



Lived Experiences of Filipinas in Adhering to the Beauty Standards in TikTok

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Abstract: Deeply rooted in a Filipina's grip of oneself was the reflection of what her detractors claim to know about her. However, as she had grown to know better, her reigning beauty eventually became the fairest of them all. Since ancient history, society has always been obsessed with beauty. Today, people's desire to leap onto the fountain of youth is still ubiquitous. Given the technological advancements present in the 21st century, a bigger pressure on beauty standards has been made where not many can make the cut without having to sacrifice their authentic beauty. This study aims to raise awareness about the misogyny faced by women in Tiktok; thus, to generate the perspective of each respondent, the researchers used phenomenological approach through the descriptive qualitative research design where an online interview has been conducted with fifteen Filipina Tiktokers of any niche whose follower count has, at least, a thousand. Through purposive sampling, this study elucidated the lived experiences of Filipina Tiktokers when adhering to the beauty standards imposed upon them. The data gathered were grouped thematically based on the theoretical framework and the general factors behind the respondents' answers. The study delved deeper into the interplay of societal impact, viewer feedback, self-assessment, and coping mechanisms when tackling the beauty standards that target these women. Furthermore, through the freedom wall blog, the researchers would now be able to set up an avenue as to where young girls and women can share their stories to inspire and empower others.

Key Words: beauty; beauty standards; Flipina, Tiktokers; Tiktok

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Since ancient history, society has always been obsessed with beauty. Though beauty is something that cannot be standardized (Hummer, 2018), the feminine beauty ideal is "the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets to achieve and maintain" (Schmoyer, 2018).

In the Philippines, there is a long history when it comes to its beauty standards considering the colonization it has gone through for 384 years. During those years, both American and Spanish cultures were clear that lighter complexions mean highly maintained social status causing Filipino's fascination for having fair skin to be considered beautiful. Given the geographical conditions in the Philippines, it is normal for the skin to produce melanin for protection from the sun's heat. However, considering how long it has been colonized by, mostly, western countries, the issue of colorism was and still is, very vivid to the Filipinos. Meanwhile, in the 21st Century, society's

definition of beauty catered to the petite and thin figures more than the curvy ones (Swami, 2016).

Having fair skin, a slim body, and a straight nose is the ideal beauty standard in the Philippines. Consequently, different beauty products such as whitening soaps were being bought by Filipinas to achieve these standards. Although morena beauty exists, these morenas usually have straight noses. Resulting in some women, celebrity or not, feeling the need to undergo cosmetic surgeries. Moreover, exercising and dieting were also done by Filipinas to achieve a slim fit body to feel like they belong in the society (Shimizu, 2016).

The emergence of technology created a huge impact on the people and history. Thus, social media has become a major part in the lives of people (Jan et al., 2017). Despite its advantages, risks such as cyber-harassing, hacking, and bad effects on health may also occur from time to time (Akmar & Kumar, 2018).

Looking into the skyrocketing popularity of TikTok in just a few years of its existence, the app has already become one of the most popular social media applications among people, especially for young adults, across the whole world (Jaffar et al., 2019). The



application was first introduced as Douyin by a company called ByteDance founded by Zhang Yiming in China in 2016 and was merged with Musical.ly and used the name "TikTok" in 2017 (Fannin, 2019). It then became the fourth most downloaded social app, surpassing Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube in the App Store in September 2019. In Google Play Store, it has a 4.6 rating, making this application highly qualified to merge Artificial Intelligence and image capture (Jaffar et al., 2019).

Like any other application, TikTok also has beauty filters that appear as a flawless beauty image causing countless young girls to lose themselves because of this demand to copy attractive ideals (Jain & Chanda, 2020). The underlying denominator found among TikTok challenges is the value judgment. This kind of context has contributed to the normalization of the female body's sexualization (Khattab, 2020). According to a recent study by Natarajan (2020), the hidden standards behind misleading creators on TikTok would eventually result in a generation of young adults who are insecure about their body image.

A teacher of digital social media at USC, Karen North, said that TikTok has developed so quickly and is so well known. "It has moreover been an app the bullies have utilized to insult youthful victims", she added. Though settings can be altered so children can only be reached by individuals they know, this still cannot fully guarantee their safety.

In the Philippines, an aspiring educator named Mia Franz Gelicka turned to Tiktok to educate and advocate women empowerment based on how she experienced colorism and body shaming. From the model's viral videos, she shuts down fat-shaming comments and toxic beauty standards wherein the post has over 68,000 likes and 376,000 views. Because of such issues in physical appearance, Tiktok launched the #BetterMeBetterInternet campaign in the Philippines where a quiz for proper knowledge for online safety and positive online habits was done.

