

Disciplining the Japanese Body: Gender, Power and Skin Color in Japan

Author: Evdokia Angelaka
Supervisor: Monica Lindberg Falk



Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to explore gender norms, beauty ideals and social practices and the way these become 'visible' on the Japanese female body as (re)producing the ideal Japanese femininity and skin color in particular. In order to achieve that, I investigate and identify these norms, the mechanisms that implement them on the body and the attitudes and expression of resistance against them. The concept of *biopower* is used to explain the above process and findings. The research used both secondary and primary data that was retrieved through eleven deep interviews and participant observation, during two months of fieldwork in Japan in 2013. As the effects of power on the gendered body become central in this research, gender and Foucauldian theoretical perspectives were used to analyse the data. During the analysis I found patterns in the women's opinions, enabling me to answer my research questions. The study found the main norms to maintain that Japanese women have a unique *Japanese* skin that should be baby soft, 'white' and fair, should have natural beauty, look young and innocent, behave in a cute way, avoid conflict or standing out and be subservient to men. The mechanism of implementation of these norms is self-surveillance, based on the forbidding and producing character of *biopower*. Women supervise themselves to conform to the norms, fearing that their lack of conformity will lead to social sanctions such as loneliness and social exclusion. While they have positive attitudes towards resisting *biopower* and are willing to resist some norms, in the end they find it difficult to overcome all the disciplinary norms they are subjected to.

Keywords: Japan, Whiteness, Power, Gender, Foucault, Beauty norms

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Angelaka Eva

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INTRODUCTION

Why study the meaning of skin color in Japan

In Japan for the first time in my life I confronted the fact that extra ‘white’ is a skin color to be complimented upon. As a Greek, in my home country I was often told that I need to get some tan, because I don’t look healthy. While studying and working in Japan from 2005 to 2010, I was surprised to be praised for my whiteness, which nobody thought that I needed to change. At the same time, I was truly captivated by the exciting and unusual artistically painted ‘black’ faces of the *ganguro* or *gyaru* girls that ignored traditional femininity and looked like surreal, almost supernatural or self-sarcastic Hawaiian Barbie dolls come to life. In a society ruled by manners and proper appearances, it was intriguing to see women adopting identities so antithetical to the dominant social and beauty ideals. As a personal preference, I would rather tend for the *gyaru* style since it was natural for me to tan during summer. Then many of my Japanese friends worryingly wondered why I’m trying to damage my natural skin color. Since I was comfortable in the Japanese language –using it at work every day- I read Japanese women’s (and *gyaru*) magazines and asked my acquaintances about the subject. Soon I discovered the Japanese preference to ‘white’ skin and the whitening cosmetics industry, based on very interesting, in my opinion, ideals. For this reason as a Japanese studies student now, I decided to research skin color in Japan.

Context of the research

Female beauty ideals and body appearances are determined by the culture specific (traditional) culture, norms, ideals and influenced at best by male desire and at worst by male authority (patriarchy) over the ideal female. Women often conform to beauty standards and behaviours that are considered to be attractive to men while growing up in a particular society through socialization (Turner, 2008: 167). In Japan from the early twentieth century some of these appearances changed as Japanese women seemingly went against the prevalent ideals and imprinted alternative, ‘modern’, more individual or foreign (‘western’) meanings and lifestyles on their body, while the traditional ideals still existed (Sato, 2003; Miller, 2006: 20-27). Benefiting from the Internet revolution of the 1990s and the intensification of

(cultural) globalization that followed, a fascinating variety of fashion and youth cultures emerged (Allen& Sakamoto, 2006). This became visible not only to visitors of Japan, but also on the social media, which with the help of globalization brought these images of modern Japanese culture to the ‘west’. Interestingly enough, skin color was a basic visual characteristic of these cultures, as they were often positioned against the white beauty ideal not only of the traditional Geisha but also of the modern ideal femininity. In Japan today cosmetics companies create (sometimes unhealthy) whitening products especially for the Japanese (and East Asian) market while some women choose to tan. Practically, among socially active women, skin color is seldom left to be seen natural and uncovered in Japan (Miller, 2006: 205).

Aim and purpose

In my research I intent to investigate the meaning behind skin color in Japan, as it varies in different places of the world. The aim of this thesis is to explore and identify the way that gender norms, beauty ideals and social practices become ‘visible’ on the Japanese female skin color. In order to investigate the meaning of skin color and analyse my interview findings, gender and Foucault’s theory of *biopower* will be used as theoretical framework. The research will try to make *biopower* visible and examine how it becomes inscribed onto one’s body, by particularly looking into the (un)conscious choice or maintenance of a certain skin color.

Research questions

My overarching research question of *how can societal norms, rules and practices be identified and “visible” on the body surface, as (re)producing the ideal Japanese femininity and skin color in particular* will be answered by addressing the following sub-questions:

- What are the norms influencing young Japanese women’s appearance and skin color in particular?
- What are the mechanisms that implement the norms on the female body?
- What are the women’s attitudes towards resisting the norms versus conforming to them? How is resistance expressed?

Disposition

The thesis disposition is intended to be operational and helpful for the reader. Chapter 1 identifies the research context, main research question, operational subquestions and aim of the research. Chapter 2 discusses the methods and primary materials used to conduct the research, research design, meta theoretical standpoint, the thesis' validity, reliability, ethical considerations and demarcations. Chapter 3 provides the contextual setting for the society and problem of my research, by reviewing previous academic literature on the subject. Some of my interview and observation findings that are not utilized in the analysis are briefly incorporated in this section. Chapter 4 reviews and justifies my theoretical choices (Foucault and Bartky) that will be used to analyse my findings. Chapter 5 analyzes my interview and observation findings in relation to the theoretical framework introduced in chapter 4, so as to demonstrate how *biopower* is producing Japanese women's skin color. My findings are developed under the subject headings of the three operational subquestions (norms, mechanisms, resistance) that were later separated into themes during the process of analysis. Chapter 6 consists of a concluding discussion that includes a summary of my findings.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

This thesis answers my research questions by using *participant observation* and by analysing the personal opinions acquired during deep *interviews* as primary material. Secondary material -academic literature- was also used to review the existing literature and provide a contextual setting.

Metatheoretical choices

This thesis follows a constructivist approach. Constructivism accepts that social phenomena are produced by social interaction, influenced by knowledge/discourse and are in constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012: 33). Constructivism recognizes that the social actors' as well as the researchers' perceptions of the world are their own constructions of it, and as such a researcher's interpretation cannot be regarded as definite and absolute, because knowledge is always in revision (Ibid).

Constructivism is well represented in the ideas of Foucault and his notion of *biopower* that will be used as a theoretical analytical tool in this thesis. Human beings are subject to and produced by discourse, because they are always subjected to power/knowledge, identify with and become meaningful only through discourse (Foucault cited in Hall, 1997: 80).¹ The *categories of ideas* that people use in order to understand the world are themselves products of social interaction (Bryman, 2012: 34). According to Foucault's approach there is no universal "truth", but the will-to-power (will to make things true) and different regimes of truth that have been made dominant (Hall, 1997: 79) by people who claim to hold the truth in different societies or historical periods. For this reason (and in line with the constructivist approach) we cannot allow ourselves to make generalized assumptions or claims of speaking the absolute "truth".

¹ Discourse in Foucault's language does not only mean speech but also practices and institutionalized regulations (Hall, 1997:78).

Research design

The research adopts a qualitative approach, acquiring its primary sources of data from participant observation and semi-structured deep interviews, selected as the most appropriate and complementary methods. Secondary material is utilized to provide a contextual setting.

During the six weeks of fieldwork in Japan, besides interviewing and observing everyday interactions and women's behaviour in various places, I collected women's magazines, beauty treatment advertisements and pictures of product packages so as to have an idea of the way that the products, services or fashions are promoted, advertised and articulated. Visits to cosmetics stores and a plastic surgery beauty clinic in the upscale area of Ginza were also made, so as to see the available treatments and prices. During those visits and observations, I aimed to check the treatments, prices and services that were described by some of my informants (such as the placenta shots). Field notes were also taken.

Participant Observation

Participant observation requires the researcher to be involved in a society for a certain amount of time, so as to observe and understand "the culture of a social group" (Bryman, 2012: 383). My six year living experience and familiarity with Japan provide a basis for my understanding of the culture and society which I am researching in this thesis. This research includes participant observation (Ibid: 432) in the native language and complete participation (Ibid: 433, 443) because I was immersed in this society over a period of years (Silverman, 2005: 49; Bryman, 2012: 445). During my observations, I observed social interactions in the metro, stores and restaurants.

Interviews

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009:17) argue that interviewing is a social production of knowledge and for that reason I chose to use interviews instead of surveys or statistical data. My ability to comfortably communicate in Japanese allowed me to conduct the interviews without the presence of a third person. I find that the absence

of a third person (such as a translator) and the total anonymity made it easier for the women to open up and reveal their thoughts. Learning the local language and its slang is vital so as to understand and penetrate the culture (Becker&Geer, 1957 cited in Bryman, 2012: 494). During the interviews, I used open ended questions so as to obtain primary data for my analysis.

The snowball method was used to establish contacts with interviewees (Bryman, 2012: 202). A total of eleven women were interviewed, during 2-3 hour long semi structured interviews (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009: 130), over a period of 6 weeks. Introductory, follow up, specifying and probing questions (Ibid: 135) were asked, based on a selection of topics. Before conducting the interviews, I tested the questions by sending them to two women via email some months prior to my arrival to Japan so as make changes or additions. Information and quotations from discussions in other contexts were also recorded or written down, after asking for permission. As quiet meeting places are not much available in Tokyo, most of the interviews were directly written down as we spoke, while the small parts that were recorded were later transcribed.

All of my interviewees showed great enthusiasm in participating in the interviews and mentioned that it was a good chance for self-reflection or practicing their English. When the interviews were conducted in English, corrections have not been made, except from some minor grammatical changes, so as to make the quotes easier to read. When the interviews or their answers were in Japanese, I translated it to English, emphasizing on the original meaning as much as possible. Direct quotes from interviews have been used to support my arguments and enhance the analysis of my own interpretations. When most women gave similar answers, I quote only a few of them, to exemplify what and how it was said.

Demarcations

This research offers insight to the opinions of the small number of interviewed young women living in the greater Tokyo area. Therefore, it cannot claim to be inclusive and representative of the opinions of the totality of Japanese women.

These opinions nevertheless entail additional issues (such as gender equality, roles and sexuality, fashion, advertising, media, individuality/group culture in Japan, socio-political or economic issues) which even though might be briefly mentioned or

related to this thesis, are not part of it but could be explored by further research. I recognize that the same issue could have been approached by other categories of analysis as it is a multifaceted topic, but I chose to approach it using the theoretical perspectives of power and gender. While the research focuses on the effects of *biopower* on the gendered female Japanese body, it does not suggest that other notions of gender (such as men and masculinities), or non-Japanese are not subject to functions of power within social relations.

In order to examine the multiple ways that various norms produce the female Japanese bodies, the space of a book would be needed to examine the vast amount of beauty and body treatments available in Japan. Thus, so as to limit its scope and make the analysis deeper, this thesis focuses only on skin color.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are inherent in all stages of interviewing and it is the researcher's responsibility to be aware of the power balance and vulnerability that are embedded in particular situations or topics (Ibid: 61) My informants were aware of the topic of my study and were given an overview of the questions, before deciding if they wanted to take part in the research. Permission was asked to write down or record their replies, while comments with strong meaning were verified twice and asked again for permission to be written down, as it is the researcher's ethical responsibility to report knowledge secured and verified (Ibid: 63). During the participant observation no hidden video or photo cameras were used. For the sake of their privacy, names are disclosed and my informants remain anonymous. Common Japanese names have been used as references in the interview quotes.

Validity and reliability

Qualitative research can be evaluated by its validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012: 389-390). In qualitative research, validity refers to identifying similarities between the research findings and the theoretical concepts while it also concerns the degree to which findings can be applied to other settings (LeCompte& Goetz, 1982 cited in Bryman, 2012: 390). This thesis approaches knowledge from a constructivist

viewpoint, using qualitative methods, it inherently cannot conclude into absolute claims that can be validated in quantitative terms. The research observes a part of society in a specific time setting and identifies a high level of similarities between the theoretical concepts, the interview findings and observations. It has been concluded in accordance to criteria for good practice in qualitative research that should ensure its *reliability*: the interview questions were rephrased, reversed or reconfirmed to find out inconsistencies and guarantee that the meanings were explicitly understood, while the fieldwork observations were used to attest interview findings.

Self-Reflexivity

I understand that I was probably seen as a western, well-educated woman that intended to ask the women questions about Japan. In order for my data not to be affected, I tried to exhibit ‘deliberate naïveté’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 31), avoiding to reveal my previous knowledge and presuppositions due to my own experience of living in Japan. However, my “otherness” as a researcher from Europe seemed to function positively. Despite the subject being very sensitive, I was able to establish rapport with my informants, who willingly shared sensitive personal information and insights that might not have been mentioned otherwise.

