

**الضغوط الاجتماعية والثقافية لمعايير الجمال على النساء
في مسرحية "غرفة الانتظار" للكاتبة ليزا لومر**

**The Sociocultural Pressures of Beauty
Standards on Women in Lisa Loomer's *The
Waiting Room***

الباحثة: رفل ثائر عبد القادر ^(١)

Researcher: Rafal Thair Abdul Qadir ⁽¹⁾

E-mail: rafal.abd2103@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

أ.د. مروة غازي محمد ^(٢)

Prof. Dr. Marwa Ghazi Mohammed ⁽²⁾

E-mail: marwa_grery@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

جامعة بغداد / كلية التربية للبنات ^{(١)(٢)}

University of Baghdad\ College of Education for Women ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

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المخلص

على مر التاريخ، فرض المجتمع معايير جمال على النساء، مما أدى إلى خلق ثقافة التوقعات والضغط الاجتماعي. تملّي هذه المعايير ما يعتبر جذاباً ومرغوباً فيه، وغالباً ما تؤدي إلى انخفاض تقدير الذات والشعور بالضعف بين أولئك الذين لا يتناسبون مع هذه الصورة النمطية، مما يؤدي بهم إلى الخضوع لإجراءات مختلفة للتوافق مع هذه المعايير. طالما تم إجراء الجراحة التجميلية منذ زمن طويل، حيث نشأت في الحضارات القديمة وتطورت مع مرور الوقت. تطورت للدوافع وراء الجراحة التجميلية، جنباً إلى جنب مع التقنيات المستخدمة. ما بدأ كوسيلة لإعادة بناء أجزاء الجسم التالفة تطور ليركز على تعزيز المظهر الجمالي. حيث تعزز ملامح الجسم المختلفة لخلق صورة تتوافق مع المعايير الاجتماعية والثقافية.

تدور أحداث مسرحية "غرفة الانتظار" لليزا لومر حول ثلاث نساء من قرون مختلفة يجلسن في غرفة انتظار الطبيب. تعاني كل واحدة منهن من مشكلة مختلفة في جسدها. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة الضغوط الاجتماعية الثقافية لمعايير الجمال على النساء.

Abstract

Throughout history, society has placed major pressure on beauty ideals of women by creating a culture of societal expectations. These standards define women's attractiveness and desirability, which often lead them to have low self-esteem and feelings of insecurity for those who do not fit in the mold, leading them to undergo different procedures to conform to these ideals. Plastic surgery has been practiced for a long time, originating in ancient civilizations and evolving over time. Initially used for reconstructive purposes, it has shifted toward enhancing physical appearance. It enhances different body features to create an image that conforms to sociocultural standards.

The Waiting Room by Lisa Loomer revolves around three women from different centuries who sitting in a doctor's waiting room. Each one of them suffers from different issue in her body. The paper aims to study the sociocultural pressures of beauty standards on women.



Introduction

Beauty ideals vary across different cultures and societies, influencing women's self-perception and self-confidence. These ideals can create pressure for women to meet specific standards and often lead to a feeling of inadequacy, which causes women to have physical and psychological issues. Furthermore, unrealistic beauty ideals sometimes cause women to undergo different plastic procedures to conform to these ideals, and traditional beauty rituals play a role in shaping these ideals and affecting women's well-being. Sociocultural pressure often influences women's behavior, limiting their personality and potential.

