

DOCTORAL THESIS

"I want to be like Beyonce": Body Work among Middle Class Ghanaian Women

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HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Doctor of Philosophy

THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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**“I Want to Be Like Beyoncé”: Body Work among Middle Class Ghanaian
Women**

AGBLEVOR Afi, Emelia

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Principal Supervisor:
Prof. LAI Gina W. F. (Hong Kong Baptist University)**

August 2021

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Committee (REC). I have attempted to identify all risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical approval, and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Emetta', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Date: August, 2021

ABSTRACT

Research in body work, that is, work performed on one's body for aesthetic modification or maintenance has particularly received increased attention due to its linkage with a presentation of self-identity in a consumer culture. In recent years, globalization characterized by the increasing dispersing of capital, a global media culture, accelerations in travel and communication technologies, increasing rates of migration among others, has led to a formation of mixed cultured identities where local meanings of body work are practised alongside a global culture (Callero 2003). Yet, scholarship in body work has mostly focused on countries in the Global North. This study, therefore, explores how globalization is indigenized and negotiated in reference to the body ideal and subsequent body work among urban middle-class women in Ghana, a country in the Global South.

This research project moves beyond the reductionisms of the structure/agency divide of past studies and uses corporeal realism as a theoretical frame. This is pertinent as corporeal realism offers an analysis that prioritises the body key in how individuals create meanings for the body (Shillings 2005; 2012). Corporeal realism recognises the body as possessing agency and capacities that cannot be reduced to social structures but capable of mediating these structures as an enfolded entity. Here the body is read as a source of body work, as a location of body work and having generative capacities (Shillings 2005; 2012).

A grounded theory approach was adopted for data collection and analysis. Data was collected qualitatively through in-depth interviews with 35 (thirty-five) urban middle-class Ghanaian women. Participant observation was done at a gym for 3 (three) months as well as online ethnography in an all-women's Facebook group for 6 (six) months. Findings indicate that while it may seem that there is not a unified

ideal, the overarching feature of an ideal body is one with prominent curves and a significant emphasis on the backside. This body is described as one that is “toned”, “smart and curvy” and, “not too slim, not too fat”. While there is an influence of the Western ideals of thinness, middle class Ghanaian women draw on specific famous female celebrities associated with the African American culture with regard to how they construct their body ideals. Middle-class Ghanaian women resist the archetypal Western ideal of the slim and slender body while constructing their ideal body type. Subsequently, various body work activities such as dieting, use of corsets, slim teas and, other supplements were engaged in by the middle-class Ghanaian woman to achieve this ideal. Social media use fueled by internet penetration, class status and, gender roles played varying roles in how these women engaged and negotiated body work practices. Even though some women embodied agency in navigating social norms and structures in creating meanings of body work for themselves, others were malleable and were strongly influenced by social norms and structures in the way they practised body work. Corporeal realism allowed for an understanding of bodywork that went beyond a binary approach.

This study makes theoretical contributions to body work studies by extending corporeal realism and proposing glo-corporeal realism. Glo-corporeal realism calls for attention to how the body is worked upon by centering globalization as well as racial affinities; a closeness to similar others present in specific geographies in how body work is practised.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Body in a Globalized Culture

“The body, it soon became clear, could be all things to all people” (Shilling 2005:8).

The body ideal has gained prominence in recent decades in a consumer culture which promotes a visual preoccupation with the size, shape and, appearance of bodies (Crossley 2001; Featherstone 2010; Giddens 1991; Shilling 2012). More people are spending large amounts of money on their bodies than ever in the history of humankind. There are thousands of surgeries and procedures to change one’s look and obtain any desirable appearance if only one has the financial means. From facial surgeries to labiaplasty, no part of the body is spared. Globally, cosmetic surgeries have increased. Overall, 13 million Americans had cosmetic medical procedures in 2016, representing an 831% rise since 1997. More than \$15 million were spent on both surgical and nonsurgical aesthetic surgeries in America (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery 2017). Various studies show that approximately 40-60% of the USA population use some form of nutritional supplements to enhance their bodies (Pillitteri et al. 2008; Pittler and Ernst 2004).

The increased need to enhance the body by individuals has led to an exponential interest in body studies. With research being conducted in many ways in the field of sociology. Particularly, research in body work – that is, work performed on one’s body for the management and modification of one’s looks and physical wellness has received increasing attention over the years (Gimlin 2007:355). Body work has also been studied in the context of health, youth and gender (Coffey 2016), gender and social class (Klenke 2013), ageism, gender, race,

sexual orientation and, social class (Slevin 2010) among others. Most studies conducted on body work practices for the attainment of beauty ideals have, however, mostly focused on Western societies and their ideals of beauty (Bordo 1993; Gimlin 2002; Grogan 2016; Wolf [1991] 2013; Wright, O’Flynn, and Macdonald 2006).

In recent years, globalization, which has been defined as “the increasing dispersion of capital, people, information and culture across international borders, a process that has been accelerated by advances in travel and communication technologies” (Held and McGrew, 2000 as cited in Callero 2003:123), has led to a stronger desire for body work around the world especially in places outside the global North¹ (Becker 2004; Edmonds 2008). In addition, a global media culture, as well as increasing rates of migration, has led to a formation of mixed cultured identities where local meanings of body work are practised alongside a global culture (Callero 2003). It is, therefore imperative to pay attention to how globalization has the potential of shaping local ideals of beauty (Edmonds 2008; Sahlins 1994). This is important because, in this contemporary neo-liberal era where self-presentation has become prominent, the body has gained importance in the workplace as well as in other spheres of life. Body enhancements such as cosmetic surgery, body art, and the use of pharmaceuticals like weight supplements to attain beauty or body ideals cannot be said to be specific to any particular sociocultural context, making the understanding of body work more nuanced.

It is consequently pertinent that the lens shifts from the global North to the

¹ These are countries, located primarily in the northern hemisphere, that have historically been identified as “the West”, “first world”, or Euro-American due to perceptions of their relative wealth, technology, and global dominance (Graml, Meyer-Lee, and Peifer 2020).

global South², in particular, Africa, where the plump body has been previously valorised. Also, the complicated history of slavery and colonisation between the West and many sub-Saharan African countries has led to the rise of complex cultural and economic relationships with multi-directional flows of trade, fashion, and popular culture between the continents of Africa and Europe.

As Africa is rapidly developing, modernisation is simply equated with Westernisation, making it less surprising that there has been an increasing appreciation of the slim and slender body ideal of the West (Adjin-Tettey and Bempah 2015; Becker 2004). However, various studies in the global South (read Latin America) point to the importance of ethnicity in influencing body size ideals (Anderson-Fye 2004, 2011; Becker 2004). Edmonds (2008) points out that there are several “modernities” such that there is some level of indigenisation when Western cultures encounter local cultures. He writes:

Globalization has undeniably brought an invasion of images of white or often whitish beauty to new parts of the globe... Cosmetic work such as hair straightening, skin lightening, and cosmetic surgery procedures with names like ‘Westernization surgery’ or ‘Correction of the Negroid nose’ indicate cultural imperialism. But the global beauty industry does not always override or erase local traditions (Edmonds 2008:157).

Building on this point Edmonds (2008), drawing on the work of Sahlins (1994), adds that, “modernization often results in neither the progress of development nor the wholesale destruction of local traditions, but rather a process of indigenization” (157). It is therefore crucial to highlight this “indigenization” of Western beauty ideals to contribute to new knowledge on body work practices in the global South. This is important as beauty ideals have been shown to inflect local values.

² Global south broadly refers to spaces outside Europe and North America that have been negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalization, mostly low-income countries (Dados and Connell 2012; Mahler 2017).

1.2 The Ghanaian Setting and Problem Statement

A casual stroll in any major part of Accra, the capital city of Ghana, reveals an abundance of billboards and signposts of all shapes and sizes. Many of these billboards advertise flat stomachs, small waists, wide hips, and big buttocks for women through various clothing, dietary pills, and creams. In Figure 1, one of such advertisements is captured on the Ecomog Road near Madina in Accra. In this billboard, a waist trainer is advertised as one that can give a “slim waist and flat tummy” resulting in a confident body that will make one the centre of attraction in any dress with a phone number prominently displayed for purchases and enquiries.

Figure 1: “The confident body u deserve”



Source: Researcher’s Field Notes, 2020

These advertisements often show pictures of the body ideal it is selling and phrases like get “the confident body you deserve” which co-opts women especially to participate in a refashioning of their bodies. All over the city, advertisements of these kinds abound.

On social media networking sites³, the narrative is no different. There are numerous advertisements mainly on Facebook and Instagram for various body enhancing products such as weight loss pills, slim teas, creams, waist trainers, and corsets. The recent mass advertisement of body enhancement products on mass media and social media in Ghana is a relatively new phenomenon that owes much to globalization and the triple digital revolution; the combination of social media, the internet, and mobile phones (Fu and Lai 2020). Reports show that about 83% of Ghanaians own at least one mobile phone (Poushter and Oates 2015). The National Communication Authority (NCA) of Ghana reported that at the end of September 2017, the total number of mobile data subscriptions was 22,865,821 with a penetration rate of 79.94%. This suggests that markets that were previously inaccessible by traditional media methods can now be accessed through social media. Also, with mobile phones that have an internet connection, individuals are connected to the world with just a tap on their phones. International news and popular cultural trends are within easy reach through the use of various social media networking sites. In this regard, the increasing popularity of body enhancement products and cosmetic procedures in the mass media, as well as non-traditional Ghanaian marketing sites (electronic media and social media), to attain various beauty ideals is worthy of note, making it a fertile site to interrogate body work activities in a non-Western culture.

In furtherance of the above, studies by Adjin-Tettey and Bempah (2015), Domi (2010), as well as Michels and Amenyah (2017), point to the fact that globalization

³ This is an umbrella term to denote media technologies that encompass the internet and websites that allow for the rapid creation and sharing of user-generated messages, as well as instantaneous communication with users on other handheld devices. Examples include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and Snapchat (Perloff 2014).

and westernised media content have led to the appreciation of much slimmer figures among women in Ghana. Other studies, however, indicate that Ghanaian women still prefer a larger body size in the face of rapid modernisation (Appiah, Otoo and Steiner-Asiedu 2016; Frederick, Forbes and Berezovskaya 2008). The studies that point to a preference for larger body sizes have however focused on samples from rural populations which have not had as much contact with a global media culture such as Accra, the capital. A study in the most urbanised part of the country is therefore pertinent to ascertain the impact of Westernisation on body work practices. More importantly, the specific ways in which urban middle-class Ghanaian women engage with idealised global images and how they negotiate these ideals is of interest to this study as various studies point to the fact that Western ideals do not always override local traditions but rather, a process of indigenisation or glocalisation occurs (Anderson-Fye 2004; Becker 2004; Edmonds 2008).

Also, in Ghana, the link that can be made to studies focused on body work practices are those in the area of ideal body size and body dissatisfaction. A majority of these studies have been conducted using quantitative methods. These studies usually adopt anthropometric measurements where the body mass index (BMI) of participants is calculated and then participants are asked to choose their ideal figures on a scale (Appiah, Otoo, and Steiner-Asiedu 2016; Duda, Jumah, et al. 2007; Frederick, Forbes, and Anna 2008; Michels and Amenyah 2017). The research participants' BMI is then measured against the ideal figures chosen, and the discrepancies are explained as either body dissatisfaction in cases where the ideal body size is smaller than the real body, or body appreciation in cases of larger figures. Whilst these methods give an idea of the kind of body figure Ghanaian women prefer by revealing a shift in beauty ideals, it has done little to show the

embodied experiences of these women or the processes they engage in to achieve their ideal body sizes.

Additionally, most of these studies (Duda et al. 2007; Frederick et al. 2008) have mainly centred either on adolescents or respondents aged 18 and above. Only one study has focused on middle-class corporate women (Adjin-Tettey and Bempah, 2015). Various studies, however, indicate that education and class play an important role in how women perform body work (Klenke 2013; Shilling 1991; Slevin 2010). This study will, therefore, provide useful insights into body work practices among middle-class Ghanaian women.

In this regard, the increasing popularity of body enhancement products and cosmetic procedures in the mass media, as well as non-traditional Ghanaian marketing sites (electronic media and social media) aided by globalization, for attaining various beauty ideals is worthy of note, thus making the capital city of Ghana, Accra a fertile site to interrogate body work activities in a non-western culture.

Empirically the study of body work in Ghana (a country in the global South), about body shape and size, brings new insights to the field. Despite various calls by scholars (Prieler and Choi 2014; Coffey 2016) for more studies in the global South, existing scholarship on the subject is based mainly on samples from the West. Besides, the few studies on body work in Africa have focused on the racialised nature of bleaching (Lewis, Gaska and Robin 2012; Hunter 2011; Blay 2007; Pierre 2012; Ray 2015). A study by Smith (2018) is the only one found that focuses on the lived experiences of women who have engaged in just cosmetic surgery as a form of body work in Ghana. Her work emphasises the fact that body shape and size are significant to the body work practices among women in Ghana. A focus on body

work practices in general, in relation to body shape and size, is therefore relevant to further enhance our understandings of bodies in the global South, specifically West Africa.

While most studies point to a slender Western ideal as an overarching body ideal (Widdows 2018; Coffey 2016; Slevin 2010; Wright, O'Flynn and Macdonald 2006; Davis, 2002;1995; Gimlin 2002; Bordo 1993; Salstonstall 1993), studies that have focused on Black Americans and Latinas show evidence that black women, after being shown pictures of slender and thin white women, do not feel the same level of objectification as white women because they did not associate the white images with their reference group (DeBraganza and Hausenblas 2010; Grabe and Hyde 2006). A few studies conducted outside Western cultures have also shown that women in different parts of the world aspire for more fullness in some parts of their bodies as opposed to other parts (Anderson Fye 2011; Franko et al. 2012). In Belize, for example, women were more interested in body shape than thinness (body size) (Anderson Fye 2004; 2011). However, most studies on body work practices typically conducted in the West have tended to place much emphasis on the slim and slender body as the ideal.

While several studies in recent times have pointed to globalization gendering various body work practices in the global South (read Latin America), there is little to be seen in the literature showing how the situation is unfolding as various parts of the global South rapidly modernises. Studies on body work practices in the global South (Anderson Fye 2011; Edmonds 2008; Franko et al. 2012) have tended to focus on Latin America, the Caribbean, and some parts of Asia. Countries such as Belize, Jamaica, Brazil, and Fiji have received some attention concerning body work practices with regard to body shape and size, however, there is little seen in

the literature on Africa. This study, therefore, hopes to bring new knowledge on how body work practices are changing in a rapidly modernizing Africa using Ghana as a lens.

Ghana is located in West Africa. This region with a dark history of the slave trade and subsequent colonization by Europeans has had long contact with the West albeit a violent and exploitative one. Since the study is premised on the contact of a global culture that is loosely associated with Westernization, this area offers a rich background to explore changes in the body ideal and body work. The West African region contains 16 countries including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. These countries share some similarities in terms of food, clothing, and language as opposed to other regions of Africa. A popular West African dish, Jollof rice has recently transcended the borders of the region with many West African countries claiming ownership of the popular dish. The famous Jollof wars⁴ between Ghana and Nigeria are testament to the popularity of the dish. In many respects, Ghana represents a typical West African country in terms of economic and cultural development.

Nicknamed the “Gateway to Africa”, Ghana is an important site to locate this study due to its complex history of trade in gold and ivory with Europeans, subsequent slavery, colonisation, and Pan-Africanism. Ghana or the Gold Coast as it was called before independence was the biggest slave port in Africa during the slave trade with over 30 slave forts and castles (UNESCO, 2021). Ghana was also the first country south of the Sahara to gain independence in 1957. Subsequently,

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210607-jollof-wars-who-does-west-africas-iconic-rice-dish-best>

Ghana has enjoyed a very stable democracy since 1992 after some brief coups in the '70s and '80s. Ghana is currently a beacon of democracy in West Africa having enjoyed almost 30 years of a stable democracy. This has allowed the country to develop at a steady pace as compared to neighbours in the region where there have been extended periods of political instabilities.

Accra, the capital city, where this study is located lies along the coast which was an important site in the slave trade. The slave castles in Ghana have become an important site for most African diasporans to connect to their roots and this has led to a constant flow of people of African descent constantly visiting the country, some of whom have subsequently relocated. These slave castles are also a huge tourist attraction for tourists from all across the world. The constant interaction with people from different places has led to an intermingling of cultures especially along the coast of Ghana where these castles are located. Accra, the capital city is also located on the coast and houses one of three castles as well as two forts.

In addition, Pierre (2012: xii) points out that Accra, the capital city “is a bustling, modern, cosmopolitan metropolis with skyscrapers, freeways, shopping malls, and nightclubs”. Luxurious residential properties abound with many multinational corporations and Tech companies such as Twitter and Google opening Accra offices recently. This is important to point out as images of Africa are still of a rural space hence the siting of a study that seeks to understand the various ways in which the body is being worked upon in a consumerist capitalist society might seem out of place but in reality, it is not.

In a globalized world where distance and time seem to have shrunk, where there is a blending of cultures and the creation of world markets, there seems to be the suggestion that the world is becoming more homogenous as “accounts of

globalization generally project onto the rest of the world the theories of modernity already devised for the society of the global metropole” (Connell 2007 as cited in Connell 2012). This is however not the case as the very ways in which colonial conquests were carried out and economic subordination continues to exist means that there are huge differences between countries of the West and countries of the South even as the South rapidly modernizes (Connell 2012). It is important to understand how these differences play out and the effects on the corporeality of the individuals who live within the borders of this space. In addition, global South scholars point out the importance of understanding broad concepts such as globalization in the global South from the perspectives of global South scholars (Connell 2012, Mohanty 2003). This is important as the very way knowledge is produced is implicated by economic and racial hierarchies. It is therefore important that Global south scholars theorize their own realities.

This study, therefore, aims to fill a gap in the theorisation of bodies in the global South by illustrating how globalization is indigenised when it encounters local cultures. In this respect, knowledge on the glocalization of the body ideal and the subsequent body work activities that are taken on to achieve this ideal among middle-class Ghanaian women is relevant. This perspective is necessary to fill a research gap in body studies literature and lend new understandings to ongoing discussions on the relationships between the body and society in the global South (read West Africa).

1.3 Conceptualising Body Work

Various scholars have suggested body work as a concept for developing a sociology of the body (Gimlin 2007; Kang 2003; Lyon and Barbalet 1994;

Wolkowitz 2006). The concept “body work” has, however, been used variously by different authors to denote a variety of meanings. Gimlin (2007) identifies four types of body work that have been studied in the field. She identifies body work as (i) the work performed on one’s own body (body/appearance work), (ii) paid labour carried out on the bodies of others (body work/labour), (iii) the management of embodied emotional experience and display (body/emotion management), and (iv) the production or modification of bodies through work (body-making through work)” (2007:353). While these types of body work are distinct, they sometimes overlap.

Studies on body/appearance work, have focused on self-disciplining routines such as restrictive dieting; exercising – mostly by women to achieve culturally acceptable body ideals (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997); working out (Gimlin 2002; Monaghan 1999, 2001); and the use of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures to attain a specific beauty ideal (Davis 2003; Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2007).

Concerning body/work labour, many authors have tried to bring attention to unpaid, affective labour performed by women in domestic settings. Feminist writers have been particularly motivated by the injustice of the amount of housework performed by women (Twigg 2000; Widding Isaksen 2005).

With body/emotion management, various studies have shown how employers manage bodies to give off certain emotions. The service industry is identified as one of the most complicit sectors in contemporary society that uses femininity and body work to further capitalist interests of making profits (Horschild 1983; Otis 2016). Arlie Hochschild's seminal work, *The Managed Heart*, shows how flight attendants perform emotion management; particularly the disparities between what

one feels and the emotions one displays which she refers to as “surface acting”. Hochschild noted that this surface acting sometimes led to discomfort and anxiety on the part of flight attendants. In recent years, Mears has coined “aesthetic labour” to denote the “practice of screening, managing and controlling workers on the basis of their physical appearance” (Mears 2014:1330). This is quite distinct from emotion management. Mears (2014) uses “aesthetic labour” to describe how people’s, usually women’s, physical appearances are harnessed for increasing economic gains as opposed to emotion management where employers manage bodies of workers to give off certain emotions, as in the case of smiling by flight attendants.

The fourth aspect of body work, according to Gimlin (2002), covers body-making. She indicates that this type of body work overlaps with the first 3 (three) discussed. In the sense that this kind of body work refers to the changes that bodies go through due to their work and interaction with society. This refers to the various changes that occur in the body due to the kind of work one does. Lessor (1884) and Tobias (1972) point to the various ways that flight attendants, for example, are affected by their work in the form of eating disorders, hearing loss, low backache, and varicose veins.

Body work has also been identified by numerous scholars as the means to realise a specific self-image that individuals seek to craft for themselves. For Crossley (2006), body work is the reflexivity to enact one’s self where the body is the resource for this enactment.

Others have also used the term “body project” to indicate work that is done on the body for aesthetic purposes. Shilling defines body project as “involving individuals’ being conscious of and actively concerned about the management,

maintenance and appearance of their bodies” (1993:5). Giddens (1991) conceptualises “body project” as individuals reflexively working on their bodies to achieve some identity. Giddens (1991) and Shilling (1993) have, however, been critiqued for conceptualising activities that individuals undertake for aesthetic purposes as “body projects” which presupposes that it ends at some point (Coffey 2016). Scholars like Coffey (2016) and Gimlin (2002) have indicated that the creation of a self-image through body work is processual; one that never ends. Giddens (1991) and Crossley (2006) have also been critiqued for privileging the mind (self) over the body in the conceptualisation of body work such that embodied experiences are not brought to the fore. What sociology of the body seeks to do, however, is to highlight the embodied experiences of the individual (Shilling, 2003; Turner, 1996). It is, therefore, necessary that a definition that pays attention to the embodiment of individuals is used for this study.

As demonstrated above, it is apparent that using the term “body work” as a lens to study the relationship between the body and society has many merits. Coffey’s use of the term “body work” as “work performed on one’s own body that connects to aesthetic modifications or maintenance of the body” (2016:4) is drawn upon to conceptualise body work. Body work is also considered a “dynamic process by which bodies and societies shape each other” (Coffey 2016:4). This definition of body work highlights a focus on process and practice in relations between the body and the society, and how the body is lived and produced in relation to various social forces such as gender, body image, health, and appearance (Coffey 2016). Body work is studied through body work practices – activities done to modify or maintain the shape and size of the body (such as dieting, use of body enhancing supplements, exercising, and cosmetic surgery) particularly related to the

presentation of self. A focus on body shape and size is essential, as it is the be most salient to the Ghanaian woman's notions of body work ((Domi 2010; Gbadegbe et al. 2016).

To this end, body work is defined as work done on one's own body for aesthetic modifications and maintenance of the body shape and size. Body work is also used as opposed to body projects because it denotes that individuals work on their bodies in a processual manner. Thus, in some ways, body work truly never ends as there is a continuous need to improve one's body as opposed to body project, which implies that the process stops at some point.

1.4 Theoretical Background of the Study

Numerous studies have been conducted on the body and the various ways individuals attend to it in this post-modern society (Aubrey 2010; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Paquette and Raine 2004; Thualagant 2016). These studies have mostly focused on how social structures such as a consumer culture, mass media, gendered norms, and the discourse of healthism influence body work practices. This perspective has been collectively termed the Structural Approach. The approach argues that "the body is shaped, constrained and invented by society" (Shillings 2012:75).

Other studies have pointed out that the structural approach paints women as cultural dopes without agency (Davis 2013; Gimlin 2002). These scholars, using an agency approach, have argued that women make informed decisions to engage in body work practices by studying their lived experiences. These studies focus on women's own knowledgeable decisions to create identities through their free will. Scholars who have utilised the agency debates have been critiqued for being overly

deterministic. While these perspectives have contributed significantly to understandings of the various relationships between bodies and society, they have focused on only one aspect of this relationship.

As a way to overcome this deficiency, some studies have sought to show that body work is not a binary phenomenon (Budgeon 2003; Coffey 2016; Coleman 2009). These studies, drawing heavily on the philosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), argue that adopting a structure or agency approach reflects Cartesian distinctions of the body and mind. They have been particularly critical about how agency/structure debates have tended to sustain inequalities between men and women, as maleness (and masculinity) is associated with the mind, reason, logic, and order. In contrast, femaleness (and femininity) is associated with the body and the passions, irrationality, and disorder (Grosz 1994). This concern has led to the adoption of Deleuzian understandings of bodies as processes (not entities) that are continually shifting and being redefined based on their relations with other bodies and forces in the world (Coffey 2016). In the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1984; 1987), the body is understood as an active, productive force that operates within broader socio-historical-cultural contexts.

The Deleuzian approach has been critiqued because it emphasises the embodied affections of individuals such that the society is only marginally included in its analysis. The application of Deleuze's theories in feminism has also been unwelcome in certain quarters. Others see Deleuze's tendency to shift focus away from the sexed and gendered body as problematic as it is seen to "take the specificity of women away from women" (Driscoll 2002: 21). Besides, while Deleuze has been interpreted creatively with respect to the body, Shilling's (2005; 2012) theory of corporeal realism is found to be better suited for this study as it is

more grounded in sociological theories.

Corporeal realism as put forward by Shilling (2005; 2012) draws on the work of Marx ([1844] 1975), (Durkheim [1952] 1897; [1893]1984), Weber ([1905] 1991), and Simmel ([1907] 1990) to show that the body is a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of meaning in the society it inhabits. The author argues that bodies are simultaneously shaped by social structures across numerous social spheres as well as through the agency of individuals. The body is presented as being a source and location of body work as well as having generative, creative capacities. Corporeal realism provides an analysis that prioritises the body first in how individuals create meanings for the body.

Theoretically, studying body work using corporeal realism as a frame is a novelty in the field of body work studies. Corporeal realism offers insights beyond the binary structure/agency divide, which has been recognised by various scholars as problematic (Budgeon 2003; Coffey 2016; Shilling 2005, 2012). Corporeal realism allows for the understanding of body work practices through both social structures that impinge on individuals, and their agency by focusing on their embodied experiences.

1.5 Research Objectives

In furtherance of the points above, this research project adopted the corporeal realism of Shillings (2005; 2012) as a theoretical frame. To this end, the specific research objectives are outlined as follows:

1. To explore the ideal body type(s) of the middle-class Ghanaian woman and how this is negotiated in the face of globalization.
2. To describe the various body work practices engaged in by the middle-class

Ghanaian woman to construct the body ideal.

3. To examine how globalization shapes the social context in which body work practices are taken on among middle-class Ghanaian women.
4. To examine how the body actively constitutes meaning out of the body work practices of the middle-class Ghanaian woman.

1.6 Organisation of Thesis

This thesis is organised into nine chapters. In this first chapter, the research background and the theoretical significance of the study site, research problem, study objectives, theoretical gap and potential contributions have been pointed out.

In Chapter Two, literature in the field of body work studies is reviewed. This chapter is organised along four themes. The first part starts with an attempt to locate the body in studies of sociology; it then moves to the conceptualisation of body work drawing on foremost scholars in the field. The third part focuses on the various studies that have been published on body work practices. The research gaps identified in the literature is presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Three presents the various perspectives through which body work has been studied and presents the theoretical approach that is adopted for the current study. Chapter Four contains the research methods section of the thesis.

Chapters Five to Eight contains the findings of the thesis. Chapter Five presents findings on the body ideal and how participants subsequently engaged in body work. Particular attention is paid to how globalization shapes the body ideal and how connections are made to the racially similar in constructing the body ideal. This chapter also teases out the various influences that shape the body ideal of the urban middle-class Ghanaian woman and how this is navigated. Corporeal realism

is used to frame how the body becomes a source of body work to enable women to stay competitive in the workforce. How body work is embodied is also discussed.

Chapter Six focuses on body work and gender, specifically looking at how body work practices are shaped by gender in the context of femininity in a consumer culture. Here again, corporeal realism pays attention to various reasons why women engage the body ideal and frames the body as being both source and location of body work practices as well as having creative properties. Chapter Seven looks at body work and social class, showing how social class plays a role in the kind of body work practices engaged in by urban middle-class Ghanaian women. It also demonstrates how healthism or aesthetic health is increasingly linked to the reproduction of middle-class status. Chapter Eight focuses on body work and social media with an attempt to tease out the various ways in which social media reinforces and sustains body work practices. Here, through the use of social media, how the body becomes a source and location of body work practices as well as having emergent properties is discussed. How social media use is embodied is also brought to the fore.

Finally, Chapter Nine contains a summary of all the findings, draws conclusions, and shows how the use of corporeal realism moves beyond the binary divide of agency and structure. A new approach to the study of body work in the global South is then discussed in this chapter. Some recommendations and limitations of the study are also highlighted.

CHAPTER TWO
BODY WORK IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: EXISTING
SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

“Humans may be the only creatures that steadfastly refuse to let nature alone dictate their appearance”(Reischer and Koo 2004:297).

Throughout history, various types of body enhancement to accentuate beauty have existed. Practices such as foot-binding in China, neck elongation among the Kayan people of Myanmar, or lip stretching with lip plates among the Mursis of Ethiopia are culturally specific forms of beauty ideals.

In recent years, however, globalization, a global media culture, as well as increasing rates of migration, have made practices related to a body ideal more nuanced and textured. Rather than beauty work being communal projects, they are independent projects that seek to craft a certain self-identity (Douglas 1980). The change from body work practices as communal projects to individual projects has led to sustained interest from scholars in this area and, in this regard, research in body work has flourished.

In the sections that follow, body work studies will be reviewed, and gaps about globalization will be subsequently identified for further interrogation in this study.

2.1 Body Work Studies

Many studies have been conducted in the field of body work. Some of these studies have focused on only body work, particularly, self-disciplining routines such as restrictive dieting, exercising mostly by women to achieve culturally acceptable body ideals (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997, Wolf 1993), use of surgical and

non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Davis 2003; Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007). Some studies have also focused on an aspect of body work, such as makeup (Beausoleil 1994) and bodybuilding (Monaghan 1999). A few studies have focused on a range of body work practices (Coffey 2016; Clark and Griffin 2007; Gimlin 2007; Crossley 2006). Coffey (2016) in studying body work, included all activities that were stated by participants as being part of their body work practices. These included pilates, yoga, application of make-up, exercising, etc. Most of these studies have foregrounded consumer culture as increasingly contributing to body work activities to create a specific self-image. Body work has also been studied in connection with various social forces such as gender, class, and healthism and these will be explored in the subsequent sections.

2.1.1 The Body as a Commodity in Consumer Culture

Various authors have linked the increasing need to fashion one's self-identity to a consumer culture in post-modernity⁵(Crossley, 2006; Giddens, 1991; Shilling 2005; [1993]2012]; Featherstone 1982; Baudrillard [1970]2016). These authors point out that body work has gained prominence in a consumer culture where a visual prominence suggests that the body should be young and sculpted while implying that this type of body is available to everyone if they are willing to invest in it. This preoccupation with fashioning a self-identity is rooted in the development of consumer culture.

Featherstone (1982) attributes the development of consumer culture to mass production. He argues that advancement in industry led to the production of surplus

⁵ Post-modernity refers to a society characterised by information technology and where flows of information, technology and finance have replaced the rootedness of industrial life and fixity of urban and rural life (Burawoy 2000:2)

due to the mass production of goods. Manufacturers, therefore, had to find ways to create desires among consumers to need their products and subsequently purchase their surplus.

He adds that this converged with the pre-austerity First World War period where many time-saving home machines and appliances were developed. This, he explained, allowed people much time to invest in leisurely activities. Featherstone (1982) points out that this leisure led to increasing obesity. Therefore, there was the need to work on one's body to maintain the thin and slender body ideal that was the norm and has remained a norm of much of the Western world persisting till today. Manufacturers, therefore, created various products for maintaining a healthy body and losing weight. These products were extensively marketed through advertising images in the press, television, and movies. This burgeoning consumer culture has conflated with capitalism⁶ to make self-presentation even more paramount in the current neoliberal era.

Indeed, Baudrillard points out that the body is the "finest consumer object" ([1970]2016:129). Baudrillard ([1970] 2016) argues that within this capitalist era, the consumption of consumer goods has now become a way to affirm one's identity, and goods have transcended their utility and market value. He posits that goods or commodities have come to embody "signs values" such that the signs goods are thought to have become more important to consumers than their utility or market value. This is further heightened in a capitalist society where beauty is treated as a commodity that can be bought in the form of cosmetic products and services. Subsequently, the body has increasingly become a site for the display of social class

⁶ "A system of wage-labour and commodity production for sale, exchange, and profit, rather than for the immediate need of the producers" (Scott, 2015).

and aesthetic beauty. In this post-modern era, one's identity is marketed as one that can be shaped based on one's ability and financial wherewithal to indulge in such services.

