Chapter 6

Disciplining the Body

A Physical Anthropology of 'Beauty'

If you gain 3 kilograms, you could be out of work for a week.

- Gauri (producer of TV show Get Gorgeous)

A model's livelihood hangs by a thread on how their everyday living is carried out.

For women in the glamour industry, their bodies are not just something to be lived in, a biological entity which must be fed, cleaned, nurtured, taken care of in the ordinary way - but something that must be actively sculpted, controlled, finely tuned everyday to the rhythm of their work. No longer is it said that 'your face is your fortune'. In a gradual shift, today it is one's body that is their fortune. As a result, their everyday activities are filled in varying degrees with an unquestioned and normalized preoccupation with measuring, maintaining, polishing, beautifying, toning, and making youthful and fresh - their bodies.

This chapter explores ways in which women in the glamour industry experience the body, how they work on it as part of their everyday world to make it work for them, how they employ technology and other products in an attempt to keep themselves (ahead) in the rat-race, how they experience natural rites of passage like motherhood and finally, how they come to terms with the inevitable toll that time takes on bodies.

1 Physical anthropology has less to do with cultural anthropology and more with the tradition of biological and zoological studies of the 17th and 18th centuries, when 'the races of mankind' and comparative human anatomy were a subject of classic study. (International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, vol 11, op cit). The subtitle is an ironical take on this academic 'discipline' in which skulls and other dimensions of the body of the 'natives' would be rigorously measured, and techniques and instruments for measuring the human form were consistently created. The stress on the self-measurement of the body and its parts in this chapter is reminiscent of this form of physical anthropology.
I. WHEN THE BODY IS ALWAYS ON YOUR MIND

Women in the industry have to take special care of their bodies. Beyond vanity, this is an inherent demand of their profession they point out, drawing parallels with sports persons or dancers and other performers. However this professional requirement is unique because it impacts their personal lifestyle in an intimate way as well as their mental framework. Not only do they monitor all parameters closely – whether it is height, weight, waist, chest, hips, skin, hair and so on, they also are meticulous in reporting these. There are no approximates. No one is around 5 ft 10 inches; they are 5 ft 9.5 inches in height or 49.5 kilograms in weight. This practice of recording and monitoring these dimensions is institutionalized through the standards set at the Miss India pageant - in the 40-day training period before the actual contest, the 25 finalists are weighed and measured every morning, and calories consumed the previous day counted and analyzed2.

Women in the industry also exhibit unusual knowledge about their own bodies, such as the many dimensions to something as simple as shoe size. While a single digit would suffice to explain the shoe size of the lay person, for a model this digit is further defined into length and fit (referring to the width of the foot).

This knowledge is not just personal. There is a shared world of knowledge – almost a separate vocabulary (see Glossary of Terms) - amongst women in the field and within the circle or community of people that 'tends' to the

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2 Moreover aspirants for the contest are measured at the elimination rounds in the cities, and being a fraction below 5 feet 6 inches could disqualify one from being eligible for the Miss India contest. Many a dreams are thus shattered in these initial rounds when they are measured at the venue, if one is lucky there may be a kindly 'measurer' who overlooks a slight discrepancy and still let one through to the next round.
women's bodies (see the glossary of terms for an example of this). This community includes fitness trainers, experts on nutrition, dieticians, cosmetologists, dermatologists, yoga experts, gym instructors and so on. Words like 'abs', 'carbs', 'Atkins', 'crunches', 'cardio', 'rhino', 'protein wash', 'Botox', 'lipo', 'bronzer', roll off tongues with practiced ease. With the help of the experts the women actively engage with their body in an effort to control it and finally transform it through various means, such as "gymming" (a regular regimen of working out at the gymnasium, abbreviated colloquially to gym), dieting (not necessarily in the sense of deprivation but 'watching what you eat' and having a planned diet, or following a diet chart), specialized exercise routines that focus on specific parts of the body, the magic of make-up, and regular cosmetic procedures including cosmetic surgery.

There are times when this heightened consciousness and constant measuring, weighing, comparing and monitoring of the body borders on obsession and gives rise to mental anguish and insecurities, across all age groups. Tina, from the current generation of models says,

I have some insecurities like my neck and my nose... I keep thinking when I am walking down the ramp, people are sitting at the side and they can see your profile – and I have a really big long nose! So I keep feeling conscious about my nose profile while walking. I have seen people at shows judging the model, whispering to one another, oh look at her, look at that one, this one has a tyre around the waist, this one's arms are like this...I used to get a bit upset at these things. But when I once told another senior model this, she said to me - you are on the ramp, they are not! You shouldn't care a damn about what they say!

