

A CUT ABOVE THE REST: NEGOTIATING A FEMININE IDENTITY THROUGH
COSMETIC SURGERY MAKEOVER PROGRAMS

by

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(Under the Direction of CAROLINA ACOSTA-ALZURU)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence media texts have on the reception and consumption practices of female audiences. Specifically looking at how reality makeover programming plays a role in the way women identify with socially constructed beauty ideals and incorporate them into their own lives. Through a textual analysis of *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* and in-depth interviews with women who have and have not had plastic surgery, this dissertation examines the power of “transformation” and how makeover programs have contributed to the normalization of cosmetic surgery as a way to create a “feminine” appearance. In addition, this dissertation argues that makeover programs provide its participants with a fairy tale experience, complete with a happy ending, which equates to shapely legs, fuller breasts and thinner noses.

INDEX WORDS: Reality television, makeover programs, beauty, body image, *The Swan*, *Extreme Makeover*, identity, representation, audience reception

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the person who has been my inspiration since the day he entered this world on September 10, 1997. Joseph, thank you for sharing your mommy these past four years with books, papers and my lap top. You are old beyond your years and you always seem to understand when I say “mommy has so much work to do.” Love does not describe what I feel for you and without you by my side, I never would have made it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for being who you are and for sacrificing certain things in order for me to follow my dream.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When George Orwell wrote about “big brother,” he envisioned a society that would be oppressed by a camera watching their every move, not one that volunteered to be deprived of its privacy. However, since the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences created an Emmy category in 2001 for the increasingly popular genre, reality television has not only become a recognized form of entertainment, but one that continues to dominate both the daytime and primetime line up. In 2001, The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences created a category called Outstanding Non-Fiction Program (Reality) and in 2003, renamed this category Outstanding Reality/Competition Program. To contend with the influx of reality programs that had a competition component, the academy decided to create two separate award categories in 2004, one called Outstanding Reality Program and the other Best Reality-Competition Program.

Reality television, as defined by Murray and Ouellette (2004) is “an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real” (p. 2). Negotiating how much reality is included in the discourse of the real becomes a challenge, as programs are “located in border territories between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (Hill, 2005, p. 2).

To better understand what is meant by the term “reality”, I turn to French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1994) and his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard explains “simulation” as a model of the real or the creation of the real through conceptual or “mythological” models, which have no connection or origin in

reality. The model becomes the determinant of our perception of reality, and we end up confusing the model for reality. According to Baudrillard, the boundary between the image, or simulation, and reality ultimately breaks down, thus creating a world of hyperreality where the distinctions between real and unreal are blurred.

Understanding Baudrillard's definition of reality is important when studying reality television, as programs are loosely scripted and non-actors "play up" situations so that they may become the popular character in the program. It is difficult to determine what is real and what is unreal as reality television is edited by producers to create the most entertaining, and sometimes controversial, hour of television. Whether they are known for being mean, abusive, sweet, or funny, the ones who capture the most audience attention on a reality program are the ones who producers will devote more airtime to. Some reality television participants have moved on to careers in acting, singing, and entertainment journalism, and I argue, have become more popular than the programs themselves. Thus making shows like *Battle of the Network Reality Stars* (2005) possible, a direct descendent of *Battle of the Network Stars* (1976-1988, 2003) this program pits the most notorious reality personalities against one another in physical challenges. These "non-actors" have also merited their own award category as the 2006 Nickelodeon Kids Choice Awards featured the Best Reality TV Star category for males and females. To understand how people playing themselves can become "stars" merits a look at the reality television genre itself.

While MTV's *Real World* is credited with inaugurating this genre more than a decade ago, in the last four years it has moved from being a fad to a staple in television

lineups (Moorti and Ross, 2004, p. 203). Today, reality TV encompasses a variety of specialized formats that Murray and Ouellette (2004) break down into seven sub genres.

The gamedoc, which pits participants against one another in feats of strength or physical challenges (*Survivor, Fear Factor*); the dating program, which takes a person and has them find love among a group of potential suitors (*The Bachelor, Joe Millionaire*); the makeover/lifestyle program where either the person or a home/dwelling is made over (*Extreme Makeover, Trading Spaces*); the docusoap which places strangers in the same living space and watches the drama ensue (*Real World, Big Brother*); the talent contest (*American Idol, America's Next Top Model*); reality sitcoms (*The Osbournes*); and court/cop programs, which show actual court cases and police cases respectively (*Judge Judy, Cops*). The sub genre that this dissertation focuses on is the makeover/lifestyle program.

Among the most popular programs are lifestyle reality shows, specifically those focusing on the makeover. The makeover phenomenon began with The Learning Channel (TLC), which aired the first makeover program in 2000 appropriately titled *A Makeover Story*. This half-hour program features two friends who receive new hairstyles and clothes and together reveal themselves to family and friends. Since this show debuted, there have been several variations all surrounding the makeover theme. *Extreme Makeover* (2002-) took the makeover to the next level by featuring participants undergoing plastic surgery. Programs like *Trading Spaces* (2000-) and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003-) took the concept of the makeover to a domestic space and instead of focusing on the body, featured homes. Automobiles have become the latest project for reality television executives as they are now making over old cars and trucks

on programs like Music Television's (MTV) *Pimp my Ride* (2004-) and Country Music Television's (CMT) *Trick my Truck* (2006-).

This dissertation examines the role that makeover shows play in women's negotiated relationships with their bodies and how this negotiation occurs. While the televised reality makeover genre frames this study, I focus on ABC's *Extreme Makeover* and Fox's *The Swan*, two programs that take makeovers to an extreme through the use of cosmetic surgery. I analyze the narrative structure of the makeover program and examine issues of gender representation. Through in-depth interviews I explore what women do with these texts and whether they incorporate them in their daily lives as they relate to their own bodies. In sum, this study looks at the impact of one type of reality television on female body image, and how the mass media posits makeover shows as fairy tales in which women's bodies are a kind of 'cultural plastic' that can be shaped at will (Bordo, 1993).

Makeover programs have gained in popularity due to the success of shows like TLC's *A Makeover Story* (2000-) and *What Not to Wear* (2003-), which make-over women through the use of hair, make-up and wardrobe alterations. However, the makeover did not become a cultural phenomenon until 2002 when ABC's *Extreme Makeover* took the concept a step further and changed the outward appearance of the participant through cosmetic surgical and dental procedures. An onslaught of cosmetic surgery makeover programs followed: *The Swan* (Fox, 2004), *I Want a Famous Face* (MTV, 2004), *Dr. 90210* (E, 2004-) and *Plastic Surgery: Before and After* (TLC, 2002-2006), confirming the marketability of this type of programming. In 2003, F/X even came up with a non-reality television show about plastic surgery called

Nip/Tuck which features two fictional plastic surgeons and the events surrounding their private and professional lives in Miami, Florida.

This dissertation suggests that television, while not the only factor, is a fundamental player in the delivery of patriarchal messages surrounding socially constructed ideals of beauty and body image as products to be consumed. It also underscores the paradox that while cosmetic surgery makeover programs are contributing to the creation of a universal standard for beauty, some women are finding pleasure in these images and embracing cosmetic surgery in record numbers.

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) there were nearly 11.5 million cosmetic surgical and non-surgical procedures performed in 2005, up 40% from 2003, but down 4% from 2004. Since 1997, there has been a 444 percent increase in the number of cosmetic procedures performed. The top five surgical cosmetic procedures in 2005 were: liposuction (455,489, down 5 percent from 2004); breast augmentation (364,610 up 9 percent); blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery, 231,467 down 20 percent); rhinoplasty (200,924 up 21 percent); and abdominoplasty (tummy tuck 169,314 up 12 percent). The top five non-surgical cosmetic procedures in 2005 were: Botox injection (3,294,782, up 16 percent from 2004); laser hair removal (1,566,919, up 11 percent); hyaluronic acid (Hylaform, Restylane 1,194, 222, up 35 percent); microdermabrasion (1,023,331, down 7 percent); chemical peel (556,172, down 50 percent). Women made up 91% of that total (10,500,000), while men only made up 9% (985,000), confirming the fact that plastic surgery remains a gendered phenomenon.

In order to understand how makeover programs became a staple on television, especially one catering to a female audience, I will place this chapter within a historical

context and trace the origins of cosmetic surgery and its relationship to the commercialization of beauty culture. I will then provide background on how *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* play into socially constructed ideals of beauty. The literature review chapter will be divided into two main sections; the first focusing on reality television and the second on beauty and body image research. Lastly, I will outline the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that will be undertaken in my dissertation, followed by textual and reception analysis of *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*.

Cosmetic Surgery and the Commercialization of Beauty Culture

More than 11.5 million cosmetic surgeries were performed in the United States in 2005 (www.surgery.org). While television programs such as *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* may have helped normalize this practice, it is a specialty that has had a checkered past. Historians trace plastic surgery to early 600 B.C., when a Hindu surgeon reconstructed a nose by using a piece of cheek. In *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery*, Elizabeth Haiken credited Gasparo Tagliacozzi as being the father of plastic surgery. She noted that “sometime prior to 1586, inspired by the great need for plastic operations during the sixteenth century due to frequent duels, street brawls, and other clashes of armed men, Tagliacozzi pioneered the Italian method of nasal reconstruction” (Haiken, 1997, p.5).

Plastic surgery in the United States also gained prominence as a result of clashes of armed men. Born out of the horrors of World War I, plastic surgeons from all over the world worked together in an international effort to learn and perfect their craft on soldiers who had severe facial burns, shattered jaws, and maimed noses and lips. The

overwhelming number of soldiers with facial injuries brought physicians and dentists together, which gave rise to the subspecialty maxillofacial surgery, where surgeons reconstructed noses, mouths, eyelids, and ears. When the war ended in 1919, American surgeons who had trained to reconstruct facial aberrations, found themselves without jobs and unsure of their futures. With no more male faces to reconstruct, many surgeons turned their attention to women, and played on their insecurities about beauty and aging. As surgeon Max Thorek explained in *A Surgeons World: An Autobiography*,

If soldiers whose faces had been torn away by bursting shells on the battlefield could come back into an almost normal life with new faces created by the wizardry of the new science of plastic surgery, why couldn't women whose faces that had been ravaged by nothing more explosive than the hand of years find again the firm clear contours of youth. (Thorek, 1943, p. 164)

This sentiment furthers the schism between reconstructive and cosmetic surgeons and speaks to the feminization of the specialty.

To understand why surgery became a procedure that primarily catered to women warrants an examination of the time period, which placed emphasis on beauty and the face. Beauty culture, according to media historian Kathy Peiss (1998) “should be understood not only as a type of commerce, but as a system of meaning that helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience” (p. 6).

Historically, the face has been viewed as a site of expression, beauty, and character (Peiss, 1996, p. 313). Peiss (1996) explains that the face was understood to be outside fashion and consumption. It conveyed the fixity and essence of identity in contrast to the mutability, conformism, and social nature of dress (p. 315).

In her study on the history of women in advertising, Jennifer Scanlon (2000) asserts that the cosmetics industry truly began to prosper in the early 1920s. According to

Scanlon, women in 1914 spent \$17 million on cosmetics, a miniscule amount considering they spent over \$141 million in 1924 (p. 219). The burgeoning film industry of the 1920s and 1930s greatly affected the way women saw their faces. Film stars were advertising cosmetics and as a result, women began using heavy makeup. Peiss (1996) stated that “by the 1930s, makeup had become an integral part of self-expression; female identity became purchasable” (p. 316). It was also during the 1920s and 1930s that “a proliferation of beauty advice columns promoted a cultural imperative for women of all ages to pursue self-improvement through appearance” (Sullivan, 2001, p. 48). As surgical techniques improved and Americans gained expendable income, cosmetic surgery became the perfect complement to the growing beauty industry. As one surgeon put it, “plastic surgery and beauty culture go hand in hand. A surgeon can make a woman beautiful and a beauty expert can keep her so” (*New York Times*, 1925, p. 1).

The years between the two World Wars saw a significant increase in the number of plastic surgeons. The cultural tide shifted from a general non-acceptance of operations for beautification in 1921 to telling readers that an unattractive appearance can be a handicap easily fixed by a cosmetic surgeon in 1941. Scholars have suggested that plastic surgeons had to respond to cosmetic surgery both to assert control over the growing specialty and because of public demand. As a result, the specialty began to welcome commercialization as a way to enlighten the public to the changes within the profession. As Feldman (2004) notes, “in the years between wars, plastic surgery had succeeded in professionalizing itself, now it had to market itself. Cosmetic procedures became consumer products” in youth-oriented post-war culture (p. 5).

Throughout World War II, cosmetics companies targeted women war workers and told them that “lipstick allowed them to ‘do’ as a man and ‘appear’ as a woman” (Peiss, 1998, p. 240). Following the war, the beauty industry began mass-producing a limitless amount of goods. By 1948, 80 to 90 percent of adult American women used lipstick, about two-thirds used rouge, and one in four wore eye makeup (Peiss, 1998, p. 245). The rise of beauty as a consumable commodity can be linked to women’s increased purchasing power and greater presence in the post-war non-domestic marketplace. Cosmetic surgery was also flourishing within the post-war beauty industry. As Haiken (1997) stated:

Cosmetic surgery lies at the nexus of medicine and consumer culture. It was the combination of medical knowledge, leisure, and money that made possible its entrance on the American stage in the early years of this century, and it was the confluence of technological prowess, cultural confidence, and postwar abundance that fueled the boom after World War II (p. 4).

After World War II, the number of medical schools and plastic surgeons increased, causing the specialty to triple in size from 1940 to 1960 (Haiken, 1997, 136).

The identification of beauty with youth was spearheaded by a 1950’s public relations effort on behalf of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Surgery was now being marketed to women through magazines and advertisements, playing upon their insecurities about aging in a youth-inspired culture. According to *Life* magazine, American women spent almost \$2.5 billion in 1956, on cosmetics, beauty products, and weight reductions aids-- a sum equal to twice Italy’s defense budget (Haiken, 1997, p. 145).

The 1960's and 70's were changing times for women who were asserting their independence through the second wave feminist movement. However, commercial women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, told women that identity was something that could always be reworked, improved upon and dramatically altered (Ouellette, 1999). Expenditures on clothing, cosmetics, and accessories were portrayed as necessary investments in the construction of a desirable self. Magazines traded on female insecurities by offering what Ellen McCracken (1993) calls a "temporary window to a future self" (p. 13), a way to envision what you *could* look like. It was also during this era that breast augmentation was revolutionized by the introduction in 1963 of the silicone breast implant, while in 1972 the first liposuction procedure was performed in Germany and exported to the United States ten years later (Sullivan, 2001, p. 60-61). The irony is that while women were gaining sexual, political and economic independence through the second wave feminist movement, they were being victimized by patriarchal visions of an idealized femininity that did not allow them to age and imposed on them a beauty standard.

Rosalind Coward (1985) asserts that in their quest to achieve "the look," women were being confronted with the female body as a site requiring constant work. Persuading women that cosmetics were a "constitutive element of femininity," Peiss extends Coward's argument contending cosmetics not only remade external appearance, but became a crucial aspect of self-realization:

Decades of advertising and advice have touted the centrality of external beauty in women's successful negotiation of life and the role of cosmetics in enhancing self-esteem. The historical evidence suggests that the cosmetics industry exploited already existing tensions in the relationship between appearance and female identity. In promising transformation, the cosmetics industry blurred the

distinction between the made up face as *revealing* a woman's inner self and the made-up face as *constituting* that self. (Peiss, 1996, p. 324)

The construction of what it means to be female and a "woman" became a staple in women's magazines beginning in the 1970's. Columns like "So You're Bored to Death with the Same Old You?" (1972) offered women the ability to construct a whole new identity defined in terms of fashion and style (Ouellette, 1999, p. 120). In fact, the magazine challenged women to do more than try a new lipstick color. They asked the question "Why not change everything, (hair, makeup, clothes, and manner), in essence, change your type?" (p. 120).

This concept of making yourself over entirely was articulated again in the 1980's and 90's with the televised makeover becoming a recurrent theme on daytime television talk shows. Targeted primarily to a female audience, programs like *Sally Jesse Raphael* (1985-2002), *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-), *Geraldo* (1987-1998), *The Jenny Jones Show* (1991-2003), and *The Ricki Lake Show* (1993-2004) provided a more powerful visual component to capture the "before and after" shot, and created what I refer to as the makeover formula. The formula is comprised of four parts, pre-makeover, transformation, reveal, and comparison. Part one shows the participant in a pre-makeover interview that includes his or her reasoning for needing the makeover and concludes with a non-smiling shot of the person in their existing state. The second part features the person getting a new hairstyle, clothing and make up in an effort to transform themselves into someone new. The third and arguably most anticipated part is the "reveal"¹ of the newly made-over person. Lastly, the before and after pictures are juxtaposed on the

¹ The word reveal is intentionally used as a noun in this sentence to keep with the original usage in makeover programs. While the programs are revealing the person to the audience, the actual portion of the program is called the "reveal."

screen and compared. Thus, the televised makeover afforded women the opportunity to visualize their own self-transformation.

While in 2000 and 2003 respectively, *A Makeover Story* (TLC) and *What Not to Wear* (TLC) gained popularity as makeover programs, it was not until 2002, when ABC's *Extreme Makeover* aired a one-hour special, that television and the cosmetic surgery industry forged a marriage and the "makeover" became more than a new hair style and outfit. Cosmetic surgery now became an advertised product, a complement to make up in the quest to change looks. Suddenly it was no longer taboo to let others know that you had plastic surgery. In fact, the term 'extreme makeover' became synonymous with surgery as a permanent (except of course for procedures like face lifts that have a 3-5 year shelf life before they need to be done again) way to enhance appearance. The commitment to continual makeovers fuels a necessary consumerism, one that unwittingly consigns consumers "to long-term purchases of style, beauty products and cosmetic procedures" (Weber, 2005, p. 4). Thus, I assert the number of people electing to have surgery has increased over the years not as an effect of television, but because of the normalization of cosmetic surgery that has occurred as a result of increased media coverage.

Background on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*

The television programs *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* will serve as the primary texts for my analysis. ABC's *Extreme Makeover* first aired on December 11, 2002 and was the first makeover program to couple reality television with cosmetic surgery. The program was heavily advertised on television and promoted through its website, blurring the boundaries between fantasy and reality through the use of the fairy

tale motif. As the website stated, “Following nationwide open casting calls and over 10 thousand written applications, the lucky individuals are chosen for a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in *Extreme Makeover*. These men and women are given a truly Cinderella-like experience: A real life fairy tale in which their wishes come true, not just to change their looks, but their lives and destinies.”

Each one-hour episode follows two people (usually women) through their surgical and weight-loss procedures in an effort to reveal their new, cosmetically altered faces and bodies to friends and family. The show opens with the participants’ teary plea for plastic surgery, an explanation of what they think is physically wrong with them and how surgery will fix these problems. Participants undergo multiple procedures in an effort to experience a complete transformation. The website offered the following tips for getting on the show:

1. If you just want a nose job or breast job that is not enough.
2. If you rate yourself a 6, 7 or 8 think again. The lower the beauty rating the better.
3. If you have been tortured as a child, or even now, we want to hear from you.
4. Be a man. 80% of applicants are women.
5. Be ready to show all--literally. If you want liposuction, show us what you want sucked out.

The website ended with the phrase, “we are looking for the extreme transformation.”

(Extracted February 13, 2004)

The Swan was also marketed using the fairy tale concept. Unlike *Extreme Makeover*, however the participants were all women. Here's how Fox originally promoted

The Swan on its website: "The Swan, a new series where fairy tale turns into reality. Each week the feathers will fly as the pecking order emerges. These women never believed they could compete in a beauty pageant. Sixteen average girls. A team of plastic surgeons. And three months without a mirror all add up to the shock of a lifetime. Those not up to the challenge are sent home, those who are, will go on to compete in a pageant for a chance to become 'The Ultimate Swan.'"

Heavily promoted for months by Fox, *The Swan* first aired April 7, 2004. The second season followed shortly, and premiered on October 25, 2004. *The Swan* took 16 self-described "average" women, who in their search to achieve a fairy tale ending, were so desperate to go from being "ugly ducklings" to "beautiful swans," they subjected themselves to surgery, strict diets, and other life-altering "enhancements." The show aired eight episodes (nine including the *Ultimate Swan Pageant*) and condensed two contestants' three-month transformation processes into a one-hour program. After three months of healing and an exercise "boot camp" (during which they were not allowed to have mirrors in their recovery room), the two women were judged on who was able to create the most dramatic transformation. If they were deemed "pretty" enough, they went on to compete in the 1st Annual Ultimate Swan Beauty Pageant. If they had not "transformed" enough, they were sent home, presumably a more confident, and attractive person. This setup begs the question, if these women had self-esteem issues that led them to want to alter their bodies to feel socially accepted in a world that rewards beauty, what does losing the competition to the other *Swan* contestant *after surgery*, say about not being "pretty enough?"

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the body of existing work on the content and reception of reality makeover television. This particular study is pertinent as it seeks to examine the influence media texts have on the reception and consumption practices of female audiences. While there is a plethora of industry articles on makeover reality programs, the topic is still underrepresented in the academy. With the exception of a special section in a 2004 *Feminist Media Studies* (Vol. 4, No. 2) titled Reality Television: Fairy Tale or Feminist Nightmare, very little of the academic literature surrounding reality television specifically focuses on *gender* representation in the reception of makeover programs. The first book that is dedicated entirely to makeovers “The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation” by Dana Heller came out in December, 2006 and incorporates chapters on all types of makeovers, not just beauty. Heller’s next book, due out in June, 2007 is also about makeovers and is titled “Makeover Television: Realities Remodeled (Reading Contemporary Television). This dissertation will be particularly valuable as it is the only study to incorporate audience analysis of makeover programs.

According to Nielsen Media Research, during the 2003-04 broadcast season, 13 of the top 25 series among women 18-49 were reality programs (Peavey, 2004). During the 2004 season, *The Swan* averaged 9.2 million viewers and *Extreme Makeover* followed closely with 8.2 million viewers (Oldenburg, 2004, p. 5d). Thus, makeover programs, and reality programming in general, are being highly consumed by a female audience.

It is unclear whether a cultural shift in attitudes toward cosmetic surgery created the demand for these programs or vice versa but what does become clear is that a record number of women are turning to cosmetic surgery to reshape their bodies to comply with

a prevailing cultural norm. Bartky (1990) suggests the body has become a project, an instrument through which women construct their feminine identity. Beauty is now achievable, and women who strive to model themselves on some cultural ideal, can with the click of the plastic surgeon's magic scalpel, become virtually "flawless".

According to feminist media scholar Charlotte Herzog (1990) "female viewers learn how to transform themselves into a new 'look' by comparison with another woman who is 'looked at'" (p. 159). I argue that the relationship between television, beauty, and body image becomes further problematized when producers posit *reality* television shows as fairy tales that illustrate to the female viewer how she too can be transformed into a fairy princess. Examining whether the "reality" in reality TV lends authenticity to viewers' negotiation of self will be a key component of my analysis.

Programs like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* "incorporate the fairy tale as a cultural product to foster the growth of commercial entertainment or to explore manifold ways in which fantasy could enhance the technology of communication, and how the effects of fantasy could be heightened through technology" (Zipes, 1979, p. 15).

Therefore, the outcome of most mass-mediated fairy tales is a happy reaffirmation of the system that produces them (Schiller, 1973, p.5). The teleology of the makeover program is a celebration of progress, empowerment, and positive self esteem; thus, I assert producers of televised makeover programs consciously repurpose fairy tale themes of romance, adventure, and fantasy as a way to confirm the role that femininity plays in bringing woman-as-subject into existence while simultaneously creating her as an object defined by patriarchy (Bartky 1990; Morgan 1986).

This topic addresses my interest in the role the mass media play in shaping how we view ourselves within a world of mass produced representations and dominant ideologies. I argue that shows like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* reinforce viewers' attitudes about what constitutes a socially desirable appearance and play into hegemonic notions of beauty in an image-centered culture. As a Beverly Hills cosmetic surgeon is quoted as saying, "With the TV shows, we're getting more and more patients [who want multiple surgical procedures]...I tell them about the risks and they say 'that's not the way it was on TV'" (Dr. Jacob Haiavy quoted in Martin Tucker, 2005). He continues by saying "business has grown over the past four or five years as the area has become more populated and television shows have made cosmetic surgery popular" (Dr. Jacob Haiavy quoted in Martin Tucker, 2005).

Proving that this is not isolated to Los Angeles, a city heavily influenced by media representations and the artifice of celebrity, *Crain's Chicago Business* also reports that Chicago-area plastic surgeons have experienced a patient surge since the premiere of *Extreme Makeover*. The article quotes a consumer of the program that states, "I love the show. Every time I watch it, I see more things I can get done" (Theresa Hoban quoted in Klein, 2004). The above reasons make reality television a medium worthy of study and an examination of this viewing audience is crucial in this rapidly changing genre.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this study:

1. How are cosmetic makeover programs framed as fairy tales?
2. How are beauty, gender roles and class represented in cosmetic surgery makeover programs?

3. How do women consume cosmetic surgery makeover programs?
4. Do study participants identify with women represented in cosmetic surgery makeover programs?
5. Do televised makeover programs play a role in women's decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery?

Subjectivity Statement

This dissertation touches upon a subject that has been integral to shaping who and what I am. Growing up in Los Angeles, I have been surrounded by people who aspire to look “perfect.” Being thin, tan, tall and toned is not an anomaly where I am from, it is the norm. Regardless of where a person grows up, I believe that most people are affected by a mediated ideal. Flawless celebrity bodies, glamorous red carpet dresses, programs that show convincing before and after shots of women who have a lift here and a tuck there, all play into the troubled relationship women have with their bodies. I am not saying that the media are to blame for why many women are dissatisfied with their bodies, but I am saying that they contribute to the problem by continuously glorifying a narrow beauty ideal. As a heavy consumer of makeover programs, I do feel that they can be viewed both positively and negatively. While some critics choose to pass judgment on women for having plastic surgery, I believe it is the cultural system in place that makes women feel that they need to change their body that should be up for critique.

Although I have not had surgery, and don't plan to, I understand why women have plastic surgery in a world that reveres beauty. I consciously make decisions about my body, clothes and face that will continue to garner compliments. As much as I would like to think that I am not affected by cultural norms, I acknowledge that I am. I enjoy people asking me about how much I work out, and I know that I don't. I like that people

think I am 27, when in reality I am 37. And I like that my son's friends call me the "pretty" mom. What I do not like is the fact that I like those things. I wish I could say it doesn't matter what people think about me, but it does. I wish I could be happy wearing a plain cotton bra, but I feel inadequate unless my bra is padded, thus creating an illusively full bust line. I wish I could have gone to my 10-year high school reunion, but I didn't because I was seven months pregnant and didn't want people to think that I "let myself go."