The purpose of this research study is to raise awareness about the misogyny faced by women, which is indeed prevalent at this point in time. Furthermore, through the Freedom Wall Blog, the researchers would now be able to set up an avenue where young girls and women can share their stories to inspire others and to remind them that the world would be theirs for the taking. Gone should be the days of them existing merely just to impress and stun men.

1.2. Statement of Objectives

This study seeks to unravel the lived experiences of Filipina TikTokers when it comes to adhering to the beauty standards imposed upon them.

More specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Filipina Tiktokers

in adhering to the beauty standards set by TikTok?

2. What are the coping strategies being undertaken by Filipina Tiktokers in dealing with the imposed beauty standards upon them?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This research study utilized the descriptive qualitative research design with phenomenological approach as it focuses on the study of an individual's life and living experiences. Using this approach, the researchers were able to have deeper analysis regarding the experiences that Filipina Tiktokers encountered and determined reality from their experiences.

Furthermore, descriptive research design directs in defining the population's phenomenon systematically. With the use of this design, the experiences, views, and opinions of Filipina Tiktokers with regards to Tiktok having beauty standards were discovered.

2.2. Participants and Locale of the Study

In determining the respondents' suit for this study, the researchers used purposive sampling which is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. With the set criteria, the researchers were able to have fifteen (15) respondents.

2.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

This research study was inclusive of any Filipina TikToker whose follower count is not under a thousand (1,000). Their niche could be of any choice they became known for.

2.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

The data gathering excluded TikTokers who are not Filipinos, who are male (identity or expression), and whose follower count is lower than a thousand (1,000).

2.3. Data Gathering Tool

The researchers utilized the virtual space through floating online questionnaires which consist of a list of questions that are not limited in addressing a single aspect only.



2.4. Data Gathering Procedures and Ethical Consideration

A letter of approval was sent to the academic head and school director of LORMA Basic Education Schools and interview questions were validated by the validators. The researchers sent the letter of consent to the respondents before sending the questionnaires. Respondents' identities were also kept confidential.

2.5. Data Analysis

The gathered data were subjected to thematization for thorough analysis wherein it was organized based on how the respondents answered the given researcher-made questions during the conduct of the study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study acquired a total of fifteen (15) fully answered and useful responses which were considered for the in-depth analysis.

3.1 Societal Impact

As society shifts its needs from women time to time, the characteristics they hold also shapeshift into what society perceives as "beautiful" every now and then (Laitman, 2020). This impact or influences how people choose to live their lives from thereon.

Each respondent had a strong viewpoint when talking about the beauty standards imposed upon Filipina TikTokers at this point in time.

a. Inclusivity

Inclusivity is being included in a part of something bigger (Loeffler, 2016). In determining whether or not beauty standards are inclusive in Tiktok, the respondents were asked if they think that a set of beauty standards is only limited to a specific niche. According to all of the respondents, beauty ideals are not restricted to a particular niche. Their statements imply that whatever your niche is, you can and will be affected by it.

b. Self-Deprecation

The concept of self-deprecation is rooted in the portrayals of unrealistic imagery of beauty ideals which initiates body dissatisfaction amongst women especially to those who cannot attain the ideal (Foo, 2010). Thirteen (13) respondents have experienced feelings of self-consciousness during or after watching other content creators in TikTok. Moreover, the results of the study are supported by Higgin's (1987) Self Discrepancy Theory which states that individuals equate themselves to rationalized norms that are linked to different forms of "emotional vulnerabilities".

c. Stereotypical Destruction

Women of today are aiming more towards inclusivity when it comes to the different beauty types (Givhan & Morales, 2020). Though some respondents said that TikTok normalizes the stereotyped Filipina beauty, often resulting to body shaming, twelve (12) respondents shared their thoughts on how TikTok can educate people in loving their flaws and normalize other people's imperfections as to fit in the society's beauty standards without giving up your genetic beauty is "unrealistic" (Donati, 2017).

d. Nonconformism

Alongside social media's rise is the instantaneous reduction of individuality (Abbariki, 2018). In TikTok, users view the platform as a real-world community by conforming to particular norms (Yang, 2020). However, ten (10) respondents repudiate to conform to these as TikTok liberates young people to be creative without adhering to the visual styles, narratives, and online cultures of the past (Bresnick, 2019).

