and express themselves through procedures of care and beautification, their agency is still conditionally distressed by this very commodification. Faces and bodies are subject to brands; aesthetic agency can easily be undermined by consumerism. In this very commodification, the self has been assigned with value aesthetics. The capitalist commodification of beauty has generated false needs within the beauty culture and market. These false needs are those which are “superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in [their] repression” (Marcuse 1991). Yet the Filipina women do not always conform to the exploitative market.

On another note, the beauty trends are more accessible to more privileged people, especially those in the middle-class with high purchasing power. This commodification is also apparent in how it is rare to find a beauty product that gives back to the community and how beauty culture tends to cater to the companies rather than the masses (Santiago, personal communication, March 2020).

Inevitably, there is a phenomenological precursor to the version of beauty that celebrates and constitutes manifestations of the “white Christian supremacist, ableist, heteropatriarchal, settler-colonial capitalism” (Ettinger 2018) that has

effectively marginalized our experiences in beauty culture and the market. Overall, the current beauty culture-market is exclusive and a money-making mechanism at its core: “Beauty culture should also focus on the total package of being beautiful, not just on external appearances. But, of course, that doesn’t sell, right? So why bother?” (Legaspi, personal communication, March 2020).

IV. The Resistance: Decentralized Standard and the Filipina’s Agency

The onset of the democratization of beauty culture has significantly enlarged the purchasing power, awareness, health and well-being awareness, and interest of the consumers (Owh, Chee, and Loh 2016). Growing market and purchasing power also entail flourishing informed choice. Consumers became more informed about the specifications of the products. Many of the informants draw attention to several considerations including effectiveness, compatibility to skin, price, cruelty-free and hypoallergenic factors, authenticity, naturalness, brand, ingredients, popularity, and overall quality. Through these considerations, the consumers can decide through their assessment of the product. Thus, they have become exposed to many options in the market. Some of the informants are also disposed to the products that their family and friends have already used. Vee (personal communication, March 2020) checks the alcohol content, doses of hyaluronic acid and centella asiatica for skincare products. Hyaluronic acid is especially good for dry skin and beneficial for acne treatments. On one hand, centella asiatica is known as Indian pennywort and has proved to benefit the skin by reducing stretch marks.

This informed choice has permitted them to escalate their awareness of the product and effectively monitor these within the preferential range and values. In general, the key drivers of consumer attitudes and behavior in the Philippines include efficiency, effectiveness, freshness, naturalness, purity, and being novel and experiential (Chopra 2018). For online shopping, reviews are highly regarded in the decision-making for the consumer’s choice. They offer insights for effectiveness, legitimacy of the product, compatibility to several types of skin, recommended period of use, packaging and overall quality.

The concept and model of corporate social responsibility (CSR), wherein the businesses consider aiming towards noble social goals (activism, charity, philanthropy, protection of rights) and practices, also offer the possibility of sustainability within the corporate world. This sustainable weapon, if rightfully utilized, can actually provide proper ventures to highlight and address social concerns within the capitalistic ventures in the beauty market. Although this warrants another discussion as to the profound existence of ethical consumerism (e.g., green purchases), the effectiveness of CSR can be seen on their extent of responsibility, initiatives, accountability, and impacts. This brings us to the question: “Is CSR truly devoid of the exploitative nature of capitalism?”

As for the beauty standards on ideal whiteness, the emerging version of whiteness does not only consist of the Caucasian model, but is now conjoined with East Asian whiteness. The Filipina informants have adapted to the East Asian beauty and skin care methods. Even in medical modifications, beauty procedures have become more “localized.” A study has found out that facial aesthetic treatments in Asians are not aimed at attaining Western features but to optimize Asian features, to correct deficiencies, and to enhance the characteristics of Asian ethnicity (Liew, et al. 2016).

Nonetheless, whiteness has no particular location now. Whiteness does not mean Caucasian whiteness anymore, but it has become cosmopolitan – whiteness is now racialized, nationalized (and localized) and transnationalized and has become non-essentialist (Saraswati 2010), contingent and adapting to a particular location or context. Cosmopolitan whiteness allows whiteness to adapt, mutate, and co-opt new forms of itself to maintain supremacy (Saraswati 2010). This form of whiteness exhibits the new forms in which there are shifting hyper idealized standards of beauty in society. Thus, it takes the shape of what the current trend in a particular culture is: “There is no one race or ethnic group in particular that can occupy an authentic cosmopolitan white location because there has never been a ‘real’ whiteness to begin with: whiteness is a virtual quality, neither real nor unreal” (Saraswati 2010). However, this virtual quality of whiteness applies to aesthetics, to the event of diaspora and to people of different cultures. This shall not, in any way, discount the white privilege and instances of supremacy in the discourses of race. It is also important to note that the Caucasian/Western whiteness is also divisive in nature.