BEAUTY NORMS AND FEMININITY IN JAPAN

Japanese Beauty Perceptions

People all over the world define beauty according to local criteria and depending on local economic and political ideologies the meaning of aesthetic virtues varies (Shilling, 1993; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; Darwin, 1859 cited in Miller, 2006:20).

The Japanese 'White' Color Preference

“Skin color is one of the main appearance concerns in Japan” (Ashikari, 2005: 77)

“White skin makes up for seven defects” - Japanese proverb: light skin conceals other unattractive features (Noguchi, 1963 cited in Wagatsuma, 1967)

“Bihaku” (beautiful white) as seen on most Japanese cosmetics packages

Beautiful white skin is called *bihaku*. The Japanese describe their skin as ‘white’, having thought of white skin as beautiful before having prolonged contact with foreigners (Wagatsuma, 1967: 407). The “Japanese self emerges as white (...) or aspiring to whiteness” because ‘whiteness’ enables one to belong to the dominant world population, the culture of “us” and not “them” (Russell, 1996 cited in Ashikari, 2005: 83). ‘Whiteness’ also represents beauty nationalism, symbolizing traditional Japaneseness because the Japanese believe that they constitute a single race with a common skin tone ((Miller, 2006: 4, 37; Ashikari, 2005:79- 84). An exception applies to the darker people of Okinawa, perceived as ethnically, physically and culturally different and to Japanese from Northern areas, thought of as having whiter skin (Ashikari, 2005: 79- 80).

In the 1960s, according to Japanese beauty concepts whiteness was associated with attractive social traits such as refinement, while blackness was related

to primitiveness (Wagatsuma, 1967: 407).² Japanese women do not pursue white skin because it looks Caucasian, but because it is the Japanese skin color, superior from Caucasian due to its texture (Ashikari, 2005: 82; Wagatsuma, 1967: 420). Shiseido's skin lightening products pamphlets discussed the exclusive "Japaneseness of white skin" (Miller, 2006: 35).

Japanese skin tones are generally divided by the dichotomy of white and black (Ashikari, 2005: 77). In the Japanese classical texts, the word *white*³ was used to describe snow, skin or paper while *black*⁴ was used to describe dark skin; there was no word to describe an average color except from words such as *light black*⁵ (Wagatsuma, 1967: 411). Today, there are different words to describe a tan according to how it was acquired: tennis tan, golf tan, Hawaii tan, natural dark⁶ but most suggest that the tan was acquired during a leisure activity (Ashikari, 2005: 78). Polls about skin color (Ranking DaiSuki!, 1999 cited in Miller, 2006: 36) suggest that even though 61.4 percent claimed to have a light complexion, the rest of the young Japanese are fragmented into percentages of different natural or artificial darker complexions.

A 1994 sociolinguistic survey reported adjectives attributed to the images of white/dark skin, revealing dichotomies in meaning: weak/strong, cute/wild, beautiful/ugly, womanly/manly, clean/dirty, sophisticated/vulgar, conservative/liberal and so on (Ashikari, 1995 cited in Ashikari, 2005: 77).⁷ Whiteness carries social or personal capital, as historically, the "ability to display white skin was limited by one's class status" (Miller, 2006: 35). *Bihaku* girls classify their whiteness as a symbol of traditional femininity, nobility, conservatism, good middle –or urban wealthy- class (Ibid: 33; Ashikari 2003) while dark skin signified working class, lower economic status or rural women (Wagatsuma: 418). In working class Japanese, the artificially lightened "extreme white face" was often observed, as an aspiration for middle class belonging (Miller, 2006: 37).

² During the birth of the Crown Prince in 1960, the Emperor anxiously asked the doctor about the newborns' skin color and was relieved to know that it was "rather white" (Okuno, 2001 cited in Ashikari, 2005:78).

³ White: *Shiroi*

⁴ Black: *Kuroi*

⁵ Light black: *Asakuroi*

⁶ Natural dark: *Jiguro*

⁷ In most of the interviews that I conducted in 2013, the same dichotomies were used to describe white/ black skin and telling someone that their color is white was taken as praise.

The Japanese separate themselves from other ‘white’ Asians, insisting that the Japanese skin has a “whiteness that is unique to the Japanese” and this is evident in the expression “*Japanese skin*”⁸ that is used in speech and advertisements, identifying the Japanese as a race (Ashikari, 2005: 83). However, the Japanese skin is protected from the sun for aesthetic reasons; to look pretty and proper (Ibid: 85).

Ashikari (Ibid: 89) suggested that the preference for female whiteness is a gendered phenomenon that “cannot be devalued as just a beauty issue”. In interviews taken in 1965, Japanese men valued whiteness as an important female feature, associated with femininity, motherhood, chastity and Japaneseness (Wagatsuma, 1967: 417). Skin also had to be spotless, wrinkle free and soft (Ibid: 418). In contrast to traditional femininity, tanned skin was of secondary preference, described as a young, modern and healthy attractiveness associated with big Western eyes and outgoing personality (Ibid). Women themselves gendered their whiteness, as they preferred brown skinned men as more masculine to pale “feminine” men (Ibid: 419; Ashikari, 2005: 77).

Ideal Femininity

*Hitomae*⁹ is a Japanese notion that explains the importance of presenting oneself properly so as to be considerate of others (McVeigh, 2000:20) in the group oriented societies of Japan. A good appearance signifies social manners and responsibility, since it’s regarded impolite for a woman in Japan to present herself without having taken care of her appearance and make up (Miller, 2006: 10).

Social actors determine their appearances and actions according to the roles and identities that they aspire to (Ibid: 28, 35). Students wear school uniforms, *salarymen* wear suits, the high-class Ginza¹⁰ women have their own code of dressing and even the Yakuza have their own style (McVeigh, 2000: 1). Part of this uniformity has its roots in the refined traditions of older Japan (Ibid: 2). For women, dress historically disciplined and forbid de- uniformizing: the kimono implicated a set of manners, linking Japanese femininity with national identity (Ibid: 105). *OL*¹¹ are

⁸ Japanese skin: *Nihonjin no hada*

⁹ *Hitomae*: literally, ‘in front of people’

¹⁰ *Ginza*: the most upscale and sophisticated area of downtown Tokyo

¹¹ *OL*- Office ladies (Japanese term)

expected to have a particular appearance that includes wearing make-up, so as not to give a bad feeling to the customers (Watanabe, 1994 cited in McVeigh, 2000: 122). Uniforms also express the economic and political configurations of society, by reproducing the “norms demanded by politico- economic structures” of Japan, which offers a “vision of hyper- capitalist future (...) in which consumerism is deeply implicated in elite fantasies of nation- statist power and control, exercised through ‘guidance’ over the masses” (McVeigh, 2000: 184- 187).

In Japan, the number of cute¹² things catches the eye of every observer (Ibid: 2). There are cute animal logos in trains, advertisements, toilets and so on. It is suggested that the need to consume cuteness in Japan emanates as a form of resistance to the dominant “male” productivist ideology of order and rationality (Ibid: 16). But cuteness is also in accordance with the dominant male order that associates ideal women with having a harmless innocent behaviour towards men (Ibid: 136; Miller, 2006:38). Cuteness is relaxing, comforting, non-subversive, secure, an escape from the pressuring Japanese society (McVeigh, 2000: 138). A *cute* woman usually behaves and looks childish (with baby white skin features) evoking protective instincts (Takasu, 1988 cited in McVeigh, 2000: 139). Cuteness is not offensive to the power structures of society but can also be manipulative (McVeigh, 2000: 144 -147). Some describe cuteness as a woman’s “weapon” (Takasu, 1988 cited in McVeigh, 2000: 148), communicating weakness, submissiveness, childlike- domination and all the other feelings that affection for something can generate; while others condemn it as a sexual obsession with children (Schomer & Chang, 1995 cited in McVeigh, 2000: 148; McVeigh, 2000: 135). Even though McVeigh notes that not all Japanese women like being cute (Ibid: 136), he fails to mention that cuteness is not always the antidote to mainstream culture. Cuteness is so ubiquitous, that it can be said to characterize contemporary Japanese pop culture.

Skin Color in Japanese history

Beauty in Japan was never natural (Miller, 2006:205). Japanese women have painted their faces white since the Nara¹³, Heian¹⁴, Kamakura and Edo¹⁵ periods,

¹² Cute: *Kawaii*

¹³ Nara period, 710- 793

when court ladies were ideally depicted to be pale (Ibid: 21; Wagatsuma, 1967: 407-408). In novels such as *The Tale of Genji*¹⁶, *Pillow Book*¹⁷, *Tale of Glory*¹⁸, descriptions of beautiful women always incorporated white skin, which symbolized the noble class that did not engage in any outdoor labor (Ibid: 408).

Scholars often locate the early modern roots of Japan in the late Edo period when modernization was fully embraced by the Meiji state¹⁹. From the 1920s until the 1930s (when the militarist regime suppressed the western trends) the influence of movie stars and increased interaction with the West had an effect in changing beauty ideals (Ibid: 416; Miller, 2006: 11). In the early postwar era, until the 1960s, a Euroamerican standard of beauty which included plastic surgery (Wagatsuma, 1967: 417; Miller, 2006: 24) emerged while in 1966 sun tanning became a fashion among urban women that wanted to show that they afforded vacations (Ibid: 419; Ashikari, 2005:85). During the 1970s, the trend of cuteness appeared and innocence was again expressed in the baby- like white faces of the models (Miller, 2006: 25- 26).

From the early 1990s young urban women rejected the ideal of ethnic purity and a variety of different beauty ideals appeared, expressing individuality, alternative ideologies and rejection of models about proper presentation (Ibid: 34). The traditional “good wife, wise mother” ideal was challenged by the struggle for emancipation through self-presentation: women do not just want to be cute innocent girls, mothers and wives anymore, but individuals with a different identity (Ibid: 38-39). Even though some openly expressed an aggressive or rude attitude -similar to punks in the UK- they were not usually connected to radical politics (Ibid: 27 - 34). But as identity became exhibited onto the body surface, it could only be created by consuming an extensive amount of products and hours in front of the mirror (Ibid: 20, 27).

The *Kogal*²⁰, *Kogyaru* or *Gyaru* trend with the loose socks, tan and bleached hair started as a subculture but later expanded into different age groups. *Gyaru* style

14 Heian Era, 794- 1185
15 Kamakura and Edo Period, 1603- 1867
16 11th century novel by Lady Murasaki
17 1002
18 1120
19 Meiji Era, 1868- 1912
20 Kogal, from *koukousei gyaru*: high school girl

taken to an extreme was manifested in the black faces of the *Ganguro*²¹ and *Yamamba*²², who used self-tanning crèmes, make up and tanning beds to achieve the darkest brown possible, the *mega-black*²³ (Kinsella, 2005:143). Often the darkness was contrasted with white make up around the mouth and eyes and grey or colorful hair; the so-called *nega-make*²⁴ or *panda-make*²⁵ (Ibid: 143; Marx, 2012; Miller, 2004). The *ganguro* were often from working-class backgrounds, with an attitude that could be categorized as low-class (Ibid: 33-34). Free from class anxieties, they did not try to look like people who belonged to the class above their own (Miura, 2001 cited in Marx, 2012)

The *Ganguro* were the “bad girls of Japan”, their bodies uncontrolled and undisciplined by male desires (Miller&Bardsley, 2005: 9- 11). Because of visually incorporating different cultures, the *gyaru* visually challenged Japan’s “supposed racial purity and homogeneity” (Kinsella, 2005: 144; Miller, 2006: 34). The “anti-Japanese” tendency of the *Gyaru* culture was featured by the media with horror, as the protection of the pure Japanese women from the damaging temptations of foreign female behavior has been a longstanding concern (Kinsella, 2005: 143-144). Magazines related the black faced girls’ lifestyles to casual prostitution and sexually rejected them, while the girls’ provocative behavior attracted abuse and violence (Miyake, 1999 cited in Kinsella, 2005: 144). The style was characterized “stupid” and frightening while the *ganguro* were degraded like primitives, tribal, ethnic minorities or endangered animal species with evolutionary stages (Nakano, 2000; Playboy, 1999 cited in Kinsella, 2005: 144 -147). Magazine companies started publishing magazines dedicated to the *Gyaru* look since 1999 (Kinsella, 2005:144).

Gyaru academic studies emerged in the 1980s mainly by male scholars, mixing cultural studies, native ethnology or folk studies (Ibid: 149). The academic treatment of the *gyaru* as separate species, pack animals, saviors of Japanese folk culture or an alien racial subculture demonstrated the Japanese scientific racialism (Ibid: 151- 153). Recently, migration and the interest in cultural flows have created a “symbiotic society” in Japan (Willis& Murphy- Shigematsu, 2008: 316- 317) while

²¹ *Ganguro*: Black face

²² *Yamamba*: A folklore and Noh theater mountain witch; a negative term coined by the male press

²³ *Gonguro*: Mega black

²⁴ *Nega make*: Negative Make up

²⁵ *Panda make*: Panda resembling make up

the term *gyaru* is now broadly used by the media to describe various female trends (Miller, 2006: 32).