For ages women have faced oppression through societal views on the female body. Feminist theatre has aimed to address this oppression by highlighting the unique experiences of women and reclaiming their bodies from patriarchal victimization. The portrayal of the body in feminist theatre often involves staging physical or mental disabilities, body-altering practices for beauty purposes, or gynecological surgeries such as mastectomy or hysterectomy. These practices are influenced by both cultural and pathological reasons, as beauty standards vary across cultures and are influenced by patriarchal systems (Bhattacharjee & Ray, 2018). In *The Waiting Room* Loomer tackles how society and culture has imposed certain beauty standards that women have to follow regardless their physical and mental health. All the characters are appalled by the cultural customs of the others, but they view their own practices as completely normal, just like the men who assist in upholding them (Winer, 1994). Women who desire plastic surgery are not doing so in order to conform to an unrealistic beauty standard, but rather to align their physical appearance with their own self-perception. This is an attempt to restore a sense of harmony between how they see themselves and how their bodies actually look. In the early 1990s, feminist studies depicted women who underwent surgery as being influenced by a patriarchal society that had been heavily influenced by media representations of female beauty (Dean et al., 2018).

Lisa Loomer: A Latina American Playwright

Lisa Loomer (1950-), a highly produced contemporary Latina American playwright, she has received little academic attention despite her significant contributions to the field. With a Spanish and Romanian background, she grew up in New York but later moved to Mexico with her parents during her late teens. These experiences have greatly influenced her work as a playwright, as she has mentioned that her time in a culture with looser boundaries between life and death, and between the literal and



the fanciful, has shaped her non-linear, logical, and naturalistic approach to writing (Durham, 2013).

Loomer possesses an unmistakable voice that has been captivating theatergoers in the United States ever since her groundbreaking play, *The Waiting Room*, premiered in 1994. This play explores the impact of body modification on societal beauty standards across three different centuries and cultures, as a group of women anxiously await their turn to see a doctor. The play received the prestigious Jane Chambers Playwriting Award and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Furthermore, Loomer has expressed that she is often inspired to write when something bothers her. She has written extensively about the concept of balance, including the balance between masculine and feminine, nature and science, Anglo culture and Latino culture, and the powerful and the powerless. Additionally, she explores the balance between life and art. In his review of the Vineyard's 1996 production of the play, American theater critic Ben Brantley observed that *The Waiting Room* shared similarities with Churchill's *Top Girls* and Kushner's *Angels in America* in terms of its fluidity of time. While he believed that *The Waiting Room* was not as powerful as those plays, he did acknowledge Loomer's unique ability to transform scientific statistics and historical data into eccentric yet finely crafted devices that bring characters to life (Durham, 2013). According to Dramatists Play Service Loomer's plays have been produced on different theaters, and she has also written for film and television. Some of her plays are *The Waiting Room* (1998), *Living Out* (2005), *Expecting Isabel* (2005), *Distracted* (2009), *Two Things You Don't Talk about at Dinner* (2013), *Home Free* (2017), and *Roe* (2019).

The Waiting Room

The Waiting Room is about three women from different time periods who are sitting in the waiting room waiting for the doctor. Forgiveness From Heaven, an 18th-century Chinese woman, is experiencing the loss of her toes which are caused by her bound feet. Victoria, a 19th-century English woman, is tightly corseted and dealing with hysteria. Lastly, Wanda, a modern woman from New Jersey, who has undergone numerous plastic surgeries and is facing issues with her silicone breasts. All three individuals are affected by the societal standards of beauty in their respective societies. Mrs. From Heaven is experiencing the detrimental consequences of having bound feet, Victoria's internal organs are shifting due to years of wearing a corset that has given her an extremely small waist of 16 inches. Her main ailment is hysteria, which her doctor husband believes can be cured by removing her ovaries. Wanda, who has undergone multiple breast enlargement procedures, has been diagnosed with breast cancer (Rousuck, 1996). The play begins by having them all together waiting in the surgery clinic.



The presence of medical waiting rooms can cause discomfort for individuals as they highlight the dilemma of being a sick person seeking care in an impersonal and bureaucratic setting. This bureaucratic and impersonal system of healthcare is essential in order to guarantee efficient and standardized treatment (Weber, 1968). Furthermore, the experience of waiting in medical institutions is distinct from waiting in other locations. Medical institutions carry a sense of anxiety and significance that is not found in other social settings where people wait (Long et al., 2008). The waiting room presents the pressure woman face of the sociocultural expectations of beauty. It indicates their pain and suffering to endure unrealistic beauty ideals that are imposed on them by society and culture. The three women are waiting for their turn to meet the doctor to treat them from their condition which resulted from submitting to beauty ideals. Furthermore, as they are flipping through fashion magazines and engaging in a conversation that is about the reason that led them to be in a doctor's waiting room. The waiting room becomes an escape from their pain and frustration experienced by the three women.