While the things that I have described may leave some women envious, they have also become a cross for me to bear. There is a dark side to being acknowledged by others strictly by your "attractive" features. As I developed into a young woman, I realized that upon first meeting people (usually men), that they saw me as a "pretty face" and did not recognize that underneath the external body was a woman with brains. Perhaps this is part of the reason I continue to pursue higher degrees, to show everyone that there is more to me than meets the eye. I guess you could say my personal beauty and body image struggle is much like a see saw. One side likes being called attractive and often uses it to my advantage. The other side detests being judged solely by the way I look and feels the need to rattle off my educational background to prove that I should be respected for my intellect. This is what I bring to this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation combines the study of reality television, the commercialization of cosmetic surgery, and audience reception. While there are many books/articles on each topic, there is no scholarship at the time of this dissertation focusing on cosmetic surgery, reality television, and the audience. This dissertation contributes to the body of existing work on the content and reception of reality TV, but also seeks to fill a gap in scholarship and expand the examination of reality television programs by focusing on reality makeover programming and the women who watch it.

This study asks questions that cross academic boundaries. Therefore, I draw from diverse bodies of scholarship including cultural studies, feminist media studies, television studies, feminist fairy tale studies, and theories of the body. This literature review will be divided into two main sections focusing first on reality television followed by studies on beauty and body image.

Reality Television: What is it?

In this age of post-industrial capitalism, the reality program reigns supreme due to its comparatively inexpensive production cost, ability to incorporate product placement, and the malleability of the genre. Reality television is a genre “where nothing-identity, lifestyle, relationships-is fixed; everything is a construct ripe for radical transformation” (Simon, 2005, p. 199). As I explained in the previous chapter, reality television encompasses several program types, and unlike other genres, is not beholden to a specific kind of formulaic text.

Non-scripted TV is a format that has historical roots in U.S. television, and precursors to what we now refer to as “reality television” include the quiz shows of the late 1950’s, “that hinged on the popular appeal of real people placed in dramatic situations with unpredictable outcomes” (Murray & Ouellette, 2004, p.3). Other predecessors include staged pranks pioneered by *Candid Camera* (1949); programs like *Queen for a Day* (1956), *Real People* (1979-1984) and *That’s Incredible* (1980-1984), which celebrated ordinary people in contrived situations; docudramas like PBS’s *An American Family* (1973) which highlighted the life of an ordinary (non-celebrity) family by placing cameras in their home for a year; and the not too distant cousins of *American Idol* (2002-), *Ted Mack and the Original Amateur Hour* (1948-1970), *Dance Fever* (1979-1987) and *Star Search* (1983-1995, 2004), gave America its first taste of the amateur talent contest. So why has the “reality TV” genre garnered increased attention from the academic community and the world? And if it has been around in various forms since the dawn of television, when did it merit enough credibility to be referenced as a genre?

Defining the “Genre”

The critical, academic use of the term dates back to 1994 when scholar Richard Kilborn attempted a description of the reality television genre. He said reality TV could be conceived as,

- Recording ‘on the wing’, and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals and groups.
- The attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction.
- The incorporation of this material in suitably edited form into an attractively packaged television program, which can be promoted on the strength of its reality credentials. (p. 423)

While the above points can be applied to a select number of current programs, the concept of reality TV has greatly expanded over the years. The last decade has seen a proliferation of programs that promise “non scripted access to ‘real’ people in ordinary and extraordinary situations” (Murray and Ouellette, 2004, p.2). With the genre continually changing, the treatment of the term “reality” must be examined as the majority of reality TV programs today blur the line between factual and fictional television (Hill, 2005). Can a game show, police chase show, an unscripted human serial, and a variety show all be categorized under the same generic heading? This question and the hybridity of this unique genre have fueled a discursive debate among scholars as to what reality TV actually is. A definitional evaluation of the range of reality discourses that abound in the academy will provide the framework for assessing this mutable genre.

Friedman (2002) says what separates contemporary reality-based television is the sale of television programming as a representation of reality (p. 7). Referring to reality-based television as a “form of televisual neorealism,” Friedman defines the genre not in terms of its delivery of real life, but its use of ‘normal’ (real) people instead of professional actors for the production of televisual drama. June Deery (2004b) asserts reality TV is an amalgam of earlier forms (game show, documentary, amateur video programs) but sees producers as capitalizing on negotiations between the private and public sphere to make programs more marketable. She links reality TV to consumption and refers to programs as a form of “advertainment” stating that their main purpose is to exploit the participants private lives in order “to attract a broad audience with matching demographics” (Deery, 2004b, p. 15). Acknowledging a relationship between reality TV and documentary, Deery (2004b) says it is becoming more difficult for independent

documentaries to find financial backing or broadcast opportunities, hence reality TV has become “its advertiser-friendly and mongrel offspring” (p.4). Like Deery (2004), John Corner (2002) locates reality television within the framework of the documentary, summarizing certain types of reality programs as watered down documentaries or as he refers to them “documentary –lite” (p. 155). For Corner (2002), reality TV represents post-documentary television, signifying that there has been an alteration from the older genre, but not a complete eradication.

In his most recent work on reality TV, Kilborn (2003) argues that the term has been used to cover a broad range of program types and “has for this reason probably outlived its critical usefulness” (p. 55). As Kilborn’s comment indicates, the term “reality” is unable to fully represent the plethora of programming types being categorized under the vast heading. And, as such, is in danger of being rendered meaningless and losing its edge as a tool of critique. Andrejevic (2003) and Murray and Ouellette (2004) are less interested in defining the genre, and more concerned with examining the cultural and institutional discourses leading up to the reality “moment” in television. It is this latter point that I will address first, followed by discussions of reality television as documentary, and the notions of authenticity and pleasure surrounding the reality television viewing experience.

Reality TV in the Post-Network Era

In the United States, the rise of reality TV can be linked to a changing regulatory climate and network financial troubles beginning in the mid 1980’s. As a result of large corporate debt incurred by ABC, CBS, and NBC, each network was sold to new parent companies. The growth of VCR’s and the influx of cable channels during the 1980’s,

created a newly fragmented audience and left networks and advertisers unaware of who their target audience was. Deregulation policies of the Reagan Era gave way to emergent networks like Fox which forced the television industry to reexamine its programming strategies. The Fox Television Network was an important player in this debate on the popularity of reality TV because it produced a range of reality programming based on police and emergency services (Hill, 2005, p. 17). Launching the network with programs like *America's Most Wanted* (1988-) and *Cops* (1989-), Fox helped inaugurate an industry reliance on reality programming which was inexpensive to produce, easy to export overseas, and not dependent on unionized writers and actors.

In the wake of increased ownership conglomeration and the acceleration of multi-channel television through the success of cable and satellite channels, reality TV became an instrumental product in the post-network competitive environment. Cost, according to Chad Raphael (2004), became a primary reason producers and networks turned to reality television. With production costs increasing at a rate of 8 to 10 percent per year, the average cost of an hour-long drama climbed to over \$1 million per episode by the end of the decade. Above-the-line costs (talent, direction, scriptwriting) were driving the prices up and by 1986, were causing producers to lose up to “\$100,000 per episode for half-hour shows and \$200,000 to \$300,000 for hour-long dramas” (Raphael, 2004, p. 123). Reality television became the new business model for U.S. television- one that entertained without the use of professional actors, garnered a profit for networks and producers through low-end production techniques, and created opportunities for global distribution.

This type of programming was quicker and easier to produce than sitcoms or dramas, and was the networks solution to summer re-runs. The majority of reality

programs started as summer series² and were later picked up for the fall or used as spring fill-ins after another show was canceled. *Survivor* (2000-) brought new life, and more importantly a younger, more marketable demographic to CBS. *Extreme Makeover* and its half sister *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003-), gave ABC the boost it needed to become the top network over NBC, which soon caught on to the reality craze and coupled celebrity with reality in *The Apprentice* (2004-). Staying true to their reality roots, Fox has made millions off of a show ABC turned down-*American Idol*. More than a show, *American Idol* (2002-) is the ultimate megaspectacle, one that is part of Fremantle Media's *Idol* franchise that spans across 32 countries, and whose season finale program garnered an audience share of 23.1 percent. With more people voting for the winner of *American Idol* 5 than voted in the 2004 presidential election, the impact reality programming is having on American culture is worthy of further study.

To discuss the industrial changes taking place in television, John Caldwell (1995) uses the term "televisuality," understood as a range of techniques and strategies used to privilege a distinctive visual style that sets programming apart from present competition (p. 5). He contends the changes in industry dynamics are a cause of programming shifts toward visual exhibitionism and excessive style. Caldwell identifies six principles that he says "further define and delimit the extent of televisuality" (p. 5). He says televisuality was a stylizing performance, represented a structural inversion, was an industrial product,

² Here are the ratings for premiere episodes of shows that went on to become summer hits:

- 1999: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (ABC) - 9.9 million
- 2000: Survivor (CBS) - 12.2 million
- 2001: Fear Factor (NBC) - 11.9 million 2002: American Idol (Fox) - 9.6 million
- 2003: Last Comic Standing (NBC) - 9.8 million
- 2005: Dancing With the Stars (ABC) - 13.5 million
- 2006: America's Got Talent (NBC) - 12.4 million

[Source: Nielsen Media Research]

was a programming phenomenon, was a function of audience, and was a product of economic crisis. Though Caldwell was not directly referencing reality television, it can be argued that the last three of the six principles he identifies as exemplifying televisuality can be applied to the genre. For Caldwell, televisuality, in part, results from a shift to narrowcasting which he argues is a programming phenomenon, redefining and reorganizing the audience, and the network economic crisis. Narrowcasting, which targets a niche segment of a larger audience, was valued by broadcasters for a particular demographic group's purchasing power and income earning potential. These principles can be applied to reality programming, particularly ones focusing on personal makeovers, as producers privilege the female audience and through product placement, advertise products within the show and throughout commercial breaks.

Reality television had not established itself when Caldwell wrote his book twelve years ago, but, if he were writing the book today, his discussion about the cultural diversification of the audience no doubt would include reality TV. He states "this industrial reconfiguration of the audience, in the name of cultural diversification, helped spawn the need for cultural-and ethnic-specific styles and looks" (p. 9). Caldwell cites the emergence of niche networks Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Lifetime as examples, explaining that gender and ethnic-specific groups "do not coalesce around content-specific narration alone" (p. 9). I add to Caldwell's point and argue that because of the hybrid nature of reality television, viewers do not unite around one reality category (game doc, makeover/lifestyle, talent contest) but around the notion of "unscripted" television in general. This led to the emergence of Fox Reality, a new network that features 24 hours of previously aired reality television from around the globe. The

network launched on May 24, 2005 to 17 million subscribers, making it one of the most successful launches in television history.

John Hartley (2004) takes a slightly different perspective on the cultural diversification of the audience by focusing on what he terms the “democratization of media semiosis” (p. 529). While Hartley identifies the shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting, his discussion surrounding the proliferation of channels in the post-network era centers on different types of citizenship that television teaches. He argues television is the foremost medium for cross-demographic communication and that a shift has occurred from the promotion among audiences based on common identity and “cultural citizenship” to a more recent acceptance of difference among audiences, thereby promoting “do-it-yourself (DIY) citizenship” (Hartley, 2004, p. 528). In her discussion of reality television, Hill (2005) cites Hartley and suggests “that popular factual programs can teach us how to become do-it-yourself citizens, how to live together in contemporary society” (p. 10). She also says that watching reality TV can be a reflexive process. Thus, when we watch, information and ideas “that may help us to construct and maintain our own self-identities” (p. 90) can be collected. The idea of reflexivity will be further addressed in my analysis of *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*.

“Reality” TV or Documentary?

While the above discussions are situated within the discipline of television studies, another stream of research by scholars aligning themselves with film studies, specifically documentaries, is contributing to the literature on reality television. By examining reality TV through a post-documentary lens, scholars like Corner (1991, 2002, 2003) identify the schism that exists between television and film studies, centering the

discussion on culture. Although most scholars agree the origins of reality television were based on the documentary form, the subject has produced a wide range of debate within the academy.

Mark Andrejevic (2003) contends the arrival of the reality genre took place when documentary techniques were used not to document the daily life of geographically and culturally remote peoples but to study the lives of contemporary figures. The hybridity of the genre has fueled discussions among media scholars about the epistemology of reality television, in particular its impact on the future of documentary studies. Works by Corner (1991, 2002, 2003), Bill Nichols (1991, 1994), and Richard Kilborn (1994, 2003) are particularly effective in highlighting this debate. In his discussion of the reality /documentary hybrid, Kilborn (2003) asserts,

One of the results of the generic blurring which has taken place over the last two or three decades is that some of the old certainties about the constituent features of particular genres have slowly evaporated. In the new order of film and television making, where hybridizing has become the norm rather than the exception, it becomes increasingly difficult to make clear generic divisions between categories, which at one time may have seemed to be relatively self-contained. (p. 126)

Drawing the distinction between reality television and traditional documentary is difficult. As Kilborn's definition makes evident, the line between the two is not always clear.

Some media scholars cite the 1973 PBS documentary *An American Family*, which monitored the lives of the Loud Family for 12 episodes, as a predecessor to docudrama programs like *The Real World* (1990-) and *Big Brother* (2000-). The "documentary format based on comprehensive monitoring of subjects daily lives" did not reemerge until 1990 when documentary filmmaker Jon Murray and his partner Mary Ellis-Bunim

created *The Real World* (Andrejevic, 2003, p. 71). According to Murray, his goal was to remake *An American Family* for the MTV generation. Robert Thompson, founding director for the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, disagrees with those who locate the origin in older shows, such as *Candid Camera* or *An American Family*. He contends *An American Family* was a documentary about a real family living in their real house and while the presence of the camera changes the way those people behaved, it was still a documentary. For Thompson, reality programming began with MTV's *The Real World* in 1992. "*The Real World* was distinctive because it was half artifice, quasi-fictional. It was, in essence, a documentary of a contrived situation" (www.mit.edu/comm-forums).

This difficulty in distinguishing between genres is more problematic for Nichols (1994), himself a documentary theorist. He complains that reality TV hybrids have been cannibalized and assimilated into the metadiscourse of television and the lack of anything real in these programs is reduced to a level of spectacle. For Nichols, reality television has become more about hi-tech editing and glamour, than about notions of realism. Helpful to this discussion is Geoff King's (2005) use of the phrase 'the spectacle of the real'. King argues reality can be presented as a form of spectacle or can alternatively be interpreted as the fascination with the spectacular in relation to its apparent realism. The production of spectacle is closely tied to declarations of authenticity, a relationship King alludes to and one that I will address later in this chapter. For this study, discussions of spectacle are necessary not only because of the intimate details revealed about the participant's personal lives, but also the way *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* exhibit the

half naked body, both externally, through before and after shots, and internally by highlighting invasive surgical techniques.

Kellner (2005) also writes about the culture of media spectacle, saying it “constitutes a novel configuration of economy, society, politics, and everyday life” (p. 35). Like Kellner (2005), I am interested in exploring the culture of spectacle. By this I refer to the meaning that is generated as a result of a certain media event. While Kellner’s (2005) idea of spectacle is rooted in French theorist Guy Debord’s (1967) original definition, which revolves around ideas of consumption, capitalism and the passive spectator, Kellner’s major interest in media spectacle involves the megaspectacle form “whereby certain spectacles become defining events of their era” (Kellner, 2005, p. 24). Kellner defines megaspectacles as

Those phenomena of media culture that dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution. They include media extravaganzas, sports events, political happenings, and those attention-grabbing occurrences that we call news—a phenomena that itself has been subjected to the logic of spectacle and tabloidization in the era of media sensationalism, political scandal and contestation... More generally, my conception of media spectacle involves those media and artifacts which embody contemporary society’s basic values and serve to enculturate individuals into its way of life. (p. 25)

While he uses the War on Terror and the O.J. Simpson trial as examples of megaspectacles, I argue *Extreme Makeover* is a megaspectacle, as it not only created a media culture that embraces plastic surgery as a form of televised entertainment, but continues to spawn a host of copy cat programs, such as *A Personal Story* (2002-2003), *Plastic Surgery: Before and After* (2002-2006), *The Swan* (2004), *I Want A Famous Face* (2004), and *Dr. 90210* (2004-). *Extreme Makeover* is more than a program, its name has become so commonplace in popular culture, it is often used to describe anyone that has

undergone a surgical procedure as looking like they had an “extreme makeover.” The *Extreme Makeover* website continues to develop a “hi-tech spectacle as a means of promotion, reproduction and the circulation and selling of commodities” (Kellner, 2005, p. 23). The website, which features background stories on the participants as well as before and after pictures, continues the program’s narrative as well as provides advertisements and links to beauty products and cosmetic surgeons. The program has contributed to the mainstreaming of cosmetic surgery and in 2004 became the first primetime network television program to feature advertisements for elective cosmetic surgery.

Corner (2002) takes a different approach than Kellner to reality television, acknowledging its roots in documentary while simultaneously recognizing the transformations that have taken place. His discussion of a “post documentary” culture is not meant to signal the end to the documentary form, but to signal the genre’s need to “reorient and refashion itself in an audio-visual culture where the dynamics of diversion and the aesthetics of performance dominate a greatly expanded range of popular images of the real” (p. 267). Corner’s (2002) discussion makes it easier to understand how plastic surgery, once a private medical procedure, could become a model of popular entertainment. As fashion trends come and go with the times, so must programming styles. While a medical documentary that showed an actual surgery in progress may have been entertaining television in the 1970’s, as Corner (2002) mentions, today’s audience requires an element of performance to accompany the narrative.

Audience, Reception, and Reality TV Consumption

Kilborn (2003) agrees that reality programming provides entertainment value, as opposed to social value, with its primary aim being ‘that of diversion rather than enlightenment’ (p. 11). The enlightenment/entertainment binary that differentiates documentary from reality TV is frequently articulated by media scholars with reality television being identified with commercialization and a sign of a decline in the collective taste and intelligence of contemporary audiences (Hight, 2004, p. 245). This contention, which pits knowledge against entertainment, is often placed upon new popular culture trends and speaks to the age-old discussion surrounding television’s social responsibility. Craig Hight (2004) summarizes this argument, placing emphasis not only on the “quality” of the program, but the audience it caters to.

Phrases such as ‘lowest common denominator’ and ‘dumbing down’ are generally applied to these television texts, as part of a wider critique of the political economy of television production and transmission which also implies a host of negative audience traits-viewers are effectively viewed as needing to be saved from these forms and redirected back to traditional authoritative, public-service forms such as documentary proper. (p. 245)

While Hight’s assertion is certainly held by many scholars (see Nichols above), there are other media scholars who refute the passivity or ‘dumbing down’ assertion made about reality television audiences.

An example of a study that places the audience in an active role is Hill’s (2001) work on British audiences, which finds that viewers are aware that what they are consuming in reality television texts is processed material. Moreover, one of her samples showed that more than 70 percent of British TV audiences actively distrust the ‘reality’ of stories in popular factual programming (Hill quoted in Kilborn, p. 143). Hill refers to

reality viewers as “critically astute” and says viewers tend to trust the authenticity of reality TV when footage resembles that of a news program or investigative journalism. As Hill’s work on reality television audience’s progresses, she also concludes “the focus on individual stories is something viewers are attracted to precisely because these particular programs offer narratives they can relate to” (p. 91).

For this study, I am interested in how viewers of reality makeover programs negotiate authenticity within the text, and add to Hill’s assertion that viewers also trust and relate to reality programs that incorporate personal narratives, thus making participants relatable to the viewer. Van Leeuwen’s (2001) assertions prove helpful in the debate surrounding authenticity and audiences. According to him, authenticity is in crisis and can mean different things to different people. He also suggests that the type of reality program being studied will greatly affect the viewer’s relationship with the text. It is expected that behavior is “played up” in a reality game show like *Survivor*, which is designed to encourage self-display. However, a lifestyle show like *A Baby Story*, which chronicles the birth of a baby and the changes it brings for the family may be viewed as less contrived.

Particularly valuable to this study is the notion of authenticity as addressed in Rose and Wood’s (2005) study of reality TV consumption. They argue the consumption of reality programming “represents a sophisticated quest for authenticity within a traditionally fiction-oriented entertainment paradigm” (Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 2). Through the use of in-depth interviews with reality television viewers, the authors conclude, “reality shows serve as a utopian space where the viewer can engage in creative play space” (p. 16). In other words, audiences construct a hyperauthenticity by

taking elements from the program and blending them with their own lived experiences and fantastical elements that play in their imagination (p. 17). Rose and Wood's notion of "creative play space" opens up a new dimension to audience analysis. I chose to structure my in depth interviews loosely around the idea of creative play space, giving women license to describe not only how they consume the text, but how they incorporate the text into their own lives. I did not to ask the women directly if they believed what they were watching was true or "authentic," but instead allowed my interview subjects to tell me how the authenticity of the personal narrative, offered by *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* participants, played into their connection to the programs.

While the connection to reality seems to be crucial to the viewing experience, for some audience members it is the element of fiction present within reality programs that engages them, fueling their desire for fantasy. Jennifer Maher (2004) explores this topic in her analysis of The Learning Channel's (TLC) lifestyle programming for women. Focusing on two specific programs, *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story*, Maher analyses posts to the TLC chat room to examine why women watch. Much like Janice Radway's findings in *Reading the Romance*, Maher concludes real romantic life is not as exciting as the televised narrative, thus "the viewer soothes the pain of the dissimilarity between experience and fantasy by watching episodes that evoke the same romance-fantasy emotions that she seeks" (Maher, 2004, p. 212).

Part of the pleasure of reality TV is the way it allows the audience to apply their expertise about the participants in the show. Lewis (2004) asserts that unlike characters on soap operas or movies that follow scripted narratives, characters in reality shows are relatable. He says viewers identify with reality TV participants because "for all the

artifice of the mediascape surrounding them, they appear to be ‘people like us’ (Lewis, 2004, p. 300).

While the study of reality programming plays an important role in this dissertation, it is not enough to survey the various ways scholars approach the subject. Because the discourse in this study focuses on women and their bodies, it is also important to discuss literature on beauty and body image. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are programs that highlight women’s bodily imperfections, sending the message to viewers and participants alike that if you don’t like the body you were born with, you can recreate it through the wonders of plastic surgery. In order to better understand how meaning is negotiated in the text and reception of these two reality makeover programs, I will briefly review literature that focuses on women and their bodies.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Beauty and Body Image

This section explores the academic discourse surrounding beauty and body image studies. I divide this section into five parts. First I explore the scholarship on makeover programs followed by literature on female body dissatisfaction, a reason many women appear in makeover programs. I then examine the ways television produces images of women that are far from realistic, but remain the standard by which women compare themselves. The section concludes with a look at academic discourse surrounding the use of plastic surgery as a means of transformation, followed by a brief look at studies on the correlations between beauty and social acceptance.

The Makeover

A makeover is the process in which a person's outward appearance is transformed via hair, makeup and in some cases plastic surgery, so they may take on a look that fits within a culturally constructed beauty ideal. The term "makeover" has entered a common cultural discourse that has made discussions about altering the face and body commonplace. Gallagher & Pecot-Hébert (2007) identify five concepts that play a central role in understanding makeover narratives, such as self-concept, body image, self-esteem, identity, and transformation. They argue the notion of change, or as it is called in makeover programs "transformation" is central to all makeover programs. As Weber (2005) explains in her examination of *Extreme Makeover*, "personal transformation is the first and most necessary step in self-improvement" (p. 4) and a point she argues is presented not as an option, but as "American entitlement" (p. 4). Makeover shows provide participants with a fairy tale experience, complete with a happy ending, and "invite us to participate in a fantasy of physical and social transformation" (Heller, 2004, p. 347).

Within the makeover format, the transformation is cued by the before and after shot which Kavka (2006) explains is premised on the assumption that the "after" is an improvement over the "before." With personal beauty being the goal makeover participants strive for, she argues "shows have replaced over-the-counter cosmetics with cosmetic surgery as the instrument of transformation, thereby updating the concept of the 'makeover' for the age of surgery-on-demand" (p. 220). In her analysis of the cosmetic surgery makeover show *Plastic Surgery: Before and After*, Melissa Crawley (2006) suggests that plastic surgery is presented as more than a procedure that can fix all that ails

you, it also becomes a part of the narrative itself. Referencing how each episode is introduced, she says, “Using active verbs, the introduction treats plastic surgery as if it is a character in the narrative, a subject with agency and will. It becomes a healer, a worker of ‘miracles’” (p. 57). In sum, she says plastic surgery is “constructed as the path to a better future” for makeover participants and the body is framed as “an important site of self-expression” (p. 56).

Gallagher et al’s (2007) textual analysis of *A Makeover Story*, *What Not to Wear*, and *Extreme Makeover* found that women are disproportionately featured in makeover programs and femininity becomes something that participants perform with the help of clothing, make up and surgical alterations. Heller (2004) argues that makeover programs not only target women, but specifically “address white middle-class women as their principal clients and offer feminine instruction and advice on physical appearance” (p. 347). Women often come out looking “hyperfeminized” which Deery (2006) describes as a type of “clichéd femininity” that takes on a standardized look made up of “C-cups, a thin waist, long hair, a long dress, high heels and several ounces of makeup” (p. 171). In an effort to keep up these new looks, Deery (2004) argues that makeover programs commodify the female subject by linking commercialism and female identity. She asserts “image *is* the commodity and participants become both consumers and objects; consumers of a self whose image is being sold to viewers whose viewing of their image is being sold to advertisers” (p. 213). Although women make up the majority of makeover participants, Clarkson (2005) argues that male makeover programs like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* also encourage men to conform to a certain look in order to compete with their female counterparts. However, he points out an importance difference between the

way men and women are portrayed in makeover programs, noting that *Queer Eye* “gives male agency a boost instead of objectifying him” (p. 240).

Negotiating Body (Dis)satisfaction

Body image is a multidimensional construct that refers to the mental picture people form of their bodies, and that picture is influenced by one’s own beliefs and attitudes, as well as socially constructed ideals of “normalcy.” Body image research is increasingly being discussed in academic circles as body dissatisfaction among adolescents and young adults continues to increase. Cash, Morrow, Perry & Hrabosky, J. (2004) describe body-image dissatisfaction as “any displeasure with one or more aspect of one's body or one's overall physical attractiveness” (p. 1083). Researchers have identified two conceptually distinct components of body image. The first, body-image evaluation, denotes individuals' evaluative thoughts and beliefs about their physical appearance. The second, body-image investment, refers to the behaviors individuals perform to manage or enhance the way they look (Cash & Szymanski, 1995). For the purposes of this dissertation, both components of body image will be examined in my analysis chapters, noting that how women view themselves (body-image evaluation) is equally as important as what women will do to change themselves (body-image investment).