Through visual media, the slender, youthful body has been portrayed as the ideal. The body is treated like a machine that needs regular maintenance (Featherstone, 1982). Dieting and exercise are marketed as the ways through which this can be achieved and are associated with healthy, slender, and youthful bodies such that a lithe frame is seen as the reward in pursuing rigorous exercise and dieting routines.

Self-presentation has therefore become a vital aspect of the post-modern age, and the body is the site where the "self" is enacted and performed. Giddens (1991), in his work *Modernity and Self Identity*, points out that the construction of the self has become a project of identity with individuals working reflexively on their bodies in fashioning out their identities. Callero explains reflexivity as "the uniquely human capacity to become an object to one's self, to be both subject and object" (Callero 2002:119). This means individuals can objectify their bodies and think of ways they can make changes to their bodies. This consumer culture and the modern ethos of showing economic and cultural capital through consumption has led to a performance of the self through various body work practices couched, through advertisements, as consumer choices. This phenomenon is not a uniquely Western phenomenon; however, there is scant literature on how this phenomenon is unfolding in the global South (read Africa). Globalization, fuelled through capitalism means that in the global South, the body has also become important in self-presentation and the various ways in which local and Western cultures merge in producing body work activities should be of interest to researchers. This study

aims to fill this gap.

2.1.2 Objectification of the Body in the Media

Over the years, numerous studies on body work have linked advertisements in the mass media to increasing body work practices. This is because advertisements use the bodies and images of slender and thin women to sell products, goods, and services. Various studies have postulated that this has contributed to the objectification of the female body in the mass media (Klenke 2013; Slevin 2010; Paquette and Raine 2004). The objectification theory posits that the media stimulates, reinforces, and reproduces an objectifying gaze through its portrayal of interpersonal social interactions, and its focus on body parts (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Women are thus objectified in the media such that they come to view their bodies as having to fit in with the norms projected by the media; bodies that must be “corrected and moulded” (Paquette and Raine 2004). Various studies show evidence that how women are portrayed in the media leads to self-objectification.⁷ This is manifested by the need to enhance or modify bodies to fit in with a slim and slender ideal portrayed in the media (Adams 2009; Aubrey 2010; Cohen, Newton-John, and Slater 2018; Harper and Tiggemann 2008; Wolf [1991] 2013). Even though recent studies (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004; Blond 2008) have shown that men also feel objectified, various studies (Bordo 1993; Slevin 2010; Wright, O’Flynn, and Macdonald, 2006) have shown that women, more so than men, feel the need to enhance and modify their bodies.

Widdows (2018) points out that the body ideal is heading towards a global one,

⁷ Self-objectification is a form of self-consciousness characterised by habitual and constant monitoring of one’s body’s external appearance (Holland & Tiggemann 2016: 101).

one that is an expansion of Western ideals but one exacting of all races. She describes this ideal to be “thin, slender and curvy” (Widdows 2018: 17). In Ghana, while there have been numerous newspaper articles about how Westernised media content is leading to the adoption of Western beauty ideals, there has not been commensurate studies in this regard. It is, therefore, necessary to highlight new knowledge on body work practices about the body ideal in the global South, which is rapidly modernizing (read Westernising).

2.1.3 The Body, Healthism and Social Class

Closely related to consumption studies, research in the sociology of health has used the term “healthism”, first coined by Crawford (1980) to denote a new consciousness that promotes health and working on the body as consumer choices; ‘choices’ essential to general well-being and success and the “quest to fulfil themselves” (Rose 1996: 162). Crawford (1980) points to new movements embodying a new consciousness of health in society. Crawford identifies these groups as advocating for holistic health and self-care. What healthism has done is to shift the focus of the cause of the disease in the individual, to how the sickness can be avoided if the individual engages in healthy practices such as exercise, healthy dieting, etc. and avoids “at risk” behaviours. Rose (1996) aptly points out that in this era of consumption, “Individuals will want to be healthy; experts will instruct them on how to be so, and entrepreneurs will exploit and enhance this health market. Health will be ensured through a combination of the market, expertise and a regulated economy” (Rose 1996: 162). Instead of empowering the individual, it has only allowed the middle class to perpetuate their social status by engaging in multifarious health activities and buying pills to prevent illnesses.

In anthropology and medical anthropology, Edmonds (2008) uses aesthetic health to denote “a variety of medical and other body practices that merge a concern for aesthetics, psychological and sexual well-being, and self-improvement” (2008:153). Edmonds (2008) points out that aesthetic health is not a state but a process in which continuous improvement becomes desirable and possible.

Numerous studies have provided detailed discussions on how the recent discourses of health and fitness are increasingly grounded in a consumer culture. Many of these activities of “fitness” and exercise practices such as dieting, yoga, pilates, jogging, and swimming through a healthism discourse have been touted as essential to being healthy and maintaining a particular body type which in this case, is the thin and slender ideal (Coffey 2016, Cairns and Johnston 2015; Shea 2012; Edmonds 2008).

The current consumer culture steeped in a capitalist system has also led to a state of ‘pharmaceuticalisation’. This topic which has seen a lot of studies in the sociology of health describes the treatment of conditions that previously did not require pharmaceuticals as needing pharmaceuticals (Williams, Martin and Gabe 2011). Weight loss for example, which required exercising and strict dieting as forms of control, is now being treated as something that can be achieved through the consumption of pills vigorously marketed by pharmaceutical companies whose sole intent is to make a profit. Studies have shown that research in the marketing of pharmaceutical products has increased by 60% whilst that of research and development has decreased (Abraham 2010; Busfield 2010). The emphasis on food and weight loss supplements in promoting healthy living despite their inefficacy and heavy marketing by pharmaceutical companies is noteworthy. The body is treated as something that can be obtained through the purchase of products to

achieve the highest market value is apparent in the extensive promotion of products of weight loss and body enhancement. The current consumer culture and the modern ethos of showing economic and cultural capital through consumption have led to a performance of health through various body work practices by merging notions of health and beauty (Edmonds 2008).

Closely linked to healthism is class. Shilling (1991) looks at how the bodies of women are constructed by society through the acquisition of physical capital. Building on embodied capital (Bourdieu 1986), he couches physical capital as the “the social formation of bodies by individuals through sporting, leisure, and other physical activities in ways which express a class location and which are accorded symbolic value” (1991:654). He recognises that physical capital is influenced by habitus, social location (i.e. social class), and taste. He refers to habitus as the “socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures”, and taste as “the processes whereby individuals appropriate as voluntary choices, lifestyles rooted in material constraints (1991: 655). Shilling (1991) illustrates with various studies how the body is disciplined through different activities for various purposes for different classes of people. Even though not explicitly mentioned, these various health activities engaged in to attain physical capital can be termed as “body work”.

Shilling (1991) points out that people in lower socioeconomic classes might not have the resources to engage in some kind of beauty work or sporting activities. However, when both classes engage in the same activity, it is interesting to note the reasons for which they are appropriated. Shilling’s work shows that the production of physical capital is a means to an end for members of the working class and an end in itself for members of the upper class. He shows that one’s acquisition of physical capital and how one utilises it depends on class positions. Whilst the

working class may get jobs related to sports through their physical capital, the elite might use sports such as golfing as a medium to obtain social or business contacts or secure marriage partners for their children.

Various studies point to socioeconomic class as one of the key influences of body work. Most women interviewed in various studies (Slevin 2010; Hurd and Griffin 2008) indicated that if they had money, they would have a body makeover. Some studies, using educational status as a measure of socioeconomic status have also indicated a strong correlation between the desire to do body work and educational status (Davis 1995).

Various studies have indicated high participation of the middle class in Africa in a consumer culture. In describing the African middle class, these studies have pointed to adequate income levels that allow for active participation in a consumer culture, a higher education (post-secondary level), decent accommodation, internet use, shopping at malls, and consuming international brands as some of the defining features of a middle class in Africa (Kingombe 2014; Spronk 2014). The consumption of health in ways that are linked to socioeconomic class status cannot be overemphasised. In many ways, healthism has become a way for the middle class to perform health through consumption. In Ghana, a study by Agblevor (2016) indicates that middle and upper-class families purchased and used more nutritional supplements to prevent illnesses as opposed to those in the lower class. In this regard, it is interesting to note that many middle and upper-class families emphasised the use of branded medicines from the U.K and America. Such families rarely bought generic medicines.

Furthermore, globalization and its attendant use of the internet has also made shopping easy and more convenient, which has led to various pills and supplements

that are available in the West becoming accessible in Ghana as well. Some studies have also shown that educational attainment is highly associated with weight and appearance dissatisfaction (Adjin-Tettey and Bempah 2015; Duda et al. 2007). This leads to the possibility of some body work to attain a certain ideal. Globalization with a link to healthism and how it influences the practice of body work has, however not been adequately explored in the non-Western (read Africa) 1. This study will therefore explore this.

2.1.4 Studies on Gender and Body Work

Gender plays a crucial role in the engagement of body work practices; the body is important to the conception of gender. Components of the gender dichotomy such as strength and weakness, activity and passivity, and sexuality are inextricably linked to the physical. As Gimlin (2002) rightly points out, the very nature of “femaleness” or “maleness” is embodied. However, it is women rather than men, who in modern society feel the intense pressure to meet certain ideals of beauty. This has been explained by a constellation of factors such as the constant depiction of the thin and slender bodies of women in the mass media and, a consumer culture steeped in capitalism. Other mediating factors have been established, such as social networks, social comparison, and the use of new media such as social media sites (e.g. Facebook and Instagram).

For this reason, a large volume of studies (Slevin 2010; Wright, O’Flynn and Macdonald 2006; Bordo 1993; Salstonstall 1993) have focused exclusively on females because body work practices are seen to be more valuable to notions of femininity than masculinity. A relatively small number of studies have focused on both genders (Coffey 2016; Crossley 2005). These studies point to the fact that

increasingly, men are engaging in body work; however, more women than men feel the need to work on their bodies.

Early feminist writers (Chernin 1983; Orbach 1988) for example, identified the female body as the basis for body work practice. Chernin (1983) argues that to maintain their power, men make women feel inadequate. She points out that the growing number of fatalities from anorexia nervosa, liposuctions, and surgeries stem from the pressure that women face to lose weight based on the demands of a patriarchal society.

Other feminist scholars have critiqued this approach of attributing body work to the natural bodies of women as inadequate. These scholars have pointed to a more active and conscious construction of body work by women. They have rejected the approach of reducing women to cultural dopes and failing to capture agency among women to take on body work. These studies (Davis 2013;1995; Gimlin 2002) have pointed out that in this contemporary era, the disciplining of the body can be said to be self-inflicted by knowledgeable individuals who subject their bodies to various beauty regimens. These studies have pointed out that women embody agency in taking on body work practices by understanding the lived experiences of their subjects.

Other studies about body work and gender have shown a relationship between body work and the service industry. These studies show that the complicit use of femininity and the performance of female-gendered roles to make profits has also led to an increase in body work practices (Otis 2016; Wolkowitz, 2006; Hancock and Tyler 2000).

The body of the woman is perhaps the best example to show how the body has been commodified in this contemporary era. Capitalism continuously targets,

exploits, and subjugates the female and the female body. Body work is profoundly gendered, ergo the focus on gender as one of the reasons why women engage in body modification has been studied across various fields in the social sciences.

In Ghana, Gbadegbe et al. (2016) showed that five out of twenty women in the urban city of Ho in the Volta region of Ghana, increasingly use fake hip and buttocks enhancing underwear called “hipsters” to attract men. The focus on the hips and buttocks is heightened by the fact that most men prefer women with huge backsides in Ghana. Ten out of every fifteen (15) men interviewed in the Ho Municipality during their research affirmed this. This difference in body work practices compared to the Western thin ideal highlights the importance of a global South perspective as well as the importance of moving away from studies of the racialised and gendered nature of skin lightening in Africa (Gaska, Robin and Lewis, 2011; Hunter 2011; Blay 2007). Besides, the study by Gbadegbe et al. (2016) only focused on the use of artificial garments “hipsters” concerning marriage. A particular focus on gender norms and various body work practices related to body shape and size is, however, missing. This study, therefore, finds it imperative to fill this gap in the literature.

2.2 Empirical Gap

As noted above, body work studies have been conducted in many ways in the field of sociology. Some of these have been studied with reference to various factors such as consumer culture, mass media, gender, and healthism. Body work has also been studied in the context of health, youth, and gender (Coffey 2016), gender and social class (Klenke 2013), ageism, gender, race, sexual orientation and social class (Slevin 2010), etc.

While many body work studies have been done along the lines of gender or healthism or both, a study that looks at the factors of gender, health, and social media was not found in the literature. The addition of social media use is however considered to be significant as authors such as Sundar and Limperos (2013), and Perloff (2014) have pointed out that social media with its instantaneous feedback, rapid generation of messages, sharing of user-generated messages on hand-held devices, calls for a new approach to the study of the body. Correspondingly, social media has a unique combination of peer influence and media depictions of ideal bodies. This is important because some studies (Kim and Chock 2015; Tiggemann and Slater 2013; 2014) have shown that having a more significant number of Facebook “friends” led to more negative views of appearance among young girls. The effects of how new media influence body work practices, in particular social media networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, needs further studies. Ergo, social media is an important force in the construction of reality.

Most studies have focused on how social media use influences body image from a psychological perspective. Holland and Tiggemann (2016), in their review of social media networking sites and their influence on body image concerns, reviewed 20 papers in this area of study. Most of these studies, using measures such as “overall time spent on social media”, “frequency of use”, and “number of Facebook friends”, showed moderate to strong correlations between social media networking sites use and the internalisation of the thin ideal, weight dissatisfaction, and appearance comparison (Tiggemann and Slater 2013; Bair et al. 2012). This suggests that some kind of body work might follow feelings of body dissatisfaction. One of the studies reviewed by DeVries et al. (2014) found that social media use was associated with increased investment in appearance and a desire for cosmetic

surgery. However, how social media influences body work practices has been left largely unexplored in Sociology literature on body work studies.

With social media being easily accessible on mobile hand-held devices, it is more critical now that social media usage in relation to body work practices be given the needed attention. On Facebook, some Ghanaian groups, for example, concentrate on fitness and weight loss. Social media networking sites and electronic media are awash with various body enhancement products that purport to make women lose weight in ridiculously short amounts of time to what suspiciously looks like the current media ideal. It is therefore imperative to explore the role social media is playing in the body work practices aimed at the size and shape of urban middle-class Ghanaian women and how this intersects with gender and social class.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the various ways in which body work has been studied has been discussed. Various body work practices that have been studied in the literature are pointed out. In addition, how the mass media in a consumer culture objectifies the female body which then leads to internalization of the thin ideal is also covered. Closely related to the above, studies on how gender implicates the body of women in body work is discussed. Studies that explore how individuals seek to reproduce their class status through a consumption of health is also highlighted. Subsequently, research gaps are identified.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL APPROACH: CORPOREAL REALISM

Introduction

In this section, the various theoretical perspectives through which the body has been studied will be outlined, and the perspective this study will adopt will be presented.

The first part of this chapter attempts to locate the body in sociology. Subsequently, I discuss the various theoretical perspectives through which body work practices have been studied. The shortfalls of these perspectives will be pointed out, and finally, the theoretical perspective that will be used, corporeal realism, will be presented.

Interactions among human beings, as well as between humans and society, are the focus of most studies in Sociology. The bodies that are inhabited by these human beings have, however, been the focus of only a few studies. Turner (1996) traces this absence of bodies to the origin of sociology and argues that sociology started as a discipline that took the social meaning of human interaction as its key focus, thereby extracting itself from the physical sciences such as human biology. Turner (1996) points out that the exclusion of bodies in sociology is, therefore, an unintended result of the critique of biologism, as any attempt to direct sociology towards the body appeared as a betrayal of its subject matter.

However, contrary to bodies being entirely missing, Turner (1996) and Shilling (2003) argue that bodies have occupied a disembodied role in classical sociology. That is, the corporeality of individuals is missing from early sociological work even though the subject matter of sociology makes groups and individuals implicit in its focus. Shilling (2012) points out that Durkheim's work on *Suicide* ([1897] 1952)

and *Division of Labour in Society* ([1893] 1984) focuses on what happens when individual bodies are disconnected from the social world. However, Durkheim does not explicitly focus on the embodiment⁸ of individuals. So even though Durkheim writes on suicide which involves human bodies, he does not focus on individual bodies. Instead, he focuses on how strong or weak ties with or without others causes suicide.

Regarding Karl Marx for instance, in his famous *Communist Manifesto* with collaborator Engels, he points to how bodies of workers are present in capitalist regimes and how the unfair treatment they receive will ultimately lead to a revolution and usher in a new era of socialism. The emotion of bodies in this population was, however, not explored. Shilling (2007) points out that at face value, Weber seems not to have contributed to the sociology of the body. However, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he shows how a dedication to ascetic life – a strict regulation of bodies – is used in explaining the origins of a capitalist era. Nonetheless, individual bodies were not given attention by Weber.

Classical sociologists did not provide an open-book guide on how to theorise bodies. It is nonetheless apparent that rather than bodies being missing entirely from sociology, they were submerged. With the advent of the 19th century and the explosion of consumer culture and its focus on the presentation of self with its concomitant body-enhancing technologies, body studies exploded. Moreover, technological advancements such as *in vitro* fertilisation, genetic engineering, and transplant surgery led to a “weakening of the boundaries between science, technology and bodies” (Shilling 2007:8), prompting many uncertainties and an

⁸ A specific attention to the lived experiences of the body and its active relations with society (Coffey, 2016).

eruption of body studies. Subsequently, sociologists have turned an increased interest to the somatic body of individuals as the body has come to occupy a central role in the social sciences (Crossley 2001; Featherstone 1982, 2010; Frank 1991; Freund 1988; Shilling 2012; Turner 1984). Currently, there is a renewed focus on the embodied experiences of individuals across feminist studies, archaeology, anthropology, physical education, education studies, etc.

3.1 Structural Perspective

The early treatment of bodies in the field of Sociology presents the body as a passive text upon which society inscribes meaning. The social constructionism approach is an “umbrella term for those views that suggest that the body is shaped, constrained and invented by society” (Shillings 2012:75).

Authors (Bordo 1993; Spitzack 1991) who have theorised using the structural approach have drawn extensively on the work of Foucault (1977, 1979) where the body is shown as an object of power to be controlled and subdued to produce docile bodies. Using this perspective, beauty work practices such as dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc. are seen to belong to the disciplinary and normalisation regime of body improvement and transformation. The body is viewed as passive to the powers of society; one that is governed and regulated by political and discursive regimes (Shillings 2012).

The structural approach has also been utilised to explain the internalisation of the thin ideal through mass media, specifically through advertisements (Thompson and Heinberg, 1999). In similar studies (Slevin 2010; Pacquettea and Raine 2004; Bordo 1993), social structures such as consumer culture, gender, and race have been used to explain body work practices.

Some feminist writers have critiqued the structural approach, arguing that individuals are not just receptors of social meanings but that individuals construct their own meanings of their ideal bodies (Gimlin 2002; Davis 1995;2017). These studies critique the structural approach as being overly focused on societal structures and cultural norms. They have also rejected the perspective for failing to capture the lived experiences of body work among women. Davis (1995; 2013) and Gimlin (2002) have pointed out that in this contemporary era, the disciplines of the body exerted can be said to be self-inflicted by informed individuals who subject their bodies to various beauty regimens. Shilling (1993; 2012) also notes that this approach alienates women from their physical bodies by treating their bodies as passive. He also points out that these authors present the experiences of women as undifferentiated, which is not the case.

3.2 Post-structural Feminists and the Agency Perspective

Post-structural feminists have pointed to a more active and conscious construction of body work by individuals. These studies critique the structural approach as being overly focused on societal structures and cultural norms. Post-structural feminists recognise the agency of women in carving out beauty ideals for themselves. In Davis' (1996) *Reshaping the Female Body*, instead of viewing cosmetic surgery as a false consciousness that oppressed women to fit in with societal ideals, the study portrayed women as knowledgeable agents who, armed with information, made decisions to make changes to their bodies. Gimlin (2002) also emphasises the agency of women in different settings in coming to terms with the differences between their bodies and the ideal female beauty. Her work shows that women simultaneously work on their bodies as sites for constructing accounts

of the body and self and they do so reflexively. This active force or power to act in ways other than what dominant structures dictate is referred to as agency (Coffey and Farrugia 2014). These scholars recognise the agency of women in carving out beauty ideals for themselves.

Most of these studies have also drawn on Bourdieu's (1986) physical capital which argues that the body is a form of resource to be invested in. Thus, individuals, while enmeshed in social structures, actively reproduce these structures. This perspective, in response to the structural approach, tries to understand body work practices through the subjective experiences and lived experiences of the individual. These studies thus place much emphasis on the embodiment of individuals (Clarke and Griffin 2007; Young 2005). Embodiment is a specific attention to the lived experiences of the body and its active relations with society (Coffey 2016). These authors have extensively drawn on the phenomenological theories of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty (1962).

Scholars who have utilised the agency debates have, however, been critiqued for providing only a partial theoretical account of the relationship between the body and the social world. Such scholars (Coffey 2016; Gill 2007; Shilling 2012; 2003; 1993) have pointed out that society, through cultural norms, has a dominant effect on how females come to view their bodies and even in cases where agency is said to be applied, it is apparent that the internalisation of cultural norms plays a major role in how females construct body ideals. Gill (2007) points out that humans are neither "cultural dopes" nor "free agents" but rather, humans are all enmeshed in certain sociocultural matrices. Agency approaches have shown that the body can create meanings for itself by understanding the lived experiences of subjects. Nonetheless, it fails to capture the complexity of the body by merely viewing it as

a corporeal object. The role of social structures on the individual simply fades with this perspective (Shillings 2012).

In conclusion, both the structural and agency perspectives have been heavily criticised (Coffey 2016; Shilling 2012/2005; Coleman 2009; Budgeon 2003;) as offering only dualistic understandings of the relationships between body and society.

3.3 Post-structural Feminism and the Deleuzian Approach

Some studies have attempted to straddle both the agency and structure divide, hoping to overcome the Cartesian dualism associated with the agency or structure debate. Most of these studies have been spearheaded by post-structural feminists using Deleuzian philosophical writings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; 1987). Most of the studies that utilise Deleuzian approaches find the need to move away from Cartesian binaries such as body/mind, cause/effect, agent/subject, and structure/agency dualisms that seem to encumber most body studies as dualist interpretations are usually faulty (Coffey 2016; Coleman 2009; Budgeon 2003). It was therefore important to move away from these distinctions as attributing a cause to one thing or the other generally obfuscates the nuances that impact how realities are formed; thus, telling only one part of a story.

Studies that utilise Deleuzian writings have attempted to put the body first in understanding body work practices. In the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1984;1987), the body is understood as an active, productive force that operates within broader socio-historical-cultural contexts. The “body” is understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the material, the symbolic, and the social conditions (Braidotti, 1994: 161, cited in Rose, 1996: 201). Bodies are understood to be made

of affects and relations that encounter various social forces to produce assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) use the term “assemblages” to explain the various complex, and unpredictable ways bodies can constantly change upon encountering new relations. These relations can be material, psychic, physical, psychological, emotional, cultural, abstract/philosophical, or social relations (Duff 2010; Fox 2011). Coffey explains that “the assemblage can be understood as comprising a range of relations that people engage in and connect with including norms, discourses and ideals and practices which are dynamic and change over time” (Coffey 2016:28). The focus is on the embodied experiences and potential of bodies within relations of power (Coffey 2017).

The Deleuzian approach has however been critiqued for its emphasis on the embodied affections of individuals such that the society is only marginally included in its analysis. Besides, while Deleuze has been interpreted creatively with respect to the body, Shilling’s (2005; 2012) theory of corporeal realism is found to be better suited for this study as it draws on sociological theories to frame the understanding of bodies.

3.4 Theoretical Perspective and Framework: Corporeal Realism

It is apparent from the discussions above that both the structural and agency perspectives have contributed immensely to the understandings of the relationship between bodies and society. They have, however, stood on either side of the divide. Structural approaches have placed too much emphasis on structure, thereby reducing the body to a blank board on which society is written. Alternatively, approaches that have adopted an agency perspective have placed too much emphasis on the lived experiences of individuals. This study, therefore, proposes

studying body work through Shilling's (2005, 2012) concept of Corporeal Realism.

Banking on almost 30 years of theoretical and empirical treatise in body studies, Shilling (2005, 2012) recognises that the dominant approaches in theorising the body in sociology – that is, the transmission of social structures and cultural norms (structural), and as a vehicle of lived experience and re-creator of its environment (agency) have contributed some enduring knowledge towards the understanding of the relationship between the body and society. He also recognises that they only present a binary approach to understanding the relationships between bodies and society. He, therefore, incorporates the most useful elements of these dominant perspectives in body studies into a comprehensive framework while avoiding their reductionisms of focusing on either social structures or agency of individuals.

Drawing on critical realism⁹, corporeal realism presents a framework for studying the relationship between the body and society that is irreducible to either structures or agency. In this framework, Shilling (2005; 2015) first recognises that the body serves as a location for the transmission of social norms, values, symbolic systems, and identities. Shilling recognises that the society consists of economic classes, norms, legally sanctioned roles among others which individuals cannot create anew in the society they live in but have to confront it as it is (Shilling 2005). These social structures and norms, therefore, have a real impact on the bodily beings of those within such borders. The experiences are however differently embodied. Individuals in these bodies are also not just passive. Instead, they are also able to actively mediate these social norms and structures to create “intentional capacities for making a difference to the flow of daily life” (Shilling 2005:10). Corporeal

⁹ Critical Realism recognises that bodies are not simply determined by social structures, it also recognises the independent properties and agency of bodies (Shilling, 2012; Spencer, 2014)

realism thus recognises the body as a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of meaning in the society it inhabits. The body is recognised as possessing agency and capacities that cannot be reduced to social structures but capable of mediating social forces as an enfolded entity that is also capable of creating meaning (Spencer 2014, Shilling 2012). Most body work studies have failed to capture these complexities of the body having agency to actively create its meaning, as well as the structuring powers of society in understandings of the relationship between body and society by focusing explicitly on either structural forces or the agency of individuals.

3.4.1 The Body as a Source of Body Work

Shilling (2005) points out that the body is a source of work because embodied beings have to work by using their bodies to provide basic sustenance such as food, clothing, and shelter for themselves. The body is, therefore, implicit in how these needs are acquired. Drawing on the evolutionary development of humans, Shilling (2005) notes that the body is not static and from the early days of men, sticks and stones were used as basic tools in hunting and gathering to ensure the sustenance of life. This mode of bodily sustenance made the body develop in specific ways which allowed early humans more effective manual movements and greater precision for efficient gathering and harvesting.

In this neoliberal era, to secure a means of subsistence means selling your labour or using your labour to secure the necessities of life. To secure this labour, one's body is surveilled and actively worked upon to create physical capital for most jobs (Shilling 2005). In the military, for example, the body is a source of work, and it is actively cultivated and disciplined in specific ways to strengthen the bodies

of individuals and make their bodies lithe for the kind of work they have to do.

In understanding bodies, it is therefore important to recognise the ability of the body to be a source of body work. It is also important to note that the body is not static. It continually adapts based on environmental, economic, political, religious, and technological changes.

3.4.2 The Body as a Location of Body Work

As the body adapts to various norms to make it efficient, “the body becomes a location for communal norms which determine how individuals intervene in their environment” (Shilling 2005:78). These norms subsequently become a part of the bodily dispositions of those subject to them, and this makes the body a location for the effects of body work. New generations encounter these norms as structures from which they cannot escape. The shift to industrialisation, for example, brought about major changes that made different demands on the human body. People had to adjust to a new character of work which involved time shifts, routinization of work and other changes that made different demands on the body as opposed to the pre-industrial period where people worked close to their homes and were in charge of their own time.

In this neoliberal era, the structures of waged labour, for example, have come to locate themselves on the bodies of workers. In this economy, the increased importance of image and presentation of self in the workplace has placed a heavy burden on personal appearance, expanding the incursion of waged labour into the realm of body work (Adkins 1995). Workers are continually positively exhorted to embody the image of fitness associated with efficiency and productiveness. The body thus becomes a location for body work practices; activities individuals must

participate in if they want to be productive in this current capitalist era. It becomes something to be continuously worked upon to retain its value within a waged labour system (Shilling 2005:85). The increased importance of body image and presentation in the workplace means that much effort has to be invested in how the body is presented. In addition, identity has become increasingly important in the current consumer culture outside the work environment such that the body's shape, size, and appearance have become essential to people's sense of self.

3.4.3 The Body with Generative Capacities

The body is, however, not passive to these social structures and norms that come to impinge on it. Corporeal realism advocates for an analysis that views the body as multi-dimensional, as one that can subvert social forces and creatively resist against those structures. Shilling (2005; 2012) draws on the work of Marx, Durkheim and Weber to show the various ways the body has resisted social norms and structures. Shilling points to the work of Marx ([1844] 1975) to illustrate how people became alienated and resigned from their labour through repetitive work. Marx ([1844] 1975) predicted that this alienation would lead to a revolution and an overthrow of the order at the time, but that did not happen. Shilling (2012) draws on studies from that period to show that even though there was not a revolution that led to massive social change, there were more subtle forms of sabotage on the factory floor such as drudgery that made work more bearable in the panopticon-like surveillance of workers (Foucault 1979). He draws on Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to show how individuals used religion as a coping mechanism for hard work. Marx ([1844] 1975) however contradicts this interpretation by pointing out that religion is the opium of the masses, and is a tool

by the ruling class to control its workers. In modern times, factory workers have found ingenious ways of protesting long hours of work and supervision by taking long breaks in the bathroom, fainting spells, spirit possessions, screaming in dreams, among others (Lee 1995; Ong [1988]2010; Ngai 2005).

Shilling (2005) argues that contrary to views that the body is not as creative due to a less repressive work culture in recent times, constant agitation and labour actions have led to better work conditions. He points out that the body is thus still capable of creative, generative possibilities in this modern neo-liberal era. Shilling (2005) points to the work of Goffman ([1956]1969) and Hochschild (1983) to illustrate how complex emotion work, for example, at the workplace presents a façade that is sometimes at dissonance with how one feels; this being an example of the generative capacities of the body in the contemporary neoliberal culture. Shilling (2005) complicates the understanding of agency with corporeal realism. He illustrates that resistance through agency can take on a variety of forms, some of which are not radical in execution but more subtle in approach. He draws attention to the various ways in which the body creatively exercises agency with regard to various social norms and forces.

3.5 Theoretical Gap

Even though Shilling (2005; 2012) presents a theoretical approach that prioritises the body as key in understandings of the body, he points out that there is a dearth of empirical studies which illustrate the creative capacities of the body to its social environment (Shilling 2005:97). He points out that “precisely how active or creative bodies are within different working environments is, of course, a matter for empirical investigation” (Shilling 2005:97). This study finds it pertinent to

address this dearth in studies and thus use corporeal realism to frame understandings of the body.

This is important because in Ghana, while there is a constant portrayal of thin and ideal images in popular media with the continuing Westernisation of the mass media in a rapidly urbanizing society, there is also an equal display of the traditional voluptuous body of the Ghanaian woman. In constructing beauty ideals, women have a variety of images to fall back on. The factors that lead one to engage in body work practices for one ideal or the other while living in the same geographical space will be explained using the corporeal realism approach. This study argues that continuing to look at bodies through the binary of either social structure or agency is inadequate. It is therefore pertinent to adopt a perspective that goes beyond this divide.

As noted in the review of empirical data, body studies have been conducted in several ways in the field of sociology. Some of these have been studied with regard to various factors such as consumer culture, mass media, gender, and healthism. Body work has also been studied in the context of health; youth and gender (Coffey 2016); gender and social class (Klenke 2013); ageism, gender, race, sexual orientation, and social class (Slevin 2010).

While there are many studies on body work, many of these studies explain body work as a result of social forces that impinge on individuals. On the other hand, others have mostly explained body work focusing on the lived experiences of participants using a phenomenological approach. Some others have also explained body work activities as a result of agency emanating from individuals. In contrast, others have sought to go beyond the agency/structure divide by adopting structuration theories and theorizing using the “body-without-organs” approach

with Deleuze and Guattari as reference points. These perspectives, which are mostly put forward by post-structural feminists, have sought to explain body work as an outcome of relations with different social forces which assemble differently for each individual.

A study that pays attention to how the various social forces that impact the body work activities as well as how individuals creatively navigate these forces through agency grounded in classical and modern sociological theory was not found. In this regard, Shilling's corporeal realism (2005; 2012) is found to be best suited for this study. To this end, this study seeks to understand the body work activities of urban middle-class Ghanaian women using a corporeal realism approach that sees the body as multi-dimensional; as a source of body work, as a location of body work, and as having creative, generative capacities. This is important as it will allow for how middle-class Ghanaian women creatively interpret and negotiate globalized and local ideals of beauty and how these are embodied.

