Body Manipulation in Contemporary Western Culture

Abstract

The prehistoric practice of body manipulation (also known as body modification) has manifested itself in many well known forms to anthropologists and dress historians. Body manipulation is distinct from surface body art forms of body modification - such as tattoos, scars and piercings - in that it changes the shape of a body part through various means including applied pressure, repeated stress, implanted objects and cutting. These include various practices such as the bound feet of the Chinese, dropped shoulders giving the illusion of an elongated neck practiced by tribal women in Myanmar, flattened foreheads, elongated skulls, and extended lips, nostrils and earlobes. Twentieth century western culture marginalised these practices as uncivilised. Today, many modern practitioners of the 'Neotribal' or 'NeoPagan' movement in popular body arts have included some forms of body manipulation along with the more commonplace of tattooing and piercing. This can be seen in the popularity of stretched earlobes, and also the use, to a lesser degree, of sub-dermal implantations. Although stretched earlobes have begun to make their way into mainstream fashion, nonetheless such practices continue to be marginalised as primitive. This same society that may marginalise these practices is in actuality composed of huge practitioners of body modification themselves in the guise of many other practices. These manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including an enormous range of plastic surgeries ranging from facelifts, to body contouring and augmentation, and genital enhancement. Hormonal therapies that can transform the body of an elderly man into the body of a thirty-year old abound in print media. Extremes of these modern practices have enhanced the celebrity of certain famous users, including Jocelyn Wildenstein, Michael Jackson, Pamela Anderson and Joan Rivers. By comparison to the primitive tribal examples of these practices, has our society accomplished something even more unnatural and grotesque?

Introduction

David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*, produced on Broadway in 1998, tells the story of a wealthy landowner, Eng Tieng-Bin, in 1918 China. In the play, Tieng-Bin returns home to his three wives and several children after three years on business in the Philippines. While there, he has been exposed to American culture. Thinking of his children and especially the future of his eldest, 10 year old daughter Ahn, Tieng-Bin chooses to westernize his family by

converting to Christianity. He also insists that Ahn's foot bindings be removed while she is young enough to recover. Tieng-Bin states:

> "The world is changing. There is a whole new generation of men who will want an educated wife. Not some backwards girl hobbling around on rotting feet, filling the room with the stench of death. To see children being turned into cripples...makes me ashamed to be Chinese." (1998, p. 13, 26)

The act of removing the bindings is a step towards civilization that goes hand in hand with their Christian conversion; both mark a break with the past and form the line of demarcation between it and the family's westernized future. Hwang depicts the unbinding as abandoning a barbaric practice, and a significant moment in China's assimilation of Western standards and culture. Reflecting on the custom in the 1970s, Bernard Rudofsky wrote that foot binding

> "…will soon be a memory; in a few years the last crippled woman will have disappeared, and with her one of the most perverse foot fashions ever invented." (1971, p. 224)

Figure 1.
X Ray image of the effects of foot binding.

Body manipulation practices go back to prehistoric times. They have manifested themselves in many forms familiar to anthropologists and dress historians. Body manipulation is a form of body modification, but distinct from surface body art, which includes tattoos, piercings, scars and burns. Body manipulation is distinguished by changing not the surface but the shape of a body part through various means including applied pressure, repeated stress, implanted objects, cutting and surgery, or ingested substances; it is sometimes referred to as body contortion (Storm 1987, p. 14).

William Brown in his 1968 book *Cosmetic Surgery* asserts:

> "One of humanities most deeply felt needs is to be attractive – and thus admired [and] loved. Among primitive peoples, men and women have gone to extreme lengths to "improve" [Brown's emphasis] their physical appearance, tattooing their skin, filing teeth, distending earlobes and lips …in order to make themselves attractive to other members of the tribe. (p. 12)

Other examples of this include a variety of practices such as dropped shoulders giving the illusion of an elongated neck practiced by tribal women in Myanmar, flattened foreheads including Northwest American Indian examples, breast ironing in the Cameroon, as well as elongated skulls, enlarged nostrils, and forms of amputation. 20th Century western culture marginalized these practices as uncivilized; Brown's rather condescending statement above is a reflection of this attitude, and ignores or misunderstands many of the other fashion theory principles at work, such as amuletic protection, hierarchy, or group identification.