Many scholars who study the body focus their research on gender differentiation, citing a pervasiveness of body image concerns among women. Researchers say one out of every two women is dissatisfied with her body (Hendriks 2002) and consistently find that males display much higher rates of body satisfaction than women (Fallon & Rozin, 1995, Muth & Cash, 1997). Men are significantly less likely than women to distort their

perceptions of their own bodies and more likely to indicate that their ideal body type coincides with their current body type (Fallon & Rozin, 1995, Miller & Halberstadt, 2005). While Kostanki et. al (2004) agree that females have a higher rate of dissatisfaction than males, they found that *overweight* children from each gender group identified a higher body dissatisfaction than children of a normal weight. Interestingly, thin males wanted to be more muscular and overweight males wanted to be thinner. Conversely, thin *and* overweight females expressed a desire to be thinner, thus identifying weight as a contributing factor for female body dissatisfaction.

In accordance with self-discrepancy theory, dissatisfaction occurs when there is a discrepancy between the ideal level of an attribute and the actual level. Researcher Marsha Richins (1991) found that female college students compare themselves with models in ads. A follow-up study, in which some women were shown advertisements of attractive models and others were shown ads without models, revealed that subjects exposed to highly attractive models in ads were less satisfied with their own physical attractiveness than subjects who saw ads without models (Levine, Smolak, and Hayden 1994). Several studies that examined the relationship between ideal and perceived body image and body dissatisfaction among women found that the majority of the women identified an ideal body similar to that suggested by the mass media (Guaraldi, Orlandi, Boselli and O'Donnell (1999), Groesz, Levine, & Murnen (2002), Tiggemann, (2002) and Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison (2004) . They also concluded that perceived body image appears to be influenced by the ideal body image. This means that the same women who wanted a taller and thinner figure, actually perceived themselves as taller and thinner than they were. Raphael and Lacey (1992) explain that media depictions of

ideal female bodies approximate the biological norm for male bodies (straight with broad shoulders and narrow hips) more than that for female bodies (curvaceous with fatty tissue in the hips and breasts), thereby increasing the potential for dissatisfaction in female audiences who do not meet the standard.

In marked contrast to discourse showing an increase in body dissatisfaction among female media consumers, there have been an increasing number of reports that say women are becoming less affected by the ideal media body/low body satisfaction binary. Several studies have presented results confirming women's increasing body-image dissatisfaction leading into the early or mid-1990s (Tiggemann and Pickering (1996), Levine, Smolak, and Hayden (1994), Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein (1994)) after which significant improvements occurred in terms of overall body-image evaluation and overweight preoccupation among both non-Black and Black women, despite heavier body weight (Heatherton, Mahamedi, Striepe, Field, & Keel, 1997, Cash, Morrow, Perry & Hrabosky, J. (2004)).

Mediated Influences on Body Image

A number of researchers have examined the influence of the media, and television in particular, on body image and satisfaction. According to Hendriks (2002) studies show exposure to ideal body images in the media directly affects the way females perceive their own bodies, and thus decreases their levels of body satisfaction (p. 110). One study discovered 95 percent of women can recognize and identify the ideal body shape espoused by television, while 92 percent feel pressure to conform to these standards (Murray, Touyz, & Beumont, 1996). Among the ideals deemed most desirable were looking thin, being physically fit, and youth. Confirming the role that the visual

plays in perceptions of body image, Baker, Sivyer, & Towell (1998) found that women who are blind, or partially blind, are significantly less likely than sighted women to express body dissatisfaction.

In her examination of British television, Charlotte Brunsdon (1997) noted that daytime television has shown an increasing affinity for makeover shows which, “construct a narrative of transformation and offer advice not only on how to realize a new feminine self but also how to switch between feminine selves.” For many makeover participants, the desire to lose weight becomes an important part of the transformation process. The majority of women who appear in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* overwhelmingly cite weight as an issue, and consequently undergo several liposuction procedures to take away body fat. They often describe their transformed bodies as “looking like a movie star,” thus suggesting the media’s role in their own body assessment. Posavac, Posavac, & Posavac (1998) explain how the issue of weight is further exacerbated by televisual representations:

Because media images of ideal female beauty are narrowly defined, exaggerated, and emphasize thinness, exposure to media images may make salient the discrepancy between a female perceiver’s conception of her own weight and the standard accepted by society (p.188).

Their study found that exposure to ideal media images increases concern with weight, but only for those women with initially low body satisfaction scores. Images of what they term “realistic beauty” (attractive women who are not fashion models) produced less dissatisfaction in subjects than did images of fashion models that promoted the media’s standard of beauty. It is important to note that while above studies assert a correlation exists between watching television and increased body image dissatisfaction, it has also

been found that the critical aspects to keep in mind are the type of material and motivations for watching, not the total amount of television being watched.

Cosmetic Surgery and the “Ideal” Body

Bordo (2003) speaks to the previous assertions and claims that media images have normalized cultural ideals of physical beauty and, conversely, problematized any deviations from these ideals. In addition, she explains that women fall victim to a media induced familiarity surrounding cosmetic surgery procedures that permanently alter the postmodern body in an effort to become the ideal.

I describe the postmodern body as increasingly fed on fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and indeed, the very materiality of the body. In place of that materiality, we now have cultural plastic. (p. xvii)

Bordo’s arguments are of great importance to this study. She does more than offer a critique of the images and attitudes that take place within a culture, but instead provides an argument that is centered on the notion that images become a characteristic of the culture. In other words, a thin, attractive female symbolizes a cultural ideal in Western society, one that we are reminded of daily through media portrayals that reward those who look like, and in essence, perpetuate the ideal. Placing culture at the heart of her analysis provides a template for this study to follow when examining the cultural shift that occurred which mandated women to use plastic surgery as a normalizing tool that resculpts the body.

Similar to Bordo (2003), Woodstock (2001) argues, “cosmetic surgery’s benefits are continually re-articulated in accord with changing social norms of beauty and health” (p. 422). For example, collagen injected into the lips has become a popular

procedure as our society has recently come to revere fuller lips as the “new norm.” As Morgan (1991) states, “there is no area of the body that is not accessible to the interventions and metamorphoses performed by cosmetic surgeons intent on creating twentieth century versions of ‘feminina perfecta’” (p. 150).

Plastic surgery for many women is a point of contention, with scholars advancing two major arguments. One views plastic surgery procedures as the brutal manipulation of the body, while the other side refers to the procedures as a “potentially liberating field of choice” and a means of achieving positive self-esteem where one is able to gain a sense of agency and control over one’s body.

Kathryn Morgan (1991) extends the first argument by accusing plastic surgeons of “creating a new species of woman-monster with new artifactual bodies that function as prisons” (p. 153). In contrast, Kathy Davis (1995) who interviewed women who have had plastic surgery contends that for some, surgery can be a positive experience and a chance for women to become narrators of their own stories.

The following studies speak to Davis’ assertion, correlating plastic surgery with higher self-esteem. According to research conducted by Figueroa (2003), female patients who have plastic surgery feel more attractive, thus, enhancing their feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and self confidence. A study on female abdominoplasty patients also indicated significant post-surgery improvements in body image outcome, including positive changes in patients' evaluations of their overall appearance, their average body image dissatisfaction, and their experiences of self-consciousness and avoidance of body exposure during sexual activities (Bolton, Pruzinsky, Cash, & Persing 2003). While Figueroa (2003) found positive psychological benefits for patients undergoing surgery

and decreased appearance related burdens, Bolton et. al (2003) found just the opposite, reporting no changes on any measure of psychological investment in appearance or on patients' reports of general psychosocial functioning (self-esteem, satisfaction with life, or social anxiety).

Much like Davis (1995, 2003), Sander Gilman (1998, 1999) associates women's desire for cosmetic surgery with individual happiness. He describes happiness as defined by being part of some valued group, and equates unhappiness with exclusion. Thus, the surgeon alters the patients' features therefore providing membership into the desired group (Huss-Ashmore, 2000, p. 29). The process of changing who you are by transforming your outward appearance speaks to what Peiss (1996) describes as the troubled relationship between appearance and identity.

Women are presented with a beauty ideal and the use of certain products promises to deliver results that will create that ideal. Thus Bordo contends (2003) female identities are partly defined by their consumption practices. Beauty products are commodities that can be bought and sold to women in a society that rewards the beautiful. According to Montell (2003), having a socially acceptable appearance guarantees success. From pre-adolescence, girls learn how important appearance is to their success and their influence over others (Rudd & Lennon, 1999). They learn how to monitor their appearances as they attempt to approximate a cultural ideal (Orenstein, 1994) and reap rewards that their appearance may bring. The following studies speak to Montell's (2003) assertion. Compared to unattractive people, attractive people are preferred for hiring (Cash & Kilcullen, 1985), are more successful at selling (Reingen & Kernan, 1993), are more influential (Chaiken, 1979; Pallak, 1983) and on average, receive higher salaries

(Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Roszell, Kennedy, & Grabb, 1989). Hamermesh & Biddle (1998) argue that for unattractive women, the bias is doubled. Unattractive women are not only disadvantaged in their own careers; they are also more likely to marry men with limited earning potential.

What these studies confirm is that we live in a culture that values the attractive over the unattractive. As in fairy tales, beauty can supercede evil, poverty, and adversity. This dissertation brings together a number of theoretical approaches that focus on beauty, body image and reality television, which, when analyzed together, will create a broader understanding of the cultural politics prevalent in our society. The various perspectives I consider, including developments in reality television, shifts in feminist understandings of plastic surgery and the body, and socially constructed beauty ideals, each contribute to an examination of how the makeover became so commonplace within the television lineup while also informing the reasons women continue to watch.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is informed by cultural studies, social comparison theory, feminist media studies and feminist fairy tale studies, and heeds Donald Haase's (2000) call for more scholarly work that "explores the role played by the popular press and electronic media in shaping, disseminating, and challenging the popular perception of fairy tales, especially in terms of gender" (p.4). Like van Zoonen (1994), I prefer to treat gender as a discourse. Conceptualizing gender in this way "does not deny the possibility of fragmented and multiple subjectivities in and among women...and allows for difference and variety" (p. 40). She argues defining gender as a discourse leads to questions of what "role" the media play in gender discourse and how that role is realized (p.41). This perspective assumes that texts are polysemous—they can mean different things to different people.

While many feminist media studies focus on the 'pleasure' women derive from a particular media text, or in Janice Radway's (1984) seminal study, how women's desires are satisfied by romance reading, I am more interested in the impact cosmetic makeover programs have on women's negotiation of a feminine self, how women consume these shows, and the role the media play in their decisions to have and/or consider cosmetic surgery. Through a cultural studies approach, issues related to power, representation, identity and consumption will be addressed in this dissertation as they play a role in the negotiation of media messages.

Cultural Studies

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1961) emphasizes a social definition of culture. For him, culture is “a particular way of life” and its analysis is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in that “way of life.” Douglas Kellner (2003) explains that television and other products of media culture assist in the creation of identities. Media images shape our view of the world and of ourselves. As Kellner (2003) argues “culture must be studied within the social relations and system through which it is produced and consumed” (p. 18). Therefore, cultural studies insist that the study of culture be “intimately bound up with the study of society, politics, and economics” (p.10).

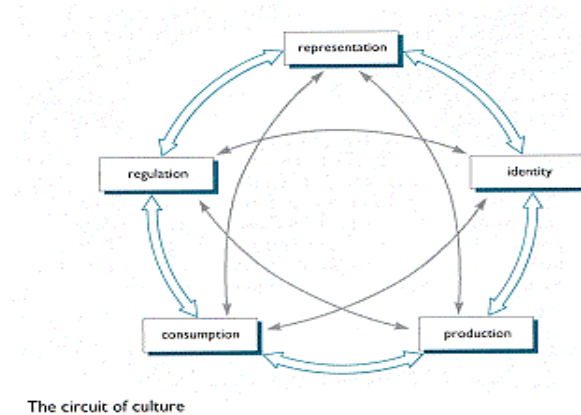
Also central to cultural studies is the concept of ideology. Loosely defined, ideology refers to “a systematic and comprehensive set of ideas relating to and explaining social and political life” (Berger, 1995, p. 58). Ideology is particularly helpful when applied to media studies as it serves as a way to critique how power is distributed through cultural systems. In this study, ideology will enable me to analyze how women are represented in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, and why certain media messages are brought to the forefront of the programs while others are downplayed in the narrative.

Within the area of cultural studies, popular culture, and television studies in general, have become accepted areas of scholarship. As Edgerton & Rose (2005) explain, there has been a “marked upswing in scholarly work on television history, theory, criticism, genres, authorship...and other cultural matters” within the past decade.(p. 2). According to Kellner (2003), previous approaches to culture tended to be literary and elitist, thus “dismissing media culture as banal, trashy, and not worthy of serious

attention” (p. 10). However, feminist media scholars (Ang (1991), Brunsdon (1997), Dow (1996), Spigel (2004), van Zoonen (1994) have adopted a cultural studies approach in their analysis of television and have contributed to the acceptance of television as a worthy academic site of study.

As Hall contends, popular culture “is an arena of consent and resistance...it is partly where hegemony arises and where it is secured” (Hall quoted in Storey, 1996, p. 2). Working within Gramsci’s (1971) framework of hegemony, Hall (1985) uses the concept of articulation to “explain the processes of ideological struggle” (Hall, quoted in Storey, 2002, p. 4). He argues that meaning is not inscribed in texts, but instead is the result of an act of articulation, which is described as “an active process of ‘production in use’” (Hall quoted in Storey, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, meaning is a social production, and the “text is not the issuing force of meaning, but a site where the articulation of meaning can take place” (Storey, 2002, p. 4).

I drew on the theoretical model the *Circuit of Culture*, developed by duGay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (1997). In this model, which is a development of Richard Johnson’s (1986) *Circuit of Production, Circulation, and Consumption of Cultural Products*, the authors identify five cultural moments: representation, identity, consumption, production and regulation. It is their assumption that these are the processes through which an analysis of a “cultural artifact or text” must pass if it is to be fully studied (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 3). The exterior arrows represent the fluidity of the analysis, which travels around the circuit, while the interior arrows depict the linkages among and between the processes themselves (D’Acci, 2004).



Representation is the practice of constructing meaning through the use of signs and language (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 24). *Identity* looks at how meaning is encoded through the product/text and how these are aimed at establishing identification between object and particular groups of consumers (p. 5). *Production* examines how an object is produced culturally, how it is ‘encoded’ with particular meanings (p. 4). *Consumption* examines how the message is used by its audience. The moment assumes that meanings are not just ‘sent’ by producers and ‘received’ passively, but are actively made by the audience and used in their everyday lives. (p. 5). The final stage *regulation* examines the relationship between the cultural product and the regulation of cultural life, the laws surrounding a product and how the meanings use “representations of public and private space and how its status...leads to attempts by institutions to regulate its usage” (p. 112). Using the circuit as a tool to organize this dissertation, I will address the representation of women and plastic surgery in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* as well as how women negotiate identity through the consumption of this type of media text (i.e. reality programs focusing on the makeover).

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory posits that exposure to idealized images in the media can lower self-esteem and self-perceptions of physical attractiveness. Attributed to Leon Festinger (1954) the origins of the theory did not focus on the media, but on “how individuals use groups to fulfill the informational need to evaluate their abilities and opinions” (Suls & Wheeler, 2000, p.3). Rooted in social psychology, social comparison theory involves comparing oneself to another individual in an effort to assess personal attributes against the attributes of another.

This theory has undergone several revisions since its inception and in the beginning was used by theorists to measure affiliation in response to stress (Festinger, 1959). It was not until Wheeler (1966) introduced the rank order paradigm, which examined whether or not people compare themselves to inferior or superior others, that the existence of a ‘drive upward’ was established. In this influential study, participants completed a test and were provided their score and rank among the other participants. They were then given the choice of comparing their scores to someone who did better than themselves (upward comparison) or worse than themselves (downward comparison). It was found that participants favored the upward comparison in an effort to confirm that their score was “almost as good as the very good ones” (Wheeler, 1966, p. 30).

Brickman and Bulman (1977) challenged Wheeler’s (1966) premise and found that comparison with others who are thought to be superior can be threatening. Therefore, comparison with others who are thought to be worse off may be sought. Wills (1981) later expanded upon the downward comparison thesis and found “in situations that produce a decrease in well-being, individuals will often compare with others who are

thought to be worse off in an effort to improve their well-being (Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001, p. 468). In contrast, Collins (1996) recognizes that in some populations upward comparisons often provide one with a positive role model who gives others inspiration. When discussing physical appearance, research suggests that social comparisons tend to be upward rather than downward (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992).

Pertinent to this dissertation is the use of social comparison theory to describe the relationship between women and their body. While a discussion of upward and downward comparisons are essential when examining body image, it is also important to observe distant targets of influence like the mass media. Lisa Marie Irving (1990) refers to these as universalistic targets. She explains, universalistic targets like the mass media are “perceived as eliciting greater pressure to conform to idealistic standards of attractiveness than particularistic targets such as intimate sources, friends and family” (Quoted in Morrison, Kalin, Morrison, 2004, p. 575). Confirming this assertion, Marsha Richins (1991) and Martin and Kennedy (1993) also found that comparing one’s physical appearance to models in magazine ads correlated negatively with self-evaluation of attractiveness.

Because this dissertation focuses specifically on female beauty ideals, it is important to look at how gender differences play a role in social comparison. Men and women differ in how they relate to other people. Men are more independent and see themselves as separate individuals, whereas women are interdependent, and tend to define themselves in the context of their relationships with others (Kemmelmeyer & Oyserman, 2001). In light of Nemeroff et.al’s (1994) finding that women’s magazines contained 10.5 times more weight loss messages than did men’s periodicals, the fact that women

who compare themselves to images in fashion magazines are more motivated toward achieving thinness than men is not surprising. Heinberg and Thompson (1995) confirm the discrepancy between male and female social comparison as they found that females who compared themselves to celebrities when assessing physical attractiveness were more likely to engage in weight loss practices such as vomiting, than females who did not consider celebrities an important comparison group. When the same study was conducted on males the results did not show a correlation between universalistic comparison and weight loss efforts.

As the above studies illustrate, the majority of social comparison theory studies have used magazines. This dissertation will apply social comparison theory to television, as it is the ultimate visual medium. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* provide a narrow definition of beauty and both target female participants and viewers, with the former *only* featuring females. As this dissertation looks at both the text and reception, social comparison theory will be helpful to understanding how comparisons to others (show participants and celebrities) play a role in motivating women to consider plastic surgery.

Feminist Media Studies

The last 25 years have seen an increase in the amount of academic scholarship focusing on feminist media studies. The emergence of feminist reception studies can be traced to the early 1980's when scholars like McRobbie & McCabe (1981), Modleski (1982), Radway (1984), Ang (1985) Mellencamp (1986), and reappropriated female targeted genres as sites worthy of cultural critique and placed the female/feminine experience at the forefront of feminist media studies. Since Liesbet van Zoonen's (1994) seminal book was published 13 years ago, other media scholars have chronicled methods,

theories and major works that contribute to the discipline. Among them are Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci and Lynn Spiegel's (1997) collection of essays *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*; Spiegel's (2004) examination on the evolution of feminist media studies in the U.S. and the influences of feminism on film studies and feminist television studies; and Bonnie Dow & Celeste Condit's (2005) *Journal of Communication* article which examines feminist scholarship from 1998 to 2003. Steadfast interest in this area of study led to the creation of the journal *Feminist Media Studies* (2001), whose inaugural edition also outlined developments and challenges faced by scholars in the field. In an effort to clarify what is meant by feminist *media* studies, I refer to Spiegel (2004) who defines the field as made up of several discursive practices that are influenced by "popular feminisms in the broader sphere of culture" (p. 1212).

When discussing feminist media studies, it is also important to define what is meant by feminism. While many definitions of feminism abound, the central concern is to locate patriarchal ideology as it relates to power (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Durham, 1999; Storey, 1998; Van Zoonen, 1994). When applied to media studies, feminism can serve as a means of critiquing patriarchy in media texts and, in the process, seek to liberate women from traditional, stereotypical representations (Durham, 1999). It is also a way to understand the concept of gender as a political construction, and posits media texts as critical sites of negotiation. I acknowledge Dow and Condit's (2005) assertion that, "mere attention to gender or sex does not necessarily constitute feminist research" (p. 453). I place my dissertation within a feminist context, since it will examine critically how women are represented within reality television makeover texts, and fitting

into Dow and Condit's category of feminist research focus on the "analysis of the role of communication practices in the dissemination of gender ideology" (2005, p. 455).

Feminist media scholars privilege television as an important site of critical analysis. Television criticism, particularly feminist television criticism, according to Bonnie Dow, "is not about discovering or reporting the meaning in texts. Rather, it becomes a performative activity that is, in some sense, dedicated to creating meaning" (p. 4). Dow (1996) asserts that feminist television criticism "tells us something about the world and how it works" (p. 5). She says criticism can accentuate the importance of television's reflection of the world and can "offer specific arguments for its meaning" (p.5).

In addition to analyzing media texts, this dissertation also considers how women consume and incorporate television texts into their negotiation of socially accepted body types. As Modleski (1991) notes, one of the goals of feminist media criticism is a desire for change, "a writing committed to the future of women" (p. 47). As such, the foregrounding of gender within media studies, particularly reception studies, moves scholarship from "What is the media doing to women?" to "What are women doing with the media?" Representation and reception have become important allies in the study of feminist media texts, and will be incorporated in my analysis of how feminine subjectivities are constructed in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*.

Feminist Fairy Tale Studies

Fairy tales are literary reappropriations of traditional folk tales and are studied by scholars with backgrounds in literature and folklore. Fairy tales reflect the conditions, ideas, tastes, and values of the societies in which they were created, thus fairy tale scholars examine folk tale narratives and the way old tales are repurposed and retold

through different generations and cultural traditions. It is the mutability of the tale that first led feminists to fairy tales studies, citing the power of the writer and the ability of women writers in particular to redefine the role of the heroine (Rowe, 1979). The role that literature embedded with fairy and folk tale myths plays in identity formation has attracted the attention of feminist fairy tale scholars, who explore the question of how women are acculturated through fairy tales by contextualizing familiar stories in a variety of ways (Zipes, 1979). Haase (2004) relates the origin of scholarly research explicitly devoted to feminist issues in fairy tale studies to the second wave feminist movement of the 1970's, when Alison Lurie (1970) published the first form of feminist fairy tale scholarship in an article titled "Fairy Tale Liberation."

While early debates about the genre focused on female representations within fairy tale texts, feminist fairy tale studies evolved into more multifaceted discussions that examined the "significance of romantic tales in forming female attitudes toward self, men, marriage and society" (Rowe, 1979, p. 222). Marcia Lieberman (1972) extends this assertion and argues "fairy tales have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of generations of girls. Millions of women...have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales" (p. 385). Christina Bacchilega (1997) says that within a feminist frame, "fairy tales are sites of competing historically and socially framed desires. These narratives continue to play a privileged role in the production of gender...and feminists can view the fairy tale as a powerful discourse which produces representations of gender" (p. 9-10).

Feminist fairy tale studies therefore encouraged scholarship that employed a critical engagement with traditional tales “as a means to liberate women to imagine and construct new identities” (Haase, 2004, p. 7). A more recent trend that occurred in feminist fairy tale studies was a call for more research in reception studies. Following a similar trajectory to feminist media studies, which also had a vested interest in how women interpret and engage with texts, feminist fairy tale scholars began “assessing the impact of feminism and feminist criticism itself on the way contemporary readers experience fairy tales” (Haase, 2004, p. 28).

Like their feminist media counterparts, fairy tale scholars began to steer away from an effects paradigm that “assumed a fairly direct relationship between women’s lives and the tales they read or were fed” (Harries, 2001, p. 99). Instead scholars like Kay Stone (1985) interviewed women and discovered that while romantic myths present in fairy tales can have a negative affect on the way women perceive themselves, women are also capable of negotiating a critical and creative engagement with the text. In her words, tales can be both “parables of feminine socialization” and stories that call “women forth to an awakening” (Stone, 1985 quoted in Haase, 2004, p. 27).

For the purposes of my dissertation, I assert that many myths first introduced in fairy and folk tales are now evident in television programs that redefine beauty and artifice as popular cultural products that play on romantic notions of living ‘happily ever after’. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are two television texts that use fairy tale discourse to define themselves and can be used as critical sites for understanding gender in a contemporary world. Although *The Swan* is a direct retelling of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Ugly Duckling*, it is also a product of female creator Nelly Galán, and

will thus invite a stream of research within feminist fairy tale studies that examines rewritings by female storytellers.

Methodology

In an effort to examine how women negotiate meaning through the consumption of a text, this dissertation seeks to extend media scholarship grounded in feminism to a new genre of reality programs that take the makeover to the extreme. This dissertation uses a combination of two qualitative methods, in-depth interviews and textual analysis, in an effort to understand why women watch *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, as well as, how they use the programs in their daily lives. Informed by the *Circuit of Culture*, representation and identity are explored through textual analysis, while the use of in-depth interviews explore the moments of consumption, identity, and regulation³.

Qualitative research examines its subject matter from an interpretivist perspective, in an effort to observe how and why things happen. The goal of the qualitative researcher is to study phenomena in their natural settings, while at the same time attempting to interpret these phenomena in terms of meanings and their negotiation. The researcher becomes an instrument in the data collection process and according to Creswell (1998) “gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (p. 14). This type of research acknowledges that methods are grounded in epistemological and ontological assumptions and seeks to analyze the “holistic picture” in which phenomena occurs (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). In this way, qualitative methods differ from quantitative methods, which examine how phenomena operate in an experimental or controlled setting. Qualitative research is reflexive, requiring researchers to reflect on

their actions, biases and values. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of the social, cultural and ideological origin of their own subjectivities, and those belonging to their interview subjects. Reflexivity is central to this study as it centers on issues of gender, body image, and beauty standards.

This dissertation is also an example of a feminist qualitative study, as it foregrounds gender and acknowledges a commitment to feminist politics. As with all political processes, “the social construction of women’s bodies develops through battles between groups with competing political interests and differential access to power and resources” (Weitz, 2003, ix). Further, a feminist methodology is concerned with providing a voice to women as well as empowering them to rise above patriarchal domination. Because gender is a fundamental component of this study, it is analyzed throughout the interviews and textual analysis.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is an interpretive method that assumes meaning is a social production (Acosta-Alzuru & Roushanzamir, 2000) therefore the construction of meaning through the text becomes the object of analysis. For this dissertation six episodes of *Extreme Makeover* and nine episodes of *The Swan* were analyzed. As cable networks are creating their own programming and broadcast networks are increasing their use of mid-season replacement programs, the number of episodes that make up a season continues to change. For most reality programming, seasons are usually shorter than primetime network programs and range between nine to fifteen episodes. Because *The Swan* is a competition as well as a makeover program, it was necessary to view the entire season in order to better understand who would be included in the final episode which featured the

ultimate swan pageant. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze a total of sixteen episodes for this study, which would be comparable to a full reality programming season.

