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Perceptions of Beauty Among Female Chinese Students in the United States and China

Cover Page Footnote

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Tim Martin, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Kennesaw State University, for his assistance in statistical analysis.

Perceptions of Beauty Among Female Chinese Students in the United States and China

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study compared the perceptions of beauty among Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States with Chinese women who were students in their homeland. We interviewed 19 women in China and 19 women in the United States to determine differences in responses. In accordance with the sociocultural approach and the social comparison approach, we expected Chinese women in the United States to have a be more acculturate, more frequently conclude that American women were more beautiful than Chinese women, be more likely than those studying in China to report body dissatisfaction, be more likely to dislike and desire to alter body parts that specifically reflect American beauty ideals, and express a greater desire to surgically alter their bodies. Results indicated that participants in the United States group were more likely to reflect some American beauty standards (particularly their desires to lose weight and to be taller), while maintaining those of their own culture (the importance of facial appearance), as well. Suggestions for future research and practice, particularly for mental health workers on college campuses with growing populations of Chinese exchange students, are discussed.

Keywords: beauty, acculturation, Chinese, female, student, weight, eyes, thinness, face, body dissatisfaction

Cross-Cultural Beauty

The concept of beauty is both subjective and transient. Research indicates that standards for physical attractiveness differ cross-culturally (Bjerke & Polegato, 2006; Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu, 1995) and that such standards change over time, even within the same society (Mazur, 1986). Thus, it is important to examine the differences between societies and the effects such standards have on the psychological health of individuals. This study will examine the effects on women as a result of differences between Chinese and American beauty standards.

American Beauty

History of American Beauty Ideals.
As Mazure (1986) summarized, physical

standards in the United States have undergone a variety of drastic, even opposing, alterations over the country's history, often due to societal factors. Whether a woman ought to have large or small breasts or a full or slender frame depended upon the fashion trends of the time, which are often popularized as a direct result of particular historical events. Chief attitudes of society were often reflected in women's dress. For example, the emergence of the flapper, marked by higher hemlines and straighter body shapes, came about shortly after World War I but virtually disappeared following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Soon after, ideal women were again curvaceous and exposed less upper leg. Regardless of the standards in place, women have sought to adapt, or, for those more concerned, "overadapt" (Mazure, 1986, p. 298) to social ideals in order to align

themselves with the prevailing ideologies of beauty to attain improved social status.

Contemporary American Beauty Ideals. Abundant research provides insight into current American beauty standards. A survey of United States advertisements suggested that Americans focus on the body as a whole when determining beauty (Frith, Cheng, & Shaw, 2004); that is, all body parts significantly contribute to women's overall physical attractiveness. Thus, an understanding of beauty standards among American women must incorporate various parts of the body.

American criteria parallel those established in European nations (Evans & McConnell, 2003). Bjerke and Polegato (2006) reported that, despite individual variations, five European cities were similar in their average chosen preferences for blue or green eyes, as well as blonde, light brown, or dark brown hair. These findings are comparable to those of Feinman and Gill (1987), who found that ideal women in the United States were perceived as having hair, skin, and eye colors that were lighter.

Further supporting Feinman and Gill (1987), there is empirical evidence to defend the notion that women in the United States yearn for blonde hair, erroneously believing it to be the dominant male preference (Jacobi & Cash, 1992). Freedman (1986) found that one-third of all Miss America contestants had blonde hair, a percentage disproportionate to the actual occurrence of blondeness among American women. Rich and Cash (1993) reported that blonde models were found more frequently in women's magazines than in the general population and more frequently in Playboy magazines than in other women's magazines; this finding may suggest a

relationship between blondeness and perceived sexuality.

Berry and Zebrowitz-McArthur (1988) theorized the blonde ideal might be related to an appearance of youthfulness, which would be desirable from an evolutionary perspective. Women who appear young physically will be associated with fertility (Buss, 2004). The youthfulness theory is also rational in light of the dominant American ideology that young is beautiful (Lijtmaer, 2010).

The popular view that youthfulness is attractive, coupled with the American values of freedom and change, results in two logical ideas common throughout the female population. First, women should maintain youthful appearances. Second, if they do not currently possess youthful appearances, they should pursue them through means of body alteration. Such mindsets provide women with the motivation to utilize plastic surgery at increasing rates. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported approximately ten million cosmetic procedures in 2009, 91% of which were for women (ASAPS, 2009).

Breast size is also an important component to American women's physical appeal. Although breast size preferences have fluctuated throughout United States history, the current preference among women is for bigger breasts (Frederick & Forbes, 2007). Breast augmentation procedures have more than doubled in the past decade, making them the most common cosmetic procedure (ASAPS, 2010). Frederick, Peplau, and Lever (2008) found that, out of 26,703 women, 70% were dissatisfied with the size of their breasts, and a majority wished them to be larger. In contrast, a majority (56%) of the 25,524

men surveyed expressed satisfaction with their partners' current breast sizes.

American preferences concerning skin texture and tone also exist. Body hair is viewed as undesirable and unattractive and is often shaved or removed through other methods (Basow, 1991; Basow & Braman, 1998; Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998). Recent research gives credence to a preference for tanned skin. Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Geschke (2009) found an overall increase in college students' tanning practices between 1995 and 2005. Women also increased in the rates with which they believed that tanning made them feel more attractive. Banerjee, Campo, and Green (2008) supported women's judgments by showing that men considered dark women thinner, taller, healthier, and more attractive than medium or light-skinned women.