Figure 2.

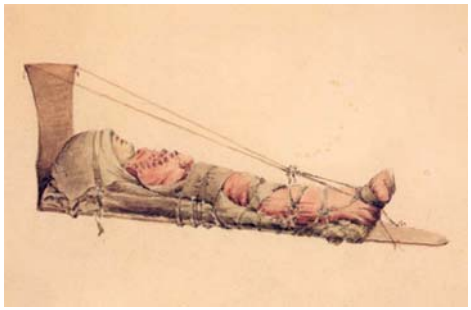

Figure 3.

Figure 2: A Southeast Asian woman with neck rings and manipulated collarbone and shoulders; Figure 3: A child of the Chinook tribe undergoing head manipulation.

Contemporary Western Use of Primitive and Tribal Body Manipulations

Today, many western world practitioners of the "Neo-Pagan" movement in popular body arts have, when decorating their bodies, included some forms of body manipulation along with the more commonplace tattooing and piercing. This can be seen in the widespread popularity of stretched earlobes. Other forms of body manipulation, such as bifurcated snake-like tongues, sub-dermal implantations, and extreme tight lacing are also popular, but are limited more specifically to body art and fetish subcultures.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 4 shows a women with a snake-inspired bifurcated tongue; the man in Figure 5 is exemplary of numerous surface body art and body manipulations, including stretched earlobes and sub-dermal implants across his forehead; Figure 6 is indicative of the practice of "tight-lacing" and could be considered a practice of a fetish subculture.

Stretched earlobes, on the other hand, have made their way into the mainstream and can be seen frequently. The current vogue for surface body art has tempered the marginalizing attitudes towards this practice somewhat. As Generation Y enters the workforce, one can often see stretched earlobes on fashionable young people in designer business clothing along certain occupational disciplines. Nonetheless the style continues to be dismissed as freakish by older more conservative members of society. Stretched earlobes have become common enough to generate much advertising from surgeons offering earlobe reconstruction for those who have come to regret their earlier choice.

Figure 7.

This is a typical example of a stretched earlobe popular today. It is not uncommon to see such earlobe manipulations in professional settings.

Cosmetic Surgery

This same society that marginalizes the practices of primitive tribes and body art subcultures is actually composed of a significant number of practitioners of body manipulations in other, more acceptable, guises. Somewhere in the United States right now there is a mother who is bemoaning her teenage daughter's stretched earlobes, but is herself contemplating a facelift or breast implants. The use of cosmetic surgery steadily increased in the United States

during the course of the 20th Century. In 1970, Harriet LeBarre charted the rise in popularity during the previous few decades stating that

> "In 1949 15,000 Americans a year were undergoing cosmetic plastic surgery. By 1959 the number had soared to 150,000. In 1969 close to a half million people [in the United States] underwent cosmetic plastic surgery… (p. 2)

And this upward trend has continued. In the United States, in 1994, the number of cosmetic operations exceeded 1.3 million (Gilman 1999, p. 6); "2.1 million operations were performed in 1997, a figure that reached 8.8 million in 2003" (Tashcen 2005, p.10). By 2005 cosmetic surgery had become a $15 billion dollar a year industry (Kuczynski 2006, p. 4).

The term cosmetic (or aesthetic) surgery refers to a subset of the broader discipline plastic surgery. Cosmetic surgery is specific to procedures performed for beautification and not deemed medically necessary. The broader term plastic surgery also encompasses reconstructive procedures that are not considered cosmetic. There is a very wide range of procedures that fall under the umbrella of cosmetic surgery spanning literally from head to toe. Additionally, many non-surgical practices are available. Essentially, if it is a body part, it can be manipulated, by cutting, trimming and snipping, sucking out or filling in.

Figure 8.
A Seventeenth Century illustration showing cosmetic surgeries including procedures to the nose and upper lip.

The roots of plastic surgery can be found in European and Asian practices before the time of Christ, and show development during the Roman and Byzantine eras, and the Renaissance. Many of the cosmetic procedures performed today come from the reconstructive plastic surgeries that were developed during World War I, especially by German doctors. Alex Kuczyski of the *New York Times* jokes that if a Serbian terrorist had not assassinated the Archduke Ferdinand "it is highly possible we might never have had a Pamela Anderson (2006, p. 61)."