The entire first season of *The Swan* was recorded on Fox in May and June of 2004. This sample includes all first-run episodes, eight of which were one hour in length, with the sixth running two hours long. In addition, a one hour reunion special was also recorded and viewed in October of 2004. *Extreme Makeover* was placed on an indefinite hiatus during the writing of this dissertation making the gathering of the text more difficult. Six one hour episodes were reviewed with one being sent directly from ABC. The other five episodes were recorded in July and August of 2006 where the program reruns daily on the Style network. A one hour reunion special was also recorded and viewed. Recorded episodes originally aired between September, 2003- February, 2005, which ensures that both programs are representative of like time periods and able to address similar social, historical, and political perspectives.

I analyzed *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* to see how each one represents women's relationships with their bodies. Because interviews are also a key methodological component to this study, I chose to analyze two programs, which were helpful when recruiting interview subjects who only had to be familiar with one. Two programs also provided richer data in my quest to understand how gender is constructed, while allowing me to contrast the similarities and differences of each program. It was important to include *Extreme Makeover* in my analysis as it was the first to use plastic surgery in a primetime makeover program, and thus served as a catalyst for other programs to follow. *The Swan* was included in this study not only because it mirrored its

predecessor's extreme approach to beauty, but because it specifically targeted women as the ones who needed making over.

According to van Zoonen (1994) "the main task for feminist media research is to unravel both the dominant and alternative meanings of gender encoded in media texts (p. 66). To do this, I followed Stuart Hall's (1975) multi-stage process involving three levels of reading and interpretation. The first stage involved a "preliminary soak" (Hall, 1975, p. 15) in which I collected and viewed program episodes to become familiar with the text. Each episode was viewed twice with notes made each time to record program specifics. A closer reading of the text was undertaken during the second stage of analysis, in which themes and specific patterns were noted. The third and final stage involved the interpretation of findings, themes and patterns found in the previous two stages, and placed them within the larger theoretical framework of the study. In total, each episode was viewed and analyzed four times to provide an in-depth level of analysis.

In-Depth Interviews

In addition to the textual analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted to examine how women negotiate meaning from *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. According to van Zoonen (1994) in-depth interviewing is the most popular method in feminist media studies and cultural studies, especially in research on audiences, as they allow respondents to articulate their personal experiences and perspectives. The qualitative interview "seeks to describe and understand the meanings of central themes" as they are understood by the interview subject (Kvale, 1996, p. 310). This study employed textual analysis and in-depth interviews because as Kellner (2003) argues, there is more than one possible reading of a text, depending on the critic's subject position, and no matter how

multi-perspective, it may not be the reading preferred by audiences (p. 15). In order to examine how meaning and significance of popular culture work with cultural forms ideologically and politically, “then we need to understand cultural products (or texts) *as they are understood by audiences*” (Lewis, 1991, 47, emphasis in original).

In order to provide rigor and consistency to this study, I followed Kvale’s (1996) seven stages of the interview process while talking to respondents:

1. Thematizing- This first stage formulates the purpose of the interview (why) and describes the concept of the topic being investigated (what) prior to conducting the interview.
2. Designing- Plan the design of the study and methodological procedures with regard to obtaining intended knowledge.
3. Interviewing-Conduct interviews using interview guide with a reflective approach to knowledge.
4. Transcribing- Prepare interview for analysis via a written transcription.
5. Analyzing-Decide on purpose and topic, nature of interview material and appropriate methods for analysis. Findings are condensed and themes are determined.
6. Verifying-Ascertain generalizability, reliability, and validity of interview findings.
7. Reporting- Communicate the findings of the study and methods applied in a format that lives up to scientific criteria.

Within these seven stages, I worked to create a rapport with the participants in an effort to put them at ease with a topic that was personal and for some difficult to discuss. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest, I employed interviewer self-disclosure (giving personal reasons for doing the study) in an effort to put myself on an equal footing with participants.

Twenty-four interviews were conducted for this study focusing on three groups of women: those who have had plastic surgery, those who are planning to have plastic surgery, and those who are undecided about plastic surgery. All of the participants identified themselves as consumers of cosmetic makeover programs, in particular *The Swan* and/or *Extreme Makeover*. Nine women identified themselves as having plastic surgery, 10 women were interested in plastic surgery and 5 women said they probably would not have plastic surgery. Because this dissertation seeks to gain in-depth knowledge about a subject, interviews were conducted until redundancy was reached.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning they were lead by an interview guide, but allowed participants to add themes as they deemed necessary. Participants were enlisted through sampling by recruitment and snowball sampling, which “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, quoted in Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 124). The first interview or “seed” of the snowball sample was found by referral. Some recruited respondents answered an ad placed on a graduate and women’s studies listserv at a public university in the southeastern United States. Of the 24 respondents, eight were recruited in this manner and were paid \$20 to participate in the study.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 44 years of age. Six women identified themselves as African-American, 1 as Hispanic, 1 as Asian, 2 as bi-racial, and 14 as Caucasian. Fifteen interviews were conducted in person, some of which were conducted in an office at a southeastern public university or at participants’ homes. The remaining nine interviews were conducted by phone with the use of a telephone recording device.

Notes about the participant were taken immediately after each interview was conducted to ensure that nothing was forgotten. These notes included how the participants received questions, their demeanor, and what they looked like (eye color, hair, weight, height, and clothing).

Because of the private nature of the subject matter, all interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word by the researcher. To ensure participants confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each. Transcripts were read several times with the first reading being used to highlight useful quotes and make individual notes. Throughout subsequent readings, I made notes of themes that were common among all of the interviews. Transcripts were then marked according to theme(s) and placed into categories which assisted with the analysis and organization of data.

In sum, through textual analysis and interviews, this dissertation explores how gender and beauty ideals are socially constructed within *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* and how female audiences consume these media messages. The following chapter will focus on how women are represented within the text, while chapter five will examine why women watch as well as how they watch cosmetic makeover programs.

CHAPTER 4

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE SWAN* AND *EXTREME MAKEOVER*

Extreme Makeover and *The Swan* are two reality makeover programs that use plastic surgery to enhance the looks of their participants. As its name suggests, *Extreme Makeover* was designed to take the already popular televised makeover a step further, and instead of offering participants a new hair style and suit, this show gives them the option of a new nose, larger breasts, and a thinner waist. Each episode features two people who have filled out an application to be on the program. With the help of friends and family, the producers create an “event” for everyone to get together and surprise the applicant with the news that they have been chosen to be on the program. Tears of joy and congratulatory hugs ensue, as the self proclaimed “unattractive” participants prepare to fly to Los Angeles where they will be chauffeured around in a stretch limousine, undergo no less than six surgical procedures and recover for eight weeks in the *Extreme Makeover* mansion. Viewers watch as participants consult with surgeons about the procedures they would like and an edited version of the surgery and the recovery are also featured. As chapter 5 discusses, the draw of the program is seeing the women transform into “better looking” versions of themselves. The “reveal” comes at the end of the program, and is when the women show off their new looks to friends and family, and in the case of *The Swan*, it is the first time the contestants see themselves.

More than a makeover show, *Extreme Makeover* changed the televisual landscape by making invasive plastic surgery a culturally accepted form of entertainment. As the predecessor to several other makeover shows, this program helped to normalize plastic surgery by featuring women from all socioeconomic groups. While class is not

highlighted in the show, it is an important part of the program which marketed itself as a “real life fairy tale” that promised to give participants a “Cinderella-like experience” (www.abc.com/extreme makeover, 2003). As is customary in traditional fairy tales, the downtrodden prevail, and through the use of a “magical” helper, overcome adversity. In this case the magic helper is not a fairy godmother or a genie in a bottle, but a plastic surgeon and a television program.

Playing on the success of *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan* took the plastic surgery makeover concept even further by featuring two contestants who, at the end of each episode, compete to see which one made the most dramatic transformation. The winner goes on to *The Swan* pageant, the loser, meets with loved ones in the studio and goes home. Similar to *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan* plays upon the fairy tale, as the goal of the show is to turn self-proclaimed ugly ducklings into beautiful swans.

The Swan differs from *Extreme Makeover* in the way it approaches the transformation process. According to the program’s executive producer and creator, Nelly Galán, *The Swan* “has a true curriculum. Women come for five months and have extensive therapy and life coaching and we strive to really work on their inside. So, the plastic surgery is two weeks of the whole show” (CNN.com). *The Swan* “dream team” as they are identified throughout the program, consists of two plastic surgeons, a cosmetic dentist, a personal trainer, a psychologist and a life coach. In contrast, the *Extreme Makeover* “extreme team” consists of several plastic surgeons, cosmetic dentists, a physical trainer and a wardrobe stylist. Psychological and/or post-operative counseling is not a part of the program.

Both of these programs received a great deal of publicity within the popular press, however, not all of it was favorable. While *The Swan*, described by TV Guide as “exploitive, cheesy and tawdry” received the most criticism in the press, it also landed the cover of the August 2, 2004 People magazine and averaged 9.5 million viewers per episode for season one and 8 million viewers for season two (TVWeek.com). That same year, *Extreme Makeover* also received the popular culture stamp of approval, averaging 9.6 million viewers per episode (Austin American- Statesman, April 17, 2004). Critics panned *The Swan* and wrote scathing reviews in the hope that it would not return for a third season. It worked, as *The Swan* began casting for season three, but never aired any episodes.

Extreme Makeover has also had its share of controversy in the press. While it has not been officially cancelled by ABC, the show has only aired one new episode since 2005, perhaps due in part to a lawsuit being filed against *Extreme Makeover* and ABC. In the lawsuit former *Extreme Makeover* candidate Deleese Williams claims her sister committed suicide after finding out that Ms. Williams was denied plastic surgery. Williams' pending makeover was announced on air Jan. 7, 2004. The suit alleges that producers coaxed family members to say mean things about her looks on videotape, while she was in earshot of the family. *Extreme Makeover* flew Williams from Texas to Los Angeles and the morning she was to have her plastic surgery, a producer showed up and told her she was being dropped because her recovery time would take too long. Her sister, Kellie McGee, was so distraught over the mean things she said about her sister, she killed herself four months later. Despite bad publicity, both programs have continued to

find their public, as *The Swan* is being rebroadcast on the Fox Reality network and *Extreme Makeover* plays daily on the Style network.

In this chapter, I will focus on the text, analyzing the similarities and differences between both programs. The chapter situates *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* as programs that reinforce heterosexual ideas of romance, playing upon elements of the fairy tale. While my analysis will touch upon narrative underpinnings of the fairy tale within the text, it will also examine how class, femininity, beauty, and agency are represented within the programs.

The Televisual Fairytale

Children are conditioned from an early age to conform to socialized gender roles. As Butler (1990) explains, gender is often performed based on cultural understandings of what it means to be male or female. Hegemony is central to a discussion about gender performance and the “ways in which we think about ourselves and one another and about our society—our images of how we should look, our homes, our lives” are represented to us through the media (Smith, 1990, p. 17). The fantasy that you too can aspire to be a princess who gets the guy, the kingdom, the wealth, and is the envy of all her friends, is driven into the minds of little girls from the time they are born and that notion is reinforced throughout a woman’s adult life. Mediated fairy tales always have a happy ending, one that is centered around the ideology that physical attractiveness is rewarded. Thus, in a society that values beauty, the fairy tale is the perfect narrative to be reinterpreted and rewritten for an adult television and film audience. For instance, *Ever After* (1998), starring Drew Barrymore was a cinematic success, as was the multi-racial television adaptation of *Cinderella* (1997) that featured Whitney Houston and pop star

Brandy. More recently, the CW launched a reality program called *Beauty and the Geek* (2005-), currently in its third season, which pairs “gorgeous but academically impaired women with brilliant but socially challenged men” to see if they can learn from each others’ strengths and weaknesses and possibly find love (www.cwtv.com/shows/beauty-and-the-geek/about).

Theorists who study myth and fairy tales (or folk tales, as some literary critics prefer to define them) have varying opinions on why these narratives are continually reworked. For this dissertation, I find the following two interpretations particularly helpful for my analysis of *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*. First, G.S. Kirk (1970) explains that folk tales "reflect simple situations that play on ordinary fears and aspirations and pander to our wish for neat and ingenious solutions" (p. 41). Kirk's (1970) statement speaks to the reason women apply to be on the programs, which I argue holds out the promise of achieving their wish of physical change through plastic surgery. Second, Adding to Kirk's (1970) assertion, Maureen Duffy (1972) says myths and fairy tales enable women to vicariously experience "states and desires we are unable to live out" (p. 20). Duffy's (1972) statement can be applied to those who view the programs as they find pleasure watching others transform to substitute for their inability to do so. This thought echoes what Radway (1984) suggested 20 years ago: the idea that women use romance novels (and I assert makeover programs too) as a way to escape disparities that plague their own lives.

'Cinderella' meets 'The Ugly Duckling'

The Cinderella phenomenon is incorporated into the fabric of reality makeover programs. ABC's website makes use of the fairy tale in its marketing of *Extreme*

Makeover. It states: "Following nationwide open casting calls and over 10 thousand written applications, the lucky individuals are chosen for a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in *Extreme Makeover*. These men and women are given a truly Cinderella-like experience: A real life fairy tale in which their wishes come true, not just to change their looks, but their lives and destinies." While denotatively *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are programs designed to entertain through real life experiences, connotatively, they reify notions of beauty, success and conformity which will label more women "ugly" or "ordinary" should they chose not to modify their bodies in a quest to achieve feminine "excellence." Women who are considered average are given new clothes, hairstyles and faces. As Cinderella does in the story, they transform from "ordinary, insecure women into confident beauty queens" (*The Swan*, season I finale, 2004).

The connection to fairy tales is apparent not only in the way the programs are marketed but also in the format they adhere to. Described on the website as a "fairy tale turned into reality," *The Swan*'s mise-en-scène also plays into the Cinderella phenomenon by recreating the feeling of the "ball" for the women's reveal. The women are dressed in evening gowns and the reveal is done in a large studio, made to look like Cinderella's ballroom with winding staircases on each side, a marble floor, and 17th century paintings on the walls. When the women first walk out, the director cuts to a two-camera before and after shot in which the audience is shown a front as well as a side view of the contestant in their bra and panties. The difference is that in the before shot, the women are all in flannel gray colored underwear and tank tops that are folded up under their breasts to show all of the previous body flaws. The after shot shows the women fully made up and in a brightly colored silk bra and panty set. These juxtaposed pictures

do more than remind the audience of the physical changes that have taken place, they signify and give meaning to the women they represent who now *appear* to be liberated and empowered.

The use of oversized gray cotton underwear suggests the ordinary, the mundane, and the ugly, while brightly colored silk underwear signifies fun, sex appeal, and attractiveness. The contrast between the two photographs is reminiscent of Cinderella in her drab and tattered peasant skirt, as opposed to her brightly colored ball gown. It is also reminiscent of the fable *The Ugly Duckling*, where the duckling was described as “a dark, gray bird, ugly and disagreeable to look at” (http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html). The fact that the women in *The Swan* wore gray undergarments, (not brown, navy or even tan, other colors that represent the ordinary) can be directly related to *The Ugly Duckling* and is one of the many similarities the program has with the Hans Christian Andersen tale.

The Swan is a loose adaptation of the 1844 fable in which a “duckling” looks different than the rest of his siblings and as is “bitten, pushed and made fun of” by the other hens and ducks (http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html). The duck goes through a series of hardships that lead to him running away and being taken in by two different families, both of which confirm his desire to live in the wild, not in captivity. It is not until the duck comes across a group of “royal birds” that he feels a kinship, a sense of belonging. To him these birds, later revealed as swans, are the most beautiful of creatures. He risks “being hacked to death because I, who am so ugly, dare to approach them,” and swims to meet them (ibid). Fearing that they would kill him, the ugly duckling bows his head and is greeted with his reflection- a reflection that reveals his true

identity, that of a beautiful swan. The Ugly Duckling is a story about self-worth and overcoming difference. And, like the tale, the premise of *The Swan* is to help women work through personal traumas and show the rest of the world how beautiful they truly are. According to the show's creator and executive producer Nelly Gálan, she "wanted women with a past" who would benefit from a holistic approach to bettering themselves from the inside out (<http://transcripts.cnn.com>). Mirroring the torment the duckling withstood at the hands of the others in the henyard, the women on *The Swan* sometimes articulate similar tormenting at the hands of their peers.

For example in episode 1, Kelly, 28, says that the kids in her middle school thought she was so ugly, they taunted her and spit on her everyday when she got on the school bus. Recounting this time in her life, Kelly says "this is when I lost my soul." In episode 3, Cindy, 32, also points to childhood as the time when she started feeling unattractive. Growing up in a small town, Cindy was made fun of because of her long, pointed nose. In the fourth grade, her school had a Halloween play and Cindy's teacher cast her as the witch. For Cindy, the subsequent trauma of being teased for having a "witch like" nose has plagued her into adulthood.

The underlying social message within The Ugly Duckling states "to be born in a duck's nest, in a farmyard, is of no consequence to a bird if it is hatched from a swan's egg" (http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html). Loosely interpreted, this statement says if you are born with inherent beauty, issues such as class and circumstance do not matter and, by implication, any related obstacles will be overcome. *The Swan* provides a different interpretation to the tale's social message and emphasizes to the contestants "it is not about the beauty you were born with, but the beauty you worked for" (*The Swan*,

episode 9, season, 1, 2004). *The Swan* claims to show the women that they had the materials to be a swan all along; they just needed help to bring them to the surface. I argue that what *The Swan* actually does is exacerbate the anxiety of the women who come to the program by continually pointing out the flaws that separate them from becoming a part of the desired cultural group. The women are not taught to enhance the body they were born with merely through stylish clothes or make up tips, but are instead prescribed all new body parts that conform to a “narrow palette of pleasing looks” (Weber, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, if *The Ugly Duckling* was better for having experienced sorrow and trouble as it enabled him to appreciate his new beauty and happiness; so are the women on *The Swan*.

The Swan and *Extreme Makeover* incorporate elements into their narrative that are distinctive to a fairy tale. Both programs rely on narrators, mirrors, and the happily ever after theme to recreate fairy tale narratives. Feminist literary scholar Carolyn Heilbrun (1979) asserts “myth, tale and tragedy must be transformed by bold acts of reinterpretation in order to enter the experience of the emerging female self” (p. 150). Thus, I conclude that producers of televised makeover programs consciously repurpose fairy tale themes of romance, adventure, and fantasy as a way to reconfirm the role of the feminine. In order to avoid redundancy and take examples from every episode, I focus on a few examples from each program to highlight how the fairy tale theme is incorporated into the context of the narrative.

The Narrator

Narrators play a number of roles in the television version of these fairy tale narratives, with the most prominent being to serve as the prevailing voice on what

constitutes societal beauty norms and to bridge the gap between what viewers see and what has been edited out. There are several types of narrators represented in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. Both programs have an external or invisible narrator, which according to Bacchilega (1997) represents the narrative vision as the only possible one. Like the magic mirror, this narrator is all knowing and presents the dominant viewpoint in the narrative. Each program also has character-bound narrators which are narrators that “recount true facts about him or herself” (Bal. 1997, p. 22). The participants in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* serve as character-bound narrators who speak about themselves in the first person. Members of *The Swan* “dream team” and the *Extreme Makeover* “extreme team” serve as secondary character-bound narrators who speak about the participants in the third person. These secondary character-bound narrators use their “expert” status to extend a dominant beauty ideology and ultimately serve as an authoritative voice for the participants. I will explore the role narrator’s play in these two programs, while also looking at how each brings a distinct voice to the narrative.

The Swan and *Extreme Makeover* both have an external narrator whose purpose is to provide continuity within the narrative. The voice within the two programs, however, is different. The narrator in *The Swan* is a woman, who also serves as the program’s host, while the narrator in *Extreme Makeover* is male. Amanda Byrum, the host and narrator of *The Swan* has two roles. As the external narrator, her purpose is to give viewers updates on what has happened previously in the program through the use of retroversions (reviewing events that occurred previously in the episode) and anticipations (previewing events that will occur within the episode) (Hall, 2005). For example in episode 3,

Amanda's voice over explains the following about the contestants just before the commercial break.

“Kristy and Christina are only one month away from their final reveal. Kristy, the funny girl who laughed her way through surgery, but had a hard time in therapy dealing with her marriage. She still has 20 pounds to lose. Will revenge be enough to motivate her? Christina came here contemplating divorce, had a tough time in surgery, and cheated on her diet. Will she fight to get back on course and become a contender?”

Through the narrator, viewers are now up to date on what has happened in the program and are also made aware of the obstacles each contestant faces as they near the end of the competition.

Amanda's second role in *The Swan* is host. In this role, she is responsible for introducing us to the women in the program, as well as discussing with the dream team their makeover plans for each contestant. It is in this position that she becomes what Bal (1997) calls a perceptible narrator, which is someone who is directly involved in the events on the screen. At the end of each episode, Amanda interacts with contestants through the reveal and discusses with them their feelings about the three-month process. It is also in this role that Amanda exerts opinion, often telling the women how proud she is of them and how beautiful they now look.

Unlike the external narrator in *The Swan*, which is primarily used to fill in storyline gaps due to editing, the external narrator in *Extreme Makeover* is also the external focalizer. As the external focalizer, the narrator presents the focalized (perspective) from within “penetrating his feelings and thoughts” (Rimmon-Kenan, 2001, p. 76). His voice becomes one of authority, often exerting a dominant viewpoint within the narrative.

Caroline, 32, explains to the doctor that she would like her nose, once broken as a child, to be straight again. The doctor begins explaining the medical procedure and how he will go about fixing her nose. As he nears the end of the explanation, the narrator's voiceover says, "The nose is the most prominent feature on the human face. And because our culture sees smaller noses as more feminine, most woman patients want a shorter length with an upturned tip" (*Extreme Makeover*, Season 2, episode 201, 2003). With this statement, the narrator's opinion becomes universalized and serves as the definitive statement on what is culturally acceptable. His voice is not only made to represent "most women" it is privileged as Caroline is never spoken to or about her ideal nose shape, but spoken for.

Similar comments on what attributes make women look more "feminine" were made about Aimee, 33, a married mother from Las Vegas. As the narrator was explaining the different surgical procedures Aimee would receive with the makeover, he told viewers that her new chin implant would "create a feminine jaw line" and that breast implants (which took her from an A cup to a C cup) would "fill out her womanly figure."

Throughout the series, the narrator emphasizes to viewers the importance of maintaining an acceptable feminine identity, sometimes chastising women who fail to do so. For instance when speaking about Peggy, 48, the narrator says, "Peggy neglected herself and it cost her her marriage. She felt ugly and it affected her sexuality with her husband. He left her" (aired in 2003, Season 2, viewed on July 18, 2006). This statement is used to reinforce the social stigma that fuels the motivation for the show in the first place--one that propels beauty through plastic surgery as a cure-all for low self-esteem, lack of social acceptance, and in Peggy's case, divorce. By suggesting that Peggy's

pre-makeover face and body are to blame for her failed marriage the narration unfairly simplifies her story and takes away responsibility from her male counterpart and obliges Peggy (and all women) to align themselves with prevailing hegemonic values in an effort to avoid social censure.

While the external narrator in *Extreme Makeover* made references to conventional gender construction throughout the episodes, it was the secondary character-bound narrators in *The Swan* that provided comment on what constitutes an acceptable feminine identity. After hearing Kristi's, 23, story and seeing her video audition tape which showed her in her military uniform, surgeon Terry Dubrow replied that she "needs to be feminized." His solution, "get rid of the fat in her cheeks and chin, get rid of the bump on the nose, breast implants and liposuction" which he says "will really help to bring out her feminine side, make her feel more sexy."

His cohort, Dr. Randall Haworth made similar comments about Kathy, 27 stating that he was going to "bring back her femininity through diet, lasik, laser hair removal, collagen, a Fotofacial, chemical peel, cheek fat removal, fat injection under her eyes, endobrow lift, nose job, breast augmentation with nipple lift, liposuction in chin, abdomen, flanks, inner thighs, butt, and knees." As the external narrator did in *Extreme Makeover*, a male voice speaks on behalf of the women and becomes the authority on what constitutes a feminine appearance, which in most cases, is thinner with perfect teeth, a straight nose and larger breasts. Although the secondary-character narrators speak about feminizing each woman as though she were getting an individual beauty "plan," they are actually working together to underscore a collective beauty imperative that produces a homogenized feminine appearance. The participants who articulate a sense of displeasure

with what they see in the mirror desire this glamorized appearance. As the next section will highlight, of all the things experienced in a makeover, nothing is more complicated than this relationship with the mirror.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Mirrors, literally defined, are surfaces made of glass or polished metal that reflect light without diffusing it so that it will give back a clear image of anything placed in front of it.⁴ However, mirrors hold a much deeper connotative meaning. They are a reflection of how we appear to others. They portray what we look like and serve as reminders of things we would like to change. The mirror is multifaceted in fairy tales. It is both a symbol of good and impending evil. Much like the mirror in these tales, contestants in *The Swan* see the mirror as both friend and foe.

When Snow White's stepmother asks the mirror, "Who is the fairest one of all?" it is assumed that she is asking more than an empirical question (Morgan, 1991, p. 153). Morgan states, "that in wanting to be 'the fairest of all,' she is striving, in a clearly competitive context, for a prize, a position of power" (p. 153). As the argument goes, the mirror's affirmation of her beauty will bring her privilege not afforded to 'the plain, the ugly, the aged, and the barren" (p. 153). This is the same privilege that contestants in *The Swan* are striving for as they negotiate their troubled relationship with the mirror and compete with one another in a quest to be the fairest swan of all.

Although Kelly, 28, has a boyfriend who says he loves her the way she is, she will not be satisfied until she changes all the things she does not like about herself and can

⁴ As defined in the Macintosh Electronic Merriam Webster Dictionary.

look in the mirror and be happy with what she sees. “If I could look into the mirror at the end of all of this and be happy with who I am and what I have achieved, then I’ve won.”

Rachel, 27, has a similar relationship with the mirror. “I do believe that how you feel about yourself physically can play a part in how you react to the world and how you react to the world and your environment. I feel average because when I look in the mirror, that’s what I see.”

