

Fitting in and/or standing out: Lebanese-Canadian women's experiences of beauty culture

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Abstract

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Abstract:

Using a feminist perspective, this research project examines the intersectionality among ethnic identity, beauty culture, body image, and societal pressures as experienced and reported by women between the ages of 19 – 45 years of age. This qualitative study is based on the reports of 11 Lebanese-Canadian, Christian women living in a Canadian provincial capital. While exploring how Western beauty culture and its standards affects the lives of this ethnic group, a beauty subculture unique to this community emerged. Participants describe this beauty subculture as having its own set of strict beauty standards and high expectations emanating from Lebanese – Canadian influences that add to the existing pressures felt from Western beauty culture. This study explores how these women construct, negotiate, and navigate their identities throughout various social environments and stages of their lives. Findings show that Lebanese-Canadian women feel a constant struggle between blending in with one's ethnic peers, yet standing out by conforming to Western beauty culture ideals.

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For my daughters, Valentina and Summer.

I hope you read this with pride one day and go on to write your own.

You are the truest form of beauty.

Introduction

What features are considered to epitomize female physical beauty? Where do the standards come from and what do they serve? Why do some women strive to embody these standards while others put less emphasis on their importance? These are only a few questions among many that one may ask about female physical beauty, and depending on your conceptual/theoretical perspective, the answers will vary. If you believe that beauty standards reflect a hardwired genetic preference for the purpose of procreation and evolution, then you will likely have opposing views to the person who believes beauty to be a socially constructed set of concepts. As an adherent of the latter, you most likely will theorize that the underlying purpose of dominant female beauty standards is quite ugly. As Naomi Wolf would famously declare in 1991: “We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty myth” (Wolf, 1991). While feminine beauty standards for women’s hair, make-up, fashion, and body size/shape have drastically changed over the centuries, what remains the same in Western beauty culture are physically and psychologically harmful practices and ideologies of beautification. Beauty culture is at play during all times of the day and throughout all aspects of women’s lives. Even if some women do not subscribe to ideals of female beauty, these images and messages still exist around them.

Within Western society, women are expected to look and act according to feminine beauty standards. They are taught that they should keep up with current clothing trends and the latest makeup styles. They must make sure that their hair is always coiffed and that their eyebrows are always impeccable. They must keep their cuticles trimmed and try their best not to

break a nail. They are told that the taller their heels the better, the bigger their breasts, the sexier, and the smaller their waist, the finer. Beauty ideals extend to having a bigger butt, smaller nose, fuller lips, longer lashes, and even more. All these expected proportions are nearly impossible for one person to have, so it is no wonder why women's body projects take so much time, effort, and money. Why do women waste so much time and resources on trying to attain an appearance that they will likely never achieve? The answer to this question is that there *are* benefits to being "attractive," however, perhaps more important than these benefits, the repercussions for not adhering to any of the Western feminine beauty standards are intimidating and may be enough for many women to want to attempt to oblige. This paper takes on the perspective that beauty is a conceptual reality, whereby women are impacted the most by its strict standards (Whitefield-Madrano, 2016).

The ideology of "beauty" is the central focus of this research project on Lebanese-Canadian women living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As a graduate student in Women and gender studies and as a member of the Lebanese community, I have a vested interest in how we embody these Western standards of beauty. This paper explores these women's beauty rituals, which characteristics they accept as beautiful, which standards they strive to achieve, and why or why not they accept and/or strive to achieve these standards. Participants explain why they choose to conform to some extreme Western beauty standards and reject others. They describe the value they see in appearing more "Western," how they prioritize looking "good," And what they sacrifice in their pursuit of beauty. From interviewing these women about their body image, the findings add to understanding the pressures they face as Lebanese-Canadian women living in a small community within Western society. With the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, physical

appearance, age, socio-economic status, religion, marital status, and education, Lebanese-Canadian women in Halifax are struggling to negotiate and navigate their self-identities within a beauty obsessed culture.

This research, to build on the knowledge of Women's studies, takes the perspective that beauty standards, for women, are largely socially constructed conceptual realities, whereby women are impacted the most by its strict standards (Whitefield-Madrano, 2016). Drawing from a postmodern feminist lens, this project conducts a qualitative analysis of Lebanese-Canadian Christian women's perspectives on the social forces and societal institutions that shape their beauty practices and attitudes.

Phoenicianism and Lebanese-Canadian Identity

Most likely, if asked where she is from, a Lebanese-Canadian woman will answer: "I'm Lebanese," even if she was born in Canada. Arguably, this is because from an early age, we are taught by our family and church community to be proud of our heritage and to nurture our faith as Maronites or Greek Orthodox Christians. The two major components of our identity and thus self-presentation are that we are Lebanese and Christian.

Being Lebanese Christians, our identities are unique compared to the rest of the Middle-East because of our ancient genealogical trees. Although Lebanon's population is made up of 54% Muslims and 40.5% Christians, the two groups are divided by a history of different ancestries (The World Factbook: Lebanon, 2017). From archaeological finds and ancient texts, Lebanese Christians claim to be descendants of the Phoenicians and are not considered to be Arab. "Phoenicians were not of the Semitic race, as the Arabs were, but rather were descendants of Ham, from which the Indo-European races emerged" (Kaufman, 2001, 176). In the second

millennium BC, Canaanite tribes arrived to the area of Greater Syria, established city-states, and created maritime commerce. They were given the name “Phoenicians” by the Greeks with whom they traded red-purple coloured fabrics. The Phoenicians are credited with creating the alphabet, mastering naval skills, and bridging the East and the West by sea-trade. When the Arab-Islamic occupation threatened the shore dwellers, the Phoenicians migrated to Mt. Lebanon for refuge. It was not until the first half of the 19th century, with the foundation built by the Maronite church, that an exclusive Christian identity materialized as a separate non-Arab ancestry (Kaufman, 2001, 174). To this day, Lebanese-Christians and Lebanese-Muslims differentiate themselves from each other as being descendants of different groups of people. The former identify as Phoenician descendants and the latter identify as Arabs united with their Islamic brothers, sisters, ancestors, and prophet.

The differences between Christian and Muslim beliefs are extensive concerning how the two groups are encouraged to live their lives and how the opposing governments want to run Lebanon, as evidenced by the civil war that raged on there and left a residual divide remaining between Christians and Muslims. It should come as no surprise, then, that Lebanese Christians and Muslims have been differentiating themselves from each other for many years and this includes how they physically present themselves.

Since Lebanese Christian women do not have strict religious laws regulating how they are to present themselves like Muslim women do, in Lebanon it is easy to identify which women are Christian and which are Muslim. Christian women are far more likely to look to Western beauty culture for inspiration concerning how they should look. The comparative lack of religious restrictions and therefore the lessened stigmatization of beautification practices allows

them to draw from beauty culture on a global scale. Like in many other nations, the influence of Western beauty standards is prevalent in Lebanese media representations of feminine beauty.

For example, one celebrity who is well known for her beauty and is often referenced by women who are consulting with cosmetic surgeons in Lebanon is the singer, Haifa Wehbe. She is considered a beauty icon in the Middle-East. She is light skinned with dark hair, green eyes, and a button nose. She has full lips, large breasts, and a curvaceous figure that she provocatively flaunts on stage. Her picture is often brought to plastic surgeons by women seeking to achieve her beauty. In a news cast by Al Jazeera English (2013), a Lebanese plastic surgeon, Naji Hayek, talks about how rhinoplasties are the most sought after surgeries at his clinic and how many women ask to have their noses look like Wehbe's. He explains that there have been many times when he has had to tell these women that it is not feasible for them to achieve a nose like hers and some women retort by saying that if he does not do it for them, they will go to someone who else who will.

Lebanon has become known as the plastic surgery capital of the Middle-East with a defining beauty culture of its own. According to Hayek, there are 87 certified plastic surgeons in Lebanon and an unknown number of people who pretend to be plastic surgeons (Al Jazeera English, 2013). Although there are no official statistics, it is believed that 1.5 million cosmetic surgeries are being performed each year (Al Jazeera English, 2013). The demand for plastic surgeries is high and people flock to Lebanon from all around the world to have their procedures done because it is cheaper there than in other countries. Nose jobs, for example, cost approximately \$8000 in the West but only \$2000 in Lebanon. Even if a woman does not have the money to pay for a surgery, the First National Bank of Lebanon has been advertising loans

specifically for plastic surgery since 2007. The bank's magazine advertisements featured a blond-haired, blue-eyed woman inviting the readers to "have the life you've always wanted" (Doherty, 2008, 28). Cosmetic surgeries are no longer exclusively for the rich and famous.

In a survey administered to Lebanese women who admittedly had cosmetic surgeries, 97% of respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the media in Lebanon promotes cosmetic surgery procedures, and 99% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that Lebanese social values promote cosmetic surgery (Doherty, 2008). The normalization of cosmetic surgeries in Lebanon can be dissected by exploring how beauty ideals are produced, pursued, and expressed in the creation/maintenance of self-identity among Lebanese women.

El Jurdi and Smith (2018) used social comparison theory (SCT) and social identity theory (SIT) in their research on Lebanese beauty culture consumption and found that when participants compared self vs other, notions of beauty emerged as opposite binaries. For example, women juggled between perceptions of real versus fake, natural versus unnatural, and inner versus outer beauty while searching for an authentic self-identity.

During their analysis, El Jurdi and Smith (2018) found that three forms of "mirroring" appeared in how women defined their national identity against Lebanese beauty culture: conforming, identifying, and subverting. Mirroring is the process by which people validate and confirm their sense of self; reflecting the need to belong to a particular social group (43). Some participants conformed to social beauty norms as perpetuated in the media for social approval and to behave according to hegemonic gender roles. Some participants pursued beauty ideals by identifying with and adopting the behaviours of another group in a self-defining relationship with them. Contrastingly, others reasserted their identities by subverting national beauty norms and

global media culture. The aforementioned categorization of responses developed by El Jurdi and Smith (2018) will be compared to the findings of this study.

Other Ethnicities in Beauty Studies

Since mainstream beauty standards are based on Anglo-Saxon characteristics, the impact of these ideals on women of non-white ethnicities is important to know for a number of reasons (Evans and McConnell, 2003). While it is challenging and laborious for white women to emulate these beauty standards, it is arguably much more difficult for women of ethnic minorities since their phenotype is further from the standard. Existing literature provides insight into how women of various ethnicities experience and embody beauty standards differently.

Evans and McConnell (2003), report on Black, Asian, and White women's self-evaluations about body satisfaction against Western standards of beauty. Acknowledging other studies of Black women's responses to mainstream beauty standards, the researchers rightly predicted that Black women would respond differently compared to other minorities. Unlike Asian women, many Black women do not identify with mainstream Western beauty standards and do not regard physically resembling them as a source of self-esteem. In contrast, the Asian women reported a higher regard for conforming to White beauty standards, and therefore experienced greater body dissatisfaction and demonstrated lower self-evaluations.

As cited by Evans and McConnell (2003), Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory "suggests that people compare themselves to others when they are not certain about their opinions or qualities, particularly when standards are subjective [and] women may compare themselves to societal standards of beauty in order to assess their own level of attractiveness" (154). Thus, the status of a woman's sense of racial and/or ethnic identity influences her

interpretation of mainstream beauty standards. As noted by Makkar and Strube (1995), Black women who aspire to achieve White standards of beauty may experience feelings low self-worth that can result in a greater risk of developing eating disorders. They, too, confirm the idea that if Black women strongly identify with African-American culture they will likely aspire to the beauty ideals that are more consistent with it. "Identification with one's cultural group (whether it be native or adopted) is important in the individual's perception of what is ideal" (1549). Therefore, if Black women embrace their racial identity and disregard mainstream, oppressive standards of beauty, they will experience more positive self-regard and body satisfaction.

Problem Statement

In the now vast literature on the subject of women's beauty culture, we know how women from different ethnic backgrounds interpret Western beauty culture and the impact it has on them. We also know of a study about how women in Lebanon consume beauty culture and use it to express a national identity, but there is a gap concerning specifically Lebanese-Canadian women's experiences of Western beauty culture and/or Lebanese beauty culture and the influence it has on their lives. This paper investigates how Lebanese-Canadian women navigate femininity in Lebanese beauty culture, Western beauty culture, or both and the degree to which they feel pressure to subscribe to respective beauty standards and/or their efforts of resistance.

Considering my membership in the Lebanese community and my existing knowledge of the culture, this research uses firsthand experiences to explore overlapping themes of beauty standards, beauty rituals, body image, gender roles, identity construction/presentation, societal expectations, and attitudes. In short, this research starts to fill the gap in the literature by shedding light on how Lebanese-Canadian women navigate femininity and beauty culture and

the degree to which they feel pressured to pursue Western beauty ideals and/or other beauty ideals. This research attempts to address this shortcoming because it is arguably crucial to learn about the pressures that visible minority women may experience as more immigrate to Canada.

The chapters to follow will aim at answering the following questions:

1. What are Lebanese-Canadian women's perceptions of Western beauty culture and/or Lebanese beauty culture and to what degree does subscribing to or resisting beauty ideals play in how they create, maintain, and negotiate their self-identities?
2. If they feel pressure from external sources, where does this pressure come from?
3. Are Lebanese-Canadian women impacted by Wolf's (1991) concept of the beauty myth?
4. Do they feel more pressure to appear Western or to maintain a more "natural self"?
5. What are the perceived potential risks and rewards in conforming to these societal beauty standards and how do these manifest on their bodies?

The existing literature on beauty culture and body image contextualizes this thesis by providing a general framework to interpret the emerging themes. In chapter one, theories of body studies are explored and the most significant ones related to this topic setup the dialog for how the findings will be analyzed and interpreted. Drawing from theorists, this chapter will show that a feminist, postmodern perspective best informs this research. In chapter 2, I explain my research method, justify the approach and describe my role as a graduate student researcher in the women and gender studies program. I also explain my position as a member of the community with which I am studying and how my membership may have benefited the integrity of this research. As a researcher with insider and outsider status, I explain the limitations that may have arisen from this sort of relationship with the participants. In chapter 3, I delve into the

findings from the interviews and explore Lebanese-Canadian women's experiences of beauty culture. From these findings, I will argue that the Lebanese-Canadians living in Halifax have a beauty culture that is unique to them with unofficial beauty standards and regulations that put enormous pressure on the women of the community. The pressure and perceived negative judgement for not abiding by these standards by fellow community members influences how women manage their appearances and behaviours. In this chapter, I will show how intersectionality of Lebanese-Canadian women plays a vital role in how they create, maintain, and negotiate their gendered identities while finding a sense of belonging. In the conclusion, it will be evident that this demographic of women struggles to adapt to increasingly strict feminine standards that weigh heavily on them. We will see that they do not feel like they fully fit in anywhere or with one specific group of people. Ironically, the community with which they share the most in common with, is the setting in which they feel the most pressure to adhere to high beauty standards.

Chapter 1: Theories of the Body

One can learn a great deal about people by studying their bodies. As human beings, they have bodies; they are bodies. As social beings, people are the products of their environment and shaped by the social structures within a society. People are influenced by multiple institutions that teach them how to live and how to be. Within different societies, people are taught specific cultural norms, values, and beliefs. These include things like how and when to talk, walk, eat, sleep, love, hate, work, play and the list goes on for all aspects of life. One of the most governing standards of all, however, is societal pressures of how people should look. Since more value is placed on certain appearances and behaviours, most people succumb to these pressures in some way. The cultural norms and societal standards that a person accepts or conforms to are reflected onto the body. “The human body is the most ubiquitous image of a social system, [such] that ideas about the body correspond to prevalent ideas about society,...[and] that particular groups adopt approaches to the body corresponding to their social location” (Shilling, 2012, p. 77). Therefore, by studying people’s bodies, one can learn about the society which they live in.