Figure 9. **Figure 10.**
A strange historic pairing: many plastic surgery technologies used today in cosmetic surgery were developed during WWI, and if a Serbian terrorist had not assassinated the Archduke Ferdinand (Figure 9) "it is highly possible we might never have had a Pamela Anderson (Figure 10)."

In the early years of the 20th century, many cosmetic surgery practices had a stigma of great vanity. The woman – or worse yet man – who had a facelift or other cosmetic procedure could be considered the ultimate narcissist. Taschen argues that the development of the camera close-up in the 1920s was responsible for a significant increase in cosmetic surgeries in the entertainment industry (2005, p. 11), but that was in keeping with the perception that cosmetic surgery was the province of someone rich and famous, assumedly shallow and obsessed with the external.

Today, perceptions and opinions have changed. The Baby Boom Generation is approaching retirement age, and its members are facing their golden years not so much with grace, but with kicking and screaming. As the oldest of Generation X is now over forty, middle age is being redefined. The attitudes from both generations towards the aging process have had a significant impact on cosmetic surgery procedures and consumption. In the 1970s it was not uncommon for parents of economic means to give to their daughters a rhinoplasty or "nose job" as a gift upon graduating from high school before going off to college (LeBarre 1970, p. 2). Now, as those recipients of the rhinoplasties a few decades back are parents, they are accompanying their teenage daughters to the cosmetic surgeon for consultation on breast enlargements (Taschen 2005, p. 308).

In addition to the increase in consumer popularity, it has also become the source of growing public interest of a voyeuristic nature. The popularity of television reality shows *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, as well as the nighttime soap opera *Nip/Tuck*, attest to the public's growing fascination. This phenomenon is not entirely new; as early as 1924, the New York Daily Mirror ran the "Homely Girl Contest" which sought the homeliest girl in New York to reward her with the services of a plastic surgeon who would make her a beauty (Haiken 1997, p. 98). The dark side is also of interest to the public: on 29 August 2007 the *The*

Village Voice ran a cover story on botched cosmetic surgeries performed by a certain Dr. Brad Jacobs. The grisly article ran in the center of the newspaper alongside its usual advertisements for Botox injections, buttocks enhancements and vaginal rejuvenations. Apparently *The Village Voice* editors saw no problem running the ads and the article side by side. French performance artist Orlan has gained great notoriety and controversy from video taping her multiple surgeries, making her cosmetic surgeries performance art. The general public has a huge fascination with the abundant use of cosmetic procedures by celebrities in the entertainment industry, and it comes as no surprise that Los Angeles is the largest per capita consumer (Taschen 2003, p. 11).

With widespread popularity, the phenomenon of the cosmetic procedure addict has developed. LeBarre suggests, "Positive psychological effects often go hand in hand with the correction of physical defects. The more attractive appearance can release what psychiatrists call psychic energy (1971, p. 7)." If she is correct, then possibly cosmetic surgery is the source of a great high, and that repeat "customers" are like heroine addicts continually attempting to recreate the rush of their first time.

The Rhinoplasty or "Nose Job"

The earliest recorded examples of rhinoplasties are found in India around 500 BCE or earlier and have been credited to a noted physician of the time, Shushutra (Haiken 1997, p. 4). The rhinoplasties were often performed to reconstruct noses that had been ritually amputated as punishment for a crime. During the Renaissance, rhinoplasties were used again in a reconstructive context, this time to combat the effects of nasal tissues ravaged by syphilis (Gilman 1999, chapter 2). These surgeries were able to ease the afflicted from the stigmatizing results of visible facial sores or the fake noses worn to cover them up.

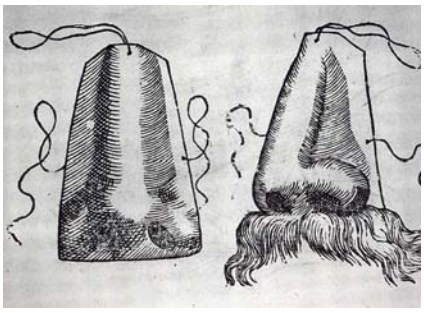

Figure 11.

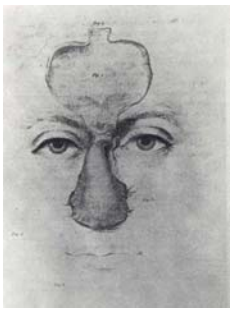

Figure 12.

