

How to organise your body 101: postfeminism and the (re)construction of the female body through *How to Look Good Naked*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the attention given by recent makeover shows, and specifically *How to Look Good Naked*, to the ‘underneath’ as a way of (re)organising the female body. I examine whether this ‘turn’ or change in media’s direction is an appreciation of the real female body (an unmodified body) or whether this is a mere (re-)organisation of the body into a controllable base of overall appearance and a further embedding of Western conceptions of beauty and of the notion that the manipulation of appearance is essential to the construction of the feminine identity and to the measure of women’s social worth. Informed by postfeminist discourse and critique, I analyse the British reality makeover television show *How to Look Good Naked*, discuss the extent to which it actually provides an alternative to prevailing cultural discourses around feminine beauty and scrutinise the impact that it seems to have on the identities of the women who participate. I analyse how the show, as the ultimate postfeminist show, inscribes gendered identities and practices, and I examine how postfeminism has created spaces for such shows to exist and affirm hegemonic gender constructions based on consumption practices.

Keywords

body image, femininity, *How to Look Good Naked*, identity, makeover shows, postfeminism, reality TV

Introduction

This article has a twofold aim: to bring once more into light the much-scrutinised discourse of postfeminism and its connections with popular culture and to highlight a ‘turn’

in media towards the importance of the ‘underneath’, the appreciation of the unmodified female body and the implications of this turn. McRobbie (2009) defined postfeminism as a new kind of anti-feminism and not as simply a backlash against feminist ideas, as it has been previously defined. McRobbie (2009) argued that popular culture has influenced this era of feminism and has rendered it into something ‘unpalatable and non-transmissible,

a social movement of which there is little likelihood of it being revived or renewed' (p. 150). While her analysis of how popular reality television shows, and particularly makeover shows, can create what she calls a 'women's movement', a term used to denote both the transformation of women and a kind of social mobility of class and status, in this article, I argue that makeover shows can also be seen through the lens of how the body can be '(re)modified' and (re)organised into a controllable base of the overall appearance, which has undeniable effects for the identity of the people who participate.

In the recent past, reality television makeover shows around the world have been concerned with the transformation of women (and sometimes men) into stylish, younger, thinner people by dressing them better or by encouraging them to 'be modified' by cosmetic surgery. From *Extreme Makeover* (US and Australian spin-offs) and *Swan* (United States) to *10 Years Younger* (United Kingdom) and *What not to Wear* (UK, and US and Australian editions), these reality shows were or are concerned with transforming their participants into 'new' people, giving emphasis on the transformation of their bodies and how others perceive them. In this article, I highlight how some makeover shows, in the United Kingdom in the light of a postmodern, postfeminist era that advocates an individualistic, reflexive and corporeal sense of 'who I am', have made a turn towards appreciating the (female) body and that a woman's self-importance, self-esteem and body image can be restored if she is merely encouraged to appreciate her body and learn how to manage it. Can these shows then uncover new discourses of femininity or is this a mere reconstruction of the female body and reorganisation of the prevailing ideals of femininity that have simply attuned to different practices of consumption?

Scholars have been examining and interrogating reality makeover shows in the West for their intentions such as presenting a classed and gendered self (McRobbie, 2009; Wood and Skeggs, 2004), advocating the idea that a healthy relationship between mostly heterosexual couples depends on unrestricted consumerism (Allatson, 2004), normalising cosmetic surgery as a means of becoming the 'ideal' woman (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006), projecting a woman's body as fragmented body parts that need separate focus in order to improve body image and which then constitutes body image as a socially constructed notion (Gallagher and Pecot-Hébert, 2007), and, in general, pursuing the feminisation of British TV and its impact on how women have become re-traditionalised, mostly relating to the idea of choice and individuality of female representations on TV (Ball, 2012).

