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Chapter 13

A World of Cookie-Cutter Faces

Rachael Rainwater-McClure, Weslynn Reed, and Eric Mark Kramer

Because I didn't like my nose, there was a time when I was young and I used to go to bed every night with the tip of my nose taped up so that it would be shorter and upturned.

—Steven Spielberg

PRESCRIPT

On arrival in the United States, a Japanese foreign exchange student purchased and began to peruse all types of American magazines: fashion, family, and even baby magazines. When questioned by her host family as to what she found so interesting in the magazines she declared, "Americans are so much more beautiful than my people!" (personal experience).

"BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE"

The feelings of this exchange student are not unique. She is not alone in feeling as though her own physical attributes are inferior to those traditionally valued by Westerners. Many go so far as to alter their bodies to look like the "beautiful people" on the glossy pages of Western magazines. Particularly for Asians, cosmetic surgery, colored contact lenses, and hair dyes are popular means of transforming their bodies and faces into the images found in the media (Darling-Wolf, 2000).

Such observations lead one to ask several questions concerning cross-cultural perceptions of beauty. What are the factors influencing individuals to perceive their own bodies as less than adequate? What leads these same people to internalize these perceptions to the extent that they alter their bodies and faces? The theories of W. E. B. Du Bois and Naomi Wolfe can be applied to answer these questions and illuminate this phenomenon.

Double Consciousness

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1995), W. E. B. Du Bois discusses the experiences of black people in the United States and describes a phenomenon he called double consciousness. This phenomenon, experienced by many ethnic minorities, is the process of internalizing the viewpoint of the dominant culture. One values what is valued by the dominant ethnicity within one's society. In terms of phenotypic aesthetics, that usually means that the facial characteristics most valued are those inherent of the dominant group. The more a minority internalizes the dominant sense of beauty in the process of assimilation, the more such a minority is challenged by a look that they do not possess (Kramer & Ikeda, 2000). Du Bois portrays this sensation as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." It is "two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 1903/1995, p. 45).

Kramer (2000) introduces the idea of cultural fusion as the combining of elements within two or more cultures to create new cultural forms. But not all fusion leads to peace of mind or so-called psychic equilibrium. The theory of cultural fusion is not prescriptive, as in social engineering. It does not ideologically justify any certain and singular course of action for all people in their efforts to be happy. Rather it is observed that efforts to assimilate can and often do lead to a con-fusion and a chronic sense of alienation. Du Bois's theory also deals with cultural fusion. What he describes is the fusion of consciousness itself. Within a minority person, the identity of the Other is fused with the identity of the dominant group, creating a painful tension, what can be called a chronic sense of cognitive dissonance; in this case about one's very face.

Richard Wright, in *White Man Listen!*, uses Nietzsche's concept of a frog's perspective to describe this phenomenon. It is the perspective of someone looking upward and measuring him- or herself by what is perceived as "above," in psychological distance. "A certain degree of hate combined with love (ambivalence) is always involved in this looking from below upward and the object against which the subject is measuring himself undergoes constant change. He loves the object because he would like to resemble it; he hates the object because his chances of resembling it are remote, slight" (quoted in Gilroy, 1993, p. 161). This is the internalization of what the dominant culture believes one is supposed to be. For black Americans, this is the acceptance of the false notion that "I am supposed to be white," along with the frequently painful realization that "I am

not white and cannot be white." The same is true for people of other ethnic minorities or dominated groups who have accepted that there is one standard that is privileged and against which all others are compared (Kramer, 1993).

Standards or ideals of beauty, along with certain behavior patterns that are "normative," seem to reflect this phenomenon of double consciousness. These standards are the most easily replicable distinctions between one race or ethnicity and another, but although one may claim that beauty is only skin deep, the implications of such valuations are quite complex and profound. If one is compelled or inclined to attempt to fit in with white Americans, the first and seemingly most obvious course of action might be to try to conform to Caucasian physical features before attending to anything else (Eichberg, 1999).