These insecurities are not just left to be, they are usually acted on through whatever means possible. Tina, from a wealthy industrialist family, is a young, fair, Punjabi girl from Greater Kailash in Delhi. She told me during the course of the interview:

I am usually conscious of my skin colour because as you can see I am very fair, to
the extent of being completely pale. I always have to wear a body tan because people get startled when they see how white I am. See this is my real skin colour...

Saying this, she raised the bottom of her pants to reveal an ankle with her real skin tone – an albino white that was completely different from the rest of the skin that was on show. She had applied some sort of colouring agent on all parts of the body that would show - her face, neck, arms [she was wearing a sleeveless top]. She continued:

But I have to always have this tan make up on – even my agents demand that I get ready like this when I come for auditions or meet clients.

This kind of consciousness is in stark contrast to the absence of the ordinary kind of self consciousness of the body that they exhibit backstage during fashion shows. Often having to change in seconds in unguarded spaces, in big halls with little privacy, and with designers and helpers and sometimes the media traipsing in and out of greenrooms, models develop a particularly thick skin about being shy or self conscious about their bodies. This ‘thick skin’ is acquired as one gains more and more experience in the industry. Older models therefore are less conscious, while newer models continue to squirm uneasily at such times, or rush to find discrete corners. Neeti recalls,

Slowly you lose your own inhibitions... In my first show, I was definitely shy about changing clothes in a common changing room. But by the third show you have lost all those cares, because if you don't change quickly you won't be ready for your next cue!

**A New Body for the New Age**
The ‘body’ in general assumes an important role in contemporary urban life, where health, fitness and physical appearance becomes important not only in social life or if you are in a media related field, but in one's working
life as well. Grooming courses, makeovers, even spiritual makeovers like Vipassana or Art of Living courses become part of a globalized corporate culture, influencing whether you get a job or not, or how your career progresses, or your day to day transactions with colleagues and clients, and your relations with people around you. This has not always been the case, and the current obsession with the body and with looking good is a relatively new phenomenon, not only in India but in other globalizing economies. Much has been written for instance about the rush in China for cosmetic procedures - people wanting to widen their eyes, reshape their nose, even undertake painful leg extensions in an effort to be taller. Again, this has less to do with indulgence or vanity and more to do with a (perceived) need to look a certain way so as to get employment in the new economy sectors, for which many of these seeming superficialities are actually a prerequisite. Priya, who has been modeling for almost ten years, talks about the difference in Western and Eastern philosophies about the way we look, and how she feels this is changing.

I guess the West has always been very superficial, where looks are more important than in the East, where spirituality and how you feel inside is more important to us than what you look like on the outside. And I think that still is the case, although I think that’s going to change very soon. Sadly. It’s not just modeling. It’s in all professions. As a ... generation... and as a developing country we are now becoming really obsessed with the way we look. With our bodies and our faces. And it’s true... you know, you do get certain advantages if you look a certain way than if you don’t. You know for example in China, they don’t give jobs to people who are below five feet. So for them being tall is a big deal and they go to insane lengths to have their heights increased. I don’t know how true that is for India, but I think sooner or later, sadly it will be a trend which will be very prevalent.

Over generations, the focus of beauty has shifted, and the relevance of the body has changed. Hence past beauty queens in India and models recall how being fair, or pretty, or having a good smile and pleasing personality was much more important in the past than the body.
Neeti, for example, a Miss India in the early 1990s says,

In our time actually the body was secondary. It was about beautiful faces, bodies were okay — nothing spectacular, reasonably slim and just ok... there was not so much focus on having the perfect body. What mattered more was your face. Today you can't say that any of them (current models, beauty queens) has a very pretty face.