Within Western society, gender plays a major role in how one is supposed to be. Men and women are placed on opposite sides of a gender continuum. On one side, men are expected to be masculine and on the other side, women are expected to be feminine. Society places higher value on men and women who embody more masculine or feminine traits, respectfully. The feminine standards for women, however, are much more demanding than those for men. This is especially the case for how women are expected to physically appear.

Western Women’s Bodies

After the rebirth of feminism in the 70's, women gained legal rights, pursued secondary education, entered traditionally male professions, and overturned beliefs about their social roles, but are these women *really* liberated? Wolf (2002) argues that they are not free from the "violent backlash against feminism" that is the beauty myth: "images of female beauty [used] as a political weapon against women's advancement" (p. 10). Advertisements for household products once portrayed the successful woman as a happy housewife, but she has been replaced with the young supermodel promoting skin care products and the diet industry. "Brilliant and angry women have demanded a change in these ideals. Yet far from fading away, they have become narrower and more powerful than ever" (Walter, 2010, p. 3). Wolf suggests, however, that as women break through more societal barriers, images of feminine beauty prevent true liberation; Eating disorders increased, more women were having cosmetic surgeries, and all women were losing control of their bodies for a second time. Within the story of the beauty myth, the more beautiful a woman is, the more reproductively successful she will be, therefore, based on sexual selection men fight for beautiful women. "Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it" (Wolf, 2002, p. 12). Realistically, however, "beauty" is actually a currency system within an economy created by men to keep them in positions of power by forcing women to compete for resources that are monopolized by men. "The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power" (Wolf, 2002, p. 13). By degrading women physically, the beauty myth erodes women psychologically. "The underlying criticism [of contemporary culture] is that the fashion industry and consumerism construct an ideal type of the female body which cannot be achieved by real

women...” (Turner, 2006, p. 27). Beauty standards are unrealistic, always changing, and becoming more extreme and impossible to achieve.

Modern Western Societies are characterized by the expansion of capitalism and the growing consumer culture. Featherstone draws on a Marxist critique to explain how bodies are used as vehicles for the expansion of consumer society through people’s efforts in up-keeping their bodies (Demello, 2014), (Featherstone, M. (1991). Featherstone identifies two bodies existing in post-industrial societies: “the inner body, which we associate with health, and the outer body, which we associate with appearance and social relationships” (Demello, 2014, p. 161). In consumer culture, however, the two are combined because the main objective for taking care of the inner body is the enhanced appearance of the outer body (Demello, 2014, p.161). “Media and advertising cultures are key here, seeking to promote their products not only via images of good looking bodies but also by employing actors who radiate health...” (Shilling, 2012, p. 8). Shilling (2012) argues that in contemporary consumer culture, the presentation of body shifted from showing symbols of one’s social position to an expression of one’s personality (p. 39). Therefore, people are encouraged and expected to ascribe to idealized cultural practices, healthy lifestyles, and beauty standards. Whether a person accepts or rejects any or all of these ideals, is perceived as a bodily expression of individuality and human agency. “The body now has to be evaluated as a ‘suitable object for display’ before the individual is accepted...” (Shilling, 2012, p. 39). When people are successful in presenting themselves according to Western standards, they are assumed to be productive members of society and their individual choices are thought to reflect good character. Conforming to these standards, however, does not come cheap. Women, for example, are expected to behave in a feminine manner (i.e., sitting

with their legs crossed and being polite), exercise and diet (to maintain a thin physique), and conform to western beauty regimes (i.e., wear makeup, heels, dresses): all which contribute to an expanding consumer society. Even for those who do not wish to present themselves as conformists, body modification is an expensive way of expressing one's individuality. "Today, Westerners use tattooing, piercing, stretching, branding, scarification, and genital modifications to allow individuals to step outside of the bounds of the normal social order, and mark membership in alternative subcultures..." (Demello, 2014, p. 213). Ultimately, one's individuality is manifested in the management and appearance of the body and achieved through the consumption of chosen products and activities advertised in a modern capitalist society.

From a feminist, poststructuralist lens, this research project approaches each woman's identity and lived experiences as unique to her. This is a suitable framework to apply because of the intricate and vital threads of intersectionality woven throughout the identity of each participant. These variables and their relationships to each other bring richness to the data, especially given the qualitative nature of the research design.

Within the broad paradigm of social constructionism, the two major perspectives that inform this research are post-structuralism and symbolic interactionism. Both perspectives foreground the meanings attributed to bodies as products of culture, one emphasizing the power of dominant discourse to create bodies and the other, the centrality of social forces to define but also the ability of individuals to negotiate meaning creatively.

Popular Sociological Theories in Body Studies

Theorists in body studies and women and gender studies have moved away from viewing the body and gender from an Essentialist approach: rejecting notions that masculinity and

femininity are universally inherent traits of men and women. They also reject functionalist ideas that people's actions are determined by their membership to certain groups. "Moreover, two people with similar group memberships may react differently to similar social circumstances because they interpret those circumstances differently" (Brym, Lie, & Retina, 2007, p. 19). Now, it is widely accepted that gender, even as much as it is ingrained in us, is socially created and sustained by social processes. We know that these processes change over time and vary among cultures (Brym et al., 2007, p. 330). I will not focus my attention on Essentialism nor Functionalism because I believe some aspect of social constructionism will help me best explore and explain my topic of interest. Since I am interested in obtaining rich, qualitative data about women's personal experiences of Western beauty pressures, I am able to narrow my theoretical framework down to the microlevel theories.

Social constructionism

Social constructionism is an umbrella term to describe all sociological theories that perceive the body as a social construct: making it a favourite among feminist theorists. According to this perspective, the body is shaped, controlled, and even created by social forces and meaning associated with the body is also socially constructed. "The study of the subjective side of social life helps us get beyond the official picture, deepening our understanding of how society works and supplementing the insights gained from macrolevel analysis" (Brym et al., 2007, p. 20). This view opposes the biological notions of the body under a naturalistic paradigm. Social constructivists attempt to pay attention to the body by bringing society into the body, but the body, as tangible matter, remains unexplored.

Symbolic interactionists, such as Erving Goffman, believe that humans autonomously manage their bodies on the basis of shared cultural meaning and social relations (Shilling, 2012). Goffman's concept of 'impression management' is based on the idea that people manage and perform their bodies in accordance to societal standards, customs, and judgments. "Our daily experiences of living...are inextricably bound up with experiencing, managing and responding to our own and other people's bodies" (Shilling, 2012, 24). It is through social interactions and 'body idiom' including how one dresses, moves, gestures, and sounds that a person attempts to control and match a self-identity with a desired social identity (Shilling, 2012, 85).

The influence of Goffman's theory is evident in the work of Anthony Giddens. Like Goffman's conceptualization of the body, Giddens' structuration theory places the body as "central to the maintenance of encounters and social roles, and mediates the relationship between an individual's self-identity and their social identity" (Shilling, 2012, 78). Giddens incorporates late modernity as another factor, which consists of several institutions that influence the body and individual identity. The cultivation of body appearance, which Giddens attributes to the expression of identity, is actually the manifestation of people's deeper concern to take control of their bodies. "The more tradition loses its ability to provide a secure sense of self, the more individuals have to negotiate and attach importance to lifestyle choices" (Shilling, 2012, 191). Giddens' concept of 'lifestyle' refers to the set of practices chosen by an individual to narrate their identity. People become intensely concerned with consumption and bodies become the main objects by which identities are cultivated (Shilling, 2012, 221).

Giddens uses the term 'body projects' to describe how people perceive, treat, and manage their bodies on a daily basis. "If body projects are one way of seeking to stabilize identity in a

‘runaway world’ (Giddens, 1990), moreover, body regimes were also used to combat anxieties about the body’s instability” (Shilling, 2012, 224). The ‘American culture of youth’ concept is an example of how people adopt specific lifestyles that aim towards a body project of minimizing the appearance of aging. “From cosmetic surgery to youthful clothing, exercise, diet, and makeup, older Americans today are putting off aging in a way that we have never seen before” (Demello, 2014, 44). Overall, in a modern society that presents people with endless options and pressures to look a certain way, people manage their bodies and appearances so much because it gives them a feeling of autonomy and control over their bodies and lives.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and physical capital complement Goffman’s ideas because cultural capital represents those experiences, knowledge, and skills valued by a specific culture and physical capital is a person’s skin colour, body shape and beauty that is differentially valued by society (Demello, 2014, 14). When inconsistencies in a person’s character are witnessed by others, that person may feel embarrassed because it “signifies a threat to a person's standing as a full, competent member of society as it reveals a gap between their virtual identity (how they see themselves) and their actual social identity (how others see them)” (Shilling, 2012, 88). Most people experience this fear of not being accepted by others as a type of body anxiety which is why so many people perceive their bodies as projects that always need to be worked on in order to be better (Shilling, 2012, 39). Within the context of this study, women reported a fear of constantly being judged on their appearance: translating to a form of body anxiety. It will be demonstrated within the findings that women feel pressure to consistently present themselves in the best way possible to minimize/prevent the negative judgments being made by others about their bodies and lifestyles. It is their understanding that when a woman does not comply to the

community's beauty standards, then it is a reflection of her character and socio-economical status. Therefore, to earn or maintain acceptance within the community, impression management is always in play.

Women, especially, are among those who experience body anxiety because they are highly scrutinized within Western society. The "male gaze" represents how women and their bodies are asymmetrically represented in Western societies from a masculine point of view emphasizing men's idealized woman. This sets women up for failure and increases body anxiety because these standards are impossible to attain, yet "they know they are always on display, both from their own experiences of being constantly watched, but also from looking at images of other women in the media" (Demello, 2014, 16 &17).

Other ideas that complement Goffman's dramaturgical theory relate to the ways in which people increasingly associate their health and age with how they look and their 'presentation of self'. In a society that places value in one's health and youthfulness (especially for women), contemporary consumer culture promotes human agency in manipulating and modifying one's body and appearance. "Many feminist scholars feel that the system as it exists in modern society is enabled by economics: the diet, cosmetic, exercise, and cosmetic surgery industries are multi-billion dollar industries, and can only exist when women feel bad about themselves" (Demello, 2014, p. 178). The fact that supermodels are highly photoshopped, contributes to the unattainable beauty standards and never-ending body anxiety women experience.

Shilling (2012) describes an important shift in body studies. Originally, the focus on "our humanity with our minds" ignored "the creative capacities of our physical being" or our bodies (p. ix). Shilling (2012) critiques the traditional sociological approaches for conceptualizing

people as merely social actors functioning to serve their biological needs. He also criticizes structuralists and post-structuralists for viewing the body as a passive canvas that is continually having social meaning ascribed onto it (Shilling, 2012, p. x). Contrastingly, Shilling's (2012) thesis focuses on the concept of embodiment. "We need to remember that we are not just constituted by flesh, blood and bones, but possess a wide range of social, moral, and intellectual capacities made possible by our embodied being" (Shilling, 2012, p. x). Within an embodiment perspective, the body is accepted as having "emergent properties" developed through interactions with other embodied subjects and through social and technological phenomena. These interactions play a part in changing the mode of organization of people/bodies as well as the societies they live in.

Shilling (2012) rejects naturalistic and social constructionist approaches to body studies and suggests an approach that incorporates both social and biological perspectives. "Society may not construct the body in any simple or total sense, but social relations and environments do affect deeply those physiological and neurological pathways that shape people's health and capacity to make a difference within particular situations" (Shilling, 2012, p. xi). From Shilling's (2012) combined perspective, the body is a "material phenomenon" that is actively changing its environment and being shaped by its surroundings (p. xii). More specifically, poststructuralists, such as Michel Foucault, argue that bodies are controlled through discourses of power by social and cultural institutions. "For Foucault, the body is not only given meaning by discourse, but is wholly constituted by discourse: it vanishes as a biological entity and becomes an infinitely malleable and highly unstable socially constructed product" (Shilling, 2012, 78). The meanings that people attribute to bodies are social products created and perpetuated through

shared language. Shilling (2012) criticizes social constructionists, including Foucault, for their short-comings in attempting to adopt a dual approach to body studies. Shilling (2012) claims that while they try to understand the social forces that construct something called the body, they neglect to explain what the body actually is and why we deem it to be so important. “The body is placed in social contexts, but remains unexplored” (Shilling, 2012, p. 76). Since Foucault views the body as merely a social product of discursive power, the body, as a material, biological phenomenon, disappears, therefore, it can never be fully examined and understood. Shilling (2012) argues that within Foucault’s theory, “The body is present as a topic, but absent as a focus of investigation” because it only exists in the capacity of discursive power attributed to the mind; the body’s flesh and bones are viewed as passive and insignificant (p. 83). This ideology is problematic for Shilling (2012) because it does not recognize the ability of the physical body to react back at and even change discourse (p. 84). It is as though Naturalists’ and Foucauldians’ theories are on opposite extremes and discount critical factors that influence how we study the body. Naturalists, on one side, believe the body to be a pre-social biological entity, while Foucauldians, on the other side, view the body as wholly created by social forces. Although I see value in Foucault’s theory and emphasis on discursive power, I agree with Shilling’s (2012) suggestion that a more thorough approach to body studies would “accept that knowledge is grounded in and shaped by the body, rather than separate from it” (p. 85).

As a woman in the Women and gender studies program, studying other women, it is important for me to put a feminist lens on any sociological theory that I accept as relevant to my research. Although feminist thought did not have a huge impact on sociology until the women’s

movement in the 60's, feminist theory is prevalent in all subject matter now. Generally, all sects of feminist theory share the following characteristics:

- A. focuses on patriarchy;
- B. male domination and female subordination are not determined by biological essence. Instead, feminism blames structures of power and social convention (controlled by men);
- C. gender inequality is perpetuated by the socialization of children, barriers to equal opportunities in education, the labour force, politics, and the unequal, unpaid domestic responsibilities for women. (Brym et al., 2007, p. 21).

Intersectionality

The analytical framework of intersectionality will be applied to my data. I am predicting that overlapping aspects of a person's identity such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age, class, education, marital status etc. impact how these women experience beauty culture and societal pressures. The term, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1991, was used to demonstrate a weakness in feminism at that time. Back then, institutional structures acknowledged racial discrimination and discrimination against women, but they fell short in highlighting the discrimination faced by women of color specifically. Intersectionality refers to women's lived experiences of the various dimensions or intersections of oppressions (Tong, 2014). Using this concept, in part, as a way to interpret lived experiences may be useful in understanding the struggles Lebanese-Canadian Christian women are facing as they navigate their identities as visible minorities in Halifax. Given aspects of the Lebanese culture, beauty standards, traditional gender norms/roles, heteronormative expectations, age-related rules/customs, and religious

bindings, I am interested in learning how/if these dimensions serve to benefit these women or add to an injustice.