Beauty Myth

The beauty myth is a feminist theory by Naomi Wolfe (1991) that exposes as delusional the claim that one set of characteristics constitutes ideal beauty. She challenges the ideological gambit that claims for itself the mantle of naturalism. In other words, she does not passively accept the idea that certain looks are "naturally," "universally," "objectively" beautiful whereas others are not. Naturalizing (ethnocentric) discourses and beliefs are pragmatically (not merely theoretically) threatening to women's self-esteem, for the ideology suggests that all women must naturally want to look a certain way and that men must want to possess women who embody that look. Wolfe insists that the elevation and privileging of some body images and phenotypes over others is not natural but cultural (contingently within the realm of human free will) and therefore not beyond debate and modification. She argues that naturalized values that are promoted as being obvious and thus hegemonic work as a counterforce against women, keeping them controlled by a white male-dominated society. Bottom line: The more a woman really accepts (internalizes) this version of beauty, consciously or not (mostly unconsciously) the more she really does feel inadequate especially because she must age in the face of an overarching dogma of youthism. Thus, even if she once could and did approximate the ideal, she must suffer the reality of losing her looks. Thus, power relations even among women have changed in the modern world. Instead of looking forward to becoming the matriarch of her family, she fears becoming irrelevant as so defined by the dominant, patriarchal society.

A recent study of young Korean women who were receiving training to enter the workforce revealed the preferences of large (male-dominated) Korean companies for female employees who fit certain physical requirements for height and weight. The requirements were not needed for the actual performance of the job but were to satisfy the companies' definition of beauty (Cho, 2000). Until the mid-1980s, the selection for female clerical employees was based on their school grades, technical qualifications, and potential to fit into their business activities rather than specific physical requirements. But as of the

late 1980s, the demand for certain physical requirements has been added to the job criteria. Vocational trainers explained that the trend toward hiring young women who fit the ideal beauty standard was predicted to increase because these women were increasingly hired for positions that dealt directly with the public and that "good looking women handle customers better ... with their nice smile and soft voices ... most complaints are easily resolved or decreased markedly" (Cho, 2000, p. 3). This explanation was given for all positions, even for those that did not deal directly with the public.

Women who accept the beauty myth as truth allow themselves to be manipulated by the forces that impose this value on them. They are the proverbial hamsters in the wheel, forever running to stay in the game and paying any price to retain the veil of beauty. A study done by Larkin and Tayler (1994) of women with eating and weight problems found that the preoccupation with external beauty promotes and upholds the oppression of females who are imprisoned by these values.

The context of Wolfe's theory of beauty is that of male and female relationships, but when extended it can be applied to the larger context of dominant Western culture and other parts of the world with lesser power and influence. The West has embraced the beauty myth and is transmitting it to the rest of the world. It has taken hold in minds within Western culture and today extends far beyond its original borders as a universal standard for many in other rapidly Westernizing cultures (Kramer & Ikeda, 2000). In reality the ideal of aesthetic beauty is a material manifestation of the power of colonization. Thus, an extension of Wolfe's theory of the beauty myth can be applied on a global level. It has intimately real consequences for men and women whose physical characteristics do not match those of the dominant, colonizing powers of the world. Western cultural colonization continues to envelop the globe, which attempts to imitate the criteria of success promulgated by the West. As the non-West embraces the Western ideal that promotes itself as the universal standard of beauty, the non-West proceeds to suffer from wide-scale double consciousness.

The internalization of the beauty myth of Western aesthetics is a form of double consciousness. It is an acceptance of "supposed to be"; supposed to be tall, thin, white, and whatever else is required to fit this mold. Though that attainment of the ideal Western (virtual) beauty is difficult if not impossible for actual Western individuals, for most Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians it is utterly hopeless. They are excluded a priori. If those who cannot possibly compete in this warped beauty contest take this standard to heart, the result can be nothing but a painful longing to be what is unattainable and often hating one's self for being unable, inadequate.