The preference for tallness in the West is steadily increasing, as shown by the requirements mandated for fashion models. The Association of Model Agents (AMA, 2009) requires that their models measure at least 5'8", over four inches taller than the average American woman (CDC [National Center for Health Statistics], 2009). All contestants on the 15th cycle of the popular reality fashion show, America's Next Top Model, were over 5'8" tall (Bentley, 2010).

Perhaps the contemporary apex of beauty in American culture is thinness. European, Canadian, and American Caucasian women of various age groups and socioeconomic statuses perceive thinness as ideal (Ahern & Hetherington, 2006; DeLeel, Hughes, Miller, Hipwell, & Theodore, 2009; Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov, & Holm-Denoma, 2010; Pruis & Janowsky, 2010), and Phillips and de Man (2010) found a direct relationship between women's weight and body satisfaction. Almost 290,000 women in

the United States desired thinness enough to undergo liposuction last year (ASAPS, 2010).

The thin ideal is explicit in popular culture through the American media's portrayal of thin women. Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, and Thompson (1980) found a steady increase in dieting and exercise-related articles in women's magazines between 1959 and 1978. Further, they observed that the average weights of Miss America contestants and Playboy centerfolds steadily declined over this period. Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, and Ahrens (1992), replicating Garner et al.'s methodology about one decade later with magazines from 1979-1988 and contestants from 1979-1985, reproduced similar results. They concluded that the advertisements portrayed women approximately 13-19% under expected weight, which fits into the criteria for anorexia nervosa (American Psychiatric Association [DSM-IV-TR], 2000).

Chinese Beauty

Is the thin ideal growing in Chinese culture, as well? Whether traditional Chinese literature indicates a historical preference for thinness is debatable. Lee, Leung, Lee, Yu, and Leung (1996) argued that traditional Chinese beauties were not thin, but were rather full, even "plump" (p. 78) and were preferred because their weights testified to greater socioeconomic status. Thus, the authors attribute current preferences for thinness to Western influence through the globalization that has taken place in recent decades.

However, Leung, Lam, and Sze (2001) argued against Lee et al.'s (1996) proposition, both historically and empirically. They discovered, through their

study of Miss Hong Kong contestants, consistent average body weights for a period of 35 years (1975-2000). Further, they called to attention traditional Chinese beauties in ancient literature whose slim figures were the pinnacles of their beauty. Three out of the four classic beauties of China, they note, were thin. In addition, preferences of the Emperor for thin women were once so strong that some began fasting and dieting.

One observation concerning Leung et al.'s (2001) findings is that although average weights stayed consistent, average heights of pageant winners did steadily increase. Increased height without increased weight may still demonstrate the development of a thinner ideal woman; for example, a model at 120 pounds and 5'4" will appear heavier than a model at 120 pounds and 5'8."

Regardless of disputes, research shows that facial attractiveness was and still is the most important determinant in the Chinese ideology of overall physical appeal. Frith, Cheng, and Shaw (2004) also examined Asian advertisements and suggested that Asian beauty still posits the face as the focal point of all that is deemed beautiful. Cosmetics advertisements are most commonplace among Asian models, suggesting a preoccupation with facial attractiveness, whereas American models more frequently advertise clothing, demonstrating a preoccupation with the entire body. Chen, Jackson, and Huang (2006) found that facial appearance and height were more salient concerns among Chinese students than were weight or body shape. Likewise, Lee et al. (1996) found that Chinese students were most displeased with facial features (e.g., eyes, nose, face, mouth). Therefore, while it may be a growing beauty ideal among Chinese,

thinness does not take precedence over the importance of the face.

Another important aspect of the Chinese concept of beauty can be found in an ancient Confucian adage concerning filial piety found in Chapter 1 of the Xiao Jing (trans. 1899): “身(shēn)体(tǐ)发(fā) ▪ (fū), 受(shòu) 之(zhī) 父(fù) 母(mǔ), 不(bù) 敢(gǎn) 毁(hǔi) 伤(shāng), 孝(xiào) 之(zhī) 始(shǐ) 也(yě).” This phrase translates into English as follows: “Your body, hair, and skin are gifts from your parents; thus, you dare not damage them.” According to this warning, women should prefer what was granted to them naturally in order to show utmost love and respect to their parents. Physical alterations beyond what is natural are not desirable under the traditional Chinese philosophy. Such a worldview stands opposed to the American mindset of the freedom and desirability of change, as demonstrated through frequent plastic surgery.

The Development of Body Dissatisfaction

Unfortunately, cultural beauty ideals are just that—ideals. Rarely do women in any culture perfectly attain such high standards of physical attractiveness, which leads to body dissatisfaction. A variety of theories attempt to explain the development of body dissatisfaction. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) proposed the objectification theory, which argues that women's perceptions as mere objects instead of human beings in the sight of others accounts for the sense of shame, disapproval, or even hatred they feel toward their bodies. Hamilton, Mintz, and Kashubeck-West (2007) did not produce findings that supported the objectification theory's ability to predict body dissatisfaction.