Although this “girl feminism” was challenging male expectations, it was nevertheless born into the same culture and ideological framework that it reacted against (Kinsella, 2005: 154): the *gyaru* carried the same “right” Louis Vuitton and Chanel bags that the conservative girls carry, but more casually, looking like they didn’t pay attention to fashion (Marx, 2012). This was also confirmed during my stay in Japan from 2005 to 2009. JETRO reported that 94 per cent of Tokyo women in their 20s own a Louis Vuitton bag (Jetro, 2005). In addition, economic resources are required to cover the frequent visits to the tanning salon or consumption of tanning creams all year long (Miller, 2006: 32). The wide availability of skin color changing technology and the appropriation of elements of various cultures also reveal the Japanese economic prosperity evident in the ability to finance such high- maintenance appearances (Ibid: 34).

In the consumerist industrialized society of Japan today, the effects of capitalism and globalization on the female body cannot be overlooked. Modern expressions of the self are shaped under the influence of the standardizing commodity capitalism (Giddens, 1991 cited in Miller, 2006: 11). Everything (including beauty) has product value and consumption is based on our ability and ambition to provoke desire: the more women resemble the prevailing beauty stereotypes, the higher their “exchange value” becomes (Featherstone, 1991 cited in Miller, 2006: 11). Nurtured bodies indicate self-control and determination, while untamed bodies testify weakness (Miller, 2006: 12).

Cosmetics

The word “*cosmetics*” comes from Greek *kosmetikos* which means adorning or putting in order. The term derives from “*kosmos*” which means the world, universe; worldly affairs; the inhabitants of the world; adornment (Wall, 1946 cited in Turner, 2008: 148). This suggests that we use cosmetics to make ourselves ready and presentable for the social world, for the *gaze* of others.

Conformity to current beauty ideals requires effort and body alterations, as the areas targeted for improvement have expanded dramatically (Miller, 2006: 9) and

everything is under scrutiny. This creates new anxieties among women, expressed in polls but is also compatible with the “long standing Japanese ideas about self-development, discipline” and *gambaru*²⁶ (Ibid: 10). Self-presentation in Japan is linked to consumption, therefore “make up is serious business”: the Japanese cosmetics industry is reported to be the second largest cosmetics market in the world - and not only limited to women (Ibid: 35; McVeigh, 2000: 110-111).

In the past, women prayed for white skin to Konsei (a Shinto god). During the Tokugawa period, parasols or face hoods were used for total sun avoidance, skin was “polished” white with cloth and various natural remedies that were believed to have a bleaching effect on their skin were applied in order to “turn the skin as white as snow” (Wagatsuma, 1967: 411).

American *hydroquinone*²⁷ bleaching products were banned in Japan, so in 1985 Shiseido produced the first *arbutin*²⁸ skin lightening product. Other Japanese and American companies followed with their own versions of *arbutin* products, for sale only in Asia (Miller, 2006: 36). Japanese beauty products and services are considered superior, because of their Japanese status (Ibid), enabling Japanese women to have better skin because of following persistent and “diligent” skin care practices (Ashikari, 2005: 88).

In the 1990s, a whitening cosmetics boom emerged in Japan when 34.3% of Japanese women used whitening cosmetics which all Japanese cosmetics companies produced, while foreign companies introduced whitening products especially made for the Japanese market (Ibid: 86). By using whitening cosmetics, none of the Japanese women that Ashikari (Ibid: 88) interviewed saw it as an attempt to change their skin color nor expected dramatic results. Instead, they regarded it as protecting or recovering “their “innate” white tone (...) which all Japanese imagine they originally have; (...) different from- or superior to- western whiteness” (Ibid: 89).

A variety of methods are used for preventing one’s skin from sun exposure: whitening serums, sunscreen, parasols, hats, sunglasses, walking in the shade, staying at home during strong sunshine, taking vitamins or wearing long sleeved clothes (Ibid: 87; Miller, 2006). Japanese women protect their skin from the harmful sun rays,

²⁶ *Gambaru*: (Verb) to effort one’s best

²⁷ *Hydroquinone*: Chemical that kills the skin’s pigment cells.

²⁸ *Arbutin*: Chemical that restricts the melanin producing enzymes.

which cause wrinkles and ageing (Ashikari, 2005: 86). Women who tan are “unthinking” of their future, while the Japanese women will look pretty if they take care of their skin (Ibid: 86). But the same women who advocate keeping one’s skin white as a protection from the sun’s harm, undergo harsh chemical treatments in order to get whiter skin, while salons offer full body whitening treatments for brides (Miller, 2006: 36- 37).

During my fieldwork in Japan, one of my informants mentioned that placenta injections or cosmetics, which are believed to make a woman look decades younger, are now popular in Japan. I was told that in the past, women used to consume their own placenta, while now the placenta of horses or cows is available in the cosmetics market. My informant Ai said that “*Sometimes they use human placenta. I use horse placenta in my lotion but I’m afraid it’s human (...). Wrinkles disappear; skin color becomes whiter with placenta*”.²⁹ I collected magazines and found out that the availability of treatments such as placenta injections was broad, while the low prices (up to 5000 yen for an injection) demonstrate the ease of access to such beauty treatments. The recent scandals of human placenta pills on the market further demonstrate the popularity of this treatment. In my interviews, half of the women thought that whitening cosmetics are safe, especially if they are Japanese (regarded indeed as of superior quality) while the ones who don’t use them suggested that they are expensive and unhealthy, as “*they try to change the skin cells from inside*” (Yuki).

²⁹ Interview on 27/01/2013

POWER AND GENDER ON THE BODY

Several theories have been examined and explored for potential use in this thesis, as the topic can be approached from different angles. I considered various theories concerned with the body (such as those of Giddens, Bourdieu, Butler) but while conducting the interviews, I decided that Foucault's theory of *biopower* combined with Bartky's gender theory are the most appropriate for analysing my research. The following part provides an overview of these theories and explains why they are suitable to be used as analytical tools and keywords in my analysis.

Power

For Foucault, *power* is the problem, what we need to look into because “on the body as a historical and culturally specific entity”, power relations are demonstrated in their most concrete form as transmitted through discourse (Foucault, 1984e; 85 cited in McNay, 1992: 16, 28).³⁰ Foucault asks: “Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? (...) How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken?” (Foucault, 1988: 103-104). As during the interviews it became clear how the notion of *biopower* is something difficult to escape in the uniformizing Japanese society, Foucault's theory of *biopower* seemed as the most appropriate theoretical tool to use in my analysis.

Power Relationships

Relationships of power do not only refer to the government, nor are exercised from one centre, but operate capillary³¹ (Foucault, 1980: 98). Power is omnipresent, in the family, workplace, personal or love relationships- for example when one wishes to direct the behavior of another (Foucault, 1988: 3, 11). Power relationships are not static; they can be modified and reversed. When these relations become firmly established and solid, we can speak of states of domination, in which all alterations upon the set relations are prevented. In such a state of domination, practice of freedom

³⁰ For Foucault, the word “power” is a shortcut to the expression “the relationships of power” (Foucault, 1988: 11).

³¹ In a net- like organization

cannot exist or is limited (Ibid). In relation to my topic, I investigate whether the Japanese norms have created states of domination that affect the freedom of Japanese women.

Power is not only repressive but also productive, because the *strategies of power* -produced by systems of knowledge- are also those techniques by which a decision is taken (Ibid: 104-118). Since there cannot be a society without relations of power it would be utopian trying to eradicate them. Instead, one should understand how regimes of truth are linked to relationships of power – as for example in the “truth” of psychiatry, where labeling someone “mad” is linked to a set of social and economic processes- and try to live according to ethical practices that allow for a minimum of domination and useless or abusive authority (Ibid: 16-18). To achieve that, Foucault recalls the Socratic imperative of putting yourself in liberty by “knowing yourself” (Ibid: 20).

Biopower

‘*Biopower*’ is the power over life that disciplines subjects, rationally justified as the protection of life and wellbeing (Foucault, 1976: 140). Biopower is based on an ensemble of societal norms, values and routines that become embedded on the individual bodies and lead not to the individualization, but massification of the bodies that are subjected and produced, becoming “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1979: 138). While previously individuals were coerced by monarchs, disciplinary practices today do not dominate by the threat of violence. Instead, *biopower* now creates desires and institutes norms against which behaviors and bodies estimate themselves and connect individuals to specific identities (Foucault, 1976: 140; Sawichi, 1991: 67-18 cited in Grady, 2005: 13). *Biopower* is so accepted, because it does not only forbid, but it also produces -identities, knowledge, discourse, pleasure- making us the “products, rather than the driving force of knowledge” (Foucault, 1980: 119). The body is supervised, affected by “regulatory controls” controlling birth, health and so on, justified by norms believed to secure a good life (Foucault, 1976: 140).

While the notion of *biopower* is used in this study to explain the power relations and dominations that lead to the conformity of the female Japanese bodies, I

will not address the institutional or governmental aspects of *biopower*.³² Instead, I look into the cultural and social dominations of *biopower*, which justified as protection of wellbeing, social order and life lead to the massification of the bodies that are produced by and subjected to the Japanese norms. In the context of my research, *biopower* is not exerted by the government, but by the patriarchal environment, media, cosmetics companies and other actors that have interests in directing the behavior and bodies of Japanese women.

Biopower is crucial to the development of capitalism as its disciplinary techniques set the standards for the norm and became actors of discrimination and hierarchization in a normalizing society (Ibid: 140-144). The regulation of the body becomes a political issue that includes and excludes individuals as *normal* and *abnormal*, disciplined or not yet controlled. For Foucault the body is the ultimate site where dominations are practiced, because on the body the disciplinary powers extend beyond what is normally defined as “political” (Foucault, 1979: 30). Japanese women’s skin color may be thought of as a trivial, superficial and certainly not political matter. But after conducting the fieldwork and as it will be demonstrated in the analysis, I am convinced that the disciplinary powers (*biopower*) that produce the Japanese body and skin color are based on norms that can be very much debated as political. While exposing politically invisible issues is not the aim of my thesis, I keep in mind that subjection to politically invisible dominations is much deeper, which makes the techniques of power more dangerous (Ibid: 30). I agree to the statement that Foucault’s politization of everyday life broadens the spectrum of things which people can inspect, confront or alter so as to change their lives (Fraser, 1989: 26 cited in O’Grady:2005; 25). Indeed, for social change to happen, it’s not enough to change institutions or social practices; for “if the micro-level of life is ignored, a range of unwanted power relations will remain intact” (Foucault, 1979: 27).

Norms

“A good discipline tells you what you must do at every moment”, not allowing things to run their course (Ibid: 45- 46). Disciplinary normalization imposes an

³² Such as schooling and family law in Japan, forms of institutionalized discipline over the body.

optimal model, divides things into suitable and unsuitable and tries to make people and actions to conform to this model so that *normal* is that which could conform and *abnormal* that which was “incapable of conforming” (Ibid: 46, 57). Of foremost concerns is the *norm* itself, because the “identification of the normal and the abnormal” is only possible in relation to the predicated norm.³³ In the case of this research, the *norm* as a theoretical keyword can help us recognize the established ideals, discourses and practices that constitute the Japanese norms. These norms produce the Japanese bodies by deciding what is normal and what is not.

Usually people unconsciously conform to the norm: with the example of music Foucault pointed out the quantitative mechanisms of the culture that we are more frequently exposed to: “a certain rarity could give someone the ability to choose”. But the more frequently something appears, “the more familiarities it creates; the most frequent becomes the most acceptable (...). Whatever is readily offered to us reinforces a certain liking” (Foucault, 2009: 317).

In the era of modern medicine, a specific choice of skin color, weight or appearance can be a choice, an “exhibit of power” over one’s nature, an act of discipline or personal autonomy (Liu, 1979 cited in Turner, 2008: 164). The alterations that we choose to do on our body reveal the norms which influence how we should look like, what a healthy body is and what makes us sexually desirable. The norms, based on scientific ‘truths’— such as that the sun rays are harmful, causing wrinkles- have not always been the same, or are not the same in different parts of the world. ‘Truth’ is relative; different dominations can hold their different truths or “rational possibilities, teaching people what they ignore about their own situation (...) or their exploitation” (Foucault, 1988: 15).

Surveillance

Foucault described the *gaze* of the disciplinary institution that disciplined the individual (Foucault, 1979).³⁴ In modern society, knowing that they could be observed

³³ The norm then, is fundamental because it comes before the normal (which is the result of disciplinary techniques) and for that reason Foucault prefers to use the term *normation* (rather than *normalization*) (Foucault, 2009:57).