While this rebranded whiteness continues to be a favorable feature and color of the skin in the physical beauty and preferences, movements from the Filipinas and the collective clutch to the dark skin beauty to affirm that WOC are already in place. Gradually, the society witnesses the commercial and sociocultural undertakings of the pioneers and market to subscribe to diversity and to effectively consult from the individual and cultural differences. As many individuals demand products from their personal necessity, the industry needed to adjust themselves even with the promising sales in the ‘whitening’ phenomenon.

The preexisting ideal whiteness and the capitalist industry do not entirely expel the emerging openness in the beauty culture. This openness movement extends to different types, looks, and ranges for one’s face, skin color, bodies, and material features. With the plethora of cultures and internet access, there is a realization that white Western perception of beauty is not the only acceptable form of beauty (Napay, personal communication, March 2020). By then, “women will be free of the beauty myth when we can choose to use our faces and clothes and bodies as simply one form of self-expression out of a full range of others. We can dress up for our pleasure, but we must speak up for our rights” (Wolf 2002). Legaspi (personal

communication, March 2020) has recommended that our beauty culture should “focus on improving and taking care of what we have, not aiming to completely alter ourselves just to get the necessary validation we thought we might need to belong in our society.”

The standard then is being recalibrated by the society through the emerging contemporary trends. In line with this, the Filipinos are becoming more cognizant of these diversities and more accepting of different forms of beauty. However, another retraction from the current trend is the fact that beauty standards and physical appearances and values are largely gendered mostly by catering and responding to women’s needs, although these needs may be qualified as false in the long run. In the beauty culture, the rationality can be located in the individual choice of women regarding the beauty norms whereas the irrationality lies in the false consciousness in which this culture creates false needs, desires, and disorders seen imposed in the media and market (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014).

Today, we can see revolutionary modes in the representation of the pluralities of appearances and diversity of beauty. The singular standard has become decentralized to different forms of aesthetic assertion. The apprehension of distinctiveness and openness to such differences have accepted and affirmed what must be seen as “normal” – hyperpigmentation, acne, body marks, different body types, and dark skin colors. The body has become a contested site of aesthetics, sociocultural mechanisms, and political liberation. It is both a powerful, symbolic medium, and an entity that is capable of creating social meanings. It is thus a “a prime site for the contestation of social and individual power; it is the locus of both oppression and empowerment, simultaneously” (Reischer and Koo 2004).

Becoming more open to diversified beauty has also offered opportunities for the Filipina to express themselves and adopt cosmetics, skincare, hygienic products, and body modifications for them. On the surface of different sorts of beauties, the LGBTQ+ people have emerged in the beauty culture scenario. Vice Ganda launched a beauty line. Vice Ganda is a gay femme man who is trying to be inclusive in his shades of makeup line and price. Thus, the role of queer or LGBTQ+ can be an interesting angle in studying the beauty scene (Santiago, personal communication, March 2020). Reconfiguration of the standard of beauty has also become visible in beauty “fat bakla beauty pageant” in urban Philippines. Pageant organizers and contestants have established a space for fat gender nonconforming bodies, for reinterpretation of fat stigma and its class associations, and racial and ethnic subjectivities in skin color (David and Cruz 2018).

Despite the pressure in this whole beauty discourse, women can operate through their agency, create a choice, and absolve themselves of the accountability in the case of non-conformity (Ong and Braun 2016). The Filipina can reject the conventional views and standards of beauty by expressing it on their individuality –

both their self-affirmation and rejection of societal ideals and pressure. The real issue is not about how women can modify or enhance her appearance through make up, clothing, surgery, or all sorts of body-related modifications, but it has become an issue of choice (Wolf 2002).

These women found ways to resist the sometimes surreal ideal through appreciation, self-acceptance, and affirmation of the self. Today's openness phenomenon is like the anti-Spanish revolution's discourse of "unloosing of bodies... alive with festive openness... dissolves barriers of gender" (Mojares 2002). Any face and body enhancements and modifications by the Filipina which are derived from her choice is a form of self-expression. Even medical procedures are valid modes to 'beautify' oneself. Physical beauty, in this regard, is not essentialized. We also need to reinterpret "beauty" in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical, and non-violent manner (Wolf 2002). Several steps or acts to make themselves feel sufficient already posit an ever-contingent position on the contemporary Filipina beauty standards.