Tawnya, 40, the oldest swan contestant says that she prefers not to look in the mirror at all. “When I look in the mirror, I see an old lady, somebody who is not what she used to be before.” Upon hearing this, her surgeon tells her that she needs “surgical rejuvenation.” Confirming her fears, he immediately begins listing procedures she needs to have done (among them a facelift, browlift, and nose job) and says “tragedy has played a toll on Tawnya’s face. She’s 40, but looks 10 years older.” Playing on the fairy tale, he says that although his scalpel is not a magic wand, it *can* sometimes do magic” (emphasis added).

The troubled relationship many of the women have with the mirror is emphasized for both the contestant and the audience, and is a pivotal component of the program.

The Swan producers play up the role of the mirror and surround the entire reveal around it. Because contestants have been unable to see themselves in a mirror for three months, the reveal becomes the first time they are able to see their new reflection. For the final reveal, the contestants come out to applause and cheers as their new self is revealed to their dream team and to the audience. The dramatic music is then brought up as the show’s host walks the contestants over to an old-fashioned red velvet movie theater sized

curtain that houses the oversized wardrobe mirror. The contestants are asked to stand in front of the curtain and are told the following:

“Behind that curtain there is a mirror. It is waiting for you to go up to it to be revealed so you can come face to face with the new you. When you’re ready, and only when you’re ready, we will pull back the curtain.”

The moments following the reveal speak to a different, less troubled, relationship with the mirror.

Kelly, 28 said, “Is that me? It’s not like one of those mirrors that make you look skinnier or prettier? I look beautiful. I don’t even recognize myself.” Rachel, 27 also does not recognize her new self. As she looks into the mirror she exclaims, “I don’t look anything like that other girl. I’m beautiful.” No longer apart of the “other,” Rachel has managed to “other” herself from herself. Beth, 25, is also unable to recognize herself. Smiling and touching the mirror she says, “I don’t look like me, I feel taller and thinner. I look so beautiful.”

Twenty-seven-year-old Kathy’s reaction was a little different. Upon first seeing herself, she exclaims, “Oh my God, that’s me. I may not be the ultimate swan, but I feel like I am a swan.” Her most telling moment came when she said, “I finally feel comfortable in my skin.” Kathy’s comments confirm that cosmetic surgery was presented as part of a woman’s struggle to feel at home in her body (Davis, 1995, p. 161). Kathy has transformed into a subject with a body rather than just a body (p. 161).

In one of the most emotional reveals of the program, Kristy, 23, speaks to the influence of popular culture and the power of a socially constructed celebrity body ideal. Unable to speak for a few seconds, Kristy looks into the mirror and whispers, “I am in

total awe. I've wanted to be pretty my whole life. I have real boobs. I feel like all of those women in the magazines." She next turns to her swan team and says, "I don't think you could ever realize what you've done for me."

In sum, the mirror becomes the definitive judge in the negotiation of female identity. As Christina Bacchilega (1985) states, the mirror reveals how post modern fairy tales lay bare the shaping of human desire by history, ideology, and material conditions. (Cited in Haase, 2000, p. 35) She concludes: "The wonder of fairy tales, indeed, relies on the magic mirror which artfully reflects and frames desire. Overtly reproducing the workings of desire, postmodern wonders perform multiple tricks with that mirror to re-envision its images of *story* and *woman*" (p. 146).

Happily Ever After

From its inception, *Extreme Makeover* promoted itself as the purveyor of dreams and fantasies. With new faces and bodies presumably comes a renewed sense of self and a greater chance for love. Women are reconnecting to their sexuality and being taken to their reveals in horse drawn carriages to meet up with their Prince Charming and unmarried women are reinforcing heterosexual notions of romance through comments like "I feel like a princess. I have never felt like the center of attention and now I am ready and more open for dating. I am open to love." (Dana) These programs represent romance as "the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment" (Rich, 1986, p. 648). *Extreme Makeover*, in particular indoctrinates women into traditional gender roles and actively constructs a gendered narrative that becomes most visible in the ultimate female fantasy: a wedding (Maher, 2004).

Playing into Maher's (2004) idea that the ultimate female fantasy is the wedding, *Extreme Makeover* aired a wedding episode during the 2004 spring sweeps week that truly gave one couple a "real life fairy tale experience." This episode featured Susan and Mike, a couple that met in a weight loss treatment center and fell in love. Each had their own reasons for wanting to be on the program, but both agreed that the weight loss took a toll on their bodies and articulated a desire to "tighten up." The episode was filled with surprises and references to fairy tales. The first surprise occurred when Mike and Susan are sitting at a poolside cabana having a romantic dinner before they begin the makeover process. Mike proposes and a stunned Susan accepts.

In possibly the most obvious example of producer/director machination, Charles Bangert, the executive producer of *Extreme Makeover* joins the couple and informs them of the new plans for their reveal: A wedding. The couple found out that they would be revealed to each other on national television when they walk down the aisle. The wedding will take place at Disneyworld, described by the narrator as "a place for fun, fantasy and fairy tales that come to life before your very eyes." Having the wedding at Disneyworld (whose very existence depends upon romance and fantasy) and playing into the fairy tale theme of living happily ever after, speaks to Bacchilega's (1997) assertion that "the fairy tale still proves to be everyone's story, making magic for all" (p. 6).

This episode follows the same narrative trajectory as the others, which includes a visit to personal stylist to the stars Sam Sabora who outfits the participants in clothes that flatter their slim and toned post surgical shape. While shopping for the perfect wedding dress, Sam says to Susan "this is the part of the story where we make you into a princess." Upon trying on her dress Susan says "I've always been a big fan of Cinderella.

But never in a million years did I think I would have that experience. You know, to be transformed.” Next we see Susan riding to the wedding in a white carriage with four white horses and a coachman. It is in fact, a rendition of the one Cinderella rode in the Disney film. As we see her approaching the church, the camera cuts to a medium shot of her with the veil over her face and her voice over states “I want to step out of Cinderella’s carriage and I want that glass slipper to fit.” This statement confirms dominant cultural beliefs about love and romance that substantiate Marcia Lieberman’s (1972) argument about fairy tales.

“Fairy tales have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of generations of girls. Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the reward it self, in part from their favorite fairy tales.” (p. 385)

Staying true to the conventional television narrative, the episode concludes with a satisfactory resolution of themes articulated by the narrator’s voice over. “For Susan and Mike this fairy tale began once upon a time” (here we see a before shot of the couple) “and ended happily ever after” (now showing a wedding picture of the couple). What the narrator does not explain is if Mike and Susan will be able to afford to keep up the fairy tale, as buying into the makeover means committing to continual purchases of beauty products, gym memberships and surgical updates.

While the narrator is unable to tell viewers if the fairy tale continues after the programs end and the participants go home, both programs had a reunion special where they attempted to answer this very question. Peggy, Cat and Caroline were all featured on the *Extreme Makeover* reunion special. In the special, Peggy revealed that her decision to have an extreme makeover was one of the best decisions she has ever made. Peggy says

for her it was not about seeking beauty, [she was one of two participants who refused breast implants] but it was about putting her self first and taking care of her needs, not the needs of others.

Not surprisingly, Cat and Caroline also said their lives have changed for the better as a result of the programs. Caroline, formerly known as “the ugly twin” is happy now that she looks like her sister again. She now feels better about being seen with her sister as people are now unable to tell them apart. For Cat, a divorced single mother, romance has entered her life and she says she is now at a place in her life where she can love someone because she now loves herself. This begs the question, where did this love of self come from? Is it that she likes what she sees in the mirror? Or like most makeover participants articulate, did the physical transformation help with the internal transformation? While this question was not directly answered, it was implied that the latter was the case.

Of the 16 women on *The Swan*, 3 revealed that they were engaged. Despite the fact that these women could not afford to pay for surgery themselves and therefore had to convince producers that their story was pathetic enough to be granted the free makeover, each woman was sporting a diamond ring on their newly manicured hands. The show spent at least 20 minutes out of the 60 minute special discussing how these women were now able to find love, presumably because their new bodies were now pleasing to the opposite sex. But, what message does this send to women about pleasing men?

The fairy tale need not always surround romance, as makeover participants consistently said that they felt the makeover would make them feel more confident and boost their self esteem. As discussed in the literature review chapter, studies have proven

that attractive people receive higher salaries, are hired easier, are more successful at selling and are more influential. Swan contestant Cindy in many ways confirms what these studies say as her big news at the reunion show was that she was now working on the Fox affiliate in her hometown of San Diego as an entertainment correspondent. On the show, she talks of always wanting to work on television, but never followed her dream because of her unattractive face. Again, the message here is that if you change your looks, you can gain confidence like Cindy and follow your dreams toward career success. What women watching, or Cindy herself may not realize, is that she may be the biggest victim in all of this. Sure, she got her dream job, but it is to the Fox affiliates benefit to hire her because she is now a local celebrity and as a result people will watch her reports out of curiosity. This of course increases the Fox affiliates ratings which in turn will earn them more money.

In contrast to the women above, swan contestant Andrea got divorced and said that the counseling on the show gave her the confidence to get out of a loveless marriage and learn how to rely on herself, not others, for happiness. Similarly, two other swan contestants said the internal transformation was what they treasure the most. Rachel, the winner of the swan pageant, says “you get four months to spend on yourself and not many people get that opportunity...this experience taught me that I control my destiny.” Merlene agrees with Rachel and says “you can get all of this stuff done on the outside, but you will still be the same person on the inside. Dr. Ianni [the therapist] taught me to be in charge of my emotions and that your life is what you make it.”

Rachel and Merlene’s comments send a more positive message, telling women that regardless of how much work you get done on the outside, if you have not dealt with

your internal issues, your transformation will not be complete. Unfortunately, messages like these are few and far between in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* as they infer personal happiness is just a surgery away. On the one hand, if some participants say the internal transformation is what they treasure the most, then wouldn't just going to therapy have taught them to be happy with the face and body they were born with? If Merlene and Rachel's statements are completely accurate, then there would be no need to alter the external body. On the other hand, some participants say that fixing the inside was central to their transformation, but the external changes were necessary to having a *complete* transformation.

Mediating Class within the Fairy Tale Narrative

Like *Queen for a Day* and many other reality shows that required participants to "sell their story" in order to be chosen for the program, *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* capitalize on participants who are relatable to the viewing audience. Class is at the heart of these programs, as the transformations that occur are not just physical, but also support Pierre Bourdieu (1984) notion that "a class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption...as much as by its position" (p. 483). Bocock's (2004) agrees, and argues that social groups use patterns of consumption to establish rank and differentiate themselves from others. Debra Gimlin (2002) found similar behavior in her study on the beauty ideology of the hair salon. According to Gimlin (2002), class distinctions in appearance are reinforced by high status women, who can afford to have their hair done and distinguish themselves from lower status women who cannot. I argue that this beauty ideology can also be applied to cosmetic surgery.

Stemming back to the 1920's, when plastic surgery started being used for purposes of vanity, not just reconstruction, the rich and famous were the only ones able to afford to fix their imperfections. *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, which provide the surgery for free, present women from all class backgrounds the opportunity to change their physical appearance through plastic surgery. The power of reality television becomes salient as women assume that the changes they see other women go through on television could one day happen to them. This mindset was demonstrated in an episode that featured a "casting call" in Las Vegas. As the camera panned the audience of thousands, the narrator was quick to point out that their odds of being chosen were 1/1000. Despite these odds, woman after woman was shown highlighting their flaws and explaining why their body and face were in need of an *Extreme Makeover*. Because the programs thrive off of "extreme" transformations, they look for a certain type of person to feature on the show and they are usually from working class backgrounds.

Class is coded in a variety of ways in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. Some of the discussions of class are implied (cued by living environment, job titles, grammar) within the narrative, however they are not played up as the impetus for the person wanting to be on the program. Others are more explicit and make the viewer aware of the participant's social and class status. An example of class being implied in the narrative would be *Swan* contestant Merlene. A single mom with three kids, Merlene states that she wants to be able to smile with straight teeth. As she begins to cry on camera, the narrator's voice over says the following, "Merlene feels like a caretaker to everyone but herself. Her parents were deaf, and growing up, she signed for them and was their ears. Merlene would like to have braces but because she has three kids of her own to take care

of, spends all of her money on them and none on herself." This scene was edited to stir emotion and empathy within the audience as Merlene is being presented to us as "the caretaker." However this scene is very much about class. If Merlene had the means to buy braces, the fact that she has three children to care for and two deaf parents would not play up as well in the narrative. In fact, if Merlene had the means to fix her teeth and did so, I dare say she may not have been chosen for the program.

Neither would *Extreme Makeover* participant Kimberly, 31, whose class status is made a bit more obvious to the audience. Kimberly also has dental needs that according to her mother, have impeded her progress to find a significant other. Kimberly's protruding overbite is very noticeable, but the audience soon learns that she also has no back teeth and front caps that need to be replaced. As is customary with makeover programs, Kimberly's "audition" tape highlights all of the reasons for wanting to be on the show. Kimberly explains that once she priced her dental work, she realized the money was not there and she began to feel hopeless. On cue, the narrator's voice over informs the audience that fixing Kim's teeth would cost more than her annual salary. This important disclosure frames the reason for her interest in the program. While the show played up her interest for having three dental procedures and eight surgical procedures as wanting to hear from a man "hey, she's really cute," one cannot overlook the fact that she could not afford to have this done on her own.

The contestants are in a sense entering into barter with the programs. In exchange for Kimberly enduring incredible pain, physical objectification, and disclosing personal information about herself and her family in front of millions, she gets her 15 seconds of fame and the dental work (plus several surgical procedures to her body) done for free.

The Swan made sure its contestants knew the gift they were being given by announcing that collectively, the women received over \$3 million of plastic surgery. *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* also reap benefits from this "free trade" agreement. The show gets a perfect candidate to transform and promote throughout the week and play up the melodrama of their "story" all in an effort to gain viewership, which translates into increased advertising revenue and entertaining television.

Ideologies of class are sometimes more subtly placed within the program. For example, *Extreme Makeover* over emphasizes the fact that the participants are able to stay in the new makeover mansion to heal after their surgery. The star treatment continues as participants are picked up from the airport in a limousine and driven around the Los Angeles area before they are taken to the mansion. On the site seeing route are the Hollywood walk of fame, the beach, and Beverly Hills. One participant (Susan) described her experience in the limo as "feeling like a dream" and associated it with "winning the lottery." The tour and the mansion symbolize more than ABC's hospitality, they show the contestants how the "other half" lives and allow them to experience the fairy tale for eight weeks; in the privacy of their own post-operative kingdom.

Although the women on the programs could not afford to have the surgery on their own, their appearance now indicates a middle or upper class identity. These women confirm what Bourdieu (1984) terms the "system of classificatory schemes" by allowing their new bodies and faces to function as a type of symbolic property. Weber (2005) adds to this discussion on class in makeover programs, particularly *Extreme Makeover*, but locates the programs' ultimate goal in beauty. "Though class plays tacitly at the edges of the *Extreme Makeover* narrative, it's not class itself that either must be changed or that

stands as the source of all problems. The underlying crisis is one of beauty and the dire consequences that befall those who do not possess it” (p.9). While I agree with Weber’s (2005) assertion that beauty is central to makeover shows, class cannot be dismissed as something that merely plays tacitly at the edges. Weber’s position minimizes class in favor of a “crisis” of beauty, however I argue class and the desire to be beautiful have equally important roles throughout the narrative. Therefore, it is this notion of beauty, and the lengths women will go through to possess it, that will frame the next section.

Beauty is More Than Skin Deep

Beauty, or wanting to be perceived as beautiful, is articulated throughout both programs and is a key reason many women desire to appear on these two makeover shows. Beauty for the women on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* is linked to internal feelings of self-worth. Throughout both programs, and particularly in *The Swan*, participants say depression, lack of self confidence and self-consciousness during intimacy are directly related to their displeasure with their face and/or bodies. As the following analysis will show, there is a relationship between the visual and how women in these programs construct their subjectivities. Susan Sontag (1972) sums up the link between the external and internal by stating “men have faces but women are their faces” (quoted in Frost, 2001, p. 131). This statement not only captures the difference in the way men and women are judged by society, but speaks to the way female identity has been culturally colonized and made an engagement with looks almost mandatory.

Swan contestant Cindy says “people don’t understand what it feels like on the inside to feel ugly.” Cindy’s comment is representative of the way many women on these two programs say they feel. For 48-year-old Peggy, this was exactly the case. As she prepared

to leave the *Extreme Makeover* mansion to go home for her reveal, Peggy told her surgeon, "...the defining moment in this process happened in your office. You told me that I was beautiful and it was the first time I ever really believed it." This statement not only connects outer beauty with internal happiness, but also begs the question of what does beauty look like?

In these two programs, beauty is synonymous with sameness. The women all came out looking very similar, always several pounds thinner, more physically toned with larger breasts, fuller lips, smaller, more "feminine" noses, and younger. This is especially true in *The Swan*, where contestants averaged 10 surgeries and at least three dental procedures each. Of the 16 contestants, 11 received breast augmentation, 12 had a rhinoplasty (nose job), all received either a face lift, eye lift, eyebrow lift, or a variation of all three. All of the contestants had liposuction, including on the stomach, knees, butt, calves, ankles, cheek, chin and thighs, and a tummy tuck and lip enhancement was performed on more than half.

Following the same formula *The Swan* used to "create" beauty, women on *Extreme Makeover* had similar procedures, just not as many. Of the six programs analyzed for this dissertation, nine women were featured, averaging six surgeries each. Similar to *The Swan*, 8 had breast implants, 5 had liposuction, 4 had a tummy tuck, 8 had something "lifted", 6 had a rhinoplasty, 3 had chin implants and 1 had fat injected into her lips. When comparing the two programs, *The Swan* contestants looked more homogenous than the women featured on *Extreme Makeover*. I attribute this to the competitive nature of *The Swan*, where upon being judged by the "dream team" women were placed on an even playing field. Contributing to this similarity is the fact that the

show only features the work of two surgeons, thus they have a certain plastic surgery signature. *Extreme Makeover* often featured a male participant on the same program, however, each story was separate and so were the reveals. There was no competition between the participants; therefore the need for contestants to conform to a certain look was unnecessary.

While in many instances, the participants did look what our culture would deem “attractive” after they had surgery, what is troubling about the “cookie cutter” way that beauty is being defined on the programs is the lack of regard for personal identity. Instead of fixing one or two irregularities (like Kimberly’s teeth for example), these programs are performing a total body overhaul on patients and focusing on “harmonizing the aesthetic units of the face and body by working on them all at the same time” (Lawson, 2004 p. 54). In most cases, the participants had one or two things about themselves that really bothered them, however, to fit in with the mission of the programs, which promise to deliver the most extreme transformations, several surgeries and many hours in the gym were required to make the reveal as shocking as possible. Surgeons sculpt women to fit into a Eurocentric body formula; one that Bordo (1997) says “participates in a process of racial normalization” and makes it “harder for others to refuse to participate” (p. 49).

Although this dissertation focuses on women, it is important to briefly examine how men are represented in *Extreme Makeover*. As I explained earlier, men were often featured on *Extreme Makeover*, and within the six programs examined, four of the participants were males. Men are becoming increasingly conscious of external looks as programs like Bravo’s *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-) cater to the male

consumer, coined in the media as the “metrosexual”, a heterosexual man who seeks physical perfection through his appearance and grooming habits. In *Extreme Makeover*, men are represented as suffering from some of the same problems as the women. Dan, a radio disk jockey whose wife left him, says he was so depressed he “let himself go for a number of years” and he is looking to the show for help because he has “always wanted to be one of those handsome guys.” Dan has developed a crush on his co-worker [his first romantic interest since his divorce], who has a strict no dating policy at work. Like some of the women on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, Dan believes that if he is more handsome, he would be able to change his co-workers mind. Therefore, he is seeking to fit into a male sociocultural beauty standard, which Law and Labre (2002) says “emphasize strength and muscularity, with the mesomorphic body type (well proportioned average build) being preferred over ectomorphic (thin) or endomorphic (fat) body shapes” (p. 697).

Michael was featured on the wedding special opposite his fiancée Susan. Because Michael recently lost a large amount of weight, he had excess skin that would not go away through exercise. Michael desired a new, firmer body that would show off his weight loss. Like Susan, Michael likened the makeover to a fairy tale, and as he was getting dressed for his wedding, said the following about his own transformation, “I can’t believe I am putting on this tuxedo, which is so much smaller in size then anything I could have imagined. All I could think of was the story of the ugly duckling.” Like many of the female participants featured in this dissertation, Michael thought of himself as ugly, but the makeover has made him rethink his identity.

John and Ray both want to change the way they are perceived by others. Ray, who spent the last 10 years on death row after being wrongfully accused and subsequently released for a crime he did not commit, seeks to look less menacing. Unlike the narrator who often spoke about female patients as needing to look more feminine, in Ray's case, the narrator constantly tells the audience that his procedures will decriminalize his face, make him look less menacing to others. There is never any mention about him needing to get certain procedures done to look more masculine. Because Ray has been incarcerated for a decade he lives with his mother due to a lack of income supposedly because his "hardened criminal looks" are preventing him from gaining proper employment. Upon arriving at the makeover mansion, he says "wholly cow, this is a step up from a prison cell. I wouldn't mind doing time here." In this way, issues of class are also present for men, and the program thrives on providing a life changing experience for those who would not be able to afford to do it themselves.

John, a self proclaimed "video game nerd" says he desires a makeover to gain more respect in the workplace. John is the vice-president of his company and he thinks that if he looks less "nerdy" then he will look more professional, like a man in his position is "supposed" to look. In this case, the *Extreme Makeover* dream team tells viewers all of the procedures they will perform on John in an effort to make him look more polished, including cutting his long brown hair and making him a blond. Thus, it could be argued that the fairy tale for men is similar to women's and that is good looks will bring rewards of romance, happiness and success.

The Reveal

The reveal is the highlight of these two programs. The shows are narrated and edited around this spectacle as the women are placed in evening gowns and presented to the world. It is important to note how the programs differ in their reveal strategies. In *The Swan*, the audience sees the contestants before they see themselves. The reveal truly occurs when the participant sees herself for the first time. In a sense, the audience is more like a voyeur as we are looking at their reaction to themselves. Revealing the women in this way allows the viewer to form an opinion about the participant's new looks while also bearing witness to the participant's own reaction. Because the participant's reaction is privileged, it suggests to the viewer that their opinion, not what others think, is what matters most.

On *Extreme Makeover*, it is the audience that is experiencing the transformation first hand, as the participants have already seen themselves. The audience does not get to participate in the participant's reaction to themselves, so we are only left with our own feelings and opinions regarding the change. Both types of reveals are powerful, however, the *Extreme Makeover* style of reveal favors the audience's reaction and thrives off of the way the participant's loved ones react to the change. These reactions, which are full of sycophantic statements like, "she's gorgeous, she could be a model or a movie star," confirm to those watching that beauty grants acceptance.

Negotiating identity for these women becomes a process where they discursively construct a new sense of self. This negotiation is further complicated when friends and family revel in the women's newly acquired beauty, making comments like "the little ugly duckling has finally turned into a swan" and "I sent away a five and got back a ten."

There are several paradoxes at work in this process, most of which are linked to agency and power, which I will analyze in the following section.

Female Beauty Practices: Agents or Victims?

Scholars have debated the feminist critique of female beauty practices for years. The fundamental disagreement between them surrounds the notion of choice or “agency”. Some (Bartky, 1990; Morgan, 1991, Bordo, 1993, 1997, 2003;) argue that beauty practices (such as cosmetic surgery) subordinate and oppress women by coercing them to resculpt their bodies to fit into a male defined vision of femininity. Others (Davis, 1995, 2003; Etcoff, 2000; Frost, 1999; Wolf, 1990) contend women have the freedom of choice and in electing to engage in beauty practices are exercising power over their own bodies. Debate around plastic surgery suggests the following questions about *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*. How is the women’s decision to undergo plastic surgery represented in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*? Are women in these two programs choosing to have surgery to correct certain body imperfections or are they trying to fit into a prescribed beauty standard? And in making the decision to have cosmetic surgery, are they doing so to please themselves or be admired by others in society?

To help me explore these questions, I turn to Davis’ (2003) definition of agency. For Davis, agency is linked to social structures but not completely reducible to them. She says agency is “multilayered, involving a complicated mix of intentionality, practical knowledge, and unconscious motives” (p.12). This definition positions women much like I do, as “competent actors” understanding the norms our society promotes, “including the dominant discourses and practices of feminine beauty.” Thus, I posit that while it may not

make sense that women feel a sense of empowerment “over hegemonic values by giving into those values” (Weber, p. 5) that is exactly what is occurring on these programs.

Empowerment therefore can be defined as a type of control, and undergoing “elective” cosmetic procedures, women feel powerful by taking control of the way their bodies will look. By taking on the ‘if you can’t beat them join them’ ethos, makeover participants are becoming a part of the desired group and equating good looks with enhanced self-esteem and personal power. This definition of agency does not deny the fact that some women make decisions about their lives (and bodies) as a result of a prevailing dominant ideology that makes women who fail to fit within the cultural markers of beauty feel less feminine, less worthy as agents, less powerful as individuals and less sexually desirable. It does however, acknowledge that when discussing power and identity “a framework is needed which enables us *both* to take a member’s perspective *and* to explore the social pressures upon women to meet the norms of feminine beauty” (Davis, 1995, p. 172).

Though not easy to quantify, power in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* is imagined in many ways. Examining how women describe themselves after surgery is useful to understanding how they feel empowered through their newly sculpted bodies. Statements like, “I now feel comfortable in my own skin” and “what people now see matches how I have always felt inside” show the idea that women now feel at home in their bodies, thereby reinforcing the ideology that physical appearances are what makes a person. Identity becomes defined by the external, but the link to increased self esteem and confidence is also made possible through the internal changes each woman undergoes.

Wanting to feel “normal” about the way they look was articulated by several of the women on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. Like many other women on these programs, Jennifer was teased about her appearance throughout her adolescent years. Jennifer is unhappy with her nose and thinks that people in other cars stare at her profile. She says surgery would make it possible for her “to go out in the open and live a normal life.” While some women did articulate a desire to be called pretty, she spoke of a desire not to be categorized as ugly.

Kim approaches plastic surgery as something necessary for her to feel comfortable with herself. She is not looking for beauty, just normalcy. “I am not looking for perfection. I do not want to be the girl with the perfect nose or the perfect cheekbones. I am looking for something satisfactory. This is not vanity, it is a necessity.” For these women, having an aberration on their face or body makes them feel like they are being misrepresented to society by the way they look. Surgery provides a means to not only change the way they are viewed by others, but the way they view themselves. In this way, Kim feels empowered through identification with the normal.