³⁴ Disciplinary institution such as the prison, as described in “Discipline and Punish” (Foucault, 1979).

by other people at any time, individuals internalize the *gaze* and become agents of their own subjection by practicing self-surveillance (Foucault, 1980: 151). Self-surveillance disciplines the person, who oversees his conformity to the norms and compares himself against them. A ‘different’ person is usually aware of the disapproving *gaze* they receive from others (O’Grady, 2005: 19). Without the need for violence, the inspecting *gaze* makes each individual his own overseer, supervising over and against himself and self-surveillance becomes a mechanism of social control in modern western societies (Ibid: 18, 24).

Self-policing works for maintaining the imperative towards sameness (the norm) and the pathologizing of difference (*abnormal*), characteristic in societies where human behaviour is categorized into ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ (Foucault, 1979:184). Foucault describes self-surveillance as a soul-destroying practice of power, which places individual conduct into categories such as (below, above) average, normal, deviant, and so on (O’ Grady, 2005: 19). Self-surveillance is effective into creating identities, because when an individual fails to ‘normalize’ or adhere to the accepted ‘norms’, their whole sense of self is regarded as “wrong” or abnormal; “being affirmed culturally is a crucial element of a robust sense of self” (Ibid).

O’ Grady further points out the strict self- polishing, evaluation, criticism, and comparisons that women impose on themselves to extreme levels when they fail to comply to their perceived ‘norms’ (Ibid: 32, 41). These practices result in a strict supervising relationship with the self that ultimately decreases possibilities for the active fashioning of one’s identity, especially if one is unaware of its mechanism (Ibid).

Agency, Resistance and Freedom

Our sense of self is not static. Identity and personal development are constantly reshaped by different conflicting forces that act upon them, while genealogy and past experiences also become imprinted on the body (Foucault, 1984; 87-88). Foucault analyses the techniques of subjectification, through which individuals configure their own identities. Through agency, individuals are not docile bodies anymore, but agents who can resist the homogenizing tendencies of *biopower*

(Foucault, 1978 cited in McNay, 1992:3-4). Foucault suggests that the creation of different identities is possible and desired, so as to enhance human creativity, inclusiveness and diversity, away from the “tyranny of the normal” which leads persons into sameness (Foucault, 1979 cited in O’Grady, 2005:25). The body that exhibits a form of agency can bring a woman closer to her ideal self or it can resist *biopower* by following pleasure (nature) and spontaneity as ‘libidinal body’ (Dews, 1984, cited in Bartky, 1988: 82).

But even when one actively fashions oneself, the result is often not always individually invented, but induced by patterns or discourse: “proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, society and social group” (Foucault, 1988: 11). Like Nietzsche, Foucault suggests that on every person, different systems of domination are constantly in the process of being overthrown as “humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination” (Foucault, 1984; 87-88).

For Foucault freedom has to be practiced as an act, because the liberal processes which might exist are not enough to totally restore freedom or let a person find his nature (Foucault, 1988: 2-3). Freedom to experiment with different identities is an ongoing negotiation of power relations, against habitual practices and constraints and never in a final state (Foucault, cited in Grady, 2005: 14, 23). In order to practice freedom ethically, the person has to “turn its gaze on itself”, “to recognize itself in what it is” and “recall the truths on which it could have reflected” (Alkibiades, cited in Foucault, 1988: 5). Luckily -and including the society that I am researching- there is no complete definition of the ‘truth’ or norms which should be used, to the exclusion of others, so that there is always the possibility to discover something and then change a rule or the *norms* which gives societies room for development.

Gender

Bartky’s theory on socially constructed femininity discusses the ideals and rules that women’s bodies are subjected to and has the notion of discipline and domination over the body in common with Foucault. For this reason I find that it can be helpful in explaining the reasons that Japanese women choose a specific appearance or skin color.

Socially Constructed Femininity

The search for a feminine body can derive from various needs or social constructions: the passage into adulthood, adoption of a certain aesthetic, demonstration of one's economic and social level, triumph over other women, over men, or just narcissism (Bartky, 1982 cited in Bartky, 1998:75). For most women and not only in Japan, facial expressions and the wrinkles that they cause are to be erased while the female silhouette should resemble rather the body of a teenager than that of a female woman, resulting in the need to diet (Bartky, 1998: 64-66). Women in general are far more restricted in their body movements than men, as they should not look "loose" nor expand into available space, looking too relaxed when seated- for example not sitting with legs wide apart as men do, revealing their crotch (Ibid: 67). Graciousness and smiling are expected, body hair should be taken away, and a wide range of cosmetics have to be used in order to fight skin weaknesses such as spots, blemishes, wrinkles or sagging (Ibid: 67, 70). These disciplinary practices, more or less in every society construct the ideal feminine 'gendered' bodies that are "practiced and subjected" (Ibid: 71).

A body constructed through the appropriate beautifying practices is usually crucial to a woman's sense of self as a female, sexually desirable and desiring (Ibid: 78). Any deviancy against creating this socially established femininity de-sexualizes or annihilates the female body so that even hard beauty regimes can be endured if perceived as necessary (Ibid: 78, 82). A woman who refuses to submit herself to such beauty disciplines will face an important sanction in a man- dominated world: the refusal of male patronage, intimacy, personal life and so on (Ibid: 76). But even though women have to follow certain beauty disciplines so as to avoid being less attractive, at the same time they are characterized frivolous for paying attention to such "trivial" things (Ibid: 73).

The absence of formal disciplinarians and invisible social sanctions – such as refusal of intimacy and male patronage- to a woman's lack of proper femininity, make it is very difficult to reveal and measure the full degree of the domination that women are subjected to (Ibid: 76). In modernity the disciplinary power is "everywhere and nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (Ibid: 74, 80).

Make-up and new Forms of Domination over the Female Body

“Beauty efforts benefit the status quo because they forestall other forms of agency, including social protest over class and gender inequality” (Miller, 2000:8).

Make-up can be self-expression and self PR -as a tactic to express individuality and sexuality- or oppression -if it's influenced by patriarchal power structures- (Mc Veigh, 2000: 110). Even though today older forms of patriarchal or religious domination on female bodies are fading, new forms of domination have arisen, linked to the fact that normative femininity is now increasingly linked to the appearance of the female body (and not to its function as mother) (Bartky, 1998: 81). Fashion is a new disciplinary power fully appropriate to maintain the constant consumption required by the capitalist system (Ibid: 81). Bartky suggests that the new disciplinary practices can be understood under the pattern of modernization of *patriarchy*³⁵ as described by Foucault (Ibid: 64). A woman who often checks her make-up or cares if the rain will destroy her hairstyle demonstrates another form of obedience to patriarchy (Ibid). She is a visible body, made to please, self-committed to continuous self-surveillance and this constant visibility makes her subject to functions of power (Foucault, 1980 cited in Bartky, 1998: 81).

In the media, women's make-up is depicted as an activity that expresses a woman's individuality. But in reality, there is little freedom on what kind of make-up a woman can have; it's not like painting, where there is artistic freedom. There are certain aesthetic criteria that have to be followed on this “painting” and a woman who does not follow them is not considered an artist but an eccentric (Bartky, 1998: 70-71). De Beauvoir noted how the female body is not perceived after the image of the subjective personality, but as a body made for the sake of men (1972, cited in McNay, 1992: 17). Make-up is the “art of disguise” presupposing that an unpainted female face is “defective” (Bartky, 1998: 71). Women are constantly under an (often imagined) gaze and live their bodies as seen by others -even by other women (Ibid: 72). As the interviews revealed, these ideas also apply in the Japanese context and can be effective in explaining the mechanisms that Japanese beauty norms install themselves on the female body.

³⁵ Society where men maintain power within the institutions (Jeleniewsky, 2010: 53).

THE MEANING OF SKIN COLOR IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

The following chapter explores the way that the various norms produce the Japanese female appearance and skin color in particular, by using the notion of *biopower* in the analysis of the interviews and observation findings. It is divided into three sections, each one corresponding to the three operational research subquestions.

First, I shortly introduce my informants. Although they have different personalities, they are all young, cosmopolitan, educated, socially active Japanese women and live in the greater Tokyo area in 2013. All of my interviewees have travel, study or living experience abroad. It is in fact hard to find Japanese young women who do not have any ‘international’ experience, as their cosmopolitanism and willingness to know other cultures is noted in the literature (Kelsky, 2001).

The eleven women I interviewed are aged 25 to 45. Most of them have university education (from Bachelor to PhD) and come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. A short description follows:

Chisa is 35, living with her boyfriend, has a degree in English literature and works in a private company. Chisa was interviewed on 19/1/2013.

Aki is 33, has a BSc. She left her office job in Tokyo to pursue a life of surfing and farming. Aki was interviewed on 1/2/2013.

Masako is 34, doing her PhD and working as a teacher. Masako was interviewed on 9/2/2013.

Mie is 34, married, has a Bachelor in Education and works in education. Mie was interviewed on 31/1/2013.

Takako is 25, majored in International Economics and works in education. Takako was interviewed on 31/1/2013.

Yuki is 44, surfs, has a Bachelor in Sociology and works in an international organization. Yuki was interviewed on 7/2/2013.

Ai is around 40, divorced and a graphic designer. Ai was interviewed on 27/1/2013.

Professor Tomoko is over 45, married and a university professor. Professor Tomoko was interviewed on 29/1/2013.

Kanae and Yuka are over 30 and work for a foreign company. They were interviewed on 28/1/2013.

Kanako is 33 and runs her own company. Kanako was interviewed on 6/2/2013.

Norms

The various ‘norms’ that influence Japanese women’s appearance and skin color in particular are discussed in this section.

Ideal Femininity

In 2013, many of the “feminine” gendered body disciplines that were reported by my informants are almost identical to what Bartky described in the 80s: Women should look pulled together, controlling their weight, skin color, movements, speech and effects of time on their body. Japanese magazines are abundant of the teenage body ideal and body controls suggested by Bartky. The effective discipline that doesn’t allow anything to run its natural course, as described by Foucault (1979: 46) is internalized by the women who know exactly what they shall do and look like. When asked about how they want to look/present themselves as women, all of them (except Yuki) mentioned similar attributes that have to do with the overall control of their body: *“looking neat, clean, proper, thin, tidy, in control of themselves and not sitting in a loose or relaxed way”* (Chisa).³⁶

“Women should care about such things [covering their ‘bad’ skin]. Guys don’t like it. It’s important in Japan for women to be presentable (...). With my boyfriend, I make up lighter. They don’t like strong make up (...). Because it looks ‘showy’ and it’s not elegant” (Chisa).³⁷

Exactly like Bartky (1988: 64) suggested, women in Japan now can use make up to either influence how they want to be looked at - as a move towards agency and their real self- or because they maintain the patriarchal norms of society- when they adjust to the liking of their boyfriend or society, as described above.

“It’s worth trying some different make-ups, work out how you would like to be looked or what kind of person you want to be. You don’t have to pretend to be another person but you can try to be looked closer to your image” (Chisa).³⁸

³⁶ Interview on 19/1/2013

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

“I bought my eye make-up in Greece and I like to keep this Greek style.³⁹ I don’t want to throw away my experience in Greece. I want to keep the things that I learnt there” (Masako).⁴⁰

As explained in the preceding contextual setting section, nonthreatening cuteness and childlike appearance are much appreciated female gendered traits in Japan. During the interviews and fieldwork observation this was affirmed to be true, being the ‘norm’ for attractive female behaviour. From my interviews, the typical Japanese women were indeed described as cute, small in size, quiet, looking younger than they are, sometimes childlike, polite, and wearing similar clothes. My informants noted that being gorgeous in the western sense (looking impressive, strong and sexy) is not included in the beauty ‘norm’ because men prefer the nonthreatening cute style while childlike behaviour can also be used as a strategy: *“I think they [women] want to get help from others, especially men, so they don’t try to mature” (Mie).⁴¹*

“Most important thing is to be cutie, try to be nice, not gorgeous. Mainly concerned about how not to stand out but be moderate cutie style (---). Cultural background, especially for women is to (...) try to be behind the scene, polite, that is the virtue in our culture. So standing out is kind of bothering to people” (Yuki).⁴²

In my observations, women who behave cutely, were also whiter, while the tanner girls usually ignored this ‘cuteness’ norm. According to the Japanese gender norms, tanned skin has negative connotations because it makes women look strong, sexy or aggressive (which is not expected of women), thus excludes the possibility of looking feminine. All of my informants noted that skin color is very important in Japan, especially for women: *“For women [whiteness] is very important but not for men” (Masako).⁴³* This was affirmed by Aki: *“White skin mean girly, fancy (...) cute. Tanned skin makes you look stronger [not girly]”⁴⁴* and Takako: *“My mom and*

³⁹ Masako previously characterised the Greek eye make-up as ‘stronger’ and ‘louder’ than the Japanese.