The Sociocultural Pressures of Beauty Ideals in *The Waiting Room*

The development of plastic surgery during the two world wars, aimed at restoring the appearance of soldiers injured in combat, played a significant role in shaping societal attitudes towards appearance-altering surgery. By restoring these soldiers to a socially acceptable state, the importance and value of such surgical interventions were recognized, and they were seen as morally commendable. This recognition brought about a different societal perspective on appearance-altering surgery. Consequently, the idea of using surgical transformations to conform to a specific subset of society that is considered more desirable is a key aspect in understanding the sociological viewpoint on cosmetic surgery (Dean et al., 2018). Therefore, any actual change in appearance will only have a limited effect. While a cosmetic procedure may sometimes alter both the body and body-image, one can rebuild their body-image by looking in the mirror and projecting the mirror-image onto themselves. Additionally, the changed perception of others can also impact one's body-image. However, these factors will not have a significant impact if they do not change the individual's psychological attitude. These considerations also explain the challenges involved in plastic surgery, as it can trigger deep-rooted pregenital activities. Beauty can promise complete satisfaction and can lead to this satisfaction. Beauty and ugliness not only affect how individuals perceive themselves, but also how others perceive them. Body-image is influenced by social life, and beauty and ugliness are important social phenomena (Schilder, 1935).

The concept of evolution can be applied to various human behaviors that are connected to appearance, attractiveness, and body image.



Evolutionary psychologists propose that certain traits in humans have developed not for survival purposes, but rather because they offer advantages in terms of fitness or competition for potential mates. In simpler terms, individuals perceive and utilize certain traits to evaluate the quality and desirability of potential partners, ultimately increasing their chances of reproductive success (Cash & Smolak, 2011). The individuals with lower levels of self-perceived physical attractiveness are more likely to seek unnecessary cosmetic surgery. This suggests that one of the reasons married individuals seek cosmetic surgery is to enhance their physical attractiveness and potentially improve marital satisfaction. This may explain the demand for cosmetic procedures such as breast surgery among women (Brown et al, 2007). The field of cosmetic surgery has experienced rapid growth, becoming the fastest-growing medical specialty. In 1988, over two million Americans had already undergone cosmetic surgery, with approximately 87 percent of them being female. This number had tripled in just two years. The increasing power and influence of women during the 1980s led to an unprecedented number of them seeking and undergoing surgical procedures (Wolf, 2002).

Forgiveness From Heaven: The Chinese Tradition of Foot Binding

Forgiveness From Heaven is the first character presented in the play. She is a Chinese woman in her late forties, living in the wealthy eighteenth century. She has bound feet and exudes sensuality and duty, always wearing an enduring smile. According to the ancient Chinese beauty traditions she has her feet binding. She explains how she has gotten her feet binding which she describes it "Like a recipe" (Loomer, 1998, p.12) saying that when she was five, one day her mother told her about the practice of foot binding. It was the day of the moon as it is considered a lucky day. Her mother took a bandage and wrapped it tightly around Forgiveness's instep, forcing her small toes towards the sole. The bandage was then wrapped around the heel, drawing the heel and toes close together. Afterwards, her mother applies a bandage to the inner part of the arch of the foot and pulls it over the small toes to push them towards the sole. Then, she tightly wraps the bandage around the heel, ensuring that both the heel and toes are pulled inwards with force.