As the body is classed and gendered, some existing approaches in the field of social class and gender are drawn upon to enrich discussions of how body work is practised and negotiated among middle-class Ghanaian women.

3.6 Conclusion

Corporeal realism's unique treatment of how both structures and agency shape the body cannot be overemphasized. Shilling's treatment of corporeal realism moves away from the structure/agency debates. It considers the various social structures and norms a body could encounter such as media, and consumer culture while recognizing the agency of the individual to resist or create their meanings out of these norms and social structures. Corporeal realism allows for a framework

which analyses “how societal and cultural transmissions, people's lived experiences, and their actual embodied outcomes in terms of propensities towards the re-creation of society resulting from these processes, interact and alter over time” (Shilling 2012:29). Corporeal realism, therefore, provides a unique “framework for examining human subjectivity and embodiment in general, but also for investigating the specifics of socially located, socially related interacting bodies” (Spencer 2014:14).

While other perspectives have sought to straddle the structure/agency divide, the analysis corporeal realism offers, provides nuances in the theoretical and methodological analysis of the relationship between the body and society that is not present in theories of structuration. It provides an analysis that places the body first in how individuals create meanings for the body while paying attention to social structures. Shilling, in this framework, suggests that in studying the body, one’s investigation can start from interrogating people’s embodied experiences before exploring their relationships of how they engage their agency or replicate social norms and structures (2012: 28).

To this extent, Shilling’s theory of corporeal realism (2005, 2012) is found to be relevant for this study which seeks to understand the embodied experiences of body work practices among urban middle-class Ghanaian women, paying attention to embodiment, agency and social norms and structures.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods that were used in data collection, how research participants were selected, and how data was analysed. In addition, the chapter will illuminate the rationale behind the research site and detail some challenges encountered in the field.

4.1 Research Approach: Grounded Theory

The research method approach was informed by the corporeal realism theory, which undergirds the study. Corporeal realism posits that bodies should be at the fore of understandings in how individuals create meanings for the body (Shilling 2005; 2012). Shilling (2012), in this framework, suggests that in studying the body, one's investigation can start from interrogating people's embodied experiences before exploring their relationships of how they engage their agency or replicate social norms and structures. This is undoubtedly an advantage of the corporeal realist as he points out that "neither of these possibilities, in contrast, is made readily feasible by structuralist or phenomenological approaches to embodiment that invest overwhelming casual significance in one or other of these levels" (Shilling 2012: 29).

It was therefore crucial that this research adopted the grounded theory approach of a qualitative research method. "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct a theory 'grounded' in their data" (Charmaz [2006] 2014:1). Grounded theory methods include simultaneous data collection and analysis, construction of

analytic codes from data, and not from a preconceived hypothesis. A constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis leading to theory development during the data collection, is used. Memo writing is also used to elaborate categories, specify properties, and define relationships between and identify gaps. Sampling is aimed at theory construction and does not aim at being representative of the population (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987, as cited in Charmaz [2006]2014). Grounded theory is an inductive approach to research that anchors interpretation rather than deductive analysis. This approach is important to the study as interpretive theories aim to understand the meanings and actions of how people construct them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, as cited in Charmaz [2006]2014).

Grounded theory as an interpretive theory, calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes multiple emergent realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as inextricably linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual (Charmaz [2006] 2014).

Notably, constructivist grounded theory prioritises the studies phenomenon and sees data as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data. A constructivist approach means more than looking at how individuals view their situations. It not only theorises the interpretive work that the research participants do but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation (Charmaz [2006] 2014). This is important as corporeal realism advocates an embodied approach (Shilling 2012:31) to studying relationships between the body and society. This approach allowed for understanding body ideals through both the structuralist perspective and the agency perspective where women are active participants in the construction of their body ideal by a close reading of

the narratives of the participants.

4.2 Research Area

Nicknamed the 'Gateway to Africa', Ghana was the first country south of the Sahara to gain independence. Apart from a few brief military coups, the country has not experienced any civil unrest. Ghana has experienced stability and peace in the West African region and has practised a system of democracy since 1992. The stability in Ghana means that modernisation has been uninterrupted by civil wars as in other parts of the region. In many respects, it represents a typical West African country in terms of economic and cultural development.

The research area will be Accra, Ghana's capital located in the Greater Accra Region, one of 16 (sixteen) administrative regions in the country. The city of Accra was designated as the capital of the Gold Coast in 1877, then a British colony. On attaining independence on 6th March 1957, the country was renamed Ghana. The city of Accra is a business and transportation hub in Ghana. Ghana has had a long history of contact with the West through its pre-colonial encounters with Western countries involved in the slave trade. As a former British colony for almost a century, there has also been an intense cultural exchange between the United Kingdom and Ghana.

Accra is one of the most urbanised cities in Africa. With a population of 4.1 million, it is the most populous city in Ghana (World Population Review 2020). Approximately 54% of this number constitutes those under the age of 24 (World Population Review 2020). This means that the population of Accra is a youthful one, and this trend is not expected to slow down. In 2010, the Globalization and World Cities Research Network think tank selected Accra as a Gamma level world

city, indicating a growing level of international influence and connectedness (World Population Review 2020). As the most globally connected part of Ghana, it has a high interaction with Western ideals compared to other parts of the country. The multiethnic composition of the city due to rural-urban migration also provides a diversity that is reminiscent of other cities on the continent. Accra is chosen because it has a high internet penetration rate. This was interesting for the study as recent studies on the use of social media has shown even higher correlations between social media use and body image as opposed to traditional media such as radio and television (Tiggemann and Slater, 2013, 2014; Kim and Chock, 2015).

As the study is focused on how social forces such as gender, health, and social media influence body work practices in the rapidly modernising global South, it was only prudent that the research site is Accra, the most urbanised part of Ghana.

4.2 Selection of Participants

In tandem with qualitative research, the non-probability sampling method was used to recruit participants as the study cannot be representative of the entire population. These participants were mainly recruited by purposive sampling and were subsequently snowballed from those who had been purposely sampled until theoretical saturation was reached (Morse 2004). Theoretical saturation is the “phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analysing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed” (Morse 2004: 2). Most studies include a minimum of 30 participants to achieve saturation (Oliver 2012). I interviewed a total of 37 urban middle-class Ghanaian women, but findings will be based on interviews with 35 women. The criteria used to select the participants was participation in some form of activity that

was geared towards aesthetics or maintenance of the body shape and size.

I interviewed an initial set of 8 participants whom I identified from my social networks via Skype between June and August of 2018 as I was in Hong Kong at the time. However, two interviews were not included in the findings presented here due to bad network connection leading to a lack of clarity in audio recordings.

Subsequently, when I was in Ghana for data collection, I interviewed 29 more women. I recruited two participants through an all-women's Facebook group after I posted about my study on the platform and asked participants who were involved in some form of body work practices and were interested in the study to contact me. Finally, I recruited three participants through a T.V fitness programme. This idea came from hearing a couple of participants mention the programme on TV. In that programme, participants were put through a gruelling weight loss plan. Activities of the group included following a meal plan and posting meals on a WhatsApp group chat. On Saturdays, the group engaged in various health walks and training.

After I connected with a high school friend whom I had seen wearing the programme t-shirt in pictures on Facebook, she shared the contact details of the coordinator of the programme with me. I enquired about the possibility of interviewing some of the women in the programme. He asked that I join one of their activities, so I joined them one Saturday in April 2019. I was told that we were going to meet at Ayi Mensah, one of the popular start-points for health walks from Accra up the Aburi mountains. This stretch is a 4 km walk that gradually goes up an incline. I was told to join the group at 5:30 am. I met them at the meeting spot easily identifying them by their T-shirts.

After waiting a little while for more people to gather, we set off for the climb. There was a cameraman who videotaped the climb. At the end of the climb, there

was an aerobics session that was led by a highly energetic woman who spurred the participants on to engage in the extremely vigorous exercise in which I also participated. The trainer mentioned that even though she was quite old, she had maintained a fit body by constantly exercising. After the exercises, there was a weighing scale that participants stood on and then their progress from the previous week was compared. The participant who shed the most weight was given a prize. After the prize presentation (which was several products from sponsors of the show), the coordinator introduced me and asked me to briefly present my research. I told participants that I was interested in activities that people are taking to attain a certain body ideal and would be happy to hear about their experiences. The coordinator encouraged them to talk to me when I approached them. I approached six random women of the group and told them I would want to interview them about their experiences. They all agreed to the interviews initially but subsequently, it was difficult to get them to commit to the interviews. I was able to interview three of these women.

For the rest of the 24 participants, I encountered them through friends in my circles and through snowballing (Babbie, 1998). In snowballing, I asked one of my respondents to introduce me to a cousin whom she said had previously been unbothered by her weight but had joined a fitness programme to lose weight. She later contacted me to tell me that her cousin told her I had interviewed her already. I was quite surprised and further inquired who the cousin was. When she mentioned her name, I realised it was one of the women from the tv fitness programme I had encountered. At that point, I realised that I had a good number of participants. Interviews were, however, conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved.

4.4 Participants

The study decided to focus on women because various studies have shown that women, more than men, feel the pressure to fit in with the body ideal portrayed in the media (Adams 2009; Cohen, Newton-John and Slater 2018; Frederickson and Roberts 1997; Wolf [1991]2013).

These women were of the middle class and between the ages of 25 and 39. ‘Middle class’ was loosely conceptualised as women having a tertiary education or currently enrolled in tertiary education, employed in either the private or public sectors and earning more than GHS700 (\$215) a month. This cap was used by the Ghana Statistical Service in its Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 Report indicates that the average annual gross per capita income was GHS5347 which translates to about GHS446 a month (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). Unemployed women currently enrolled in graduate school were also considered. This conceptualisation of class is in tandem with some studies that have pointed to adequate income levels that allow for active participation in a consumer culture, a higher education (post-secondary level), decent accommodation in urban areas, internet use, shopping at malls, and consuming international brands as some of the defining features of a middle class in Africa (Kingombe 2014; Spronk 2014).

The focus on middle-class women is because many studies have pointed to the fact that economic capital and social class status play an important role in body work practices (Grogan 2017; Slevin, 2010; Shilling 1991). I did not ask women which class they associated with but rather based on their educational status and income, I further grouped them into lower-middle class, middle class, and upper-middle class for analysis. I do recognise that this categorisation may not reflect all the situations of the singular women; however, it allows for meaning to be forged

from the data.

All participants had a university degree. Ten had postgraduate degrees, and one had just completed her PhD studies. The women were working in a wide range of professions. Two were in the health sector, four were in banking and insurance, and four were in various administrative positions. Two of the participants were full-time law students pursuing postgraduate studies. Others offered consultancy services in marketing, branding, communication strategy, digital strategy, and policy. There was a make-up artist, fitness coach, event manager, budding actress, graduate teacher, and an e-commerce business owner who doubled as a digital strategist.

Regarding marital or relationship status, eleven women indicated they were married, while fourteen were single. Four women, however, clarified to ask if they were to indicate they were single if they were in a relationship but not married. I asked them to indicate that they were in a relationship. Since I did not have options but rather indicated that people should write out their marital or relationship status, I perceive that some women may have written 'single' as they were not married even though they were in relationships.

The participant with the lowest income earned GHS700 (\$125), and the one with the highest income earned an estimated GHS10,000 (\$1,760). On average, participants earned about GHS2000 (\$350) monthly.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic details of the participants.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Details of Participants

	Pseudonym	Marital Status	Job	Age	Earning (GHS)	Educational Status
1	Ingrid	In a relationship	Law Student	31	0	Postgraduate Law Degree
2	Loretta	In a relationship	Administrative Assistant	29	2,000	Bachelor's Degree
3	Ewurama	In a relationship	General Manager	29	3,000	Bachelor's Degree
4	Adoley	Single	Law Student	28	0	Postgraduate Law Degree
5	Patricia	In a relationship	Corporate Communications Executive Assistant	30	1,700	Bachelor's Degree
6	Lilian	Single	Executive Secretary	32	1,500-2,000	Bachelor's Degree
7	Lydia	Married	Hotelier	28	1,500	Bachelor's Degree
8	Adwoa	Single	Communication Strategist	31	1,500	Bachelor's Degree
9	Akweley	Single	Brand Consultant	30	2,500	Bachelor's Degree
10	Mildred	Single	Content Creator and Copywriter	26	1,200	Bachelor's Degree
11	Mercy	Single	Fitness Coach	28	1,500	Bachelor's Degree
12	Anna	Single	Banker	26	3,500	Master's Degree
13	Belinda	Married	Anaesthetist Nurse	39	1,800- 2,300	Bachelor's Degree
14	Ruby	Married	Nurse	38	3,000	Bachelor's Degree
15	Adobea	Married	Health Administrator	33	Mandatory Internship	Master's Degree

16	Stacy	Single	E-Commerce Business Owner and Digital Strategist	33	10,000	Bachelor's Degree
17	Cindy	In a relationship	Farmer	26	1,500	Bachelor's Degree
18	Daisy	Married	Insurance Officer	32	3,000	Master's Degree
19	Borley	Single	Make-up Artist	23	700	Bachelor's Degree
20	Dela	Relationship	Banker	29	2,500	Bachelor's Degree
21	Bernice	Married	Digital Marketer	26	1,800	Bachelor's Degree
22	Olivia	In a relationship	Digital Marketer/Writer	29	2,000	Master's Degree
23	Sharon	Single	Investment Promotions Officer	25	3,500	Bachelor's Degree
24	Becky	Married	Consultant	32	4,000	Bachelor's Degree
25	Beatrice	Married	Insurance Officer	35	3,000	Bachelor's Degree
26	Pearl	In a relationship	Accounts Officer	24	1000-1,500	Bachelor's Degree
27	Aba	Married	Social Researcher and Farmer	32	3,000	PhD Candidate
28	Naomi	Single	Customer Consultant	25	1,200	Bachelor's Degree
29	Angela	Married	Teacher	30	1,700	Master's degree
30	Diana	Single	Data Analyst	31	2,800	Bachelor's Degree
31	Anita	Single	Video Vixen/Actress/Marketer	28	2,500	Bachelor's Degree
32	Hilda	Married	Event Manager/Blogger	28	4,000	Bachelor's Degree

33	Mariam	Single	Digital Strategist and Policy Consultant	32	2,000-5,000	Master's Degree
34	Wendy	Single	Administrative Assistant	31	2,300	Bachelor's Degree
35	Anna	Single	Banker	26	3,500	Master's Degree

4.5 Data Collection Methods

This research adopted the qualitative method of semi-structured, face-to-face, and in-depth interviews to facilitate a deep understanding of how body ideals were formed among urban middle-class Ghanaian women from their perspectives and through their lived experiences (Marvasti 2004). This was important because corporeal realism advocates an embodied approach (Shilling 2012:31) to studying relationships between the body and society. This approach allowed for understanding body ideals through both the structuralist perspective and the agency perspective, where women are active participants in the construction of their body ideal by a close reading of the narratives of the participants.

4.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

I used the semi-structured interview guide which consisted of mainly two parts; Part A, which asked questions about the body ideal, body work practices, experiences of body work practices as well as various influences; and part B, which collected data on the socio-demographic details of the participants (See Appendix I). The interviews were based on the questions in the interview guide. Follow-up questions were asked based on the responses from the respondents. None of the interviews went strictly according to the interview guide, but I ensured that at the end of the interview, all the questions on the guide were asked. As I gained mastery over the questions, I was able to build a rapport with my interviewees and referred to the guide infrequently.

The interviews were all conducted in the English language as my participants were formally educated and were comfortable expressing their thoughts in English. A few participants punctuated their interviews with words from a Ghanaian

language, Twi¹⁰, to better express certain thoughts. I tried to be unobtrusive as possible, allowing a free flow of conversation. Interviews lasted between twenty-five minutes to an hour and twenty minutes.

I met participants where they felt comfortable talking. I met a majority of participants in their homes. For others, it was more convenient to meet in a restaurant or a smoothie bar. For these meetings, I paid for the food and drinks. I did not find the restaurant a conducive site as it was a bit noisy. The smoothie bar was, however, convenient; the location was well-known for work meetings, and it was not crowded. I interviewed four participants at their offices because it was the most convenient time for them. For two of those participants, since the office space was not private enough, I asked that we conduct the interview in my car. I also interviewed two other participants in my car near their homes. For some people, it was convenient to interview them outside their homes. All interviews were conducted during the day.

4.5.2 Participant Observation

To understand the experiences of my participants, I undertook participant observation at a gym for three months between February 1st, 2019 and April 27th, 2019. This was important as participant observation allowed for opportunities to observe the practices and activities of urban middle-class Ghanaian women.

In choosing the gym, I considered a neighbourhood that had lower to middle and upper-class families. On Monday, January 25th, 2019, at around 4 pm, I visited Supreme¹¹ Gym at Adenta in the Adenta Municipality of Accra. Adenta initially

¹⁰ Twi is an Akan language that is widely spoken in Ghana and most especially in urban Accra due to its cosmopolitan nature.

¹¹ All names are pseudonyms

served as the site of estates for various companies. It has now grown to encompass a bigger neighbourhood. It is predominantly middle-class and has about a 91.3% literacy rate as compared to a regional average of 89.3% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). According to a poverty report by CHF International based on the 2010 Population Census by the Ghana Statistical Service, Adenta Municipality is one of the fastest urbanising parts of Accra. It houses some of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the country such as Adjiringanor.

When I first went to make enquiries, I informed the manager of the gym that I wanted to lose weight and that I was looking to sign up for a gym because I had gained about 5kg in the previous year. After I was told the price, I told him that I was a student and needed a discount because I would want to do participant observation which means that I will be taking notes of what happens at the gym each time I visit for my research. I explained to the manager that, subsequently, I intended to interview some of the gym members if they agreed to talk to me. The gym manager said that was not a problem and I could talk to the gym members and even mention the name of the gym. I explained that it was unethical, and I would not have to do that.

I told him that I could not see any women at the gym at the time and asked if there were a good number of women who trained at the gym. He responded in the affirmative and said most of them came in the mornings before work, and after work in the evenings. He said the afternoons were generally not busy because a lot of the gym members went to work at that time. He added that many women do not patronise the gym on Friday evenings probably because they had to prepare for social engagements or travel across town to see their boyfriends (I laughed).

The gym manager had to leave, so he asked that I continue the conversation

with the receptionist. I talked to the receptionist who gave me the gym price list, which included walk-ins, monthly, and yearly membership. I saw that the registration fee was GHS100 (\$17), and the fee for three months was GHS420 (\$72). I told the receptionist that I had already spoken to the manager about a discount. He however said he was not privy to that. He asked that I talk to the gym manager to confirm the discount. I took the phone number of the gym manager and called about the discount. He slashed the fee to GHS300(\$51). The registration remained at GHS100 (\$17). He asked to speak to the receptionist after we were done and he confirmed our discussion with him.

On the first day of observation, I paid GHS300 (\$51). GHS100 went to registration, and the GHS200 (\$34) left, went to the gym fees. I later paid the remaining GHS100 (\$17) of the gym fees at the end of the second month. After paying, my biometric details were taken, and I was given access to the gym through the use of a biometric scanner. The biometric access was to ensure that customers who had not paid could not enter the gym.

I was at the gym for two hours for three days each week. The original plan was to be there for three hours but most people trained between an hour and two and spending three straight hours at the gym was quite tasking, so I decided to do two hours, three days a week instead of the initial three hours, two days a week.

The gym is average-sized, and they had modern equipment for training which included five treadmills, two elliptical machines, two rowing machines, two stationary bikes, a leg press machine, a hack squat machine, a leg extension machine, a leg curl machine, two lat pull down machines, a cable crossover machine, a chest press machine, and two machines for lifting weights (as well as different barbells and weights) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: A section of the gym



Source: Researcher's Field Notes, April 2019.

The manager could not introduce me to the gym members because they came in at various times, so I interacted with them as fellow gym members. Over the three months, I spent frequenting this gym, there were about five consistent women. I spoke to three informally about their body work activities after introducing my study to them and interviewed two of these women.

I used an observation guide to take notes on the number of people who were at the gym when I got in, the activities they were engaged in, and their interactions with other members. Because I was exercising, I used my resting time in between exercises to take notes on "Keep" a note-taking app by Google. This helped me keep important points for elaboration when I got home. The observation guide is attached as Appendix II.

4.5.3 Online Ethnography

To properly understand precisely how social media influenced participants' body work practices, I followed the activities of a popular Ghanaian women's Facebook group for six months. This was done from March to September 2019. I explained my research to the administrators of the group and asked for permission to do the observation. I was granted permission to observe after which I announced my presence in the group and explained my research to the members. After I announced my presence, a few asked further questions about my research, and one member indicated that she was not going to be active for the period I was doing the observation.

I do not think my presence in the group created any change in the attitudes of the members after the announcement. I was a member of the group for about a year before I made the announcement, and I did not perceive any altered changes in the interactions of the group. I also was not the first to post about possible research in the group, so it was not out of the ordinary.

Each day, I scrolled through updates of the group for 30 minutes. I took screenshots of various conversations where women sought advice on how to attain a certain body ideal or their frustrations with trying to fit a certain body ideal. The group is the largest female Facebook group in Ghana and has members from all over the country. Some of the meetings of the group have been moved offline, and the group has undertaken several charity drives. It was found as a haven for mothers to share their experiences in a safe place. It has metamorphosed into a platform that has become popular with various stories from people's marital homes. The popularity of this group also stemmed from the anonymous feature where individuals sent posts to the group administrators to post on their behalf.

I also support my data with various social media artefacts as well as interviews in mainstream media. This is important for my research as some participants declined interviews with me even though I assured them of anonymity and confidentiality but then went on to do public interviews to discuss body work activities they had explicitly undertaken cosmetic surgery. In this regard, I make references to interviews granted by Moesha Buduong (actress) and Nana Frema (singer). This is necessary to augment my findings as it was not possible to interview an individual who had taken on surgery for cosmetic purposes.

4.6 Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used in analysing data. A grounded approach analyses data by seeking to discover patterns and building a theory from the ground up or elaborating on earlier grounded theories (Babbie 1998). A major methodological strength of the grounded theory approach is its approach of simultaneous data collection and analysis, inductive¹² coding and memo writing (Charmaz, 2011:361).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was then coded and recoded and organised around themes using the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Data was analysed with the use of the qualitative software NVivo 16. The data was analysed with the research questions in mind. Some of the themes that emerged include activities to obtain body ideal, ambivalence about the body ideal, changes in the body ideal, current body ideal, healthism and body work, reasons for body work activities, the role of social media, feelings associated with

¹² An inductive approach to the study of social life attempts to generate theory from the constant comparing of unfolding observations. This is different from the deductive method of hypothesis testing (Babbie, 1998).

body work, products acquired for body ideal, media portrayal of women, where products are bought, agency of women, gender and body work, physical capital, embodiment and body changes among others.

Field diaries from participant observation were also examined thematically using the grounded theory approach. Themes that emerged include feelings associated with exercises, exercises undertaken at the gym, conversations at the gym, the relationship between gym members, and the relationship between instructors and clients.

4.7 Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was sought from both the ethics committee of the Humans and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Science of the Hong Kong Baptist University, and the Ethics Committee of the College of Humanities, University of Ghana. Ethical clearance was needed from Ghana as well since the data was collected from Ghana (see Appendix III).

Participants interviewed at the preliminary stage were assured of anonymity and confidentiality by word of mouth. Subsequently, during the face-to-face interviews, participants granted verbal consent after I explained the research.

Interviews were protected following rigorous data protection procedures. This included saving recorded interviews with names that could not be linked to participants. All documents were placed in a hidden folder only accessible by me on my personal computer.

4.8 Field Experiences

The most challenging part of the field experience was scheduling interviews

and getting participants to honour their appointments. After scheduling interviews, I did not want to pressure participants so I would usually remind them the day before the interview or sometimes the morning of the interview if the interview was scheduled just about three days before. However, after clearing the day to meet with participants, some would call or message just a few minutes to the appointed time and explain that they had either forgotten about it or that something had come up. In one instance, I rescheduled an interview three times and eventually gave up. Others did not respond to their calls or messages after they had agreed to interviews.

During participant observation, I interacted with several gym members whose weight-loss journeys have been frustrating, especially at meeting their weight goals. While this offered me a unique opportunity to observe their embodied experiences, it also made me feel that I was vain trying to reduce my weight from 65kg to 60kg. I understood that I was privileged in the sense that I had a low BMI in comparison to the other gym members. Anytime weights were checked usually on our way out, some female members will jokingly ask why I was in the gym when I only weighed 65kg. This led me to a better appreciation of body work activities of urban middle-class Ghanaian women.

I was lucky to be living in the capital area, and most of the participants were close to where I lived or could meet in my vicinity. This was, however, not always the case, and I had to drive for about two hours to meet interviewees on the other side of town. There was a case where I had to travel from Adenta, where I lived to Dansoman to conduct an interview. I left home at 1 pm to make the 3 pm interview. After getting lost a few times, coupled with a traffic jam, I finally met my respondent around 4 pm. After the interview, I was famished and went with the respondent to eat. I left Dansoman around 6 pm, got stuck in terrible traffic and got

home at almost 10 pm. My family had a car I could use, and the fact that I could drive myself made navigating the city a lot easier. I could also drive to meet my respondents as well because most of them were of the middle class themselves and owned cars they drove themselves, so it did not seem unusual that I drove. There were times that I used public transportation, where I had to meet participants in the Central Business District because of the chaos in that area.

During my participant observation at the gym, I decided to use public transportation since the gym catered to people from different walks of life and it is essential to embed yourself in the field as much as possible. It also allowed me to exercise a bit by walking. Most of the clients used cars and sometimes offered me lifts after training sessions.

It was especially tasking to do field observation while arranging and conducting interviews as well. I took breaks during training sessions to take notes, yet it still took between three and four hours to write my field diary after each observation period. I tried to transcribe interviews right after they had happened, but this proved to be almost impossible, and I had to shelve most of the interviews for transcription after I had finished my participant observation and field work.

Going back home to Ghana after staying in Hong Kong for almost two years meant that I had to make time to see family members and catch up with friends as well. This was sparingly done to enable me to make more time for the fieldwork.

4.9 Personal Reflection

Several scholars have pointed to how the researcher is implicated in qualitative research (Etherington 2007; Haraway 1988; McCorkel and Myers 2003). Most of these scholars have pointed to the privileged position of power the researcher

occupies and how that shapes the creation of knowledge. Most scholars have pointed out that race, gender, social class are factors for example that bring a power imbalance to how knowledge is created and have argued that the researcher has to constantly reflect on his/her position with respect to participants and how that influences how knowledge is created (Haraway 1988; hooks 1990). As Haraway points out “positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices. It follows that politics and ethics ground struggles for and contests over what many count as rational knowledge” (Haraway 1988:597). Feminist scholars have pointed to reflexivity as a useful tool where

“we can include ourselves at any stage, making transparent the values and beliefs we hold that almost certainly influence the research process and outcomes... so that our work can be understood, not only in terms of what we have discovered but how we have discovered it” (Etherington 2011:601).

Reflexivity allows us to be “fully conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of those we study and those we select as our audience” (Hertz 1997: viii).

In this section, therefore, I reflect on my position as a black Ghanaian female PhD candidate during the collection of data and how that could have shaped the collection of data and subsequent analysis of the data.

First of all, my physicality was implicated during the research. I did all the data collection by myself and I had to constantly reflect on my body work practices while conducting this research. I had always been a UK size 8, sometimes bordering on a size 6, but at some point, I gained weight and became a size 12. Before arriving home, my friends made many comments about how much weight I had gained when I posted pictures on my social media handles. Even though I knew I was at a healthy weight of 65kg, I was somewhat bothered by these comments. When I signed up to

the gym for participant observation, I also liked that I could engage in some active exercise and try to lose some weight, especially around my midsection. I struggled with thoughts as to why I was not happy with my current weight. Despite being aware of the social constructs of the body ideal. I tried to convince myself that I looked better when I was slim. During a weighing session after training during the participant observation at the gym, one attendant who weighed a little above 150 kg (I saw the weight because she had checked her weight just before me and I could see her weight on the scale before I stood on the scale) jokingly asked what I was doing at the gym after I checked my weight and it read 63 kg. My struggle in trying to achieve a weight goal of 60kg and the embodied affects that came with those struggles helped me to better relate to the experiences of my participants. In addition, during interviews, some respondents made references to my body as to how it fit the body ideal they wanted. I tried in some situations to explain that I was also taking part in some body work to lose weight as I was not happy with my current weight.

My gender being female I believe made it easier for the women to open up to me about their frustrations with body work practices and I get the feeling that if I were male, I might not have got rich interviews as I did from women in this study. Also, because I used the snowballing approach to select participants, I first spoke to people in my circles who were taking on some kind of body work. Subsequently, they led me to other respondents. This method of finding respondents through snowballing meant that my research participants knew someone who knew me personally and that greatly helped with trust. I will usually start the interviews by asking participants how we came to know the same mutual friend which was a great opener for our conversations. My participants and I, therefore, knew a mutual friend

except for the 2 people who contacted me through social media as well as the participants I recruited through the TV fitness show. Even with the T.V show, they had an opportunity to meet me and hear about my research before meeting up with me again for the interview.

Most of the research on reflexivity has also been centred around racial hierarchies and how that affects power relations in research (hooks 1990; McCorkel and Myers 2003). In a country with a colonial past, I believe my position as a local sharing the same skin colour and nationality gave me an entry into the field and to experiences of women that might have otherwise been more difficult to navigate. Some believe that being an “insider” means that there is a risk that you overlook some important aspects of the subject being studied. In this study, I lean towards those who defend the insider approach as not being problematic as “insiders” know exactly what to look out for (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

Covid-19 happened while I was writing up my thesis and the startling amount of the deaths in the news made it difficult to read through transcripts of my interviews as I felt that discussions of bodywork which is mostly related to a performance of the self were rather frivolous. I lost interest in the work at some point and it took sheer willpower to stay through it. I shared some of my feelings and thoughts on my social media handles and a lot of friends had very kind words and thoughts for me which helped during moments of anxiety and angst. The ways in which my personal affects and embodiment was affected during the writing is important to note.

4. 10 Conclusion

This chapter explained the qualitative approach that undergirded data

collection and analysis. The various methods that were used to collect data were detailed and the reasons why they are used were explained. The data collection tools are also described in this chapter. How data was analyzed is discussed as well as ethical issues. Finally, the chapter looks at some challenges encountered in the field as well as the position I occupied as a researcher and how that influenced the research as well as how I was able to navigate the field despite it.

CHAPTER FIVE

BODY IDEALS AND BODY WORK IN GHANA

Introduction

“... the overarching theme and primary end of most body work is the pursuit and attainment of beauty, however it may be defined”(Reischer and Koo 2004:297).

This chapter explores the body ideal in Ghana and the subsequent body work practices that are engaged in to achieve this body ideal. Body ideals and subsequent body work are understood against a background of globalization, a neoliberal setting and by extension, a capitalist and consumerist culture.

In trying to understand the current body ideal, this chapter will first attempt to trace the infiltration of Western notions of beauty into Ghanaian culture. It will then move on to establish the overarching body ideal in urban Ghana, based on interviews with urban middle-class Ghanaian women and supplemented with various archival materials. To understand beauty ideals, one has to pay attention to how participants perceive their bodies regarding the globalized ideal and how this is negotiated along with local beauty ideals. This is important to do as various studies have shown that, especially in developing countries, body ideals, in relation to body shape and size, are multiple as the society encounters ideas and influences of the West (Edmonds, 2008; Savacool, 2009).

The second part of this chapter details the various body work activities urban middle-class Ghanaian women engage in to attain a certain body ideal. The role of the body as a source and location of body work is explored. In addition, the creative ways in which the body ideal is negotiated and how body work is subsequently practised will be presented. This will be done by an understanding of body work

activities through the embodied experiences of urban middle-class Ghanaian women as advanced by corporeal realism. Corporeal realism advances an embodied approach that moves away from the binary understandings of why women take on body work. It is therefore important to take a close look at the embodied experiences of women and how they negotiate various influences to create meanings of their body work practices.

5.1 Tracing the Body Ideal in Ghana

Traditionally in Ghana, fatness or plumpness of the human figure (in both male and female) has been associated with affluence, good living, happiness, and even beauty. It is common knowledge that the full-figured Ghanaian woman with ringed-neck, firm breasts, wide hips, prominent posterior and rounded calf muscles have always been admired on the streets not only by men but by women themselves (Domi 2010). In Ghanaian culture, beauty is mostly constructed on the shape and size of the body as opposed to the face in certain cultures (read Asian culture) (Holliday). This is evident in the kind of body work practices engaged in by urban middle-class Ghanaian women which to a large extent focuses on acquiring small and flat mid-sections and more defined curves at the bust and hips area.