⁴⁰ Interview on 9/2/2013

⁴¹ Interview on 31/1/2013

⁴² Interview on 7/2/2013

⁴³ Interview on 9/2/2013

⁴⁴ Interview on 1/2/2013

*grandma always told me not to tan, not to get dark spots, not like manly or boy. Told me to be feminine”.*⁴⁵

Subservience to Men

Another gender norm in Japan according to my interviewees, appears to be the women’s subservience to men. The established gender norm that men are more important and respected, even though not explicitly brought up as an issue by all women, was nevertheless suggested from their opinions and participant observation. Yuki suggested that *‘Asian and Japanese girls don’t argue with the male authority, but accept men as they are, because they don’t have the courage to argue’*.⁴⁶

*“As a woman I faced discrimination. People who decide to promote are men, and they promote other men because they are uncomfortable being ruled by women (---). I’m embarrassed to say but if I was reborn I’d like to be a European guy, tall, smart handsome. Many important positions are filled only with men; it’s difficult for women” (Ai).*⁴⁷

My observations identify similarities with Bartky’s (1988: 67) descriptions of the socially constructed femininity and disciplines: women in public spaces occupied less space, legs kept together, arms close to torso, looking downwards and avoiding direct eye contact with men. Men, on the other hand, sat with legs apart and some of them even looked me in the eye. When talking to men, I noticed that some women used some kind of artificial voice or way of speaking, slow, kind of childish or flirtatious. While when I noticed female friends drinking, shopping or talking in the metro, their speech was fast, often ironic, sharp and demonstrated somewhat more strength.

In a very safe society like Japan’s, the traditional image of the wife walking behind her husband, even though not usually seen now, still exists in the minds and movements of some Japanese women. While asking for apologies every time you walk past someone is considered good manners in Japan, during my observations

⁴⁵ Interview on 31/1/2013

⁴⁶ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁴⁷ Interview on 27/1/2013

women were particularly polite towards men. For example, when a woman wanted to sit next to a man in the metro, she extensively bowed and said “sorry”.

Another example where this is demonstrated is in Japanese speech. The Japanese language uses different verbs or words for men and women, making speech highly gendered. As a rule, the women have to use more honorific, polite or humble speech such as verbs, pronouns and prefixes. For example, men can say *meshi o kuu* (which is not a polite way to say “eat”) while women should say *gohan o taberu* - which has exactly the same meaning but is polite and honorific. Women who use men’s ‘impolite’ language (like the *gyaru* did) are usually looked down on, considered low class and unpleasant.

This is affirmed by Chisa, who said that it is in traditional Japanese manner to “*make men feel important, elevate them, treating them like kings, like the most important thing*” something that she learnt from her mother and her behaviour towards her father.⁴⁸

White Beauty

All women expressed the opinion that in Japanese society, a whiter complexion with dark hair is the norm: “*Now whiteness is in fashion*” (Aki),⁴⁹ “*Whiteness is beauty, everyone wants to be white*” (Ai).⁵⁰

“*Now they say that the skin should be genuinely white, not looking white by make-up but really white in its natural [make-up free] state. They say it should be white from inside, by the use of cosmetics, to change and whiten it. These cosmetics are adored by Koreans and Chinese, even Greeks I have heard of. They prefer to use Shiseido, Kanebo.*⁵¹” (Professor Tomoko).⁵²

The proverb “*White skin covers 7 negative aspects of your face*” was mentioned several times. When asked about the meaning, it was explained that less attractive attributes such as wrinkles, spots, uneven skin are less visible when the skin is white, while they are accentuated with darker skin: “*It means that white skinned*

⁴⁸ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁴⁹ Interview on 1/2/2013

⁵⁰ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁵¹ Japanese brands

⁵² Interview on 29/1/2013

women are more beautiful than darker skinned women (...). We, Japanese have those images from long time ago” (Chisa).⁵³ It is worth noting that this expression also exists in Chinese, as “White skin covers 1000 weaknesses”.⁵⁴

The norm that whiter women are considered more beautiful can also be seen in the expression *Akita Beauty*⁵⁵. Being from Akita is always taken as a compliment, because women from Akita (or Hakata and Kyo) are exposed to shorter daylight hours, which leaves them whiter than usual. The next quote is characteristic to the Japanese reaction to women from Akita:

“I have whiter skin (...) means that I am supposed to be more beautiful than others, because my 7 negative points are invisible. And when I introduce myself that I’m from Akita prefecture nearly 100% Japanese people - and even some foreigners- have exactly same reaction like “Oh you are Akita Beauty”(…) People from Akita are beautiful, because Akita has shorter daylight hours and they have whiter skin which covers their 7 negative images (...) Nobody gets angry when they are called beautiful. If foreigners know about Japan, I tell them I’m from Akita too and so they tell I’m Akita beauty so I’m proud. It’s important that I’m from Akita” (Chisa).⁵⁶

Celebration of Youth

Youth is another norm closely connected to beauty in Japan. One of the reasons for applying make-up is to look younger. This is also evident on make-up products: words such as “baby skin” and “baby soft” appear together with images of babies on the packaging of make-up for adult women. Ai agrees that “*It’s important to have baby skin*”.⁵⁷ The “baby” appearance is also consistent with the childlike behaviour that was mentioned in the previous section.

“*Christmas cake*” is a Japanese expression, referring to women over 25, who have ‘expired’ together with the Christmas cakes that were to be consumed before the 25th of December. Women over 25 should be married, as they now get older and their

⁵³ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁵⁴ Personal conversation with a young Chinese woman in October 2012.

⁵⁵ *Akita Beauty: Akita bijin*

⁵⁶ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁵⁷ Interview on 27/1/2013

beauty fades away, like the cake's freshness. While this expression is not openly used as it is impolite, the fact that it exists in the language, reveals another limitation that Japanese women are subjected to. As my informant noted, looking young is one of the pressures Japanese women face:

"It's really pressuring [to look young] (---). I find it very difficult to keep up to the ideal (...). I'm tired of it, I want to give up. It's spending tons of money, it's stupid but I can't stop it. If I stop it, maybe after one day I will look old, like a grandma. You can't get back if you stop, you can never get back" (Ai).⁵⁸

While aging is clearly not considered that important for the appearance of men, women should always take care of hiding their wrinkles. The Japanese culture of not making everything visible also justifies covering wrinkles, not for the women themselves or for vanity reasons, but because they are perceived as 'ugly' wrinkles create a bad feeling of inconvenience to other people, even when seen on much older people. So, women should be polite enough to conceal their wrinkles with make up because as Bartky (1998:71) suggested, it is presupposed that an unpainted female face is defective.

"It's impolite to show your bad skin to other people, so women wear make-up. People don't want to look, so you have to hide. If you are ashamed about it, you have to hide it. In Japan you don't show everything, it's very Japanese culture to hide some things. Women should care about some things. Guys don't like it. It's important in Japan for women to be presentable" (Chisa).⁵⁹

It was generally suggested by my informants that the older one becomes, the more one has to spend on cosmetics and skin care but most of my interviewees noted that they do not spend so much, or as much as it would have been expected of them.

The case of *AKB48* (a currently very popular Japanese girl band, with members being 12- 20 years old) was mentioned in almost every interview. The members of this band have 'white' skin and openly accepted to having had cosmetic plastic surgery.⁶⁰ Plastic surgery at such a young age creates surreal beauty expectations, but men love this band because they like the girls' appearance and

⁵⁸ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁵⁹ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁶⁰ Which is also the case for many K-Pop (Korean pop) singers. From the interviews I was told that in Korea male cosmetic surgery before the age of 18 is also very popular.

women try to look like them: “AKB48 music group, or advertising uses young girls, feels like we have to be young and pretty (---). Most Japanese women want to look young and Japanese men force them to be young” (Ai).⁶¹ Kanako added that “idols AKB48 are all white so women follow them” (Kanako).⁶²

It was suggested that youth is particularly important in Asia, compared to Europe. Ai and Yuki partly justified the youth norm in Japan by the religious roots of Japanese culture, in contrast to Christianity in Europe:

*“Being young is very important in Asian culture, not only in Japan. In Europe, being mature is a very good thing. Like Sofia Loren, Katherine Deneuve, but there is no model in Asia that getting older is good. Always young is the best (...). Because Europe has a history that getting mature is better. In Asia it’s not a good thing (---). Christianity keeps the churches old, that’s why in Europe being mature is ok. But in Shinto every twenty years buildings are torn down and rebuilt, because everything has to be renewed. I think that’s part of why youth is important in Japan” (Yuki).*⁶³

Natural Beauty

It was widely understood from the interviews and observations that beauty in Japan should be natural: “Maybe men don’t like women who care so much [about their appearance]; they want natural beauty but it’s impossible” (Ai).⁶⁴ Like Bartky suggested, women should look a certain way, but they are not supposed to discuss or visibly make efforts on it. The Japanese women are expected to invisibly conform to or naturally match the beauty ideals. It is characteristic that women are expected to have applied make-up before going out in public and work (because the natural female face is considered to be defective or impolite) but public application of make-up is discouraged. There are posters in the Tokyo Metro which suggest “Let’s do it at home” and depict a woman applying her make up in the train. On the contrary, there is no poster suggesting that men should not read magazines depicting naked women in the metro, something that I often observed in Tokyo.

⁶¹ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁶² Interview on 1/2/2013

⁶³ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁶⁴ Interview on 27/1/2013

Almost all of my interviewees suggested that their skin color is natural, except from two women that mentioned they are using whitening treatments. By natural they mean that they do not go into extra effort so as to change the skin color that they already have by their everyday activities.

Uniformity -The Typical Japanese Person

In the interviews, the typical ‘normal’ Japanese person is indeed described as hard- working, considerate of others, vague- “*Here it’s important not to have an opinion*” (Yuki)⁶⁵- avoiding conflict, following fashion, polite, reserved and group oriented: “*That’s Japanese’s favourite thing, following somebody*” (Aki).⁶⁶ During an online discussion among Japanese academics, it was suggested that in Japan “*there is voluntary suppression or mutual social coercion on certain attributes*” but not divided by gender -because men are also subject to *biopower*- and “*voluntary ‘tuning’ in to certain attributes*” (Discussion on Mixi).⁶⁷ Most of my interviewees suggested that it is a Japanese value to follow the rules and avoid conflict: “*Keeping things grey, not mentioning yes/no, try not to hurt other people (...). Many Japanese try to accept each other’s’ opinion even they are not really happy about that*” (Chisa).⁶⁸ These traits are important so as to as to coexist peacefully in society, and they involve having the right appearance that does not make people feel uncomfortable around you: “*I don’t want to look like an uncomfortable person; I don’t care if I look pretty or not, that’s people’s taste. But I don’t want to be rude*” (Chisa).⁶⁹

Skin color shows what kind of person one is: “*Skin color tells people what you do or what you are interested in*” (Aki).⁷⁰ The proper “whiteness” suggests that a woman is serious and has the hard working Japanese mentality, while being tanned has the ‘negative’ meaning that one is not work- oriented. Students, youth, people outside society or unemployed might be tanner, but once they want to enter society, they should adhere to the ‘white’ norm. Chisa noted that once they “*graduate*

⁶⁵ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁶⁶ Interview on 1/2/2013

⁶⁷ Discussion on Mixi (Japanese social network) on 7/3/2013

⁶⁸ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁶⁹ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁷⁰ Interview on 1/2/2013

university; get a job, so they can't be so dark; they want to get whiter. Whiter is normal".⁷¹

"Whiteness is very moderate [i.e. average], which means good, in public space (...). If you are tanned (...) it's implying that you're playing around, not having a serious lifestyle. If you're concerned with your job, you don't (...) go to the beach and you're suitable for business look (---). Being tanned (...) shows that you are playing around"⁷². In our culture it's not a good sign to have fun. You have to be very serious, belong to your company. Working hard is virtue, being serious. Being tanned [as a result of having free time] is kind of opposite of that" (Yuki).⁷³

The tendency to uniformity or lack of diversity among the society is justified as an avoidance of conflict: *"If you like diversity, automatically conflict comes out, because diversity has conflict. I think Japanese culture doesn't like diversity because they don't want conflict" (Yuki).⁷⁴*

"I don't have anybody I can be rude or fight with Japanese friends, but I can fight with [name of non-Japanese friend]. Sometimes she tells me very directly what I did wrong (...). [Fighting] is hard for me, difficult but makes me feel like an international person" (Ai).⁷⁵

The above demonstrate how politeness, group and work mentality, avoidance of conflict and uniformity are seen by all of my informants as important Japanese characteristics or norms, while diversity and assertiveness to disagree are often seen as "western" traits.

Uniqueness of Japanese skin

Different scientific truths regarding racial theories are accepted in different places of the world and these theories change a lot with the advance of science;

⁷¹ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁷² The verb 'play' is used in Japanese when one hangs out, having fun or doing something in their free time, so many of the women transliterate it into English with this verb, while it is actually better translated as 'having fun, going out'.