Forgiveness said that night, she tried to escape into the forest, but her feet were in excruciating pain. But her mother found her and made her continue walking. Her mother had gone through the same process when she was younger and never cried, even though her feet never grew and actually became smaller. Over time, Forgiveness's feet became infected, and pieces of flesh started to fall off as her toes decayed. Also, she said that eating salted fish would cause her feet to swell, causing immense discomfort. Her mother would remove the bindings, lance the corns with a needle, and clean the pus, blood, and dead flesh. Every two weeks,



Forgiveness would change to a smaller pair of shoes, each one a quarter inch smaller than the previous pair. She mentions that her feet only hurt for the first couple of years. After two years, her feet were practically lifeless, and no longer felt any pain. Eventually, all the bones in her feet were broken, and her four toes were bent in a neat row towards the sole. This was done to make her feet look pretty for a future husband. Her father arranged that she would be married to her future husband, when she was nine years old.

Foot binding was a tradition in China that began in the 7th century and lasted until the early 20th century. It was seen as a symbol of wealth and status for affluent families, as only they could afford to have women with small feet who did not need to engage in physical labor. Additionally, foot binding was widely practiced because it represented women's purity and obedience and ensured that they would have a respectable marriage. The process involved binding the feet from a young age, typically starting at five or six years old, and continuing throughout adulthood. This involved breaking the bones in the feet to achieve the desired shape (Jackson, 1998).

Foot binding is believed to have originated from a court dancer named Yao Niang in the tenth century. She captivated Emperor Li Yu by dancing on her toes inside a golden lotus adorned with ribbons and precious stones. As the emperor's favorite concubine, other concubines tried to imitate her to gain favor. This practice started in the royal court and eventually spread throughout China, starting in the south and reaching the north. Wealthy court ladies then adopted foot binding as a status symbol. In Chinese culture, having small feet, similar to having a tiny waist in Victorian England, symbolized female refinement. Families with marriageable daughters saw foot size as a form of currency and a way to improve social status. The most desirable bride had a three-inch foot, known as a golden lotus, while a four-inch foot was considered respectable (silver lotus). Feet measuring five inches or longer were seen as undesirable (iron lotus), leading to poor marriage prospects. Foot binding not only changed the shape of the foot but also created a specific walking style that relied on the thigh and buttock muscles for support. From its inception, foot binding had erotic connotations (Foreman, 2015).

Forgiveness describes the habit of her husband, Blessing From Heaven, who calls her "First Wife" (Loomer, 1998, p.34) as they have been enjoying a meal together with traditional Chinese music sets the ambiance, Blessing eagerly instructs Forgiveness to remove her shoes. She complies, taking off her left shoe, Blessing then unwraps her left foot and passionately caresses and smells it. Just then, the maid enters with a bowl of leeches. Forgiveness places a leech on her toe and Blessing eats it off, exclaiming how delicious it is. He expresses his desire for more,



referring to Forgiveness as his "golden lotus" (Loomer, 1998, p.34). He attempts to remove her right shoe, but she resists. Despite her resistance, he forcefully removes the shoe, revealing a bloody bandage, causing him to scream in shock. Forgiveness explains it as a minor accident, comparing it to losing a petal from a flower, she said "Golden lotus... lost a petal" (Loomer, 1998, p.35). Blessing is angry, offended, and deeply pained because he only loves Forgiveness' foot. The golden lotus can symbolize the traditions of culture and the pressure of social norms. Forgiveness is unable to remove those shoes, which represents how she is chained with the traditions and social norms. Moreover, they represent the significance of cultural prejudice and customs that she has to deal with. The burden of traditions, portrayed by the golden lotus shoes, which limits her freedom and prevents her to find her true self, they also show her internal conflict between cultural traditions and her own independence, she is obliged to wear them from a young age even they uncomfortable for her.