Figure 11: Artificial noses worn by those afflicted with syphilitic tissue damage to the nose. Figure 12: A 19th Century rhinoplasty utilizing a forehead skin graft technique developed centuries earlier in India.

In the late 19th century, the rhinoplasty was used most frequently as a tool of "ethnic correction." This was most typical of two ethnic groups. The Irish were sometimes "afflicted" by the Celtic pug shaped nose, and a successful surgery would result in a more "Anglo-Saxon" look for those wishing to assimilate into mainstream culture in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Figure 13.
Before and after: a woman of Irish descent with an "ethnically corrective" rhinoplasty.

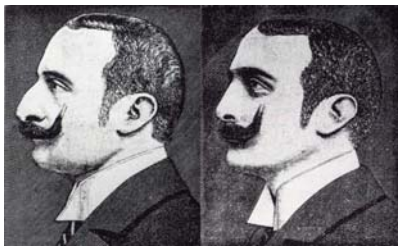

Figure 14.
Before and after views of an "ethnically corrective" surgery to a Semitic nose.

At the same time, Jews sometimes sought to have large noses restyled into Aryan proportions. These ideas of beauty continue to this day: Northern European physiology continues to frequently serve as the prototype for Black African and Asian surgeries, including, but not limited to, the nose.

Jewish American comedienne Fanny Brice had a much-publicized nose job in the 1920s but insisted that her decision to have the surgery had nothing to do with her ethnicity (Haiken 1997, p. 182). In the 1960s, Barbra Streisand's decision not to change her nose created a similar amount of publicity, and succeeded to some degree to champion unaltered Semitic features. Actress Jennifer Grey made a significant impact in the 1987 film *Dirty Dancing*, but her rhinoplasty that followed altered her physical appearance so much that her career has since been adversely affected. Grey now openly regrets her decision to have the surgery (imdb.com 2007).

By noting these ethnically motivated rhinoplasties one can see a correlation to ancient, primitive and tribal practices of body manipulation and other body modifications when they were used for group identification purposes. It the case of ethnically corrective surgeries, a desire to be identified with an adopted group is a motivating factor.

Facelifts

The first recorded modern facelift was performed in 1901 (Taschen 2003, p. 84); widespread use of the procedure came soon after, during the early years of the 20th century, coincidentally the same time that foot binding was dying out in China. The facelift is often associated with famous recipients; interior decorator and socialite Elsie de Wolfe is one of the first celebrities documented as having one at this time. Phyllis Diller's overt public discourse of her facelift (and many other cosmetic surgeries) brought discussion out of the closet in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Joan Rivers and Cher both became icons of the manipulated woman with their facial surgeries, creating ultimately very unnatural looking creatures of themselves, and, like Diller, their procedures went far beyond facelifts. New York socialite Jocelyn Wildenstien has gone to such facial extremes that she has past the limits of cosmetic, and could be considered part of the body art subculture; her efforts to create a more animalistic appearance has direct correlations with primitive and tribal practices. Wildenstein's desire to look feline and the results have often been documented; such a wish to look feline through plastic surgery is not, however, limited to Wildenstien, and, when surveyed about their experiences, doctors report such requests from other patients (Taschen 2005, p. 310). A motivation to imitate a creature from the animal kingdom is also one of the history of fashion and adornment's earliest motivating facts. In an ancient, primitive and tribal setting this has manifested itself in the form of wearing animal skins, heads, horns, teeth and similar parts, Additionally, and more directly relative to Wildenstien and others like her, were, and are, body art and body manipulation practices where an animal's look is created, again perhaps harnessing the power of the animal imitated.

Injectable Fillers

Injectable collagen, a naturally occurring protein, is used to fill in wrinkles and to enhance the plumpness of lips. Collagen used in cosmetic procedures in recent years has been derived from bovine and other animal collagens, and from stem cells. Sometimes these injections are performed instead with fat harvested from the patient's own body. Other injectables include Fibril, a gelatin compound that is mixed with the patient's own blood, and Restelyne, a synthetic hyaluronic acid.