SURGICAL SOLUTIONS

Jewish women demand reductions of their noses to be able to pass as one of their Aryan sisters who form the dominant ethnic group. Adolescent Asian

girls bring in pictures of Elizabeth Taylor, and Japanese movie actresses (whose faces have already been reconstructed) demand the Westernizing of their own eyes and the creation of higher noses in hopes of better jobs and marital prospects. Black women buy toxic bleaching agents in hopes of attaining lighter skin. What are being created in all these instances are not simply beautiful bodies and faces but white, Western, Anglo Saxon bodies in a racist, anti-Semitic context (Morgan, 1991, p. 36).

The use of cosmetic surgery to alter one's features to appear Western is evidence of double consciousness and the acceptance of the beauty myth around the world. The historical glorification of the "classical" body (and the denigration of other body types) as a little-questioned assumption has been promoted in the West for centuries. Sander Gilman's (1999) history of aesthetic surgery demonstrates the degree to which Westerners and immigrants to the United States have internalized the notion of northern European classical beauty and the extent to which they have taken drastic surgical action to conform their bodies to fit that ideal. Individuals from ethnic groups whose physical characteristics did not fit the standard often sought the services of aesthetic surgeons who could give them the face they desired. Aesthetic surgeons commonly performed alteration of the "Jewish nose" and the Irish "pug" nose to create new "American noses." In the 1880s John Orlando Roe performed operations in Rochester, New York, to "cure" the pug nose that "plagued" Irish immigrants who could then truly pass as Anglo Saxon. Surrounded by and under the weight of an opposing standard of beauty, these immigrants assumed the consciousness of the host culture. They attempted to meet these standards, in hopes that changing their faces would change their lives (Brubach, 2000). Consonant with the promise that if one disintegrates and reintegrates the psychic self (operationally, functionally, and emotionally) in conformity with mainstream cultural values and expectations then happiness and personal success follow, reconstructing the most prominent aspect of the "behavioral self," the face, has been pursued (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

In more recent times, Great Britain has witnessed a startling rise in black and Asian customers for reconstructive cosmetic surgery. Chinese women are also having blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery) to create a Western-style fold. Black women seek liposuction to reduce their fuller figures. Rhinoplasty (nose surgery) is popular with almost all nonwhite groups: South Asians have their stronger noses reduced and tilted at the tip; Afro-Caribbeans have their noses narrowed; and East Asians have implants inserted to give more defined (nose) bridges (Branigan, 2001). The acceptance and internalization of the Western beauty myth, as evidenced through plastic surgeries, is especially visible in Asia and in Asian immigrants to the West.

Asia Looks West

A desire for Western beauty apparently began in Japan in 1868, when Commodore Perry opened the country up to the rest of the world and the Japanese

got a glimpse of Western culture and fashion (Darling-Wolf, 2000). In 1896, Japanese surgeon K. Mikamo introduced a nonincision eyelid-altering procedure called the three-stitch technique, whereby the upper eyelids were sutured six to eight millimeters above the eyelash with silk thread, creating a scar line that produced a fold, giving the Japanese patient a desirable Western eyelid. His technique spurred other plastic surgeons to follow his example for the next fifty years (Inoue, 1996).

The demand for eyelid surgery boomed after World War II and "by the 1960s had become an obsession. Fashion-conscious Asian American teens taped their eyelids to emulate their favorite Western film and television stars. Those who could afford the surgery would have it done, to the envy of their pals" (Inoue, 1996, p. 6). In 1963, a Singaporean surgeon, Khoo Boo-Chai, performed his modern nonincision method of Oriental blepharoplasty to create "double eyes" for the purely cosmetic requests of Asian patients. He commented that "our Eastern sisters put on western apparel, use western makeup, see western movies, and read western literature. Nowadays, there even exists a demand for the face and especially the eyes to be westernized" (Inoue, 1996, p. 6; Gilman, 1999, p. 107). In Khoo Boo-Chai's opinion, the three reasons for the surgery are: (1) to be more accepted by Westerners and thus have better socioeconomic status; (2) local beliefs and superstition that Asian eyes were suspicious or "mousy"; and (3) that with altered eyelids a woman had a better chance to snag a husband (Inoue, 1996). For those who chose surgery, the benefits of economic status, marriage, and the avoidance of negative stereotypes outweighed the painful costs of double consciousness (Jay, 2000).