Stormer and Thompson (1996) proposed four other potential explanations for the development of negative body image. They included 1) social comparison approach, 2) sociocultural approach, 3) negative verbal commentary approach, and 4) maturational status approach. They found that both the social comparison and the sociocultural approaches were significantly related to body dissatisfaction. They later found that social comparison also provided a link between the latter approaches (negative verbal commentary and maturational status) and body dissatisfaction (Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer, 1999). Therefore, both approaches will be discussed in detail, explaining how they uniquely may affect Chinese women in particular.

Sociocultural Approach. The sociocultural approach, pioneered by the work of Vygotsky (Mahn, 1999; see Vygotsky, 1978 for a thorough overview), proposes that people learn to think and behave in ways that are taught to them early in life by consistent agents of influence. A sociocultural approach to body image proposes that body dissatisfaction comes about through the standards solidified by unofficial authorities within a culture (e.g., the mass media, which includes print and electronic forms of advertisement and entertainment). These standards determine which physical traits are appealing or unappealing, and women who do not match the criteria are no longer perceived as ideal within the society (Lau, Lum, Chronister, & Forrest, 2006; Stormer & Thompson, 1996).

Social Comparison Approach. The social comparison approach may be considered as a natural outflow of the sociocultural approach (Lau et al., 2006), for once an ideal is widespread and examples of the standards are consistently visible, comparing oneself to them becomes

automatic. Festinger (1954) theorized that, especially in ambiguous or subjective situations, people compare themselves to others to discern social norms and expectations. Researchers note that collectivist ideology (the perception of the “public” or “collective” self; Triandis, 1989) prevalent in Asian cultures may lead women to engage in social comparison and attempts to conform more frequently (Evans & McConnell, 2002; Jung & Lee, 2006). Thus, according to the social comparison approach, Chinese women, because of their proneness to group orientation, will be more likely than those of individualistic ideologies to compare their physical appearances to others, which will result in body dissatisfaction.

Support for Social Comparison Approach and Sociocultural Approach. Both the sociocultural approach and the social comparison approach are supported through prior research related to media, particularly advertising. According to the sociocultural approach, the media is an agent of influence, conveying socially acceptable standards to the general population. Chinese advertising has a long history of Western influence. Chinese Billboards, along with the first magazine, newspaper, and radio outlets in the country, were created by Westerners and featured Western advertising (Wang, 2004). Such early advertising successfully introduced and popularized American fashion, cuisine, and medicine into the Chinese culture, thus giving credence to both approaches: Chinese citizens acknowledged media outlets as agents of influence, qualified to set standards of acceptability (the sociocultural approach) and, after comparing themselves to the media, adopted their standards (the social comparison approach).

Although advertising halted during the Cultural Revolution, China reintroduced its usage by the late 1970's, and Western influence continues in popular culture, both through printed materials and audiovisual media, such as television and film, particularly in the area of cosmetics (Hong, 1994; Nelson & Paek, 2005; Wang, 2004). After analyzing 496 Chinese commercials, Zhang and Harwood (2004) found that Western, modern values were advertised more frequently than traditional Chinese values. 9.3% of all commercials advertised products related to beauty and youth. In a content analysis of seven countries, including other Asian nations, such as South Korea, India, and Thailand, Nelson and Paek (2005) found that China was the most likely to use Western language and models in cosmetic advertisements. When traveling to Shanghai to collect data for this paper, the first author photographed a variety of globalized advertisements and products, including those that use Western women as the models for cosmetics and fashion. They are available for viewing for purposes of this study (Staley, 2011).

The usage of foreign advertisements throughout China is so widespread that it has created a blend of both Western and Asian culture, which Zhang and Harwood (2004, p. 165) referred to as "hybridization". Zhou and Belk (2004, p. 64) agreed, describing the country as "awash in a mix of foreign and local goods, images, advertising appeals and consumption ideas." This notion was supported by their research on Chinese participants who observed both Western and Chinese advertisements. Participants experienced conflicting desires; they wanted to remain faithful to native culture while also associating with foreign culture. In particular, they found Western advertisements related to beauty and fashion, as well as the women advertising

such products, more appealing than similar Chinese advertisements.

Numerous studies show that advertisements have effects on individuals' perceptions of beauty and their levels of body satisfaction. Hamilton, Mintz, and Kashubeck-West (2007), as well as Glauert, Rhodes, Byrne, Fink, and Grammar (2009) found that priming their participants with advertisements of thin, American women increased their levels of body dissatisfaction. Evans and McConnell (2003) achieved similar results with Chinese participants by using advertisements of an ideal American woman (blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin); these participants experienced decreased ratings in self-esteem and increased desires to conform to the Caucasian standard. Chinese women who internalized the American beauty standards portrayed in the media were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies (Lau, et al., 2006). From these findings, we conclude that Chinese women's body images will be susceptible to the inherent messages that are spoken through media and peer exposure that are a constant presence in the United States.