In traditional dances like the Adowa of the Asante, the backsides of women are exaggerated with pillows and other materials to make their posterior jiggle when they dance. While this is part of the dance costume, it also points to an appreciation of larger backsides in Ghanaian culture. Figure 3 depicts a woman doing the Adowa dance in a traditional costume.

Figure 3: “Adowa Dancer”



Source: @tnxheritage Instagram page, 2020. Adowa Dancer [Artwork]

Traditional notions of beauty have also been strongly associated with virtue. In a study by Adjin-Tettey and Bempah (2015), women were asked to define beauty. Responses varied from “a well-behaved person”, “beauty is a character of a person and not the physical”, “beauty comes with the inner self”, “a kind of affable personality that responds to the needs of others”, etc. A study by Odoi (2018) also

confirms that good character traits were important in mate selection and constituted 97% of what people looked for in a partner. These responses are congruent with how beauty is constructed in Ghana. This is evident in the popular Akan saying “ahoufe, di wo beko, nanso wo suban di wo beba fie” translated loosely to mean, “beauty will take you away, but bad character will send you back home”. Even though marriage is not explicitly mentioned, there is an implied meaning of marriage, and this saying is often used to show the importance of good character as opposed to beauty in choosing a partner for marriage. It is important to note that this reference is mainly said to women and never to men. Women are admonished to have a good character when they are taken away in marriage as a bad character will have their husbands sending them back home which is considered a disgrace to the woman and her family.

In Ghana, as in Fiji, the most dramatic and noticeable change with body ideals came with the introduction of television broadcasting (Becker 2004). Television broadcasting was established in Ghana in 1965 by the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, in collaboration with Sanyo of Japan. In his inaugural speech, Nkrumah said:

“Ghana’s television will be used to supplement our educational programme and foster a lively interest in the world around us. It will not cater for cheap entertainment nor commercialisation. Its paramount object will be the education in the broadest and purest sense. Television must assist in the socialist transformation of Ghana”. Ghana’s Television which is inaugurating today, will be judged by the extent to which it fulfils these aims. Our Television Service should be African in its outlook; and in its content, even though it may express and reflect outside; and foreign experiences, it should remain geared to the needs of Ghana and Africa. It must reflect and promote the highest national and social ideals of our ideology and society”.

Nkrumah, who was an acclaimed Pan-Africanist, recognising the potential of foreign influences, implored that the content of the television station must remain Ghanaian and African. This was mostly the case when only the state broadcaster,

the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) operated. In 1995, however, the first commercial television broadcasting licenses were given to private media houses to operate following a return to democracy and adoption of the 1992 constitution which stood staunchly for the rule of law and an open and free media. Before this, the country was dogged with dictatorships and military rule after Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's nine-year period as head of state, the latter part of which Ghana was a one-party state.

The media landscape in Ghana is currently a friendly one allowing both private and public electronic and print media to thrive. According to the National Communications Authority (NCA), by the second quarter of 2020, the total number of authorised TV operators stood at 146 with a total of 102 being on-air as at the end of June 2020. With the licensing of the first private and commercial media house, several private commercial media houses burst onto the scene. It was important for these stations to have content to fill their time slots. Unlike the state media which had resources to produce local content, the private media houses bought the rights of old Western soap operas which they started showing, and which became instant hits with the populace, influencing several private media houses to adopt this approach. With this came an onslaught of western ideals and a depiction of the thin and slender body of women.

In most TV programmes these days, the traditional plump body which was previously valorised has given way to a slimmer yet full woman. Adjin-Tettey & Bempah (2015) point out that recent projections of beauty in the media are directly opposite to traditional notions. They point out that few programmes are tailored to include the plump traditional Ghanaian woman; rather, it is the slim and slender figure that is projected in the media as the perfect representation of who a beautiful

woman is. The ubiquitous nature of the media means that this onslaught of images influences individuals who internalise these images and try to replicate them. The study by Adjin-Tettey & Bempah (2015) showed that (40.2%) of their sample size of 100 middle-class Ghanaian women aspired to have thin and slender figures after they have been exposed to these images through the mass media. This is in tandem with various studies which point out that women internalise mainstream images of women to be the ideal (Cohen, Newton-John and Slater, 2018; Paquette and Raine, 2004; Wolf, 1991).

Participants agreed that there has been a shift in how body ideals were conceived in the past — before the commercialisation of the media space in Ghana — as opposed to the present. Ingrid explains how the ideal body type has changed over time.

Now there is a lot more emphasis on having a big backside and a smaller waist. Generally, the ideal body type was plump. Plump was plump but now it is being thick in the right places. The men like it! Back in the day when your wife gains weight, the man will be applauded for taking good care of the woman but currently, there is an emphasis on a slimmer waist and a bigger backside.
Ingrid, 31, Law Student

In Ingrid's description of what she believes to be the current ideal, it is interesting that while she points to slenderness being desirable, she however emphasises a bigger backside.

Beatrice confirms Ingrid's description of what a full-figured person might look like in Ghana now.

In the past, a full-figured person was a plump person but now, it is not too big, not being too slim. It is you attaining that full-figured look - a little bit of a bust then a mid-section going inside and the butt area coming out.
Beatrice, 35, Insurance Officer

In social media advertisements, the narrative is no different. Citi Fm, which is currently the most listened to English-speaking radio station in Ghana, used a

picture of a slim and curvy woman to advertise the showing of an English Premier League football match scheduled on 5th November 2017 on their official Facebook page. This is quite interesting as many Ghanaian men are passionate about football as opposed to women. At various bars and pubs, you will find most men watching football matches, as seen in the advertisement captured in Figure 4. That is not to say that Ghanaian women do not support sports. They do and are quite excited when the national football team plays occasionally. Therefore, using this image of a woman to advertise the football match reflects how women are objectified and treated as objects to be marketed and promoted to sell goods and services.

Figure 4: Advertisement of a football match by *Citi Fm*.



Source: Citi Fm, 2017. Football match advertisement. [Artwork].

Patricia attributed the change in body ideals and unrealistic expectations of men to social media. She explained that the constant interaction on social media with idealised images has led to unrealistic standards of the body ideal.

“... at first, men didn't really care whether their wives lost weight or not, but now it is the age of social media. Ladies take *backfies*; that is what they now call it, back selfies to show their big butts and their slim waist and most of the men want their wives to be like that so don't blame the ladies too much for going to such lengths to achieve that kind of body shape now...”

Patricia, 30, Corporate Communications Executive Assistant

As Patricia, Ingrid, and Beatrice point out, while slenderness is desired, there is an emphasis on the backside. While there is an overpopulation of images of the slender body type, this is not an overarching ideal as in the West. Local culture mediates this interaction of mainstream images. The aim for most Ghanaian women is not to have the ‘waif-like’ slender and ‘thin Twiggy’ or ‘Kate Moss’ look. While leaning towards slimness, Ghanaian women typically want to keep their curves hence the popularity of the waist trainer and waist shaper. This aligns with images that were in the Daily Graphic as far back as in 1972, as shown in figure 5, “Don’t be skinny”.

Figure 5: “Don’t be skinny”



Source: *Daily Graphic*, January 27, 1967

The depiction of a model who is “underweight” and one who has taken a food supplement called “Wate-On” shows that as Ghana made some more contact with the West, its beauty ideals changed but not to the same standards as the Western ideal. While the advertisement implored women not to be skinny which suggests that a plump figure is desired, the image used in comparison to the skinny model is not the typical plump full-figured woman that was previously the ideal.

It is also interesting to note that in the same period, there is also an advertisement in the Daily Graphic calling on women to lose weight with a drug called “Figuran”. In Figure 6, the advertisement says “the obesity drug FIGURAN takes off the excess fat from your body within a few days. “FIGURAN” has no side effects. In the advertisement, Walter Ritter, a German company, is the producer of the medicine with a local distributor in charge of getting it out to the people. The picture of the slim lady in the picture shows a slim and well-toned body.

Figure 6: “Slim! Slim! Slim!”

appeals to
for more
tion

SLIM! SLIM! SLIM!
SLIMMING
WITH
FIGURAN

WALTER RITTER
GEMO
HAMBURG - Germany
Hamburg - Akwasi

"FIGURAN" the obesity drug FIGURAN takes away the excess fat from your body within a few weeks.
"FIGURAN" has no side or after effects.
Obtainable from all the leading Drug Houses or direct from the
Distributors: J. A. BUCKLE & CO
(PHARMACEUTICALS)
P.O. Box 2934, Accra, Phone 25443

G.P.O. as a newspaper. EDITOR: K. GYAWU-KYEM. TELEPHONE: 28282 (5 lines)

Source: *Daily Graphic*, October 20, 1967

Ghana's colonial past started with the first documented interaction with the West (read Portuguese) going as far back as 1471, with subsequent cartel slavery starting in the early 1500s. Western notions of beauty ideals have since infiltrated into the Ghanaian constructions of beauty. Notions of racial superiority related to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and subsequent colonial rule led to a racialisation of beauty ideals where many have attempted to look white, and this persists even to this day. The most evident is the straightening of the curly kinky African hair using chemical relaxers and the use of bleaching creams to whiten the skin. Pierre (2012) points out in her book *The Predicament of Blackness*, that a colonial legacy has led to a white supremacy thinking where beauty ideals are centred around white ideals. As recent as 2018, Ghana's Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) in an interview with the Mirror newspaper, advised pregnant women to desist from taking hydroquinone pills in the hopes of having children who were light-skinned¹³. This interview was necessitated by reports in the news that some expecting mothers were taking pills so that their children can be lighter.

Following the independence of several African countries in the 1960s, there was, however, a renewed confidence of the African and a renaissance of pride in the black identity. This was captured in various forms, such as Pan-African events and literature that espoused these ideals. Chief among them are the poems of Negritude by Leopold Senghor. This Pan-African spirit was also championed by Ghana's first president, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. All of these historical antecedents have led to a multiplicity of beauty ideals that have existed side by side in the Ghanaian culture and are evidenced in newspapers following independence.

¹³ <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/expectant-mothers-resorting-to-pills-for-light-skinned-babies.html>

A random listen to popular Ghanaian music from the 90s will, for example, show such an appreciation of a variety of body types – “slim things”, “atea donko”, “chingilingi” denote slimness while “bola bola” and “world trade centre assets” point to an appreciation of more plump bodies. It must, however, not be forgotten that often, it is men singing these songs. This supposed variety could thus be a celebration of different female body types or just a reflection of the ‘liberal’ tastes of these men.

5.2 Globalization and the Body Ideal(s)

Cultural exchanges, globalization, a growing middle class, greater awareness of diet, exercise and fashion have contributed to the formation of a new, ideal Ghanaian woman that is less plump but not pencil slim as in women of the Western world. Various studies have shown that especially in developing countries, body ideals in relation to body shape and size are multiple as the society encounters ideas and influences of the West (Becker, 2004; Savacool, 2009).

In describing what was thought to be the current body ideal, the majority of the participants (22 out of 35 women) pointed to the hourglass figure as being the ideal body type. This body shape was elaborated upon to be one with ample breasts, medium to huge buttocks, a flat stomach, and a small waist. Seven participants referred to this body type as the “Coca-Cola” body shape. This shape was described as one which was curvaceous at the top, small at the waist and then flares out at the bottom. It was synonymous with the description of the hourglass figure. Even though in reality, the Coca-cola bottle did not look like an hourglass and its curves are not as pronounced, the reference to the Coca-Cola bottle as body ideal is one that is very popular in Ghana and has featured in many Ghanaian songs when the

body ideal is being alluded to. A study in Belize also had girls referring to their body ideal as the Coca-Cola shape with one girl describing it as “curvaceous at the top, goes in at the waist, and bigger on the bottom” (Anderson-Fye 2004:568). The author points out that “the “Coca-Cola shape might be thought of as an “hourglass” shape, though the upper curve is smaller than the lower curve, and neither is as pronounced” (Anderson-Fye 2004:568). Three women pointed to Kim Kardashian’s body, and another participant also referred to the pop culture celebrity, Nicki Minaj to be examples of the Coca-Cola shape.

“... the Kim Kardashian body is the ideal body size in Ghana now. It is what we are being bombarded with left and right now. Tiny waist, big boobs, big ass. That Coca-Cola shape. It is in the media, on the TVs and there are lots of pictures on social media.”

Adoley, 28, Law Student

Ingrid elaborated on the features of this ideal. She said...

“... It is what they call the slim waist, a hefty bust and then a big backside so you have the hourglass figure. So that is what is seen in our music videos, especially in our secular kind of music, so that is highly expected.”

Ingrid, 31, Law Student

Even though Kim Kardashian is not black, she is a global cultural icon. She has been accused of cultural appropriation¹⁴ several times, particularly blackfishing¹⁵, where she has tried to pass off as black many times. She is a massive influence in the Black American community, especially with her marriage to Kanye West, a popular and sometimes controversial Black American rapper.

Another participant suggested that the hourglass ideal was not just specific to Ghana and implied that it was a globalized body ideal.

“Not just in Ghana but I think all over the world, everybody wants to have a flatter tummy, bigger boobs but that is not necessary (boobs), but they want a flatter tummy and more curves.”

¹⁴ <https://www.news24.com/w24/PopCulture/Entertainment/Celebrity-gossip/kim-kardashian-faces-backlash-for-brazen-cultural-appropriation-again-a-timeline-of-her-antics-20200424>

¹⁵ <https://www.dailytargum.com/article/2020/03/kim-kardashian-appropriates-fulani-braids-again>

Bernice, 26, Digital Marketer

Adoley intimated that girls who were slender and curvy attracted the attention of men compared to those who were bigger.

“If you go to Osu, you will see the white men with these slim slim girls. Nobody wants a fat one except perhaps you are fat, but then the fat is in the right places, and the shape is there. Like you have a big ass, small waist, and tiny boobs. Like the literal coca-cola kind of shape.”

Adoley, 28, Law Student

It is interesting the reference she makes to white men and their preference for slim girls. Due to globalization, Accra, particularly Osu, has become a hotbed for tourists and expatriates. Osu has some of the most bustling nightlife in Accra. Some participants hinted that some girls take on body work as an investment to attract expatriates as well as rich men. This deliberate building of bodily capital as a means to an end is worthy to note.

Six participants pointed out that the slim and slender figure is the figure of choice. Six of the participants also pointed out that the ideal body was neither a plump one nor a slim one but one somewhere in the middle. Three participants used the term “εhɔ ne hɔ” in the Twi language, which literally translates as “here and there” and can be interpreted to mean ‘not too plump, not too slim’. For these women, it was most important to have a flat stomach and curves in the case you were plump. Most of these women acknowledged that the ideal has shifted from being just slim to being slim and curvy in the right places.

“I have noticed that most women want to be slim, but then they want to be shapely. Most women embrace curves, so they don't necessarily want to be overweight, but they don't want to be skinny. They just want to be slim but curvy.”

Hilda, 28, Event Manager and Blogger

Two participants did not acknowledge an overarching ideal, pointing out that people were different and that the body ideal was different for everyone recognizing

that some women resisted the beauty ideal. One participant explained that being fit and not being overweight was the ideal while the other insisted that the body ideal was different for everyone. This tying of a beauty ideal to health notions is interesting and will be discussed further in the section on healthism and body work.

For a majority of the participants, it seemed the converging points of this ideal was the emphasis on having a flat stomach and being curvy. As one of the participants, Naomi said, “once your tummy is flat, your backside pops out”. Another participant also points out that you could be plump, but it was important to have a flat stomach and essential that the curves were prominent.

The reference to Kim Kardashian and Nicki Minaj, both popular American celebrities famous for their enormous backsides, small waists, flat stomachs, and big breasts points to a cultural imperialism of American culture and as well as globalization. The references to Beyonce and Nicki Minaj in particular point to racial affinity, a closeness with people of a similar race in the construction of the body ideal. Even though beauty ideals have leanings of Western cultural imperialism (read European), it is interesting that references are drawn from popular Black American culture. While these references are global, they are also mainly black representations. Even though many studies have shown that most Latin American countries prefer fuller and curvy bodies, and the popularisation of Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) is a testament to this, all the women pointed to popular Black American culture. I argue that connections to specific geographies are important when body ideals are being studied in the global South. In this study, the specific references to America and the connection of the history of slavery in West Africa to America, leading to a substantial population of Black people living in America is a point to consider when understandings of beauty are being sought in

this part of the global South (read sub-Saharan Africa).

In addition, Holliday (2012) acknowledges that with globalization, many expatriate communities are in constant touch with their home countries. This means that there is a constant flow of aesthetic ideals from the host countries. Ghana has a substantial expatriate community in America. In a 2015 report, the Migration Policy Institute indicated that over 235,000 Ghanaian immigrants live in the United States. In addition, Ghana's role as a major slave port during the slave trade has ensured that there is a constant stream of African Americans and black diasporans visiting the country to connect with their roots. In 2019, the government of Ghana marked 400 years since the first slave ships docked in the Americas by dubbing 2019 as the "Year of Return"¹⁶. This saw several diasporans trooping into the country, especially from the United States. This constant interaction with similar others has led to an intermingling of local and global ideals of beauty in Ghana.

It is worthy of note that the references women made to the body ideal was mainly from popular culture and the social norms of what the ideal figure should be. This study argues that the popularity of the curvaceous body in Ghana currently converges with traditional body ideals. The thin beauty ideal while popular in the immediate years (late 90's to early 2000) after the popularity of American soap opera shows such as "The Bold and the Beautiful", "Sunset Beach", and "Passions" was not adopted by most people in the country. Currently, the curvy body is being embraced as it allows for elements dominant in popular culture to be merged with the traditional preference for the plump body. This also interestingly coincides with the popularity of Mexican soap operas such as "La Gata", "Rosalinda" "Storm Over

¹⁶ <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/akuffo-addo-declares-2019-diasporan-return-year.html>

Paradise” and “Second Chance” (early 2000’s to about 2015), shows which allow for shapelier bodies. More recently, Indian soaps dominate prime time television, and they also feature a multiplicity of body types. T.V houses have brought some of these Telenovela stars to Ghana and all programmes organised were mobbed with fans. In 2017, the Second Lady, Samira Bawumia, on a trip to India, posed with the entire cast of Kumkum Bagya¹⁷. There have been several media reports and studies conducted on the effects of these telenovelas, especially with regards to how it has given unrealistic expectations of romantic relationships.¹⁸

It is important to note that while there is an overwhelming recognition of the hourglass figure as the currently desired body type, there are other ideals that are preferred by research participants. This points to the fact that multiple beauty ideals exist side by side and unlike studies (Coffey 2016; Gimlin 2002) in the West where there is an overarching ideal that is recognised as the slim and slender ideal, this is not the case in Ghana.

I argue that while corporeal realism places the body first in understandings of the relationship between body and society, in the contemporary world, attention should also be directed to how globalization and global happenings shape local events and bodies. This is not only true for global South countries but also Western countries. In the West, for instance, Afrobeats is enjoying massive play with Burna Boy, a Nigerian artiste dominating the Billboard charts. His recent album, “Twice as Tall” was produced by popular American rapper and producer, Sean Diddy Combs. In 2020 as well, Beyoncé released “Black is King” which featured

¹⁷ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/entertainment/photos-samira-bawumia-meets-kumkum-bhagya-stars/https://www.indiatvnews.com/entertainment/tv-kumkum-bhagya-ekta-kapoor-tv-show-popular-in-ghana-u-17-football-team-looking-forward-to-meet-abhi-pragya-in-real-life-407273>

¹⁸ <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-impact-crew-The-ugly-side-of-telenovelas-467262>

numerous African artistes. This project which enjoyed huge global attention, features some Ghanaian artistes. There is currently a flow of cultural ideas not only from the global north to the global South but also from the South to North aided mainly by globalization.

I argue that globalization, and by extension, racial affinity, which I explain as closeness to similar others, plays a huge role in the images participants draw on to construct their body ideals. In this vein, I propose glo-corporeal realism as a frame for understanding bodies in the global South. Glo-corporeal realism calls for attention to be placed on globalization and global events and how they shape events in both the global North and global South countries. Features of globalization, such as migration, a global connectedness due to internet connection, and capitalism have led to an intermingling of cultures and influences between the global South and the global north. This has a real effect on bodies and how bodies are worked upon by people in the global South. This is supported by the various images women in this study drew on to construct their body ideals and subsequently, the body work activities they engaged in.

5.3 Negotiating the Body Ideal

Almost two-thirds of the women (23 women out of 35 women) had a particular body ideal that they wanted to achieve that looked like the current overarching ideal described. In describing their ideal bodies, most of these women also tied their body ideal to notions of femininity and wanting to be “fit and healthy” and to be “toned”. A ‘fit and healthy’ body was one associated with walking briskly and not running out of breath and feeling lightheaded. To be toned meant to have a body that was hard and did not feel fat.

“I am about 3kg away from my goal weight. My target is 75kg. I am about 78.5kg currently. My ideal body size should be about a size 8 to 10 but toned. Properly toned...”

Ewurama, 29, General Manager

The embodied descriptions of the body ideal as “walking briskly and not running out of breath”, “feeling lightheaded also connects the affects of these participants and give us a real opening into how their corporeal body feels.

For some, they were generally satisfied with their bodies but unhappy with their midsections. There was generally an emphasis among the women on attaining a smaller waist.

“... ok I don't think I am really fat. I will like to keep this shape with a flat tummy. You get it. Like they say, "coca-cola" shape [laughs]. My problem is my tummy.”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

It is interesting to note that Lilian self-identified as a size 14¹⁹ and does not see herself as fat. In most Western cultures, a size 14 will be considered fat, but in Ghana, because traditionally the ideal has been plump, women do not usually associate a size 14 with fatness.

Right now, I am excited about my body shape size. I went from a 70 to a 65 so yeah, I am excited. I wasn't happy about my previous size because with my body stature when I gain weight, I look very busty so it wasn't very flattering. but right now, since I lost weight, everything has become quite proportional, and it has affected my facial structure so I am excited about that

Adoley, 28, Law Student

What Adoley meant by her body stature was that she was quite busty at the top and not as endowed in the hips area therefore when she gains weight, this feature becomes further emphasized and she does not look proportional.

A few participants drew on popular celebrities in the media to illustrate what

¹⁹ This is in reference to UK female dress sizes. Ghana uses the UK size charts following its colonisation history. Participants therefore spoke of body size ideals in terms of dress sizes in some cases.

they wanted their bodies to look like. They, however, acknowledged that it was not an easy figure to achieve. For these participants, even though they recognised a personal ideal, they perceived it was unrealistic to attain this ideal and did little to attain it.

“I want to look like Beyoncé. Oh yes! Very much! I like her body type. Well, there are so many people that you can say “oh I like this body type”. You want to be like that, but as I said, it is not that easy to get there.”

Belinda, 39, Anaesthetist Nurse

In recognizing that a body like that of Beyoncé was impossible to achieve in Belinda’s instance, even though she recognised a specific body ideal, she did not feel inclined to pursue it. Indeed, as post-structural feminist theorists have argued, women are not cultural dopes and can create meanings of the body ideal for themselves.

In furtherance of this argument, out of 35 participants, 12 answered that they were satisfied with their bodies and did not have any personal ideal that they wanted to achieve. These women represented a diversity of sizes ranging from size 8 to 16. These women acknowledged that even though there was a mainstream body ideal of the hourglass figure, they were not influenced by it neither did they feel pressured to fit with the overarching ideal.

“The fact that the media portrays a certain type of body more than they do other bodies doesn't make that type of body more desirable for anyone other than the body I have so I just accepted it, and that's been my thing.”

Adwoa, 31, Communications Strategist

Adwoa has been a friend for over 10 years, and she has what for most people will be the ideal; a prominent posterior but not a heavy bust. She also lives her life off social media and has no social media accounts. So, for most of these groups of participants, their bodies closely resembled what was the current ideal and probably accounts for why they did not feel influenced by the mainstream ideal. Most of

these participants explained that they engaged in body work to keep healthy. Out of the 12 participants who were comfortable with their body sizes, 8 were between a UK size 8 and 10 while the others featured medium to larger body types. In discussing the body ideal, some women acknowledged their body capital.

“Maybe if I didn't have a big butt, I would have thought of having a big butt, but I already have a big butt, so I don't compare myself to people. I think I am ok with my body.”

Loretta, 29, Administrative Assistant

It is important to note that not all participants who recognised the overarching body ideal had bodies that looked like the current ideal. The doctor had recently told Mildred, for example, that she was overweight and needed to lose some weight. She explained that she did not care much about how she looked, but she had to go on a diet to lose weight because her doctor diagnosed her as obese. These participants were, however, in the minority. Only 2 plus sized women in this category had these convictions. In describing their body ideal, most participants made references to the fact that they were comfortable in their skin. This conforms to recent body positivity campaigns mainly on social media in Ghana which advocate that people should accept their bodies as they are and be comfortable in them rather than giving in to irrational pressure to attain certain societal body ideals.

While a majority of the women were seeking to lose weight to attain shapely bodies, a few participants were okay with their body figures and were just looking to maintain their current sizes. Interestingly, two participants thought they were too slim. One mentioned that she had gone below the average BMI and as such was underweight and was therefore looking to gain some weight.

“Since I am slim, I wanted to gain a little weight. I just wanted a little flesh to my skinny body [laughs] so I bought some drugs previously. I stopped using them, but I used to be worried that I was too slim. I didn't want to be slim.”

Wendy, 31, Administrative Assistant

Wendy was a size 8 and wanted to gain some weight to get to a size 10. She initially started taking some food supplements from Herbalife® but could not maintain the costs of the supplements and the diet she was advised on, so she moved to buying blood tonics. She indicated that she stopped taking the blood tonic because it made her drowsy at work. She indicated in the interview that she was currently on a kenkey²⁰ therapy which was recommended to her by a friend, and she said she believed it was working as she was looking good. With the kenkey therapy, all she has to do is to blend the kenkey with some water, milk and sugar and drink it every day.

Aba was another participant who indicated that she had lost a lot of weight due to the pressures of having to submit her PhD thesis as well as taking care of her two children. She said that after she submitted her thesis, she realised that the thesis had taken quite a toll on her. She mentioned that her husband told her “the schooling has taken the life out of her” and she felt the need to take a more proactive approach to get back to her old self.

“... I actually went as low as weighing below 50kg over the period that I was schooling. I wasn't underweight per se, but it wasn't too good. So, after submitting my work I decided to try to pay more attention to myself. Yeah. So, I saw a dietician and told him what had gone on with me over the period and what I was trying to achieve so he helped me to come up with a menu to try and fix in some snacks and things to get me gain the weight and at the same time, get my butts and my breasts still in shape as I want them to be. Now I weigh 52, I am targeting 55.”

Aba, 32, Social Researcher and Farmer

In describing their ideals, it became apparent that the Western notions of the body ideal did not necessarily apply in all cases. In Ghana, it appears that what is considered the ideal ranges from slim and slender to more plump and curvaceous bodies. In Aba's case for instance, even though she was not underweight, she felt

²⁰ A dish made from fermented corn that tastes like sour dough.

she had become too slim and needed to gain some weight for her breasts and butts to get fuller.

Corporeal realism recognises that “individuals experience social norms and technologies through the mediating powers of their own senses, sensualities, neurological, muscular and physiological processes” (Shilling 2013:22). This assertion is evident in the manner in which participants discussed their body ideals. For some, the mainstream ideal was their ideal. For others, they recognised the mainstream ideal for what it was but were not influenced by it for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons is that participants realise that the predominant images are idealised and not available to all. Corporeal realism presents an understanding of bodies that takes into consideration the subjective meaning of individual experiences. Nevertheless, the reference to popular black entertainers in the global space makes a case for an extension of corporeal realism to pay attention to globalization as advocated by glo-corporeal realism.

5.4 The Significance of the Global South (Ghana)

While most studies in the West have pointed to an overarching thin and slender ideal, studies from non-western cultures such as Latin American countries or even among African-American cultures have shown that women in these areas are more interested in body shape than thinness (Anderson Fye 2004; 2011). In Ghana, traditionally, the plump figure has been the body ideal for the Ghanaian woman. However, in recent times there has been an overpopulation of slim and slender images in the mainstream media. In response, the body ideal has shifted from a plump figure to an hourglass figure.

It is important to note that while there is an overwhelming recognition of an

hourglass figure to be the currently desired body type, there are other ideals that are preferred by research participants. This points to the fact that multiple beauty ideals exist side by side and unlike studies in the West where there is an overarching ideal recognized as the slim and slender ideal, this is not the case in Ghana. This confirms earlier claims by studies done in Latin American countries where body shape was found to be more important in conceiving the ideal body type (Anderson-Fye 2004; 2011).

In Ghana, while urban middle-class Ghanaian women draw on Western culture in constructing the body ideal, they also pay homage to the traditional norms of the body ideal. This produces a glocalized body ideal which draws heavily on celebrities in the African-American culture. The significance of drawing on the racially similar, with regard to body size and shape, is interesting as various studies that focused on the popularity of skin bleaching in Africa have shown that the remnants of colonialism left a racial hierarchy that painted the white skin colour as superior. Concerning body shape and size, it seems the cultural norms have persisted, with a greater focus on curviness despite increasing contact with the West.

5.5 Body Work

In this section, how body work in relation to body shape and size was practised based on the body ideals participants sought to achieve will be presented. Body work is defined as work done on one's own body for aesthetic modifications and maintenance of the body shape and size. Body work is discussed using a glocalcorporeal realist approach where attention is paid to how globalisation shapes body work practices among middle class Ghanaian women. Additionally, feelings of embodiment about how body work was practised will be brought to fore.

The women interviewed had embarked on various body work practices regarding body shape and size. All 35 women interviewed engaged in some form of body work. However, the frequency of such body work varied. Body work practices ranged from simple routines such as drinking lime and warm water, or cinnamon powder and honey in the mornings and evenings to more moderate activities such as portion control, jogging, exercising with weights at home, going to the gym, and using corsets and other undergarments for shapely bodies. Others used food supplements, slimming teas, and various weight loss products. Some participants were engaged in more elaborate methods such as keto dieting, intermittent fasting, and surgery.

5.5.1 Dieting

Dieting, which mostly entailed following a strict dietary plan was one of the many ways the urban middle-class Ghanaian women sought to achieve their body ideal. Some form of dieting was an aspect of body work for all participants and included keto dieting (a low fat, high protein diet), Atkins dieting (reducing carbohydrates and in some cases cutting out some food items like sugar entirely from diets), and portion control. Adoley, who had earlier mentioned that she was happy with her current figure, was engaged in dieting to maintain her figure.

“The thing I do most is portion control. I don't really eat like I used to eat. It is not easy. I literally starve myself sometimes because what can you do? I try to eat once a day and drink a lot of water.”

Adoley, 28, law student

Adoley brings to the fore the effects of dieting on her body. She tells me that she “literally starves” herself because she cannot see any other way to maintain her body size. Here, we see the disciplining nature of body work on the embodied being. Not all participants were as strict as Adoley with portion control. Most participants

mentioned that they had made changes to their food intake and adopted more healthy eating habits and diets. Ruby for example told me that she had made changes to her diet and eats a lot more fruits and has incorporated a lot of fibre into her breakfast for example as well as a lot of greens such as Spinach into her food. She showed me a vegetable patch near her office which she tends that had a lot of spinach growing.

An increasingly popular diet which the study found participants engaged in was the keto diet. This was supposed to be a diet that helped individuals lose weight speedily. It is a low carb, high fat diet where carbohydrates are eaten in really small quantities and more proteins such as chicken, eggs are consumed in large portions. To supplement the low carbohydrate intake, participants bought psyllium husk powder which they used to mix their carbohydrate foods. Participants also had a list of keto compliant oils which included coconut oil and olive oil which they used. Four participants had tried this diet.

“Currently, I am on a keto diet. It’s a low carb, high fat diet. It is a quick fix because it makes me lose the weight I want in a very short time. Even though it’s not sustainable, it helps me to hit the weight I want in a very short time.”
Ewurama, 29, General Manager

Even though Ewurama points out that the keto diet is not sustainable in the long term because of how expensive it is, she indicated that it was helping her achieve her current weight goal. She indicated that once she hit her desired goal, she was going to stop and then try to maintain her weight through exercising.

Araba, who also tried the keto diet in the past, shared how she felt when she was on it.

“With keto, you begin to feel light; you begin feeling like, oh okay, I am losing weight though the scale might not change or anything. But you feel very light on keto, and you hardly feel hungry.”
Bernice, 26, Digital Marketer

By describing the body as feeling light, Bernice ascribes a feeling to how the body feels. This is important as the materiality of the body is evident.