Demands for Cosmetic Surgery Today among Asians and Asian Americans

In the 1990s, people of all ethnic groups were flooding into plastic surgery offices. The American Association of Facial and Reconstructive Surgery indicated that there was a 35 percent rise in cosmetic surgical procedures in the United States since 1990. Asian blepharoplasty is on the rise, especially in California, where both the populations of Asians and plastic surgeons are growing each year (Inoue, 1996). Michael D. Rabkin has practiced cosmetic surgery in San Francisco since 1980 and performs five to seven hundred strictly cosmetic surgeries a year; 30 percent of those are Asian patients. He has seen an increase in cosmetic eyelid surgery in Asian communities, as well as in non-Asian ones. Dr. Andrew K. Choi performed 1,550 surgeries and 300 revisions in Los Angeles from 1989 to 1994 (Inoue, 1996).

In San Jose, the business of eyelid surgery is lucrative. A ninety-minute surgery performed in the office operating room can yield up to \$3,500. Some doctors heavily advertise their services to immigrant communities in newspapers, magazines, and billboards. There are hundreds of Web sites for cosmetic surgeons, many of which advertise expertise in Asian blepharoplasty. Timothy

Parsons, a Los Gatos eye physician, runs full-page advertisements in the local Vietnamese monthly, *Thang Mo*. He attributes 5–10 percent of all eyelid surgeries he performs to Asian American teens under eighteen years of age. Dong Chung places advertisements in the Korean fashion magazine *Chubu Saenghwal* promising bigger, fuller eyes for patients as experienced by more than three thousand of his female patients.

It has been estimated that 40 percent of young Korean women undergo this eye surgery. The surgery can cost up to \$3,500 in the United States, but only \$800 to \$1,200 in Seoul. The trend is so popular today that in some parts of Korea one has difficulty finding someone *without* eyelid folds. Im Kwon-Taek, the director of *Sopyonje*, a popular movie set in the 1950s and released in 1993, searched desperately in Seoul for an actress with creaseless eyelids to play one of the major roles, and eventually had to settle on a young woman with no acting experience (Inoue, 1996).

Apparently, many Asians have internalized the idea that beauty is defined in terms of approximation to the Western eyelid; now that modern medicine and technology can provide it, the race is on to acquire the improved look. Young women who might be hesitant about the change or the pain involved in the surgical procedure and subsequent recovery period are often encouraged and sometimes even pressured by older family members to acquire the prettier eyelid. Inoue (1996) interviewed several women who had resolved the dilemma in different ways. He tells of a twenty-two-year-old Korean American named Kimberly who flew to Korea for the surgery when she was just a freshman in high school and for \$200 received the palpebral fold across each eyelid. Her aunt had requested that she have the surgery, telling her that she would look much better afterward. Jennifer was afraid to undergo the surgery, but her mother pushed her to have it. Although Jaclyn refused the surgery, pressure began in junior high school when her mother offered to pay for the surgery. "It was a matter of fact that when you get older and graduate from high school, you'll go and have it done. I was led to believe that having it done would make me prettier and more attractive to men, and to find a husband" (Inoue, 1996, p. 4).