In this article, I will be taking a closer look at the British version of the popular makeover show *How to Look Good Naked (HTLGN)* in order to examine how this show is ostensibly aiming for an appreciation of the 'real', unmodified female body, one that does not need the expensive consumption practices of cosmetic surgery and modification, but one that can be (re)constructed with other more practical and cheaper technologies. Recent scholarship on makeover television has been examining and scrutinising this particular show because of its different 'script', which, with a more sympathetic and supportive language, focuses on the transformation of women by a gradual development of body confidence. However, the attempts to examine this show's different intentions are

not only very recent but also very few. Some of the most important attempts include Rodrigues' (2012) analysis of how the show builds body confidence by inciting the show's participants to self-govern, Kadir and Tidy's (2013) exposé of how *HTLGN* (re)produces a regime of discipline through the 'gaze' in order to maintain gendered cultural boundaries and Frith et al.'s (2010, 2012) argument that *HTLGN* does not use the humiliation language commonly used in other makeover shows but instead has an alternative discourse of 'niceness', which ultimately results in a recognition of women's power and agency, and a more sexualised feminine 'glamour'.

My aim in this article is to also 'undress' the particular show and discuss the extent to which it actually provides an alternative to prevailing cultural discourses around feminine beauty and to interrogate the impact that it seems to have on the identities of the women who participate. Informed by postfeminist discourse and critique, I will be scrutinising the show as an example of postfeminist media culture in terms of how it inscribes gendered identities and practices. I will also examine how postfeminism has created spaces for such shows to exist and has affirmed hegemonic gender constructions based on consumption practices. I start by revisiting some of the debates around the definitions of postfeminism and how, as a discourse, postfeminism has transformed media culture, and I describe *HTLGN*'s structure as well as discuss its similarity with an older makeover show, Trinny and Susannah's *Undress the Nation* (*UTN*), in order to demonstrate makeover TV's turn to appreciating the unmodified, 'real' female body. Finally, I expose how *HTLGN* has become the ultimate postfeminist show by promoting a very basic 'lesson' to women's transformation, which eventually leads to the homogenisation and standardisation of female identity.

Postfeminism, popular culture and the 'reflexive self'

Ginia Bellafante (1998) described postfeminism as the 'Camille Paglia syndrome' (p. 58). This famous illustration came from the American author and feminist Camille Paglia and was intended to describe the well-known TV dramas *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*. However, it still applies more broadly to what postfeminism is all about. Bellafante (1998) argued that Paglia's work help project feminism as more than just an ideology of victimhood, and she applauded Paglia's declaration that 'it is men who are the weaker sex because they have remained eternally powerless over their desire for the female body' (p. 58).

In Susan Faludi's (1992) *Backlash*, she suggested that feminism has committed crimes against women. Women, Faludi said, have turned their backs on femininity and their 'natural biological imperatives' (Whelehan, 2000: 17) as they have entered the public sphere. But backlash feminists, such as Faludi, Paglia, Naomi Wolf and others, have been criticised as putting forward new definitions of feminism that are 'built on an array of rhetorically savvy terms and misleading oppositions: "victim feminism" vs. "power feminism"' (Karlyn, 2006: 59).

Postfeminist discourse has a diverse set of definitions, whether in the epistemologies of postfeminism or the ‘Third Wave feminism’ in popular culture. On one hand, postfeminism has had a clear demarcation in scholarly discourse, similar to postmodernism and postcolonialism (McRobbie, 2009), and on the other hand, it has been treated as the depoliticised product of ‘backlash’ rhetoric (Brooks, 1997; Faludi, 1992; Munford, 2004). In fact, Kim (2001: 321) noted the three approaches that have been said to define postfeminism: as the post second-wave era especially in the 1990s, as a backlash rhetoric (mentioned above) and as a frame of reference which comprises the intersection of postfeminism with other movements like postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism. Other feminists, like Stéphanie Genz (2006), have argued that postfeminism should not be considered a polarised discourse since this prevents the engagement with ‘postfeminist plurality’ and proclaims postfeminism as ‘easily categorized and contained in well-defined boxes’ (p. 336). Postfeminism has been and still is a subject of considerable debate, being criticised for its apolitical intentions since women now, arguably, enjoy access to education, employment and new family arrangements (Aronson, 2003: 904) – an attitude influenced further by the media and popular culture, which imply that feminist action is no longer needed. Indeed, postfeminism has been viewed as the ‘overcoming’ of feminism.