The practice of collagen injections to enhance lips has been the target of ridicule, as unnaturally plumped lips have abounded in photographs of female celebrities. This was satirized in the 1996 film *The First Wives Club*: a divorced and aging actress played by Goldie Hawn has the procedure as part of her attempt to recreate her lost youth. A bizarre instance of art imitating life, it was a highly ironic comment on Hawn, given the degree to which Hawn has been a consumer of cosmetic procedures in her real life. Angelina Jolie's lips are a particular source of speculation in the media and in Internet chat rooms, her "bee-stung" look attributed to Restelyne injections.

Figure 15.
An "increasingly taut" Nicole Kidman.

Stories abound of wealthy women gathering for Botox parties in much the same way they might have for Tupperware in the 1970s (Kuczynski 2006 p. 10). Botox, the trade name for botulinum toxin, works, when injected into the face, by temporarily paralyzing muscles that cause wrinkles; these are also muscles that contribute to facial expressiveness, and the number of actresses working today with less than expressive faces has been the fodder for much comment. Pharmamarketing.blogspot.com recently made a comparison between the mask-like face of Botox-filled Janice Dickinson, former model and reality television star, and the remarkably expressive face of the Botox-free actress Julia Louis Dreyfus (2007). In a bizarre marketing decision, Botox Cosmetic used the phrase "Express Yourself" for a recent ad campaign, a choice which has met with great lampooning. When referring to Dame Judi Dench's performance in the 2006 film *Notes on a Scandal*, film critic Dale Peck commented

> "In these days of Joan Rivers, Cher…and the increasingly taut Nicole Kidman…it is something of a privilege to see a fully mobile, fully human old person's face." (2007, p. 41)

Breast implants

There are many types of breast implants, and technologies are frequently developing. As with some other procedures, these technologies are also used for reconstructive purposes, in

this case for mastectomy patients. Breast implants have been the object of much feminist criticism, but their popularity continues to grow, and today they are one of the most common cosmetic procedures.

Figure 16.

Figure 17.

Implant record holders Maxi Mounds (Figure 16) and the late Lolo Ferrari (Figure 17).

As with other practices, breast implants have significant celebrity associations. Actress Pamela Anderson is the United States' most famous consumer of breast implants, and is known especially for having her implants removed only to replace them with even larger ones at a later date when her career foundered. Her implants have been dubbed "…the most famous plastic surgery in history (Mulvey and Richards 1999, p. 201)." Regarding other actresses, there are frequent "did she" / "didn't she" discussions in tabloids and Internet chat rooms. Implants of very extreme dimensions can be seen on such well-known porn stars as Letha Weapons and Maxi Mounds. The French singer and actress Lolo Ferrari was known less for her performances than for her 8 pounds each implants; her death by possible suicide or murder in 2000 was later possibly attributed to asphyxiation – her breasts being cited as a likely contributing factor (Davis 2006, p.1).

Figure 18.

Queen Latifah, iconic recipient of breast reduction surgery.

The flipside of these examples is breast reduction surgery. This procedure received great media attention in 2003 when American actress and musician Queen Latifah had the surgery performed to alleviate years of back pain caused by her large breasts. Treatment of Gynomsatoasia (male breast enlargement) was actually one of the earliest corrective plastic

surgeries being performed by Paulus Aegina in the Byzantine Empire in 7th century Alexandria (Gilman 1999, p. 260, Taschen 2005, p. 65).

The shaping of breasts has many historical antecedents in brassiere like garments that date back to classical Greek times. Breasts have also been the objects of body manipulation practices in primitive and tribal traditions; perhaps most notable is the controversial practice of breast ironing still performed today in Africa, especially the Cameroon.

A Changing Male Body Image

Figure 19.

Figure 20.

Two examples of enduring male beauty. Hermes (Figure 19) in a Classical Greek example; Michelangelo's David from the Renaissance (Figure 20).

The athletic image of the male body goes back to the Ancient Greeks and earlier, and a well-toned physique is associated with masculinity throughout the history of art. Bodybuilding as we think of it today begins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the first half of the 20th century, its practitioners moved from sideshow appearances to progressively more mainstream pursuits including publications such as *Physique Pictorial*, and muscle man movies such as the mythic vehicles for Steve Reeves.