Reasons to Study College Women

Much of the research on attitudes toward physical appearance and body dissatisfaction utilizes college women for participants. One explanation for this trend is the sophomore college problem, the general tendency to use college students, particularly sophomores, as participants in studies because of their availability and willingness (Jackson, 2009, p. 214). Perhaps a more relevant explanation, however, is that body preoccupation and eating pathology are issues particularly plaguing young women (Pruis & Janowski, 2010). Thus,

researchers should give special attention to this population.

Reasons to Study Chinese Women

Conducting research on Chinese women is worthwhile because there are numerous risks to the increasing rates of body dissatisfaction among Chinese women. One significant risk to Chinese women's preoccupation with thinness in particular is that mainstream perceptions of desirable weights are frequently unhealthy and exceptional. Leung et al. (2001) found that Miss Hong Kong winners, who are manifestations of society's beauty ideals, are both taller and thinner than the average female citizen. Although the majority is neither overweight nor obese (Lee et al., 1996), the desires to lose weight and the considerations of medically underweight women as ideal persist (Sanders & Hess, 1998, as cited in Lau et al., 2006).

Another risk is that recent research shows that body dissatisfaction among Chinese women is increasing and is directly related to the development of eating disorders (Kennedy, Templeton, Gandhi, & Gorzalka, 2004; Lee et al., 1996; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) and emotional difficulties, including low self-esteem and depression (Green et al., 2009; Marmorstein, von Ranson, Iacono, & Malone, 2007; Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Eisenberg, 2006). Low rates among both Asians and Asian Americans to utilize mental health services (Meyer, Zane, & Cho, 2009; Mo & Mac, 2009) further exacerbate this problem. Further, Meyer et al. (2009) found that Asian immigrants were even less likely than Asians who were American-born to utilize available services, making Asian immigrants especially at risk. Finally, another reason to study Chinese women is because research aimed studying

the Chinese population and body image is still limited.

Reasons to Study Chinese Immigrants

It is also important to study Chinese women who are immigrants to the United States, where body dissatisfaction, plastic surgery, and increasing rates of eating disorders are so prevalent (ASAPS, 2010; Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders, 2003). According to the social comparison approach (Lau et al., 2006) frequent exposure to the American environment places Chinese women at increased likelihood for internalizing these attitudes and behaviors that are common in the United States.

One important observation is that Chinese women who have immigrated to the United States must compare themselves to representatives of a dominant group that is no longer one of their own ethnicity; less than 5% of the United States population claims any type of Asian heritage, and approximately .8% of the total population specifically claimed Chinese heritage on the 2000 Census (United States Census Bureau, 2000). In light of the social comparison approach, this is problematic because it could result in Chinese women's growing dissatisfaction with their own bodies as they compare them to those of American women, whose facial and body structures are notably different (Kaw, 1991).

Collectivist ideology's effects on Chinese women who move to the United States may not be limited to social comparison alone. Motivation to actually conform to those social standards esteemed by the culture may also follow. Hall (1995) found that even Chinese women who are not in the United States are persistent in their aspirations to attain Western beauty

standards, and such desires can be fueled further as women immigrate and are exposed to Western culture on a daily basis. Evans and McConnell (2003) found that, unlike some minority groups in the United States, Chinese women do not utilize “self-protective” strategies to maintain their ethnic beauty values, but rather internalize popular Western standards of beauty in the same way as Caucasian women. As a result, Evans and McConnell warned that Chinese women in this unique position may even have lower body satisfaction than Caucasians because they have idealized a highly unattainable appearance—one at odds with their ethnicity. Kaw (1991) noted that the types of plastic surgery most commonly undergone by Asians in the United States (alterations to the eyelids and nose) are those that actually attempt to eliminate the distinguishing features of Chinese ethnicity.

Reasons to Study Chinese Exchange Students to the United States

As researchers continue to investigate body dissatisfaction, acculturation, and Chinese women’s ideologies, an integration of all three elements is necessary. Many have attempted such integration through conducting studies that incorporate Asian American women, those who either are first-generation American citizens or have permanently immigrated with their families. Results from such studies indicate that Chinese college women have the lowest body satisfaction when compared to other ethnic groups living in the United States (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Jung & Lee, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2004).

Although such studies are beneficial in ascertaining behavioral norms among Chinese immigrant women who are directly exposed to American culture for lengthy

periods of time, they are insufficient in their scope; they do not attempt to isolate Chinese exchange students, which were the members of the largest group of exchange students to the United States in the 2009-2010 school year, experiencing a 30% growth rate in as little as one year (Institute of International Education, Inc., 2011).

Native Chinese exchange students studying in the United States differ from American-born Chinese students in two critical ways: First, exchange students intend for their times spent in the United States to be temporary. They are granted permission to study in the United States and to obtain an F-1 Visa, which permits them to live in the United States for the sole purpose of education; once completed, exchange students return to their countries of origin. Researchers must acknowledge that the students’ mindsets that their immigration to the United States is merely temporary may affect the power of psychological impacts American culture can have on their deeply seated ideologies.