More recently, feminist scholars (McRobbie, 2008; Tasker and Negra, 2007) have located postfeminism within consumer culture and have argued that women’s feelings of empowerment, that is, choice and agency, have been commodified in the marketing of goods. The autonomous femininity emphasised by postfeminists has now also acquired an increasing political dimension, that of neoliberal subjectivity. Evans and Riley (2013) argue that ‘[t]he discourses of postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumerism are thus enacted in complex and interconnected ways’ (p. 270). And indeed, within this matrix of discourses, women have become consumer citizens (Gill, 2007, 2008; Jackson et al., 2012). Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) maintain that

Women are to unproblematically inhabit both a masculine, rational, productive, worker self, and a (hetero)sexualized feminine, (appropriately) reproductive identity that *both* consumes itself into being and *is* the object of consumption. (p. 231, emphasis added)

The projections of postfeminist icons within popular culture are explicitly strong and have troubled feminists with multiple examples until today. Gorton (2004) echoed this thought, saying, ‘[p]opular representations of feminism in the media sell: [... I] mages of independent women appeal to a wide audience’ (p. 154). Indeed, popular images of women with successful careers, sexual desirability and freedom have been projected in the media and particularly in TV dramas. But the ‘overcoming of feminism’ suggested above is seen as a promotion of an over-sexualised version of femininity and embedded in consumption practices. Media studies and/or feminist writers have raised considerable debates regarding postfeminist discourse, analysing some of the most popular TV dramas and movies of the late 1990s and early 2000s that changed the way women are portrayed in popular culture. These include the TV dramas *Ally McBeal*

(Fox, 1997–2002) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004) and the movie adaptation of Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and its sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004). Whelehan (2000) pointed out, particularly about Bridget Jones, that

it might be seen as a 'post-feminist' text in the sense that feminist values are situated as somewhere in the past or as an uneasy conscience to a woman who finds the newspeak of the 'biological' accounts of sexual difference more comforting. (p. 137)

Feminist evaluations of these drama series and movies argue that by satirising the everyday struggles of the heroines with their careers and sex lives, media has turned the eye away from any serious challenge of hierarchical relations and instead has given emphasis to how a woman's source of worth is practised through sexual freedom and consumption of style (Aronson, 2003; Arthurs, 2003; Gill, 2003; Tincknell et al., 2003). However, Arthurs (2003) suggested that there is a counter-argument that

feminine cultures of consumerism and fashion ... as a source of pleasure and power ... [are] potentially resistant to male control. Indeed they can offer women an alternative route to self-esteem and autonomy that overcomes the damaging division that second-wave feminism constructs between feminism and femininity. (p. 87)

Indeed, while scholarly discourse has turned its gaze towards subjectivity and placed emphasis on self-governing and self-fashioning, and while issues of reflexivity in postmodernist theory reveal that women's concerns have shifted to 'how do I improve myself?', popular culture has followed by stressing individuality and issues of self-regulation and self-improvement, processes that have been extended through the 'com-modifying pressures of consumer culture' (Williams, 1998: 73). Individuals are now encouraged, both by scholarly discourse and by popular culture, to become reflexive, to make the right choices and to invest in their own structures. McRobbie (2009) stressed that women

must do this internally and individualistically, so that self-monitoring practices (the diary, the life-plan, the career pathway) replace reliance on set ways and structured pathways. Self-help guides, personal advisors, lifestyle coaches and gurus and all sorts of self-improvement TV programmes provide the cultural means by which individualisation operates as a social process. (p. 19)