These women in the Philippines resist this through the informed choice, purchasing power, awareness of the beauty market and cosmetic goods, and the sociocultural knowledge of the nuances in the beauty culture. Their aesthetic, sociocultural, and economic agency has also provided them opportunity to freely choose cosmetic and hygienic preferences, to utilize the social media to bring awareness, to resist the old standard through accepting more non-essentialist versions of beauty and to decentralize the homogenous preferences brought by the Western ideal.

The select Filipina has resisted the pressure within the society and the market by affirming their own personal standards: "I don't care about the trend. I do my own preference" (Ronders, March 2020). They have accepted their own as they have recognized that the standard is not the only admissible version of self: "Tanggap at mahal ko ang aking sariling mukha at katawan" (Cabunoc, March 2020). For them, "society's concept of beauty tends to be unrealistic" (Georgia, personal communication, March 2020).

There are indigenous practices and enhancements that show their very own versions of aesthetics which were already in place and have resisted several modes of colonizer-imposed beauty. One of the examples is the traditional tattooing in Kalinga. Whatok, the (Kalinga) tattoo, displays visual presentation for aesthetics, for indigenous values, and for expressing cultural practice and beauty tied to the personal, social, ecological, and metaphysical beliefs in Kalinga (Abbacan-Tuguic and Marnag 2016). Pangotoeb, the Manobo term for tattoo, is the traditional tattooing in the Pantaron Manobo of Mindanao which possess several meanings and functions for the people (Ragragio and Paluga 2019). Such tattoos signify an important aspect of our culture and tells something about our choices in our body

and the complexity of such art. Indigenous tattooing should be part of our beauty culture.

Another change in the contemporary beauty scenario is the increasing historical awareness among the Filipina. They have already moved away from the imperial standards of beauty by continuously attempting to unlearn the Caucasian-centered aesthetics and learning from our colonial past. Hence, we can see the nativist turn that looks at the Filipino diversity and that breaks colorism in the Philippines. This scenario is like the affirmation during the Philippine revolution and the 1920s when the Filipinos rejected the Western racial superiority and asserted their identity by highlighting their Malayan roots. Their personal choices and local affirmations have, in a way, impeded the racialized and imperialist standard and moved towards a diverse, almost cosmopolitan one.

The socialized body is subjected to cultural norms, and that our attitudes towards the body reflect the value configuration of a particular society (Neagu 2015). Inevitably, women in the Philippines are subjected to a measure of idealized beauty while being resistant to the capitalist commodification of beauty and ideal preferences in the society. The current beauty trends and culture gave birth to innovative forms to enhance and modify one's appearance while still being oriented by the pressure to be lighter, skinnier, and to be a woman subjected to classicist and colorist aesthetic values.

There are multiple conceptions and preferences that appear in the remarks of the select Filipina, and these preferences are flexible and largely motivated by the society, history, and the market. Whereas the beauty phenomenon demonstrates the affirmation of agency of the Filipina, the corporate system has also taken a flexible response to this. The system has bent itself an interesting, trending, compelling, and more "environmental-friendly" consumables, and services that once again revert to the society-driven demand and to the multinational-industry scheme to globalize the need to be conventionally beautiful and to extract billions from this movement.

The beauty myth, thus, is "not about women at all" but is about "men's institutions and institutional power" (Wolf 2002). This myth does not only consist of anything material (i.e., aesthetic) but also something behavioral, and inevitably, sociopolitical. It is a struggle "between pain and pleasure, freedom and compulsion" (Wolf 2002).

The sociocultural ideal face of the Filipino society, then, is foremost a dual face: the cosmopolitan 'white' and conventionally attractive mode of beauty, and on one hand, the diverse, inclusive, affirmative, and cosmopolitan version of beauty. This phenomenon is closely tied to the concept of "feminine double-bind." The feminine double-bind persists as women who actively dismiss the beauty products

and the culture cannot entirely discount the sociocultural importance of the beauty culture (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). While the woman is an active agent and can be a wise consumer at her own game, she is restricted by the very own systems in the beauty market which pushes for capitalistic commodification of aesthetics and by the sociocultural and conventional standards of the Filipino society.

Women's bodies and the social constructions of their form reveal more than just their position in the society but includes the channel in which they negotiate, reconfigure, and redefine this designation (Reischer and Koo 2004). This research does not aim to prescribe what should a Filipina do with their bodies and whether or not they should conform to the conventional norms of beauty. This does not also impose full allegiance to all types of beauty but rather it demands that "we have to stop reading each other's appearances as if appearance were language, political allegiance, worthiness, or aggression" (Wolf 2002). This, then, inclines to a pro-woman definition of beauty that redefines power (Wolf 2002) and regards women as agents and active consumers with proactive choice and awareness, not solely as subjects of the beauty culture and its capitalist scheme.

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