Pageants today focus primarily on the body, certainly contests like Gladrags do not even entertain the pretext that it has anything to do with intellect, and are quite blunt in what they are looking for — the perfect body. Even in the Miss India contest today (which still maintains that it is a well rounded personality they seek, and has the much feared question-answer rounds), the exact specifications of the body, the height, the different parts of the body — abs or abdominal stomach muscles, legs, muscles, thighs etc. are all under scrutiny, and there is a high premium on not just being fit and slim, but most importantly being ‘toned’. “I am thin, but my fat percent is high”, was a common refrain. “Fat percent” is the technical term given to the condition that there are areas in the body where fat (in the technical sense, and not in the colloquial sense) could be converted to muscle — in fact this conversion was referred to as ‘toning’. The camera sees bodies differently, is often the explanation given for the importance of ‘toning’. Technically, it is said that the camera makes any person look 20% fatter than they are in real life. It makes all the difference in the way the photographs or images come out both on screen and in print. Harpreet, who has been modeling for four years now and was a runner up at the Gladrags pageant elaborates:

I went for a shoot audition one day. The photographer said fine, you have so much potential, but all you need to do is to tone up. You should look like a model, you should not look like a girl, your legs should be toned up, your abs should be toned up, your arms should be toned up, you should look like a perfectly carved out figure. I said, how does that matter? I am thin! He said, I will show you in the picture. He showed me two-three pictures I got clicked from some photographer. And he said, see, the skin where it bags and where it’s loose, even on a thin
person it shows behind the camera. So you have to tone up all this. I said okay. And that inspired me so much. I went to the gym - my body wasn't like this. I was heavy, and I have lost so much weight, so much weight... I was thin according to the normal standards, of being like a college girl, but I wasn't the model thin... you know, like jaw line and cheek bones... So I worked really hard for one year gymming everyday. After a shoot I was gymming, before going to the shoot I was gymming, at 8 o'clock I used to go to the gym, at 9 o'clock when I reached home I used to gym...

The gym therefore becomes a temple of sorts for this profession – a crucial means to the desired end. It becomes more than a building, a room equipped with weights and other equipment or a facility to exercise, it becomes a social universe of its own – a social and professional space which sets the normative standards – of bodies, of the time and efforts that others in the profession are putting in, thereby setting reference points for one another. And an important place to network, exchange information and conduct business, and in a way carry out - in Wolkovitz's words – “employment's numbing routines”. Women often mention how they feel thin in 'normal society' amongst ordinary people, but suddenly in the space of the gym, all their inadequacies emerge, and being amidst such good bodies, they suddenly begin to feel fat. They attribute a lot of their motivation and inspiration to workout harder to the others (with great bodies) at the gym. Vinita brings this out when she says,

Don't you think that whenever we walk among models, then we start finding (things wrong with our bodies) all these rounds coming out, extra lard like we say coming out, and we are not comfortable with our bodies? Otherwise when we hang around with normal people, and normal people means people who are not from this industry, we feel funny. There is nothing over... no tummy coming out, there is no sides coming out... there is nothing (wrong).

The credit for creating these sculpted bodies is often not given to the persons themselves but to the experts who claim to have 'manufactured' it, in some cases even to the gym itself. A massive life-size hoarding
outside a posh gym in Bombay shows a young model who is being featured in a Bollywood film showing off his toned torso and spectacular abs (abdominal muscles) and pecs (pectoral muscles). The text above the picture reads 'Upen Patel.... By Sykes' (the name of the gym), indicating that the body on display was made by the gym (as opposed to hard work by the model himself), that this body is a product of the gym. While the above example may be a commercial endorsement in which the model may have been paid for the use of his name, it brings out an important point. The body is not the personal domain of the person but a work-ground or workspace for the various experts that 'work on it' who are justified in claiming ownership of it. Even at the recent Miss India contest, the organizers were almost arrogant in their assertion that the girls in themselves were nothing of consequence, and it was only the training and fitness programme they were put through, and the inputs of the experts that were to be credited for creating national and international beauties/winners. They took the credit for manufacturing beauties and beauty queens. The girls themselves had been mere putty in the hands of experienced artists. The editor of Femina told me with reference to India's double win in 1994 at the Miss Universe and Miss World pageants,

India's win did not happen because it was opening up as a market. India happened because we made it happen from here (indicating the office and the Times of India building generally). Here inside the walls of this building.

**Body Types: Deconstructing the Image of the Model**

An outsider would imagine that the regular model is of a standard height, weight and so on. There is an image of the emaciated, anorexic, tall, thin model who starves herself to fit into the sizes deemed worthy of a model. That is, one 'body type' that is required to be part of the glamour industry. This is both true and untrue. The reality is more nuanced.