Some participants pointed out that this diet plan did not have ingredients that were readily available on the Ghanaian market such as asparagus and broccoli, making the ingredients costly, so they had to stop at some point.

Some participants, however, were not enthused about the keto diet.

“...it makes you lose weight fast but for how long do you live on only proteins and fats and oils? Certainly, your body is going to fight that at some point because you are going to be overworking your organs, processing proteins and all that. I don't think it's a wise thing.”

Adwoa, 31, Communications Strategist

Dieting has been recognised in the literature as one of the ways through which the bodies of women are repressed. Various feminist studies in body work and the beauty ideal have shown that extreme dieting to achieve some form of body ideal has led to anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Bordo 2003; Davis 1991). In this study, one participant admitted to having had body dysmorphia at some point due to her obsession with losing weight before her wedding. She explained that even though her friends and family told her she was at a good weight, she did not listen, and it was only when she saw her wedding pictures that she realised how much weight she had lost. She explained that her dad had always been particular about dieting and weight, and she believes this might have been internalised over the years.

“Now I look back at my pictures and I hate how I looked on my wedding day..... I don't like to say that I have it but I realised that it is something I deal with; body dysmorphia where I see myself bigger than others see me. During that period, I really thought I was huge and I wasn't. I enrolled in a gym and started working out so what I told myself was... at that time I was weighing 62kg and I told myself I wanted to weigh 58 kg so just lose 4 kgs. I lost the 4 kgs and I said "Oh, now that I have lost the 4, let me just lose 1 more". It was like that till I got to 53. A very unhealthy weight because for my height, I am 5'6. So for my BMI, I was underweight. I looked anorexic. I was very, very skinny. I became 53kgs. My wedding gown and everything was oversized so they had to be altered. Even at that time, shockingly enough, I still did not

think I was skinny and everyone kept complaining "A, you look terrible", "you've lost too much weight", "you have to gain weight". I couldn't see it. I was refusing to eat; it was very unhealthy. I was working out more than I was eating and then after a while, I think after I got married, the obsession to lose weight just diminished so I wasn't really working out then. I started eating normally, and then I saw my wedding pictures, that was when I started seeing my collar bone, and that's when I realised " No, this isn't it"."

Hilda, 28 years, Event Manager and Blogger

Hilda had two children, and she continues to work out to maintain her body shape and size but is now at a healthy weight factoring in her body shape and size. She also writes about her journey to weight loss and maintaining her size after childbirth, among other things on a blog that is quite popular with young moms.

5.5.2 Corseting and Waist Training

The use of corsets and waist trainers was the second most popular body work activity. 26 out of the 35 women had owned and used corsets at some point in trying to lose weight or attain the ideal body figure. While some used it on just a few occasions before giving it up, others have persisted with their practices. For many of these women, the corset was an easy fix to getting their desirable figures.

"If I am going out in the night and I am wearing a really clingy dress, I use it. It gives me a flatter look, and it defines the love handles a little."

Adoley, 28, Law Student

Some abandoned the corsets because they explained that they were highly uncomfortable and made it difficult to breathe. This position is in tandem with feminist literature that points out that women have for years been encouraged to go through pain to attain ideal body figures (Grogan 2017; Bordo 2003).

"You know the body shape is already there, but the waist trainer tightens the waist to what you actually really want. It's not easy, my sister. They say life is pain. If you're a girl and you want to look nice and all that, it's pain."

Anita, 28, Actress/Video Vixen

For some participants, it was worth the pain to continue using the corset as it

gradually shapes the body. This disciplining of the body to attain a certain body by individuals where they exercise power over their bodies has been associated with the neoliberal governance of the self where the individual takes charge of the shape and size of their corporeal bodies to fit in with ideals of the current consumerist culture (Bordo 1993; Cairns and Johnston 2015).

For others, they did not like to use the corset anymore as the body went back to being undesirable right after the corset came off.

“...at the end of the day when you put on your corsets it gives you that shape, so you are lazy to train. I stopped wearing the corset, and when I saw my tummy, it forced me to get back into the exercise again.”

Bernice, 26, Digital Marketer

In Figure 7, Lilian, whom I interviewed at home, shares some of the garments she wears in trying to achieve the body ideal. She had about 7 different garments. When I asked her why she had so many, she explained that the choice of corset was based on the dress that she wears. All the garments were targeted at making the middle section smaller. She mentioned that she did not think she weighed a lot; however, after having a baby, it has been difficult getting her stomach back to the state in which it was in pre-pregnancy. Her goal was to achieve an hourglass figure by cinching the bulge of her stomach into these corsets.

In general, corsets made from the traditional Kente cloth have become popular for traditional weddings in Ghana with comments like “wow, your waist is so snatched” to indicate admiration for a small waist which makes curves look more accentuated. In this regard, it is vital to note that several women pointed to the reason why they take on body work was to fit nicely in body-hugging clothes which show off curves. The fact that women usually start training vigorously or try to lose weight sometime before their wedding was collaborated by participants. This will

be explored further in the chapter on gender and body work.

Figure 7: A display of some undergarments for achieving body shape and size



Source: Researcher's Field Notes, 2019

5.5.3 Gym Training

Training at the gym was the third most popular body work activity with the participants of this study. Fourteen participants had signed up to gyms, but not all of them were regulars. Working out at the gym has currently become a popular urban activity. In Accra currently, there are more than 100 gyms, an increase from just about ten gyms in the early '90s. Prominent Ghanaian blogger, Jemila Abdulai, lists 20 popular gyms²¹ in Accra as well as their price ranges. Most of these gyms are filled with state-of-the-art equipment and usually come with gym instructors.

The current rise of gym culture in Accra can also be attributed to numerous factors. Chief among them is the sharing of videos by various local celebrities as well as global celebrities training in gyms with hashtags such as #bodygoals,

²¹ <https://circumspecte.com/2019/02/20-popular-gyms-in-accra-get-fit/>

#fitfam, #fitinspiration, among others. In addition, the emphasis on a flat stomach and a cinched waist in Ghana is recently driving many women to the gym.

In my observations at the gym, most of the women who came to sign up kept emphasizing that they wanted to get rid of their fatty midsection, which is in tandem with descriptions of the body ideal. The Nutrition Transition Theory has pointed out that as developing countries modernise, they tend to switch their dietary habits to Western-style fast foods which lead to obesity (Prentice, 2006; Popkin, 2004;). There have been some studies in the Ghanaian setting that mirrors this (Appiah, Otoo and Steiner-Asiedu, 2016; Agyei-Mensah and Aikins, 2010). A 2017 New York Times article²² by Dionne Searcey and Matt Richtel sought to connect obesity, \fast-food, and how fast-food patronage is indulged in as a middle class culture in Ghana. The article also described the President of the Republic of Ghana, Nana Akufo Addo as obese, which raised a great furore in public.

During the time of observations, however, I identified about seventeen women who came to the gym to train regularly. Out of this number, only five of them looked overweight by estimating their BMI using their weight (which mostly came up during my interactions with them) or during weight checking after training and an estimation of their height. Most of the ladies were usually slim. Usually between a UK size 8 and 10 (mostly between 55 to 65kg). For many, even though they were slim, they were not happy about the size of their stomachs and wanted flatter stomachs. The presence of smaller sizes at the gym as compared to larger sizes is interesting as the literature points to increasing rates of hypertension stemming from obesity (Duda, Jumah, et al. 2007; Duda, Kim, et al. 2007). In the study, however,

²² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/health/ghana-kfc-obesity.html#:~:text=But%20KFC's%20expansion%20here%20comes,at%20least%20doubled%20since%201980.>

there were slimmer people in the gym than overweight or obese people. This points to the fact that gym culture has become a performance of middle-class culture. Several of the gym attendants will take selfies while training or ask their friends to take pictures of them while they train, which they posted on their social media pages.

“While we were packing after a gruelling aerobics session, I heard Onyx telling Ofa (Gym Instructor) that she wants to just lose her belly fat but does not want to lose weight. Onyx is between a size 6 and 8. Ofa tells Onyx to watch her diet. Onyx then asks him that what she should be eating? In turn, Ofa asks her what she eats, and she said banku, fufu, etc. (diets saturated with high carbs). Ofa tells her to watch her diet and cut out the carbs. He also advised that she eats small portions. Onyx has a look of desperation on her face. She kept mumbling after Ofa had left that with the kind of dishes in Ghana, it was almost impossible to avoid the carbs.”

Field Diary, March 20, 2019

Most of the training sessions at the gym were gruelling, and most often, gym participants could not keep up with exercises. At these points, instructors will start shouting statements like “no pain, no gain”, “feeling the pain means your body is responding to the exercise”, “if you want a flat tummy, you have to endure” to urge participants to keep the goal in mind. The constant repetition of these words actively mobilized participants to be exacting of their own bodies.

During one of my observations at the gym, a lady who had signed on earlier during the week was asked to do some exercises. The moves were strenuous, and after a while, the lady gasped in exasperation “I am curvy, not fat”. I had been instructed to do the same exercises with her and she told me she doesn’t know why she is putting herself through all the trouble when she is not fat. This was interesting because it points to the fact that being plump and curvy was still acceptable in Ghana but being fat was not. This lady looked like a UK size 14 or 16.

Gender at the gym

In conversations with trainers, I overheard gym attendants say many times say

how much they wanted to have a toned body even though they were already slim. As noted in the literature, in the 21st century, some muscle tone is important as a firm looking body was ideal for both men and women (Lupton 2013; Widdows 2018). Five of my participants mentioned the need to tone their bodies.

“I am striving towards an ideal where I have more toned body parts. Basically, trying to tone my muscles and make them firmer.”
Sharon, 25, Investment Promotions Officer

This is noteworthy because previously, going to the gym was deemed a mainly male affair in Ghana, but in recent times, the gym has become a female space as well. In the gym where I did my fieldwork, the number of males and females working out at any point was almost even. In the afternoons, however, there were more males than females at the gym. A possible explanation for this might be that because most of my participants were middle-class women, they had to go to work and could only come in the evenings after work while according to some of the male gym attendants who trained in the afternoons, some were gym instructors while others were in jobs such as bodyguarding that required a specific muscular looking physique hence consistent training. It was interesting to observe both males and females lifting the same set of weights on some occasions. Three of the female gym participants regularly did weights training and had a camaraderie with male gym attendants which sometimes bordered on conversations loaded with sexual innuendos.

“On one such occasion, which was Valentine’s day, Naomi, a gym attendant who was a regular at lifting weights, was doing so but was rather tired, so a male colleague started urging her on. He said, “Push up”, “Go faster”, “You are almost there”. In one instant he asked Naomi “Are you there yet?” and she said, “One more stroke”. At this point, a lot of people could hear them and had their attention on them. At the beginning of the last set, the guy said this was a Valentine edition and started again with the sexually suggestive words. He asked her “Are you there yet?” and she said, “I have 4 more to climax”. After, she started a countdown from 4 and after the final lift, exhales with exaggeration.”

Field Diary, February 14, 2019

It seemed Naomi and Iris (another gym regular) had a closer relationship with the guys at the gym because of the kind of exercises they did. Looking in, it seemed, the guys considered them as one of their own with the heavy weightlifting they did. I notice that the kind of banter they had with the guys was not the same as the other ladies who visited the gym. The training at the gym was mostly gendered with a lot of female participants doing aerobics and male participants doing weightlifting.

5.5.4 Exercising at home

Some participants did not go to the gym but exercised at home. Some went running or jogging while others trained alongside YouTube tutorials or apps doing some form of aerobics. Three participants in the upper middle class category had equipment such as treadmills and weights. Some of the participants described the feelings they associated with exercising.

“Jogging is refreshing. Though when you come back, you feel tired, you feel energised. You feel excited. Naturally, you know exercise releases endorphins and endorphins make you happy so yeah when I exercise, I really feel vitalised.”
Adoley, 29, Law Student

It is interesting to note how a body work activity like jogging affected Adoley’s mood directly, making her happy. So, even though she felt tired doing those exercises, she felt content in the embodied experience of happiness it brought her.

Patricia describes how her body felt when she stopped exercising.

“I don't feel good right now because I've stopped exercising for a while now and I have realised that I am going back to size 12 instead of the size 10 I've always desired, so I have to go back to exercising again.”
Patricia, 29, Corporate Communications Executive Assitant

Participants’ descriptions of “feeling excited”, “energised”, as well as “not feeling good” shows the affective feelings they associate with body work. Coffey

(2016: 29) points out that affect can refer to the psychological, emotional and physical connections a body has with other people, abstract ideas or activities such as through body work practices of jogging, weights training, aerobics or walking. Understanding the affective feelings participants associate with body work practices is an important part of adopting an embodied approach. This is important to note because many studies have focused on body work practices, but these feelings of affect have been left unexplored in how individuals experience their bodies.

5.5.5 Herbal Products and Other Supplements

Three of the women interviewed used some kind of herbal preparation to lose weight. Two of them were using senna leaves which they said helped them to have free bowels. Another lady was using a local herb called *adumbiase* which she had seen being advertised on social media networking site , Facebook and was said to have phenomenal slimming qualities. The participant, however, mentioned that after she had purchased it, she found cumbersome to prepare, and it tasted bitter so she stopped drinking it. She explained that she decided to switch to a tea called “Lofera Fat Burner” which she again saw being advertised on Facebook and subsequently bought. She indicated that even though she has not been using it for long, she could see that it was going to be effective because she could see visible signs of losing weight.

Others relied on food supplements from companies like Herbalife® to lose weight even though they are not very consistent with how they are supposed to take it. Others stopped using supplements because their incomes could not support it.

“I tried Herbalife. I tried their shake, their tea and some of their supplements. But the shake was the only thing I finished. I haven’t really been consistent

with supplements.”
Angela, 30, Teacher

Figure 8 shows some of the products used by research participants in their weight loss regimen.

Figure 8: A display of products used for weight loss



Source: Researcher’s Field Notes, 2019.

5.5.6 Body Work and Medical Technologies in Ghana

Various studies have pointed out the increasing framing of social problems as medical problems. This phenomenon, known as medicalisation, has been blamed for increasingly offering solutions to problems that were previously treated outside the medical domain, such as weight loss. Various studies point out that pills are

increasingly being suggested as solutions to weight loss, which exercising, and dieting were supposed to solve. These studies indicate that more social problems are being brought into the medical realm (Busfield, 2010; Conrad, 1992). Conrad and Valerie (2016) also point to marketing and advertising as key influencers of medicalisation. The corporatisation of health, as well as decreased public regulation, has led to new medical markets, thereby increasing medicalisation.

In this study, one lady had undergone a gastric bypass procedure where a part of her stomach was sliced off to enable her to lose weight. She explained that she did the surgery to lose weight based on health reasons and not aesthetic purposes.

Although there are no official statistics on the number of cosmetic surgeries done in Ghana, the presence of billboards, radio and TV advertisements, as well as brochure advertisements makes it evident that body work practices are becoming a phenomenon in Ghana. On June 4, 2018, several media houses and online news portals reported that a government official, Stacy Offei-Darko, who was the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the National Entrepreneurship Innovation Programme (NEIP), had died as a result of a botched body-enhancing surgery at the Advanced Body Sculpt Centre also known as Obengfo Hospital. The exact details of her death were sketchy. However, Dr. Obengfo, the eponymous owner of the facility, was subsequently arrested by the police for the death of Stacy Offei-Darko. Dr. Obengfo had previously been in the news for botched surgeries and had been embroiled in several malpractice and regulation tussles with the Ghana Medical Association (GMA) about operations at his facility. The GMA has attempted shutting him down several times but has been unsuccessful, and he continues to operate.²³ Dr. Obengfo

²³ <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/all-efforts-to-close-down-obengfo-hospital-failed-medical-dental-council/2019/>

has granted several media interviews where he explains that he offers an essential service of making girls beautiful.²⁴ He urged Ghanaians not to worry about his credentials and training which has been scrutinised, but the quality of his work should speak for him.

The death of a high-profile government official at the facility confirmed rumours and the subsequent collaboration by a singer and actress Nana Frema²⁵ about having worked on her body at the said facility brought to the fore that cosmetic surgeries were on the increase in the country. A study by Smith (2018), where she focuses on cosmetic surgeries in Ghana confirms this previously non-existent phenomenon. Her study also indicates that there are various risks associated with cosmetic surgeries in Ghana, such as botched surgeries leading to infections and sometimes death in some facilities where the credentials of the health workers were highly suspect. Urban middle-class Ghanaian women, however, continue to seek services in these same facilities to enhance their body shape and size evidencing a real need for this service. Famous Ghanaian cartoonist and satirist, Tilapia, attempts commentary on the matter in Figure 9.

In Accra, I visited the Centre for Cosmetic Surgery situated at the Airport Women's Clinic, which offers various cosmetic procedures. A flier I picked at the centre (shown as Figure 10) advertised butt lifts, breast enlargement, liposuction, etc. They also had a website²⁶ that detailed all their services and contact information. Brochures were readily available at the reception desk, and a pull-up banner was visible at the reception area of the Airport Women's Clinic. The use of a Western

²⁴ <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/my-work-has-produced-beautiful-girls-obengfo-to-critics.html>

²⁵ www.graphic.com.gh/showbiz/news/my-wahala-after-cosmetic-surgery-nana-frema.html#&ts=undefined

²⁶ <https://www.cesghana.com/>

skyline in the brochure alludes to the Western nature of cosmetic surgery.

Figure 9: “Resurrect my fallen breast”.



Source: Tilapia, (2018). Tv3 Network.

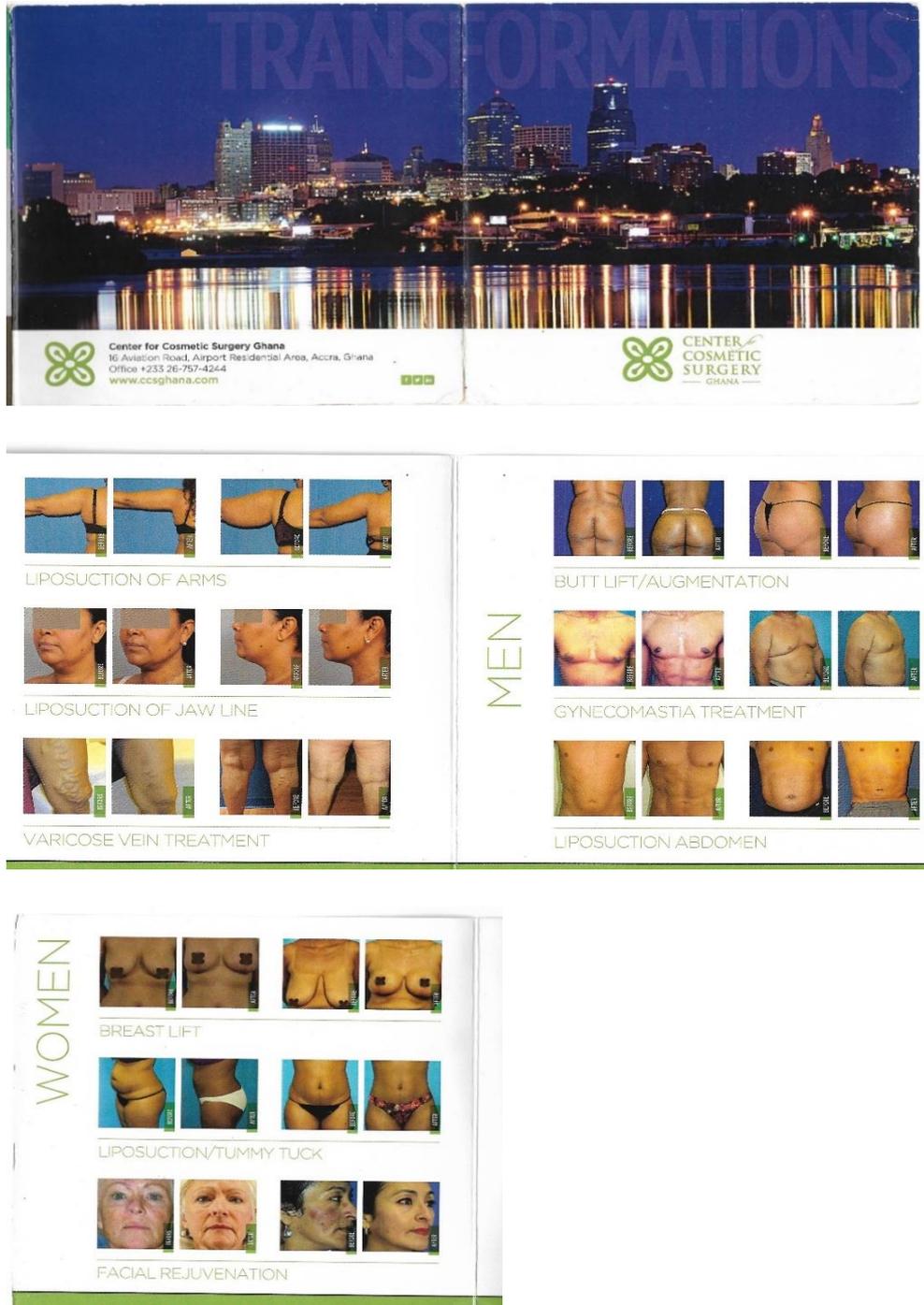
The study by Smith (2018) comments on the increasing patronage of cosmetic enhancing procedures in Ghana. Even though some Ghanaian celebrities and socialites seem to have developed ‘curves’ overnight, they deny having gone through any cosmetic procedures. A news story from Multimedia Ghana’s Joy News throws some light on this issue in the entertainment industry where they show old pictures of celebrities and an attempt to find out if one such celebrity had had surgery.²⁷ This secrecy might reflect the religious nature of the country and the backlash these women perceive they will face if they admit they had made changes to their God-given bodies.

During the study, two ladies admitted to having had butt lifts on TV. Popular Ghanaian actress Moesha Boduong finally admitted to enlarging her backside through cosmetic surgery. In an interview with Angela Bamford on the TLS Show on GhOne TV, on 15th August 2020, Moesha Boduong admitted to having done a

²⁷ <https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=624504611373402&extid=fQfma6Uij3Z2E2FE>

Brazilian Butt Lift.²⁸ Her admission follows years of reportage in the media that she had “touched” her backside, with her denying such reports.

Figure 10: “Transformations”



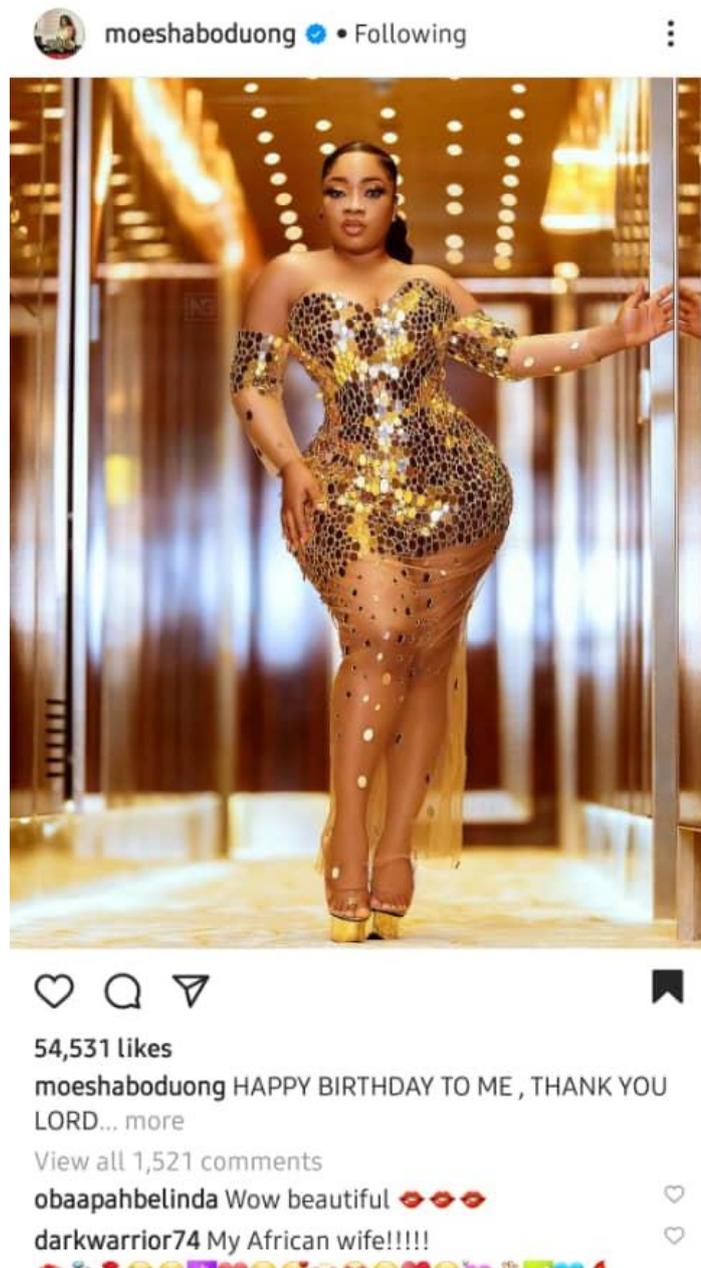
Source: Researcher’s Field Notes, March 2019

²⁸ <https://www.pulse.com.gh/entertainment/celebrities/moesha-boduong-details-the-type-of-plastice-surgery-she-had-watch/jj9gtf8>

This public declaration was possibly due to the increased patronage and the admission by some others that they also had undergone cosmetic procedures.²⁹

Figure 11 shows a picture of Moesha Boduong from her Instagram page.

Figure 11: Moesha Boduong



Source: Moesha Boduong's Instagram Page

Singer and actress Nana Frema, during the period of data collection, also

²⁹ <https://web.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=624504611373402>

admitted to patronizing body-sculpting services in an interview on “The Delay Show” which was shown on Youtube. In Nana Frema’s case, she employed the services of the Advanced Body Sculpt Centre. This celebrity alluded to the fact that a lot of public figures had also had cosmetic surgery.

While medical technologies for body work are not as advanced in Ghana as in the West, it is interesting to note that food supplements and other medicinal products for weight loss are mostly sold outside the medical field, and generally by individual marketers. Consequently, this has led to an increase in body sculpting service providers who purport to use methods such as suctioning and fat transfer to shape the body (Smith, 2018). These methods have generated controversy with the Ghana Medical Association, sanctioning a practitioner. However, there seems to be more of these services opening in different parts of the capital city.

In Figure 12, this advertisement for various body enhancement services such as “stomach reduction”, “hip enlargement”, “penis enlargement”, etc., are advertised in Osu, a bustling part of Accra. Many of such establishments, operating outside the purview of the Ghana Medical Association, are scattered across the city.

Figure 12: Billboard for “Perfect Skin and Body Therapy”



Source: Researcher’s Field Notes, 2020

In summary, body work activities differed for each of the research participants. The frequency and intensity of activities engaged in were very varied. Body work activities were mostly targeted at the fatty middle. Some participants, though not obese, wanted to attain more shapely and toned bodies. They all emphasised that being shapely and curvy was particularly important in attaining a body ideal in the Ghanaian society. Body work activities undertaken by participants varied but, in most instances, socioeconomic capital determined which activities individuals engaged in. Participants with higher incomes, engaged in more expensive body work routines. Engaging in body work is expensive and, in many cases, participants cited that although they preferred to engage in one body work or the other, they lacked the financial ability to do so. This is consistent with studies (Slevin 2010; Hurd and Griffin 2008) and will be further explored in the chapter on body work, healthism, and class.

5.6 The Body as a Source of Body Work

In this current neoliberal society, the body is still a determinant of work and individuals who have to work in specific fields need to have the commensurate corporeal abilities to match it. Like the men and women in pre-industrial society, the body has to be disciplined to fit in with the environment.

Thompson (2003) points out that while industrial economies targeted a finite range of the worker's productive capacities, the post-industrial economies of wealthy Western countries target the whole person. Thompson's assertion is not only true for wealthy Western countries but across the world in capitalist societies. With globalization, several giant corporations in the West have subsidiaries in the global South, and the same standard practices are enforced across the world.

Patricia, who is a Corporate Communications Executive Assistant, explained that in the banking sector, aesthetics, as well as body shape and size, play an essential role.

“Patricia: ... for those bankers who go to look for accounts, you need to have a particular body size, if not they won't even include you. We call that corporate prostitution.

E: Can you elaborate on that, please? This is the first time I am hearing it.

Patricia: It is when banks line up beautiful women and send them out to look for accounts, either from the ministers, the big guys in Ghana because the bank needs to have some kind of money to be operational and you don't send out guys in these instances, you send out beautiful ladies who can catch the attention of the men, you know she needs to have this big bum, flat tummy and all that, and if you ask most of the bankers, the intelligent and big ones are left in the banking hall. They never get to go out.”

Patricia, 30, Corporate Communications Executive Assistant

In both narratives, it is apparent how the femininity of women is used in this neoliberal era to sell products to customers. Women are expected to look “smart” in heels and always “look on point”. The same attention to personal looks is not expected of men (Otis 2016).

In the current capitalist culture, not only do employers expect workers bodies to be managed and groomed in specific ways, but they also seek to construct the embodiment of workers by emphasising things like “emotional intelligence”. Hancock and Tyler (2000) argue that employee recruitment and management are increasingly commodifying embodied capacities that were once considered private. In the current socio-cultural environment, many body work activities were taken on by urban middle-class Ghanaian women to make them functional in their work environment.

Engaging in body work was also a function of gender where women felt they had to fit in with a societal ideal to look attractive to male partners. In this instance,

the body is a source of body work by virtue of the body being occupied by the women. They felt the need to cultivate their bodies to make them functional in society by way of making them more attractive for marriage. This overlaps with their bodies being a location of the impingement of cultural and societal forces. This is also moderated by individual agency in some cases. In the next chapter, to understand why women took on body work, how gender is embodied will be focused and explored to capture how middle-class women make meanings of body work.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to understand what urban middle-class Ghanaian women perceived to be the overarching body ideal and how that aligned with their ideal body. The chapter subsequently addresses how women negotiate and make meaning of the difference between the general ideal and their ideal through their embodied experiences. The findings show that even though women recognise an overarching body ideal, they do not always subscribe to them. Various social forces such as race, religion, healthism, social media usage, and their agency influence how body shape and size ideals are formed. A prominent factor that is driving the curvy hourglass ideal is self-presentation. This coheres with findings from other studies which identifies the current consumer culture to be a driving force of increased attention to one's self-presentation (Shilling 2005; 2012; Giddens, 1991; Featherstone 1982).

Various body work practices are engaged in to achieve the body ideal. These include dieting, exercising at home and in gyms, the use of corsets and waist trainers, the use of herbal and other food supplements and surgery. One participant underwent gastric bypass surgery. In the Ghanaian culture, beauty is mostly

constructed on the shape and size of the body as opposed to the face in certain cultures such as Chinese culture (Holliday 2012). This is evident in the kind of body work practices engaged in by urban middle-class women which to a large extent focuses on acquiring small and flat mid-sections and more defined curves at the hips area. These body work practices are highlighted by using an embodied approach to understand the experiences of these women and the feelings they associated with these activities.

CHAPTER SIX

BODY WORK AND GENDER

6.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how gender shapes the practices of body work among urban middle-class Ghanaian women in the context of femininity, and links gender to the current consumerist culture. Gender is a relevant frame in understanding how urban middle-class Ghanaian women experience body work practices. Gender is framed around “hegemonic gender ideals” where women are supposed to be “skinny or slender” (Coffey 2016), hourglass-shaped (Grogan 2008) and in this current 21st century, have well-toned muscles to look firm (Lupton 2013).

Gender norms dictating how a woman is supposed to look played a significant role in how participants worked on their bodies. In the previous chapter, it is apparent that descriptions of the body ideal as having a “slim waist”, “hefty bust”, “big backside”, “coca-cola shaped”, “hourglass figure” fits in with feminine ideals of what the female body is supposed to look like. To achieve this ideal, women engaged in several body work practices.

Subsequently, the chapter will look at the motivations behind body work practices and show that body work is deeply gendered. Finally, the chapter will look at stories of agency and show how participants both reproduce and resist the current body ideal.

6.1 The Gendered Nature of Body Work: The Body as a Location for Body work

The body is a “key site where gender divisions are constructed and played out” (Crossley 2006:16). Gender played an important role in how participants perceived

their bodies based on the cultural constructs of gender in the Ghanaian society. In Ghana, gender norms also play an integral role in the body work practices of women. How a woman is supposed to look is integral in landing male partners in marriage. As a highly patriarchal society, the decision of choosing life partners is heavily dependent on the man with the woman merely accepting (or rejecting) the proposal. This is because the man's family pays the bridewealth to the family of the prospective wife. The payment of the bridewealth formalises the union between the two families. Even with the advent of Christianity and its associated white weddings in Ghana, the tradition of the bridewealth persists (Nukunya 2003). In a society where high value is placed on marriage, especially for women, an unmarried woman is mostly viewed with malicious pity. Ghanaian women might thus feel the need to engage in body work practices to make themselves more attractive to the opposite sex for a relationship geared towards marriage, or to maintain their marriages.