When she inquires about what he has brought home, he says that he has brought silk, candlesticks, spices, and another wife. Curiously, she asks him about the age of the new wife, to which he replies that she is eleven. She then asks about her appearance, and he hesitantly admits that he supposes she is pretty. Wanting to know the name of the fifth wife, he mentions that her name is Precious Snow, but she decides to call her Precious Swallow instead. Expressing forgiveness, she compares her to the beauty of springtime and requests that he brings her so they can begin the binding process the next day. She reassures him that eleven is not too old and he thanks her. She mentions that tomorrow is a lucky day according to the moon. In this scene, there is a powerful portrayal of the delicate balance between pleasure and pain. Forgiveness welcomes her husband back from a journey, during which he has brought her luxurious items such as silks, spices, and even a new wife. However, the most significant gift he presents to her is opium. As he unwraps her feet, which are infected and emit a foul odor, the stench is so overwhelming that a servant in the adjacent room vomits, as if her feet hold the secret to all human desires (Winer, 1994).

Gender norms create unrealistic and exaggerated body image ideals. Although women have more opportunities in the workforce; societal expectations still prioritize their appearance. Women face even more pressure today to achieve perfection. The cultural image of the 'superwoman' expects women to excel in both work and family roles while looking flawless. It is important for society to critically examine the belief that women should effortlessly balance multiple roles without support. The emphasis on thinness is constantly evaluated, and the increased sexualization of women is a concern. Men's roles have not evolved as much as women's, but change is necessary to achieve gender equality. Men should be encouraged to prioritize nurturing and caretaking over



competition and dominance. Promoting minority cultures can help reduce gendered roles and broaden the definition of an ideal man and woman (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Forgiveness's husband sees her as a wife who must fulfill her duties. Even he does not call her by her name, he only calls her 'First Wife', although she is calling him "my Blessing" (Loomer, 1998, p.35). Furthermore, she has to take care of her physical features, especially her feet because her husband loves them, he ignores her only caring about her feet. His obsession with her feet reflects the impact of cultural traditions on him and when he knows that she has problems with them he stops caring for her and leaves her in the hospital dying from the pain of her feet. Furthermore, he has five wives, and the fifth wife is very young; she is eleven years old, and Forgiveness will bound her feet, she says "Bring her to me. So I can start the binding. Eleven is not too old" (Loomer 36).

Foot binding has both physical and emotional impact on women who bound their feet. Physically, it has an extreme and long-lasting effect on them, the painful process that these women go through including manipulating their bones shape and preventing their growth in a young age, in order to create a small foot in a certain shape that called the golden lotus, which are considered the ideal beauty in their culture. Bounding the feet can cause pain and infections, restrict movement, and lead to cases of deformity. Emotionally, foot binding can affect the women who undergo this practice. From a young age, girls are taught that to be beautiful and desirable is to have a small foot, and will be seen as more desired in marriage. In addition to the suffering and pain endured during the foot binding process can put a girl in small age in a huge pressure to follow these ideals can affect their mental health.

Victoria: The Victorian Corset

The second patient waiting in the clinic is Victoria, a woman in her early thirties, tightly corseted in the fashion of English Victorian era. She is curious, intelligent, and cunning, with strong opinions and impeccable manners that hide her inner panic, confusion, and sense of wonder. Victoria is being treated for hysteria which is defined in Cambridge Dictionary as an "extreme fear, excitement, anger, etc. that cannot be controlled". Hysteria is a severe psychological state where an individual overreacts to a stimulus. In the past, hysteria was believed to primarily affect women and was characterized by various symptoms such as anxiety, difficulty breathing, fainting, sleeplessness, irritability, nervousness, and even sexually suggestive behavior (Amin, 2019).

The concept of hysteria can be traced back to Ancient Greece, where Hippocrates and Plato discussed the wandering womb, known as hysteria, which was believed to be responsible for various physical and mental ailments (Cohut, 2020). The term 'hysteria' comes from the Greek word for uterus. The term itself is not ancient, and in ancient Greek medicine, the



term "hysterical suffocation" was used instead, referring to a sensation of heat and difficulty breathing. The name implies that the symptoms have a purely physical origin, but by associating them with the uterus, it implies that the disorder is exclusive to women (Gilman et al., 1993). Furthermore, the origins of hysteria can be traced back to ancient Egyptian texts called the Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus and the Ebers Papyrus. These texts, dating back to around 1825 BC and 1600 BC respectively, are among the oldest medical texts in history (Smith, 2011).