Postmodern feminism

There is no perfect or set way(s) under any type of feminism to liberate women. “Postmodern feminists reject any mode of thought, including feminist thought that aims to provide a single explanation for why women are oppressed or the steps all women must take to achieve liberation” (Tong, 2014, p. 192). Postmodern feminists encourage women to become the type of feminist they want to be.

Drawing thus from feminist poststructuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives on the female body, this research explores the many complexities and nuances of the self-reported bodily regimens of a group of women who are navigating the gender expectations of two distinct cultures.

With a postmodern feminist mentality, I choose to adopt the aspects of theoretical frameworks that I have mentioned above as my own approach to my research project. I was able to rule out many theories that I believe would not serve my project. As I have demonstrated, it is most useful to apply a social constructionist-feminist lens to the analysis of the data because the experiences of women I am focusing on are all to do with social forces and societal institutions impinging value and expectations onto them.

Chapter 2: Research Methods

This research aimed to gain a rich understanding of how Lebanese-Canadian women accept, reject, and negotiate their gendered appearances in a country that subscribes to female beauty standards based on what is referred to as “a particular form of ethnic whiteness that we might call Northern European” (Kimmel & Holler, 2017, 300). This clearly called for a qualitative research design to capture women’s own ways of relating their complex experiences. As a researcher with insider status, both as a Lebanese Canadian woman and one who lives within the community from which interviewees were recruited, I conducted interviews face-to-face. I invited women to participate in individual interviews to document their self-reported accounts of their personal beliefs, experiences and practices regarding feminine beauty culture.

To recruit the participants for this project, I sent a mass message/post to all of my Facebook friends and Instagram followers inviting those who are Lebanese-Canadian Christian women between the ages of 19-45 to participate in the research. I informed them that the study is based on their experiences of beauty culture and femininity, told them that it would take approximately how 30-90 min for the interview, and assured them of full confidentiality. I provided my contact information so that I could answer any questions they may have had and I instructed them to send me a private message, email, text, or call if they were interested in participating. (see appendix 1). I encouraged snowball sampling by asking participants to invite their friends to participate. I gave them permission to pass along my contact information to their friends if they showed interest.

A total of 11 Lebanese-Canadian Christian women between the ages of 19-45 were recruited. Participants’ backgrounds varied in socio-economic status, education, occupation, and

marital status. All of the participants were recruited after showing interest in the study by responding to an advertisement posted by me on social media. The one-on-one audio-recorded interviews took place in private rooms where privacy was guaranteed. After having each participant sign the consent form, they were given a copy along with contact information for counselling services available in the city (see appendix 5). Then, I asked for permission to audio record the interview (see appendix 2). Open-ended questions were asked, ranging from upbringing to relationships, work-life, beauty routines, goals, beliefs, and motivations (see appendix 3). The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to openly express their opinions and ideas on a given topic. Because I asked general questions, the participant was free to guide the interview by sharing what was most significant to her in as much detail as she pleased.

Once each interview concluded, participants were thanked and assured anonymity. Toward the end, each women was given the option of picking her own pseudonym. I also provided them with an option to receive feedback upon the completion of their interpreted portion of the thesis and invited them to participate in any necessary clarifications before the final draft was completed (see Appendix 4). Signed consent forms were stored in a file folder in a locked filing cabinet in my house and the raw data (audio recording and notes) were immediately transcribed, with hard copies kept in a separate cabinet drawer. At the completion of the thesis process, all audio files are to be erased, paper files shredded, and transcripts cleared of any identifying personal details.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours long. The sample size was anticipated to be between 10-15 people, however, my main priority was to collect data until

no new insights surfaced and themes became saturated. The interview guide consisted of semi-structured questions that probed respondents to express their experiences, practices, and beliefs about Western beauty culture and Lebanese beauty culture. Each audio-recording was transcribed and uploaded to a qualitative research data analysis program called MAXQDA. It is also with this program that data was organized and coded with common themes and concepts such as blending in, standing out, influences/pressures, self versus other, ideal self, collective identity, and definitions of beauty.

First, I coded the data by taking notice of relevant phenomena. Second, I collected examples of the phenomena. Third, I analyzed the examples to find patterns, differences, and similarities. More specifically, during the open-coding, I became aware of themes and categories. From there, I narrowed my focus on the relevant themes; making note of them in all transcripts. Then, I started to interpret the data and understand the meaning behind it all. To verify my interpretations, I worked backwards; confirming they can be supported by the data. Lastly, I linked the concepts together, applied existing theory from the literature, and compared and contrasted my findings to formulate a thesis.

Analysis of data was based on: (1) how participants defined beauty culture, i.e., whether they believed there were differences between Western beauty culture and beauty culture in Lebanon, and whether they believed there was a beauty culture specific to the Lebanese community in Halifax. (2) How they compared themselves to non-Lebanese people, fellow Lebanese women in Halifax, and Lebanese women in Lebanon. (3) How the emergent themes integrated with the existing literature on ethnic beauty studies and potentially filled the gap in literature on Lebanese-Canadian women's issues of body image and beauty culture. (4) How data

compares to the findings of “Mirror, mirror: national identity and the pursuit of beauty,” and emergent identity postures of “mirroring:” Conforming, Identifying, and Subverting (El Jurdi and Smith, 2018).

Reflexivity

As a participating member of the Halifax’s Lebanese-Canadian community from which participants were recruited, there were advantages and disadvantages to researching the women of this demographic profile. First, it is important to emphasize the significance of the community’s church. The parish of Our Lady of Lebanon Church is the central meeting spot for Lebanese-Canadian Christians in Halifax. It is here that parishioners meet every Sunday, dressed in their best attire for mass and where many community events are organized and executed. Our church is where families meet, mingle, celebrate, and mourn. Although we are proud of our strong presence in Halifax, our community is small in comparison to the Lebanese-Canadian population in bigger cities like Montreal. The Halifax community is small, but it allows us to know most, if not all, of its members on a personal level. Even if we do not know someone personally, we likely know them by name and know their family. As a researcher, knowing who my participants are and having them know me was beneficial in some ways and problematic in others.

Arguably a huge benefit was having insider status. As an insider, the women of the community were easily approachable for recruitment. I had many opportunities to contact women in person, through social media, and by texting and calling when discussing their interest in participating in this study. Because I am a member of the community, they know who I am and did not feel like a stranger was approaching them. They may have felt a sense of

camaraderie with me more than they would have if a complete stranger, who does not share a similar upbringing, asked them to take part in this research. Arguably, our similarities allowed me to delve deep into this research by building rapport with these women: knowing the right questions to ask, and most importantly being able to relate to their experiences (even if mine vary) for better understanding and interpretation of their responses.

However, being an insider also presented some challenges. Women usually have no hesitation sharing their beauty routines and beliefs with other women, but sharing the extremes that we resort to in the name of beauty, some may prefer to keep private. As an insider, some women may not have wanted to divulge any/all cosmetic surgery or injections they may have had. In this case, women may feel more comfortable revealing those types of procedures to an outsider since they may never see that person again, they do not know them personally, and/or there is no fear that these actions will be revealed to their peers. For example, during the recruitment process, one woman messaged me, after seeing my social media post, asking me to give her more information about the study. After telling her the types of questions I was going to ask, we set a day and time to conduct an interview. This woman is someone whose appearance has drastically changed over time and it is obvious that she takes great pride in her looks. The day before our scheduled interview, I messaged her to confirm the appointment and she did not respond to me. It was not until a couple days later that she apologized for missing the interview. I did not push her to reschedule. There is a chance that she no longer wanted to participate because she did not want to reveal some beautification practice or procedure that she had done. Although I ensured confidentiality and made sure the women felt comfortable, I anticipated that some women worry about being judged for their actions. Sharing my own past experiences of these

more extreme beauty practices during the interviews served to strengthen the rapport and build trust, but it would have been inappropriate to do so during the recruitment process.

As mentioned above, I am an insider to this demographic because, like them, I am a Lebanese-Canadian woman living in Halifax. I am, however, also an outsider because I grew up in Cole Harbour, with only one other Lebanese-Canadian female acquaintance in the immediate area. From elementary school to high school, my friends have been predominantly Caucasian. Therefore, my childhood was different from the Lebanese-Canadian girls who have always lived in Halifax and grew up close together. It is in terms of this experience of growing up among mostly Caucasian people that the contrast between my own Lebanese identity and that of the women who grew up in close-knit, predominantly Lebanese neighbourhoods stands out to me.

Chapter 3: Lebanese-Canadian women's experiences of beauty culture

Psydonom	Age
Rachelle	27
Sam	24
Aleyna	33
Jennifer	32
Katie	34
Betty	30
Michelle	24
Krista	25
Amelia	28
Eve	31

Halifax's Lebanese-Canadian Beauty (sub)culture

As part of the data presentation, this chapter begins by distinguishing a niche beauty culture according to the participants' own accounts. From their perspectives, the women give detailed descriptions of both Western beauty culture and Lebanese beauty culture. They describe similarities and differences between the two before discussing their own experiences as Lebanese-Canadian women living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Interviewees describe a beauty culture that exists to them as something unique in and of itself. Throughout the interviews, it becomes evident that there is a distinct set of standards and expectations that attempt to govern the lives of women involved in Halifax's Lebanese community, establishing a hybrid beauty culture specific to this group of women. The specific beauty culture that is present in the

Lebanese community is established and perpetuated by two major factors; community members (including family) and the media.

Differentiating between (Lebanese) beauty culture in Canada and Lebanon

When asked to describe the Lebanese standard of beauty, respondents expressed the need for me to be more specific.

Me: How would you describe the Lebanese standard of beauty for women?

Michelle: Like the Lebanese-Canadian or just Lebanese?

Me: Both.

They wanted to know if their response should reflect the Lebanese standard of beauty for community members in Halifax or if I wanted them to describe the beauty culture in Lebanon. Therefore, they made a distinction between the two. By describing both, their similarities and differences are emphasized:

Well I think that they are similar in the way that everyone is trying to be like, look their best almost. They have like this goal so everyone kind of wants to hit it. I don't know how I would say it's different because I feel like they are both going after the same thing but in different ways. I would say they're the same in the way that like, when you think of it, they both want to be like small nose, blonde, da da da even though that's not how they were made to be (Sam).

Sam explains that although Lebanese-Canadian women and Lebanese women look to traditional Caucasian western beauty ideals for inspiration in constructing their appearances, the ways by which they attempt to achieve these ideals differs.

The prevalence of cosmetic surgery in Lebanon and related attitudes

Respondents identify cosmetic surgery experiences to be the greatest differentiating factors between them and the women in Lebanon for a number of reasons: In Lebanon, firstly,

the general consensus is that cosmetic surgery is more popular. Secondly, those women prefer the results of the surgeries to be obvious. Thirdly, the ability to obtain cosmetic surgery is considered a contributing factor to one's socio-economic status. Fourthly, modifying one's body is more encouraged there. Overall, there is less stigma surrounding plastic surgery in Lebanon.

Lebanon has a reputation as a plastic surgery mecca for its citizens and for people from all over the world who travel to Lebanon for their cosmetic surgery desires including some of the participants.

Me: Have you ever had any cosmetic surgeries? If so, what did you have done and why?

Amelia: Of course I did, I'm Lebanese! Like so many Lebanese people, I did have a rhinoplasty when I was in Lebanon not last time but the time before, so I was 17. Either I was 17 or I was 19. Beauty is pain; that went through my head a lot. I did it in Lebanon in the middle of the summer, because it's cheaper and more people do plastic surgery or more doctors have more experience in plastic surgery because so many people get it done.

Amelia's response not only demonstrates the popularity of cosmetic surgery among Lebanese/ Lebanese-Canadian women, but also the prevailing sentiment that Lebanese/ Lebanese-Canadian women commonly get cosmetic surgeries.

Michelle explains how she believes Lebanese beauty culture in Halifax is similar in ways and different in others compared to that in Lebanon:

I think it's similar because they're all influenced by celebrities and social media especially in Lebanon like every single celebrity has had something done that is very obvious and here it's

the same thing but it's more subtle like celebrities will have their lips done or their nose is done but it's not all the time that it's in your face. It's very subtle that they'll get Botox or something but they pretty much still look the same, but in Lebanon, like Nancy Ajram looks completely different than she did 10 years ago. She looks like a completely different person and I think, I wouldn't say that it's like romanticized there, but it's super encouraged- not even encouraged but it's widely accepted to get plastic surgery, so I think that the difference would be that plastic surgery is very involved in it in Lebanon whereas here it's mostly just like it's nice to be natural but only if you're pretty without makeup on pretty much (Michelle).

Michelle touches on many aspects of Lebanon's beauty culture and how it differs from Halifax's Lebanese beauty culture including the influence of extremely modified celebrities, the preferences for more obvious changes, and the encouragement/acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Contrastingly, Michelle demonstrates that in Halifax, women are still influenced by celebrities, however, the celebrities we see most often have had cosmetic procedures that appear more natural-looking than those in Lebanon. Therefore, in Lebanon plastic surgery is a standard, whereas in Halifax, plastic surgery should seem subtle if deemed necessary to enhance one's appearance.

Other respondents describe memorable accounts of their visits to Lebanon and what they saw on a daily basis:

You go to the mall and you see them. They've got the straps on their nose, their eyes look like they were bludgeoned and they are so happy. They're like yes I did it and they're buying their new shoes so they can show how fashionable they are with their new stylish shoes to match their new stylish nose (Aleyna).

Aleyna describes her own experience of witnessing a number of men and women casually walking around with their post-operative bandages in Lebanon: something you would not usually see in Halifax.

She adds:

Literally you can go to your local bank and get a withdrawal for a nose job and there's such an emphasis on beauty (Aleyna).¹

Krista's statement amplifies these notions:

Whereas in Lebanon, plastic surgery is looked up on but it's not a big deal to have plastic surgery whether you're a boy or a girl. If a girl [here] got a nose job, half would be like: oh yeah, me too and the other half would be like, I knew it because everyone takes such account of what we look like in the Lebanese community. Everyone is judging everyone all the time, so it's obvious when someone makes a change. It's not just obvious but we point it out. Lebanon is very much like we want it obvious, like the changes you make to your face are obvious and with no shame especially with the celebrities or the people on media whereas here, we try to have all those features but in the most natural way as possible but we still want them. We still want the big lips. We still want the perfect eyebrows. We still want the long hair whether that's natural or extensions, we still want all these things. We want to look perfect (Krista).

Sam adds:

I find there, it's more of a standard. It's like oh, you don't have a nose job, like what are you doing?

¹ Given the current unrest in Lebanon after the explosion in 2020, the most severe economic crisis in history, and the government corruption, it will be interesting to see how beauty culture evolves there. How are citizens prioritizing beauty now that it costs a month's worth of wages to pay for a loaf of bread? The assumption is that people will prioritize providing food and medical care for their families, so what place will beautification practices, something once so important, have in their everyday lives? Will beautification ideologies and practices become obsolete in the face of civil unrest and a socio-economic crisis? Will people resort to at-home beauty treatments for maintaining a certain look? Will plastic surgery be a thing of the past or will people strive for the same level of appearance standards, doing whatever needs to be done to accomplish their body goals? If Lebanese-Canadians visit Lebanon now, will they not hear the same appearance related messages from the country's citizens? How will the changes in Lebanon's beauty culture translate to Lebanese-Canadians? Will they feel less pressure from family members who live there?

Sam suggests that having a nose job in Lebanon is considered one's obligation and that by not getting one, you are doing something wrong or not living up to the standards.