Gender played an important role as participants narrated various body work practices they undertook and why they undertook them. Even though some of the participants said they were engaged in body work practices to feel good and gain confidence in themselves, most of them also intimated that they were expected to look that way because of the society in which they lived. Gender norms shaped women's perceptions and experiences of their bodies in varied ways, and these are explored in the section below.

6.1.1 Real or Perceived Pressure from Male Partners

Many participants explained that there was a lot more pressure on women to fit in with the ideal body type. The ideal body type was mostly described from the

lens of men pointing to a power imbalance in male-female relationships. Ingrid, for example, expounded that

“In our African society, it is the men who approach the ladies and do all the talking. That is why there is a lot of pressure on women to look a certain way because the women have to wait for the men to approach. The men have that power, so the pressure is on the women more. I won't say there is an ideal body type for men. The pressure is always on the women as in any part of the world. It is two times as much.”

Ingrid, 31, Law Student

In Ghana, these narrations are consistent with literature that point to women engaging in body work practices such as wearing padded underwear to give the impression of a fuller backside to attract men (Gbadegbe et al. 2016). Literature also points to the fact that women, more than men, are under scrutiny to enhance their bodies to fit in with body ideals (Adams 2009; Aubrey 2010; Coffey 2016; Wolf, 1991).

A majority of participants explained that the main reason women worked on their bodies was that they wanted to fit in with a specific body ideal mostly dictated by men.

“A big part of the perception that a woman has to look soft or a woman has to look curvy or “bodacious” is obviously aligned with what men want; so we can't talk about this without talking about what it is that men in our society say they want. So, I think sometimes women do the things they do not because they want that themselves, but because a man that they are interested in or the kind of man that they want.”

Mariam, 32, Digital Strategist

In the quote above, Mariam observes how femininity is aligned with what men want. She goes on further to tell me how young girls are groomed to look a certain way even from an early age.

Lilian also points out the power imbalance in relationships that pushes many women to take on body work for fear of losing their partners based on conversations with friends.

“.. sometimes you hear some ladies say "me, my guy says that he doesn't want me to be fat so me I will not do this... I don't want to do this to make myself fat then he will leave".”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

For the eleven married women in the study, seven of them were engaged in some body work activity to keep their husbands happy as their husbands had complained about them gaining too much weight. Some intimated that to keep one’s husband, one has to look a certain way or run the risk of losing one’s partner to someone who looked like that.

“My husband made a statement that, if I don’t work on my stomach, my shape was going to vanish. You know guys are attracted by what they see, so if a guy tells you that you have to take action.”

Lydia, 28, Hotelier

From the interviews, the actions of some husbands (real or perceived) spurred women to go to lengths to change their appearance.

“August will be our 10th anniversary. So, I was thinking about getting a dress for a renewal of vows at church. I saw a nice dress online and showed it to my husband, and he said, “if you look at the person wearing that dress, do you think you can go for that dress?”

Adobea, 33, Nurse

Adobea explained that she was upset by the comment from her husband, and it got her thinking about the possibility that the husband was not comfortable with her weight gain. She said that the husband could easily get attracted to ladies who were a smaller size than her. She explained that she was a size 12 when they got married, but she is currently a size 16 and hopes to get to a size 14 at least and lose some fat on her arms and midsection. Adobea was taking a herbal slimming tea *Lofera* at the time of the interview and hoped to lose some weight. She had reduced the amount of food she ate and was engaged in intermittent fasting. At the time of the interview, it was about four months to her wedding anniversary, and she was determined to lose some weight because of the comment the husband had passed.

Lydia had been married for less than two years and delivered her first child not long after the wedding. Lydia was a friend at church who had a curvy body. After childbirth, she got a bulge around the stomach region, and her husband implored her to exercise to get rid of the bulge in order to get her figure back.

“I was really hurt when he said that. I think he was even getting upset that I had not started exercising. I believe that I was beginning to annoy him because he had told me to start exercising to get my body back after I delivered, and he thought I was not trying hard enough.”

Lydia, 28, Hotelier

The pressure on women to get their figures back immediately they have children is fuelled by idealised images their partners see on the internet of women “snapping back” to their former sizes after childbirth. Patricia, another respondent, narrates one such episode on Facebook.

“...there was this debate between men and women and the men were complaining that after their wives give birth, they become fat, they are not like the Beyoncé's and the Kim Kardashians. I mean it was a debate going, and people were like the Beyoncé's and the Kim Kardashian's have medical professionals and after they give birth and they have liposuction and all that... but they don't have the money to do all that so they have to exercise... and some of the women were like they have kids to raise, what time will they breastfeed, come home and eat, and then go out and exercise again.”

Patricia, Corporate Communication Executive Assistant

These women had to take on body work activities because of the roles they occupied as women and as wives. Most of their husbands had gained weight too, but these women did not pressurise them to lose weight. Various feminist studies have pointed to an imbalance of power in relationships in many patriarchal societies that leads to the subjugation of the natural bodies of women (Chernin 1983; Orbach [1978] 1988; Wolf [1991] 2013). In this study, some of the reasons why women worked on their bodies in reference to their male partners made this assertion rather apparent.

Various studies show that women's choices to engage in body work practices

are strongly influenced by their significant others, and comments from partners affect their self-esteem (Slevin, 2010; Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008). Research shows evidence that men rely greatly on physical appearance in the selection of mates (Buss 1989; Feingold 1992; Furham and Tsoi 2012; Odoi 2016). Even though the comment from the husband was flippant, Adobea perceived a lot of hidden messages in the comment which spurred her on to lose weight. Chief among them being that her husband might become attracted to someone of a slimmer size. Lydia also alluded to that by saying “men are attracted by what they see, so if a guy tells you that, you have to think twice”. In this study, out of the eleven married women, three expressed fears that their partners would leave them for younger partners who fitted more with their ideal if they did not try to get a slimmer figure.

At the beginning of my fieldwork at the gym, after explaining my research focus to the gym manager, he mentioned that he rarely meets unmarried women or young women who were overweight but immediately they get married and get what they want, they let themselves go and become overweight. The manager went on to say that sometimes, some young women come to the gym a few months to their wedding, with hopes of shedding off some weight to fit into their gowns. He pointed out that he found it to be absurd as in most cases, as it was impossible to lose the weight they wanted in that timeframe. He added again that he understands the women because the men want a slim but curvy body, so the women feel the need to work out to achieve such bodies, but once they get married, they let themselves go.

The gym manager’s narration brought to the fore, the premium placed on marriage in the Ghanaian culture. Young unmarried women go to great lengths to get the perfect body to make them more attractive to future partners.

Ewurama corroborates this assertion based on a story she shared about a friend

who was going to get married and wanted to attain a specific size before the wedding. She shared the frustrations of that friend.

“I have a friend that has bought a lot of weight loss supplements and teas and all that through social media. She hasn't met anybody who has used it. It's just a matter of pictures and then short notes explaining how it works. There are many of those “before” and “after” pictures so she believes it will work. She hasn't lost the weight yet but she is desperate to achieve a certain body weight. She is actually getting married soon so she wants to achieve a certain body size before her wedding.”

Ewurama, 29, General Manager

Stories like that of Ewurama's friend were replete in conversations I had with friends and some participants during the interviews. All of which points to a high premium on marriage leading to body work activities to attain a certain body shape and size.

Anny Osabutey, an award-winning Ghanaian journalist, noticed the increasing number of billboards advertising for various body enhancing procedures on his Facebook page (see figure 13). In a post³⁰, he asked whether “men are unnecessarily pressurizing ladies to beef up their body parts artificially or the ladies themselves are determined to stay fit and fly, in the market space?” Market space in this instance is a reference to the marriage market.

The comments following the posts were varied, but most of the women who responded in the comments indicated that they were taking on various body work practices for themselves, a few indicated that ladies wanted to stay attractive on the marriage market. All the men in the comments said they thought the women were doing it to attract men. The interplay of thoughts on the matter which varied from agency to cultural norms makes it evident that a theoretical frame that allows for explanations of both agency and structure in how body work is embodied is

³⁰ <https://web.facebook.com/osabutey.anny/posts/10156102119839254>

necessary in understandings of the body and society.

Figure 13: “No pills, no diet”



Source: Osabutey, A. (2018) “No Pills, No diet”. [Photo]. Retrieved from Facebook

6.1.2 Getting Pre-Pregnancy Bodies Back

For many mothers, it was paramount to get back the bodies they had before they gave birth. This helped them remain attractive to their husbands as well as gain confidence in their bodies to remain competitive at the workplace. The women explained that before pregnancy, they were much slimmer but gained weight during

the pregnancy, which they have not been able to get rid of especially around the middle section. Some respondents alluded to the fact that the pressure on women to remain a certain way even after childbearing is forcing women to go to various lengths to fit in with the current ideal because that was what their partners wanted.

“...growing up, I've always had aunts and church women, tell me things like “when I was your age, this was exactly how I looked. I was slim like that and then childbirth and all that ...” so it was something that I had told myself way in advance that when I have a baby, I will lose the weight. I started to exercise very early when I had my first baby.”

Hilda, 28, Events Manager

Beatrice, a mother who was trying to get her figure back after two children, explained that there was not much pressure on the previous generation to attain their figures before birth. She explained that social media and urban life were major contributory factors.

“... especially within the city, after birth, people are looking forward to attaining the shape that they used to be before they gave birth. With our mothers, there wasn't much of that because there was no social media and all the hype about having a curvy shape. So, they were not much into that. They were just looking at being well...”

Beatrice, 35, Insurance Officer

Beatrice further explained her routines in trying to get her figure back after having her two children.

“Beatrice: I will say before childbirth I was a size 10, right. After birth... I was between a size 12 and 14, but with some conscious effort, I decided to get back to 10. I eat once a day. I don't eat breakfast, so I eat my main food, that's lunch. Occasionally I'll have like two meals a day with some drinks and fruits. That's if I have the opportunity so I eat basically once a day.

Emelia: Have you tried exercising?

Beatrice: No, I don't have the time. So I don't exercise. What I do, to prevent my tummy from not showing in my funky dresses, is putting on a corset or girdle. So, I don't do exercise, I don't diet, but I put on girdles to hold my mid area in so that...yeah, my mid-section then the figure will be quite okay.”

I interviewed Beatrice in her office, and she proudly told me that the clothes she was wearing were from before she had children. She looked svelte, and in an

interview with a colleague (Pearl) on that same day, Pearl intimated that she was motivated by Beatrice's figure to keep exercising as she had not left herself to go after two children. Pearl indicated that as an unmarried lady, she had to be trim and maintain a shapely figure as even those who have had children were engaging in some body work to maintain their figure. Observing the other colleagues at the office, as I waited for the interview to begin, I noticed that most of them looked relatively slender and curvy and I could infer that there was some pressure to keep this up.

6.1.3 Self-Presentation: Embodying Femininity

The ladies interviewed also pointed to the fact that they were concerned about losing weight or maintaining a particular figure to make them fit nicely in their clothes. About 27 out of the 35 women interviewed mentioned that they engaged in various body work practices to make them look good in their clothes and create a good impression on people they meet especially in their line of work.

Daisy worked for an insurance company, and she admitted that most of her colleagues were young and good looking. After getting married and having two children, she gained some weight. It, therefore, became necessary to lose weight to look "smart" to create a great impression on customers.

"... it was psychological pressure. The staff in my office are young girls and women, and most of them are not married and the kind of work we do, you always have to look on point because you need to go to the client; and the kind of clients we target are the corporate ones, so you always have to look sharp, so when I became fat, I was feeling the pressure. You couldn't dress like them, and then it was difficult to wear heels, and I thought I was not as smart as they were, so it pushed me to work and come back to be at par with them."

Daisy, 31, Insurance Broker

This narration corroborates earlier points about how the femininity of women is used in this neoliberal era to sell products to customers. Women are expected to

look “smart” in heels and always “look on point”. The same attention to personal looks is not expected of men (Otis, 2016). In her work, women were essentially hired to perform femininity. Managers hired young females with slender bodies. Once hired, these women were subjected to routines designed to enable them to radiate elegance, poise and social ability (Otis 2016).

Radical feminists have used the naturalistic approach to show how the natural bodies of women form a basis for and contribute towards social relationships. It maintains that inequalities are not socially constructed but are determined by the biological body (Shilling, 1993/2012). Early feminist writers adopted this naturalistic approach and located the origin and maintenance of patriarchy in the female body. The female body was identified as the basis of much of their subordinations (Orbach 1988; Chernin 1983). Chernin (1983), for example, argued that to maintain their power, men make women feel inadequate. She points out that the growing number of fatalities from anorexia nervosa, liposuctions, and surgeries stem from the pressure that women face to lose weight in a patriarchal society. Orbach (1988) has also argued that the obsession with maintaining a slim and slender body ideal often leads women to distort their physical bodily development. Wolf (1991) cast the obsession with beauty as a result of patriarchy. She points out how the beauty myth encourages women to model their bodies to fit in with societal ideals of the slender and thin shape.

From interviews with women, it was apparent that just because they embodied the natural body of a woman, they had to perform activities to look a certain way in order to fulfil societal expectations. Many studies indicate that while men are beginning to feel pressurised to make changes to their bodies, that pressure cannot be compared to what women have to face daily.

Mildred also mentioned that having a precise body type was necessary to fit in with the latest fashion trends.

“...girls want to dress a certain kind of way. If you want to wear a crop top, you can't have a big stomach and wear a crop top. You understand... you have to have a flat stomach to wear those crop top and those bralettes and those things.”

Mildred, 26, Writer

Looking shapely in clothes is important to most Ghanaian women. It confirms the emphasis that is placed on the body shape in what the Ghanaian considers to be an aesthetically pleasing body (Domi 2010).

While the natural bodies of women have contributed to how they engage in body work practices, it is interesting to note that these women are not passive objects. Hilda actively shaped her body because she was determined to lose her baby fat after birth. In Mariam's case, she was aware that the preferences of men played a role in how women shaped their bodies. Stacy felt she needed to shape her body to be healthy. So, while the naturalistic approach and structural approaches have placed the reasons for body work on the natural body and society respectively, the corporeal realist approach shows that various factors prompt women to work on their bodies. Even though the natural bodies of women play a huge role, the individual agency of these women is also evident in these accounts.

6.2 Emergent Properties of the Body

While capitalism has led to the body being the location of many changes, it will be erroneous to assume that these structural processes have obliterated the creative potentials of the human body. Instead, it is necessary to examine the various ways in which the generative capacities of embodied subjects have interacted with and, in some cases, resisted these structures.

The body cannot be conceptualised adequately as an entirely passive location for social or cultural inscriptions.

6.2.1 Women as Active Agents in the Construction of Beauty Ideals

Three of the married women interviewed told me that they were losing weight for themselves and that their partners had no impact on their decisions. One woman noted that trying to achieve a body ideal to satisfy a man does not guarantee that the man was going to stay faithful, and as such, it was futile.

Women were not just reproducing the mainstream beauty ideal. Two of the women I interviewed were also active agents in the construction of these beauty ideals. They were actively involved in selling beauty products and services towards the hourglass figure. Anita used to be a marketer and is currently pursuing a career in the movie industry. She supplements her income by selling corsets and waist trainers. She explained:

“I sell waist trainers, and they (ladies who buy) do complain a lot, and I tell them life is pain. You want to get that body, and you want to look fit in your clothes, so you have to endure it.”

Anita, 28, Actress

Mercy, inspired by her weight loss through exercise, has become a fitness trainer who leads other women to achieve their weight goals. She has a Facebook page where she posts “before” and “after” pictures of women she has trained who were previously overweight and had lost weight through undergoing various regimes with her. She also posted diet plans on her page. Although she has a degree in accounting, she is currently pursuing a full-time job as a fitness trainer. During our interview, she explained to me which parts of my body needed work after I asked her what she does as a fitness coach. She explains...

“... for someone like you, I feel like you are okay. If you want to work on yourself, then it should be toning your lower body small and then working on your tummy a little, and maybe we work a little on your arms. Aha!”

Mercy, 28, Fitness coach

During the period of online ethnography on an all-female private Ghanaian online Facebook group, several women placed various adverts on remedies that could help one lose weight. These adverts drew many responses within hours of being posted.

Figure 14 is an advert placed inside the group which members pay for before group admins approve the post. In this advert, a member of the group advertises *Ajumbiase* which one of my participants purchased to lose weight. In the advert, the herb is purported to help one lose weight and also flattening the stomach while at the same time boosting fertility. Many other members posted on this platform to advertise similar products for losing weight. Most of these advertisements were business oriented and a pursuit of profits aimed at meeting demands being made on the platforms.

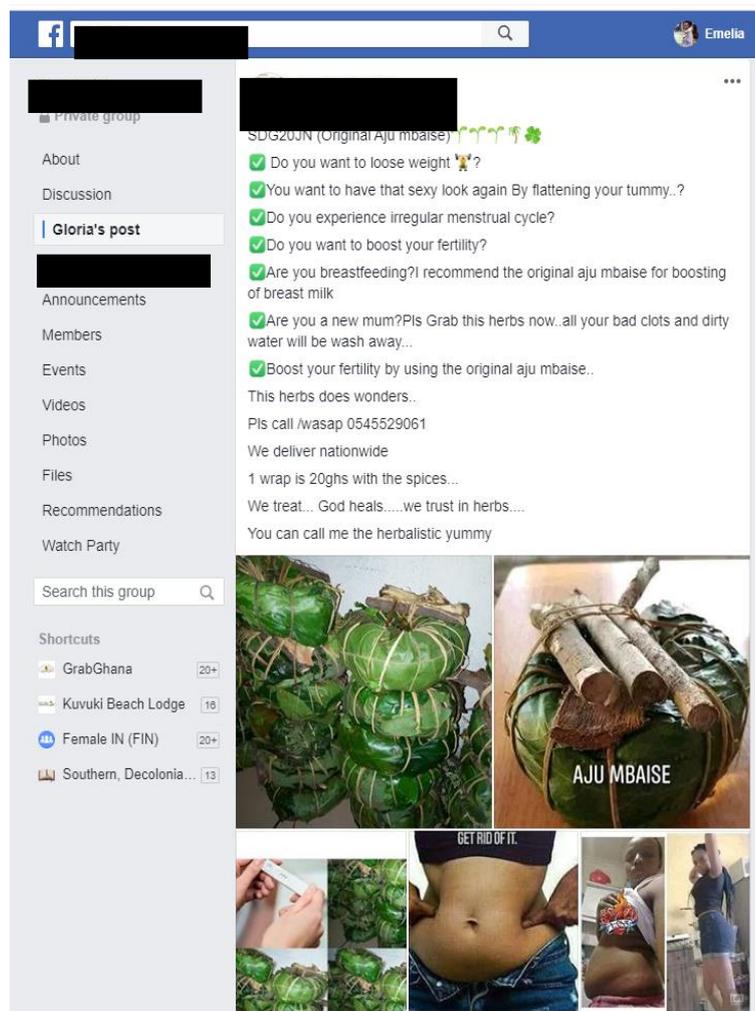
It is evident here that, by paying attention to the embodied experiences of women, understanding the body through the structural approach or the agency approach only elaborates one part of the relationship between the body and society. It is apparent that while individuals may embody agency, the social structures they encounter continues to play an important role in the embodiment of individuals. In addition, using a corporeal realism approach showed that the experiences of body work are differentiated from person to person. Even though some women embody agency in navigating social norms and structures in creating meanings of body work for themselves, others are also very pliable and are heavily influenced by social norms in the body work practices in which they engage.

The meanings attached to body work practices varied from woman to woman,

but the most prominent were feelings of being refreshed and being more confident. For some of them, they pointed out that they wanted a certain kind of attention and validation, and consciously went for that.

“I want to turn heads whenever I pass so basically, apart from myself, it is for everybody else. I want to be noticed.”
Ewurama, 29, General Manager

Figure 14: Products for weight loss on Facebook



Source: Screenshot from Researcher’s Online Ethnography on Facebook posted on 3rd June 2019.

Body work to gain confidence

Closely related to the above, some women were concerned about how they

were perceived by others and put in much work to look like what was emphasised in the mainstream media. For them, working on their bodies to look close to what was the current ideal was important to gain confidence in their bodies.

“It is a confidence booster for me because when I gain weight, my cheeks look bloated, my tummy and my upper arms become very flabby. I don't feel as confident, but when I lose weight, I become more confident. So, it's something that I do physically for myself because I feel I look beautiful when I lose weight.”

Adoley, 28, Law Student

For these participants, feeling confident was associated with being able to carry one's self effortlessly and feeling light. It is interesting to note that participants tied confidence to notions of feminine beauty.

Health Reasons

Some participants pointed out that their goal for engaging in body work practices was to be healthy as their size posed a health risk. Stacy explained that she had multiple medical conditions, and she had to do something drastic to lose weight. She had to do gastric bypass surgery. She insisted that losing weight was not for cosmetic purposes as her life depended on losing weight.

“I weighed 169 kg. I had tried all diets, all exercises, it just wasn't working. I had to take a decision for myself purely for health reasons so I opted for weight loss surgery. I went in for vertical gastric sleeve which is a gradual process of losing weight.”

Stacy, 33, E-Commerce Business Owner

“I had health issues, I had constant migraines, I had very irregular periods, and I also had very bad acne. I knew then that for the purposes of my health, I had to lose some weight.”

Ewurama, 29, General Manager

6.2.2 Resisting Body Work through Religion

Religion played a marginal role in how respondents perceived body work. Six

out of the 35 women interviewed made references to religion in explaining why they would not undertake some body work such as surgery.

Ghana is a deeply religious country. According to the 2010 population and housing census, about 71% of the population is Christian, with 17% being Muslim, (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). It is, therefore, not surprising that religious views played a role in how some participants viewed the body.

Six of the participants used religion as a tool to resist body work practices. These participants wanted to undertake specific body work procedures such as surgery to fit an ideal. However, they conceded that working on their bodies will mean that they did not appreciate their God given bodies. Lilian explained that people have to be comfortable in their bodies, as that is how God created them.

“...we just have to accept it that God has made us in His own special way, whether fat or slim. God accepts us and likes it so we should not be putting pressure on ourselves.”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

During the interview however, there was a lot of ambivalence in the answers Lilian gave which suggested that if she had more financial power, she was going to take on some form of body work and religion was more of a coping mechanism than a tool of resistance. This is further explored in the section on body work and class.

For others, because of their Christian faith, the thought of altering the bodies God gave them was a source of internal conflict. It was discernible in Naomi's narration that her faith made it difficult to want to do anything to her body while she was in Ghana.

“... If I wasn't in Ghana and I was like somewhere in America or something, I probably would... (referring to cosmetic surgery). I don't know but at the same time I am like once you do it you are telling God that he didn't create you well and then the Bible says he created you in His own image so ...”

Naomi, 25, Customer Consultant

In Ghana, a lot of women who have procedures to enhance their bodies deny it because of the shame associated with physically enhancing one's body in a deeply religious society. Enhancing one's body in Ghana through medical technologies is framed as being ungrateful to God for one's given body. In an interview that was aired on television on the popular entertainment programme, *The Delay Show*, hosted by Deloris Frimpong Manso, which was aired on GhOne Television and subsequently loaded on YouTube, the interviewer asked the singer, Nana Frema – who admitted to having had surgery to enhance her body – what she was going to say to God if she got to heaven and was asked why she made changes to her body. While in recent times, the number of cosmetic centres has increased in Ghana, women who visit these centres are difficult to identify and they are unlikely to talk about their experiences because of fear of being judged by other Ghanaians.

Interestingly, Christianity as a “foreign” and globalized religion is activated to resist body work. In this study, the women who resisted body work using religion were those in lower-earning brackets which brings in the possibility that these women were using religion as a coping strategy because they cannot afford some forms of body work. This is because this did not come into conversation with women in the upper middle class category who have a lot more money to spend on body work activities. Lilian was a single mum and earning around GHS1,500.00 a month. At some point during the interview, she intimated that she wanted to sign on to a gym but could not do so because she did not have the financial means to do so. Naomi also alluded that if she were not in Ghana and were in America, she would probably not think twice about going in for surgery. The way religion, and in this context Christianity, was used to resist body work is significant.

6.2.3 Sustaining Body Work through Religion

Aba also explains how the teachings of various churches will compel women to engage with a specific body ideal. Church leaders are viewed as God's earthly representatives, and as such, much of what they say is deemed sacrosanct. In many churches in Ghana, especially during sermons on marriage, much emphasis is placed on women looking appealing for their husbands.

“The pressures are coming [from] different quarters like the church. I go to weddings, and I listen to the sermons, and I am thinking, really? It is all about how the woman should maintain her looks, you know, things like “When you give birth, don't allow yourself to go.””

Aba, 32, Social Researcher and Farmer

In this study, a new factor, religion especially Christianity, is seen to play a role in how women thought of their bodies and subsequently constructed the body ideal. This is riveting for studies in the global South as Africa has the largest concentration of Christians in the world now followed by Latin America (Johnson et al. 2018).

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, gender was used as a lens to understand the performative nature of body work practices among urban middle-class Ghanaian women. The findings showed that gender norms had a real impact on the natural bodies of women where women engaged in body work practices mainly to satisfy male partners. However, as other feminist scholars have pointed out, women are not cultural dopes and have agency to make decisive decisions. By using a corporeal realism approach, the analysis moves from these essentialisms to focus on the embodied experiences of urban middle-class Ghanaian women. This subsequent analysis using a corporeal realism lens shows that body work is not just a function of social structure or agency

but most often, an entwinement of both. Body work practices reinforced and sustained gender roles, but participants were not always passive agents in the way body work activities was practised. Some women actively made decisions in the body work activities they undertook and went a step further to be agents in the reproduction of the body ideal. Corporeal realism allowed for a multi-dimensional understanding of bodies; women undertook body work based on their agency while others felt pressured to engage the beauty ideal. Some women resisted beauty ideals, while others sustained them and actively reproduced these ideals. It is therefore important to not lump the experiences of women together as a uniform one but rather allow for an understanding of those relationships through an understanding of their embodied experiences.

In the next chapter, social class is going to be highlighted, and the role it plays in fostering the mainstream ideal will be discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BODY WORK: HEALTHISM AND SOCIAL CLASS

Introduction

This chapter examines how the socioeconomic status of participants influenced their body work activities. This is important as various studies have shown a correlation between socioeconomic class and body work activities (Coffey 2016; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Shea and Beausoleil 2012). Various studies have used different classifications in defining class. In many cases, economic capital and education have played a significant role in body work. Some studies (Waller and Jarvis 2002; Ogden and Thomas 1999; Shilling 1991) have shown that educational attainment is highly associated with weight and appearance dissatisfaction.

In this study, the attention was on women in the middle-class category as they were identified in the literature as the group that participated in body work activities the most. Even though this study did not initially set out to examine class as it focused on just the middle class, in doing the analysis, it became apparent that body work practices were influenced by differentiations not just across but also within class. This will, therefore, be discussed and a much broader discussion of the pursuit of healthism among the middle class will also be tackled.

Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili (2013) argue that different levels of post-secondary education put people in different levels in the middle-class cohort; lower-middle-class, middle-middle-class, or upper-middle-class. For this study, a delineation of lower middle class, middle class and upper-middle class will be made based on income. Incomes between GHS700 and GHS1,200 is classified as lower middle class, incomes between GHS1,201 to GHS3,500 is classified as middle class,

and GHS3,501 and above is classified as upper middle class. Education is not included in this sub categorization since everyone had at least a bachelor's degree, education was therefore held constant. In addition, in this study education is not seen as making a big influence such as income. This chapter will also discuss how the middle class lifestyle attempts to pursue a healthism ideology and how this is embodied and reinforced through body work.

7.1 Social Class and Body Work Activities: The Body as a Source of Body Work

Through the analysis of interviews, it became evident that women in higher income brackets had much more sophisticated body work routines as opposed to those in the lower middle class categories. Engaging in body work is expensive, and in many cases, participants cited that they would like to engage in one body work practice or the other, but they lacked the financial resources to do so. This is consistent across other studies as well (Slevin 2010; Hurd and Griffin 2008).

“Initially, I was on a meal replacement supplement, so I ate just once a day. It could be dinner, lunch or breakfast and the other 2 square meals, I replaced with the supplements, but it was too expensive. It needs to be a lifestyle that will be sustainable, but it was too expensive, so I got off it.”

Ewurama, 29, General Manager

Ewurama's is an example of a case where financial resources became a barrier to the kind of body work practices she wanted to take on. Ewurama further explained to me that she was obese and after losing weight, she had a lot of loose skin which she wanted to take off through surgery but did not have the means to do that yet. Ewurama earned GHS3,000 a month which is a salary above the national average in urban areas. This is by Ghanaian standards, a good salary but coupled with having to service her car and maintaining a certain class habitus, she explained

that it was not sustainable.

Participants who were on keto diets, for example, were mostly high earners. Stacy, who had previously been on the keto diet, made an income of more than GHS10,000 a month. She stopped keto dieting, not because of financial constraints but because she said she wasn't getting the results she wanted, which was to shed weight quickly. She later got a gastric bypass surgery in India which cost her about \$5,000.

“E: Ok. So how did you fund the procedure?”

S: [laughs] So, I was researching, and I decided to do it in the US but in the US it was costing \$23,000 and I didn't have \$23,000 so I decided to find a cheaper option. So while I was still researching, I realised I could do it in Dubai for \$15,000 so I am like okay I can afford that but even with the \$15,000, I was working then so I thought I could convince my employers to pay for it because of the health complication aspect so the challenge was for me to get a letter from a hospital to take to the office. I didn't know how to get that so one day, I just woke up and went to Yeboah Clinic in East Legon. It's also like an endocrine hospital so I decided to speak to the doctor and told him about it and then he was like “oh, have you looked at India?” and that India too their health system is very good and all the good doctors come from India and that it's relatively cheaper so I am like “oh, I didn't know about India let me go and find out about India”. So I started a new research again. I spoke to different hospitals and then I got one for \$5,000 in India.

E: So, did your work fund the surgery?

S: Their process was too long, and I was like “fuck it, \$5,000. I can pay for it”. So, I paid for it.”

Stacy, 33, E-Commerce Business Owner

I interviewed Stacy at her mother's business shop at the Central Business District where some of the busiest shops were located. I also follow Stacy on Instagram where I contacted her after I realised, she had lost a lot of weight when it appeared that she couldn't be bothered by it previously. Her page shows a lavish lifestyle by Ghanaian standards.

Some participants said they wanted to try keto dieting because they had heard from others that it gives results but could not afford the ingredients. Lilian, for

example, made GHS1,800 a month as an executive secretary. She was also a single mum, and she felt that her financial resources could go to better use.

“If you don't have money, you can't do those things... the kind of food they prescribe and all those things... I planned on doing it, but it's very expensive, so I decided not to worry myself.”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

It was also observed that women in the upper middle class bracket most often registered at gyms and used mobile apps for exercising to supplement their activities. The two women in the upper middle class apart from signing on to well-equipped gyms had treadmills at home. Women in the lower middle class also joined gyms, but the gyms they joined were usually ill-equipped, and activities in these gyms mostly rotated around aerobics and weightlifting. Women of the lower middle class were also more likely to join a group activity to engage in body work activities like in the case of Portia who joined a keep fit club or two others who joined a TV reality show for weight loss.

In Ato Quayson's (2014) *Oxford Street*, he notes that the middle class are now engaged in an expensive gym culture, and while backyard gyms made with metal scraps from cars and others have long existed, the proliferation of signed-up gyms is associated with middle class culture. In my observations at the gym, I noticed that the gym has also become an activity to engage in because one has the means to participate in it, and it was a way to display one's location in a particular social class. Signing up to a gym in Accra is not cheap, neither is the apparel that goes with training. Some participants indicated that they would have loved to sign up to a gym but did not have the financial capabilities to do so.

Lilian, who has had a baby indicated that she would have loved to sign up with a gym to help her lose her baby fat but it was expensive and she will rather dedicate that money to other resources. As a single mum she intimated that she wanted the

best life for the son and was rather saving towards that.

“I learnt it's 250 cedis or something to sign up for the gym for the month. If you give birth and you don't have much money on you, how can you be paying 250 cedis when you are being paid 2,000 cedis a month? How long will you continue with that? It will get to a point you will stop because you will say this money that I am just wasting, I can use it for something else. You will stop. So sometimes it's your pocket. If you don't have money, if you are not financially sound you can't do.”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

The embodied experiences of body work of participants were also as a result of their socioeconomic class. Class played a role not only in dictating whether women would engage the beauty ideal or not but also in shaping how they negotiate the beauty ideal. In this study, body work activities undertaken by women varied, and social class is key to understanding the kind of body work activity they undertook.