Undeniably, we have seen a rise in lifestyle and reality TV shows that are dedicated to helping, usually women, to improve themselves and to manage their self-esteem. While the perpetuation of beauty ideals of slimness and youthfulness gave rise to self-improvement regimes and consumption practices such as cosmetic surgery (Bordo, 2004), the media followed with a genre of makeover TV shows where fashion gurus and

stylists ‘makeover’ women, and sometimes men, by transforming their way of dressing or by transforming them literally after encouraging them to undergo cosmetic modifications such as tummy-tucks, liposuction, breast augmentations or chemical peeling, especially in the name of overturning the effects of ageing. British TV has hosted several such makeover shows, including *What Not to Wear* (BBC 1 and BBC 2, 2001–2007), *Would Like to Meet* (BBC 2, 2001–2003), *10 Years Younger* (Channel 4, 2004–present), *HTLGN* (Channel 4, 2006–present), *UTN* (ITV, 2006–2007) and other.

Makeover shows: going beyond the ‘movement of women’

Reality TV, in general, has gained ground over the past decade and particularly in the guise of makeover shows that emerged at the turn of the new millennium as a guide for women (and men) who have ‘lost the plot’ and who can be transformed in order to improve their appearance, status and self-esteem. These ‘social makeovers’ have a transformative character not only in that they change the physical appearance of the women participants but also in that they bring an ‘internal change as [they] can improve their self-esteem, confidence and help them to acquire cultural and social capital’ (McRobbie, 2009), thus fitting well into the demanding expectations of a fashionable appearance. Women’s skills in dressing better and in taking care of their hair, skin and overall look have been connected with acquiring knowledge of how to look better and an overall success in how their family and society, in general, see and accept them, which in Bourdieusian terms we would call cultural capital. The epicentre of these TV programmes is how to work on the distorted self- and body image that render women almost invisible. McRobbie (2009) noted,

[N]ow it has become a feature of women’s lives, indeed almost an entitlement, to move from the shadows, into the spotlight of visibility, into a luminosity which has the effect of a dramatisation of the individual, a kind of spectacularisation of feminine subjectivity, which becomes the norm. (p. 125)

This postfeminist sense of agency seems, though, to be deceptive as it not only assigns women the responsibility and guilt of ‘letting themselves go’ but also leaves them with the responsibility of getting themselves back on track. Women’s body image, including looking good, and their confidence have become commodities, and these shows assume that women can always afford financially to buy self-esteem (Rodrigues, 2012).

Chapter 5 in McRobbie’s (2009) *Aftermath of Feminism* deals with three popular makeover shows on the UK television, aired between 2002 and 2004. These were *What Not to Wear* and *Would Like to Meet*, both BBC TV programmes, and *10 Years Younger* on Channel 4. She used the term ‘women’s movement’ to denote the transformation of women and their movement from a state of unfashionable appearance and low self-

confidence and esteem to a state of stylish appearance and bolstered self-confidence. This 'movement' brought the women participants into the visible terrains of fashion and style, thus re-acquiring their lost self-importance. The term 'women's movement' for McRobbie (2009) also denoted a kind of social mobility in terms of how class and status were being defined. She noted that the outcome of these programmes was

a more glamourised and individualised feminine subjectivity. The woman who is made-over embodies the values of the new, aspirational lower middle-class, in which she has a more autonomously feminine identity. (p. 10)

Indeed, scholarship on makeover shows has emphasised their transformational character where participants seek expert help and intervention to transform their physical appearances. The final, well-anticipated moment, the 'big reveal' as it is usually called, when participants get to see the final result, is usually a big surprise for them but for the viewers as well since some parts of the makeover, mostly towards the end result, are not visible to the viewers. Thus, participants become a pleasurable spectacle (Moseley, 2000) not only for themselves but also for the audience. Heyes (2007) argued that a makeover show 'tells a sanitized fairy tale of identity becoming, in which the makeover enables the recipient to achieve longstanding personal goals presented as intrinsic to her own individual authenticity' (p. 21).