Summary

This chapter has been primarily concerned with the way fairy tale themes are posited into televised reality makeover programs, and as a result, how plastic surgery has become normalized as a way to alter female bodies into a socially constructed ideal. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are revised versions of a fairy tale that sells women the belief that if you look a certain way, then you will be revered by men, envied by women, and generally accepted by all. I argue that producers of reality makeover shows not only rewrite these tales to fit a cultural norm, but they ideologically update the tales to make them more appealing to an adult audience. These revised narratives are constructed with

patriarchal assumptions about gender and take the position that “ugliness,” *as it often is in fairy tales*, is a temporary affliction, and one that can cosmetically be transformed to a state of acceptable beauty. Whether validated by attention from the opposite sex, or by smiling when looking in the mirror, women transform their bodies to gain acceptance.

The Swan and *Extreme Makeover* present plastic surgery as a positive event in the lives of the women who participate in these shows. Viewers are made to believe that plastic surgery is the cure for all that ails you, especially if what ails you is physical appearance. While I may not agree with the motives behind the decision to have plastic surgery, and feel that a new hair cut, new outfit and some psychological coaching would have served them just as well, I do recognize the positive change in the level of confidence each woman portrayed after surgery. As Morgan states, “a woman’s pursuit of beauty, through transformation is often associated with lived experiences of self-creation, self-fulfillment, and self-transcendence. The power of these experiences must not be underestimated” (p. 154).

While the women in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* elect to be on the programs and always provide the surgeons with suggestions as to what procedures they would like done, the ultimate decision about what is actually changed on their bodies, and by how much lies in the hands of the male surgeon. The problem does not rely solely with the women themselves, although one could make the argument that they facilitate the dominant ideology by playing into it, whether this is done knowingly or not is up for debate. The problem is exacerbated by the way the programs gender beauty and utilize the narrator to ideologically manipulate the storyline.

For women watching these shows, the message being sent to them by the narrator, who articulates dominant cultural perspectives and assumptions, is that the world does not value the unattractive. It is detrimental enough when a woman holds herself to societal standards of beauty and performs a daily self-critique. It is quite another when husbands call their wives “a little average” (Rachel’s husband, *The Swan*) and narrators differentiate between two twin participants (Caroline and Cat, *Extreme Makeover*) throughout the program, referring to Caroline as the ‘ugly’ twin and Cat as the ‘pretty’ twin. Hearing negative comments not only reinforces the hegemonic beauty code for women, thus playing into a common sense understanding of how one should look; it validates the insecurities that women bring with them to the program as both participants and viewers. Exploring how female viewers negotiate between the text and their own body image will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO *THE SWAN*, *EXTREME MAKEOVER* AND THEIR BODIES

While the previous chapter examined the social, historical, and cultural frameworks present within *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, this chapter will explore how female audiences create meaning through the viewing of these two programs. This chapter will be divided into four sections, and will explore why and how women watch reality makeover programs and how they negotiate between “real” women on television and celebrity culture; how the normalization of plastic surgery has caused women to turn to it as an alternative to aging; female agency and the body; and women’s relationship with their breasts.

Scholars note that women use popular culture both as a way to think about their own lives as well as “to construct fantasies about how they might want their lives to be” (Heide, 1995, p. 81). While the women interviewed for this dissertation said they were not solely influenced by *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover*, the majority did state that their assessment of self is shaped by media images of what women *should* look like (i.e. thin toned body, flawless skin, white perfectly aligned teeth, and an hourglass figure). Thus speaking to McRobbie’s (1994) point that the discourse surrounding women’s relationships with their bodies is based in part upon the media content they consume.

According to feminist media scholar Charlotte Herzog (1990) “female viewers learn how to transform themselves into a new ‘look’ by comparison with another woman who is ‘looked at’” (p. 159). This point is particularly relevant when applied to reality makeover programs, which feature “real” women, not actors or celebrities. Examining whether *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*’s use of real women lends authenticity to the

viewing experience and viewers relationship with their own bodies is a key component of my analysis.

Audience responses to *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* yield insight into how women not only respond to these types of makeover programs, but also how they interact with these programs and apply what they see to their everyday lives. While my primary interest in this chapter is to examine how and why women consume reality television makeover programs, I also explore how women construct their own definition of beauty and body image and how much, if any, the media influences the way they see themselves.

While the 24 women interviewed for this study varied in age, ethnicity, and in their attitudes toward plastic surgery, there was no correlation between those factors and their individual opinions about the programs. Several respondents thought the contestants looked great and said they would appear on the programs if given the chance; however, others felt the excessive amount of procedures each participant underwent in the programs went too far. As the previous chapter explained, many of the women on the programs had one or two “problem” areas that they wanted to fix. Those one or two areas turned into 16 or 17 different procedures, which many interview respondents felt were just too much.

Not all of the women interviewed for this study watched both makeover programs, but several of them were familiar with both. For the sake of clarity, I will include the name of the specific program whenever a participant is only speaking about one program.

Why and How Women Watch

Makeover programs have been a staple on daytime television for years. Women in the 1950's watched in amazement and envy as others were crowned queen for a day. Today women continue to watch other women with amazement and for some, envy, as they go from "flabulous to fabulous" with the help of a trainer, a therapist and most importantly, a plastic surgeon. What is it about change and transformation that women are drawn to? And why do women continue to watch programs that perpetuate socially constructed beauty norms? For answers to these and other questions I turn to the women who watch.

Transformations and "The Reveal"

While women interviewed for this dissertation cited different reasons for being attracted to cosmetic makeover programs, the primary reason they watch is to see other women transform. They say the programs keep them coming back for more each week because the suspense of waiting to see what each participant will look like during their reveal is fascinating. SHELLY (38) watches "strictly to see the reveal." She continues, "...think about it, 20 years ago if you were ugly, you were stuck. Now, it's amazing to see what they can do to make these women look better." KRISTIN (19) says she is also fascinated that medical science has advanced to the point of being able to transform the way a person looks. "It's entertaining to see them sort of morph and how an aspect of their life is changed for the better. I just can't stop watching it."

Like KRISTIN (19), BETTY (25) says her viewing pleasure also comes from seeing the women after they transform. "I like seeing the outcomes...you know where someone gets a new lease on life." Although HELEN (19) started watching the programs

as a form of “research” for her own desire to have a rhinoplasty, she says the overall transformations are what keeps her tuned in. “Originally, I liked to see if there were going to be any nose ones [episodes] because I like to see the outcome. And now I just think it’s great transformations and peoples stories.”

Watching other people transform is a form of entertainment for these women. However, for others, it is not enough to just watch the transformations, they want to be the ones transformed. When asked about her reaction to the contestants’ before and after looks, JAMIE (34) said “Well, I wish it were me a lot of the times, but I think it’s very good that someone can perform these changes whether it’s for surgery, or a makeover, or whatever.” DENISE (44) agrees with JAMIE (34) and also says that she would look at the women on *Extreme Makeover* and think, “I would like to be one of those ladies, I would love to have gotten that.” It is interesting to note that JAMIE has not had plastic surgery and DENISE had her breasts augmented when she was 41.

JAMIE (34) says her main fascination with the programs is liposuction (a procedure nearly all of the female makeover participants featured in chapter 4 receive). She has gained over 90 pounds since the birth of her two children and has been unable to lose the weight through diet and exercise. For JAMIE, appearing on these programs would provide what she calls a “quick fix” to her weight problems as well as make her less self conscious about her body. JAMIE has always been opposed to plastic surgery, but now sees it as the only way to “get her body back.” It seems that JAMIE’s exposure to makeover programs has helped to change her opinion about plastic surgery. “ I used to say never...but in the last five years it has gotten more popular as far as what I’ve been exposed to TV wise...I think all of that from society factors into it.”

While the majority of interview participants agree that seeing the women on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* transform is what keeps them watching, some view the programs with a critical eye and are concerned about how the women will handle their new found societal acceptance. KRISTIN (19) was particularly concerned about the women in *The Swan*, who she describes as emotionally vulnerable. She explains by saying,

With *The Swan*, this person's complete appearance has changed. I mean their face doesn't look like their face! It's different when you grow up and everyone is always like 'oh, you are such a pretty girl.' Then you have that mind set. It's different when you are the butt of all jokes, when you are tortured like that and then you are changed into somebody who is now acceptable, who is now pleasing. And then now, all of a sudden, you have this societal acceptance?

KRISTIN is not alone in her concerns for the participants. ELIZA (27) also wonders how difficult it would be for the contestants to re-enter a world that only months before told them they were ugly. "I am usually floored and so happy for them that they will feel better about themselves...that is very exciting for me. But sometimes when they look in the mirror it seems like they lose themselves. Like they are not comfortable with their new look because they are so strikingly different."

Wondering how the show participants will handle their new looks was not the only concern troubling some respondents. Others, like JANICE (34) (who had a rhinoplasty at 18 to combat feelings of unattractiveness) had a hard time coming to terms with whether or not she thought the makeover shows were a positive experience for participants.

"Having personally experienced it [feeling unattractive and wanting plastic surgery], they do what they have to do. Yes, you can go too far, but the show in itself you could see how happy those women were. And I guess to me, they

looked better [after the transformation] because of the huge smile on their face. Hum, I don't know..."

AMY (29) is not as convinced as JANICE (34) regarding the programs positive effect on the makeover participants. A self-described "heavy reality makeover consumer", AMY says "I feel that if a woman is getting liposuction and she feels better about herself, then that's great, but often times I feel like what they do on these programs is only provide a temporary fix to a problem that they already had." BETTY (25) agrees with AMY and said that while she liked seeing the outcomes, she felt like *Extreme Makeover* was putting people on display, "making them a spectacle."

Although some respondents' opinions regarding *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* were not favorable, they kept watching to see *how much* the participants transformed throughout the program. Unlike the women in the beginning of this chapter who thought the shows participants looked great after their transformations, the following women disagree and say the results made the makeover participants look standardized and fake. For them, extreme makeover programs go too far and instead of improving the contestants look; they create homogeneous, artificial looking people.

Like some of the other women I interviewed, LORI (25) started watching *Extreme Makeover* because of all the buzz surrounding the show. Unlike many of her friends who praised the makeover results, LORI found the transformations to be problematic. She explains, "The end results are almost frightening I think. Nine times out of ten, I don't think a single person comes out looking...(pauses) I mean they might look better per se than they did before, I guess, but there is this kind of alienish quality to them. They get way too much stuff done on them for them to even look human." In her assessment, plastic surgery becomes a word taken literally, as the women begin to take on

characteristics that make them look unnatural or plastic, like a doll. Their bodies become made to order, molded like a “cultural plastic.” With all of the negative things LORI had to say about the program, she still watches. When asked why she continues watching if the final results are problematic for her, LORI (25) said she could not articulate a reason and compared her continued viewing to a car crash saying, “you don’t want to look, but you just can’t help it.”

RENEE (27) has a similar reaction to the male and female participants on *Extreme Makeover* after they completed their transformations. She says, “I was horrified. I was horrified because they all kind of looked the same. You know, they had a Barbie/Ken doll sort of effect. And it kind of scared me that anytime somebody got something done to their face, I got a little bit freaked out because that is how people identify each other, you know?” Similarly, JUSTINE (25), a plastic surgery proponent who is saving money to pay for breast augmentation and a rhinoplasty (nose job), is very critical of *The Swan* season one winner Rachel Love Fraser. “I didn’t think she was attractive at all and she was just amazed [at herself]. It was her face. They just completely altered her face and I just didn’t like it. I didn’t like it at all.” Although JUSTINE does plan to have plastic surgery, she is adamant about not wanting to look like a totally different person, rather “a more attractive version” of herself.

There were different levels of “extreme” according to the interviewees. Liposuction, Botox, and breast augmentation/lifts/reduction seemed to be acceptable procedures that were not viewed as radical or overboard. Altering the face, however, was overwhelmingly looked down upon, as the face is viewed as the core of a person’s identity. So much so that only two women out of 24 respondents said that they would

consider having work done on their face. In addition, the women who watched *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* overwhelmingly said *The Swan* was the more extreme of the two programs.

Comparisons: Ordinary Women or Celebrities?

It is women's identification with "the ordinary" that makes reality television different from a dramatic series, and is another reason women watch. While the idea of looking at other women transform is central to why respondents watch, they say it is the use of real women like themselves that fuels their interest. "I would hate to see celebrities on this type of show. When you see real women who aren't 5'11 and weigh 125 pounds, and have beautiful skin and no wrinkles you think that it is really interesting to watch the transformations occur" (AMY, 29). As the textual analysis chapter discussed, women are conditioned from the time they are little girls to believe in fairy tales and the notion of happily ever after. While some of these women may not admit to having fantasies about transforming into the 'bell of the ball' these programs present them with possibilities of what they *could* look like.

KAITLIN (19) says identifying with women like herself increases her interest in the programs. "The attraction for me is the ordinary people because celebrities have this stuff done to them all of the time. The reason I watch them is because they show everyday people that just had boring lives. I just like watching it to see people that are ordinary like me can get transformed into something that is a lot more beautiful than they were." JOANIE (35) also cites the use of real women (non-actors) as adding to her fascination with makeover programs, and recalls what she thought the first time she

watched *The Swan*. “You know, at face value, I was thinking wow, they could make anybody, an ordinary anybody look like a movie star.”

This notion of “regular” or “ordinary” becomes important in the discussion of the reception of reality makeover programs like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* where women are watching other women like themselves (non-actors) who are considered average or below average by societal standards and within the hour, are transformed into someone who is now considered socially acceptable. A modern, more extreme adaptation of Pygmalion, these programs bridge the gap between the viewer’s *actual self*, a realistic appraisal of qualities they do and do not have; and their *ideal self*, a person’s notion of how they would like to be (Solomon, 2004).

According to previous research on beauty and body image, women compare themselves most frequently to figures they see in the media, including celebrities, fashion models, and actresses in advertisements (Garner, 1997; Grogan, 1999; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Richins, 1991). While women interviewed for this study acknowledged the strong influence the media has on their (dis)satisfaction with their image of self, the majority refutes the literature and says that they compare themselves more to “regular” women than celebrities. “I compare myself more to ordinary girls. I guess because you see that you can look like that and not be in the business” (JUSTINE, 25). The difference seems to be that when comparing themselves to a celebrity, women feel like they will never measure up to that beauty standard, so it becomes more realistic to compare themselves to everyday women:

JASMINE (36): I think I look more at normal women. Entertainers don't really influence me that much, it's more like what everybody is wearing right now. I want to fit in.

JOANIE (35) It is very easy to look at celebrities and aspire to be that but the realistic part of you knows that it is a completely different lifestyle. I mean they have the luxury of working with a trainer 4 hours a day. So, I tend to look at women who are similar to myself.

MEGAN (20): I think celebrities are kind of an ideal, but most women kind of know that it is a point that they will never reach. I don't think I have ever looked at a woman and not compared my body to hers. I mean it's not just bodies, I compare everything! I mean everything to real women and women I see on TV, but probably more to real women because men and women see celebrities and realize that they look like that because they have a trainer and make up and hair artists, but more so when real girls are around me because real girls can look like that, you know?

Nancy Etcoff (1999) writes about comparison in her book *Survival of the Prettiest*, and explains that women tend not to compare themselves with people "whose attainments are out of reach" (p. 68). However, she is quick to point out, that the media, and advertisers in particular, trick women into believing that "anything and anyone are within reach" (p. 68).

While most of the respondents claim that it is not realistic to compare themselves to celebrities, I assert that women use celebrities as a template for what they want to look like. For instance, CINDY (34) says that she does not "aspire to look like somebody on TV" but she does acknowledge using TV and print to determine what she likes. DENISE (44) also recognizes the influence the media has on the way she wants to look, stating "I don't have to look like Julia Roberts when I walk down the street, but yes, when I walk into a room, I want to know that I am dressed as well as I can be and know that I have done everything I can to portray that image of the movie star." These women fail to recognize that using the media as a model to create a "movie star appearance" or to "assess what you like" is a form of comparison based upon a hegemonic beauty system

that is perpetuated by unrealistic images. While the interview respondents are not “comparing” themselves to celebrities in the sense that they aim to look exactly like them (that was already done on the MTV plastic surgery program *I Want a Famous Face*) they are aspiring to look “celebrity-like”.

One woman did say that after reading fashion magazines she becomes highly critical of herself. ANGIE (19) stated a few times during her interview that looking at magazines in particular had an adverse effect on her. Referring to her early teen years, she says, “I mean personally, I had really low self-esteem at that age. I am really glad that I didn’t read magazines much and stuff, because I notice even when I read them now, I start feeling like I’m not tall, or I don’t look like that.” Interestingly, ANGIE who wants to have a rhinoplasty and breast augmentation, had an opposite reaction to *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, saying that they made her feel good about herself because the women featured on the shows were usually so unattractive and had so many problems, that she would look at herself and think, “I look so much better.” Because the television makeover programs highlight the before as well as the after, and magazines only show celebrities *after* they have been primped, ANGIE was able to gain self confidence from the programs, primarily because she was comparing herself to women who she believed were less attractive than her. For ANGIE, and many other women, how good you feel about your external self depends on who you are comparing yourself to.

Women interviewed for this dissertation had a very narrow definition of the term “celebrity.” Julia Roberts, Halle Berry, Jessica Simpson are just some of the names that came up when the discussion turned to celebrity comparison. These women are all thin, glamorous and according to the interview respondents, are what they envision celebrities

to look like. Oprah Winfrey, Ellen DeGeneres, and Drew Barrymore were absent in the celebrity discussion and were never mentioned as a point of comparison, although these women are also celebrities. Thus, the term celebrity in this dissertation is not an all-inclusive term, but one that specifically refers to those who fit into the tall, thin, and beautiful category.

The above section examined why women watch, however, as ANGIE'S (19) comment pointed out, how women use the programs is also of interest to this dissertation. The previous comments represent the complex relationship many women have with this text. While they do get pleasure from watching contestants transform, they also identify with the women being featured. This is where the "reality" in reality television affects the way women identify with the text. Women not only watch these programs to be entertained, they watch them intently and are also critical of what they are seeing. I should note however, that all but three of the women interviewed for this dissertation were either in college or graduated from college, and several went on to graduate school. Because of their level of education, they may be more savvy media critics than the average women targeted by ABC and FOX.

The Normalization of Cosmetic Surgery

As explained in the literature review, plastic surgery is a procedure that has become normalized within the last 10 years however; cosmetic makeover programs serve to further normalize how acceptable surgery has become. Once treated as a covert operation one undertook during "vacation time" so that others would not be privy to your secret, plastic surgery is now an acceptable topic of conversation at dinner parties. We have gone from a society where women in the 1970's gathered for Tupperware parties to

one that brings women together for Botox parties. Having plastic surgery is no longer taboo. It does not discriminate by race⁵ or gender⁶. It is not only for the aging⁷. And as discussed in chapter four, plastic surgery is no longer a procedure reserved solely for the wealthy⁸. In fact, women (and arguably men alike) are openly having plastic surgery in record numbers and going on television to talk about it. Academic and institutional literature both speak to the correlation between cosmetic makeover programs and the normalization of cosmetic surgery, however, I was curious to know if the women watching these programs had similar or different viewpoints on this issue. While they all agreed that the popularity of programs like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* helped to ease the stigma attached to plastic surgery, not all of them felt that this was a positive result. I will explore the positive comments first, followed by those that reflect the negative connotations that surgical normalization can have on women and young girls in particular.

⁵ The number of ethnic patients who chose to enhance their appearance or minimize the signs of aging through cosmetic plastic surgery took a substantial jump in 2005, with nearly 2.3 million procedures performed – an increase of 65% from 2004, according to statistics released by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). Hispanics continue to lead all ethnic groups with more than 921,000 cosmetic procedures performed, up 67% from 2004; followed by African Americans with 769,000 procedures, up 67%; and Asians with 437,000 procedures, up 58% (www.plasticsurgery.org).

⁶ Twelve percent of all cosmetic surgery patients in 2005 were men, up 44% from 2000 (www.plasticsurgery.org).

⁷ In 2005, 333,363 women under the age of 18 had invasive and non-invasive surgical procedures. (www.plasticsurgery.org).

⁸ According to a 2005 poll conducted by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 30% of the participants who said they were considering surgery within the next two years had an income of less than \$30,000. Forty-one percent made between \$31,000 and \$60,000, while 19% reported an income of over \$90,000. This speaks to the normalization of cosmetic surgery as a standard practice among the non-elite and gives credence to director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University Robert Thompson's quote in an April 26, 2004 issue of *Maclean* in which he stated that plastic surgery acceptance is changing and now it is becoming an option "to a body of people who otherwise wouldn't have considered it" (p.40).

DENISE (44) is the oldest woman in my interview pool and says society has changed for the better in its acceptance of plastic surgery. She explains that in her early 20's [around the mid 1980's] cosmetic surgery was something she never considered having because she was not that familiar with it and because "in those days, there was a stigma attached to it, like you know oh so and so had this and this done." Today, DENISE says her opinions, along with society's, have changed. "I think *Extreme Makeover* is probably the best thing that could ever happen to plastic surgery because it made it acceptable and it transformed these people's lives, so I think it did a world of good for it." In December 2003, exactly one year after *Extreme Makeover* debuted, DENISE had breast augmentation and when asked if she was pleased with the results, she responded, "Absolutely, I would do it again tomorrow!"

For some of the respondents, the shows educated them on types of procedures as well as how to find a surgeon. JOANIE (35) has always wanted to get work done on her eyes and claims "the makeover shows just reinforce how easy it is to find someone to do it. It's not so far out of my reach where it may have felt that way before." While these programs play a role in JOANIE'S research, she has not yet undergone plastic surgery.

HELEN (18) and BETTY (25) both used these programs as an information tool prior to undergoing their surgical procedures. In her search for the perfect nose, HELEN says she watched all of the cosmetic makeover programs, "because I liked to see if there were going to be any nose surgeries...there are a lot of them on boobs and that type of thing, it's a lot harder to see one that featured a nose surgery that was like my nose...I looked for people who had a big bump out nose like me to see 'oh, she had a good outcome'." Because plastic surgery programs abound on television, HELEN (18) says

she had several women to choose from, thus confirming Woodstock's (2001) assertion that the normalization of surgical procedures has been endorsed by mediated representations "that suggest everyone is 'doing it'" (p. 426).

BETTY (25) said makeover programs helped her in two important ways. She always knew that she wanted larger breasts, and she noticed that when watching the programs, they would have commercials encouraging viewers to call board certified plastic surgeons when having procedures done. Like JOANIE (35), BETTY said this reinforced the ease with which she could find someone in her home state. Surgeries were not just taking place in Los Angeles or New York, they were also available in suburban Georgia. What BETTY cites as the one thing she really took away from *Extreme Makeover* was the ability to have multiple procedures done at the same time. "I think *Extreme Makeover* made me recognize that I could do it all at once. I mean the doctor told me that, but I think I went in with that idea and seeing that they can do this and this in one surgery instead of having to go back over years." After careful research and planning, using friends who had plastic surgery and the makeover programs as research guides, BETTY had breast augmentation, liposuction on her legs and liposuction on the back of her arms in December, 2005.

Not all of the women had positive reactions to the multitude of makeover programs that frequent the airwaves. PAULINA (34) argues that because these programs normalize plastic surgery, they make women feel pressure to conform to societal norms. She says the programs have "Hollywoodized America by saying 'you will be a better person if you get all of this stuff done to you', and I don't agree with that." Though she had a rhinoplasty when she was 18, PAULINA thinks the programs make women feel

pressured to “have work done” for the wrong reasons. “You know if you have a certain issue, which I did with my nose, and it is holding you back...it can certainly help, but the programs certainly push the fact that you need to be perfect in order to be equal or to be acceptable and I think that’s a detriment.” The programs in essence serve as models against which women continue to measure, judge and correct themselves (Bordo, 1993).

In addition to making viewers feel pressure to conform, the respondents were concerned about the impact normalized beauty standards via plastic surgery would have on young girls. While *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* usually feature women 20 and older, some programs like MTV’s *I Want a Famous Face* (2004) targeted viewers 16-25 who underwent plastic surgery to look like their favorite celebrity. Twenty-year-old MEGAN’s comment explains the potential harm these programs can have on what Bordo (1993) terms a young woman’s “material” body.

I feel like these shows (pause) I mean out of 10 of my closest friends growing up, I think 7 or 8 of them have had eating disorders and I think it’s because we all look up to these role models and celebrities and all these newly formed perfect, perfect people, or at least they are supposed to be perfect, and there is such an infatuation with looks and I really feel that it has had such a negative impact on my generation.

RENEE (27) also worries about the message these programs send to young girls, especially since the media lacks many counter messages that tell them it is o.k. to have small breasts and wide hips. She explains, “...seeing it in the media has made it more normalized and I think that a lot of women just grow up thinking that it is going to happen. I mean especially people just a little bit younger than myself, who grow up with these shows instead of being introduced during adulthood. I mean what are you going to

get done and when are you going to get it done. Are you going to get a nose job or are you getting a boob job for your college graduation?”

I related what RENEE (27) said to the other women I interviewed for this study and her words rang true even within this small sample of 24. Four of the 24 women alluded to or did receive plastic surgery as a present for graduation. HELEN (18) had a rhinoplasty for her high school graduation; KRISTIN (19) asked her parents for a breast augmentation for her high school graduation present, to which they refused; BETTY (25) started a “boob job jar” while she was in college with the intention to save enough for a breast augmentation by the time she graduated, she did not raise enough, so BETTY waited until she was in graduate school and supplemented the fund with money from friends, family and student loans; and JUSTINE (25) who plans to graduate with her masters degree in 2007, is trying to convince her father not to give her a new car for a graduation present, but new breasts.

Some of them even likened surgery to something you do to enhance your appearance, similar to putting on makeup or getting braces on your teeth, leading to Morgan’s (1991) argument that women who do not submit to plastic surgery will eventually be the ones viewed as deviant.

Women, their Bodies and Plastic Surgery

Many women referred to age as a reason they would consider having plastic surgery. They explained that youth is valued both in the media and in society in general, and women in Hollywood who are getting older, appear to be looking younger. Several women cited age as an issue in the workplace, feeling competition with younger women who are interviewing for jobs, while others admitted to being afraid of aging, as it is not

something that they feel is valued in society. According to some of the respondents, this fear of aging is being played upon by the cosmetics industry that places millions of advertising dollars into anti-aging creams that promise to minimize the look of fine lines and wrinkles.