Collectively, Aleyna's, Krista's, and Sam's observations demonstrate how ordinary it is for Lebanese people to get cosmetic surgery and how they do not feel the need to keep their surgery a secret. It is not just obvious by a person's bandages that they have had cosmetic surgery. The results of their modifications are intentionally obvious:

I feel like there's also a difference between [the] Lebanese standard of beauty in Lebanon versus here because the difference, I feel, like in Lebanon it's very extreme. In Lebanon, it's obvious that they have Botox- not Botox! That's the least of it. It's obvious they've had plastic surgery. It's obvious they've had alterations to their body, to their face, to their hair, to their everything, and it's not subtle and they know it's not subtle, but they don't even care. That's just what they want. They want the biggest lips, the highest cheekbones, the fullest cheeks. They want their eyes to be bright, their eyebrows to be lifted and it doesn't even look good but they do it anyway for some reason. Whereas here, it's like we want all those things, full lips, lifted face, but we want to look as natural as possible, so it looks like we're just born that way even though that might not be the case and we look down on plastic surgery (Krista).

Krista reiterates that Lebanese-Canadian women in Halifax and Lebanese women in Lebanon are generally interested in having the same ideal physical features as promoted in Western beauty culture but to different degrees. She adds that one difference between these two groups of women is that in Lebanon, women do not have the same desire to achieve natural-looking results like the women here do.

Eve, someone who has not had any cosmetic surgeries and who overtly rejects traditional notions of beauty standards, describes how she felt about her own appearance in comparison to other women when she visited Lebanon:

When I go to Lebanon, I see a lot of girls that look exactly the same, like very uniform. I think there's a little bit more diversity here. I guess it depends on the parts of Lebanon, like in the village, obviously it's a little more maybe natural-looking, but I do remember having several experiences in Lebanon where I looked at people, I looked at women and felt like in Beirut, in that kind of area, I looked around and I was like I feel like the biggest alien of life right now like every woman looks exactly the same so I think that it's definitely worse there right now definitely (Eve).

Eve's account reiterates the notion of cosmetic surgery popularity in Lebanon. It is a common opinion among participants that cosmetic surgeries are so popular in Lebanon that there is minimal diversity in women's physical appearances. In an attempt to achieve Western ideals of the perfect facial features, many women turn out to look alike. Ironically, a person like Eve, who has not modified their body according to Western beauty ideals to the extent of Lebanon's citizens, may end up feeling more like a foreigner in her homeland.

As portrayed in the documentary "Copy, cut, paste," women in Lebanon will take magazine pictures of their favourite celebrities to plastic surgeons and tell them that they want to modify themselves to have the same body part as the women in the picture. Since many women take in photos of the same celebrities, they all end up having similar facial features and looking alike (Ghazali, C.). (2016).

In addition to the pressures of Western beauty standards, Lebanese women opt for plastic surgery to improve their looks and their social statuses.

I think for Lebanese, it comes back to that socioeconomic status. You know, to look a certain way could indicate wealth. In Lebanon, they are happy to show it off because it's a status symbol. I can afford to get my nose done. How awesome is that? I have money (Aleyna).

Aleyna attributes part of the reason for so many women getting plastic surgery to an attempt at raising their social status among their peers by proving that they are wealthy enough to be able to afford the privilege of getting plastic surgery.

She adds:

In Lebanon it's not a secret that there's a lot of political unrest there. There is a lot of, I mean, war is an issue there. There's always fights. There's always battles. If you're in the inner cities you're safer and I think that the problems in Lebanon are so great and they're going to be so hard to fix that nobody wants to share that. It's easier to just focus on yourself and what you think is more important than what's happening around you, so I think especially for women, they get pressured to look a certain way and act a certain way, so you see women, literally, literally you can go to your local bank and get a withdrawal for a nose job and there's such an emphasis on beauty (Aleyna).

Aleyna's perspective lends itself to the idea that by diligently manicuring one's body according to beauty standards, it will appear to others like that person is unaffected by external factors and as though they have control over their own life.

The importance of beauty in Lebanon is evident in the wide acceptance and encouragement of modifying one's body. Lebanese women talk about beautification practices openly and bluntly to others. From dietary restrictions to extreme surgeries, they also give unsolicited advice to other women about what they should do to improve their appearances. Participants describe their first-hand experiences of becoming hyper-aware of the importance placed on beauty in Lebanese beauty culture. Michelle describes the moment she stepped off the plane in Lebanon:

I remember being 14 and going back. We had just been in Lebanon two years before, so this was in 2012, and I got to the airport, and as soon as I got to the airport, I had my aunt say hello and then she like patted my stomach and gave me a thumbs up because I lost weight. That was the first thing she did, so it's like, just being fat or being skinny is super involved in what the standard of beauty is, I think.

This memory has stuck with Michelle all these years later. Her recollection of it demonstrates how this message of beauty standards has had a lasting impression on her. The act of giving a thumbs up and commending someone for ascribing to a beauty ideal is not uncommon. Michelle's sentiments are echoed by Amelia's recollection of her arrival to Lebanon:

One of the first things when I would go back was, 'oh you're still so small like you're still so skinny, like good, stay this way' ... that's not really like a healthy way of greeting someone and it's kind of funny because in my opinion, from what I see of my cousins and their friends, most people aren't super, super tiny, so I don't know where they're getting these like comments from, but yeah, people have no problem being like 'oh man, you've gained some weight, like maybe you should do this instead.' Yeah, they really don't have a problem with that kind of thing.

Amelia describes her experiences of going back to Lebanon and being welcomed by her family with unsolicited remarks about her appearance. What she describes as her family's first reaction to seeing her, shows the worry or concern Lebanese women have for their appearances as well as other women's appearances. It also shows the difference in etiquette with regards to how in Canada, it would be deemed impolite or rude and unhealthy to verbally express your concern for another's appearance. This is an indicator that not only is beauty a top priority for Lebanese women, but also that it is not uncommon for people to openly critique one another's

appearances. Unlike Michelle and Amelia, Katie's experience involved negative criticism from her family members. Katie described this incident to me:

Everybody – every time I go to Lebanon, [they say] ‘You still didn't close your teeth like why wouldn't you close them? You'd look so much more beautiful if you closed them’ and this and that and I just never did it. I always said no.

Katie's account of describing the recurrence of family members welcoming her to Lebanon by criticizing her for not closing the gap in her teeth is another example of how beauty is at the forefront of the Lebanese mindset.

It immediately became clear to these three women upon arrival in Lebanon that one's appearance is first to be criticized. While Michelle and Amelia were admired and even congratulated for conforming to glorified body sizes, Katie was reprimanded for rejecting other beauty standards. Both accounts work in shaping each woman's idea of what is considered beautiful.

According to the interviewees, although Western feminine beauty ideals are prominent in both Canada and Lebanon, women's direct experiences of beauty culture in the two countries are different. As shown, the degree to which women feel pressure to pursue Western beauty ideals differs greatly between Canada and Lebanon, with the latter often characterized by explicit pressure from family members.

First Generation Immigrants and the Preservation of Culture and Traditions

The women were asked why they believe there is a difference between Lebanon's beauty culture and Canada's. Their reasoning comes from a history of immigration. As Amelia explains,

It definitely is different between here and Lebanon, but I think that kind of goes with everything because here, the community that's here left a country in kind of like general terms the same time, so they left that country with the ideologies of that country at that time and they brought them here and so their biggest influence on their view of beauty for example, is based on those ideologies from when they left and then accentuated by each other because everyone left with similar ideologies. So it's, in my opinion, that it kind of stayed stagnant in a way because they're thinking of their old country and that's how they've always viewed it and so they haven't like, there's kind of like a resistance to change... I think with any immigration group, like they want to keep their culture- it's very important to them and so they, I think, that generation that left was resistant to change the place that they're in which makes the opinions of their other fellow immigrants more prominent, whereas in Lebanon, people are living there, things are changing every day, and they're living that change and so I think the image that is in Lebanon of what beauty is is different than the image that's here within the Lebanese community because they're stuck in the ideologies they brought with them versus Lebanon who has been changing because that's just the natural course of any country, is to change.

It is their understanding that when their parents immigrated to Halifax from Lebanon, they brought their ideas about beauty with them as they experienced it in Lebanon before they left. As they attempted to preserve their culture and pass on their beliefs and traditions, they became resistant to change. Their ideas about beauty culture were passed down to their children and emphasized by other community members who shared these ideologies. While Lebanon's beauty culture evolved over time, the beauty culture among Lebanese-Canadian people in Halifax maintained the standards they took with them when they emigrated.

To explain further, when our parents and grandparents immigrated to Halifax from Lebanon during the civil war, they brought their Lebanese ideologies with them. As the Lebanese community in Halifax grew, people preserved their Lebanese customs and traditions by surrounding themselves with like people. As Lebanon progressed as a country, so did the ideologies of its citizens. In Halifax, however, the immigrants tried to maintain their original

customs while teaching the following generations about their heritage, culture, traditions, and beliefs, including those about beauty standards. Therefore, their perceptions of beauty culture, as they experienced it in Lebanon, are what they passed down to their children and grandchildren. For the second generation Lebanese-Canadian women, their interpretation of beauty culture is unique in that it combines ideologies from Lebanon (now and before) in addition to Western beauty culture. The pervasive need by immigrant parents to preserve the traditional Lebanese customs that were known to them before arriving in Canada is being imposed by them onto their children.

Lebanese-Canadian women's Western beauty culture experiences in Halifax

Cultural identity: Learning us versus them

Even at a young age, many factors play into how the concept of beauty was formed in the minds of the participants and how they began to formulate a self-identity. As children, they started to learn that they looked different and had different customs from most of their peers at school. As previously stated, the parents of the women interviewed raised their children with the values that were taught to them while still living in Lebanon; attempting to preserve their traditions, beliefs, and rules. The lessons described by participants support the construction of their national identity and shape their understanding of the Lebanese community and culture.

Eve starts off her interview by describing her family life growing up. She, like other women interviewed, explains that she has a tight knit family that prioritizes spending time together and having open communication. Eve remembers comparing her home life with her time spent at school.

There was definitely a disconnect that I noticed as soon as I started going to school with who I felt like at home and who I felt like in school, just because of how different the culture was with the school climate and being in a school with a lot of Caucasian people. So, I definitely felt more like myself at home with my family than I did in school. But, I did enjoy school. As I got to my upper elementary years I started being a little more self-conscious or aware of differences and how I communicated with people, how I presented myself and like, the customs and values my family had, and how different they were from my peers and my classmates.

Eve starts to believe that she is different from her classmates as early as when she started in elementary school. This is when she learns that her family values and Lebanese customs differ from her (mostly) Caucasian peers'. She describes feeling more self-conscious and less like herself at school because of these differences. An example of this is when Eve explains how she would ask to hang out with her classmates after school and her parents would not allow it because they wanted her to surround herself with people who share the same rules and beliefs. Her parents feared that she would be influenced by her Caucasian peers to behave or do things that went against her Lebanese upbringing. Participants mentioned another, similar example of how they were taught to believe that they were different from their caucasian peers based on what they were not allowed to do: have sleepovers. During the interviews, when women were talking about how they felt different from their peers growing up, almost every participant mentioned how one of the first ways they learned a sense of us versus them was when they received the strict lesson from their parents that sleepovers were prohibited. It became their understanding that their peers were allowed to have sleepovers and as Lebanese girls, they were not allowed. Sleepovers were considered to be as taboo as having boyfriends: another example of how girls are reminded that they are Lebanese not White.

She also states that she was always aware of how different she looked from her peers because she went to a predominantly White private school where her ethnicity made her stand out from her schoolmates.

Blending in and/or standing out

Participants tell their memories and experiences of getting older and determining when and where they feel more like they fit in and/or stand out from the majority of the people around them. Does one ever fully blend in in all places at a given time? Generally, the women all describe their childhood as a time when they learned that they were different from the majority of their school peers in terms of appearances and culture. They describe feeling like they blend in more with other Lebanese-Canadian women as they get older and increase their involvement in the community, however, they struggle more with keeping up with the higher standards associated with being Lebanese-Canadian women. It becomes a juggling act of blending in by conforming, yet standing out by continuously striving to achieve higher standards. Overall, women describe feeling more at ease hanging out with their Caucasian friends because they believe the appearance standards/pressure to be lower and the expectations to be more casual. Ironically, although participants more closely physically resemble their Lebanese-Canadian friends, their insecurity levels are higher around their Lebanese-Canadian friends because appearance and behaviour standards are much higher within this community.

Early influencers: media and community

Participants describe the influence of the media on their ideas about Western beauty and Lebanese beauty through the vast number of images of feminine beauty to which they are exposed. They recall seeing images of beauty standards and receiving messages about feminine

beauty expectations from early ages. From this perspective, interviewees explain how they start forming their perceptions of themselves within this beauty culture. From here, they describe experiences of how they negotiate their ethnic, gendered identities within a Western setting. Lebanese-Canadian women adopt the conventional Western standards of beauty as their ideals too. When asked to describe the images of beauty seen in the media, Eve describes what she sees and how it makes her feel about her own body:

Everything being in line, smaller nose, the chin, high cheekbones, and kinda like, Halle Berry looking face. And I think that like, in the Lebanese community, it really affected girls and like, women a lot, because there's this huge shift to try and Westernize how our facial features look, even though we're obviously different from Western style bone structure. And like, to each their own. I never really thought it was a big deal if people wanted to change things, but I was also a little bit sad that, you know, in order to be classified as beautiful, I knew as a teenager, in order for me to be classified as beautiful by others, my nose is too big, my chin doesn't look great, my forehead is too big. There were things I was very self-conscious of, but then, to me, it was like, I can still express myself with how I look, so I was okay with it.

In Eve's explanation, Western ideals of facial beauty are *the* standards of what can be classified as beautiful or not. As a Lebanese-Canadian woman, she believes that her bone structure does not allow her to easily conform to these notions of beauty and feels insecure as a result. She adds that these images of female beauty in the media and a societal continuum of what is most beautiful to what is unattractive may be a contributing factor to why some Lebanese-Canadian women modify their bodies according to what is deemed most desirable.

It's especially noteworthy that all participants mentioned the Kardashians at some point in the interviews. The Kardashians are super-celebrities who have grown a worldwide empire based on their looks and their connections to the beauty and fashion industries. They are of

Armenian descent, have brown hair, brown eyes, with slim yet curvy bodies. Participants describe the difference they feel seeing these women in the media compared to seeing the all-American, blonde hair, blue-eyed, Barbie doll-like women they saw growing up.

Amelia says:

I think like- well I'm kind of trying to form an answer on that because I think like if you're looking at the Kardashian thing, they kind of look more like me than they do my white Canadian friends I grew up with. But like at the same time, I think like people here are very exposed in like all ways to celebrities and famous people and so they have that ability to make their own opinion using a lot of media, whereas I guess maybe within the Lebanese community, because these kinds of visual role models are now becoming a thing, you're more likely to look at Kim Kardashian to look for beauty inspiration than you're going to look at Britney Spears for beauty inspiration... because whatever Kim Kardashian does is going to more likely work for you than what Britney Spears does. But at the same time, I think this whole idea of beauty, we're in a transition because still like Western people are looking at people that aren't Western and thinking they're beautiful and wanting to use their products and do the same thing and this whole like contouring, highlighting business um that's like making your skin darker so it looks nicer like that's part of it so I think both forms of beauty are in a transition. I think it's in the Western sense more encompassing of different forms of beauty- not all forms of beauty but definitely different forms.