⁷³ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Interview on 27/1/2013

similar to what Foucault described with the case of madness.⁷⁶ The origins and interconnectedness of the various ethnicities/races is not the subject of this research to be debated here. However, the norm of the ‘different Japanese skin’ due to genes/race theory is used by cosmetics companies as scientific rationalization in order to promote their whitening products.⁷⁷ When asked for the reason behind different skin needs, my informants mentioned genes, evolution and races with different skin types.

Almost all of my informants suggested that all Japanese have similar face characteristics and one skin color, which can be darker or lighter, but one shade nonetheless. It was interesting how the difference to Europe or the US -where it was suggested that there are racial discriminations or issues of skin color- was noted. It is believed that Japan is homogenous and all people look more or less the same: “*We are yellow (...) whiter yellow or darker yellow (...). Yellow people didn’t really suffer from the difference of skin color I believe. Everyone knows that black/white - especially black- had a hard time dealing with history*” (Chisa).⁷⁸ The above demonstrate another clearly identified norm, that “*all Japanese have same skin color. NY has different races but Japan not*” (Yuki).⁷⁹

While increased and unprotected sun exposure is proved to be dangerous for all skin types because of the probability of skin cancer, it was suggested in my interviews that it is particularly damaging to the Japanese skin. It is generally accepted in Japan and by most of my informants that the Japanese skin is unique, different to other Asians’ or Europeans’ skin, with higher melanin pigmentation (easier to tan and spot) and more sensitive.⁸⁰ It was quoted by almost all women interviewed that the sun is dangerous for their Japanese skin, as it creates wrinkles and dark spots. The reason for being white is not only charm or beauty anymore, as it was the case in the past. The most important reason for being white is the prevention of ‘bad’, aging skin that is the worst thing for a woman’s beauty: “*Whitening skin*

⁷⁶ In History of Sexuality (Foucault, 1976), see theory chapter above.

⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that the European belief on the topic argues that using whitening makes skin prone to spots and uneven tan (because whitening products take out protective layers of our skin, making it more sensitive), which clearly explains how skin develops sun intolerance, if one uses whitening all year long. Western whitening products come with precautions that forbid to use whitening/ brightening/ acne treatment and then expose skin to the sun, as it believed to cause hyper pigmentation and spots.

⁷⁸ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁷⁹ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁸⁰ As can be seen on product advertisements that address the “Japanese skin”

care is not for “whitening”, but for dark spots” (Ai).⁸¹ Skin cancer was suggested only by one informant (Masako) as the most important reason to protect from the sun; wrinkles and dark spots (aesthetic effects) are believed by almost all of them to be the worst result of sun exposure.

“The most important thing for Japanese is that because they have a lot of melanin, they don’t want to have dark spots (...). We’re afraid of dark spots and we protect ourselves for the sake of beauty (...). Our skin is weak; we burn and become red (...). White is better, for the skin (...)” (Kanae).⁸²

Moreover, it is understood that if one stops caring about their skin, its condition will worsen in terms of aging and then the damage will be too serious to fix: *“If I stop, maybe after one day I will look old, like a grandma. You can’t get back if you stop, you can never get back” (Ai).⁸³ Kanako agreed that “if I get a lot of suntan, I’ll get older and look worse, sagging skin”.*⁸⁴

Finally, two women suggested that the ‘whiteness’ norm is additionally promoted by cosmetics companies, that sell more products by creating trends and making women believe that whiteness is beautiful: *“The cosmetics companies always promote ‘whiteness’ with a lot of effort so when I see cosmetics I think always ‘Ah, I must not tan my skin’” (Kanae).⁸⁵*

Mechanisms of biopower

The interview findings suggest that the various norms essentially control Japanese women’s lives by inducing fear or desire/hope, exactly like Foucault had proposed. As these norms rather discipline Japanese women and exercise power over life justified as the protection of life and wellbeing (Foucault, 1976:140), we can recognize them as exerting *biopower*, which as Foucault suggested appears to be so permeating because of its effective *forbidding* and *producing* mechanisms (Foucault, 1980: 119).

⁸¹ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁸² Interview on 28/1/2013

⁸³ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁸⁴ Interview on 1/2/2013

⁸⁵ Interview on 28/1/2013

It is suggested that the realization of hopes and the avoidance of fears produced by the norms that *biopower* entails are secured by surveillance. In the case of Japanese women, norms and their surveillance mechanism work simultaneously in two ways: first, as punishing forces, that threaten with the fear of social sanctions the women who do not follow the norm and second, as rewarding forces, inducing desires that women believe will link them to a better identity, better self or future. Miller (2006: 16) agrees that the Japanese are rewarded when they conform to beauty ideals and penalized when they ignore them.

The following part suggests that (self) surveillance has indeed become an effective mechanism of social control in the Japanese society.

Surveillance and Biopower as Forbidding Force

In the interviews, I found out that especially for women, the whole of society, family, men and institutions⁸⁶ tend to teach and expect them to look a certain way, to be ‘docile bodies’, adhering to the Japanese norms. In the case of going against the Japanese norms, the disapproving *gaze* of society can bring about consequences such as social exclusion, invisibility and rejection: “*If you don’t adjust to the rules, nobody will hear you here*” (Yuki).⁸⁷ Being outside the scope of ‘normal’ decreases one’s popularity or social charm: “*I want people to feel comfortable with me, to want to see me more (...). If you are different, maybe people talk about you, in a good or bad way (...). People talk*” (Chisa).⁸⁸

Even though the opinion and gaze of others is important, people don’t always consciously consider them when preparing for society, because the knowledge of the norm is deeply internalized. Women know how others feel if they do not conform to the norm: “*It’s still important to be beautiful when older because you’re not living alone, you are in a society and of course it’s natural [to age] but without make up you really look old and other people don’t want to see that*” (Chisa).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Institutions such as schools

⁸⁷ Interview on 7/2/2013

⁸⁸ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁸⁹ As these are similar norms for Japanese men, it is usual in Japan for a man to dye his hair black when it greys

The conflict- avoiding, uniformity norm supports the surveillance mechanism that keeps people from standing out: *“They all tend to look the same”* (Takako).⁹⁰ It was suggested that when one stands out as more individual, the continuity of the norm is disturbed, order is upset and for that reason ‘abnormal’ people are socially excluded: *“There is no individuality; everybody tends to look the same. They don’t want to be looked as weird or strange or excluded”* (Chisa).⁹¹

This seems to happen not only because the Japanese society demonstrates a tendency to avoid the ‘abnormal’ (surveillance by others) but because it is believed that not being ‘normal’ causes anxiety and unease to other people (which results in self-surveillance). On the one hand, surveillance threatens with social exclusion and on the other hand, self-surveillance ensures that one is polite and considerate of others. As Bartky suggested, Japanese women constantly live their body as seen by others: *“If people say to my boyfriend that I look older, it’s hard for him, so I try to be beautiful so that he’s happy to hear good things about me”* (Chisa).⁹²

The fear of social exclusion appears to be a strong disciplinary mechanism that keeps most people onto conforming to society’s norms and rules. If one exceeds the predetermined limits, there is a social price to pay for such a freedom: loneliness, loss of social networks and so on.

“Sometimes I think that freedom and loneliness are exactly the same thing. If you’re free, you’re lonely. If you are lonely, you are free” (Ai).⁹³

“You can change everything if you are strong and don’t mind losing everything, but if you’re not ready, then there’s a limit (...). If you change a lot, you might have success or maybe lose everything” (Chisa).⁹⁴

The gaze and opinion of men is also a mechanism that maintains the norms: *“Men like cute so for marriage, we must be cute. It’s difficult in Japan”* (Masako)⁹⁵ while Ai suggests that *“men pressure women most [on their appearance]”*.⁹⁶ As gendered bodies, women who deviate from the socially constructed femininity, indeed

⁹⁰ Interview on 31/1/2013

⁹¹ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Interview on 27/1/2013

⁹⁴ Interview on 19/1/2013

⁹⁵ Interview on 9/2/2013

⁹⁶ Interview on 27/1/2013

face the sanctions that Foucault and Bartky proposed in 1988: refusal of personal life, desexualisation of their body, loneliness, lack of intimacy, affection and other needs.

The majority of my informants agreed to the fact that they have changed or would change something on their appearance if their boyfriend didn't like it, although some claim to grow more confident with age: *"I care about men's opinion. As a university student, I would wear and make up as my boyfriend wanted but now I don't care so much. Even though I skip some things if my boyfriend doesn't like it"* (Chisa).⁹⁷ Men's opinion works as a disciplinary mechanism that divides women into desirable (normal, controlled) and undesired (uncontrolled, different, abnormal). However, Mie suggested that it's also the gaze of other women that supervises one's femininity: *"We care about other's thinking. Other women's opinion is more important than men's. I think our same sex has sharp point of view"* (Mie).⁹⁸

Finally, fears of ageing, future sickness and economic uncertainty can keep women disciplined to their health and beauty regimes by self-surveillance. All women acknowledged these fears and suggested that if they take care of themselves now, they will be rewarded by having fewer troubles in the future.

When the women I interviewed attested by self-surveillance that they failed to conform to beauty norms, their sense of self was 'wrong' and they felt that they need to correct themselves. In that way, the Japanese women in my sample were subjected to *biopower* and produced by the decisions which they have been brought up to believe that will eliminate the chances of their fears (of abnormality) becoming true.

Surveillance and Biopower as Producing Force

It was asserted in the interviews that people judge a lot from appearances and first impressions matter. It was mentioned that having an "appropriate" appearance will *open doors*, while being 'abnormal' will close them and this is because appearance is regarded as representative of "who we really are". Most interviewees noted that the appearance of our body is believed to be constitutive of our personal identity and it is in the interest of people to have the best possible appearance, as this

⁹⁷ Interview on 19/1/2013
⁹⁸ Interview on 31/1/2013

will make their life easier, giving them more chances and linking them to socially successful identities.

“People judge from appearance, which is good, bad or sad. Especially for women, people judge a lot. Even if two people have same character, the man will want to meet the cute one, not the ugly one. So it’s very important to represent that you are good. Our appearance represents who we are, or our character” (Chisa).⁹⁹

It was noted that this is especially valid for women, because it is understood that a pretty woman will have a social advantage over a not-so-pretty one: *“It’s sad but true, pretty people get attention. Even if someone is a bitch, she has a chance to get to be known because she is cute. A good girl, if she is not so cute, she doesn’t have a chance which is sad” (Chisa).¹⁰⁰*

Regarding the group culture in Japan, most of my interviewees suggested that they happily want to be part of a group of similar people. Since ‘whiteness’ was explicitly suggested as the norm for Japanese women, once they enter society (especially workforce) they usually abandon their tans and become whiter. The various social interactions keep women ‘disciplined’. ‘White’ receives an approving gaze and compliments as it affirms that one is ‘normal’ and suitable for the occasion: *“Whiter gets compliments, as adults like it” (Chisa).¹⁰¹* As Foucault (2009: 317) suggested, we develop a taste for things that we are frequently exposed to. In that way, *biopower* as a producing power produces tastes and desires that are multiplied the more we are exposed to them, not unlike the mechanism that spreads a certain movement.

Finally, my sample suggested that the media in Japan support *biopower* by promoting ‘normal’ lifestyles and products that appear to be the answers to our fears and hopes. Yuki noted how Japanese magazines have attention catching headlines such as “I want to be happy”, but at the same time they talk about the same norms that are already established (that she thinks don’t make the women happy): *“that’s why we*

⁹⁹ Interview on 19/1/2013

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

have so many magazines and fashion and everyone copies them. Everybody looks the same, everybody wants to look the same” (Yuki).¹⁰²

The above demonstrated how among my interviewees *biopower* can become permeating and effective into ‘normalizing’ Japanese women, as its mechanisms are not only forbidding or punishing, but also producing; desires, lifestyles and identities.

Resistance

Attitudes regarding resistance and conformity to the norms

Because my sample is limited, I cannot claim it representative of the total of Japanese women. Yet the difficulty to find tanned women to interview reveals the scarcity of women who resist *biopower* in relation to the white beauty norm. Since most of my informants are already fairly white and all look ‘appropriate’, they do not feel that they need to ‘correct’ or change something.¹⁰³ All women -even the one who had an extreme appearance in the past and is more resistant towards disciplinary powers on her body- use skin care and sunscreen. They all admitted making themselves presentable according to different occasions, demonstrating awareness of the ‘rules’ and dress codes (including make-up) of Japanese society. The expression “TPO” (time place occasion) was often mentioned as a rule that they take into account when preparing for different occasions. Most of my interviewees recognize and embody the norms of Japanese society as natural, sensible regimes. Most do not think of the norms as requiring much effort, money, being strict or freedom limiting and their overall attitude did not demonstrate any resistance against the norms.