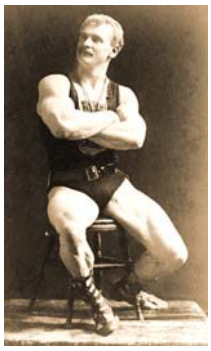

Figure 21.

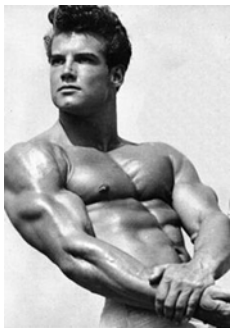

Figure 22.

Early body builder and Ziegfeld performer Eugene Sandow (Figure 21); 1950s and 60s physique model and actor Steve Reeves (Figure 22).

The real turning point for American men in the 20th century came in 1982 with the homoerotic photographs by Bruce Webber advertising Calvin Klein underwear. The widespread use of these images had a significant effect on the mainstream American male. Following in the footsteps of the 1970s fitness craze, it set the standard for the new male body image. With the preponderance of such images ever since, it has been suggested that men have now become the victims of the "Beauty Myth," a role that had been traditionally the place of women (Davis 2003, p. 119).

Figure 23. **Figure 24.**
Competitive body builder Lukás Osladil (Figure 23); an unidentified body builder (Figure 24) typifies the body image promoted by the Calvin Klein ads of the early 1980s and is just slightly less extreme in his proportions than Osladil.

Due to these standards an increased number of men are now having some form of cosmetic procedure. The earliest facelifts left scars that could be easily camouflaged by fashionable women's hairstyles, but the short cropped looks worn by men made this more difficult. Secondly, the prevailing attitudes of most of the 20th century would perceive a facelift or other cosmetic procedure on a man (other than ethnic correction) to be the height of effeminacy. Haiken cites attitudes in the 1970s that men's need for facelifts were less than women's, "according to the popular belief, where age made women ugly, it made men…distinguished (1997, p. 155)." But today, a number of men are choosing to get cosmetic procedures and the percentages have changed drastically: "In 2002 more than 15 percent of [cosmetic surgery] patients were male, a tendency that has continued to climb since (Taschen 2005, p. 10)."

Since the debut of the Calvin Klein underwear ads, American men are working out like never before. Those who find working out too time consuming or difficult at a certain age have a variety of solutions. A six-pack of abs usually requires much time spent doing crunches, but liposuction can carve your existing fat into a simulated look (albeit one sculpted of fat!) Implants are available to create bigger harder pecs, biceps, high and hard buttocks, and any number of other faux muscles. Dietary supplements to burn fat and cut muscles are taken orally and in patch form and can be found virtually anywhere. Anabolic steroids – nicknamed

"the juice" – though against the law and despite the stigma, are easily available at most gyms. Obsessive bodybuilding to extreme proportions has now been classified as a psychological syndrome known as "bigarexia." And in an odd response of gender reciprocation, extreme female bodybuilding, aided by steroids and other substances, has been on the increase in the last few years, a phenomenon that creates an image of transgenderization.

Highly advance hormonal therapies utilizing Human Growth Hormone and other medical protocols are rapidly on the rise as well. The leaders in the field, Cenegenics, market their program as an "Age Management System." Enormous media attention in the United States has been paid to Cenegenics and similar systems, particularly a high profile article in Gentlemen's Quarterly in January 2006 and a segment on 60 Minutes. The poster boy of these therapies is Dr. Jeffry Life, himself an age management medical specialist. At 69, Life is frequently featured shirtless in advertisements for Cenegenics treatments sporting the muscled torso of a thirty year old. The effect is both striking and disturbing.

Are such practices a contemporary manifestation of the inclination to assert oneself as "Alpha Male?" Primitive and tribal man may have done this in a variety of forms of adornment, with skins, accessories, and body arts; bodybuilding and hormonal treatments today may be accomplishing the same intent and instinct.

The Strange Case of Michael Jackson

An internet attachment circulated a few years back that included 6 images of African American Pop Music sensation Michael Jackson over a span of time. The images were arranged in chronological order from young Jackson as a pre-teen, to a recent middle aged Jackson, showing him with progressively unnatural features and lighter skin. The accompanying caption both echoed and mocked the American Dream: "Only in America can a poor black boy grow up to be a rich white woman."

Figure 25.
Jackson in the 1980s, midway in his transformation.