In her mention of the Kardashians, Amelia suggests that she, because of her Lebanese heritage, looks more similar to them than her Caucasian friends. She infers that since Lebanese-Canadian women can identify more with the Kardashians look-wise, they are more likely to turn to them for beauty inspiration than they would look to Britney Spears, for example. Her reasoning for this comes from her belief that one will be more successful in accomplishing a beauty goal based on Kim Kardashian's appearance because one's starting point is more similar to hers. The effort required to achieve the look is much less and the outcome is better-suited.

Contrastingly, Aleyna describes a problem with having the Kardashians as beauty icons for women to look to for inspiration and reassurance:

So look at the Kardashians as a great example. So I have friends who are curvier and they said oh they're doing a great service for us because they're making thicker thighs in a slender body more acceptable, but they're not. They're still super enhanced. I'm not tearing them down- they built a brand and their brand relies on their looks, but the reality is that their stomachs are concave because they get lipo, their breasts were enhanced, they have a tiny waist with bigger hips and a bigger butt. That just doesn't exist in genetics, so it's the same problem but it's just a new body type that's currently in fashion and it just so happens to be curvier.

Although this participant acknowledges that some of her peers appreciate seeing the Kardashians in the media for being curvy representations of feminine beauty- making it fashionable, she also recognizes that they are setting a new standard that is difficult for the average woman to achieve. While they may differ from past images of women in the media by having curvier bodies, they still represent a preference for slenderness and surgical enhancement. This participant describes their body type to only be attainable through cosmetic surgery because on average, their body proportions do not occur naturally. Arguably, this body type may be even more difficult to achieve than the super-skinny ideal of the past. Therefore, while Lebanese-Canadians believe they may look more similar to the Kardashian's than Spears, using the Kardashians as a benchmark of what to aspire to may be just as challenging as if they were to look to the traditional images of female beauty.

Katie describes some of the risks involved in aspiring to achieve unrealistic and unattainable body goals as portrayed by the Kardashians:

Sometimes the pressure can get to you and then you kind of lose your sense of focus of why you're doing it to begin with, so like when you're comparing mostly, if

you're comparing like, if you're saying this person looks like this- I want to look like that, but your bodies are completely different-that's an unrealistic comparison, so you always need to be realistic and stick within your comfort and what works for you. I can't compare myself to someone who's 6 feet tall and like a hundred and 130lb because I'm 5 ft and that right? So like you have to always be realistic and I think sometimes we get lost in an unrealistic reality where we want to aspire to something but it's just never going to happen because our metabolisms are different like our facial structure is different our body type is different so when you're doing that you're setting yourself up for failure and really you fail in building your own confidence because you're just degrading it even more so you have to be realistic (Katie).

Katie's remarks add to the issue raised by Amelia and Aleyna because it is her belief that if a woman sets her appearance goals too far from what she looks like currently, she will feel body dissatisfaction when she attempts and fails to reach the goal. She goes on to explain that one's main purpose of setting body goals and reaching them is to increase one's self-confidence, but the opposite happens when the goals are unrealistic and unattainable. Instead of building one's self-confidence, one may end up feeling worse than before.

Michelle gives an example of how identifying with people who look like yourself may be more reassuring:

Sometimes we'd go to church and I would feel insecure, but at the same time I would see like another girl who had like not necessarily a unibrow but like super thick eyebrows too and like, ok, I'm not the only one.

Michelle states that even at a place that makes her feel insecure about her appearance, she found some comfort in seeing other girls who had similar physical traits that she did not like about herself. It made her feel like she was not alone and that other girls were going through

similar body image issues.

Body surveillance, perceived judgment & bullying

When asked if they ever felt like their bodies were under surveillance by others, all participants responded enthusiastically by saying that they do. Their responses vary in terms of how this belief impacts them, but all of the women state that they feel like their bodies are under surveillance, mostly when they are around other Lebanese people and it makes them feel self-conscious and like they are being judged negatively by others.

Any time I'm in like a big group of Lebanese people or at church or anything I feel like people are staring at me. I don't even feel like that I know they're staring at me because I can see them like they don't try to hide it and instantly I'm like oh it's because I have blonde hair or it's because I'm bigger than the rest of my family or something like that so I do feel like I'm always being judged in a way (Michelle).

From Michelle's experience, she feels quite certain that people are judging her for how she looks and comparing her appearance to that of her sisters. This belief comes from her awareness of people staring at her, making her feel like her body is under surveillance and judged negatively. This mindset is echoed by Jennifer:

Oh, oh all the time! Constantly! Constantly! Even though I know that sometimes it [her body] is definitely under surveillance, I think that is now drilled in my head that even when I'm somewhere where it's probably not [under surveillance], I'm still, like here for example, I still feel like I'm like oh shit, someone's looking at me and being like judging me. So yeah, I do, I might not always be under surveillance but I do feel like I am (Jennifer).

Insightfully, Jennifer explains that because of all the times she felt aware of people surveilling her body and judging her for it, she feels like this is always happening, even when she

knows it may not be. This mindset arguably results in a self-conscious attitude and self-policing actions. This is reminiscent of Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, an architectural plan for a prison. This is a concept where, hypothetically, a prison guard tower is in the middle of a circle of prison cells where the guard can always see the inmates, but the inmates cannot see the guard, so the prisoners never know, for certain, if they are being watched. The prisoners have to assume that there is always a guard present, surveilling them, so they govern themselves accordingly (Foucault, & Milligan, T. (1999). Feminist renderings of Foucault's discussion apply the concept of the panopticon to women's bodies, i.e. they police their own bodies voluntarily, assuming that they will most likely be judged for them.

Church: Walking down the aisle/runway

Church is the place where women reported feeling like their bodies were under the most surveillance by others and like they were being judged negatively for how they look. This is very telling of the profound impact the Lebanese-Canadian community has on its members for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is ironic that women feel the most pressure to look a certain way in a supposedly modest and humble place where materialism should not be important to people. It is a place where people are encouraged to live their lives according to lessons from the Bible; be honest, kind, forgiving, helpful, and to not judge or hurt others, yet according to the participants' experiences, the actions of fellow parishioners and community members (although subtle at times) contradict these notions.

Participants identify the community's church to be a place where beauty ideals are taught and beauty standards are perpetuated among the Lebanese-Canadian women. It is there that they

also report feeling the most pressure to uphold these standards because they believe their bodies are under extreme surveillance by the other parishioners.

We are raised in a society where going to church, you always wanted to look your best and your parents always wanted you to look top (Rachelle).

She adds:

When I was younger and I would go to church, I saw all these women- a little older than me, right, and they were all so pretty, skinny, designer purse, nice hair, this and that, so I thought like you're supposed to look nice.

Rachelle illustrates how even from a young age, girls are taught by their parents that it is important to look their best when going to church. Her memories of the messages received by her parents reflect how her parents took pride in going to church with a well-dressed, presentable daughter. She also demonstrates that it is the lessons from her parents, as well as what she observes of other women in church, that create her understanding of what a woman should look like, eventually influencing her own beauty ideals and appearance managing choices. By mirroring each other, women are setting high standards for each other and perpetuating Lebanese-Canadian beauty ideals.

Amelia echoes these sentiments:

I think kind of like a big thing I noticed growing up because our only real exposure to the Lebanese community growing up was when we would go to church. I'm sitting here thinking like my Canadian friends go to church wearing sweatpants, how come I'm wearing heels at like 12 years old to church like that doesn't make any sense and I think that kind of like that idea that you have to always show your best self to the community around you because if you don't, then they're going to talk about you.

As demonstrated by Rachelle and Amelia, girls and young women receive strong messages from their parents about how they should present themselves in church, but there is added pressure on them from feeling like they are under surveillance when they are there because it is believed that if they are not presenting themselves according to the beauty standards, then they will be judged and gossiped about negatively by other parishioners.

When asked, “Do you ever feel like your appearance and/or your body is under surveillance by others?” one of the most profound scenarios of feeling this pressure came up among almost all of the participants; They describe walking down the aisle to receive communion as the time in church when they feel the most surveilled, judged and self-conscious:

Yes. I go to church and I look around and I swear many times, I've seen women go up and down- eyeing me from head to toe like all the time like, I go to do communion and I'm thinking in my head- who's looking at me and how many people? I walked back from communion and the same thing; I'm thinking who's looking at me and how many people so I without a doubt know more so within the Lebanese community that yeah I am (Rachelle).

Eve's response resembles that of Rachelle's:

Probably church; That's why I don't go very much. Well, I think it's part of the reason why I don't go very much. Even like, the way -it's not even just the way that you dress yourself and make yourself look like, how you move your body like everything is under surveillance and it makes you feel so out of control and very anxious. It's not a good feeling. Oh yeah. Oh my God. It's the worst. The worst part is going to get communion and feeling like- I'm just like what the- I don't even know how to fucking walk anymore and most the time I'm not wearing heels and I'm like I can't walk. Everybody's watching me, so that sucks. Yeah, I think I honestly am really happy growing up I was really in this fuck you mindset so I really didn't care as much. I think I wore Guns N Roses t-shirt and got communion once with like ripped jeans and I'm pretty sure I got so many stares but I really did this whole look ahead don't give a shit thing (Eve).

Even when asked, in general, if they feel like their bodies are under surveillance, most

women responded by saying yes, among the Lebanese community, and especially while attending church. From Rachelle's account, she remembers noticing other women, on several occasions, looking at her and witnessing them eyeing her entire body. Her response alludes to her feeling anxious about being gawked at while walking down the aisle to receive communion. Eve's response also describes these strong feelings of insecurity and anxiety while attending mass and moreso while waiting in line to receive communion. Her account of these experiences goes further inward by reflecting on how she feels about herself as she is walking up the aisle. As a result of the perceived onlookers, she describes feeling like she does not have control of her own body and like she does not know how to walk or carry herself during the procession. It is her belief that people are not just judging you based on the beauty standards but also on how you move and behave. Despite these feelings, she tries not to allow them to negatively affect her self-confidence and she proceeds by looking straight ahead and ignoring the people around her, however, she admits that it is these experiences and feelings of anxiety that prevent her from attending church often.

Comparing and contrasting

As described by the participants, attending church is the greatest source of pressure, intimidation, and perceived body surveillance, however, it is not the only place or setting that influences how they present themselves. Participants describe the differences in their beauty routines for when they are getting ready to go to different places and with different peer groups. What is common among all respondents is their descriptions of how they make the extra effort that goes into getting ready for Lebanese functions.

I would say that the Lebanese standard for women is definitely like to the nines. Like I would say that you know as a Lebanese woman you are expected to pretty much be to the nines like especially when you go to functions you know you buy your new dress and you get your hair done professionally, you get your makeup done professionally like you don't always do it yourself (Katie).

Jennifer mimics Katie's sentiments:

Definitely! I would depending on how my hair looks, I would most likely get a blow dry- go get it blow dried like re blow-dried professionally depending on the event I might get my makeup done but if it's just like you know like I said dinner with the girls or dinner with my sister-in-laws I might you know put a little bit more effort into my makeup it just depends but yes it would be much different. That routine that I just described is if I'm going to the mall or going to my friend's house like for the afternoon.

As Katie and Jennifer describe, going to a Lebanese event entails an even higher standard of appearance management than if one was planning on spending time with non-Lebanese friends. It is a common understanding that at these events, one is expected to look their best and one way to accomplish that is to buy a new outfit and hire professional hair and makeup artists for the day.

Aleyna adds the notion that by dressing in what is considered to be in-style and with designer pieces, one's self presentation is elevated even more:

Yes with the Lebanese I still put in extra effort. Maybe I'll wear something that's much more stylish or trendy but I'll pull out the designer stuff. I have some designer bags, some obviously designer jewelry and that might influence me to have those on just to be, you know, extra impressive- extra polished (Aleyna).

After respondents describe the efforts that they go through to present themselves according to what they believe is acceptable and impressive, I asked them why they do these things. Their responses illustrate a number of reasons:

Jennifer's reasoning for why it is important for her to surpass appearance expectations lies within the opinions of others:

Upping it a notch for events or hanging out with Lebanese people is also important to me because I do want to be perceived as- she does look good today or oh she's actually looking good.

From Jennifer's response, not only is it important for her appearance to be accepted by others, but one can infer that she believes that for other Lebanese people to regard her as 'looking good,' she must make the extra effort in how she presents herself.

Katie's response echos Jennifer's:

I think it comes down to reputation too and pride like I think like it's a certain way we carry ourselves we always want to put our best foot forward which is a good thing but it is also a little bit more pressure, I think, on people too. I think a lot of it comes too from representing ourselves well and you know looking well and I hate to say it like sometimes just to look well in the eyes of someone else but ultimately you matter most. If you're comfortable, that's all that matters but I think sometimes there is pressure because of that. I'm not speaking personally, but generally speaking, that's the sense I get. I probably put a little bit more effort in, again, because you know, they are my community. They are the people that I grew up with. They are the people that are around me all the time, you know? I don't know. I just want to represent myself well I guess- not just for my own sake but for my parents. I know that sounds weird but a lot of the time I always want to represent my parents well. I respect them so much and I want them to have pride in me and you know I want to give them a sense of pride I guess (Katie).

For Katie, doing herself up to look her best is important for a number of reasons. First, she mentions her reputation and maintaining a good reputation for her looks and personality by consistently managing her appearance to what she believes is considered beautiful by other Lebanese women. She admits that this reason can also be, at times, just for validation from others, but she believes that doing it for oneself is the most important. She places importance on

putting in more effort for when she is around other Lebanese people because of a sense of community. She also justifies her self-presentation efforts by acknowledging that maintaining a positive reputation for looking good gives her parents a sense of pride and accurately represents them: respectfully.

Betty describes a different reason:

Say I wore one (dress) the other week and then I wore one 2 months later- the same one, people are going to be like ohh you just-don't you have anything else like? It actually has the impression that you're poor (Betty).

For Betty, the extra effort is in purchasing something new to wear to an event. It is important for her to make this effort to avoid negative judgment by other attendees. It is her opinion that if people saw her wearing the same dress twice, shortly after wearing it the first time, then people would assume that she has nothing else to wear and that she does not have a lot of money.

It is important for women to make the extra effort in managing their appearances according to the Lebanese-Canadian standards for a number of reasons: 1) Women describe wanting to look their best for themselves and to accurately represent themselves; 2) they all admit that there is pressure to submit to the beauty standards of the Lebanese community; 3) they feel the need to be accepted by other Lebanese people; 4) to avoid negative judgment from other Lebanese-Canadians; 5) to maintain a perceived reputation; 6) to maintain a sense of pride for their families.

When asked directly whether they feel the need to compete with other women in regards to beauty, most participants say they do not. They do, however, acknowledge that competition exists within the community. Contrastingly, many of the women who report not competing with other women contradict this response in other parts of the interview. When the concept of competition arises in the interview, women reported it happening between other Lebanese-Canadian women and not with women of other ethnicities. However, they also report comparing themselves to women from other communities, ethnicities, and media platforms.