In the Victorian Era (1837-1901), it was common for women to keep a vial of smelling salts in their purse. This was because women were prone to fainting when they experienced strong emotions. It was believed that the strong scent of the salts would hold off the wandering womb, as suggested by Hippocrates, and bring it back to its proper position, thus helping the woman regain consciousness (Leff, 1982). Hysteria was commonly observed in Victorian middle-class women who were raised and conditioned to be submissive wives. This was their designated role and identity within society. Their upbringing differed greatly from that of the boys around them, who were encouraged to compete, learn, and explore. Boys faced physical punishment for misbehavior, rather than feelings of guilt or the threat of losing love. Smith-Rosenberg argues that as girls grew into adulthood, they often struggled with feelings of abandonment and dependency, lacking a strong sense of self. They were discouraged from asserting their abilities, strength, and skills, leading to a lack of ego development. With this inadequate preparation, they were expected to fulfill the demanding and conflicting expectations of domestic life. Women were expected to embody the ideals of the ideal wife and mother, as defined by society (Smith-Rosenberg, 1986). The Victorian cult of female invalidism served as a means of social control. It functioned as a dual symbol, similar to the concept of "beauty". On a personal level, women who were identified as invalids were able to exert some control over their lives, avoiding the burdensome expectations of sexuality and the risks associated with childbirth. They also received attention and care from sympathetic doctors. French writer Catherine Clément explains that hysteria was tolerated because it lacked the power to bring about cultural change. It was safer for the patriarchal order to allow discontented women to express their grievances through psychosomatic illness rather than advocating for economic and legal rights. Society placed pressure on leisured, educated, middle-class women to preempt any potential problems by feigning illness, and this enforced hypochondria felt genuine to the sufferer. Similarly, in contemporary times, societal pressure demands that women preempt the consequences of asserting ownership over their bodies by feeling unattractive. This forced lowering of self-esteem is perceived by the individual as ugly (Wolf, 2002).



Victoria mentions that it is an illness affecting the ovaries and believes that the ovaries have an influence on one's personality. She has conducted some research on the subject. Her husband, Oliver, is a doctor who is both proper and cheerful but has a hidden dark side that he keeps tightly buttoned. He recommends the rest cure as a treatment. Victoria has a tic where her lower arm involuntarily jerks out from her waist whenever she mentions the word husband, as if she is trying to swat someone. She explains that she has tried various treatments, yet nothing has worked, and her husband believes she has symptoms of ovarian disease. She describes her symptoms and expresses her desire to have her ovaries removed.

One of beauty and fashion pieces in the Victorian era is the corset. In the play Victoria mentions that is wearing a corset that has caused her waist size to be sixteen and says that she got her first corset when she was fourteen. She adds that the corset only hurts when she breathes. The corset is a garment made of layers of fabric and boning, tied to the body with laces at the back. Its design has changed over time and its origins are uncertain. The corset was used by women in various social contexts in the 19th century. Industrial processes and publications made it more accessible, and technological advancements made the Victorian corset unique in its ability to constrict. This allowed women from different social classes to wear corsets, defining the female silhouette of the time. Towards the end of the century, there were debates about the use of corsets, involving doctors, feminists, artists, and members of society. The corset faced criticism, particularly regarding public health and maternity (Pereira, 2020). Corsetry represents the power and restraint imposed on the female body, acting as a tool of control and exploitation by patriarchal society. It exists in a space between elegance and repression, empowerment and victimization (Steele, 2001). A Victorian corset created a significant amount of physical restriction. The boning on its curved panels were able to compress the breast, thorax, pelvis, and particularly the waist, shaping them into a different form. This was ideal for portraying a tired and unwell woman, plagued by fainting spells and hysteria (Mcclintock, 1995).