HTLGN delivers the same transformational values to its female participants. Although the first connotation of McRobbie's 'women's movement' is still the rationale of this show, one thing changed: this show emphasises showing the 'real' bodies of women, bodies that have not been modified. And it encourages women to appreciate their bodies with all their faults and their incompatibility with the standards of beauty promoted by the rest of the media representations. By advocating 'quasi-feminist terms of empowerment and antibeautey' (Rodrigues, 2012), this show has made a turn towards the 'underneath' (p. 48) as an important element of women's identity, and there is a clear declamation that a woman's body, no matter its shape and size, can still be appreciated and adorned without any surgical cosmetic modification.

So, what brought this change about? After years of being fed images and icons of prevailing ideals of beauty, attractiveness and overall femininity that embraced youthfulness and slimness and digitally modified images of women, we are now gazing at chubby bodies, big breasts and fat tummies which are celebrated by the same genre of reality TV that had previously set out to 'fix' them. Is this a turn to alternative, more 'real' and achievable standards of beauty? Is the 'movement' now a transformation of ideas about how to appreciate the 'real', unmodified female body?

The 'other' show

This turn towards the non-intrusive approach to makeover was simultaneously initiated

by *HTLGN* and by the UK fashion gurus and popular duo Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine. These presenters had done a series of makeover shows, starting from a BBC TV show *What Not to Wear* and then moving to ITV as *Trinny and Susannah Dressing*. Their last show *UTN* aired on ITV1 in 2007, but it stopped airing in 2009 after two successful series with the first episode of the series attracting about 5.1 million viewers (Tryhorn, 2007). The popularity of the show, though, earned them a whole season of a similar show (*Making Over America*) in the United States aired in January 2009 on TLC and a season in Australia (*The Australia Makeover Mission*) aired in April 2011 on The LifeStyle Channel. Their latest series, *The Makeover Mission*, is aired in 12 countries around the world, with spin-offs like *Makeover Mission – India* (TLC).

At the end of the second series of *UTN* (ITV1), some spin-off episodes were shown with different titles and a specific theme, like *The Great British Body*. While the rationale of *UTN* was the same as the earlier shows, that is, participants were made over by transforming their outer appearance and self-image, but with this show, something was different. It included more than one participant and on some occasions a large number of women, and it was more concerned with the ‘inside’, the ‘underneath’, that is, the naked body and women’s inner self. *UTN* was different in the sense that the duo was explicitly shown to be more sensitive to the ‘body and self-misfortunes’ of the participants. Compared to the

‘humiliation’ and ‘bossiness’ of their previous shows, which particularly dictated *What Not to Wear*, *UTN* mimicked the more supportive language of *HTLGN*, as Gok was considered to be ‘genuinely non-judgmental’ and the show, in general, was thought to be TV’s ‘most benign makeover show’ (Cooke, cited in Frith et al., 2010). The title *UTN* indicated its aims: to ‘undress’ the participants and to reconstruct their bodies, not by plastic surgery but with better-fitted underwear and tailored clothes. The fashion experts travelled around the country with a pink cubicle (the ‘pink pot’ as they called it) comprising a camera and mirrors on all sides as a ‘confessional’ booth for women (and sometimes men). There, and similar to *HTLGN*, women, either alone or with the two presenters, looked at their bodies or confessed their ‘body woes’. There was a lot of emphasis on the ageing process, and women sometimes burst into tears as they contemplated their younger, pre-maternal or pre-aged body. This series apparently took a more ‘humanitarian’ role to present women’s and men’s bodies in their natural form without the need for surgical procedures. The turn to the underneath was quite evident in the first series, having episodes that targeted British women’s breasts and bums. They emphasised the need for the appreciation of the body and celebrated it with spin-off episodes like the three-part episode *The Great British Body* where the presenters got naked with other people, men and women, and laid on a hillside in Sussex in order to create two living sculptures.

All the episodes had a similar structure, which included, after the confessional booth, a line-up of women with different body sizes or ages (according to the theme of the episode), and the participant was asked to place herself where she thought she fit. The participant then placed herself between women who were a lot heavier than she, and the presenters would emphasise the fact that the participant’s distorted body image made

her feel much worse than she should for how she actually looked. Through a process of re-education on how to shop for the proper clothes, control-pants and underwear, makeup and hair styling, the women were then transformed into ‘new women’. On several occasions and again similar to *HTLGN*, the final event was a catwalk where women would demonstrate their new and improved self-image with commentaries on how different they felt after the makeover.