Jackson himself admits to remarkably few of his cosmetic procedures, citing an accident that required “reconstructive” surgery, and explains his lighter skin is the result of the skin disorder vitiligo. His repeated nose jobs lead to his nose eventually loosing its tip, and the repair has created his current look. It is often noted that his obsession with cosmetic procedures is the ultimate in racial corrective surgery as mentioned above, and this is exemplified also in the procedures used by his sisters Janet and La Toya.

Jackson’s costly cosmetic procedures could be interpreted as an expression of his economic status and are perhaps conspicuous consumption at its most conspicuous (Haikin 1997, chapter 5). In this context, the body manipulation here has a correlation with the body manipulations of the Clackamas Chinook or the Kwkiutl where the flattened heads were an indication of hierarchy within the tribal society.

Figure 26. **Figure 27.**
Jackson in 2003 (Figure 26) and a Clackamas Chinook tribeswoman with altered forehead. Are these equivalent marks of hierarchy and status?

Female Genital Manipulation and the Mythic Foot and Vagina Connection

Manipulation of the vagina has manifested itself in many ways both historically and today. The practice of female circumcision has been common to many cultures and is still practiced in some tribal contexts, although it is greatly criticized and denounced as being mutilation and not manipulation. Contemporary surgeons provide a variety of procedures including vaginal tightening and labia lifts, and with these surgeries has come the expression “designer vagina” (Proctor 2007, p. 83). Hymen restoration is also available.

Returning to the Chinese practice of foot binding, it was believed that the size of the manipulated foot corresponded to sexual talent and specifically that the size of the foot was relative to the size of the vagina (Riley 2005). For this reason, a marriageable girl’s shoes were presented to a prospective bridegroom’s parents as part of betrothal negotiations (Rudofsky 1971, p. 12). This is the likely source of the Cinderella story in European folklore: as the girl with the smallest foot, Cinderella is unquestionably the fairest in the land and the

most desirable romantic partner. Keep in mind how undesirable and ugly the large-footed stepsisters are.

Figure 28.
Gustave Dore illustration of Cinderella trying on the glass slipper; her stepsisters look on.

There has been a steady increase of women's shoe size during the course of the 20th century. Around 1900, the average American woman wore perhaps a size 4, whereas by 2002 the average was around a size 9 (Chicago Sun Times 2004). This trend is the likely result of improved childhood nutrition and healthcare encouraging bone growth. Additionally, the popularity of more casual athletic shoes during the later decades of the 20th century has encouraged more unrestricted development of the feet. Within the context of the Chinese custom and the Cinderella story, it is disturbingly coincidental that at the same time as women's shoe sizes increase, we see the development of a number of surgical procedures such as vaginal rejuvenation.

High-heeled shoes are still associated with sex appeal on women, and smaller more dainty feet are still sometimes associated with greater sexual desirability. Shoe designs that are enchanting when one sees the size 7 can be disconcerting or comedic when the size 11 or 12 is viewed. Foot surgeries are a rapidly growing category of the cosmetic surgery industry and women are having foot reductions, usually explained by a desire to fit more comfortably into sexy expensive designer shoes. Dr. Suzanne Levine, a noted Manhattan podiatrist now offers such procedures as collagen injection to soles and toe shortening. She also notes that most of her patients are women who link the procedures to romantic appeal (Kuczynski 2006, p. 3). Intentionally having one's feet reduced is again oddly reminiscent of the Cinderella story, where, in some versions, the ugly stepsisters chop off their toes in an attempt to fit into the glass slipper.

Male Genital Manipulation

The Japanese *yakuza* implant pearls into the shafts of their penises. As with their digital amputation practices, this is usually viewed as a perversion or abomination. Nonetheless, the penis has been the focus of other manipulation practices for several thousand years. The practice of penile circumcision was mandated by God in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17) and continues to this day in Judaism, Islam, and, to a lesser extent, Christianity. Circumcision in this context could be interpreted as the first recorded example of body manipulation as a "civilized" practice. Today. circumcision is very controversial and global public opinion towards the practice is extremely mixed, ranging from viewing it as highly civilized to viewing it as barbaric mutilation. There has been considerable debate on the issue in post-Apartheid South Africa, where different tribal customs have come into conflict; a noted South African surgeon went so far as to title an academic paper in favor of foreskin restoration *Penile Reform* (Gilman 1999, p. 292, 378). Today, this is a common procedure, but the earliest forms of foreskin restoration are recorded in the Bible (First Maccabees 1; First Corinthians 7) when it was utilized by previously circumcised Jews wishing to assimilate into Greek culture.