Jennifer describes feeling like she has to compete with her extended family:

Yes my sister-in-laws because they look like supermodels 24/7 and they have more children than I do. I don't know because like most women, a lot of women, pop out two, three or four kids and then they just let themselves go, but not my sister-in-laws. Like I said, they all look like a billion bucks every day and here's, you know, Jennifer, still in her twenties, but like weighs the most and has the dirtiest hair and has the shittiest manicurist, even before my kid. At least now I have a bit of an excuse but before the kid, it was like 'Okay, what is your excuse, Jennifer?

Jennifer describes feeling pressure to look a certain way because she feels like she is being compared to her sisters-in-law. From her perspective, because she is younger and has the least number of kids among them, she is expected to look just as good, if not better than them, but this is not how she perceives herself or how she believes others view her. Jennifer later describes how she will put more effort into getting ready to go out with her extended family than with other people because of this perceived comparison and judgement.

Michelle's input corroborates Jennifer's by stating that she too puts in more effort to looking a certain way when she knows she will be around other Lebanese-Canadians:

I mean it depends like I wouldn't say compete but I would say I do feel pressured to look a certain way if I'm with certain people. Like, if I know I'm going to be with like Jessica or something, I want to look nicer because I know she's going to look nice but I wouldn't be like thinking like, oh, I want to look better than her. I don't want to one-up her or anything. It's like I want to feel comfortable; It's like if you show up to an event and like everyone's dressed in fancy dresses and you're in like sweatpants, like it makes you feel uncomfortable, so I think in that sense, I feel like if I'm with Lebanese people, or I know I'm going to an event with Lebanese people, I'll definitely try harder and like wear nicer clothes or whatever but if I'm with Canadian people I don't really care that much.

Although Michelle rejects the notion that she competes with other women in terms of her appearance and wanting to look her best, she does admit that she will dress according to how she feels other Lebanese women will be dressed. She describes the motivation to come from wanting to feel more comfortable by dressing similarly or putting the same amount of effort into her appearance as she assumes they do. This shows that there is a sense of confidence and comfort that comes from successfully blending in with your peers based on outward appearances. Contrastingly, she does not feel the same pressure when she is planning on spending time with non-Lebanese people.

Jennifer and Michelle both describe scenarios where the main purpose of presenting oneself according to their presumption of other people's beautification efforts is to blend in with them. The aim is to successfully blend in by looking like you have matched your peers' standards and/or efforts in hopes of avoiding negative comparisons because by doing so, they cannot not be looked down upon as easily by others.

Even Eve, a woman who claims to rejecting traditional notions of beauty standards, describes the differences in how she manages her appearance between friend groups:

If I'm with Lebanese people it's more formal than if I'm with Canadian friends. I think that's like well, you know what everyone else is going to look like when you go to dinner at The Bicycle Thief and it's like okay well I'm not going to wear leggings and a sweater I'm going to wear pants and some sort of fancy shoe and more makeup and some jewelry, but I would still say, even though I'm being more formal- going to something like, that I'd still say I'm probably less formal than people that are there.

Coming from someone who willingly rejects many characteristics of feminine beauty, she too describes an increased level of planning and effort put into her look for going out around Lebanese people. In her response, it is clear that she plans what she is going to wear according to what she thinks other women there will be dressed like. The pressure to blend in applies to all community members and the beauty expectations are mentally inescapable. Women are aware of what is considered acceptable and undesirable; they manage this performative femininity within their personal comfort zones.

Bullying

As mentioned previously, participants describe how family and friends influence their ideas and choices around their appearances, but sometimes they take less gentle approaches in relaying their opinions. Bullying is not a rare occurrence, but it is often camouflaged within the premise of caring for the person.

Aleyna describes two scenarios of when her family criticized her body and encouraged her to take extreme measures to change her body to become what they perceive to be better than what it is:

My dad would say, 'Why can't you look more like her? See how perfect she is? Why can't you just make some changes and look more like her?' It would hurt. It would hurt so bad and to feel humiliated in front of everybody like that and to make it, to make you feel like the body you inhabit is something to be

ashamed of because it's not, you know, what somebody else thinks is attractive enough. That was tough.

She adds,

I only hear it from the Lebanese and specifically from all the female members of my Lebanese family, including the extended ones, because maybe they feel comfortable saying it but they put a lot of pressure on me to just get my stomach stapled or reduced, so that the change can be permanent and long lasting. And here's the great irony of it, one of my aunts did do it and it did work for the first few years but she learned to eat around the surgery and gained back the weight and she's still telling me, 'Well, you should still do it because maybe it will work better for you.' Isn't that weird. They make it sound easy too, they always say it in a way like it's so easy, it's so simple like everyone is doing it.

It is very clear how Aleyna was made to feel when she was told by family members that she should change her appearance to improve her looks. First she describes feeling embarrassed and emotionally hurt when her father compared her appearance to another woman's publicly, negatively criticizing her for not choosing to do anything to alter her body to look more like that of the other woman's. By pointing out that the other woman was perfect, in his opinion, he was sending a message to his daughter that her body was flawed, making her feel ashamed of herself. From her experiences including her aunt encouraging her to get her stomach stapled in order to lose weight, Aleyna was bullied into thinking her body is not attractive enough. Moreover, because of the way her family members suggest she should simply decide to make those drastic changes, she feels personally blamed for not making those choices for herself or subscribing to those standards.

Conforming: Damned if you do & damned if you don't

In regards to whether participants acknowledge and/or accept Wolf's concept of "The Beauty Myth," most participants reported that they believe beauty ideals are attainable. The

majority of women feel like if they have enough money, resources, and put enough effort into achieving a certain beauty ideal, they can accomplish societal representations of what is considered to be feminine beauty. One participant adds, however, that although someone may be able to achieve an accepted trait of feminine beauty, they, as a person, will never be fully accepted by others in this regard:

I feel like in a way they are attainable - in a way quote on quote, but you'll never have enough. You'll never be good enough anyway. There's always going to be someone there calling you out- whether it's to your face or not, just like the whole Krista's hair and the girl being like 'Which blonde one, none of them are blonde. That's not her real hair. Her real hair is not blonde; it's brown. She dyes it blonde, but it's like that's the way she looks right now - it's blond hair.' They want to make sure you know, no, she doesn't look like - we love calling out people for being fake but why does having my hair dyed mean fake, why does having lip injections make me fake, why does getting a nose job make me fake? Maybe it's just what you wanted (Krista).

Krista recollects a time when she was being judged by others on her hair color. Naturally, she has brown hair, but she gets it done professionally to turn it blonde. She describes a time when a group of girls were talking about her and one of them referred to her as 'the blonde one'. Another girl said that she is not truly blonde because she dyes it that color even though, now, her hair is blonde nonetheless. Krista interprets this experience as an example of how even when you attain a beauty ideal, however the method, other women will try to discredit you for it. In her opinion, they take it further to be a reflection of her personality. If she dyes her hair to change its natural color, she must be fake or inauthentic as a person.

Michelle describes a similar hypothetical scenario:

I don't even know because like I feel like no matter what she looks like there's always someone who's going to say something about her like, 'Oh yeah, she's beautiful but her nose is fake' or 'She's beautiful but her lips are fake'... like, 'She got her lips done'.

Both Krista and Michelle's examples illustrate an understanding that they have about negative connotations associated with modifying one's appearance. Even when a woman changes something about her appearance in accordance with beauty standards, they may still be subject to negative criticism for subscribing to these ideals by others. It is their understanding that no matter how close one gets to successfully accomplishing these beauty goals, there is always someone there pointing out an imperfection. The potential risks of not, at least, attempting to conform to these beauty ideals, however, may arguably subject a woman to more scrutiny from others.

Body Positivity: does it apply to us?

All the women in this study describe positive changes happening in Western beauty culture. They acknowledge that there is more diversity in the media, including the portrayal of different bodies and ethnicities, but they feel a lot more progress needs to be made. Moreover, they do not feel like these inclusions apply to them because the Lebanese-Canadian standards are so rigid and will unlikely accept the notion of body positivity, especially that of plus-size bodies.

The medical framing of fatness is a moral panic feeding into the stigma around being overweight. In a qualitative study on young Lebanese-Canadians by Abou-Rizk & Rail (2013), women identified healthy people as those who are thin and physically active. Some women go to extreme measures to achieve a body that they believe will be perceived by others as belonging to a thin, healthy, beautiful, and desirable woman. Women reported participating in body

monitoring practices such as dietary restrictions, weight loss pills, compulsive exercise, and plastic surgery. Fatness and thinness have come to be associated with judgments of character.

Aleyna describes the ideal changes she would like to see happen in beauty culture:

I want to see that shift in culture where it's more about body positivity to be the new standard. I would love to see that be the new standard. I would love to see that girl growing up not being as suppressed by social expectations that are impossible to reach. I want girls to grow up feeling good about their bodies. It's sad when a six-year-old says that she needs to be on a diet. That's so sad. You know I want to see girls being able to grow up running and playing and being happy and feeling beautiful and free and just being the best person they could ever be without the restraints and chains of beauty standards that you could never reach.

From her wishful thinking, Aleyna describes a liberation from oppressive beauty expectations. In her opinion, many good things would happen if a body positive shift were to dominate beauty culture. She believes that if more messages of body positivity were relayed, young girls could grow up feeling more confident, free, and happy being who they are. They would no longer be held back by trying to conform to the unattainable expectations, so they would have the capacity to enjoy their lives more.

Michelle's suggests that within today's Western beauty culture, there is an attempt to replace traditional ideals of beauty standards with the notion that all women are beautiful in their own ways:

I think that we, today,... the Western ideals try to make it seem like there are no Western ideals - like it tries to make it seem like you're beautiful no matter what color you are you're beautiful, no matter what body type you are but in reality I feel like we all kind of know that it's not like that and you're only really taken seriously if you're like thin; maybe not necessarily like your hair color have

to be blond you don't have to be brunette long hair short hair like I don't think that's necessarily something that's like this is what beauty looks like but I do think it's like body type mostly that's like this is how you should look like it's obviously like big is not as beautiful as you think it is even though social media and stuff companies try to play it like big is beautiful there is nothing wrong with being this size and whatever but I just feel like underlying that is just reality of we are just saying that to make you feel better but actually it's not really.

Michelle is not convinced by the newer body positivity campaigns presented in the media within beauty industries. She explains that although there is an attempt by beauty companies to include more diverse images of women in their advertisements, the traditional Western beauty standards still rank higher as the most desirable beauty ideals. She specifies by saying that although being blonde versus brunette may not matter as much as it did in the past, one standard that remains constant is one's body size. She believes that even though companies are presenting "plus-size" women in their campaigns, there is an underlying belief among the majority of people that being bigger is not actually considered to be as beautiful as being thin.

Katie echoes this:

It's almost contradictory because we have a society that's more open to women being comfortable in their own skin – that she's not doing things for other people; she's doing it for herself - not to compare yourself to someone else. That's a lot of the messaging that's coming out of a lot of different campaigns, but then you still see, dominantly, this gorgeous done-up woman on things so it's almost kind of a contradiction. You know, they're competing with one another so that's why I say it's kind of still in evolution because there's almost like this confusing phase. We're trying to be open and accepting but there is still that pressure, especially for the younger generation with social media and everything.

Krista describes her interpretation of the body positivity changes in Western beauty culture and how she believes they are not the dominant messages emitted and received through the media. She explains that although beauty culture is evolving to include a discourse involving

women's own choices, self-love, and acceptance, the contradicting messages of traditional beauty standards are confusing for people. She adds that the pressure to conform still exists, but the younger generations also have new media platforms whereby beauty-related messages are also passed on.

Jennifer sheds light on the contradictory messages in the media:

It's always changing. Right now, what do they say - strong is the new skinny? Toned abs, toned arms, big ass but like not too big. Eyebrows, you know, like the perfect eyebrows, but like kind of no makeup look. Like nobody looks good without makeup, but people think that's the new thing even though you're wearing a ton of makeup. They're not trying too hard but really you're actually trying very hard. I think that's the beauty standard right now.

Among the diverse bodies now represented in beauty campaigns, a fit, but slender, muscular female body is the dominant one. Jennifer acknowledges that this representation is newer and different from the skinny female body previously dominating the media, but the beauty ideals surrounding it are still strict. While presented as a beauty ideal to have a muscular body versus a skinny body, a woman must not be too muscular or big. Similarly, she describes a new trend where the ideal makeup look is to appear like you are not wearing any makeup - another confusing and contradicting expectation. Overall, in her opinion, the new standards may be more accepting of different body types, but they are only considered beautiful if their associated contingencies are fulfilled.

Krista describes how Lebanese-Canadian woman interpret the shift to campaigns promoting body positivity:

In terms of beauty again there's a lot of crossover - like a lot of Westernized beauty is Lebanese beauty like being thin, being this, being that, but

that kind of goes back too and Western beauty we're trying to be a lot like big is beautiful and every body shape is beautiful and every skin color is beautiful - doesn't matter how you look on the outside, it's on the inside that counts. In Lebanese beauty culture, we're still kind of a few steps behind that like we're still missing a few steps. We definitely aren't promoting big is beautiful, we definitely aren't promoting - like Lebanese people don't promote big is beautiful - we don't promote any specific idea but we definitely aren't promoting any of these differences being beautiful. My point is in Western beauty, I feel like they're making advances to being accepting whereas in Lebanese beauty we're still not that accepting. We still have these ideas of how we are supposed to look and how we're supposed to dress (Krista).

Although Krista acknowledges that Lebanese beauty ideals are based on Western standards, she believes that the newer messages of body positivity have not yet permeated Lebanese-Canadian beauty culture. In her description of how beauty companies are moving to include campaigns that promote messages like big is beautiful, all body shapes and sizes are beautiful, and all skin colors are equally as beautiful, she suggests that these messages are not accepted or promoted by the Lebanese-Canadian community – it perpetuates the strict expectations of traditional feminine beauty standards.

The Lebanese gaze

In almost every account of women describing their beauty experiences, there is mention of how other people may be judging them. Through the interviews, it is clear that all participants are hyper-aware of the notion that Lebanese people, whether family, friends, or community members, are formulating opinions about them based on their appearances and that this belief plays a major role in how women manage their looks and behavior. From their perspectives, they are governing themselves according to a more potentially harmful set of standards than that imposed by the male gaze.

Family/community pride

Why do these women care about what others think of them? Where does this mentality come from? Participants' testimonials demonstrate that they put much more effort into managing their appearances when they know they will be around other Lebanese people. In part, they attribute this conformity to a fear of criticism or judgment especially from their Lebanese peers, but it is also their general community membership that compels them to present themselves in this way according to set beauty norms.

When asked further about why she puts more effort into her appearance when she knows she will be surrounded by Lebanese people, Katie responds:

Probably yeah. I probably put a little bit more effort in. Again, because you know they are my community. They're my community. They are the people that I grew up with. They are the people that are around me all the time, you know? I don't know. I just want to represent myself well, I guess. Not just for my own sake, but for my parents. I know that sounds weird, but a lot of the time I always want to represent my parents well. I respect them so much and I want them to have pride in me and you know I want to give them a sense of pride I guess.

Katie's response demonstrates another layer of reasoning as to why she subscribes to the higher beauty expectations surrounding Lebanese women. Her encouragement comes from a sense of pride in her community and her family. Firstly, she explains wanting to represent herself in a way that complements her community membership as a fellow Lebanese person. Secondly, she connects presentation of self with a way of generating pride in her parents. She believes that if she presents herself according to the community's standards, she is showing solidarity with the community and making her parents proud of her. Thirdly, she believes that the way she presents herself, is, to others, a reflection of her parents or a representation of them.