HTLGN

HTLGN is presented by fashion stylist Gok Wan and was first aired by Channel 4 in 2006. Channel 4 (2014) headline of the show:

Gok Wan presents the inspirational fashion series that shows women how to look fantastic with their clothes on or off no matter what their body shape – and all without a surgeon’s scalpel in sight.

There is a clear emphasis throughout all episodes that women can improve their body shape and thus their body image without undergoing cosmetic surgery. Each episode follows the same structure, where a woman usually loathes her body, has low self-confidence and does not like to show her naked body even to her partner. Gok’s target in each episode is to reinstate the ‘victim’s’ confidence usually by making her see her body through the eyes of others and then to teach her how to dress more appropriately and how

to pamper herself. In the end, the participants are confident enough to do a photo shoot with no clothes on, take part in a catwalk show in their underwear and ‘feel good’ about being naked.

First, Gok sets out to introduce the participant of each show, who is usually dressed in shapeless, dark, ‘non-feminine’ clothes. She is then stripped to her underwear, usually a plain black or white cotton set of underwear, in front of a large, three-way mirror. While the woman stares at her body, she confesses what she does not like about it and what went wrong, a process that sometimes ends with the woman in tears as she reports feeling exposed, disgusted and ashamed for neglecting her body and ultimately herself. In the following weeks, while the episode is being recorded, the presenter conjures up various techniques to make the woman appreciate the parts of her body that she does not like. The first technique, similar to Trinny and Susannah’s, is for the presenter to take the participant in her underwear, in front of a line-up of women of different sizes (in an order of measured body size) which serves as a corporeal comparison (Rodrigues, 2012). Then, the presenter asks her to identify the place she thinks she belongs, that is, what size she is according to the line-up. Gok then corrects the woman by moving her to the right position (usually a smaller body size). The second technique is to put a large poster in a public space with the image of the woman in her underwear for other people to see and

comment on. Next, Gok gets the participant into well-fitted underwear, including usually a body control suit or vest to hold in the body, structuring it to accentuate the parts of the body that are connected with femininity, such as the hips, breasts and waist. Then, Gok tackles the woman's wardrobe and takes on the mission to teach his participant to dress stylishly and to understand what looks great on her according to her body shape. The woman is then pampered with various cosmetic treatments like exfoliation and so on, she gets a more sophisticated hairstyle that accompanies the overall change and she is given professional makeup. The whole process boosts the woman's confidence, and as she realises her transformation in the big reveal, she is asked to do a nude photo shoot and then participate in a catwalk show where she showcases her transformation in both clothes and new underwear.

Another feature of the programme is market research for the best body products such as body creams, moisturisers and others, where a large group of women test some of the most popular products on the market and report if these actually do the job. Moreover, in each episode, Gok gives style tips and advice on what the latest fashion trends are and also guidance for common women's 'issues' with dressing, like what a properly fitted bra looks like and more.

The lesson: six steps to a makeover

My aim in referring to both *HTLGN* and *UTN*, although no new episodes are being filmed for the former and the latter is no longer on air, was to highlight the similarity of the shows in their underlining efforts to transform women. Both makeover shows, although different in style and idea, follow the same structure and in fact the same procedural makeover regimes. They seem to advocate a very simple way, actually only six steps, towards women's transformation to their new selves and their re-constructed feminine identity:

Step 1. Admit and confess your distorted body image. The mirror effect aims towards an admittance of the problematic areas of the body, which consequently have led these women to let 'go'. The following steps aim towards normalising these body parts.

Step 2. See yourself through the eyes of others. These shows advocated that body size and problem areas had become exaggerated in the mind of these women and reduced their self-confidence. Compliments from others about parts of the body motivated them to regain a sense of reflexivity and self-control.