3.2 Viewer Feedback

Viewer feedback magnifies what types of feedback these Filipina TikTokers get from their viewers given that judgemental disability has been more rampant considering the century we currently are in (Lores, 2016).

a. Compliments

"You're really pretty", "You're a good dancer", and "You're very inspiring" are common complementary phrases Filipina TikTokers have been receiving from their viewers based on the data gathered. Compliments may be considered an act of kindness that has the potential to make us feel good about ourselves – whether we are the giver or the receiver of the compliment (Bedosky, 2018).

b. Imperfections

Having flaws are what caused three (3) of the respondents to receive criticisms from their viewers targeting issues of colorism and physical appearance. A respondent said, "someone said I look different without makeup" while another one received the comment, "you have dark skin like other Filipinas". As per Schreiner in 2017, the occurrence of such name-calling and/or bullying are caused by an "unconscious defense mechanism" making these bullies feel "superior" and/or "better" than the person whom they call out (Dean, 2020).



3.3 Self-Assessment

Past the judgments and criticisms these Filipina have encountered in TikTok, the essence of self-assessment is a process close to their roots as they always fear to lose their groundedness. Through the respondents' varied answers, Contentment, Self-Appreciation, and Natural Beauty are the sub-themes under this theme.

a. Contentment

According to Pearce in 2019, being satisfied and thankful with what you have, who you are, and where you are is what it means to be content even though a bit of desire is still existing. Thirteen (13) respondents do not consider themselves eligible for cosmetic surgery and are content with their present physical features.

b. Self-Appreciation

Self-appreciation is about consciously acknowledging the positive within you without the need to compare yourself to others (Razzetti, 2018). Seven (7) respondents answered that Tiktok boosts their confidence which fuels their appreciation for their beauty.

c. Natural Beauty

Natural beauty is defined as appearing attractive without the use of cosmetics. Teenagers with inner radiance, charming smiles, and natural elegance stand out (Kotamraju, 2018). The essentiality of beauty products for nine (9) respondents is low; claiming that beauty products are not necessary in Tiktok videos. Though people believe that women who wear lots of make-up have poor self-esteem, today's women are more into embracing flaws than ever. However, in some cases, cosmetic products are needed as TikTok itself has filters to enhance features, whiten complexion, and smoothen skin (Kupp, 2016).

3.4 Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms tackle the adjustments made by the respondents in addressing the negative feedback from their viewers. Sub-themes of Self-Worth, Neglect, and Screen Time Reduction had been raised.

a. Self-Worth

Personal importance placed upon oneself is hugely dependent on self-worth (Hill, 2021). Considering that thirteen (13) of the respondents are not affected by people's feedback and do not take negativity to make them change their body image, there is a noticeable force of high self-worth within these empowered women. Women with high self-

worth tend to look past their mistakes and not let negative feedback be launched into an onslaught of heightened self-criticism (Kabir, 2016).

b. Neglect

It's impossible to evade criticism nowadays; there are simply too many review sites for you to keep anything quiet (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2019). When the respondents were asked how they cope with negative feedback, the majority answered "ignoring" while some answered to be optimistic, and some said to accept what is.

c. Screen Time Reduction

The importance of reducing screen time in using various types of technological devices is worthy as it is beneficial to your health (Slingshot Health, 2020). According to Consumer News and Business Channel in 2020, excessive screen time has been found to increase the risk of different illnesses. Nine (9) of the respondents answered that they are decreasing their screen time for their health and to avoid the loops of self-deprecation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research found out that the imposition of beauty standards among Filipinas may be inimical, but these empowered women are taking bigger steps in smashing stereotyped beauty standards one at a time. In addition, the relationship between the societal impact and the way these Filipina TikTokers see themselves was also distinguished. The change of direction these Filipina TikTokers wish to take to have a more inclusive definition of beauty was also highlighted through this study.

Given that these beauty standards had done more harm than good to the women of the past, now would be the time to best unshackle the chains of stereotyping because these "imperfections" are what also make these Filipinas a real Filipina. The researchers would also acknowledge that this paper has its own gaps and weak points; thus leaving these recommendations for future researchers to take into consideration:

1. Conduct personal interviews to allow more room for interaction.
2. Examine TikTokers with a smaller audience reach to assess whether or not the public would have more pressure onto those who do not tend to "fit" the imposed Beauty Standards among Filipinas in TikTok.
3. Consider the interactions that these TikTokers have with their followers to know if this leads them to change their personality traits or not.
4. Determine the effectiveness of TikTok videos that challenge pressing issues aimed toward women and



how such movements can be maintained and/or improved.

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