The second difference, related to the first, is the fixed Chinese locality of kinship relations for exchange students. Parents, grandparents, and other close family members remain in their homelands while only the students make the move to the United States. The significance of familial location should not be understated when examining the differences between Chinese exchange students and Chinese American students. For native Chinese students, the level of support given by family members can significantly affect wellbeing. For example, Ma and Lai (2009) found that family therapy was successful in helping Chinese youth suffering from anorexia recover. For Chinese American students, the comfort and structure of the family unit are present daily. Chinese American students

may have the opportunity to live with their parents, rather than college dormitories, which Qin (2006) found is the preferred situation among immigrant Chinese parents whose children attend college. Chinese exchange students do not have this option, which may decrease their ties to traditional cultural values as they become immersed in a university subculture.

Although acculturation can occur while still living in China, the process of frequent exposure to the actual American culture on a daily basis provides greater opportunity for internalization of American values. Reading or hearing about the social environment of a country is no substitute for experiencing it firsthand. Thus, we conclude that real differences will exist between Chinese women who stay in China and Chinese women who temporarily relocate to the United States; although both groups have been exposed in some way to American culture, one group will experience a broader, more consistent exposure, which will foster internalization of the culture.

Currently, social scientists tend to conduct research that incorporates both Chinese American and Chinese exchange students into one sample with no distinctions. Although research designs using Chinese exchange students for participants may not produce results distinct from those utilizing only Chinese American students or a combination of both groups, it is worthwhile to test this possibility. Therefore, we intentionally separated out only Chinese exchange students to better examine the effects of temporary immigration to the United States on Chinese women's perceptions of beauty.

Hypotheses

In this pilot study, we examined the differences in perceptions of beauty and body image between two native groups of Chinese college women, one group of women studying in their homeland and one group of women studying as exchange students in the United States. The data we collected through interviews and questionnaires was used to determine the degree of American acculturation of all participants and to analyze their perceptions of beauty and body image.

In accordance with the literature, we formulated five hypotheses: First, we expected that Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States would be more acculturated, operationally defined as having a higher mean acculturation score on the American Acculturation Scale (AAS), than Chinese women who were studying in China. Second, we expected Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States to more frequently conclude that American women were more beautiful than Chinese women. Third, we expected Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States to be more likely than those studying in China to report body dissatisfaction. Fourth, we expected Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States to be more likely to dislike and desire to alter body parts that specifically reflect American beauty ideals. Finally, we expected Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States to express a greater desire to surgically alter their bodies.

Method

Participants

Thirty-eight women participated in the study. Group 1 consisted of 19 Chinese

college women studying in China. Group 2 consisted of 19 Chinese college women studying as exchange students in the United States.

With the help of a Chinese classmate, the first author recruited Group 1 participants from both Shanghai International Studies University and Shanghai University's College of Business and Finance in Shanghai. Women were granted permission to participate under the conditions that they were of Chinese decent and origin and were at least 18 years old.

The first author recruited Group 2 participants from Kennesaw State University and Southern Polytechnic State University, both located in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. Women were granted permission to participate under the conditions that they were of Chinese decent and origin, were at least 18 years old, had parents still living in China, and planned to return to China after finishing their educational requirements.

Measures

The first author interviewed all participants in person. Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions to determine participants' attitudes about beauty standards and personal body satisfaction. Question #1 was, "Describe the ideal woman. What does she look like?" Question #2 was, "What is the difference between Chinese and American women's bodies?" Question #3 was, "Which group do you think is more beautiful: Chinese or American women?" Question #4 was, "Are you satisfied with your appearance? Why or why not?" Question #5 was, "If you could change one thing about the way you look, what would you change?" The first author asked Question #6 ("Would you ever have surgery to change that?") as a common

follow-up question to Question #5, depending upon the responses received.

We developed the American Acculturation Scale (AAS; see Appendix) to determine individual levels of acculturation. All items were behavior-focused (e.g., "I watch American movies"). Seven out of eight items used a Likert-type scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), and we included the eighth item in order to determine the number of years participants had spent studying English.

Procedure

After obtaining consent, the first author conducted the interviews. Participants answered in English, unless they could not thoroughly express their ideas without speaking Chinese. An interpreter served to translate Group 1's participants' responses to English. Often, follow-up questions were asked to participants' responses to gather further relevant information. Interviews lasted no more than 10 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. No incentive was given to those who participated in the research.

Results

To display the results of our analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the responses to Question #1 ("Describe the ideal woman. What does she look like?") and Question #2 ("What is the difference between Chinese and American women's bodies?"), we created frequency tables (see Table 1 and Table 2). Table 1 shows both the physical and character traits of the ideal woman for both groups of participants. Chinese women studying in China frequently described the ideal woman as knowledgeable or intelligent ($N = 10$),

possessing inner beauty ($N = 7$), and kind or loving ($N = 4$). Physically, they most frequently described her as having big, beautiful eyes ($N = 15$), white skin ($N = 9$), black hair ($N = 9$), and a healthy body ($N = 6$). Chinese women studying in the United States described the ideal woman most frequently as kind or loving ($N = 16$), knowledgeable or intelligent ($N = 9$), possessing inner beauty ($N = 6$), and independent ($N = 6$). Physically, they most frequently described her as having big, beautiful eyes ($N = 8$) and long hair ($N = 6$).