At this point, let us look at the body types of the sample. The scatter
graphs below show the heights and weights as recorded in the demographic profiles filled in by the sample. The first graph, on a single unit scale shows a startling image – that of women who are carbon copies of one another, with their heights and weights mostly overlapping one another.

**Figure 21**

**Height and Weight of Respondents**

However a stretched graph shows the interrelation between the two variables as well as the slight differentiation amongst the women.
Heights are all between 67 to 71 inches whereas weight ranges from 48 to 58 kgs. The average height and weight are 68.6 inches (with a modal value of 67) and 52.5 kgs (with a modal value of 50). This differentiation, despite the evidence of overwhelming similarity (in the ordinary sense) is crucial for the profession. One can see that heights have been reported down to units of 0.5 (as have been other vital statistics such as waist and so on). These degrees do matter, not just as an obsessive detail but because it impacts the kind of work that they will get.

The narratives of women I interviewed reveal that there exists a stratification of different body types and body requirements within the industry. Different body types are coveted for different kinds of work within the industry. This differentiation is a recent phenomenon, and did not exist two decades ago when often the same models would be doing all kinds of work.
There are broadly four kinds of work, and for each there are certain preferences and requirements. There are two aspects to this, one is the physical body and the other is the way the body is projected in a carefully crafted "look". For ramp work what is required is a tall, skinny body. The colour of the skin, bust size and the face are not so important. Also important is "attitude" or personality, and the ability to look glamorous and comfortable in all kinds of clothes. Niharika feel this is more true of the ramp today, where the standard features that are considered 'beautiful' no longer apply. She gives an example to illustrate:

The concept of beauty has become more inclusive now. Have you seen this foreign model Alec Wek? Very dark, wild hair, great body. African. She's completely black. Ten years back you would never have considered her a profitable beauty! But she is considered amongst the top fifty most beautiful models in the world! A lot of people I know say, how?! How is she considered among the top...?! But you know the concept of beauty has changed... specially in ramp modeling. Not so much in press. Because you don't have to be "beautiful" (conventionally, to do well)... like I am not beautiful in the conventional sense. But if you have good projection, good personality that comes across, if you know how to show the clothes, and the physical requisites are there like height and body, then you can still make it as a model without looking like Aishwarya Rai. That variety, that diversity is there much more now... so a lot of people who never thought that they had chances now think they can! Like for example a lot of my parent's friends' daughters, who say oh if you could become a model even we can. They only thought an Aishwarya Rai type (fair, light eyed, delicate features) could become one, never my type!

For print work, what is most important is being photogenic and attractive. Here having a fit, shapely body is not the primary concern and neither is height and weight. Skin colour is also less relevant (although in recent times, models claim that photographers more and more prefer darker "dusky" skin). For television commercials and TV serials, the pretty face, preferably fair, is important along with the perfect smile. Again height is not important and a reasonable weight is preferred rather than the lank
frame of the ramp model. Finally, for the film industry, a pretty face, bigger bust size and perfect smile are important, although having a good body is catching up in importance today (a new phenomenon which sees even seasoned actors and actresses working hard in gyms to get a sculpted and toned body).

The graph below shows, for example, that height has a clear correlation with ramp work. Those doing more of print and TV work were significantly shorter than those working primarily as fashion models on the ramp.

**Figure 23**

Correlation between height and kind of work

Therefore women who want to make a transition from one kind of work to another have to work at transforming their body – negotiating those seemingly small degrees of difference - to another body type. As a result there are less chances of shuttling between different kinds of work, and usually the progression from one to the other is in a sense, irreversible. Often some women are unable to make the transition as the basic requirements for another kind of work precludes them. A model from the current generation bluntly points out that
Most of the models are ugly, they are not even average... they can only work on the ramp and not seen on TV or commercials.

Niharika – who does ramp work, and who was one of the top models of her time, talks about how despite trying initially she never got print ads because of the colour of her skin. She says,

I was dark. Tall was another factor, and I had curly hair which they did not know how to handle. These were the two main things. Everyone wanted straight hair. They knew how to handle straight hair, but not curly hair. And they didn't know how to handle dark skin. There were very few and far between models who were dark skinned. Essentially all pretty pretty girls. Fair conventional looking pretty girls! So... I didn't get any print work. From the beginning what would happen was... someone would see my pictures somewhere, and most of my pictures were black and white – they were going through a black and white phase that time - so you couldn't tell my colour in a black and white photograph. So I would get a call, they would say oh we want to meet you for this press ad. And then they would see me... and I could see their expression change! They would expect a fairer girl, and this black thing would walk in and they would be like.... Uhhh... actually we... uhhh, ohhh....So I'd say its ok. Luckily I was smarter. I figured out what the reason was, so I didn't even bother trying with print.