Patient Rationale for Aesthetic Surgeries

In the early days of cosmetic surgery, one of the most common reasons patients stated for aesthetic surgery was for the purpose of changing their ethnic features to look more like mainstream Americans. Today, perhaps due to the discourse of multiculturalism and an emphasis on political correctness, more patients deny that assimilation is their objective. They state that the motivation for the surgery is not to look more Western but to look "more beautiful" and to have "more balance to their face." One doctor said, "From having performed surgery since 1981, and teaching the surgical techniques to other doctors for the same period, I honestly believe that most of the Asian patients are not wanting to look like Westerners or their Caucasian friends. Rather, they want

to retain their Asian features with the addition of an aesthetically pleasing *Asian* [emphasis mine] eyelid crease" (Chen, 1999). "I think that all females want to look better," explains Jennifer, who immigrated to the United States from Korea at age fourteen. "The main reason people are doing it in Korea is because they want to look pretty" (Inoue, 1996, p. 3). But interestingly, *pretty* in the definition of cosmetic surgeons and their patients is not defined as the ethnic Asian eyelid but as the eyelid characteristic of Westerners. One may argue that people who have rhinoplasty or blepharoplasty are not trying to deny their heritage but are only trying to look better, but that seems to veil the underlying inherent message that Western European standards dominate current thoughts of beauty and that Asians and others around the world are influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by those values (see also Chapter Three of this volume).

ANIME

The Japanese, like many other Asian cultures, seem to be experiencing the effects of double consciousness. Although traditionally they have been racial purists, the Japanese seem to be fervently embracing Western ideals of beauty. Japanese animation, or anime, a uniquely Japanese form of animation, reflects the evolving acceptance and promotion of the Western beauty myth (see Chapter Two about the impact of Twiggy on Japanimation).

Anime represents a pop culture phenomenon around the world (Berman, 2000; Chung, 2000; Corliss, Harbison, & Ressler, 1999; Lefton, 1998; Mallory, 2001). It is in this phenomenon that a reflection of the Western beauty myth is evidenced. This Japanese-originated style of animation is unique in many aspects. Notable for its fast pace and comic book-like action, the characters also remind one of comics—their faces for the most part remain immobile, while the mouth moves (Corliss, et al., 1999). Furthermore, one of its most distinctive characteristics is the Western look of the characters (Cooper-Chin, 1999). Anime points to where the identity-mediating process of double consciousness, the acceptance of the beauty myth, is occurring in Japan. An examination of the physical characteristics of characters in popular programs points to a dependency on perceptions of Western beauty in Japanese culture.

In contrast to the Western standard of beauty, which glorifies a tall, slender frame; big, often light-colored eyes; big breasts; and light skin, the Japanese generally have dark hair; narrower, dark eyes; and smaller stature and slight frames. Most anime, however, points very clearly to Western standards of beauty. *Pokémon*, *Digimon*, *Cardcaptors*, and *Sailor Moon*, TV shows that air in the United States, all present characters with notably Anglo features and coloring. The most noticeable and exaggerated are the wide, generally light-colored eyes. These characters are accurately described in *Time* (1999) as "Frisbee-eyed kids." Their eyes are so exaggerated that they often carry a per-

manent look of surprise. Most also have pale skin coloring as well as brown, blond, or red hair. Sakura, the heroine of the program *Cardcaptors*, is an ideal example of this. She has light brown hair, wide green eyes, and pale skin. The only characters with black or blue-black hair, which might traditionally belong to someone of Japanese origin, also have blue eyes.

Interestingly, cartoons with coloring and features that might be found on a Japanese person are very few; they are usually old or, if young, are male. Brock, for example, one of the main trio of characters in *Pokémon*, has tan skin and slit-like eyes that appear closed at all times. Although his coloring and features do not necessarily look Japanese, neither do they fit the typical appearance of anime characters.

Though it may seem that these trends in children's programming might have been created simply for their Western audiences, they are reflected in more traditional anime film characters as well. There is some intentional cultural editing of the children's shows before they move to the United States from their Asian market. For example, in *Pokémon*, chopsticks are replaced with forks before it reaches the American market (Fulford, 1999). However, the trend of Western phenotypic features was not created to satisfy Western viewers. Even movies produced for Japanese audiences and subtitled in English have the typical big eyes, pale skin, and light hair. One clear example is the popular series of films *Ranma 1/2*. Ranma, the main character, has bright red hair, has blue eyes, and is very busty.