Table 2 shows both groups' responses when asked to compare American and Chinese women's bodies. Chinese women in China most commonly described American women as sexier or having a better body shape ($N = 11$), taller ($N = 7$), stronger ($N = 5$), and fatter ($N = 5$). They most commonly described Chinese women as being straighter or slimmer ($N = 5$) and shyer or gentler ($N = 4$). Chinese women in the United States most commonly described American women as fatter or bigger ($N = 8$), taller ($N = 5$), and having a more contoured face ($N = 5$).

Quantitative data was entered into SPSS for analysis. Mean score for the AAS was 24.16 ($SD = 4.14$). Our results supported Hypothesis #1. The mean score for the AAS was higher for Chinese women in the U.S. ($M = 25.68$; $SD = 3.4$) than for Chinese women in China ($M = 22.63$; $SD = 4.24$), and this difference was significant ($t(36) = -2.446$, $p = .019$). The two groups of participants did not significantly differ in the number of years they spent studying English, $t(36) = .902$, $p = .81$.

Chi-square analyses were used to assess the interview responses for Group 1 and Group 2. Hypothesis #4 was partially supported; Chinese women in the United

States group reported a significantly higher desire to alter body parts, $X^2(1, N = 37) = 2.245$, $p = .01$. Chinese women in the United States were more likely than those in China to desire to alter their heights, $X^2(1, N = 37) = 4.081$, $p = .043$, and weights, $X^2(1, N = 37) = 6.784$, $p = .009$; indeed, none of the participants studying in China expressed a desire to make these types of alterations. However, Chinese women in the United States were not more likely than those in China to desire to alter their faces, $X^2(1, N = 37) = 2.245$, $p = .134$.

Hypotheses #2 was not supported by our results; women in the United States were not more likely to think that American women were more attractive, $X^2(2, N = 36) = .126$, $p = .939$. Hypothesis #3 was also not supported; participants in the United States were not more likely to report overall body dissatisfaction, $X^2(2, N = 35) = 3.504$, $p = .173$. Finally, Hypothesis #5 was not supported; support for surgical alterations did not increase with the United States group, $X^2(2, N = 35) = .052$, $p = .974$.

A binary logistic regression was conducted to determine if the differences found were a result of the AAS or the group conditions. Only the group condition (i.e., being in the United States) had a significant effect on whether participants mentioned altering their bodies ($p = .006$).

Discussion

Examination of Table 1 shows that the ideal woman for Chinese women in both groups is kind, intelligent, independent, and possesses inner beauty. The most prominent physical attributes that make her ideal are big eyes and long, dark hair. There are notable differences in the group's responses, however. White skin was the second most reported physical attribute for Chinese

women in China ($N = 9$), but was only reported twice by Chinese women in the United States. Possibly, exposure to American culture, where skin colors vary, served to decrease the salience of the preference for white skin. Although both groups mentioned slimness, it was not nearly as frequently noted in comparison to facial features, such as eyes, hair, and skin. These findings support prior conclusions that facial features were more significant for Chinese standards of beauty (Chen et al., 2006; Frith et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1996).

Examination of Table 2 shows that Chinese women in both groups considered the biggest difference between American and Chinese women's bodies to be their body shapes. American's height and contoured faces were also common responses. One of the differences between groups is the way they described the differences in body shapes. Chinese women in China described American women's bodies primarily as "sexy" or "having a good body shape." Fewer participants explained the difference by saying that American women were "fatter." Thus, the description used to describe the differences among participants in China was favorable. Chinese women in the United States described American women's bodies primarily as "fatter" or "bigger," which are less favorable descriptions; only one participant reported that American women's bodies were "sexy." One explanation for the difference in responses is that Chinese women who remain in China are exposed only to glamorized versions of American women portrayed through the media and do not see many examples of the average American woman, who is not as thin as the women in the media.

Although we asked for participants to describe physical differences in Question

#2, women in both groups also reported personality differences between American and Chinese women. They described American women as "open," "outgoing," "energetic," and as "having a brightness." They described Chinese women as "quiet," "shy," "gentle," and "feminine." One participant described the character difference this way: "That's difficult to express with words. But I can use a metaphor: When you say 'American woman,' I will think of a rose. When you say, 'Chinese woman,' I will think of a lily or a lotus." From such responses, two conclusions can be made: 1. Chinese women consider beauty a blend of both physical and personality traits. 2. Chinese women note the extroverted, boisterous natures of American women and find it in contrast to their more reserved, meek personalities.

Numerous conclusions can be made from the quantitative data, as well. Results indicated that Chinese women who were exchange students in the United States were more likely than Chinese women in China to desire to change their bodies, primarily their weights and their heights. These great differences between groups, particularly in the desire to lose weight ($p = .009$), imply that participants may have been influenced by American beauty ideals, especially those that focus on the body.

There was no difference among groups for the desire to change aspects of the face, the central component of Chinese standards of beauty. The results indicate that Chinese women in the U.S. maintained the traditional focus on facial appearance, despite their location. Thus, these participants appear to have acculturated only in some ways; the result of partial acculturation was not a mere shift from the face to the body as important, but an incorporation of both parts. Such results

may be applicable to the findings of Zhou and Belk (2004) and provide more evidence to the notion that China is becoming a “hybrid” culture (Zhang & Harwood, 2004).