While most of my interviewees feel fine as they are, some expressed the wish to change, care less for the norms and be happier as a life goal. While change is unwelcome when it is forced, most women were open to the possibility of changing themselves in the future, if this change was natural and not coerced. They also noted that they have changed over the years, whether as a result of wanting to adapt to norms and relationships or as their life situations (such as aging) changed.

¹⁰² Interview on 7/2/2013

¹⁰³ Nine out of eleven women

“Everybody should be themselves. I’m tired of trying to conform and caring about other’s opinion (...). I want to be just different, because now, I’m not happy with what I am” (Ai).¹⁰⁴

“I like to be flexible and I like diversity and being free is important to communicate with people (...). If you have strict criteria you can’t observe things in people. If you are free from anything, you have the rule to have a good time. Without bias” (Yuki).¹⁰⁵

Even though it was not always directly suggested, my interviews and observations revealed that more than half of the women are willing to but do not feel strong enough to break free from all the Japanese norms because they recognize the social price of their ‘practice of freedom’ and prefer to conform to the rules.

“My casual is too much casual for other people (...). At the same time I don’t want to be ugly, so still seeking out the golden line (---). Women, try to look like they’re free from everything and active. But I can feel they have very overwhelming peer pressure and being white is one of them (---).After staying in NY and then back to Japan, I think maybe I gave up something. Because Japanese culture is like that, no more fighting with that. I want to be who I am but the Japanese culture invades the state of my mind so sometimes I’m fighting it, but except that, I let it go (...). This is kind of frustrating to me” (Yuki).¹⁰⁶

“Women always want to look beautiful, but I don’t try too much; only as long as I’m not impolite to others (...)” (Chisa).¹⁰⁷

“I’m tired of it, I want to give up. I’m spending tons on money [on beauty], it’s stupid I think but I can’t stop it (...). I don’t think about using them [expensive whitening cosmetics]; I just do it like paralyzed” (Ai).¹⁰⁸

Half of the women expressed sympathy towards the *gyaru*, for being strong enough to be different, while the other half regarded them as silly, ‘old fashion’ and fashion victims. Regarding attitudes towards different or abnormal people, all of the

¹⁰⁴ Interview on 27/1/2013

¹⁰⁵ Interview on 7/2/2013

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Interview on 19/1/2013

¹⁰⁸ Interview on 27/1/2013

women positively suggested that they would not mind meeting ‘different’ people, even though they might feel uncomfortable at first:

“If I like their kind of strange, I might feel comfortable or not. Maybe I can be strange with them” (Chisa).¹⁰⁹

“I love talking to everyone, even if they look funny or strange” (Kanako).¹¹⁰

“Maybe at first I feel horrible (...). Maybe she’s very strange but if she’s kind, it’s nice and funny. I can be friends with them” (Masako).¹¹¹

“[Non- Japanese friend] she’s not wrong, just different. I respect her; she’s so strong (...). I would also like to be stronger” (Ai).¹¹²

It was suggested that while younger women might be more natural and individualistic, by growing up in Japanese society *biopower* makes their bodies conform to its ‘norms’. Takako noted that *“Most people can’t feel free when they enter society”*.¹¹³

“Everybody is going to have the same face (...). It’s funny, in my job I design idol¹¹⁴ magazine and these idol girls are 9-12 years old, they look so different but as they get older, they look the same by cosmetics, plastic surgery and make up” (Ai).¹¹⁵

From a gender perspective, all the women (except Yuki) suggested that they would possibly change something on their appearance if their boyfriend didn’t like it and that they have done so in the past. This reveals that while a beauty norm (perceived by some as a contemporary preference) might be a little easier to overcome, the norms that are connected to one’s attractiveness and value as a female are much more difficult to uninstall.

The above demonstrate that while there is willingness to resist the norms, women are open to change and mostly accept ‘difference’ positively, it is not easy for them to resist *biopower* and most of them are reluctant to look ‘different’ themselves. It was suggested throughout the interviews that it is particularly difficult to avoid

¹⁰⁹ Interview on 19/1/2013

¹¹⁰ Interview on 1/2/2013

¹¹¹ Interview on 9/2/2013

¹¹² Interview on 27/1/2013

¹¹³ Interview on 31/1/2013

¹¹⁴ She means young music “idol” groups that are very popular in Japan

¹¹⁵ Interview on 27/1/2013

conformity to norms in Japan, as the tendency to uniformity itself is perceived to be the characteristic of a ‘typical’ Japanese person. Women in particular are more likely to follow norms, as their femininity is closely linked to their body and skin texture, as Bartky has described. Living in a normalizing society, the one who does not conform always stands out as ‘abnormal’ and even if the sanctions are invisible at first, the ‘tyranny of the normal’ (Foucault, 1979) is very effective into normalizing bodies and identities. In my sample, since the relations of *biopower* appear to be rather established and mostly inflexible, we can recognize the domination of the Japanese beauty ideals on the female body.

Expressions and Results of Resistance

For my informants, resisting the norms would entail finding their true nature. Like Foucault suggested, this involves discovering and following their inner voice, something that can be a difficult or conflictual procedure for two reasons; it’s not only that one has to negotiate or overcome the existing states of power dominations (the Japanese society rules), but also that before overcoming or changing any power relations, one has to ‘turn their gaze on themselves’, recognize the constraining network of power practices that they are subject to (or the model that they are following) and thus get to know themselves, as Foucault recalled from the Socratic imperative. This is not always an easy procedure and women might lose themselves in the process. Ai characteristically noted that “*I’m losing what I want to be (...). I’m totally losing what is important for me. I’m totally lost*”.¹¹⁶ Being and feeling natural was often mentioned in the interviews, as a goal of freedom for most of the women and as a state of being for two of them.

*“Sometimes it’s not easy to find your voice. It’s a trap. Sometimes we follow models without realizing and we don’t think for ourselves, why we think “this” is good (...). It’s a trap; sometimes we follow models without realising (...). We [the Japanese] don’t have a tendency to argue but argument is different from conflict right? Argument is good because you get to know each other and also yourself” (Yuki).*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Interview on 27/1/2013
¹¹⁷ Interview on 7/2/2013

The willingness to upset the usual norms and to know their self better, similarly to what Foucault suggests as an antidote to domination from *biopower*, was expressed by all women in my interviews. Whether their acts are acts of freedom in the Foucauldian sense has to be seen in a person's continuous negotiation with the existing structures in society. But all agreed that in their search for freedom and independence, they try to discover their true self, get out of their comfort zone and abandon following models:

"I tried to learn English, French, Korean, study abroad; I want to find my different sides, discover myself" (Kanao).¹¹⁸

"I'd like to be more confident, stronger and more international (...). I want to do the things I always wanted and postponed them for somebody. I want to be just natural, like somebody who can decide for themselves" (Ai).¹¹⁹

I often brought up the concept of *freedom* to my interviewees. It was mentioned that in Japan personal 'freedom' is the goal, as it is not a given and even magazines give advice on how to be free. Even though the Japanese are free to ignore the norms, it was obviously stated that they conform to societal rules because of the sanctions and marginalization if one is outside the predefined 'normal'. In the interviews, freedom (and not caring about society's opinion) was associated with strength and lack of fear: *"I think independence is no fear to say what I think"* (Yuki).¹²⁰

The women I interviewed want to be more individual, although they recognize that being unique might entail going outside the societal norms or being lonely: Ai argued that *"maybe freedom is most important [thing in life]. But sometimes I think freedom and loneliness are exactly the same things"*.¹²¹ The fears of social sanctions and consequences make my interviewees feel weak, prevent them from certain decisions or standing up for what they believe in and keep them under the disciplinary normalization of *biopower*.

¹¹⁸ Interview on 1/2/2013

¹¹⁹ Interview on 27/1/2013

¹²⁰ Interview on 7/2/2013

¹²¹ Interview on 27/1/2013

In my sample, only the two surfer girls responded that they ignore the whiteness norm¹²² as their love for surfing is more important but they also confessed that they had to “adjust” their look in some cases, so as to avoid problems at work or in their social environment. Of these two surfers, one of them noted that she always uses sun protection to avoid the dark spots, so that only 1 out of 10 women doesn't care for the -dark spots- beauty norm. The above suggests that even if a woman overcomes the “white beauty” norm, there are still some other norms connected to whiteness (such as lack of dark spots) that are almost impossible to overthrow. One's freedom, even if practiced in some sectors of life, has its limits and boundaries in others and for that reason not all norms can be overcome.

It was noted during my interviews that there are two ways of resistance against the “white beauty” norm: being natural or artificially –on purpose- going against the norm because of following some other ‘fashion’.

In the first case, a woman indeed goes against norms, follows her passion and lets her skin be natural, as described by Bartky in the “libidinal body” which following pleasure (nature) can resist dominant body disciplines:

*“Tanned skin means that ‘I want to enjoy now’. My life is just one time, so I want to do what I want to do. I don't want to regret (...). Tanned skin means I don't care for the fashions, I show I am different from others; I am doing what I want. I prefer to look stronger. White skin makes you more girly I think. But I want to feel independent, live by myself (...). I want to be tanned” (Aki).*¹²³

For one interviewee (out of eleven), the above quote demonstrates how her tanned skin is maintained on purpose as a sign of agency and individuality while Chisa suggested that sometimes we have to accept how nature created us and not try to change everything.

My two surfer informants asserted that surfing is their life - changing passion and as members of the surfer culture, they want to show their passion in life. With surfing one cannot avoid the effects of the sun, so that the surfer lifestyle becomes visible by the –natural- tan. The surfers constitute another group, one that exhibits uniformity among its members. Although this uniformity might be unintentional (as a

¹²² 2 out of 11 women
¹²³ Interview on 1/2/2013

natural consequence of surfing) my observations of the clothes that the surfers often prefer demonstrate an intended uniformity, as there are certain surf fashion brands (such as Roxy, O'Neill) that are preferred. The surfer group has its anti-establishment meaning to communicate in Japanese society because their tan can be interpreted as a sign of difference and *"in our culture it's not a good sign to have fun. You have to be very serious"* (Yuki).¹²⁴ However, the surfers also become subject to certain dominations on their appearance as their preference to certain fashions and their willingness to show their surfing lifestyle demonstrates. Aki noted how she wants to be tanned *"because it tells that I'm a surfer girl"*.¹²⁵

In the second case, the skin is tanned because a woman follows a certain subculture or fashion, such as the *gyaru* did. This distinction was also suggested by Yuki (surfer) who wanted to separate herself from the *gyaru*, whose tan is "artificial" while hers is not.¹²⁶ Before conducting the fieldwork, I sought to interview some *gyaru*, understanding them as more individualistic, representative of a persistent subculture that made a big impact, resulting in the wide controversy. But it was almost impossible to spot them randomly anymore (as it was the case in the past) while my interviewees also agreed that it was just a fashion that is over now. It was also suggested that even though they started as a subculture against the norms, their appearances soon fell under different fashion dominations - which are now replaced by something else. Most of my interviewees (the ones who do not tan though) suggested that probably most of the former *gyaru* now care about whitening and other conventional beauty routines, something that was also noted in magazines and other conversations.

The above demonstrate that even when one claims to be ignorant of the 'norm', they are usually falling into some cultural, fashion or other category that they then adhere to.

"If there's a fashion, say 'white beauty'¹²⁷, then usually everyone wants the same, white white white! If some girl doesn't want to look the same as everyone, then she might change hair or skin color, but even in that case she's not unique and individual. A few women don't want to look like the majority,

¹²⁴ Interview on 7/2/2013

¹²⁵ Interview on 1/2/2013

¹²⁶ Interview on 7/2/2013

¹²⁷ White beauty: *Bihaku*

and they take another direction, but still then they enter another group! (Laughs) This is the Japanese way of thinking. It's interesting how it works with the skin color. Even the alternative people, they again belong to another group, they're not so individual" (Professor Tomoko).¹²⁸

This was confirmed by Yuki who recognized that trying to be unique can also restrict and dominate the person and the body, just like following the 'norm' does:

"Trying to be unique also tied me up (...). Trying to be special and seeking your value is good for your life as a journey but at the same time it's also a kind of trap that your view becomes an obstacle to find who you are (...). Young people even though they try to be independent, they still have role models, unique singer, somebody" (Yuki).¹²⁹

As demonstrated in the literature review, the *gyaru* (although representing an alternative subculture) did not escape the capillary powers of uniformity or capitalism. Louis Vuitton, Chanel bags, branded goods are massively consumed by the Japanese, *gyaru* or not, male or female, as capitalism has perpetrated Japanese society in various levels. The above findings accord with Foucault's suggestion of dominations replacing one another, as they reveal that even one of the most reactive, norm resisting visual subcultures in Japan was not free from subsequent dominations.