Women, in both the upper and lower brackets, signed on to gyms to enable them to achieve their body ideal or “body goals” as some participants preferred to put it. However, the kind of gyms they were signed up to reflected their financial status. As the number of gyms in Accra have multiplied, there were a variety of gyms catering to the pockets of participants. While most upscale gyms accepted monthly and yearly memberships, some mid-sized gyms that were poorly equipped or were focused on aerobics charged less.

The body is a source of body work because the participants sought to engage in body work to help them reproduce their class privileges. This included keeping fit to remain competitive in the job market. Some of these resources were unavailable for those with a lesser earning power. This is in line with how Bourdieu explains the reproduction of class status through habitus (Bourdieu 1956).

7.2 Social Class and Healthism: The Body as a Location of Body Work

Numerous studies have provided detailed discussions on how the recent discourses of health and fitness are increasingly grounded in a consumer culture. The term “healthism” was first coined by Crawford (1980) to denote a new consciousness that promotes health and working on the body as consumer choices. Many “fitness” and exercise practices such as dieting, yoga, pilates, jogging, and swimming have been touted through healthism discourse as essential to being healthy and maintaining a certain body type which in this case, is the thin and slender ideal (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Coffey, 2016; Shea, 2012).

A majority of the women interviewed discussed the body ideal in terms of remaining healthy. They believed that keeping a certain weight would enable them to live healthier lives. Thus, even though these women did not acknowledge mainstream body ideals, they indicated that they undertook body work activities to maintain their current body shape and size to stay healthy.

Mariam explains how exercising makes her feel comfortable in her body. Here, she is not considering the reason why she might be doing the exercise but how her body feels when she exercises.

“I think for me it is being at a healthy body weight and being comfortable with my body and myself so I work out.”

Mariam, 32, Digital Strategist

Billboards advertising various products for weight loss and attaining a curvaceous body were all over the city (in Accra) and on social media. The advertisement of these products was mediated by a discourse on healthism exploiting the goals of individuals in staying healthy. A product one of the participants had purchased off social media had on the packaging: “Flat Tummy Tea with Moringa. 28 Day Detox. Reduces bloating, eases digestion, and suppresses

appetite”. The participant, after taking the product, expressed doubts about the efficacy of the product. She explained that after taking the tea, she had diarrhoea. She said it made her feel weak and light, creating the illusion that one might be losing weight, but it was just a detox tea. It becomes apparent that this product is rooted in a consumerist culture rather than purporting to do what it claims.

Adoley, another participant says it's big business, and she feels people are cashing in on it because there is a demand for it.

“I guess people are really using it. It's in the media; on the TVs, on social media. It's now a really huge business here. Every girl now wants to have that kind of body, and they want it quick.”

Adoley, 28, Law student

It is thus evident, that the rigorous advertisement of such products and the questions about their efficacy point to an increasing commodification of the body steeped in a consumer culture in Ghana (Rose 1996; Crawford, 1980). The body has been commodified, and individuals are implored continuously to buy products to achieve body ideals that will afford them certain healthy lifestyles. The efficacy of many of these nutritional supplements and detoxifying teas are publicised with ‘before and after’ photos of consumers who have used the products with startling results. The potency of most of these drugs are, however, mostly unverified (Pillitteri, Shiffman, Rohay, Harkins, Burton, and Wadden, 2008; Pittler and Ernest, 2004).

In Ghana, healthism is marketed as engaging in body work practices that lead to much healthier lifestyles. Individuals who want an easy fix to fatty midsections or more desirable body shapes are told of the redeeming qualities of various nutritional supplements on the market. These nutritional supplements from companies like Max International, Herbalife®, and Vida Divina also operate

network marketing schemes that promise individuals residual income and riches. Currently, many individuals and businesses have ventured into the sale of these supplements. There are countless advertisements on nutritional supplements, weight loss pills, waist trainers, and waist shapers on various social media pages and in the mass media.

Marketing agents couch their products as healthy options that help you lose weight healthily. A friend on Facebook, who is a Herbalife® agent, regularly updates his timeline with posts like the one captured in Figure 15 where the ideal body is framed as something available to all if only one is willing to invest in it.

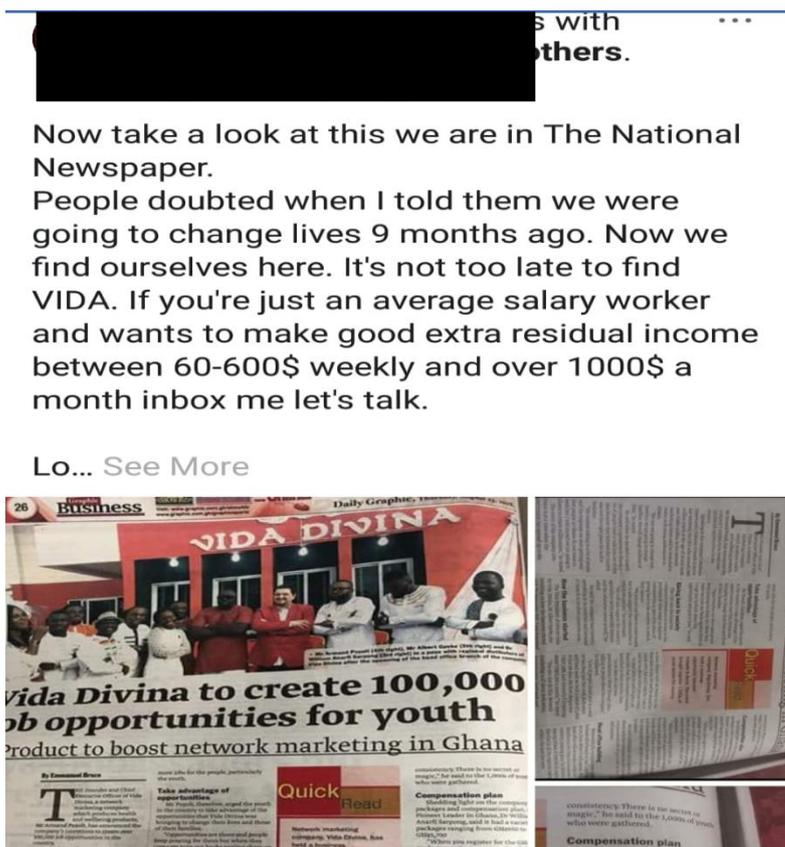
Figure 15: Herbalife® ad from an agent



Source: Researcher's Field Notes, 2020

In Figure 16, a marketer is touting the network marketing aspect of a weight loss supplement company “Vida Divina”. She urges others to sign on because it is a good source of income. It is interesting to note that this post highlights the economic benefits rather than helping people get the body they want.

Figure 16: Vida Divina Facebook post by a marketer.

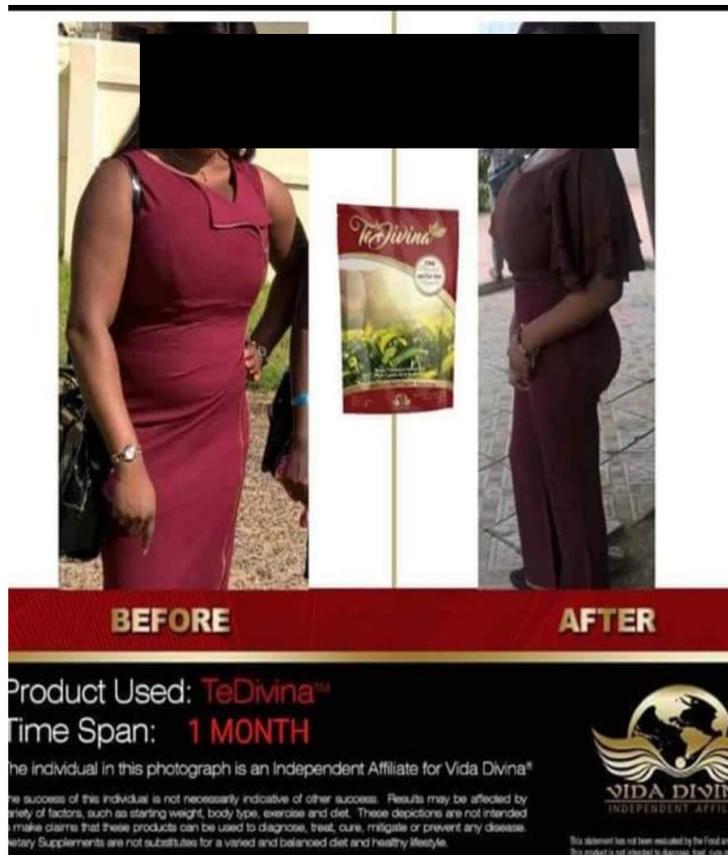


Source: Asamoah, A. L (2018). Vida Divina in Daily Graphic [Screenshot].

In Figure 17, another marketer of the same company shows “before” and “after” photos of a client who has used the product and seen marked changes. A focus on these two screenshots foregrounds how these products are commodities that are being purposely marketed for a profit. How social media sites are the leading platforms for the marketing of these supplements is worthy to note. The supplements being marketed, such as Herbalife®, are international brands that are

available elsewhere in the world. In this regard, the way aspects of globalization come together to influence body work activities in the global South is significant.

Figure 17: A TeDivina advertisement on Facebook.



Source: TeDivina. Before and After Artwork. [Artwork]

7.3 Pursuing a Middle-Class Lifestyle? “Fat to Fit” Programme

During my interviews, a couple of participants made references to a TV fitness programme called “Fat to Fit”. This programme essentially recruited people who were overweight or felt fat and wanted to lose weight to engage in a fitness challenge over 90 days. There were weekly fitness activities and weigh-ins, and each week, the top three people who lost the most weight were awarded prizes from sponsors. At the end of the 90 days, the person who was able to lose the most weight within the period was then crowned the winner and given a prize.

While the programme advocated healthier lifestyles through exercises and dieting, it also promoted the products of weight loss companies like Viva Divina, which was a sponsor of the programme. While on the surface it seemed that the motive of the programme was to help people achieve healthy lifestyles, it cannot be disputed that it was also a profit-making venture for the organisers who sought sponsorships and actively promoted these brands during the show.

I eventually joined one of their health programmes which was an 8km health walk and an hour of aerobics afterwards. During and after the activities, I engaged with some of the attendees and scheduled interviews with some of them. In my interaction with them, I realised that a lot of them were corporate executives, bankers, marketing executives, civil servants, etc. After the event, quite a number of them drove back to the city in their cars which they parked at the start of the walk. While some of them may have joined the challenge to lose weight, the novelty of appearing on TV and taking pictures for social media might have also been a motivation. Participating in such a challenge for some of the attendees might be a way of showing their class habitus.

While I was engaged in field work, the “Fat to Fit” programme was not the only one that was being championed by a media house. There was also a fitness challenge by Joy FM, one of the popular radio stations in Accra, for 30 days. The programme got such positive engagement with participants posting “before” and “after” pictures of improvements, that another edition was launched in 2020. This programme is marketed as a health-conscious weight loss challenge, and in the second season, some health experts were invited to speak as part of the launch which was aired on radio. The launch of a second season lends credence to the popularity of the show which though challenges individuals to lose weight, also has

sponsorships. Figure 18 contains the e-flyer of the programme.

Figure 18: Weight Loss E-Flyer from *Joy Fm*



Source: Screenshot from Researcher's Online Ethnography on Facebook

The growing number of weight loss challenges and its associated activities of dieting and gym registrations in Accra can be said to be steeped in healthism where options to remain healthy are immersed in a consumer culture.

While the body can act as an active generative phenomenon in the production of body work, it is also a location upon which social norms impinge. The body can, therefore, be a resource which determines how individuals intervene in their environment. Social norms and structures have a way of writing themselves on the corporeal body of those subject to them.

The processes of commodification, increasing consumer culture as well as globalization means that the body is continually implicated in adjusting to the social setting by a refashioning of it. Shilling points out that workers must continually embody the image of fitness associated with efficiency and productivity (2005: 86).

The capitalist world associates old age with burnout, incapacity, and incompetence (Hepworth and Featherstone, 1982; Hurd Clark and Griffin, 2008; Slevin, 2019). This obsession with youth has led to the discourses of health and fitness increasingly being grounded in a consumer culture (Coffey 2016; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Shea 2012). This is even harder on women who are judged more harshly for their looks than their male counterparts (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993).

7.4 Conclusion

Once again, even though it is apparent that a healthism discourse was influencing individuals, some participants also made informed decisions in trying to maintain a body ideal.

It is imperative to understand why women engage from a non-binary approach because as the interviews with these women have shown, women have different experiences. To focus on agency or structure for accounting for why women take on body work is to negate the experiences of the other.

In this chapter, the study sought to find out the link between body work and social class. The study found out that social class and financial resources were instrumental in how participants engaged in body work. High earners signed up to more expensive gyms and engaged in more expensive dieting routines. Those on the lower end of the income bracket tried to get to their goals quickly by getting products which usually failed to deliver what they promised. They engaged much more in exercising at home while others signed on to gyms that could fit their tight budgets.

The body ideal has become a way to affirm one's social status and identity. Body work practices are not just utilitarian but hold a certain symbolic value for the

one who acquires them. The desire to achieve a slender body among urban middle-class Ghanaian women is to fit in with a particular lifestyle and taste.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BODY WORK AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

A germane aspect of globalization is the use of digital technologies (Callero 2003). In this chapter, a torch is shined on how digital media (such as social networking sites) facilitates and sustains the beauty ideal. This illumination will involve unearthing the understanding of how participants explained their use of social media networking sites. This is important because various studies show a positive correlation between social media use and body image issues. Most of these studies show that individuals who spend a long time on social media tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies (Kim and Chock, 2015; Tiggemann and Slater 2013; 2014). This study complements existing literature by following the actions of participants after this dissatisfaction, looking at the specific ways women become dissatisfied with their bodies, how social media influences their perceptions of the ideal body, and the evaluation of their bodies against the ideal and subsequent body work practices. Glo-corporeal realism is used to frame understandings of how social media is used and how ideal images are mediated.

8.1 Social Media

Social media is an umbrella term used to denote media technologies that encompass the internet and websites that allow for the rapid creation and sharing of user-generated messages, as well as instantaneous communication with users on other handheld devices (Prieler and Choi, 2014). Examples include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Pinterest. From the interviews, all participants actively used social media networking sites. The least amount of time spent on

social media was 30 minutes, and some admitted to spending as much as 6 hours on social media platforms in a day. Most of them could not allocate the number of hours they spent on social media networking each day.

“I am on it all the time. When I am not doing anything, I log onto it.”
Patricia, 30, Corporate Communication Executive

To resist spending too much time on social media, some participants who used iPhones checked the Screen Time app to make sure that they do not exceed a certain number of hours in a day. The most popular social media networking sites were Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, in that order. Two participants mentioned using LinkedIn and Pinterest, as well. All the participants mentioned using the WhatsApp instant messaging app for communicating and chatting with friends daily.

From interviews with participants, social media networking sites facilitated, reproduced, and sustained body work practices in various ways, and these will be addressed below.

8.2 Facilitation: Social Media as a Source of Body Work

8.2.1 Encountering Ideal Images

First, social media influenced body work practices through pictures posted by others showing ideal body types. Some of the participants mentioned that they felt pressurised to look a certain way based on the kind of images they saw on social media sites. For most of the participants, there were a lot of ideal images they observed, particularly on Facebook and Instagram, and these images influenced their decision to work on their bodies. Various studies have pointed to new media, such as social media, influencing beauty ideals. These studies have shown that those who spent more time on social media tend to internalise beauty ideals and sought

to reproduce them (Tiggemann and Miller, 2010; Tiggemann and Slater, 2013; Bair, Kelly, Serdar and Mazzeo, 2012).

For example, Ingrid, who weighed about 90kg in the past, narrated how she was scrolling through her Facebook timeline one day and saw a video of a woman who had shed much weight through exercise. She added that coincidentally, she had not been able to fit in her jeans that day and seeing that video was a wake-up call for her to begin her weight loss journey.

“I saw a video on Facebook, and I decided to do something about my weight... to get into shape.”

Ingrid, 31, Law Student

She added that she was not even as fat as the woman in the video when she started exercising and felt that once the woman was able to do it, she would be able to do it too. So, in this case, the video spurred her on. For many other participants, they explained that seeing “before” and “after” posts of people on their weight loss journeys inspired them to work hard rather than pressurising them to adopt a specific body ideal. Even though social media is a digital space, how participants used social media evoked corporeal emotions. Ingrid saw a video of a woman on a weight loss journey and felt and so connected to the woman’s story that she cried and decided to follow through with a weight loss plan too. Watching this video happened in a digital space, but the action taken afterwards was embodied.

For others, seeing their friends looking good on social media put a lot of pressure on them to look good too.

“I log on anytime I am free, but I am there most of the time. You will see people looking fine and only you it's like you are left behind. You also have to get that body. It is an achievement, so it will become your goal.”

Rita, 25, Social Media Manager

Rita subsequently signed up for a gym because she felt that her body did not fit into what she described as current “body goals”. She explained that she was

checking her diet and trying to lose weight, but she put in a more concerted effort due to the kind of pictures she saw of her friends. This was also confirmed by another participant who said her friend confided in her about the reason why she wanted to take on body work.

“...you go online, and you realise that your friend has achieved this body size and the guys are saying she looks beautiful, that is from someone's perspective. I am telling you because that was her reason for losing weight. That guys are always commenting on her friend's picture that she looks beautiful, she is all that so she is looking for money to go to the gym so that she can go and lose weight, and then her bum will become bigger and all that.”

Patricia, 30, Corporate Communications Executive

The structuring effect of social media in influencing how participants engage the body ideal was undeniable. Understanding the specific ways in which social media use influences the construction of the beauty ideal is relevant as recent studies (Perloff, 2014; Prieler and Choi, 2014) have shown, that with its instantaneous feedback and abundance of images it is even more crucial in influencing body image than mass media.

In addition, the triple digital revolution (social media, internet, and mobile phones) has increased the use and popularity of selfies (Cohen et al. 2018; Faimau 2020). Such selfies are posted with accompanying hashtags that seek to promote the body ideal. This is evidenced by various hashtags that have gone viral around the world such as the #tenyearchallenge which started on Facebook in 2019 on the cusp to 2020 and the #DollyParton³¹ challenge which started on Instagram where individuals made a collage of how they present themselves on various social media platforms at the beginning of 2020. Many of these social media challenges involve putting the idealised images of the body on display with captions that mostly shows

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolly_Parton_challenge

the evidence of some body work practices.³²

8.2.2 Knowledge from Social Media

Some participants explained that they made a lot of the changes to their diet based on what they learnt from social media. These individuals explained that rather than social media being a platform where they felt they had to conform to meet the ideals of beauty, it was a platform where they gained knowledge and got empowered. While participants viewed this empowerment in a positive light, it still led to engagement in body work activities. Social media, therefore, facilitated the body ideal, but participants mediated their engagement with it differently.

“I do my own exercises with videos I see online like YouTube. I just go and watch it and then try it.”

Lilian, 32, Executive Secretary

Some also indicated that they learnt more about planning their diets and various body work practices on social media, and that has helped them to achieve their body ideal. These participants mostly spoke about the power of social media and the amount of information available if one was willing to learn or following the right groups.

8.3 Sustaining Body Ideals: Social Media as a Location for Body Work

8.3.1 Buying from Social Media

These social media sites reproduced ideals by serving as a platform for advertisements of body enhancement products where participants could effortlessly get products to buy. Participants mentioned that these advertisements they saw on

³² <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/1/16/18185256/10-year-challenge-facebook-meme>

their social media pages were both paid advertisements (unsolicited) and those shared by friends in their networks. All participants mentioned that there were many products to lose weight and attain a particular shape advertised on social media. Ingrid bought one of the products she saw on social media to try, and she narrates what influenced her to buy the product

“I have seen a lot of products on social media. Facebook, Twitter... Cellgevity which is for cells but they also attest to it helping in weight loss. There was also one Nana Ama McBrown (Ghanaian movie star) was using. Colarad. I actually wanted to buy Colarad instead of the slim tea but I kept calling their number which I saw on Facebook, but they never answered, so I went in with my second choice which was the slim tea which I saw on my Facebook feed.”
Ingrid, 31, Law Student

Figure 19 shows an advertisement of a sponsored ad that popped up on my Facebook feed, and Figure 20 is a picture of the same product purchased by Ingrid, who also saw the advertisement on her feed.

While some participants bought products they had seen being advertised on social media, others were sceptical about such products. Adoley, for example, said she felt most of the people who sold the products were purely marketers profiting from the current craze to have shapely bodies.

“It is a big business now. It is all over social media. There is the demand for it, so more people are getting into selling such products.”
Adoley, 30, Law Student

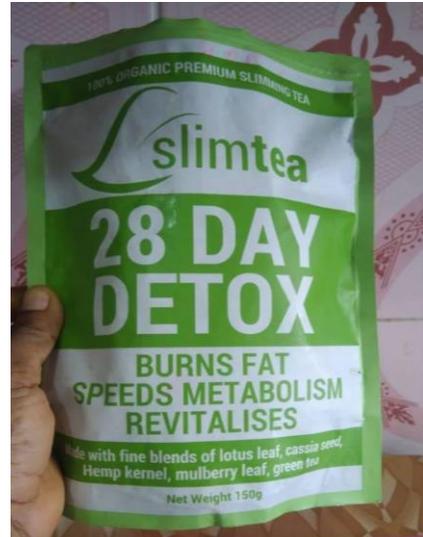
While some participants were deeply moved to buy products from social media, others were uncertain about products on social media. The main difference I saw between these two groups was not the level of educational attainment or financial resources, but how committed one was in wanting to lose weight. Two of the participants who spent less time on social media that is about an hour cumulatively across sites also never bought any products from social media. This corroborates studies which indicate that individuals who spend more time on social media sites

tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies (Tiggemann and Slater, 2013, 2014).

Figure 19: ‘Slim Tea Ad’



Figure 20: Slim Tea Bought



Source: Photos from Researcher’s Field Work, 2020

8.3.2 Support on Social Media

Social media usage sustained body ideals and body work practice by providing support. Some participants said they found support on social media by joining groups which helped to keep them on track on their body work journey. It was also a place to draw strength and inspiration.

“Actually, I belong to a keto group on Facebook and WhatsApp, so we challenge ourselves. For example, we challenge ourselves that for three weeks, we are going to be on a certain diet. We eat the same food and then we exercise. That means we are responsible for each other. We have to do the work together.”

Ewurama, 29, General Manager

“There's this group on WhatsApp. It's "Eat to Slim". You do your exercises, you put it up there. You do your meal plans, you put it up there. We check our weight every week to see if there's been progress or not. It's been awesome.

I've been able to lose 6kg in 4 months, and I feel healthier. I feel fulfilled, accomplished.”
Ruby, 38, Nurse

As evident in the cases of Ewurama and Ruby, their social media engagement led them to achieve their weight loss goals. They felt supported in a communal setting where participants felt that they were responsible for each other's journeys. The participants who were part of these groups explained that they had never had offline meetings but their online participation left them with feelings of being “healthier” and “fulfilled”. Some groups (such as the Facebook group my online ethnography focused on) have been able to move their meetings to in-person meetings, thereby bridging the virtual gap. Once again, framing understandings of social media with glo-corporeal approach allows for affective feelings to come to the fore.

8.3.3 Validation on Social Media

Finally, social media sustained body ideals by being a place to gain validation. After reaping the benefits of going through body work practices, social media sites allowed participants to flaunt their bodies and gain a sense of confidence in their bodies.

“When you post a picture, and you get comments like “You look fabulous”, “You look great”, it gives you some kind of validation.”
Ingrid, 31, Law Student

For others, it made them accept their bodies.

“I did a “before” and “after” and then I got a lot of positive feedback like “Wow, you've snapped back” things like that even though in my mind I hadn't got to the weight I wanted that helped me appreciate where I was.”
Hilda, 28, Event Manager

It is evident from the various interviews with participants that social media use

facilitated body work practices in various ways. It facilitated beauty ideals by being a platform where participants encountered ideal images and subsequently sought to achieve those ideals. It also sustained body ideals by being a platform where products were advertised, and participants bought products. It was a place to gain validation after losing weight. Participants felt affective connections of feeling good about themselves based on comments they got on their social media pages and thus became more accepting of their bodies.

8.4 Deception on Social Media

Even though Ewurama had not tried any products yet from social media, she explained that after losing weight on her own by following a strict diet and exercising, she was approached by a representative from Herbalife®. The representative convinced her to buy the Herbalife® Meal Replacement to help aid her in her weight loss regimen. Subsequently, the Herbalife® representative took some photos of her which she had posted earlier on Facebook before she started the Herbalife® regimen and posted them on his page, touting it as results from their products. Ewurama said she told him to take the photos off as it was deceptive, and she did not lose the weight based on their regimen. She explained that this was a ubiquitous characteristic of most marketers and most of the pictures posted as “before” and “after” transformations are not a true reflection of reality and just a way to lure people into buying products from them.

Lilian, Ingrid and many others narrated how they had bought various products from social media which did not work. Lilian who bought a pepper like cream which was supposed to get rid of the fatty middle section found out much to her disappointment that the pepper burning sensation she experienced after using the

cream did not lead to any changes in her figure which led to her stopping its use. Ewurama also recounts that a slim tea product she bought only made her have a runny stomach but did nothing to make her lose weight.

Others, like Adoley, were more sceptical about the efficacy of such products and were not interested in trying them even though they had encountered numerous advertisements of such products.

“Herbal teas and green teas are all over Facebook. I am afraid of herbal teas and supplements because I feel that is what is causing a lot of these kidney diseases these days. I am really scared. I know a friend who tried the Chinese herbal tea and she says it helped but I am afraid of it.”

Adoley, 28, Law Student

Others were concerned that products were not what was advertised.

8.5 Agency: Creative Properties of Social Media Use and Body Work

Some participants exercised agency in how they used social media. They recognised that what people posted was not always what it seemed and erred on the side of caution when it came to the pictures people posted on social media. They were knowledgeable and self-aware of deception on social media.

“... there's been so many times we've caught people in photoshop fails. [laughs]. Their shadow is warped or there is a door behind them that is warped and you realise it. I think social media in itself is not a problem. It is the obsession. The fact that you are looking into someone else's world and not getting the full picture and making decisions based off that. That is really the problem.”

Adwoa, 31, Communications Strategist.

For some other participants, even though they encountered ideal images, they did not feel pressured by them. This stems from their awareness that everything is not what it seems on social media, and images could have been edited.

Some other participants also indicated that they joined social media groups for specific purposes, such as watching videos to learn how to exercise and eat well.

“I have not been okay with my weight for a very long time. I think social media rather informed me on how to lose weight properly. It is because of social media that I know for a fact that it’s not always about cardio, but at a point, I need to lift weights as well”.

Borley, 23, Make-up Artiste

8.6 Conclusion

The use of social media was extreme among all participants and greatly influenced individuals how they engaged in body work practices. Social media facilitated and sustained the body ideal and subsequently led some participants to engage in body work activities of various kinds. Social media also facilitated body work practices by being a platform where some participants admitted to feeling pressure to fit in with ideal body types through posts by peers and other idealised images encountered on social media. It was a place where some participants bought products that were being advertised for weight loss toward achieving shapely bodies. Additionally, social media maintained body ideals and subsequently body work activities by providing some participants with the opportunity to join virtual groups. Through joining of groups, some participants felt encouraged to stick with their body work activities. Finally, it was a place to sustain body ideals and gain validation after going through body work practices; allowing participants to flaunt their bodies and gain a sense of confidence in their bodies.

The findings from this chapter specifically illustrate how the use of social media influences body work. Even though social media usage with its instantaneous feedback, rapid generation of messages, and sharing of user-generated messages on hand-held devices has been considered to be influential in how body ideals are shaped, leading to a call by various authors for a new approach to the study of the body as opposed to traditional media. Little has as yet been done in the field (Sundar

and Limperos, 2013, Perloff, 2014).

Most studies on social media use and the body ideal have been studied from a psychological perspective. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) in their study of social media networking sites and their influence on body image concerns, reviewed 20 papers in this area of study. Most of these studies, using measures such as “overall time spent on social media”, “frequency of use” and “number of Facebook friends”, showed moderate to strong correlations between social media networking sites use and the internalisation of the thin ideal, weight dissatisfaction and appearance comparison (Tiggemann and Slater 2013; Bair et al. 2012; Tiggemann and Miller 2010). This suggested that some kind of body work might follow feelings of body dissatisfaction. In one of the studies reviewed, DeVries et al. (2014) found that social media patronisation was associated with a greater investment in appearance and a desire for cosmetic surgery. How the use of social media influences body work practices has been left unexplored in the Sociology literature on body studies.

Findings from this study show that following feelings of dissatisfaction, participants subsequently engaged with the beauty ideal through various body work activities. This study fills this gap by showing how social media use facilitates, reinforces, and validates body ideals. It also shows that, for some people, social media is an avenue to gain support and exercise agency regarding how they want to practice body work. With social media being easily accessible on mobile handheld devices in many countries in the global South, this study offers an important contribution to the field of body work studies.

Social media has the unique combination of peer influence and media depictions of ideal bodies. This is important because some studies have shown that having more Facebook “friends” led to negative views of appearance among young

girls (Cohen and Blaszczyński 2015; Cohen et al. 2018; Fardouly et al. 2015; Kim and Chock 2015). The effects of how social media networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram influence body work practices, therefore, need further studies. Ergo, social media is an important force in the construction of reality.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings in this research based on the objectives set out in the study. First, I explain how the body ideal is understood in a globalized culture and subsequently outline various body work practices that are taken on based on this ideal. The various factors that influence this ideal are also discussed. Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of using glo-corporeal realism as a theory to understand body work practices in the global South and points out directions for future research.

9.1 Major Findings

I started this research seeking to explore the body ideal(s) of the middle-class Ghanaian woman and how it shaped by globalization, the various processes engaged in to achieve this ideal, and the multiple factors that shape this ideal. The study sought to go beyond the agency/structure divide by using the embodied approach of corporeal realism to understand how the body actively constitutes meaning out of body work. Data collection for the study included semi-structured interviews with 35 women; participant observation at a gym for two hours a day, three days in a week for three months. This brought observation to a total of 72 hours. There was also an online ethnography to follow the activities of a popular all-women Facebook group for six months. Archival documents were used to supplement the data collected for this study. The findings based on the objectives of the study are summarised below.

9.1.1 The Body Ideal and Body Work

Chapter Five of this study sought to find out the overarching body ideal of the middle-class Ghanaian woman and to examine how globalization mediates local body ideal(s). It also sought to find out how this idea was negotiated and the various body work activities that were taken on to achieve this ideal. This was to determine the exact role societal norms and structure as well as individual agency played on participants' conceptions of their body shape and size and subsequent body work.

I found that urban middle-class Ghanaian women are increasingly concerned about their physical appearance. There seemed to be an overarching body ideal for urban middle-class Ghanaian women. 33 out of the 35 women interviewed recognised a curvy body with a flat stomach to be the current body ideal for the urban middle-class Ghanaian woman. This body ideal was discussed with references to global pop icons such as Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and Kim Kardashian. Even though all the participants recognised that there was some kind of ideal body type, the degree to which they put in body work to achieve this ideal was varied. Some women, while aware of this ideal, engaged in little body work. While some aspired and actively worked towards this ideal, others opined that achieving it was unrealistic. Some interviewees also intimated that they were working towards the ideal, not for aesthetic purposes but rather to stay “fit and healthy”. The discourse of health in discussions of the body ideal is congruent with other studies in the field (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Coffey 2016).

To achieve the body ideal, women engaged in various body practices, including dieting, wearing corsets and waist trainers, exercising at home and the gym, as well as taking nutritional supplements and herbal products. One participant underwent gastric bypass surgery. These body work practices are highlighted using

an embodied approach to understand the experiences of these women.

9.1.2 Body Work and Gender

In Chapter Six, I focused on how gender shapes body work practices among middle-class Ghanaian women. Gender norms relating to women's physical looks play a significant role in how participants worked on their bodies. Women cited reasons such as pressure from spouses, a craving for feminine "sexiness", and getting pre-pregnancy bodies back to fit into their work environment, as well as looking good for their partners.

Finally, the chapter looked at stories of agency and showed how participants both reproduce and resist the current body ideal. The study showed that religion played a valuable role in both reproducing the body ideal and being a tool of resistance for some participants. This revelation is important, and it was only by paying attention to the data and trying to creatively think through the theory as advocated by the grounded theory approach that this was brought to the fore (Charmaz 2014). Paying attention to the corporeal properties of the experiences of participants is also relevant in this regard (Shilling 2005; 2012). The study reemphasised that some women have cultural agency and take active decisions in working on their bodies to achieve a particular ideal which in most cases was linked to staying healthy.