Phalloplasty, or penile enhancement surgery, has become increasingly widespread in the last couple of decades. Some surgical practices specialize only in these procedures, which include penile lengthening, penile engorgement, penile re-proportioning, scrotal reduction, and correction of peno-scrotal webbing (the penile equivalent of the turkey neck.) The male desire for a larger penis not only manifests itself through surgery but also through non-surgical forms of body manipulation in the form of drugs and pumps. The popularity of erectile dysfunction pills and patches, and other penile enhancement treatments that appear in email spam attests to the demand.

The Gastric Bypass and Deborah Voigt

A contemporary body manipulation practice that works from the inside out is the surgical procedure known as gastric bypass. "Gastric bypass surgery makes the stomach smaller and allows food to bypass part of the small intestine." (WebMD.com 2007). This surgery results in a feeling of a full stomach more quickly and reduced absorption of calories, causing significant weight loss. The surgery is controversial and not without risk. Often the resulting rapid weight loss leaves an excess of loose skin hanging around the midsection that requires a "belly lift" from a cosmetic surgeon.

In the last few years, it has become widely publicized because of the surgeries of pop singer Carney Wilson, and soprano Deborah Voigt. Wilson gained back some of her lost weight following childbirth. Voigt on the other hand has, so far, kept hers off.

By mid-career, Voigt had become the living embodiment of the "Fat Lady Singing", and was confronted by a standard in opera casting that had developed recently: audiences have become increasingly demanding of opera as a visual art form, a trend analyzed in a July 2001 *Opera News* Cover Story "The Fit Lady Sings." The catalyst for her surgery was her extremely publicized dismissal from a high-profile production at the Royal Opera Covent Garden because of her size.

Unlike the freakish body modifications of Cher, Joan Rivers, or Michael Jackson, Voigt has become an accidental icon of body manipulation similar to Queen Latifah and her breast reduction surgery. In the case of both women, the positive side of body manipulation practices is clearly visible and they serve as role models to members of our plus sized population, whose numbers are continually rising.

Marks of Civilization?

The question remains, do our sophisticated contemporary practices of cosmetic surgeries, injected substances, and drug induced body changes represent our advanced level of civilization, or are we merely practicing new body manipulations that deserve comparison to the forms that our society has denounced as uncivilized. Are breast implants a mark of civilization, but breast ironing not? Is a facelift a mark of civilization, but forehead flattening not? Or have we created a collection of grotesques in our own contemporary society that rivals or exceeds the extremes of those we have historically marginalized? Have we as a society accomplished something even more unnatural and barbaric?

In her essay "Beauty and Beauty Surgery" Angelika Tashcen states:

> After years of examining and researching the subject of aesthetic surgery…I am still deeply convinced that real beauty is based on truth. Looking at beauty in a larger context, it only truly touches me when it is authentic and real, when it isn't just an external mask but emanates from within… True Beauty has the power and scope to be profound, to make sense. Stendahl wrote that "beauty is a promise of happiness," while Dostoyevsky claimed that "Beauty will save the world." It remains to be seen if these sublime qualities are evident in a beauty that has been manipulated. (2005, p.15)

Although she is specifically writing about modern cosmetic practices, she reflects some of the same sentiments that others have expressed about primitive forms of body manipulation. These two categories, primitive and indigenous practices and contemporary procedures, have more in common than many would wish to acknowledge. Returning our attention once again to China, a noteworthy comparison can be found. The abandoning of foot binding, as portrayed in *Golden Child*, was a significant change in Chinese culture at the beginning of the last century. Today in China, using surgical methods developed in the West, the painful procedure of leg lengthening is available and used to create a more Caucasian body proportion on Chinese women with short legs; this mirrors the sentiments of the ethnically corrective nasal surgeries noted earlier. This correlation between foot binding and leg lengthening can be interpreted as a microcosm of body manipulation in general, and begs the questions "has a barbaric body manipulation practice been replaced by a civilized one?"

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