Step 3. Body control. Bodies must be 'pulled' in and 'controlled' with the correct underwear. Body suits and control underwear, or 'magic knickers' as Trinny and Susannah called them, are essential to any shopping experience and general appearance. Gok says repeatedly in the show that they provide a clean silhouette where the outer clothes can be then better supported.

Step 4. Wardrobe replacement. Fashion regimes advocate that there is specific clothing that each woman must wear according to her body shape. Depending on body shape,

attention must be driven away from ‘trouble’ areas and given to areas that can complement the silhouette and overall appearance.

Step 5. Pamper yourself. An overall makeover deserves an overall transformation and attention should be given to hair and skin. A new hairstyle supposedly enhances these women’s appearance and shows off youthfulness. Clean and pampered skin is said to peel off years and make them feel like a new woman.

Step 6. Be gazed upon. The overall transformation is then adored and becomes a subject of applause. The women appear to be full of confidence and excited about their transformation.

While the underlining theme of all makeover TV is for women (or men) who participate to acquire body confidence, and the whole process has the aim of fixing their body image, the two shows described here, and of course particularly *HTLGN* differ in the sense that body confidence and body image are acquired gradually through these steps and without any intrusive makeover methods that ultimately lead to an internal change and achievement of self-esteem. Thus, the show aims for a long-term internal change, which is far more practical than what other, more intrusive makeover shows, for example, *10 Years Younger*, would advocate. This trope of change is more attractive and supposedly more practical and feasible to all women as the show reveals tips, advice and ‘secrets’ for women to follow in their own pursuit of transformation. The portrayal of ‘real’ female bodies in *HTLGN* emphasises the idea that self-esteem is integral to overcoming body hatred and the distorted body image.

Dion et al. (cited in Grogan, 1999) were the first to recognise, in 1972, that physical attractiveness leads to a judgement of positive personal qualities. Grogan (1999) also cited Eagley who suggested that there is also a link between physical attractiveness and perceptions of social competence, such as sociability and popularity. Although the idealisation of female slenderness began in the 20th century, and in fact the plump and full female body that symbolised the reproductive nature of women was adored by artists and was previously considered the feminine ideal (Fallon, 1990), fuller bodies have come to be associated with laziness and lack of control (Bordo, 2004). The image of women running treadmills is constantly portrayed in the media, and it is associated with successful and self-disciplined women of the 21st century. Indeed, studies show that fuller people are viewed as ‘less happy, more self-indulgent, less self-confident, less self-disciplined, lazier, and less attractive’ (Grogan, 1999: 11). As a result, Bordo (2004) argued that ‘[m]ost women in our culture, then, are “disordered” when it comes to issues of self-worth, self-entitlement, self-nourishment, and comfort with their own bodies’ (p. 57). Indeed, one of the main problems of women today as advocated by the media and popular culture in general and clearly accentuated by makeover shows is their distorted body image.

What body image really means is debatable, and different sets of definitions have been given depending on the background of the researchers. Paul Schilder (1950) was the first to investigate the psychology and sociology of the term in 1920, and in a later work, he defined body image as

the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves. Grogan (1999: 3), on the other hand, defined body image as ‘a person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body in order to include a sense of embodiment in the term. (p. 11)

However, the paradox with *HTLGN* is that body image and body confidence for the women participants seem to acquire meaning through the eyes of others. Other people’s thoughts about these women’s bodies become paramount in defining their body image and part of their gradual acquiring of self-esteem. It also reaffirms the idea that self-esteem and self-confidence are inscribed on women’s bodies, which resonates Gill’s (2007) assumption that today’s media portray women’s (sexy) body as key source to their identity:

The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgments of female attractiveness. (p. 149)