Krista and Aleyna share these beliefs:

Well as little kids, if you were a kid and you act a certain way, then those people would be judging your parents, like ‘oh they didn’t raise them nice. They don’t take care of their kids properly, or whatever. If you were like a sloppy like messy person and your parents weren’t doing anything about it, then those people are probably judging your parents. But then as you’re older and you adopt those habits the people are judging you (Krista).

Krista’s explanation demonstrates the belief that throughout one’s entire life, they and their parents are judged according to how people are presented and how they present themselves. As children, the way one looks reflects on the parents, so if a child’s physical appearance does not align with the community standards, community members blame the parents. Once a person is old enough, the onus is on them to present themselves however they choose – any negative judgment is placed on them.

Sure, so I grew up in what I would describe as a traditional conservative household. My family was definitely more on the strict side. I always thought my white friends had more liberties but there was such a focus on family orientation. Family comes first. We take care of each other and that's something that I've always appreciated. There's also, I've noticed, a big focus on pride - embarrassment is not to be tolerated. I say it's more of a Lebanese thing, but my family taught me that trait - the way you present yourself to other people is how, like you are an agent representing the rest of the family so if you do something that someone might be perceiving as embarrassing - that's embarrassing for everybody, not just you. So it's really important to maintain the pride of everyone else even if you don't always agree with that (Aleyna).

Participants describe how they were raised to believe that the way they look and act reflects back on their parents. Although they want to make their parents proud, ultimately the desire to conform to the community’s beauty and behavior standards stems from avoiding embarrassment. The reoccurring theme among participants’ responses is that there is a fear of judgment by other Lebanese-Canadian community members. Avoiding negative judgment

strongly reinforces beautification efforts and behavior and a woman consequently feels extreme validation in herself and her devotion to her family.

The benefits of conforming to beauty ideals:

In addition to avoiding negative judgment and embarrassment, participants describe a number of benefits to conforming to beauty standards:

Aleyna says,

So let's say you are able to attain the closest thing to the Western Standard. You know what I honestly do think is that you will get treated better. When you look a certain way, I think people aren't going to make as many flash judgements about you. They'll see you as oh like she looks really smart, she looks really put together, she looks elegant and if you've got the, you know, polite attitude attached to it as well, then people will vie for your attention and more for marriage material.

In her statement, Aleyna highlights four benefits to conforming to Western standards. She believes that one will receive special treatment from others, that people will not make negative judgements about you; they will, instead, make positive assumptions about you and consequently behave more positively towards you. She adds that once people get to know you as presentable and well-mannered, more people will want your attention. She even goes as far as to say that a woman's marriageability increases the closer they get to conforming to Western beauty standards.

Krista echoes these sentiments:

I think in Lebanese culture we do emphasize, even if it's just jokingly, there's a hint of realistic-ness to it, when like your mom or the people who are a bit older than you are like, 'oh you need to look nice; maybe you'll talk to a boy tonight.' Like, once you're at the right age, I guess you need to look good, like who knows who you'll see tonight. Who knows who you'll see at church. Who knows who you'll see at the festival or whatever. You need to present yourself to be wifey material, like your marriageability. I feel like our looks are emphasized a

lot in terms of being able to find a husband because if you go to these Lebanese events looking like a slob or not even a slob if you just don't look your best or if you don't look what they think is beautiful than you might not find a husband. That's not necessarily what I believe though, that's just the message - that's definitely the message I received from Lebanese.

As illustrated above, getting married is high on the Lebanese priority list. Although many young Lebanese women are discouraged from dating or even forbidden from having boyfriends in their teenage years, the enthusiasm around getting married in the future starts from before babies are even born. Some people even go as far as saying to a couple who are expecting a baby, “farhit arouse” or “farhit areese,” meaning ‘to the birth of a bride or groom.’ Before kids can even understand the sayings, traditionally, Lebanese people send well wishes for their future weddings. “Farahteek” or “farahtek” are common phrases used to tell a person the equivalent to ‘here’s to when you have your wedding celebration.’ Therefore, arguably, the importance of achieving physical beauty can, at least partly, be correlated to the significance of finding the best marriage partner. This topic deserves to be explored independently and in further depth because of how prevalent this belief is in the community.

Contrastingly, Katie gives shares another benefit:

Probably mostly self-care, like you know, when you’re aspiring to a certain ideal, it also allows you to discover yourself and your comfort levels so it might, you know, motivate you to take a little bit more care of yourself in terms of hygiene or in terms of other elements like finding out what works and what doesn't work for you, in terms of building confidence. I think again if you're doing it though for the sole purpose of pleasing someone else or are trying to look exactly like someone else, you're failing. But if you're doing it to find your medium, like your ground, then I think it's a good thing. I don't think there's an issue with it (Katie).

For her, a benefit of exploring beauty standards is self-exploration while attempting to achieve specific body goals. During the process, she believes that one is able to discover their

own comfort levels, take care of their bodies, improve hygiene, and determine what beautification practices increase self-confidence. She reiterates that as long as the purpose of your appearance management is to please yourself, then subscribing to the beauty standards can be beneficial.

Additionally, Katie and others report finding pleasure in some beautification practices:

I love getting a manicure and pedicure. I love getting my hair done – like, I love getting pampered. I enjoy it - it's relaxing (Katie).

As she concisely puts it, many women just enjoy the processes and the products of beautification procedures.

Self-confidence and fulfilling potential

More profoundly, most women report that the greatest benefit to subscribing to beauty ideals is the confidence they gain:

I think that the benefit is confidence. I think if people think and feel they look beautiful, they do act more confident. They have more, they're more willing to go out there and put themselves out there and meet people and socialize with people (Betty).

Krista's response build on this point:

Because the way you perceive yourself, in terms of looks, can really affect everything else about you. I keep saying confidence but confidence isn't just about, oh I can walk with my head held high. Confidence makes you do amazing things. If you feel good about the way you look, I know for me, when I feel I look good, I do better in life. A lot of people I've talked to say they go to their exam in sweatpants but I talked to other people who say I like to look good when I go to my exam because I want to feel good going into this test, and if I feel good, I perform better and it's kind of just like an all-around thing - if you have that confidence and you are walking through life with your head held higher, you are more likely to take opportunities that you may not have taken if you felt, like,

gross today or if you felt like you didn't work your best today, so I think it is overall to us, it really is important (Krista).

The power of confidence is the greatest benefit to conforming to beauty ideals, as reported by most participants. It is their belief that if one aspires to achieve beauty standards, they have the capacity to increase their self-confidence - as long as they are doing it for themselves mostly. It is from this increased self-confidence that women believe they are empowered to do more of what they want in life. "Look good, feel good," (Krista) do good. Although they believe that it is *their* confidence that allows them to take on challenges, the source of the confidence comes from attaining beauty ideals.

Aleyna explains how being considered beautiful by others may lead to professional advancement:

There have been studies done for both men and women that people who are perceived as more beautiful tend to make more money - like, they get the promotions first. They are more likely to get the job. They're more likely to be likeable. They're more likely to be listened to, but then at the same time, like, that only goes so far - I think that that's not necessarily always the case in every profession, especially if you're talking about the woman side of things, especially if it's a profession that women do not dominate or are not 50/50.

From her point, and based on studies she has heard about and in accordance to Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990), beautiful women are more likely to earn more money, get promotions sooner, are considered to be more likeable by others, and more likely to be taken seriously. She does acknowledge, however, that being considered beautiful can only get you so far in a profession that is male dominated.

The importance of conforming to beauty ideals

When asked about the importance of beauty, some participants misunderstood the question. I asked them to rank the importance of being considered beautiful on a scale of one to ten - ten being extremely important. Some women thought I was asking how they believed people would rank them on a beauty continuum, ten being extremely beautiful. Other women needed more clarification, wanting to know if I was asking them how important it is to consider yourself to be beautiful or for other people to consider them to be beautiful. Interestingly, some valuable information emerged from this mistaken understanding of the question.

As Katie explained:

I think every woman wants to be considered beautiful and everybody has their own idea of what beauty is. You could say beauty and it could be inner beauty. Like if I were to ask [husband's name] am I beautiful, he would say 10, and what woman doesn't like to hear that - you know what I mean? So, I think it's reassuring. I think every woman wants to be I would say 10. Everybody wants to feel beautiful and it doesn't have to just be appearance-wise because it could be their whole being, right?

Katie's response to my question indicates that it is her belief that all women want to be considered beautiful by others. She explains that they may want to be viewed as physically beautiful and/or embodying beauty as a person. Her response also suggests that it is important for her and maybe others to be considered beautiful by the people who are most significant to them. Her answer to this question can also be understood differently in terms of how she interpreted the significance of a 1-10 scale because she describes her husband calling her a 10 and other women wanting to be viewed as a 10. Although this interpretation of the question is not what I intended, it is noteworthy that some women associated it with women being degraded to a ranking. Arguably this interpretation demonstrates the pervasiveness of the now famous, male gaze.

I mean like it depends. I mean for themselves, like for them to consider themselves beautiful, like obviously 10. I think that's what matters the most but at the same time, I don't want to say it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks because we all know we care about what other people think like no matter what (Michelle).

From Michelle's response, it is most important that women consider themselves to be beautiful, however, she also makes a generalization about how all women want to be considered beautiful by others, whether people like to admit it or not. She does not specify whether she means physical beauty, inner beauty or both.

Aleyna's response adds to the idea that, for some women, considering themselves to be beautiful is of utmost importance:

It's so important that I put my best face forward and I feel confidence. It gives me a confidence boost. I feel powerful and I feel like my inner self is being reflected more so. I personally prefer the more polished look because it enhances my sense of confidence and wellbeing. And it just makes me feel more brave to go and interact with other people if I feel like I look good and put together. It does feel nice when you get those compliments (Aleyna).

Aleyna places high importance on being considered beautiful by herself and others. Firstly, Aleyna's response tells us that she gains confidence when she believes that she is successful in adhering to beauty standards. Secondly, it makes her feel powerful, Thirdly, she feels like her personality is better expressed in her appearance. Fourthly, she places importance on people accepting her appearance and feeling validation when she receives compliments from them. Overall, subscribing to beauty norms that she knows others will accept, gives her the added self-confidence that she needs to interact with people.

Benefits to not conforming

Only one participant acknowledges her rejection of traditional notions of feminine beauty standards. She reports the negative consequences for not conforming and the benefits to rejecting beauty standards:

Yeah! I really internalized a lot of the negative stuff but then I think I used that negativity to then represent myself more which I guess was a good thing, and it went in a different direction. And that was a lot of fire. I remember feeling all that negative energy and then putting it into a look that I would create that I knew was different and maybe, you know, just not accepted by people around me and some of them who were going to care about me. But I still felt really empowered by like, using that negative energy to express myself (Eve).

Eve describes her personal experiences of internalizing negative feedback from people about how she was dressing. She explains how she used that negativity by channeling it into unique styles of clothing, which she knew was not going to be accepted by the people around her, including people close to her. Nonetheless, she describes feeling empowered by her choices and describes the process as an expression of self.

She goes further to regard expressions of feminine beauty as a potential learning opportunity for those who do subscribe to beauty norms:

I guess it makes them self-reflect a lot about what they feel they have to be and what makes them happy - like, I hope that that's something that enters their mind, but I think it becomes a learning experience like, learning about okay, I feel like I need to look like this, so let me try it and then hopefully realizing that does this make me happy or does this not make me happy? Other than that, I don't think they benefit too much unless they're inspired by something and that makes them happy, like I said.

In her opinion, the benefits for women who do (or do not) attempt to subscribe to beauty standards is the potential to learn about oneself. She describes a process of self-reflection happening while trying (or not trying) to embody these standards. She believes that women are

able to learn about what makes them happy and what makes them feel good about themselves while engaging (or not engaging) in these beautification practices.

As the women's accounts thus far have indicated, there is an acknowledged high standard of physical self-presentation that encompasses Lebanese-Canadian women's lives. It goes far beyond looking excellent all the time, however. Women, today, are expected to be perfect in various roles and stages in life.

As Eve puts it,

I think that there's this image of perfection that's almost like more overwhelming than the Western standards of beauty when I think of specifically locally here, I would say there's this image of perfection being portrayed very often, like frequently, by like really young ages (Eve).

Although women acknowledge the tremendous amount of pressure on them to present themselves physically according to Lebanese-Canadian standards of female beauty, this outer appearance is only one of many expectations of perfection that this demographic of women face. From an early age, participants describe the behavioral expectations put on them by their parents. They were expected to be polite, well-mannered, respectful, and kept looking presentable at all times.

As they grow, so do the pressures imposed on them. Along with strict rules regarding where they are allowed to go, what activities they can participate in, and who they are permitted to hang out with, girls begin to learn, early on, that there are standards associated with their presentation of self. They learn lessons on female beauty taught by their family members, peers, through observation of community members and the many images of feminine beauty in the

media. Altogether, they decide (not without consequences) which aspects of these messages they accept or reject while creating their personal style/appearance.

As they continue to grow, expectations of successful life endeavours are added to body presentation pressures. By the time a girl graduates from high school, she is expected to have a flawless reputation: perfectly well-behaved, polite, respectable and respectful of others, social, popular, well-dressed, smart, ambitious, and responsible. For example, university acceptance is not considered a major accomplishment, it is merely assumed. Although getting a job with respect to your university degree is considered commendable, this is the time in a Lebanese-Canadian woman's life when she may start feeling more pressure to get married. This is the stage in a young woman's life where all those previous lessons and messages about how a woman should look and act are reinforced to her. Now, she is expected to be ready for marriage and motherhood and the pressure continues to build. A whole new set of expectations arise as a woman enters this stage in her life, but what remains constant and at the top of the priority lists, are the unrealistic beauty standards.

As a wife and mother managing a household and caring for children, Rachelle describes the message she may send to people in her community if she were to stop the beauty practices after marriage and a baby:

I don't want to be the person that people look at and say "oh she just had a baby and she's married and she doesn't even have 5 minutes to fix her hair - like, tough life. Sucks for her. People would probably be like 'Oh that's weird that she stopped, like, she used to do it for almost 7 years now, why did she stop all of a sudden? I wonder if it's because the money is tight' (Rachelle).

Rachelle believes that her appearance says a lot about her lifestyle to other people in the Lebanese-Canadian community. From her perspective, if she were to stop doing all the

beautification practices she has done for many years, people would assume that she has a difficult time with managing her responsibilities in life and maintaining her appearance; they might pity her for lack of time and monetary resources needed to support her appearance management.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusions

From the very early development of this research topic, I struggled to find literature on Lebanese-Canadian women and beauty. There are many ethnic studies out there about the concept of beauty but only a couple related to Lebanese women. This lack of literature somewhat limited the direction to take this project, and required my interview guide to be very long. Even after multiple revisions, I realized during the interviewing process that this topic is too broad for just one study. Within the data collection, too many topics arose. They are all relevant to this study, but each subject can be made into an entire project itself. For example, the cultural emphasis on marriage for women is complex enough and so significant that it, alone, could form the basis of a Ph.D. dissertation. What interests me most, however, given my current position in life, is the topic of motherhood. I always knew beauty pressures were extreme for women in my community, but I did not fully understand the magnitude of pressures and expectations that came along with becoming a wife and mother. As if beauty culture does not produce enough pressure to drive some women to extreme measures, the expectations, standards, and competitiveness that arise once a woman becomes a mom surely warrants its own study.