However these 'requirements' also change with time. Tina (of the tan make up distinction), who is from the current generation of models talks of the reverse - how being fair has its disadvantages, and how today's discourse gives more preference to 'dusky' skin. She says,

Now with all this bronzed look and everything...... there are certain photographers who like 'dusky' skin and who keep going on and on about dark beauties, and you are completely sidelined. I remember one time there was a print ad for a mobile phone company, there was one male model and three female models – one myself, and the other two were those dark dusky kinds of girls. The photographer was all into them, and completely ignoring me. He would constantly direct them – you stand here, you sit here, you look here. oh that's beautiful darling, look this way.... And me? He was like, oh just stand anywhere. So they were made to sit on either side of the male model, and I stood behind the sofa in the centre just behind the male model. When the Polaroid came out... he was raving about it. oh
you look at X and that's beautiful Y (he was saying to the other girls)... out of curiosity I went to see the picture. And I was shocked. The top of my head was not in the picture! It was chopped off, not even in the frame!

Even within similar kinds of work, acknowledgement for different body types or faces exists, and a more subtle stratification is evident – according to preferences of the period (dusky versus fair), preferences of the designers (some designers prefer fuller models, some prefer skinny models), or the market to which the industry is catering to (international, local, national), the type of face (very Indian features, or a global face) or the extent of exposure a model is willing to undertake (this one will only show shoulder, that one is alright with some exposure). Shivani for instance, who has dusky skin, is in high demand from international clients. Her agency is delighted with her skin colour and sees that as her 'selling point' to the international market. Even though she is getting good work, her agency still feels she needs to lose some weight to be a perfect confluence between the East and West (dusky, exotic and skinny) and fit into the international ideal. Here is what she says:

M: What do you do to maintain your body?
S: I don't do anything actually. I have to join gym, but I haven't. People at my agency, they are after my life, everyday they say Shivani you have to lose weight! But still, ya. I don't do anything.
M: How much do you weigh?
S: 50 kg
M: But why do you need to lose weight, you are so thin!
S: Ya...but somehow they think.... Because I am mostly into international shoots, so there, models are skinny... and so they want me skinny.

However if Shivani wants to shift to say, print or TV commercials for Indian clients, she may have a problem if she is too skinny, and work to gain weight.

Shifting location also means that a model may need to work to change her
body type to suit the 'market' they are now entering or expected to cater to. Roopali, for example, modeled for a few years as a part time occupation in Singapore (where she was stationed because of her job with Singapore Airlines) and returned to India as a result of the SARS epidemic. When the health crisis was declared to be over and expatriates were given the option of returning to their jobs, Roopali decided to stay back in India and pursue modeling as a full time profession in India. She joined Elite India which had just opened its offices here. Roopali recalls how weight was an issue because of her relocation.

M: Did you have to lose weight when you came to India?

R: No, not here. Actually, I used to be more skinny because in Singapore you know, all the Chinese people, they are really, really skinny. So for a person like me, I am considered bulky there in fact! So to be a model in Singapore I had to be really lean, which happened automatically because the food habits you have over there - Chinese food is really light - I used to eat a lot of Singaporean and Chinese food so that was really good for me and I lost weight. Plus my work profile was such because it was a lot heavy physical work, you know, being an airhostess is not just all about glamour. They say that you look pretty and you work like a horse. (Laugh) So working like a horse did it for me. Then I automatically lost weight and plus I swim very often, I used to canoe. So all these things really helped me be very thin.

Over here when I came back, people used to consider me really-really skinny because Indian models are slightly different from the Singapore build. So, initially yes, few people told me that you are not really good for the ramp because I am so skinny and tall. So a few people liked it but some said that no, I am too extremely skinny. Especially for the print shoots and all, they don't want somebody very lanky then. So I had to put on some weight... actually I did not put on much weight as such, I tried to tone on what I had, you know, like I started working on weights in India.

It is not just weight which the women have to work on to shuttle between different markets. It is also the specific dimensions of certain body parts - such as the bust or the hips.
In the demographic profile, the reported vital statistics of the respondents show that most of them are more or less similar in size. The vital statistics are shown in the graph below.