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the endurance of facial beauty among Chinese women who study in the United States is that they may be at greater risk for multiple concerns over physical appearance; a simultaneous focus on both the face and the body may prevent any self-motivating strategies that can buffer body dissatisfaction. For example, women who dislike their faces may avoid the development of body displeasure through emphasizing their bodies, and vice versa. Women who focus on both may not be capable of utilizing this strategy. The lack of differences between groups for the facial component also indicates the retention of the traditional value of facial attractiveness (Chen et al., 2006; Frith et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1996) among participants.

Also noteworthy is that the inclination toward plastic surgery did not differ between groups, though the desire to alter body part did differ. These results may indicate that the Confucian virtue of filial piety (Xiao Jing, trans. 1899) is an enduring value to modern Chinese young women; they preferred the position that their bodies were gifts and should not be altered, but cherished, even if they experienced the desire to change. The traditional value, in this case, superseded the modern value of alteration. One participant expressed this paradox, “It may be a dream of mine to change, but I don’t want to change. My body is a gift from my parents, so I don’t want to change. So, I must, I must like who I am. Changing is just a dream.”

Our results indicate that Chinese women who temporarily relocate to the

United States are affected in some ways and unaffected in others. Although they embraced the most important component of the American standard for beauty (thinness), they did not renounce important components of Chinese beauty (facial attractiveness and an emphasis on natural beauty). Therefore, their standards of physical attractiveness appear to permit some additions, but not the full relinquishment of core cultural values. They are fluid only to a certain extent.

Limitations

This study had numerous methodological limitations. First, we interviewed only a small sample of the total population of Chinese women ($N = 38$), due to time constraints, participant availability, and intentions to use this research as a pilot study. Another design limitation was that we used different participants in Group 1 and Group 2, preventing our ability to compare the effects of acculturation on each participant before and after relocation to the United States. Finally, we failed to gather the exact number of years each Group 2 participant had spent in the United States. Although we know that the majority of the participants had been in the United States less than two years, we did not record exact figures for each participant.

There were a number of limitations specifically related to acculturation. First, it is important to note that the majority of Group 2 participants relocated to the United States alongside other Chinese colleagues, with whom they live and attend classes. Moving together in a group may work to reinforce cultural ideologies and reduce the extent of the effects of American acculturation. Also, many of the participants had been in the United States a little over one year, which may not be sufficient to successfully observe the full effects of

internalization of American cultural attitudes.

Finally, the question of the internal validity of our measurement must be addressed. Binary logistic regression showed that the groups (locations) of the participants, rather than their acculturation scores, were responsible for the differences found. It is possible that the AAS was not an effective method of assessing the extent of acculturation among our participants.

One possible explanation for the scale's insufficiency is that acculturation was measured by asking questions pertaining only to behavior. One potential explanation to the statistically significant difference in acculturation levels between Group 1 and Group 2 can be attributed to necessity; for example, it is possible that the participants increased the frequency of attending American-style restaurants because they must do so, not because their ideologies and preferences were becoming more Western. From this perspective, the increase due to true ideological acculturation and the increase due to necessary behaviors are indistinguishable and would call for a measurement that incorporates values-related items, as Lau et al. (2006) and Kim, Atkinson, and Yang (1999) proposed.

This perspective, however, is also problematic. First, we do not believe necessity alone influenced our participants, for if this was the case, all would have very similar levels of acculturation. Instead, there was a wide range of acculturation among the Chinese women studying in the United States (*Range* = 16; *SD* = 3.4). Thus, participants were not placed in positions in which they had no option but to act only in ways that American citizens would. Second, the usage of values-related items to measure acculturation may also be problematic.

Behavioral measures may provide quantifiable data that are not as easily swayed by participants' states of mind during the research or by the common dilemma of participants claiming adherence to ideals without actually upholding them in their behaviors. Thus, studying behavior may provide a deeper, more stable representation of actual ideals.

Future Research and Action

In light of their growing numbers, future studies should be conducted on Chinese women who are temporarily immigrating to the United States for educational purposes. It would be helpful to record exact lengths of time spent in the United States to notice how responses vary over time (refer to Yang, Harlow, Maddux, & Smaby, 2006). Comparisons using values-acculturation measurements or a scale with both behavioral and values items would allow for further research concerning measurement methodology. Additionally, using a scale rather than a yes-or-no question to measure levels of body dissatisfaction to compare between groups will prove insightful, allowing researchers to know if Chinese women's emphasis on both cultures' values actually decreases body satisfaction overall.

The results also provide a framework for prevention, treatment, and intervention strategies. Researchers and clinicians should give thought to strategies that could reduce body dissatisfaction during Chinese women's studies in the United States. University counselors should more thoroughly research the effects of American acculturation on the Chinese population as a whole, especially as it relates to the development of body displeasure and eating pathology. The students should be widely informed of counseling options available on

campus, and alternative therapy strategies may be necessary to encourage Chinese women to use the services provided.

Finally, researchers should further examine the endurance of the facial attractiveness and filial piety virtues among female Chinese exchange students, as well as other types of Chinese immigrants. It would be beneficial to study whether the length of time spent in the United States is correlated with a decreasing adherence to both standards.