While the results of this study are insightful and informative on the beauty culture experiences of Lebanese-Canadian women in Halifax, the sample size and qualitative research design do not allow for a generalization of experiences and beliefs to all Lebanese-Canadian women across Canada. Additionally, the women interviewed are all second generation members of a small community in the small province of Nova Scotia, so in many ways their experiences may differ from other age groups and Lebanese-Canadian women living in larger cities and communities like Montreal, for example. The women interviewed ranged between 19 and 45

years of age and their experiences are specific to their ages and the ever-evolving beauty culture of their time. Their attitudes are likely different from their immigrant mothers because of the generational difference and locale within which they were raised.

The research findings, however, do add to understanding the pressures relatively young, Lebanese-Canadian women face living in a small city within Western society. Considering the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, physical appearance, age, socio-economic status, religion, marital status, and education, this research project foregrounds the words of Lebanese-Canadian women in Halifax as they struggle to negotiate and navigate their self-identities within a beauty-obsessed culture.

Designed and interpreted using social constructionist theoretical frameworks, findings show how one's individuality manifests in the management and appearance of the body achieved through the consumption of chosen products and activities advertised in a modern capitalist society (Demello, 2014, p. 213). Drawing from a postmodern perspective, the women in the study do pick and choose from different aspects of culture and from various people and places to construct their appearances and identities. As Lebanese people, we are influenced by the culture that exists in Lebanon - our customs, traditions, and the teachings of our immigrant parents. As Canadians, we have the privilege of living in a multi-cultural society, which offers a limitless exchange of knowledge with our communities. As educated women, we are empowered by learning about institutions that are beneficial and detrimental to us, informing how we navigate ourselves in a patriarchal society.

From these enriching perspectives, it may look like this demographic of women have everything going for them, but as the findings of this study show, there is something still holding

us back. It comes as no surprise to me, as the researcher and fellow community member, that beauty culture is adding an enormous amount of pressure on young Lebanese-Canadian women. As repeatedly illustrated by the women interviewed, a unique beauty culture exists within this community, but partly owing to its extremely high standards, it is hurting these women. Directly connected to these standards is the consensus that Lebanese-Canadian women are severely judging each other on outward appearances. They are experiencing body anxiety because they are highly scrutinized within Western society and within their own community. The “male gaze” represents how all women and their bodies are asymmetrically represented in Western societies from a heterosexual masculine point of view emphasizing men’s idealized woman. The Lebanese gaze is another microscope with which women are scrutinized and oppressed. This sets women up for failure and increases body anxiety because these standards are impossible to attain, yet “they know they are always on display, both from their own experiences of being constantly watched, but also from looking at images of other women in the media” (Demello, 2014, 16 &17)

Even when women attain a body goal, participants agree that they are still being judged negatively. As mentioned previously, when inconsistencies in a person’s character are witnessed by others, that person may feel embarrassed because it “signifies a threat to a person's standing as a full, competent member of society as it reveals a gap between their virtual identity (how they see themselves) and their actual social identity (how others see them)” (Shilling, 2012,88). This is evident when women reported being called fake for altering their appearances in accordance with the beauty ideals. It is the idea that their body modifications, although in line with beauty standards, becomes a reflection of who they are as a person - unnatural and fake. Most people

experience this fear of not being accepted by others as a type of body anxiety which is why so many people perceive their bodies as projects that always need to be worked on in order to improve (Shilling, 2012, 39). This is especially the case for this group of Lebanese-Canadian women because the beauty standards that govern the community are unattainable, especially with all the expectations that come with their traditional gender roles. Contrasting to the belief system in Lebanon, women, here, feel the need to keep any body modifications a secret from others to avoid negative judgement for taking those extreme measures. It is interesting to note that in order to avoid judgement for not conforming to beauty ideals, women may subject themselves plastic surgery to achieve noticeable changes in their appearance, yet they are aware of the possible negative judgement they may receive from others if people become aware of the decision to go under the knife. The physical changes should be drastic enough to warrant such measures, but natural enough so it is not obvious that they had the procedures. Regardless, women are left feeling anxious about their bodies and wondering if they still passing as authentically themselves or not fake in the eyes of others.

They are faced with having to negotiate their gendered identities as visible minorities within settings where they never feel like they fully fit in. With their non-Lebanese peers they stand out because they do not fit the Anglo-European look and with their Lebanese peers they stand out for never being able to fully reach the beauty ideals of that culture. The cultivation of bodily appearance, as Giddens attributes to the expression of identity, is actually the manifestation of people's deeper concern to take control of their bodies. "The more tradition loses its ability to provide a secure sense of self, the more individuals have to negotiate and attach importance to lifestyle choices" (Shilling, 2012, 191). These women pick and choose from

Western beauty culture, Lebanese traditions, and local Lebanese beauty expectations to construct their identities, adding to the existing cultural pressures of societal gender roles. Giddens' concept of 'lifestyle' refers to the set of practices chosen by an individual to narrate their identity. For this group of Lebanese women, treating their bodies as projects that always need improving is a lifestyle, but one that is very difficult to live.

Appendix #1

Invitation script for mass Facebook and Instagram Post

Dear, Facebook/Instagram friends:

I'm looking for Lebanese-Christian women between the ages of 19 and 45 to participate in my Master's thesis research. My study is on your experiences of beauty culture and I'm looking for individuals willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with me. Your identity and your responses will be kept strictly confidential and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes. Your participation would be greatly appreciated because I know each of you can provide rich insight on this topic, so what do you say? Are you willing to share your opinions and experiences with me? If so, please send me a private message, email, text, or call me. If you think someone you know would be interested in participating, please don't hesitate to share my contact information with them.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Cheers,

Joanne Metlej

joannetoulany@gmail.com

(902) 293-3810

Appendix #2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Fitting in and/or Standing out: Lebanese-Canadian Women's experiences of Beauty Culture as they Negotiate their Racial Identities

SMU REB #

Joanne Metlej

Women and Gender Studies

Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3

(902) 293-3810; joannetoulany@gmail.com

Dr. Audrey MacNevin

Supervisor

Sociology and Criminology

(902) 420-5883; audrey.macnevin@smu.ca

INTRODUCTION

- My name is Joanne Metlej and I am a Masters of Arts candidate in Women and Gender Studies in Saint Mary's University. As part of my masters thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. MacNevin.
- I am not receiving economic benefits from this study.
- You are being invited to participate in this research on beauty culture. By volunteering to take part in this study, you will be answering questions about your experiences of beauty culture in a one-on-one interview with me.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

- There is no research on how Lebanese-Canadian women experience Western beauty standards, ideals, ideologies, and practices which is the main purpose for my proposed research project.
- It is crucial to research this topic because it is important to learn about the pressures that Lebanese-Canadian women may feel living within Western society as visible minorities.

- My overall research objective is to gain a rich understanding of how Lebanese-Canadian women accept, reject, and negotiate their gendered appearances within a Western society

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART

- I am looking for Lebanese-Canadian women from Halifax, NS between the ages of 19 and 45 years old.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING MEAN?

- We will arrange to meet at either a private work room on the SMU campus or in a private room at a public library.
- After you sign the consent form, I give you a copy and contact information for counselling services, we will start the interview. I will ask you open-ended questions ranging from your upbringing as a girl, relationships, work-life, beauty routines, goals, beliefs, and motivations.
- the interview length will be guided by your responses and how much you are willing to share with me. I predict the interview will take approximately 90 minutes.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?

- With this research, we will be filling in the gap in existing literature about Western beauty standards because I will conduct the first qualitative research on Lebanese-Canadian women's experiences of Western beauty and/or Lebanese beauty pressures they may be facing while living in Canada.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?

- There are no foreseeable risks with this research and the only potential harm is the discomfort you may feel if you do not want to answer a question that I ask you. If I notice that you are seemingly uncomfortable replying to a question, I will stop and reassure you that you do not have to answer anything that you do not want to.

WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION?

- We will arrange to meet at either a private work room on the SMU campus or in a private room at a public library.

- Your identity will be kept confidential. Any notes I take during the interview, will not contain any of your identifiable details.
- As a way to protect your privacy and confidentiality, you will have the option of choosing your own pseudonym or allowing me to choose one for you
- My thesis supervisor will have access to the data, however, only I will know which responses came from each participant. The signed consent forms will be safely stored in her office.
- I will also give you the opportunity to review the transcript and clarify and/or elaborate on details of your responses
- Once my thesis project is complete, I will erase all audio files and shred any paper documents that may compromise participants' identities.
- If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, you can sign the feedback letter and I will email a copy once the thesis is finalized.

WHAT TYPE OF COMPENSATION IS AVAILABLE FOR PARTICIPATION?

- There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

- You are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.
- If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview has started, please let me know if you would also like the data collected up to that point to be discarded.

HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- If you wish to receive more information about this study or if you have any questions, you can ask me or contact my thesis supervisor.

Dr. Audrey MacNevin
audrey.macnevin@smu.ca

Certification:

The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 420-5728.

Signature of Agreement:

Fitting in and/or Standing out: Lebanese-Canadian Women's experiences of Beauty Culture.

I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I give permission to have this interview audio recorded

I would prefer not to be audio recorded

I understand that a pseudonym is necessary to protect my identity

I wish to view my transcript to validate my account

I wish to have a summary of the findings emailed to me

email: _____

Participant

Signature : _____ Name (Printed) : _____

Date : _____

Principal

Investigator

Signature : _____ Name (Printed) : _____

Date : _____

Appendix #3

Interview Questions

Demographics

1. In what year were you born?
2. With which ethnicities do you identify as?
3. What language(s) do you speak?
4. Have you visited Lebanon before?
5. Can you tell me about your upbringing as a Lebanese-Canadian girl?

Beauty Culture while Growing Up

6. What beauty/appearance related messages did you receive while growing up?
7. Tell me about your experience of Western beauty culture growing up?
8. Can you please describe your beauty or grooming routine while growing up?
9. Did you feel like your appearance allowed you to blend in or stand out from your peers?
Why?
 - A. What kind of conversations about appearance and beauty did you have with your peers?
10. What were the ideal feminine beauty standards when you were growing up? Can you describe a hypothetical woman who embodied all the ideal beauty standards?
 - B. In your opinion, were these standards realistic and attainable?
 - C. Did you subscribe to any of these standards? Why or why not?

Beauty Standards Today

11. According to Western beauty standards of today, how would you describe the perfect-looking woman?
 - D. How does your description differ from the mainstream image of a beautiful woman?
 - E. Are today's standards attainable for women? How or why not?
 - F. In your opinion, how are beauty standards created? Who creates them and why?
12. What messages are girls and women receiving from beauty culture today?
 - G. Do you approve of these messages? Why or why not?
13. In your opinion, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely), how important is it for a woman to be considered beautiful? Why?
14. How do women benefit from ascribing to beauty ideals?
 - H. How are women limited by subscribing to beauty ideals?
15. Do you believe there are negative connotations associated with beautiful women or beautification? If so, what are they and where do you think they come from?
16. Is there anything you would change about beauty culture? Why or why not?

Personal Experiences

17. What is your beauty/grooming routine from day to day? Can you tell me about your routine from the time you wake up?

- I. Is there any form of grooming that you do because you feel like you have to? If so what and why? Why do you feel like it is compulsory? What would happen if you did not do this?
 - J. Is there any form of grooming that you do voluntarily? If so, what and why? What about this activity is enjoyable for you?
18. Can you tell me about a time when you loved the way you looked? Describe your appearance, setting, and why you were pleased with yourself.
19. Can you tell me about a time when you were unhappy about the way you looked? Describe your appearance, setting, and why you were not pleased with yourself.
20. Can you tell me about a time when someone negatively commented on your appearance?
21. Tell me about what you would do to get ready for a special event like a wedding, for example. Why are these processes important to you?
- K. What would happen if you attended an event without getting ready like this?

Church

22. How would you describe your church attire?
23. Is there a certain way that you would never look and/or dress yourself to go to church?
- L. If yes, describe this look and explain why not.
 - M. If no, please explain.

Dating and Marriage

24. Let's say you had a date tonight. Can you tell me about the process you would go through to get ready?
- N. What message would you want your date to receive from your appearance? Why?
- O. In your opinion, how would your date want you to look? Why?
25. What is the relationship between a woman's beauty and marriageability?
26. Do you ever get dressed according to what you think your significant other/romantic interest might like? Why or why not?
27. What is an appropriate appearance for a woman who is married? Why?

Body Modification

28. Is there anything about your body or appearance that you wish was different? Please explain what and why.
- P. If you could change this about your body/appearance, would you? Why or why not?
- Q. What would you need to do to make this change?
29. Have you ever had any cosmetic surgeries? If so, what did you have done and why?
- R. Can you tell me about that/those experiences?
- S. How does the change make you feel?
30. What do you do or get done professionally to manage your hair (the hair on your head and body hair)? What is your motivation for doing this?
31. Have you ever tried dieting? Why or why not?
- T. What kind of diet did you try?

U. How long did you diet for?

V. How did it make you feel mentally and physically ?

32. Tell me about your exercising practices.

Friendships

33. Do your friends influence your decisions of how to present yourself? If so, how? If not, why not?

W. If you were going to hang out with a friend who usually dresses up, would you keep that in mind as you got yourself ready? Why

X. To what degree are your conversations with friends about beauty culture? Do you feel expected to talk about this subject with other women? Please explain.

34. Do you ever feel like you have to compete with other women on the basis of beauty? Please explain.

35. Do you ever feel like your appearance and/or your body is under surveillance by others? Please explain.

Makeup

36. Tell me about your makeup routine. When do you apply it, to which areas, and why?

Y. What is your philosophy of makeup?

Social Media

37. Are you active on social media? If not, why not?

Z. If so, how do you present yourself on Facebook, Instagram, and/or Snap Chat?

38. Do you keep up with beauty/style trends? Why or why not?

AA. If so, how do you stay up to date with styles?

39. What is your greatest strength/best quality as a woman? Please explain.

40. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences or opinion of beauty culture?

Appendix #4

FEEDBACK LETTER

Fitting in and/or Standing out: Lebanese-Canadian Women's experiences of Beauty Culture as they Negotiate their Racial Identities

SMU REB File #

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Women and Gender Studies

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Dr. Audrey MacNevin

Supervisor

Sociology and Criminology

(902) 420-5883; audrey.macnevin@smu.ca

Date

Dear,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to obtain rich data from Lebanese Christian women living in Halifax on their beauty ideologies and practices.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of how Lebanese Christian women self identify, present themselves, and their influences/motivations for doing so while living in the West.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with my thesis supervisor and the defence committee.

If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the top of the page.

If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address. When the study is completed, I will send it to you.

The study is expected to be completed by December 2018

As with all Saint Mary's University projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728 or ethics@smu.ca.

email: _____

Appendix #5

Free Counselling Services

Community Mental Health Clinics are staffed by a team of professionals who provide a range of services to help people manage their mental illness and improve their mental health. Services are available at no cost to adults:

Bayers Road Community Mental Health: (902) 454.1400

Bedford/Sackville Community Mental Health: (902) 865.3663

Cole Harbour/Eastern HRM Community Mental Health: (902) 434.3263

Dartmouth Community Mental Health: (902) 466.1830

West Hants Community Mental Health: (902) 792.2042

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