JOANIE (35) says she has been conditioned by society to keep her looks up and admits to falling prey to plastic surgery and “age-defying” products. “There is an emphasis on looking young and one of the options is plastic surgery. It’s in magazines, it’s on the radio, it’s on TV, it’s all over the place...I think I’ve been conditioned to try and buy the best products, you know all the anti-aging creams that say they work for you. It’s all about that, staying as young looking as long as you can, or however long your budget allows you to.” For JOANIE, aging is the thing she fears most, or at least showing signs of aging. She plans to get work done on and around her eyes in the near future and can see herself getting Botox or a face-lift as she gets older. JOANIE’s husband is 7 years younger than she is, so age for her is a point of contention as she does not want to look older than her husband, even though she chronologically is. According to Bordo (1993), JOANIE is keeping up with what she terms the “new norm” that celebrities perpetuate. Bordo argues, “they [celebrities] have established a new norm—achievable only through continual cosmetic surgery—in which the surface of the female body ceases to age physically as the body grows chronologically older” (p. 26).

Respondents say they find comfort in watching *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* as some of the stories featured on the programs reflect their own fears of aging. For example, *Extreme Makeover* participant Susan had a similar story to JOANIE (35). She was 10 years younger than her husband to be and, like JOANIE, wanted to have plastic

surgery done on her face which she said “looked like it was melting.” Although not part of this study, several of the participants said they enjoy watching the TLC program *10 Years Younger* (2004-), which promises to make the participant look 10 years younger after they receive a makeover.

JOANIE (35) was not alone in her desire to keep her face looking youthful. CINDY (34), who has never had any procedures done to her face, but has had liposuction on her hips, abdomen, and back, says she would consider facial surgery *only* if she began to show signs of aging. “I’ve contemplated doing a face-lift as I got older and I got really wrinkly, like when I hit 40, I would do that, definitely.” While JOANIE (35) and CINDY (34) are both in their mid-30’s, their concern about aging becomes salient as they prepare to enter their 40’s, which as the following statistics exemplify, is a time when women begin to perceive that they are showing signs of aging and also become proactive in trying to stop it. According to a report by the American Academy of Facial, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, only 2.8% of women between the ages of 22-40 had a face-lift in 2005. That number increased substantially to 59.6% for women between the ages of 41-60, which validates JOANIE and CINDY’s point that once women turn 40, they become more concerned with wanting to keep the face looking youthful. This finding mirrors S.J. Thorpe et al’s. (2004) study, which suggests that women do not perceive the aging process as continuous, but instead feel that there is a certain point at which they begin to age.

I found it interesting that several women in their 20’s were also concerned with aging, two of whom said at the beginning of their interview that they were not interested

in having plastic surgery, but quickly changed their mind when the subject of age came up. An exchange with 25-year-old LORI speaks to this point:

Interviewer: Are you interested in having any sort of surgical procedures?

LORI: Not at this age.

Interviewer: What does that mean, like when you become 40, you might?

LORI: I mean yeah, we'll see how things go.

Interviewer: So when you hit a certain age and start sagging a bit and wrinkling up, you would consider doing something?

LORI: In the facial area perhaps, maybe the neck.

Interviewer: Why do you think you associate surgery with age?

LORI: I guess just because of wrinkles, face-lifts, that sort of thing. I can understand wanting to preserve youth.

Interviewer: Why?

LORI: I guess I just fear aging. I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think you fear aging or people judging you because you look old?

LORI: Um, I think I fear aging. I think I want to look like I have this whole time and I want to stay that way.

The women in this study say they fear aging not only because it is presented as a negative in the media, but because age threatens women's position in the workplace, and for some, their position with men. Single women spoke of a desire to attract a man, while married women spoke of a desire to keep their men. JOANIE (35) sums up the dilemma of aging and the pressure women feel to remain physically attractive by offering the following, "...the fundamental difference between an aging man and an aging woman is that the aging man seems to do it gracefully."

Female agency and the body

The notion of female agency in relation to cosmetic surgery is one that feminist scholars continue to debate. As I explained in chapter 4, some argue that women become

caught up within the confines of a culturally prescribed beauty system that perpetuates unrealistic beauty norms (Brownmiller, 1984; Chapkis, 1986; Wolf, 1990). While others casts women as agents, asserting that the decision to undergo surgery is an active process, one that requires reflexivity (Bartky, 1990; Davis, 1995; Young, 1992). Female agency and the body are difficult to analyze. One must keep in mind the era that we are living in and deconstruct concepts like “girl power” that became-- and are still becoming popular-- during this, the feminist Third Wave. Women talk about being in control of their bodies and the decisions they make with their bodies, however, they often fail to analyze the system of beauty that is in place to make them *think* that their body requires work to become socially acceptable.

Several of the women interviewed for this dissertation stressed that they had or were interested in having plastic surgery to please themselves, and not others. The women listed “confidence,” “self esteem,” and simply “feeling better about themselves” as reasons for having surgery. All of the respondents were actively involved in a heterosexual relationship and most stated that their mates were not behind their decision to have or want surgery. In fact, they stated that their mates thought they looked fine the way they were and it was their own feeling of dissatisfaction that led to the decision.

After three children, SARA (37) was not happy with the way her body looked. As a result, she had minor liposuction with a mini abdominoplasty, “100% to please herself.” She continued by saying, “my husband did not care one way or another. I just felt like I would be a better person, a better mom if I felt better about myself and wasn’t constantly thinking about ‘I wish this [excess weight around her waist] would go away.’” JASMINE (36) says her post-baby stomach made her feel so self conscious, she did not want her

boyfriend to even look at her naked with the lights on. Like SARA, JASMINE'S partner was fine with the way she looked, but she also says her motivations were personal. "As far as motivating factors, I think wearing a bikini was number one and looking in the mirror and having my stomach look the way it did before I had children was number two...because I didn't lose my sexual partner, I just didn't feel beautiful, I didn't feel pretty anymore."

KRISTIN (19) described herself as never feeling pretty growing up and in order to feel more social acceptance, wanted to have breast augmentation and liposuction on her thighs. She shared the following exchange with me about her decision to pursue surgery. "I was in a really good relationship with a guy who was like, 'you don't need it, you are beautiful' and I told him well, I am not doing it for you, I want it for myself." Similarly, CINDY (34) says her boyfriend's opinion does not make her feel any better about her body. In answer to my question of where her displeasure originates, CINDY replied, "With me. It is my displeasure. Like the guy that I am dating now, says to me 'if you don't lose another pound that would be fine with me, you are perfect the way you are now.' Meanwhile, I am thinking, 'but my nipples are like hanging, I mean hanging. How can you think that looks good?'" BETTY (25) says the decision to augment her breasts and have liposuction was not someone else's to make, it was hers. "...It is my body, I have a feminist voice and a choice that I can do with it what I please."

To these women, the decision to "do it for themselves" is a choice. While three of the above four women have actually had surgery, they had positive results that they say made them feel better about their bodies and lead happier lives. To the respondents in this study, saying yes to surgery was not giving into a patriarchal power structure, it was a

decision to change the parts of their body that were no longer pleasing to *them*. This, as Kathy Davis (2003) would say, is where a focus on agency opens the door to a “sociological exploration on how people draw upon their knowledge of themselves and their circumstances as they negotiate their everyday lives” (p. 13).

While many interview respondents saw themselves as exercising their right as a woman to choose how their body should look, this decision to get rid of their sagging nipples becomes less about individual beauty and more about the culture we live in. If the women are being truthful with themselves when they say the decision to change their body was not a response to please someone else, then that begs the question when did it become unacceptable to *us* to look at chubby stomachs or hanging breasts? It seems that women’s desire to maintain their looks goes deeper than physical beauty, it has become a cultural requirement for personal happiness.

For some women in this study, the desire to have plastic surgery was not solely motivated by personal gratification, but by being pleasing to others, specifically men. As LORRAINE (20) noted, “a lot of times people get plastic surgery and say it’s for them, but it’s really not. It is for other people to go ‘oh wow, look at her, she looks good.’” One woman admitted to having surgery as a reason to please her boyfriend, however others were not so quick to acknowledge that their underlying motivations were also tied to male acceptance. RENEE (27) says she underwent breast reduction surgery in her late teens for physical reasons and to combat social pressure, but was quick to add, “And I wanted to look better for my boyfriend, embarrassing as that is to say.” For RENEE the desire to please her partner was just as strong as her desire to have smaller, more functional breasts. Her admission about wanting to please her boyfriend was

embarrassing for RENEE because she said it makes her sound like a weak person who needs acceptance from a man in order to feel validated as a woman, and that is not representative of who she is now.

Other women were not as forthcoming with their motivations as RENEE (27). For JUSTINE (25) and ANGIE (19), understanding their motivations for wanting plastic surgery was complicated. Both women say they want to have plastic surgery to feel more confident and/or to garner attention, however neither woman sees that the factor that underlies their decision is dictated by whether or not they have men in their lives. For example, in response to my question of “Would you say your motivations for having surgery are personal or to be more attractive to others?” JUSTINE replied,

A combo. I actually have a few reasons. Yeah, one is probably to be more attractive, and I know this is a big cop out, but I dated a guy for a really long time and then started dating him again and seeing those girls he was with...I mean I saw one girl and she had fake everything. Yeah, and I never figured he would like someone like that. And I would never do that for anybody, but I thought you know, that's something, I don't know... I mean this relationship is an isolated incidence. He's, well, he's part of the problem now.

JUSTINE'S (25) story is not one of personal agency, but one where she claims that she would never change herself physically for a man, yet he is all she talks about. Without knowing it, JUSTINE has put herself in direct competition with the other women he has dated and feels that in order to keep him interested, she must look a certain way. This is where she differs from the women above. She says that she wants to feel more attractive, but the difference is JUSTINE is not wanting to feel attractive for herself when she looks in the mirror, she wants to be perceived as attractive to men.

For ANGIE (19), plastic surgery was something she spoke very highly of in the beginning of the interview, citing low self esteem and a desire to gain confidence,

however, the more we discussed her boyfriend and their relationship, the less convinced I became that surgery was really what she wanted. Accordingly, ANGIE said a rhinoplasty would make her nose look straighter and that is something she sees as more beautiful and breast implants would make her feel more confident or “less unnoticed” as women with larger breasts get more attention. As our conversation continued, we began discussing cosmetic makeover programs like *The Swan*. ANGIE commented that she was not *that* dissatisfied with her appearance, indicating that there are levels of dissatisfaction and her level is minimal compared to women who would appear on a makeover program. When I asked her what “not that dissatisfied” meant, she said the following,

Yeah, well, I am not really very dissatisfied. Like right now, I am currently in a relationship so it makes my self-esteem go very high, since this is kind of long term right now. But, before that, I would feel insecure about my body, about how small I was. Like I used to feel a lot more down, sort of.

Interested in hearing more, I asked ANGIE if she felt that being in a relationship validated her as a woman? And she replied,

It depends on the type of relationship. Like the one I am in, I feel very comfortable about myself and I don't feel as much of a need to change things about myself. I think if you were in a relationship and you did get remarks about stuff, you would be a lot more likely to have plastic surgery. But like I feel a lot more happy with myself, like in my own shoes, so I think that would make me not as likely to have plastic surgery (pause) It really sucks though because males have so much control over how we see ourselves, you know and I don't like that. But, right now, I am feeling great!

Like many of the female participants who appeared on *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, ANGIE's (19) level of dissatisfaction is dependent on being in a *healthy* relationship with a man. As she stated, she doesn't feel the need to change herself “now” because she has already obtained her goal--a romantic partner. Her repeated use of the word now, indicates a temporary feeling of happiness, one that could change if the relationship fails

to succeed. In addition, her admission about men having control over how we [women] view our bodies, speaks to the point made by many feminists that surgery, and beauty norms in general, are used to reaffirm hierarchies of power as women become “participants in a gendered social order where they are continually defined through their bodies” (Davis, 1995, p. 59).

Beauty and the Breast

Of all the topics covered in this chapter, no subject was as widely talked about, or as problematic, as the breast. Out of the 24 women I interviewed for this dissertation, 17 were dissatisfied in some way with their breasts. One woman had a breast reduction, 1 wanted a breast reduction, 2 had breast augmentation, 7 wanted breast augmentation, 1 had breast reconstruction, 4 wanted a breast lift, and 1 wanted a breast lift *and* augmentation. Although these numbers may seem high, they are in line with studies that conclude 34% of women dislike their breasts and more than half would change their breast size if they could (Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004). According to statistics from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 291,350 women had breast augmentation in 2005, up 37% from 2000 and 10% from 2004. In contrast, only 114,250 had breast reduction surgery, indicating women’s preference for larger, not smaller, breasts.

While these women had different stories to tell, there were some similarities that became clear in my analysis. Women who wanted breast augmentation stated a desire to attract attention, feel more confident when entering a room, and feel feminine. Women who wanted a breast reduction were interested in finding clothes that fit, taking pressure off of their lower back and detracting attention away from their breasts. All of the women who expressed an interest in having a breast lift, stated they wanted to add perkiness back

to their now sagging breasts. In addition, four out of the five women who desired a breast lift had children. Unable to ignore the way her breasts were making her feel, TANGIE (36) expressed the ambivalent feeling many women had toward their post-baby body. “After nursing 3 children for a year each, my breasts have next to no volume or firmness and that really changes the way my body looks. There are certain aspects of my post-baby body that I can deal with, looser skin on my stomach, a few stretch marks here and there, but saggy breasts is not one that I’ve accepted thus far.”

The breast is a defining symbol of feminine sexuality. For some women, it was what they looked forward to having most, as they grew older. To others, developing breasts, not the start of menses, was when they first felt like a true woman. As a child, KRISTIN (19) remembers seeing Dolly Parton on television and subsequently, walking around the house with a pillow under her shirt. Growing up, she says that she always admired her mother because of her long fingernails and breasts, which to KRISTIN were two things she identified with being “feminine”. Today, she says “When I look at myself, I wish I had breasts. I don’t have breasts and I really don’t feel like I’m growing into a woman.” What she is really saying is she doesn’t have *large* breasts, for surely by virtue of being born a female, KRISTIN has breasts. Like KRISTIN, many of the small-breasted women correlated breasts with womanhood and femininity. BETTY (25) described her decision to have breast augmentation as balancing out her smaller upper body with her curvaceous lower body. She says, “it’s not at all that I want to be supermodel thin, with big boobs, it was more like I want to be feminine, I want to have curves.”

In addition to being a component of feminine identity, the breast, according to Young (1992) is also fetishized, valued as an object, and objectified through the look of

the male gaze. The two women in this study who said their breasts were viewed by others as objects, also happened to be naturally larger breasted women. Both BETTY (25) and RENEE (27) say others identify them by their breasts, and it makes them feel as though it is all people can see. RENEE said her breasts were so large before she had a breast reduction at 18 years old, the stares she received from boys “were not in a I want to have sex with you kind of way, but in a hey you are a freak kind of way.” Interestingly, RENEE says she did not start getting compliments on how large her breasts were until *after* they were reduced. RENEE’s breasts, once a G and now a double D, were sculpted into a more mediated ideal breast, one Young (1992) describes as round, sitting high on the chest, large but not bulbous, with the look of firmness (p. 153).

MEGAN (20) says she is defined by others through her breasts and that she is often misconstrued as being overly sexual when in fact she has yet to be sexually active. She says that when people refer to her, they say things like “you know the blond girl with the big boobs” and that has made her self conscious to the point that she slouches to make her breasts less noticeable. She explains how her breasts have invited unwanted attention from men. “They [breasts] are a way people identify me. Especially my guy friends. They often say lewd things and sometimes I wish they wouldn’t, but especially with men-- I feel very uncomfortable.”

Both RENEE (27) and MEGAN (20) are particularly critical of the way breast augmentation has become a standard procedure on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, offering comments like “I want to tell them it’s not all it’s cracked up to be.” MEGAN finds it hard to hear women say that they want to augment their breasts to get attention,

much like ANGIE (19) admitted earlier in this chapter. She says they should be aware that the attention they are attracting is not always positive.

I know why they want breast implants and it's for the same reason that I used to show off my boobs when I was younger and that is because I did not like myself. I was not happy with myself and I could not get attention for me and my personality, and I felt that I did not stand out in a room. And of course, any woman wants to walk into a room and watch men's mouths drop, you know every woman wants that, but with big boobs, it's attention for the wrong reason.

MEGAN (20) also explained that she thinks more women are becoming interested in breast augmentation because of reality makeover programs, where the majority of the women get breast implants and wear low cut outfits during their "reveal" to emphasize their new, attention getting body part. She singled out *The Swan*, calling it "the most nauseating show she has ever seen" saying the show teaches women to "find security in all the wrong places."

Summary

The number of women who were interested in being interviewed for this study speaks both to the popularity of the topic and the willingness of women to speak about their body. It was my initial thought that women who watch plastic surgery programs would be more likely to have had or want to have plastic surgery however, the women in this study dispute this theory. While they all acknowledge the increasing number of programs has normalized plastic surgery, no one stated that they wanted to have plastic surgery as a result of watching the programs. The majority of the women who did have procedures done say they already had a desire to do so. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* just made it easier to find someone to perform them. There were some discussions about the programs increasing body dissatisfaction, but not to the extent that women were more inclined to do something about it. The shows themselves were actually viewed by most

of the women as going overboard with the number of plastic surgery procedures. While the majority of respondents say that three or four procedures would have enhanced the participants looks, they felt some were unnecessary and only done to coincide with the programs *extreme* premise. Respondents say they continued to watch because the narrative of the ordinary women's stories resonated with their own feelings and experiences; the programs became a research tool and provided information on different procedures; and the reveals were so dramatic, they were fascinated by how different people can be made to look.

Although I was not able to explore all of the comments and ideas expressed by the women in this study, by identifying recurrent themes and patterns, I was able to give voice to the main points each woman made. While my interview pool was fairly diverse, seeking out people from different ages, racial backgrounds and regions of the country, my findings did not indicate a major disparity in how these women viewed plastic surgery or cosmetic makeover programs. Many of the younger women seemed more dissatisfied with their breast size than the older women, but the older women were equally as dissatisfied with their sagging breasts. Women from the east and west coast (Los Angeles and Connecticut/New York) were much more concerned with fashion and celebrity influence than the women from the south or southeast. While only two non-white women discussed feeling the pressure of being judged via a white standard of beauty, the overall racial differences in the women's responses was minimal.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I brought to this dissertation the knowledge that women have a complicated relationship with their bodies. With that understanding, this dissertation sought to examine how women were represented in, and how they reacted to, cosmetic surgery reality makeover programs *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. I chose to analyze the text and audience as both are important to understanding the cultural assumptions in place about female beauty as well as the meaning-making experiences that take place during the viewing process. In addition, studying both the text and the audience allowed for a more comprehensive perspective on how society currently defines an acceptable feminine appearance. As my introduction chapter discussed, standards of beauty are not static and change over time. The curvy, full figured model of the 1950's would be considered overweight by today's beauty standards, thus looking at how beauty and body image is defined at *this particular moment in history*, and examining how culture plays a role in defining what a socially acceptable woman should look like, is important to future beauty and body image research.

Since I began this project, the number of overall makeover programs has remained consistent, while those incorporating cosmetic surgery have begun to decline. Both *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* are no longer a part of the primetime line up, however both programs have been kept alive as a result of reruns on the Style network and Fox Reality network, speaking to the fact that these programs *still* attract audiences. *The Swan* season one and two came out on DVD October, 2006, two years after airing its last episode, and *Extreme Makeover* still promotes itself on the ABC website, however no

new episodes have been scheduled for 2007. *Dr. 90210* continues to be one of the most promoted programs on the Bravo network, and *Nip/Tuck*, a fictional program on the F/X network about two Miami plastic surgeons, just wrapped its 4th season and plans on a 5th.

The “buzz” surrounding many of these programs has decreased, perhaps due in part to lawsuits and protests by women’s groups calling for the end of programs that tell women outward beauty is the first step toward achieving happiness, fulfillment and success. While many advertisers continue to capitalize on the audiences makeover programs target, by selling everything from anti-aging and firming creams to teeth whiteners, other programs and advertising campaigns have started offering counter messages that tell women they are beautiful just as they are.

The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*, which launched in September 2004, says its mission is “to make women feel more beautiful everyday by challenging today’s stereotypical view of beauty and inspiring women to take great care of themselves” (www.campaignforrealbeauty.com). While Dove has not stated that this campaign was created as a direct result of the increasing number of makeover programs that have aired since 2002, its website features a one-minute “evolution” film that begins with the question “How did our idea of beauty get so distorted?” The film features a girl sitting in a salon chair, and in a series of rapid edits, shows her receiving a makeover on her face and hair and then posing as if she were a model. Her newly made over face is then put on a computer screen and “touched up” to increase the length of her neck, change the shape of her eyes, thin her face, and raise her eyebrows. After the alterations are done, her face is placed on a large billboard at a busy intersection and the screen goes black with a

caption that reads, “no wonder our image of beauty is so distorted.” In essence, Dove is placing blame on the media for promoting a narrow definition of beauty and their new advertising campaign is trying to promote self esteem and love of self. While this is a step in the right direction, one must keep in mind that Dove is a brand in the business of selling products, therefore regardless of how you choose to define beauty, the commercial imperative behind it promotes consumerism.

Another type of beauty campaign that provides a counter message about beauty is being promoted by ABC’s *Ugly Betty* (2006-). This program, ironically shown on the same network as *Extreme Makeover*, features Betty who is not thin and beautiful like her co-workers at the fashion magazine Mode, but thinks she is fine with the way she looks and won’t change to please anyone at the magazine. In the spirit of “be happy with who you are” ABC has teamed up with Girls, Inc., a non-profit organization that inspires girls to be strong, smart and bold, and launched the *BE UGLY IN ‘07 Campaign* complete with T-shirts with matching Empower-Rings. According to ABC’s website, ugly is the new beautiful and they are encouraging girls to “throw away society’s unrealistic standards of physical beauty, start fresh, and be more like Betty”

(www.abc.go.com/primetime/uglybetty/index.html).⁹ While counter media messages about beauty are a step in the right direction toward providing some balance to current mediated beauty ideals, as this dissertation points out, women continue having plastic surgery in record numbers. And although cosmetic surgery makeover shows are not as plentiful as they were in 2004 and 2005, shows that makeover your hair, make up and wardrobe are on the rise.

⁹ It is too early to assess how people decode *Ugly Betty* since it is still in the first season and its content is packaged as a sitcom.

Revisiting the Text and the Audience

This final chapter addresses the research questions that were introduced in chapter one, followed by limitations and avenues for future research. The first two questions speak specifically to the text: How are *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* framed as fairy tales? And how are beauty, gender roles and class represented in cosmetic surgery makeover programs? While the last three relate to the audience: How do women consume cosmetic surgery makeover programs? Do study participants identify with women represented in makeover programs? And do televised makeover programs play a role in women's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery? As some of these findings overlap, research questions will not necessarily be answered independent of one another.

The Swan and *Extreme Makeover* are two programs that disproportionately target women. With *The Swan* catering only to women and *Extreme Makeover*'s applicant pool being 80% female, what this says about beauty and gender roles is that women are more in need of [and more interested in] transformation than men. Of the 13 participants who are featured in *Extreme Makeover* episodes analyzed for this dissertation, only 4 of them were men. While surgical procedures were somewhat gendered with the majority of female participants having breast augmentation, rhinoplasty's (nose jobs) and eyebrow lifts, most men seemed to be getting chin implants, hair restoration and liposuction on the face. As I stated earlier in this chapter, female identity is linked to the physical, however as they are represented in *Extreme Makeover*, it seems the same also holds true for men.

Makeover participants are made to believe that a surgeon's scalpel will fix their problems and after the show, they will all live happily ever after. The programs frame themselves as fairy tales in several ways. Through self promotion on their websites "Men

and women are given a truly Cinderella-like experience: A real life fairy tale in which their wishes come true”; through their name (*The Swan*, the end point of *The Ugly Duckling*); through their use of a narrator who often uses phrases like “this is a fairy tale ending” “she looks like a princess” and “she went from looking like the ugly duckling to a beautiful swan”; and through symbols like Cinderella’s carriage and the magic mirror, which in the spirit of Snow White, women rely on to see that they, after undergoing surgical and other procedures, are now the fairest ones of all.

The participants who appear on *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* cite their external bodies as the cause of their internal pain, thus external beauty is directly related to participants internal happiness and self worth. In other words, if Cindy’s nose wasn’t so big and her breasts were larger, she would feel more confident as a person and in her marriage. Or, if Kim’s teeth were not bucked and partially missing, she would not seclude herself in the house and be more outgoing in the workplace and in the dating world. This dissertation confirmed that there is a relationship between the external and the way makeover participants and interview respondents construct their subjectivities.

Beauty is represented in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* as the desired goal, the cure for all that ails you. Participants say that once the external body becomes a closer representation of the beauty ideal, internal issues such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence will diminish. In this way, female identity is linked to the physical, and authenticity of self is only achievable through surgical rejuvenation. Although some makeover participants say they do not aspire to be beautiful, “just normal,” what is “normal” becomes rhetorical as it depends on who is creating the definition. In both makeover shows, beauty is homogenized: large breasts, slim waists, flat stomachs, toned

thighs, high cheekbones and thin noses. These physical attributes are also described by the male surgeons as the required elements for a woman to look more “feminine.”

Through the privileged male voice, gender and femininity become social constructions that tell women they must fit into societal norms if they are to be accepted. Therefore, patriarchal dominance is evidenced in the fact that the standards for women are set and voiced by males.

In keeping with the fairy tale, *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* look for women from working class backgrounds that are unable to afford plastic surgery on their own, and thus make the perfect candidates for the most “extreme” transformations. Class is central to these programs as plastic surgery is presented as a gift that not only helps women conform to societal beauty norms, but gives them a new appearance that indicates a middle or upper class identity. In other words, beauty—as defined in these shows—becomes a signifier of class. And class becomes a transformable property with the participant’s new image compensating for their lack of material capital. Makeover participants are exposed to how the “other half” lives as they reside in makeover mansions, ride around in limousines, receive approximately \$20,000 of surgery, and get help from a personal trainer and Hollywood makeup, hair and wardrobe stylists. Because participants must now keep up their makeovers through the consumption of beauty products and in some cases, additional procedures like Botox, beauty for them becomes an investment, thus confirming Bourdieu’s notion that a class can be defined by its consumption as much as its position.

Because the formula for all makeover programs includes the reveal, which showcases the women’s newly sculpted faces and bodies, the audience is also left

wondering about makeover participants' life after the makeover. Do their dreams come true? Or, is their post-makeover life similar to the one they had previous to the procedures? After all, the reveal is unwaveringly positive and the idea that someone would not like their post surgical look is never presented on either program as an option. Furthermore, it is the reveal that the majority of the interview recipients cite as the main reason for watching the programs for this is where the fairy tale becomes reality.