Despite being criticized for being unhealthy and uncomfortable, corsets were a popular fashion item in the 19th century. They were seen as a symbol of social status, respectability, and the desired youthful figure for women. Corsets were believed to provide support for women, who were considered the weaker gender. However, critics, including health professionals, argued that corsets could lead to various health issues such as cancer, anemia, birth defects, miscarriages, and damage to internal organs. The tightness of corsets also restricted lung capacity and could cause fainting. During the Victorian era, women had limited power and opportunities. They relied on men, first their fathers or guardians, and later their husbands, for support. It was expected for young women to be



submissive and obedient, following the wishes of their male figures. Their intelligence and wit were only allowed to be displayed in social gatherings and entertaining conversations (Monet, 2023). Victorian corsets were commonly strengthened with whalebone and tightly laced around the waist to enhance the desired hourglass shape. However, wearing them regularly could lead to breathing difficulties, digestion issues, and the deformation of the ribs and spine (Sherrin, 2022). Victoria wore the corset when she was fourteen, and as the time passes it starts to ruin her body causing her multiple health problems, she says "the doctor says the corset compressing my stomach, dislocating the kidneys, crushing my liver, and constricting the heart but is pretty, isn't it?" (Loomer, 1998, p.49).

Victoria's husband is afraid and concerned about the children of having their mother away from them in hospitals and rest cures. Oliver suggests that Victoria may not want to get well and prefers to let their children be raised by someone else. But at the end of the play, Oliver tells Victoria that she has become fine, and she can go back home. Victoria goes back to her husband and daughters even one of them has a cold. She says that her family needs her. She goes with her husband without being cured with the continuity of pain and possibility of death. Victoria pays the price of the cultural beauty ideals of having a slim waist to please her husband.

The corset presents the expectations placed on woman by sociocultural factors. It shows how women are forced to submit to beauty ideals which cause discomfort, they have to wear it in order to be considered beautiful.

Wanda: Modern Plastic Surgery

The third character is Wanda, a modern American woman from Jersey, in her forties. She has large breasts and has 'perfected' her appearance in every way. She is bold, with a great sense of humor, but also vulnerable despite her street smarts. She is smarter than she lets on. Wanda has a rhinoplasty, but the doctors have removed too much cartilage, so she had to have the procedure redone. Additionally, she has made a chin augmentation to match her new nose. Liposuction was performed on her tummy and thighs to enhance her cheekbones. She also received breast implants as a gift from her father for her thirtieth birthday. So, she had previous breast implants, got new ones, and still has the ones she currently has. She says, "It's funny, I can keep a couch for six years, but I can't keep a pair of breasts for six months." (Loomer, 1998, p.17).

The play tackles the issue of societal pressure and its influence on body dysmorphic disorder. Wanda is seeking physical perfection through plastic surgery. This leads to have Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), it is a mental disorder characterized by a distorted perception of one's appearance. The benefits of plastic surgery vary from person to person, with many patients expressing regret for not undergoing the procedure



earlier. This led to an obsessed with a perceived flaw in their appearance that is actually normal or very minor. Nevertheless, there are also individuals who regret their decision or wish they had conducted more research or chosen a different surgeon (Scott).

Wanda's obsession with plastic surgery shows that she has BDD, at first, she has a nose job, and this leads her to have other surgeries in her face to match her nose. But she does not have plastic surgeries on her face only, she has several surgeries in different parts of her body. This shows how Wanda has become obsessed with her appearance and starts to see her body in a fragmented way, she wants to conceal any imperfection in her body. This obsession with minor flaws and led her to undergone extreme number of plastic surgeries to have an idealized look. In addition, she lies about her real age claiming that she is in her thirties while in fact she is in her forties in order to look young to people. She believes that "If you're young and beautiful, some old broad's gonna try to knock you off. And if you're ugly or old, you're screwed" (Loomer, 1998, p.74).