The idea that the body is central to women’s identity, according to Gill (2007), is one of the relatively staple features that constitutes the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses today’s media. Consequently, femininity becomes a ‘bodily property rather than a social, structural or psychological one’ (p. 149). *HTLGN* then undeniably can be described as a postfeminist media. As Gill argues, following the idea that the body is a source of power for women, the body then becomes the window to the individual’s inner life. And indeed, *HTLGN* aims for an internal examination of the women who participate in the show, a confession about their distorted body image and then the gradual achievement of an internal transformation which then reinstates self-esteem. There is a clear emphasis on women being confident in who they are, being empowered and taking control of their bodies and themselves, notions that are central to postfeminist discourse. Thus, a feeling of agency is ascribed to women who become responsible to present themselves as desirable subjects. Scrutinising this argument from a Foucauldian perspective, it seems that power in this sense constructs women’s own subjectivity. The dramatic last scenes of the show where women are photographed naked and also walk down the runway in their underwear to be gazed upon by their families and the public distract from the sartorial makeover; the appreciation of the unmodified female body distracts the viewers from the

reality: women have been made over with consumption, that is, beauty regimes, fashion and self-surveillance.

Conclusion

The six-step guide is an inference of how *HTLGN* achieves its self-esteem project.

There is an utmost certainty, shown not only in the advices from Gok but also from the rationale and 'sameness' of each episode; if these steps are followed, then body image and thus self-confidence and self-esteem can be improved. It is a 'perceptual pedagogy' (Bordo, 2004: xviii). Indeed, Bordo argued that the digitally modified pictures of women in the media have 'taught' us how a woman should look. Similarly, the endeavour of Gok to 'teach' women to appreciate their bodies, organise them better, pull them in and then dress them better 'results' in a re-education around the social imperatives around femininity. This has been the same 'lesson' for the US version of the show and a lot of other shows that follow the same makeover pattern like Trinny and Susannah's shows in the United States and around the world. The lesson is simple and basic: *How to organise your body 101*. The result of this lesson, though, is a homogenisation and standardisation of female identity which goes against the postfeminist promotion of unique individuality and feeling special about 'who you are'.

Thus, to answer the question I previously asked, about whether the 'movement' is not just a transformation but a movement away from conventional ideals of beauty, is that the seeming turn away from cosmetic modifications and to the appreciation of the 'natural' body is indeed evident, and it is clearly emphasised throughout the show. But the show's 'alternative' script does not really provide alternative femininities. In contrast, it reaffirms gender boundaries and constructs gendered identities and practices, by complying with the standards of slenderness, youthfulness and the idea that appearance is interlinked with social worth.

So, what has changed? The lesson! Women are now advised to re-organise their body in order to regain their social worth and social capital. Drawing from the discourse of postfeminism and popular culture, the attention to this self-organisation has led to the rise of stylists, fashionistas and women's magazines with fashion tips and style guides that advise on how to be a new woman by re-structuring the body and the self. The case is the same here. This reorganisation entails pulling-in the body and controlling it with the right underwear and clothing, so it becomes a controllable base of the overall appearance and thus further embedding Western ideals of beauty and of the notion that the manipulation of appearance is essential to the construction of the feminine identity and to the measure of women's social worth. Postfeminist discourse has thus created spaces for such shows to exist and to affirm hegemonic gender constructions based on consumption practices.

This raises the debate of whether there could ever be alternative routes for women (and men) to gain social worth. If this is so interlinked with outer appearance and self-confidence, then this is still embedded into the politics of consumer culture. Women are caught in the web of self-regulation and social surveillance, which targets any women who are 'letting themselves go'. It is thus important to explore and further question the implications and consequences of these 'lessons'. This also brings us closer to the arguments raised by McRobbie (2009) about the effects on class relations since the transformation of women is done merely by cheaper consumption practices. McRobbie (2009) emphasised that this type of makeover show has relied on usually showing working-class women who rely on the 'experts' (who are socially superior) to guide them

towards self-improvement (p. 135). She argued that our neoliberal society demands women to compete for the right jobs and negotiate their class and status. Thus, it is imperative that guidance be given towards self-improvement and self-governance and 'controlling' one's body, in terms of how one dresses. Another issue that stands out is the politics of resistance of women to this new regime of 'realness' and 'naturalness', and it is worth progressing this into a future analysis. Thus, the makeover shows require further and deeper examination as to what this turn to 'real' women means and entails.

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