Why are these Anglo features so common in Japanese animation? Anne Cooper-Chin's (1999) analysis of anime heroines, points to the influence of one particular cartoonist, Osamu Tezuka. He discovered that this look—the portrayal of Japanese women as "blondes or red heads with Barbie-doll proportions and large, often blue eyes"—was more appealing to his audience and that bigger eyes could more easily express emotion. This eventually became conventional for the genre and is now common throughout anime but is most pervasive in women's or girls' shows—indeed, it is the standard look.

This offers some (but little) explanation of why big eyes were more popular in the first place (see Chapter Two). It seems to be a reflection of what the Japanese believe to be beautiful, a reflection of an earlier internalized image of Western beauty. For over a century, Japan has received and internalized beauty images from the west. As early as the late nineteenth century, the Japanese had begun to cosmetically alter their features to appear more Western or more white. They underwent various surgical techniques to improve their noses and eyes to enter the modern world (Gilman, 2001). More recently, popular fashion also reflects these attitudes. One trendy Japanese stylist explains that her clients are "usually trying to achieve a unique, but natural hair color like that of westerners" (Klensch, 1996). This acceptance of Western appearances as *the* standard of beauty is quite clearly evidence of double consciousness.

It is possible to see how complete the taking on of Western consciousness has become when one examines the prevailing characteristics of anime more

closely. The settings, hairstyles, clothes, and even sometimes the names used in anime programs point to the conclusion that the characters are, in fact, supposed to be Japanese people. Both interior and exterior shots are clearly Japanese settings. Frequently shown in rooms with tatami mats, bamboo screens, and sliding doors, the characters wear kimonos and often-complicated coiffed hair. Although these light-skinned, pale-eyed characters seem culturally Japanese, they manifest a racial ambiguity.

An online magazine about Japanese pop cultural trends, *MyNippon*, has been publishing an ongoing debate about the popular use of cosmetic alteration (makeup, contact lenses, breast augmentation, and hair dye) by Japanese and other Asian women to appear more Western or white. This further implies that the characters represented in anime are Japanese. They depict Japanese people who have already taken (increasingly common) steps to beautify themselves in the Western style. They wear colored contact lenses, dye their hair, and augment their breasts.

Rather than exoticizing looks different from their own, the Japanese have normalized them and are now attempting to become "normal," which means Western-looking. This is the epitome of double consciousness. Kramer (1999) explains that this can lead one to hate one's self and one's own traditional values. He describes the fruitless attempts of Japanese after the Meiji Restoration to intermarry and Westernize their race in an effort to "become valuable by being erased." Now, with the ability to alter one's eye and hair color, even change one's facial and body construction, the Japanese have found a new way, bypassing intermarriage, to become valuable by erasing themselves.

This effort is futile. Kramer asks, "How can one conform to a dominating culture that defines you as never being worthy of inclusion?" The obvious answer is that you can't. As pointed out by *MyNippon* (2001), "If continued, Japanese women will compete against the 'stripper' tradition (tall, blonde hair, and large breasts)—a battle they will surely lose."

PASSING

At the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans were undergoing transformation as they attempted to reidentify themselves in a new social order.

Physically cut off and culturally removed from an African homeland they did not know, and unwanted and derided in the post-slavery West, blacks were a people without a country... Blackness was a dual-cultural experience—physically they were Africans, but they belonged to the New World... Self-invention was what being an American was all about, and adopting New World values was tantamount to an application for citizenship. (Arogundade, 2000, 28)

Dominant society derided blackness and demonstrated a bias in favor of the "mulatto aesthetic," therefore, people of color aspired to the beauty values of

the dominant class (Arogundade, 2000.) Those African Americans whose physical characteristics did not approximate those of the white majority were encouraged by society and through the media to take the steps necessary to alter their hair and skin to more closely resemble that of the majority (Eichberg, 1999). The black cosmetic industry began in Harlem in the 1890s selling "ethnically altering" skin-lightening and hair-straightening products. Arogundade (2000) notes the revealing nature of some of the names of the skin creams: Black No More, Lucky Brown Bleaching Cream, and Cocotone Skin Whitener. Madame C. J. Walker, daughter of former slaves on a Louisiana cotton plantation, made her fortune as the pioneer of black hair and beauty products. Her invention of the hot comb and hair conditioners were made to "tame" unruly hair, implying that black hair was wild and in need of domestication. According to Arogundade (2000), "Walker's premise—that altering blackness is the starting point for success—has influenced the entire genre of black hair and beauty advertising to the present day. It struck at the heart of black aesthetic insecurity and low self-esteem at a moment when ethnicity was still being systematically degraded throughout popular culture" (p. 28).