9.1.3 Body Work and Class

The chapter on body work and class examined how the socio-economic status of participants influenced their body work activities. This is important as various studies have shown a correlation between socioeconomic class and body work

activities (Coffey 2016; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Shea, 2012).

In this study, attention was on women in the middle class category as they were identified in the literature to be the group that participated in body work activities the most. Even though this study did not initially set out to examine class because it focused on just the middle class, in analysing the data it became apparent that body work practices were as much influenced by socioeconomic class as other factors. The study stratified participants into upper middle, middle and lower middle classes using income. Upper middle classes engaged in healthism by participating in activities that came with certain class advantages unavailable to people in other socioeconomic categories.

In the analysis of interviews, it became apparent that women in higher income brackets had much more sophisticated body work routines as opposed to those in the lower middle class categories. For example, some women in the upper income bracket had treadmills at home and were more aware of body work activities centred on weight loss. While various studies have alluded that people in lower socioeconomic classes did not practice body work activities due to a lack of financial resources, this study revealed that such individuals obtained weight loss supplements and other medications which were advertised for weight loss mostly on social media. Others also joined keep fit clubs which are popular social health groups in Ghana. These clubs usually organise health walks and other exercises (mostly aerobics) over weekends to help members keep fit.

9.1.4 Body Work and Social Media

The chapter on body work and social media presented findings on the relationship between social media use and body work practices. The study found

most of the participants spent an average of between three to four hours on social media each day. Social media greatly influenced how individuals engaged in body work practices, in effect facilitating and sustaining body work practices. First, social media served as a platform where participants encountered ideal images. Some participants admitted to feeling pressurised to fit in with ideal body types posted by their peers. It also sustained body work practices by providing a platform where some participants bought products which were advertised for weight loss toward achieving shapely bodies.

Additionally, some participants, through joining groups, were encouraged by others who were also engaged in various body activities. Finally, it was a place to gain validation after going through body work practices. Here, we see persons flaunting their bodies on social media as a show of confidence in their bodies.

9.2 Contributions to Knowledge: Theorizing with Glo-Corporeal Realism

Various studies on the body have been guided by theories centring structure or agency (Coffey, 2016; Davis [1995] 2013; Coleman 2009; Budgeon, 2003, Gimlin, 2002). These have usually led to an elaboration on only one part of the relationship between the body and society. This study, however, went beyond the agency/structure divide by placing the body and the embodied experiences of participants centre in the understanding of the relationship between their bodies and society. By drawing on the theory of corporeal realism, the study sought to show how the body becomes a source of body work, a location for body work and how the body is also able to navigate various social forces — social media, gender, race, religion and a healthism discourse steeped in a consumerist capitalist and globalized culture. This project, therefore, brings to the fore, a nuanced understanding of how

the body ideal is constructed in the global South using Ghana as a lens.

Corporeal realism allowed for a multi-dimensional understanding of bodies that is not currently seen in the literature. Some women undertook body work based on their own agency while others felt pressured to engage the beauty ideal. Some women resisted beauty ideals, while others sustained them and actively reproduced these ideals. It is, therefore, crucial to not lump the experiences of women together as homogenous but rather allow for the definition of those relationships through an understanding of their embodied experiences.

Various reasons motivated participants to take on body work activities. The primary reason that women in this study took on body work in this study can also be attributed to how they wanted to look, especially how they fit in their clothes. As previous studies have noted, body work was increasingly linked to self-presentation in the modern world (Giddens 1999; Gimlin 2012). Many of the women interviewed mentioned that they were engaged in body work activities to look beautiful for themselves and to feel more confident in their bodies.

Closely linked to the issue of self-presentation is gender. While some women wanted to look beautiful for themselves, the literature also shows that body work practices are more important for notions of femininity than masculinity and the increased need to carve a certain self-identity by women in this study is also increasingly linked to gendered expectations of what women are supposed to look like (Chernin 1983; Orbach [1978] 1988; Wolf [1991] 2013). It became apparent from the interviews that while women wanted to look good for themselves, they were also performing for the male gaze. The power imbalances in relationships due to being embedded in a patriarchal society such as Ghana meant that many women felt the need to shape their bodies based on comments of their husbands whether

overt or covert. Some women in partnered relationships expressed worry that they were afraid their husbands or boyfriends might look elsewhere if they did not go back to the body shapes they had before getting married. Some women who have had children also mentioned that it was important they got their pre-pregnant bodies back as they had to stay competitive in the workplace as their bodies were supposed to look “smart” in their workplaces as opposed to it being loose and untoned. Ingrid who was training to be a lawyer suggested that having a flabby body was considered anti-intellectual in her field as lawyers were supposed to be “doyens of knowledge” therefore letting one’s self go is almost tantamount to not being intelligent enough. Some participants in the banking and insurance industry intimated that ladies with specific features (fair and shapely) were hired mostly by males in high-level positions and strategically placed at client-facing duties or asked to go out to look for accounts while those who were not as endowed stayed in the back offices. Here, the role capitalism played in shaping the corporeal bodies of women is worthy of note and it coheres with the literature of how the feminine body is implicated in a capitalist system (Mears 2014; Otis 2016).

In addition, the power of mostly male executives in the hiring process enforces entrenches patriarchy in the workplace as well. The femininity of women as a representation of embodied submissiveness is also exploited by the capitalist culture. A lot of scholarship has pointed to how women are expected to take on extra tasks that are deemed to be feminine and nurturing in the workplace such as making sure snacks are available during meetings, making coffee, taking minutes during meetings among others (Heilman 2012). The bodies of women are therefore in a double bind, at the mercy of both the patriarchy and capitalism at the workplace.

With regard to social media, how digital technologies have to come to have a

real embodied effect on individuals is of importance to note. Participants experienced emotions including joy when their virtual friends commented on how they have lost weight or sadness when they saw others with trim bodies they wished they could have. Some women also mentioned that they wanted validation from friends in social media spaces and that influenced how they worked on their bodies and the kind of pictures they decide to post. Yet again, women indicated that they felt a lot more pressure to work on their bodies for social media than men as they indicated pictures men posted did not elicit as many comments on their bodies as opposed to that of women. This is therefore an extension of embodied gender power imbalance in digital spaces which is constantly reinforced.

So, while most of these women exercised some agency in taking knowledgeable decisions to work on their bodies for themselves, some also did so because they wanted to fit in with societal norms. A close reading of interview narratives shows that in some cases, even though participants exercised agency, that agency was bounded in the way it was exercised; these women were also influenced by societal expectations of what they were supposed to look like. Bounded agency is defined as “socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions” (Evans 2007:10). The corporeal realism approach is important here because it allows for both individual agency and structuring factors to be accounted for in understanding the relationship between body and society affording more nuance to discussions.

In the findings, it becomes clear that globalization, and by extension racial affinity which I explain as closeness to similar others, plays a considerable role in the images participants drew on to construct their body ideals. Gender also plays an

important role in the specific ways women shaped their bodies. Social media was spurred by internet penetration a major feature of globalization, while a consumerist culture was propelled by the continuous interaction with global images and the need to be part of a global culture.

In this vein, I propose glo-corporeal realism. Glo-corporeal realism calls for attention to be paid to globalization and global events and how they shape events in both global North and global South countries as features of globalization such as migration, and a global connectedness due to the internet has led to an intermingling of cultures. In this regard, I call for attention to focus on how connections are made to the racially similar in what I call racial affinities in the way images are drawn upon in the imagination of the body ideal and how this ideal is subsequently worked upon.

While corporeal realism calls for placing the body first in understandings between the body and society, this study by framing discussions around the conceptual tools that corporeal realism provides; the body as a source of body work, the body as a location of body work and the body as having generative properties, the structuring effects of society become pronounced. While through corporeal realism the effects of some social forces such as social class, gender and a capitalist consumer culture come to the fore, this study argues that globalization has the most salient effect on the bodies of urban Ghanaian women. The very features of globalization such as advances in media technologies have led to high internet penetration as well as social media use among middle class Ghanaian women. In addition, a global media culture has led to affinities with specific black American communities and celebrities with a majority of the participants drawing on names like Beyonce, Nicki Minaj, and Kim Kardashian when they talk about their ideal

bodies. The proposal of glo-corporeal realism therefore calls for specific interest in the features of globalization such as a global media culture, and advances in technology in the way the body ideal is imagined and how body work is subsequently practised.

In this study, social media use as a feature of globalisation against a background of capitalist consumerist culture brings new empirical knowledge to body work studies. Though body work has been studied in the context of health, youth and gender (Coffey 2016), gender and social class (Klenke 2013), ageism, gender, race, sexual orientation and social class (Slevin 2010), mass media and gender (Aubrey, 2010), this study brings to the fore the complex ways in which social media use, gender relations and healthism in a consumerist capitalist society, as well as a neo-liberal work culture, impinges on the corporeal bodies of women. Studies by (Perloff 2014; Prieler and Choi 2014) have shown that with its instantaneous feedback and abundance of images, social media is even more crucial in influencing body image than mass media. This study therefore contributes to filling a gap in the field of body studies.

I present Figure 21 to illustrate the importance of globalization and by extension, racial affinity, to the contribution of glo-corporeal realism in furtherance of the understanding between bodies and society. Figure 21 lays out a conceptual framework that illustrates how globalization brings to the fore, new forces that affect how the body is worked upon.

First of all, capitalism has been identified as one of the major structural forces that has contributed to how the body is worked on. Various studies have pointed out that a consumer culture fueled by capitalism has led to a preoccupation with self presentation (Featherstone 1982; Shilling 2005). Women especially are

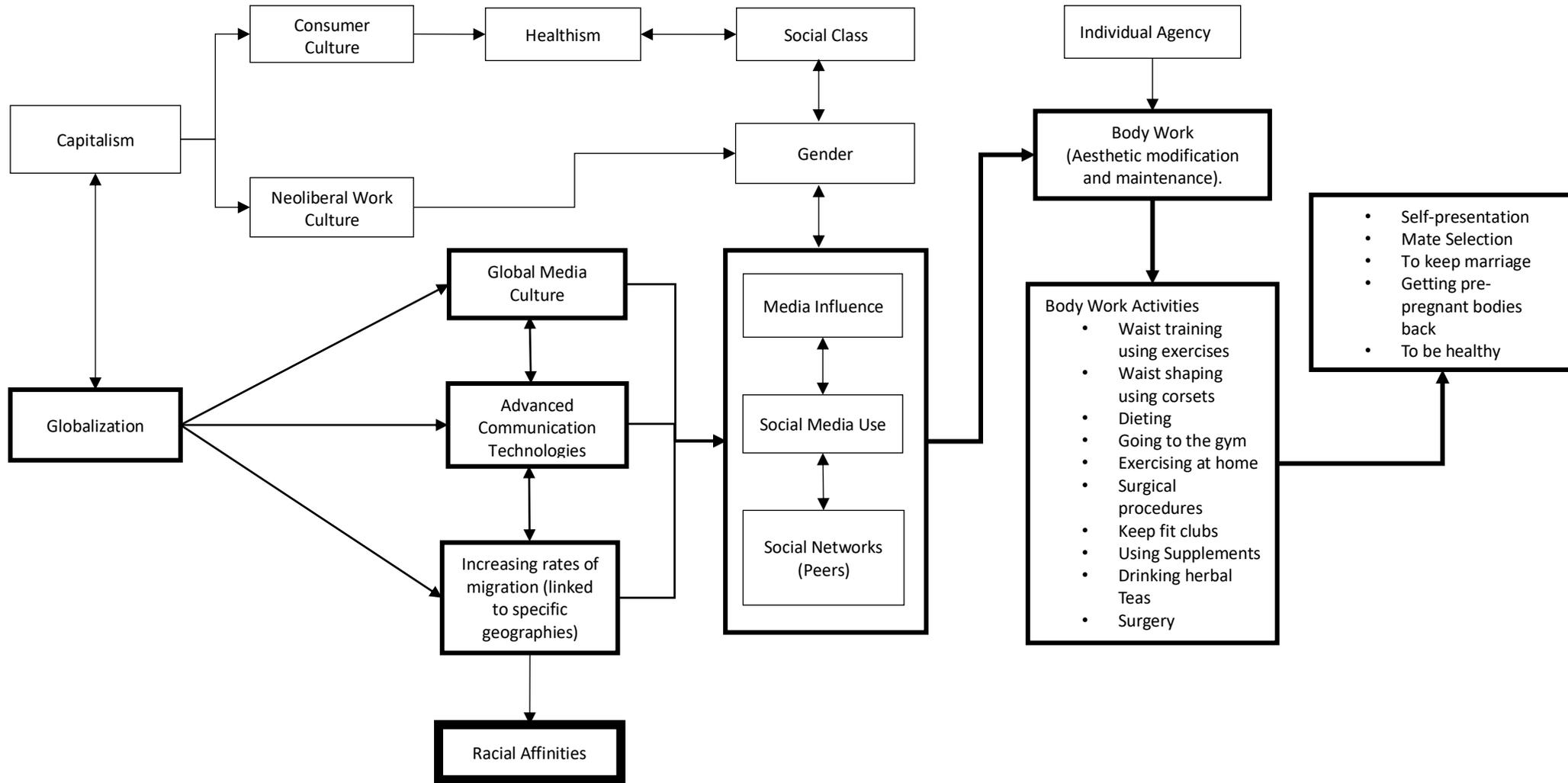
objectified in the mass media in current consumer culture which they subsequently internalize and then self objectify (Coffey 2016; Wolf [1991] 2013). Linked to a consumerist culture is healthism where individuals participate in a consumption of health to reproduce their class status (Cairns and Johnston 2015; Crawford 1980). Capitalism has also led to a neo liberal culture where the bodies of women especially are implicated in the work force and women are expected to look svelte, fit, slim and toned (Grogan 2016; Widdows 2018).

I argue that globalization, accelerated by a global media culture, advances in communication technologies as well as travel is a structural force that attention has to be paid to as it brings new forces into play. Advances in communication technologies has led to an increase in mobile phone usage as well as access to the internet. This has subsequently led to an increase in social media use. This constellation of factors has led to increased body work activities as there is the constant display of bodies which women have come to aspire to. Some scholars have pointed out that social media with its interactive, content creating features as well as strong peer presence creates fertile ground in influencing body ideals than mass media (Perloff 2014; Prieler and Choi 2014).

The glo-corporeal conceptual framework therefore points to how the various elements of globalization therefore interacts with already existing social forces to influence the way body work is practised among urban Ghanaian women. In this study, urban Ghanaian women therefore feel the need to work on their bodies for the purposes of self presentation; fitting in the current neoliberal culture as well as how they want to look based on how their peers look on social media. In addition, others wanted to work on their bodies to make themselves competitive on the marriage market while those who were already married engaged in body work to

keep their husbands interested in the marriage. Here, the role gender plays on the corporeal bodies of women cannot be over emphasized. Here the concept of glo-corporeal realism is important as women are not drawing on images of local celebrities but rather celebrities linked to American popular culture. I therefore argue that in the global South when body work is being discussed, attention should be paid to racial affinities; a closeness to similar others. This is important as I argue in this thesis that the drawing on images from an American culture can be linked specifically to Black American popular celebrities. The presence of Blacks in the diaspora stemming from slavery and more recently migration means that there is a constant interaction between the racially similar in the global South and global North constantly aided by the presence of globalizing features such as social media as well as advances in travel. Attention should therefore be paid to how the structural force of globalization brings to the fore new elements to influence the way the body is worked upon.

Figure 21: Conceptual Framework of Glo-corporeal Realism



9.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focused on the experiences of a small number of middle-class Ghanaian women. While this study is not generalizable, it provides an in-depth understanding of body work activities among the participants.

About half the participants indicated that the current overarching body ideal is a result of the reflection of the tastes of men. In recent times, studies have shown that men feel pressured as well to attain a certain body ideal (Coffey 2016; Crossley 2005). Various advertisements on how to lose potbellies and grow beards are on the increase. Additionally, during my participant observation at the gym, men took protein shakes and other supplements to carve a muscled look which aligns with the male ideal. Future studies might want to incorporate the views of men on what they think the body ideal is for men in Ghana. This will help broaden our understanding of the body ideal among both men and women in a global South setting and how that influences body work practices.

Secondly, an in-depth tracing of the beauty ideal through the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial period through a careful analysis of archival material will be fascinating to study. Unfortunately, time constraints made it impossible for this to be done. The researcher could only be in Ghana for six months for data collection, which included three months of participant observations, identifying research participants and subsequent in-depth semi-structured interviews and online ethnography. This will be theoretically significant to study due to Ghana's complicated past with slavery and colonization. Such a study will shed light on the various political stages of Ghana and how the body ideal has evolved through time and the specific ways the body ideal changed with reference to Western cultures.

It will also be meaningful to see if there are ethnic beauty ideals in Ghana as

participants hinted — there was the possibility that people from different ethnic groupings would have different body ideals or preferences. This is important because modern Ghana was created with different ethnic groups; several indigenous states existed long before contact with Western colonisers. Ghana, as we know, is a result of the brazen masterminding and deviousness of Europeans to grab what they wanted of Africa as captured in the Berlin Conference of 1884. A study that highlights a possible linkage between ethnic groups and body ideals will be significant for global South scholarship as various studies have pointed to how the colonial complex shaped and changed indigenous cultures. A study in this area will therefore be useful to understand how certain ethnic groups have sustained and/or adapted to body ideals.

Finally, previous studies have shown that rural areas and regions also have an appreciation of the body ideal. It will be riveting to compare and contrast how body work is undertaken in these areas in comparison to urban areas. This is important because it will establish more firmly the role Western culture plays in the adaptation of local beauty ideals.

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Appendix I: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Emelia, I am a student reading Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University. I am interested in the various practices urban Ghanaian women engage in for the purposes of aesthetic beauty, body modification or body maintenance. Basically, the various activities the urban Ghanaian woman engages in to achieve their ideal body shape and size. So, I am interested in your experience of these practices and the various meanings you give to these kinds of activities.

So, to start off, I will want to know how you feel about your body shape and size. There are no correct or right answers. Just talk to me generally about how you feel about your body.

- What does your ideal body look like to you? (in terms of shape and size)
- Is this how you've always wanted to be?
- Tell me about how your appearance has changed over time?
- How do you feel about those changes?
- What does body work mean to you?
- What kind of body work activities/products are you engaging in to achieve this ideal? (e.g., diet, exercise, nutritional supplements, herbal teas)
- What has the experience been like and what are your feelings about it? Tell me about your experiences of/perceptions of these body work practices/products
- What is the motivation for the use of these products?
- How did you get the product/ how did you start this activity? Through friends? Advertisements? Social Media
- What will you say has been the main influence in wanting to achieve this body shape (ideal) (mass media, friends, social media?)

- Which kind of social media sites do you use the most? How many hours do you spend on social media?

Socio demographic details

Level of studies:

Profession:

Age:

Tenant / Lives in the house of a parents/relatives/ Owner:

Monthly average:

Mother tongue:

Religion, If Christian specify church:

Vehicle Owner? If yes, which kind:

Thank you very much for your time, I once again assure you of confidentiality and anonymity.

Appendix II: Field Diary

Location:

Date:

1. Setting (Number of people present, what's going on, interactions):

2. Body work activities being engaged in:

3. Self- Expression, behavior:

1. Reflections:

Appendix III: Ethical Clearance from University of Ghana



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)

P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No.....

10th December, 2018

Ms. Emelia Afi Agblevor
Hong Kong Baptist University
Sociology Department, 10th Floor
Academic and Administration Building
Baptist University Road, Kowloon Tong
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Agblevor

ECH 038/18-19: Gender, social media and healthism: body work practices among urban Ghanaian women

This is to advise you that the above reference study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for the Humanities for an expedited review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date: 04/12/19
On Agenda for: Initial
Date of Submission: 16/11/18
ECH Action: Approved
Reporting: Bi-annually



Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof. C. Charles Mate-Kole
ECH Vice Chair

Cc: Professor Gina W. F. Lai, Hong Kong Baptist University

Tel: +233-303933866

Email: ech@ug.edu.gh

Appendix IV: Ethics Application Form, HKBU

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
Research Ethics Committee (REC)
REC/Ethics/Human (Fast Track Review)
(for student projects only)

Important Notes:

- (1) All students' research projects utilizing human subjects are required to seek prior approval from the Faculty/School Dean/Academy Director before commencement of the research project. This assures protection of the rights and welfare of persons participating in the research.
- (2) This application is **NOT** applicable for research involving subjects in the category of pregnant women; fetuses; prisoners; human in vitro fertilization; persons with mental or physical disabilities; persons with serious illness; persons who are economically or educationally disadvantaged and minors*. Should the study involve any of the above subjects, you must consult your Principal Supervisor/Course Instructor and fill out the **Full Review** form. [*Under Section B Checklist, should any research involving minors in categories 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, such activities will be qualified for the Fast Track Review.]
- (3) All documents must be typed and legible; please use layman terminologies to explain your research project.
- (4) Faculty/School Dean/Academy Director reserves the right to return incomplete/outdated application to the SI and this will result in delay in approving the application.
- (5) A copy of the approved application should be sent to the REC via the Graduate School.

Section A. Project Information

Course Name	PhD Thesis	Project Title	Gender, Social Media and Health: Body Work among Urban Ghanaian Women		
Duration (months)	20	Start Date	07/01/2019	End Date	31/08/2020
Student in charge (SI)	Emelia Afi Agblevor	Student no.	17481554	Department	Sociology
Telephone	62218676	Email	17481554@life.hkbu.edu.hk		
Other student (s) involved in the research project	Name:	Student no.		Dept	
	Name:	Student no.		Dept	

Section B. Checklist

Check the box(es) for the appropriate category(ies) **AND** sub-category(ies) that apply to your research project. Your research project is qualified for the Fast Track Review if it falls into anyone of the following categories. In the event that **NONE** of the following is applicable to your research project, please fill out the **Full Review** form.

1. Research conducted in an established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as
 - (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or

- (ii) research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- 2. Research involving the use of research assessment or measurement tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, and that any of the following would be incurred in the study: NOTE³³
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the human subject **CANNOT** be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subject's responses outside the research would **NOT** reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- 3. Research involving the use of research assessment or measurement tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph 2, if the human subjects: NOTE¹
 - (i) are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or
 - (ii) require without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- 4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens:
 - (i) if these sources are publicly available or
 - (ii) if the information is recorded by the project team member in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject.

*The Student in charge **must** describe the information provided in the dataset and the number of subjects involved when the data was originally collected.*
- 5. Research and demonstration projects which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:
 - (i) public benefit or service programs (e.g. social security, welfare, etc.);
 - (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;
 - (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or
 - (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

³³ NOTE: Include any **INSTRUMENT** to be used, e.g. questionnaires or surveys. In the case of interviews, include a list (or representative sample) of the questions to be asked. If subjects will do a task, provide a sample copy of the task. Copy for any advertising should be submitted. All information used to recruit subjects (precontact, letters, phone scripts, etc.) must be submitted.

Section C. Research Protocol and Documentation

Selection / Recruitment of Subjects			
Criteria used to recruit/select subjects. You may choose more than one option.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sex	<input type="checkbox"/> Socio-economic status
	<input type="checkbox"/> Marital Status	Others, please specify: <u>Location</u>	
Number of subjects to be recruited/selected	40		
Type(s) of subjects You may choose more than one option.	<input type="checkbox"/> Minor	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female
	Age range: _____	No: _____	No.: _____
	Reason(s) for choosing only Male or Female as subjects (if applicable). Various studies(Bordo 1993, Slevin 2010) have shown that body work for the purposes of aesthetics are more salient to the self-presentation of women than men hence the focus on women,		
Your relationship with the subjects.	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent / Principal/Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Employer / Employee
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No relationship	Others, please specify: <u>Friends and contacts from friends.</u>	
Rewards to the subjects. You may choose more than one option.	<input type="checkbox"/> Monetary Dollar Value:\$ _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gift Dollar Value:\$ <u>10-20</u> <u>HKD</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Class credit Credit earned: _____
	Describe the payment arrangements		
	Gift in the form of mobile phone airtime will be paid for by researcher.		
	Any rewards if the subjects withdraw prior to the completion of the study? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A If Yes, the dollar value is: \$ _____ Others: _____		
Consent from the subjects ³⁴			
Necessary information will be provided to the subjects so that they can understand their roles and the risks involved in participating in the study?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, each subject will be provided with the Informed Consent Statement. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, each subject will be provided with the Study Information Sheet. <input type="checkbox"/> Others, please specify: _____		

³⁴ Signed parental/guardian informed consent must be obtained when minor subjects are involved in the research, but for adult subjects, in most cases, signed informed consent is not required if the project is qualified for this Fast Track Review. However, it is generally required that information about the research will be given to the subjects either in written or oral form by following the "Study Information Sheet". The Study Information Sheet should contain information listed on Appendix A (Items 1-9) and a sample is also included in Appendix A1 to assist the project team.

Conduct of the Research Study	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By interview	Will the subjects be taped? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes. I will keep/ destroy the tapes within <u>24 months</u> (duration) upon completion of my research study. NOTE ³⁵ <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Where will the interview take place? It depends on the respondents' preferences. It could take place in public spaces such as a coffee shop, a University campus, restaurant or in the private space of respondents' home.
	If the interview takes place during class time, what will non-participants do? <input type="checkbox"/> Dismiss from class <input type="checkbox"/> Reading time <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____
	Time needed to complete the interview: <u>1-2</u> minutes / hours (please circle)
<input type="checkbox"/> By questionnaire	How will the questionnaires be distributed AND collected? <input type="checkbox"/> By mail <input type="checkbox"/> By Email (Subject should be told that their confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while their data are on the internet) <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____
	Time needed to complete the questionnaire _____ minutes / hours (please circle)
	Confidentiality statements are included in the questionnaire <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Others	Describe what the subjects will do (action).
	Will the subjects be taped? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. I will keep/ destroy the tapes within _____ (duration) upon completion of my research study. NOTE ³ <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Where will the action take place?
	Time needed to complete the above action _____ minutes / hours (please circle)
	If the action takes place during class time, what will non-participants do? <input type="checkbox"/> Dismiss from class <input type="checkbox"/> Reading time <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____

³⁵ NOTE: The Research Committee approved that for longitudinal studies, record may be kept up to seven years. Please provide justifications for any period longer than that.

Record Keeping			
Format of recording and keeping the data. You may choose more than one choice.	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper copies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital/Electronic copies	Others, please specify: _____
Identifiers are used for identifying the subjects?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes. I will keep/ destroy the identifiers within <u>24 months</u> (duration) upon completion of my research study. NOTE ³ <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Describe how you will destroy/dispose of the records?	Delete audio recordings of interviews form my computer and mobile phone.		
Types of identifiers. You may choose more than one option.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Name <input type="checkbox"/> Job Title <input type="checkbox"/> Others: The identifiers will be kept for <u>24 months</u> (duration).		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Number code. The subject will be identified by the code? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No The code list will be stored in _____ When will the code list be destroyed? _____		
Research Output			
How will the report be written?	<input type="checkbox"/> In aggregate terms. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual responses will be described.		
Additional methods to preserve confidentiality for any of the procedures	Names used are going to be Pseudonyms		

Section D. Approval

I. Declaration by the Student in charge

My project team and I pledge to conform to the following:

As one engaged in investigation utilizing human subjects, I acknowledge the rights and welfare of the human subject involved. I acknowledge my responsibility as project team member to secure the informed consent of the subject by explaining the procedures, in so far as possible, and by describing the risks as weighed against the potential benefits of the investigation.

I assure the Faculty/School Dean/Academy Director that all procedures performed under the project will be conducted in accordance with prevailing standards of research ethics in the academic community. Any deviation of the project (e.g., change in student in charge, research methodology, subject recruitment procedures, etc.) will be submitted to the Faculty/School Dean/Academy Director in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

I understand that it is the sole responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the research is in full compliance with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

I also undertake to thoroughly inform other students in the project as stated in Section A of the necessary aforementioned details.

Signature: _____(SI) Date: _____

II. Recommendation by Principal Supervisor/Course Instructor

This protocol for the use of human subjects has been reviewed and I have the following recommendations:

Recommended for Approval Not Recommended Withdrawn

Comments/Conditions:

Principal Supervisor/Course Instructor: _____ Date: _____

III. Endorsement by Department Head

I hereby endorse this application and confirm that under the supervision of the Principal Supervisor/Course Instructor, the SI is appropriately experienced in the work envisaged and that the Department is aware of the protection of the rights and welfare of the persons participating in the research.

Justifications:

Department Head: _____ Date _____

IV. Approval by Faculty/School Dean/Academy Director

Approved Not Approved

Signature _____ Date _____

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT (for Full/Fast Track Review)

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Gender, Social Media and Health: Body Work among Urban Ghanaian Women.

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand body work practices among urban Ghanaian women considering the context of gender, social media and a healthism discourse.

INFORMATION

You will be invited to have an interview with the researcher. The aim of the interview is to investigate how you engage in various body work practices for the purpose of maintaining body shape and size. Body work practices in this case refer to any activity undertaken for the aesthetic modification or maintenance of body shape and size. The interview will take 1 to 2 hours. The interview will be taped using an electronic tape recorder and will be deleted within 24 months upon completion of research study.

This research project will include around 40 participants in total.

This research does not include any kinds of deceptions.

BENEFITS

This study will provide a means to contribute to understanding body work practices of urban Ghanaian women. Accepting to be a part of this research will also lend great insights to the relationship between bodies and society.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information obtained in the study will be kept secure and strictly confidential. Other researchers may see the data; however, your name or any other identifying information will be removed from the data. Pseudonyms will be used in all materials related to the research.

COMPENSATION AND INSURANCE

For participating in this study, you will receive GHS10 (Value of about 20 HKD) of airtime of your preferred mobile phone network. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will receive nothing.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Emelia Afi Agblevor at the Sociology Department, University of Ghana, and through mobile on (233207377131) . If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in this research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the Committee on the Use of Human and Animal Subjects in Teaching and Research by email at hasc@hkbu.edu.hk or by mail to Graduate School, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Appendix V: Protocol Consent Form, University of Ghana

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



Official Use only
Protocol number

Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH)

PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM

Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Title of Study:	Gender, Social Media and Healthism: Body Work among Urban Ghanaian Women
Principal Investigator:	Emelia Afi Agblevor
Certified Protocol Number	I.D (17481554)

Section B - CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

General Information about Research

This research seeks to explore the various body work practices of urban Ghanaian women. Body work practices in this case refer to any activity undertaken for the aesthetic modification or maintenance of body shape and size. The current study will therefore focus on how structural forces such as a healthism, social media use and gender norms as well the agency mediate body work practices of the urban Ghanaian woman. This perspective will fill a necessary research gap in body studies literature by using corporeal realism to theorise body work and lend new understandings to ongoing discussions on the relationships between the body and society that goes beyond a structural/agency dualism.

The research will take place over a period of 6 months and will include around 40 female participants. Interviews lasting between one and two hours will be

conducted with participants. Interviews will be taped using an electronic tape recorder and will be deleted within 24 months upon completion of research study.

No experimental or intrusive methods will be adopted in this study.

Benefits of the study

You will have no direct benefit from participating in the study. However, accepting to be a part of this study will provide a means to contribute to understanding body work practices of urban Ghanaian women. This will lead to great insights in the relationship between bodies and society.

Risk of the Study

There are no direct risks associated with this study except that, participants may share some personal or confidential information or they may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics.

Confidentiality

This information obtained will be safely secured and stored on computer devices owned by the researcher. Other researchers may see the data; however, your name or any other identifying information will be removed from the data.

Compensation

For participating in this study, you will receive GHS10 Ghana worth of airtime of your preferred mobile phone network. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will receive nothing.

Withdrawal from Study

- Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.
- Participants can choose not to participate or to answer any individual question or all of the questions.

- Participants will be reliably informed or legal representative would be informed in a timely manner if information becomes available that may be relevant to the participant's willingness to continue participation or withdraw.
- Participants participations may be terminated if they feel too uncomfortable talking about the subject, become tired or find the study too intrusive.

Contact for Additional Information

If you have any additional questions or complaints please call, Emelia Afi Agblevor, University of Ghana on 020 737 7131 or send an email at emelia.agblevor@gmail.com.

If you have any additional questions for clarifications such as your rights as a research participant you can also contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at ech@isser.edu.gh / ech@ug.edu.gh or 00233- 303-933-866.

Section C- VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

Name of Volunteer

Signature or mark of volunteer

Date

If volunteers cannot read the form themselves, a witness must sign here:

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

Name of witness

Signature of witness

Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

Name of Person who Obtained Consent

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

CURRICULUM VITAE

Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Ms Agblevor Afi, Emelia:

- Received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Classical History from the University of Ghana, June 2013
- Received the degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology from University of Ghana, July 2016

August, 2021