Wanda has a problem with her breast implants. She has three breasts as she describes them because the foam of the implant disintegrated and became rigid. Wanda mentions that she only feels pain when watching TV shows about complications from breast implants. She asks the doctor's opinion on removing her implants. He informs Wanda that the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) believes there is not enough evidence to justify removing silicone implants if the woman is not experiencing symptoms. Wanda is relieved by this information. Because mammogram do not have a clear image, she has done a biopsy which showed that she has a tumor, breast cancer in advanced stages, and she has to be treated.

Wanda tells Victoria that cancer is present in her body. It is not in Victoria's body, or the doctor's body. It is the one thing that she has left that is solely hers, for better or worse, until death separates. It is about having control over her own body. Struggling to hold back tears, she refuses any medical treatment telling her doctor, "No thank you very much," crying, "Please, God, help me!" (Loomer, 1998, p.70). Furthermore, she says for once in her miserable and messed up life it is her body and belongs to her, she says "MY BODY! MY BODY! It belongs to me." (Loomer, 1998, p. 70). She explains that she has calculated 6,750 hours of her life dedicated to her hair. It took her nine months to remove her waterproof mascara. She says that she will save a lot of time by not worrying about her appearance and should take some time to make decisions about her body. Wanda, who has undergone multiple cosmetic surgeries on her cheeks, nose, jaw, and breasts, is considered to be the most unsettling character. Despite her obsession with physical appearance, Wanda surprisingly demonstrates some understanding of feminist ideology. Like many women, Wanda has



realized it is challenging to resist the societal expectations to conform the traditional ideals of beauty (Winer, 1994).

In the play, norms of beauty that result from sexist ideologies are depicted through body-altering practices such as foot binding, corseting, and breast implants. These practices serve as dramaturgical devices that allow women to confront the expectations imposed on them by their cultures, reject male-defined beauty standards, and find a sense of sisterhood. By examining the politics surrounding the female body in the play, it becomes clear that women have historically been devalued and objectified, while men have been seen as intellectually superior. Certain cultural practices, such as foot binding, long necks, or thin waists, have been associated with beauty in specific regions and time periods. These practices have reduced women to mere body parts and distracted them from pursuing social equality. The play effectively explores the politics surrounding the body and medical practices, with the goal of challenging patriarchal systems. Its non-linear narrative, which jumps through different times and places, highlights the culture-specific definitions of beauty and emphasizes that women bear the consequences of conforming to male-dominated beauty standards (Bhattacharjee & Ray, 2018). Body images and their attractiveness are not fixed entities. Individuals constantly shape and reshape their own body image as well as the image of others. Through this ongoing process, they exchange parts of their own body image with others, leading to a continuous socialization of body images (Schilder, 1935).

Conclusion

For ages women have been subjected to beauty standards imposed by society, resulting in a culture of social pressure. These ideals influence what is considered attractive and desirable, which can lead to low self-worth and feeling of misery. One of the beauty aspects that society has led to its growth is plastic surgery, which has been practiced for a long time, exceedingly back to ancient civilization, when it was used to restore broken body parts. The causes for undergoing plastic surgery, as well as the procedures have evolved over time and currently its used to improve appearance. In *The Waiting Room*, Loomer presents the character of Wanda who has done different cosmetic surgeries by doctors in different parts of her body, she believes that altering her physical appearance will lead to a better life and increased her self-worth. Furthermore, the playwright reveals the unrealistic beauty standards imposed by society to seek validation through plastic surgery. Both Forgiveness From Heaven and Victoria have their plastic surgery done differently by their society. Forgiveness has her feet pounded by her mother which changed her feet shape to fit her cultural standard of beauty. Victoria has to wear a corset to make her waist look thin to follow her social codes. Furthermore, *The*



Waiting Room highlights the consequences and risks of surgical procedures, it shows the complications that the three women encounter with their bodies, emphasizing the potential danger that come with alerting one's appearance to be socially valued. Also, its emphasis on the significance of women's right to make decision about their bodies.

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