The experience of African Americans demonstrates the extent to which beauty values are conditioned by dominant white aesthetic paradigms and the internalization of double consciousness among minorities. The direction of influence in fact helps define the minority from the majority. Although a large majority of African Americans adopted the beauty ideals of the dominant culture, most retained identification with their African American heritage. However, some individuals of mixed African American/white heritage passed as white and changed their social categorization to join the majority. Daniel (1992) stated that attempts to change one's ethnic appearance to fit in was often practiced in the United States by African Americans whose skin was light enough to pass for white so they could gain the privileges afforded to members of the dominant majority. Such acceptance could provide economic stability as well as "the illusion of having escaped the taint of subordinate group status, if not the actual achievement of equality with whites" (Daniel, 1992, p. 92). "Passing is the word used to describe an attempt to achieve acceptability by claiming membership in some desired group while denying other racial elements in oneself thought to be undesirable" (Bradshaw, 1992, p. 79).

Passing Goes Global

In a more global sense, the practice of passing continues today for individuals of other ethnicities who have accepted, as African Americans historically did, the idea that the standard of beauty is established by the dominant group and that to be successful they must fashion their looks to most closely resemble that of the dominant group. Although Adrienne Gosselin (1998) claims that "the idea of passing for White is a uniquely American notion," the trends discussed herein are evidence to the contrary. Alterations made to the body to give

the appearance of a more desirable identity continue today, and such practices have expanded across the globe. Worldwide, the use of plastic surgery, hair dyes, and tinted contact lenses are modern forms of passing in which persons attempt to blend in with the dominant ethnic group. The Korean American woman who opts to alter her eyelids to appear more beautiful and the Japanese woman who augments her breasts are making unveiled attempts to pass as Western sophisticates in hopes of receiving the benefits of membership in a privileged class.

These attempts at passing are a result of double consciousness and acceptance of the Western beauty myth. The desire to completely eliminate one's biological characteristics in exchange for a new and improved set of features may seem to result in a kind of fusion, a fusion that is both internal and external, but rather it remains a vicious dualism, which leads to painful cognitive dissonance and self-hate. Double consciousness, the confusion of two identities, manifests itself physically in the manipulation and combination of idealized Western and other traits.

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I dedicate this book to two people I know and admire for their courage to change society rather than passively "adapt" to it just for personal security and comfort, and who have generously spent many hours teaching me about the true and revolutionary essence of the ongoing American experiment: Professors George Henderson and Melvin Tolson. This is also dedicated to Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, who sued for her right to attend the University of Oklahoma law school in 1946, a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. It is also important to remember the white students, professors, and administrators who supported these people in the face of majority indignation. These three, who were willing to "die to make a difference," as Professor Henderson has conveyed to me, made it possible for women and people of color to attend and teach at the University of Oklahoma.

During hours of conversation with Henderson, he relayed to me many truths, some very personal. With his permission I share a few: In 1967, the Henderson family became the first black family to own a house in Norman, Oklahoma. One of their neighbors at the time asked his minister why God hated him so much that He allowed a black family to move in next door. The family's windows were broken, racial slurs were endured, and Professor Henderson suffered doubt from what he had asked his family to endure by moving to Norman. Today, he is one of the most celebrated faculty members at the University of Oklahoma, having a wall full of awards, including being named a Regent's Professor. His conviction of presence changed the state and the university.

Ms. Fisher later became a member of the board of regents to the university that once denied her admission.