In an effort to perpetuate the fairy tale mythos and convince viewers that aesthetically pleasing bodies and faces do reap benefits, both programs had a reunion special. *The Swan* special featured 15 of the women who appeared in the program and *Extreme Makeover* featured six guests, three of whom appeared in the episodes analyzed in chapter 4 of this dissertation. The verdict? Yes, good looks do make for happier people, or so the producers want viewers to believe. By highlighting only the positive things that have happened to the participants since their makeovers, *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* confirm Liberman's (1972) assertion that women form "their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, in part from their favorite fairy tales" (p. 385).

Cultural studies assert that media culture, and television in particular, assists in the creation of identities. While the majority of women I interviewed said *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* did reinforce the idea that women who fit the beauty ideal would have a greater chance of finding romance, none of them said that watching the programs made them more likely to have cosmetic surgery. Because this study deals with reality TV, not fiction, interview respondents say their identification with the programs comes from seeing real women, not celebrities, transform and is what keeps them watching.

Therefore, interview respondents in this dissertation identified with the women's stories because they in some way resonated with their own experiences. As culture is concerned with the way members of society create and exchange meaning through cultural products, the programs became a site where an articulation of meaning took place and as Hill (2005) asserts, viewing became a reflexive process.

As discussed in chapter 3, social comparison theory posits that exposure to idealized images in the media can lower self esteem and self-perceptions of physical attractiveness. Comparisons can either be upward (comparing with someone you consider better than you which can provide inspiration or have a negative affective reaction) or downward (comparing to someone worse off than you in an effort to improve self-esteem). Both upward and downward comparisons were confirmed in this dissertation as some women stated they felt less attractive when comparing themselves to celebrities or those they considered "pretty," while others said that comparing themselves to women who were less attractive made them feel better about their looks. Only one woman interviewed in this dissertation compared herself specifically to makeover participants.

There was a good deal of discussion among interview respondents surrounding celebrities and regular women. During the reveal portion of both *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, participants were told that their new look resembled that of a movie star. When discussing upward and downward comparisons, Irving (1990) says the mass media, which she refers to as a universalistic target, elicits greater pressure to conform to beauty norms than particularistic sources such as friends and family. Findings in this dissertation dispute Irving as interview respondents acknowledged the influence

celebrities have on reinforcing beauty ideals. However, they also said that celebrities were an unattainable ideal, so they tend to compare more to everyday women.

Interview respondents differed in the way they viewed the program participants. Some thought they looked great after surgery and noted a drastic difference in confidence levels. Seeing how happy the women were and how differently they carried themselves after surgery was what viewers talked about most. Other women interviewed for this dissertation thought the women had too much surgery and that some of it was unnecessary. They felt that the show participants took on a homogenous look, and that individuality was replaced by similar looking noses, breasts and hair extensions.

Perhaps the most troubling issue presented in this dissertation surrounds the notion of agency and power. Program participants see the makeover as a way to change their lives and create new opportunities for themselves. Interview respondents said a fear of aging and dissatisfaction with their breasts are two reasons why they would consider or have plastic surgery. The majority of interview respondents also emphasized that their decision was a choice made to please themselves, and that they were not giving into a patriarchal power structure that told them they had to do so in order to be deemed acceptable.

Women studied in this dissertation articulate a feeling of empowerment that is closely aligned with beauty, which many would argue suggests that there is no real agency and that their self-deception has made them the weakest link in the hegemonic process. However, the definition of agency that I employ in this dissertation acknowledges that while women may make these decisions about their bodies as a result of a dominant cultural beauty imperative, it is important to also acknowledge their

perspective and the social pressures upon women to meet these norms. Although this dissertation analyzes representations of women within the text as well as what women do with the text, cultural studies insists upon an analysis of the system of beauty currently in place to make women think that their bodies need work in order to be deemed socially acceptable. As more programs continue to promote a narrow definition of beauty and embrace plastic surgery as the norm, women who do not conform to this ideal will be viewed as abnormal.

While this dissertation has highlighted the main themes that were discussed in the programs, I would be remiss if I did not mention what the programs do not talk about. The programs do show approximately 5 minutes of the surgical “recovery” process, but fail to discuss the risks involved in plastic surgery. The positive results supersede any discussion of what could go wrong while participants are in the operating room as well as when they are healing from the multiple procedures. In addition, the programs do not broach the subject of how the women will deal with their new faces and bodies after surgery. The reunion shows all highlighted positive things that have happened to the participants since the programs, but as one of the interview respondents stated, it is one thing to be told that you are pretty your entire life because you have that frame of mind. But to go from being the butt of all jokes to having total societal acceptance may be more than some of these women can handle.

Future Directions and Limitations of Research

Because this research focuses on female beauty and body image as it is represented on television makeover programs, it can be expanded upon in many ways.

My study was limited to women. Therefore, the most apparent direction for further work is to do a study that incorporates male body representation in makeover programs. While I include a brief discussion of how male bodies are represented in *Extreme Makeover*, this does not delve deeply enough into the different ways male and female bodies are depicted in the media. Therefore a study comparing how each gender is represented in the media, and cosmetic makeover programs in particular, warrants further discussion.

While women are disproportionately featured in makeover programs, the number of males who are undergoing surgical procedures is steadily increasing. According to statistics from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the number of male minimally invasive surgical techniques increased 44 percent from 2000-2005. The most popular of which is Botox injections, which increased 233% from 2000-2005, with over 300,000 men receiving Botox injections in 2005 alone. The other two procedures for men that are growing at an alarming rate are tummy tucks, which increased 156% since 2000 and promises to give men flatter and presumably more desirable abs; and calf augmentation, originally used to restore leg contour for polio victims, is now being used to “create cosmetic fullness in the lower leg” (www.plasticsurgery.org/patients_consumers/procedures/PlasticSurgeryForMen.cfm).

Future studies may want to examine the motivations men have for undergoing plastic surgery and use some of the categories found in this dissertation as a starting point. An untapped prospect for audience reception research could query how males view other males who are featured on makeover programs. Do men compare themselves to other men? Do they feel pressure to conform to the broad shoulder, thin waist and “six pack abs” beauty ideal that many male actors and models are admired for? Are men as

concerned as women with preserving their youthful looks? And do men articulate feelings of confidence after receiving plastic surgery like most women in this dissertation did?

Another possibility for further work would be to study how body image and makeover shows affect minorities. While this study attempted to retain a diverse pool of women, it is limited in that the majority of women interviewed were white, middle class, and college educated. As my textual analysis chapter argues, class is at the heart of these makeover programs, therefore, a reception study that includes women from various class backgrounds and education levels might produce different emergent themes than this dissertation presents. In addition, obtaining a more racially diverse interview sample could illuminate how non-white viewers perceive and relate to makeover programs and a Westernized beauty ideal. For this dissertation, it was advantageous to have a homogenous interview sample as it closely mirrored the women featured in *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. Of the 25 women featured in my textual analysis, 2 were Hispanic, 1 was Asian, 1 was African American and 21 were Caucasian. However, as 20 percent of all plastic surgeries in 2005 were performed on “racial and ethnic minorities,” it is a population that is increasingly seeking out surgery and it would add to the body of literature to examine whether these women are seeking out beauty or conformity.

From a textual perspective, this study would benefit from examining makeover programs from the standpoint of production. As the only moment in the Circuit of Culture that is not explored in this dissertation, production would look at how an object is produced culturally and “encoded” with particular meanings (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 4). Producers walk a fine line in mediating between the business of television (creating

programming that is financially viable) and the creative process itself (producing innovative programs according to prevailing social and cultural norms). Therefore, interviewing producers and editors to understand how narratives and “characters” are crafted, and how participants are chosen to appear on the programs is necessary to gain a more encompassing perspective.

Finally, makeover programs purport to create aesthetically pleasing faces and bodies that promise to make all participants happier, and presumably better people. The participant’s testimonials at the conclusion of each program confirm this premise, as does the information presented earlier in chapter 4 from the *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* reunion shows. However, both reunion shows were shot within the same year the person received their makeovers. For some, only two or three months passed since their initial makeover. It would be valuable, then, to do a follow up with actual participants from the makeover programs to see if they were able to keep up the makeovers and if the makeovers did in fact change their lives as was originally broadcasted. Also, a query into the way the programs were produced from the participant’s perspective could add to the body of research on reality TV and the notion of “unscripted television.”

In many ways, the research presented in this dissertation can be a starting point for future studies that examine gender in programs that makeover *the body*. I emphasize the body because the term “makeover” is an inclusive term and refers to programs that makeover homes, cars, as well as bodies. As I pointed out in chapter 2, makeover programs have received considerable attention in the commercial press, but as of the writing of this dissertation, have not received enough attention from the academic community. One anthology about makeovers was published during the writing of this

dissertation, and another is scheduled to come out in 2007¹⁰, thus the makeover is a subject that is slowly gaining influence among academic researchers. Because television is a medium that tells stories with the goal of captivating audiences, examining how women are depicted in reality makeover programs not only speaks to current cultural beliefs about gender identity, but also to the *extreme* lengths programs will go through in an effort to entertain.

¹⁰ The book “The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation” by Dana Heller came out in December, 2006 and incorporates chapters on all types of makeovers, not just beauty. Heller’s next book, due out in June, 2007 is also about makeovers and is titled “Makeover Television: Realities Remodeled (Reading Contemporary Television).

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APPENDIX A

SHOW CHARACTERS

THE SWAN:

Episode 1 (aired 4/07/04)

***Rachael Love Fraser** is a married 27-year-old Caucasian office worker from Sammamish, Washington. She was crowned the Ultimate Swan. She appeared in episode 1 and won against Kelly. Her beauty plan included rhinoplasty, lip enhancement, chin implant, endobrow lift, microdermabrasion, blue light treatment, liposuction of the chin, cheeks, stomach, flanks, inner and outer thighs, and back, breast lift, zoom bleaching, full DaVinci veneers and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

****Kelly Alemi** is a 28-year-old single Caucasian woman from Hartford County, Maryland. She competed appeared on episode 1 (4/07/04) and lost against Rachel. She was the wild card recipient and was added to the pageant. Her beauty treatments included Lasik, laser hair removal, collagen in the nasal labial folds, collagen in lips, lip enhancement, liposuction in her chin, cheeks, back, calves, ankles, thighs, butt and knees, photo facial, microdermabrasion, an endobrow lift, and breast augmentation, partial DaVinci veneers, zoom bleaching, and put on a 1200 calorie a day diet.

Episode 2 (4/12/04)

Kristy Garza is a married Hispanic 22-year-old mother of one from Fort Irwin, California. She is a private in the army. Kristy's beauty regime included a rhinoplasty, fat transferred to the lips, a brow lift, mid face lift, CO2 laser treatment, breast augmentation, liposuction in her inner and outer thighs, butt, flanks, abdomen, knees, chin, zoom bleaching, a full set of DaVinci veneers, periodontal treatment, dermatologist visits, and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

***Christina Tyree** is a married 27-year-old Hispanic administrative assistant from Rancho Cordova, California. She is also a mother of one son. Her beauty plan included a browlift, eye lift, rhinoplasty, liposuction in her chin, cheeks, and thighs, dermatologist visit, collagen, Lasik, a tummy tuck, breast augmentation, zoom bleaching, full DaVinci veneers, gum tissue recontouring, deep cleaning and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

Episode 3 (4/19/04)

***Cindy Ingle** is a 32-year-old married Hispanic mom from San Diego, California. She competed against Tawnya and won a spot in the pageant, ultimately coming in 3rd. Her beauty plan included a rhinoplasty, endobrow lift, cheek fat removal, fat removal under eyes, lip augmentation, mid face lift, liposuction of inner thighs, chin refinement, fotofacial, laser hair removal, collagen, Lasik, breast augmentation, a tummy tuck and a 1200 calorie diet.

Tawnya Cook is a 40-year-old, unemployed, divorced Caucasian mom from Colorado. She competed against Cindy and lost. Her beauty plan included a nose refinement, brow

lift, mid face lift, fat removal under eyes, lip augmentation, Botox, collagen, fotofacial, tummy tuck, liposuction in thighs, knees, and butt. Teeth whitening, upper and lower veneers, and gum surgery.

Episode 4 (4/26/04)

***Beth Lake** is a 25-year-old married Caucasian woman from Milton, Washington. She competed against Kathy and won. Beth placed 2nd in the Swan pageant. Her beauty plan included an endobrow lift, chin and lip enhancement, a rhinoplasty, Lasik, breast augmentation, liposuction on her calves and ankles, a tummy tuck, teeth whitening, veneers, gum surgery, lower orthodontics, deep cleaning and 1200 calorie a day diet.

Kathy Rickers, is a 27-year-old Caucasian woman from Lake Villa, Illinois. She competed against Beth and lost. Her beauty plan included Lasik, laser hair removal, collagen, fotofacial, chemical peel, cheek fat removal, fat injection under eyes, endobrow lift, rhinoplasty, breast augmentation with a nipple lift, liposuction in chin, abdomen, flanks, inner thighs, butt and knees, lip enhancement, teeth whitening, veneers, and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

Episode 5 (5/03/04)

***Belinda Bessant** is a 27-year-old Caucasian single mother and former model from Las Vegas, Nevada. Belinda lost 35 pounds in her quest to become the Ultimate Swan. Her beauty plan included a brow lift, mid-face lift, fat transferred to lips, liposuction to lower eyes, cheeks, inner and outer thighs, knees, flanks, and hips, Lasik, breast reduction, breast lift, porcelain veneers, bridge for front teeth, zoom bleaching, and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

Andrea Morris is a 29-year-old Caucasian single mother from Westminster, Colorado. Her beauty plan included CO2 laser treatments, rhinoplasty, brow lift, fat removal from chin and cheek, fat transfer into lips, liposuction of inner and outer thighs, abdomen and flanks, breast augmentation, tooth extractions, gum tissue recontouring, veneers, zoom bleaching and a 1300 calorie a day diet.

Episode 6 (5/10/04)

***Sarina Voight** is a 36-year-old Caucasian divorced woman from Denver, Colorado. Her beauty plan included brow lift, mid-face lift, lip augmentation using fat injections, upper eye lid fat removal, mole removal, fotofacial, Lasik, liposuction on her flanks, knees, thighs, calves, ankles, and abdomen, zoom bleaching, gum recontouring, orthodontics for lower teeth straightening and a 1200 calorie a day diet.

Kelly Becker is a 25-year-old Caucasian, single, customer service rep from Milton, Washington. Her beauty plan included a rhinoplasty, brow lift, cheek and chin implants, lower eye fat transfer, lip augmentation, otoplasty (ear lobe surgery), mole removal, Restylane line filler, zoom bleaching, veneers, gum surgery and a 2300 calorie a day diet.

Episode 7 (5/10/04)

***Marnie Rygiewicz** is a 35-year-old divorced, Caucasian medical assistant and mom from Michigan. Her beauty plan included a brow lift, mid-face lift, lower eye fat removal, rhinoplasty, corner lip lift, lip augmentation with injections, chin lift, breast augmentation, liposuction on her abdomen, thighs, calves and ankles, a bridge, zoom bleaching and veneers.

Dawn Goad is a 33-year-old married Caucasian mother of three from Hobart, Indiana. Her beauty plan included a brow lift, lower eye fat removal, mid-face lift, rhinoplasty, cheek refinement, collagen injections, chin lift, fotofacial, Botox, breast nipple lift, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, liposuction, laser hair removal, gum surgery, veneers.

Episode 8 (5/17/04)

Tanya Salvino is a 31-year-old Caucasian data processor from Olympia, Washington. She could not stand the fact that she could not see herself and snuck in a mirror. She was caught and subsequently left the show. No reveal was ever shown.

***Merline Norman** is a 29-year-old Asian single mother of three from Victorville, California. Her beauty plan included a brow lift, an upper lip lift, lower eyelid fat removal, chin liposuction, chin transfer to cheeks, Lasik, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, zoom bleaching, veneers, gum surgery and a 1700 calorie a day diet.

*Won the competition and competed in pageant.

** Wild Card pageant pick.

EXTREME MAKEOVER:

Women:

Carolyn is a 32-year old married Caucasian mom who appeared on the show with her twin sister Cat. Carolyn's beauty plan included a nose rhinoplasty, lower eye lift, a chin implant, lower of the upper lip, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, liposuction on thighs, porcelain veneers, two root canals and gum recontouring. (Season 2, episode 1, originally aired 9/18/03)

Cat is a 32-year old divorced Caucasian mom who appeared on the show with her sister Carolyn. Her beauty plan included a tummy tuck, breast augmentation, and liposuction on her thighs. (Season 2, episode 1, original aired 9/18/03)

Dana is a 40-year-old single Caucasian self-defense teacher from Miami, Florida. Dana's beauty plan included a brow lift, cheek pads, rhinoplasty, chin implant, liposuction on stomach, eye lid correction, and breast augmentation. (Season 2, episode 4, originally aired on 10/09/03)

Melissa is a 28-year-old married Caucasian waitress from Sacramento, California. Her beauty plan included a tummy tuck, rhinoplasty, ears pinned back, browlift, Lasik, and breast implants.

Peggy is a 48-year-old Caucasian police detective from Colorado. Her beauty plan included porcelain veneers, zoom whitening, face lift, brow lift, neck lift, cheek lift upper and lower eye lid surgery, fat removal from her eyes, Lasik, new jowell and a chin implant. (Season 2, episode 2, originally aired 9/25/03)

Jennifer is a 25-year-old Caucasian single mom from Pennsylvania. Her beauty plan included an upper and lower eye lift, rhinoplasty, fat injected into her lips, breast augmentation, laser and light beam treatments, zoom whitening, six root canals, porcelain veneers. (Season 2, episode 2, originally aired 9/25/03)

Kimberly is a 31-year-old African-American woman from Jersey City, New Jersey. Her beauty plan included extraction of 6 front teeth and 4 lower teeth, lip and gum repositioning, porcelain veneers, crown lengthening, crowns and bridges, dentures, removal of a third nipple, lower eye lid lift, rhinoplasty, upper lip reduction, prk eye surgery, liposuction on stomach and upper thighs, breast augmentation, laser hair removal. (Season 2, episode 13, originally aired 1/22/04)

Susan is a 39-year-old Caucasian woman who appeared on the wedding special with her fiancée Michael. Her beauty plan included breast augmentation, a face lift, tummy tuck, rhinoplasty, eye lid surgery, brow lift, chin implant, Lasik. (Season 2, episode 14, originally aired 02/05/04)

Aimee is a 31-year-old married Caucasian mom from Las Vegas. Her beauty plan included an ear lift, brow lift, upper and lower eye lift, cheek lift, tightening of lower eyelids, chin implant, breast augmentation, upper lip augmentation, rhinoplasty, 16 porcelain veneers, psoriasis treatment and live tissue implant into her face. (Season 3, episode 11, originally aired 1/13/05)

Men:

Ray is a 37-year-old Caucasian from Dover, Pennsylvania. His beauty plan included a hair transplant and restoration, rhinoplasty, porcelain veneers, dental implants, zoom whitening, laser skin resurfacing, foto facial, Lasik, eye brow lift, upper and lower eye lid lift, acne scar excision, mini face lift, and fat taken out of chin. (Season 3, episode 13, originally aired 2/10/05)

Dan is a 40-year-old Caucasian radio deejay from Seattle, Washington. His beauty plan included a hair transplant, cheek and chin implant, liposuction on face, lip, chin, stomach and love handles, porcelain veneers, breast reduction, Lasik, lost 20 pounds. (Season 2, episode 1, original aired 9/18/03)

John is a 27-year-old Caucasian video game designer from Hockley, Texas. His beauty plan included rhinoplasty, otoplasty (ear pinning), chin implant, fat injections to the face, face and neck liposuction, cheek reduction, Lasik, zoom whitening, dental bonding. (Season 2, episode 7, originally aired 10/30/03)

Michael is a 29-year-old Caucasian man who appeared on the wedding special with his fiancée Susan. His beauty plan included a chin implant, rhinoplasty, liposuction of the abdomen, chest, hips and back, breast reduction, fat injections to cheekbones.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

AMY is a married 29-year-old Caucasian woman who lives in Texas. She is a college professor and does not plan on having surgery.

ANGIE is a 19-year old single Southeast Asian woman from suburban Georgia. She is a college student at a large southeastern university and is interested in a rhinoplasty and breast augmentation.

BETTY is a single 25-year-old Caucasian woman from suburban Georgia. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university. She had breast augmentation, and liposuction on the back of her arms and legs after saving up with the help of a “boob jar.”

CINDY is a divorced 34-year-old African American woman from New York. She is a college graduate and works as a consultant. She had liposuction on her abdomen, hips and back and has not ruled out a face lift as she ages.

DENISE is a 44 year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She works at a large southeastern university and has had a breast augmentation.

ELIZA is an engaged 27-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university and has not had plastic surgery.

HELEN is a single 18-year-old bi-racial (Caucasian and Armenian) woman from suburban Georgia. She is a college student at a large university in the southeastern United States. She had a rhinoplasty in June, 2005, a present for her high school graduation.

JAIME is a married 34-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She is a stay at home mom who would like to get liposuction and/or Botox.

JASMINE is a 36-year-old divorced African-American woman from Los Angeles. She works for the LAPD and has two children. She has had a tummy tuck.

JOANIE is a married 35-year-old Hispanic woman from suburban Connecticut who recently relocated to suburban Georgia. She is a businesswoman who has not had surgery but would like to get her “eyes done” and as she ages, will consider Botox and a face lift.

JUSTINE is a 25-year old single Caucasian woman from rural South Carolina. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university and plans on getting breast augmentation and a rhinoplasty.

KAITLIN is a single 19-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She is a college student at a large southeastern university who wants to get a scar removed and get breast augmentation.

KARA is a married 34-year-old African-American woman from Los Angeles. She is a mother of two and is considering a tummy tuck.

KATY is a single 18-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Tennessee. She is a college student at a large southeastern university who is opposed to plastic surgery.

KRISTIN is a single 19-year-old African-American woman from suburban Georgia. She is a college student at a large southeastern university and is interested in getting breast augmentation.

LORI is a single 25-year-old Caucasian woman from suburban New York. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university and has not had plastic surgery.

LORRAINE is a single bi-racial (Philipino and Caucasian) 20-year-old woman from suburban Georgia. She is a college student at a large southeastern university and is opposed to plastic surgery.

MAGGIE is a married 40 year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She owns her own business and has two children. MAGGIE has had a procedure called a tran flap which consists of breast reconstruction, a tummy tuck and a breast lift.

MEGAN is a single 20-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Georgia. She is a college student at a large southeastern university and has not had plastic surgery but is considering breast reduction.

PAULINA is a single 34-year-old Caucasian woman from Los Angeles. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university. PAULINA had a rhinoplasty when she was 18.

RUTH is a married 27-year-old Caucasian woman from rural Michigan. She is a graduate student at a large southeastern university. RUTH had liposuction done on her upper arms and had breast reduction.

SARA is a 37-year-old married Caucasian woman from suburban Georgia. She is a speech therapist who has three children and has had a mini abdominoplasty and liposuction on her stomach.

SHELLY is a divorced 38-year-old African-American woman from Oakland, California. She is a manager of a business and has not had plastic surgery.

TANGIE is a 36-year old married African-American woman from Los Angeles. She is a mother of three and is considering breast augmentation and a tummy tuck.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

What is your name?

How old are you?

How would you classify yourself racially?

Where do you currently live? Would you consider it rural, urban, or suburban?

Can you describe how and when you first heard about plastic surgery?

Have you ever had plastic surgery?

If so what procedures have you had done? When?

Can you describe why you chose to have these specific procedures? In other words, what did you hope to gain as a result of having surgery?

If you have not do you plan to? If you do, why are you thinking about having plastic surgery?

What procedures are you thinking about having done? Why those specific procedures?

Do you read fashion magazines? If so, which ones?

Do you watch television makeover programs? Why or why not? How often?

How do you feel about the women on the programs and their results?

Would you ever be a participant on a cosmetic surgery makeover program?

How would you describe yourself physically? Above average Average Below Average

How do you think others would describe you? Above average Average Below Average

If you answered average or below average, can you describe what an above average person looks like?

Is there anything you would like to add about plastic surgery, makeover programs, beauty or body image that I did not touch upon in this interview?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I _____ agree to participate in the research project, *A Cut Above the Rest: Negotiating a Feminine Identity Through Cosmetic Surgery Makeover Programs*, being conducted by Lisa Pecot-Hébert, Department of Journalism, University of Georgia, (706) 542-3787; Faculty Advisor: Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Department of Advertising/Public Relations, University of Georgia, (706) 542-5680. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate and I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason, and without any penalty or consequences of any kind. I can refuse to answer any questions I do not feel comfortable responding to. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- a. The purpose of this interview is to explore the motivations for why women have cosmetic surgery and/or are considering a cosmetic surgery procedure.
- b. I will be given an opportunity to discuss my feelings and attitudes toward reality makeover television shows, specifically *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, both of which employ cosmetic surgery to make over show participants.
- c. The interview will be taped on an audio cassette recorder for data transcription and analysis. Should you not agree to be taped, you may still participate in the study. Participants will not have to discuss anything that makes them uncomfortable. In the event that someone chooses to participate but not be recorded, detailed notes will be taken in place of the recording. Recording of participants will not include names to ensure confidentiality. I will inform all interview subjects of their rights to review the tapes at any time during the writing of this dissertation, which will conclude in May 2007.

Please check one of the following:

_____ I AGREE to the taping of this interview.

_____ I DO NOT AGREE to the taping of this interview.

- d. If I volunteer to take part in the study, the procedures are as follows:
 - i. The interview will be set up by phone or email at a location and time convenient to me.
 - ii. I will read and be asked to sign an informed consent form.
 - iii. The interview should last one hour.
- e. I acknowledge that due to the sensitive and private nature of the subject matter, participants may feel some discomfort. Some participants may not want to disclose names, specific incidents relating to the topic or may not feel comfortable answering all of the questions and have the right to skip any questions that may cause discomfort. In addition, participants do not have to disclose their name to the researcher to ensure anonymity.
- f. The results of my participation are confidential and will not be released in any published reports from this project. For the purposes of confidentiality, tapes and written transcripts will be labeled with pseudonyms (names that will stand for my name, but in no way will reveal my name). All tapes will be destroyed December 2007.
- g. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have the right to review/edit the tape of this interview and I have been instructed that the tapes will be only accessible by the researcher and will be kept in a locked box in the researchers office. I have been given a copy of this form.
- h. I am aware that a \$20 incentive is available to me for participation in this interview.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 425-4125 or email hebert@uga.edu.

Signature
Lisa Pecot-Hébert

Date

Name of Participant

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Copies or problems about your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411. Telephone (706) 542-3199; Email: IRB@uga.edu.