Summary

In summary, beauty standards depend upon culture and time. Despite change, the United States and China traditionally emphasize different components of physical appearance in order to determine physical attractiveness (the United States, the entire body, and China, only the face). The result of not conforming to the standards of one's society often results in body dissatisfaction. The sociocultural approach and social comparison approach provide explanations for how women develop body dissatisfaction. According to these approaches, women determine acceptable

and desirable traits through the observation of and conformity to standards established by agents of influence, such as the media. Westerners were largely responsible for the inauguration of advertising in China and maintain significant influence over the media, thus providing a degree of acculturation and creating a blend of traditional and modern values.

We chose to study the effects of acculturation on a growing population of immigrants: female Chinese exchange students to the United States. Through our interviews and questionnaires, we concluded that Chinese women who studied in the United States became more acculturated and embraced some Western beauty standards, including an emphasis on the entire body, particularly as it relates to thinness, while simultaneously maintaining Chinese beauty standards of facial attractiveness and good character and refusal to consider plastic surgery. We anticipate further attention and research devoted to Chinese exchange students and body dissatisfaction, as well as joining the conversation with clinicians to propose strategies for prevention and treatment of eating disorders among this population.

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Table 1

Frequency table showing number of responses for each group to Question 1: “Describe the ideal woman. What does she look like?”

Group 1 (China) Responses			Group 2 (United States) Responses				
Character	#	Physical	#	Character	#	Physical	#
Knowledgeable/intelligent	10	Big/beautiful eyes	15	Kind/loving	16	Big/beautiful eyes	8
Has inner beauty	7	White skin	9	Knowledgeable/intelligent	9	Long hair	6
Kind/loving	6	Black hair	9	Has inner beauty	6	Dark hair	3
Independent	4	Healthy body	6	Independent	6	Complexion	3
Moral	3	Slim	4	Competent	4	Slim	3
Handles family well	2	Long hair	4	Elegant	4	Simple/natural	3
Handles job well	2	Small mouth	2	Proud	3	Healthy	3
Energetic	2	Doesn't need to be tall	2	Handles job well	3	Dark eyes	2
Communicates well	2	Beautiful smile	2	Moral	2	White skin	2
Elegant	1	Clear complexion	2	Handles family well	2	Not too tall	2
Fresh	1	All hair colors acceptable	2	Strong	2	Unique looks	2
Happy	1	All hairstyles acceptable	2	Determined	2	Straight hair	2
Brave	1	Gold hair	2	Confident	1	Symmetrical face	2
Loves life	1	Dark eyes	1	Comfortable	1	Smells nice	2
Easy-going	1	Straight hair	1	Traditional	1	Curly hair	1
Has a brightness about her	1	Hot	1	Doesn't complain	1	Smiles	1
Doesn't drink or smoke	1	Big face	1			No glasses	1
		Contoured face structure	1			High nose	1
		Proportional	1			Short hair	1
		Cute	1			Impressive hair	1
		Good figure	1			Comfortable clothes	1
		Yellow skin	1			All skin colors nice	1
		Eyelashes	1			Yellow skin	1
		Thick eyebrows	1			Tall	1
		High nose	1			175 cm	1
		Small face	1			165 cm	1
		Bright hair	1			100 pounds	1
		160 cm	1				
		164-165 cm	1				
		160-170 cm	1				
		168 cm	1				
		Taller than 160 cm	1				
			1				

Table 2

Frequency table showing number of responses for both groups to Question #2: “What are the differences between American and Chinese women’s bodies?”

Group 1 (China) Responses				Group 2 (United States) Responses			
<u>Americans</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>Americans</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>#</u>
Sexier/Better body shape	11	Straighter/slimmer	5	Fatter/bigger	8	Slimmer	6
Taller	7	Shyer/gentler	4	Taller	5	Whiter skin	2
Stronger	5	Flatter face	2	Contoured face	5	More made-up	2
Fatter	5	Shorter	2	Bigger eyes	4	Don't shave legs	1
Contoured face	4	Prefer academics over sports	2	More outgoing	4	Longer hair	1
Beautiful eyes	3	Healthier	1	Different hair colors	3	Quiet	1
Exercise more	3	Darker hair	1	Different eye colors	2	Yellow skin	1
Whiter	3	Not as attractive	1	Less made-up	2	Flatter face	1
Healthier	2	Stouter	1	More made-up	2	Straight hair	1
Different eye colors	2	Yellow skin	1	Healthier	2	Thick eyebrows	1
Energy	1	Cuter	1	Curved eyelashes	1		
Like a rose	1	Feminine	1	Whiter	1		
More open	1	Like a lily/lotus	1	Like tanning	1		
Smile more	1			Bigger breasts	1		
Gold hair	1			Multi-racial	1		
Darker skin	1			Sexier/better body shape	1		
Bigger bones	1			Bigger bones	1		
Bigger rears	1			Slender	1		

Appendix

American Acculturation Scale

Choose the number that best represents your frequency.

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Always
1. I listen to American music	1	2	3	4	5
2. I watch American movies	1	2	3	4	5
3. I watch American television programs	1	2	3	4	5
4. I read American magazines/books	1	2	3	4	5
5. I view American websites	1	2	3	4	5
6. I speak English	1	2	3	4	5
7. I eat at American-style restaurants	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have studied English for _____ years.					