It was suggested in the interviews that when abroad, women want to assimilate themselves in the new environment and try to follow the local norms and practices, as they don't want to look 'different' or 'abnormal' in any case: *"when I lived in Canada, I wanted to be like them [Canadians] so I was trying to"* (Takako).¹³⁰ The Japanese *biopower* might be resisted but it is probably replaced by the local norms that now produce one's appearance:

"But when we go abroad, sometimes we tan because it's fun (...). When I went to France and the sunlight was strong, I wore sun lotion but I felt shy to wear sun protection gloves, umbrella or all the things we use to protect ourselves from the sun in Japan. I think it looks weird to wear such things abroad (...). I followed the European way" (Kanae).¹³¹

¹²⁸ Interview on 29/1/2013

¹²⁹ Interview on 7/1/2013

¹³⁰ Interview on 31/1/2013

¹³¹ Interview on 28/1/2013

This is in line with Foucault's theory of dominations replacing one another (Foucault, 1984). From my sample it is suggested that *biopower* is everywhere, difficult to avoid and according to the established norms it produces the body because it is always important to look 'normal'.

It is natural that we all tend to acculturate ourselves in the environment we live in. The Japanese norms described in the previous section, also affect and influence non- Japanese who live in Japan. The increased expectations -even from non- Japanese- make the norms' domination stronger and more persistent.

"A guy told me that he never thought a Japanese girl would be like me, saying what I feel. They cannot accept it. Their expectation is to find a cute Japanese girl who doesn't stand out (...). Foreigners look at different things on women but foreigners who live in Japan long time are kind of the same like Japanese, or more" (Yuki).¹³²

It was very well suggested¹³³ that not even non- Japanese female residents in Japan are able to escape or fully resist the uniformizing and altering effects of *biopower* on their body and femininity.

"Even foreign women who stay long in Japan, they change and don't argue. Had a Canadian friend in a weird state of herself after living here. She was maybe subconsciously adjusting here to survive. Especially women; [foreign] guys are ok, because Japanese girls are as they are. But [foreign] women cannot take advantage of being a foreigner here, because of that (...). If a girl changes here as a strategy to survive is ok, smart and clever but if it happens subconsciously you change who you are, it's very dangerous. You have a lot of risk if you stay more than 3 years here. I say to my foreign female friends that this country is very dangerous. It's a pink fluffy cotton choking your neck. Because it's fluffy and cotton you don't realize it, that's why it's dangerous. You never understand the subconscious change, the fluffy cotton that chokes you. It's safe here to walk around (...). You don't need to be careful when walking, with strangers. In Japan you don't need to protect yourself from

¹³² Interview on 7/2/2013

¹³³ And I can affirm it from my personal five year experience

anything and everybody is polite. So we are off guard. But it's not so safe, other bad things happen to you, in a very sneaky way" (Yuki).¹³⁴

The above suggest that *biopower* is rather well installed and embedded on the female body in Japan (including non- Japanese women), as it seems difficult to resist its normalizing powers of massification. In the cases of resistance or absence of conformity to *biopower*, the women become aware of the disapproving *gazes* they receive and the consequences (sanctions) that their lack of conformity to the norm will bring to their personal and social life. In my sample, *biopower* becomes visible on the body via the knowledge of the norm, which accounts for the 'correcting' *surveillance* that ensures the women are appropriate to participate in their everyday life.

¹³⁴

Interview on 7/2/2013

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore and identify the way that gender norms, beauty ideals and social practices become 'visible' on the Japanese female skin color. In order to achieve that, I sought to identify these *norms*, the *mechanisms* that implement them and *resistance* against the norms. The effects of power on the gendered feminine body became central in this research. I used both secondary and primary material. My findings are based on eleven in-depth interviews and participant observation, during two months of fieldwork in Japan in 2013. I asked my informants questions about their opinions of the typical Japanese person, the ideal woman and their attitudes towards resisting the dominant ideals and rules, among other things. Every person is unique, with unique experiences and ideas. However, I recognized tendencies and patterns in their opinions that I used to answer my research questions.

First, I asked about the norms connected to ideal femininity and beauty in Japan. My research identified the main cultural, gender and social norms that synthesize the feminine ideal in Japan and revealed that 'whiteness' means a lot more than beauty. According to the norms, Japanese women should take care of their uniquely Japanese skin to be 'white', fair and baby soft, have natural beauty, look young and innocent, behave in a cute nonthreatening way, be polite, avoid conflict or standing out and be subservient to men. Being 'white' communicates that a woman is proper, hardworking and respectful of the structures of society. Second, I inquire about the mechanisms that maintain these norms. The study found out that self-surveillance secures their implementation, as an effective mechanism of social control over the female body. The women internalize the norms, making them visible on their body. As these norms discipline Japanese women and exercise power over their life, I recognize them as exerting *biopower*. *Biopower* in my research is found to be exerted exactly as Foucault described it: for the sake of wellbeing, protection of life. I demonstrated how *biopower* works both as a forbidding and producing force, because women are afraid of the social sanctions and the consequences of not conforming, while they aspire to the lifestyles and identities produced by *biopower*. Conforming to the norms makes women attractive, socially acceptable and proper, while being different or abnormal will lead to loneliness and marginalization. Third, I examine resistance to *biopower*. The research found out that even though there are women

willing to resist the norms and have positive attitudes towards ‘different’ people who do not conform to the norms, in the end the fear and desire inducing mechanisms do not let women resist *biopower* as much as they would like to. Even though some norms are resisted by some women, there are other norms that cannot be overcome and this makes *biopower* so well installed. The Japanese norms do not usually traverse abroad, but are replaced by local norms and practices, while *biopower* and the Japanese norms strongly affect even non- Japanese women in Japan.

My findings reveal how *beauty* is culturally and socially constructed, while *whiteness* -based on norms that can be debated as political- has a profound meaning in Japan. *Whiteness* signifies much more than just beauty, as it is linked to issues such as the Japanese identity, the construction of gender and sexuality, and personal virtue. How these norms were produced and who is benefiting from them, can be the subject of further research.

Every person reacts differently to social norms, rules, media images and other influences. Some care less about how they *should* be like, while others care more. The advertising and media industries are eager to feed us with images of ‘successful’ people that use the right product, have the right appearance or way of living and enjoy their well-deserved happiness in life. Their success is based on human fear and desire: fear of not being good enough, not being ‘normal’ or average; desire for happiness and the best life possible. Lifestyle, practices and consumption are so much thoroughly involved in the maintaining of the various ideals that personal identity becomes dictated by someone else, supervised and divided into ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. *Biopower*, intangible and not defined as political, can socially and economically dominate the body. However, it is not just the body that can become docile, but the mind as well. Beauty and body disciplines can be potentially ‘dangerous’ if we do not reflect on the influence that our actions or consumption might have on our own personality, freedom and finally identity.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Following are the questions that guided my interviews. I did not always use all of them.

Basic information

1. Educational level/ Family background
2. Nationality- place (is skin color important where you come from?) Do you categorize certain skin colors as certain nationalities?

Japanese women

3. Can you talk to me about the typical Japanese woman? What does she look like?
Are you a typical Japanese woman?
4. What is the Japanese society's mainstream beauty? What is not?
5. Do you find it difficult to live up to that standard/mainstream? Have you ever felt you want to break it/ or you want to go against society's rules?
6. Did you ever think that you cannot conform to society's mainstream beauty/life standards? Is this why you ever liked to be part of a subculture or a certain group?
7. (*optional Akita Bijin)
In Akita everyone is an Akita beauty. What does it mean to you that you are from Akita, now that you are in Tokyo? What does it imply?
8. What are your limits? Do you do everything you like?

Skin Color Perceptions

9. What do you think of tanned women? Refer to/bring up stereotypes.
10. Do you think that skin color is important in Japan? (To you? Why?)
11. How do you think it characterizes you?
12. Do you think being white was always important in Japan? Why?
13. Do you think whiteness is a status/class mark? Was it always like that in Japan?

Self-presentation

14. How would you characterize yourself?

15. Who/ what made you who you are? Do you think your parents influenced a lot?
16. Do you sometimes say different things about you, according to who's listening? Do you need everyone's acceptance and compliment for example, or you don't care about what they will think about you?
17. If you meet a foreigner, how would you introduce yourself? If you meet Japanese?
18. Are foreigners different from Japanese when it comes to appreciating your looks? Do they like/look at something different?
19. Were you ever involved in a relationship with a non- Japanese partner?
20. How does it feel when you meet someone that doesn't value at all your whiteness or tan? Have you ever met someone that told you it's better to be tanned etc.. How did you feel? If someone in general disapproves something on you or your lifestyle, do you care? How do you react or do you say something?
21. Have you ever felt that someone looked upon you negatively? What happened?
22. Why did you like to be white/ tanned? What do you think of the people that are (opposite from you).
23. What would be important for you when you prepare for something important? If you went to an important job interview/family meeting/date would you change your appearance?
24. How do you know what is acceptable to go out and what is not? (school, society, friends, magazine, life). In your house, do you dress different than outside?
25. How do you want to present yourself?
26. What is the purpose of your look? ex. find a husband, be praised by other women, please yourself.
27. How would you feel if one day you woke up and you were (opposite) from what you look like? Wake up white and girly? Wake up ganguro? What would you think and what would you do?
28. Do you think that as a woman you are not free to dress/make up as you want? Do you think you are completely free with your appearance or sometimes you have to compromise what you really want?

Skin color

29. Is your skin color natural?
30. Have you ever been burned by the sun (or tanned)? What do you mean by burned?

31. What does white stand for in Japan? What does being tanned stand for? How do you feel about it?
32. What does the color white bring to your mind? What about black? Does one of them give you more negative/ happy feelings? Which is preferred?
33. How many different skin colors would you say there are in Japan? How many can you think of?
34. Why do you think people have different skin colors? (ex. is it because of environmental conditions)

Lifestyle

35. Tell me about your lifestyle. How do you live, what do you value? What do you think your lifestyle represents?
36. Why do you want to live this way and not another way? Do you think that your lifestyle belongs/ puts you to a certain social group?
37. How does it feel to be a member of "this" lifestyle/group?
38. Do your friends look like you (same style)? Is it important?
39. How do you support your lifestyle? (How much do you spend per month for maintaining your lifestyle/appearance? Do you think it is appropriate to spend this amount? Why?)

Changes and Freedom

40. Do you change your look completely sometimes? For example, now you are a surfer, do you sometimes dress completely different (ex. cute) or rock or something else? Do you feel free enough to dress as you like, when you like (I mean in your free time)? Or do you think that people (and your friends) would react and you would have a lot of explaining to do?
41. Do you feel you need to have some continuity in your look and identity? Or you change a lot, after some years/relationship/life change?

Kirei (Beautiful)

42. I know Kirei has two meanings. Why? Could you explain why it has many meanings? Do you consider white to look "clean" or "neat"? (In Japan white skin is considered to be beautiful for women, but the word for beautiful also means clean, tidy).

Society's standards and rules

43. Do you think you don't want to conform to society standards? Or cannot? Why?
44. Did you ever feel pressure from society/friends/ family to conform to a certain appearance/lifestyle?
45. Do you think that today in society, everyone tends to look and be the same? Follow same fashion, do same things etc or not? Do you like this? Do you try to be different or try to be like someone else?
46. What do you think about (little or more) different/unusual/abnormal people? Are you comfortable with them?

Class

47. Do you think that the Japanese society has classes/groups? Where do you put yourself?
48. Do you care to be seen as a girl of good family/good society/ high class etc?
49. Are you more respected if you look like this? Elevated status or not?
Do you want to be respected by how you look?

Being Japanese

50. What is the best with being Japanese? Is there something not so positive? (ask more about it- I can talk about how I feel about being Greek first to give example)
51. Do you feel proud of being Japanese?

Being a woman

52. *Some women* dress and make up so as to be attractive to men. Others don't care, though. What about you?
53. Do you think that you have to follow certain standards as a woman, in order to be desired? What do you think and do you do about that? For example do you present yourself in ways that men don't like it, but you don't care?
54. Do you think that if you dressed like gyaru, you would not look attractive to men? What about extra white? Do you think this is attractive, do men like it??

Please value the following criteria

55. (What is more important for you): Wealth, beauty, fame (popularity), love, marriage?

Self-awareness/ Planning

56. The way you are now, did you plan for it? How do you plan for the future? Who would you like to become or how would you like to live? Do you want to change something on you? Would you like to be something else?
57. Ever tried to actively change something on you? Something you didn't like? Ever tried experimenting with different identities? Trying to be like someone else or like something you would like more to be??

Products

58. Do you use whitening products? Do you think it's healthy or not? Do you have any skin treatments in general? Do you think these chemicals are healthy? If you were pregnant, would you still use them?
59. Do you think the sun is good for your skin? Why?
60. How much do you spend on beauty? What do you buy?

Aging and Beauty

61. Do you think that beauty is more important at a certain age? What do you do about anti-aging care? Would you ever do plastic surgery?

Marriage

62. Do you want to get married/ have children/ family? Do you think it's selfish not to think about it and just live your life?
63. Will marriage change/restrict your lifestyle? Is it different being single?