**Figure 24**

Vital Statistics of Respondents

The average and modal values of all three dimensions (bust, waist, hips) are same – the average dimensions being 32, 25, 35. (Three respondents of those who gave their details stressed that their waist was 24.5.) From the graph we can see that the line for the hips is particularly skewed. The narratives also reveal that women in the industry feel that hips are the biggest ‘problem area for Indian women’.

22-year old Anurita originally from Guwahati in Assam, has been modeling on the ramp for the last three years. She was chosen to go for a modeling stint abroad after winning a model hunt contest held by an international modeling agency. While the rest of her was suited perfectly for this stint (she was over 5 feet 10 inches in height) only her hips were of
A: I have never been on a diet, but I had to when I had to go to Paris. Because I was little heavy that time, heavy in the sense, I was not like this. I was like a different person you know. I was heavy on the hips - 38 - you can't imagine! So I was on diet for, at least a month, because they told me, you have to lose weight; otherwise we can't take you there (emphasis added). Hips are the only problem and my arms were also little big you know.

M: Did someone like look at you very carefully...

A: Ya ya ya ya. For one day they totally... they called all the models especially to look at them, they told us to wear bikinis and they told us not to wear any make-up with hair open and everything and walk from there to there for like 10 times, and then they noticed. I think that time they noticed...

So ya, I was on boiled food, I used to be on kaccha paneer and all that during those days. I was on a diet for a month. But now I am not on dieting anymore.

M: They told you what, that you have to lose on your arms?
A: Yes they specifically told me, if you can reduce weight from arms it's fine all right otherwise hips is going to be too broad - it was 38 and they wanted 35. So they told me can you please reduce 3 kilos also. It was like a shock because I had only 2 weeks you know to lose weight. So I was like no, I don't think I can do it!

But (model and grooming consultant) Noyonika Chatterjee was there, you can say she groomed us for that contest, I told her I don't think I would be able to do it, because it was very difficult for me you know... Because I always used to eat chicken and fish, being an Assamese in my household fish is made everyday! I was like no it's not possible, I can't diet and all that... But she told me, 'Look at Ujjwala (she is an Indian and now top model abroad) where she is now, even you have to be. You have to really do well there. You have to do it'. Then I said, ok, let me try. I did it but it was little difficult for me. Every morning I used to have only like egg whites, brown bread, I was only having brown breads, egg whites, boiled potatoes, no non-veg - I think I had no non-veg for a month - only that for a month. It was like crazy for me.

What happens when a model wants to make a more drastic transition, from one kind of work to another? Swati is an example of someone who is
in the midst of making this transition from one body type to another in the hope of being able to shift to a different type of work. The last two years have seen her work hard on her ‘natural body’ once at losing weight and getting the correct body type to suit a Gladrags contest, and then again working hard on her ‘Gladrags body’ to gain weight and getting her smile ‘corrected’, so that with her new ‘TV body’ she could move to Bombay to try her luck at television serials and commercials. She talks about her hard work:

People told me ... I could be a “pretty print face” but I couldn’t be a model on the ramp. And I was really determined to do ramp. make it big on the ramp! But they said, “You can’t do ramp, you have too much baby fat on your face!” You have to have chiseled bones, chiseled cheek bones, and this face and that face! So I worked on myself...

You know, it was actually quite a shock when the photographer told me I had to lose weight. I told him I was working as an airhostess and already had a slender body. He told me he didn’t care - I had to lose weight! I weighed alright, not much at all; in fact I was quite thin! But I had a lot of baby fat on my face, and that was the problem in modeling. He said I had to run, I had to jog, I had to lose it all - I had to get toned! I was thin, but I had to get toned. My stomach had to be flat and things like that.

So I started gymming. I had never gymmed before! The experience of gymming was alright because I thought I had to do it, there was no other option. So I took it very seriously. I changed my diet pattern - I didn’t diet, but I changed it to more proteins and as per the gym instructor told me... it was alright. I felt good. See, I knew I had to concentrate on my face, because my body was thin. So I concentrated on more of cardio exercises – like jogging, running, cycling. And I started having a lot of water. I woke up with a bottle of water and went to sleep with a bottle of water.

There was a visible difference from when I first went to the photographer and those one and a half months. I was regular at the gym... I used to go five days a week. (It took) about say four five months to show a major difference. Then you know, when I saw myself everyday at the gym, I thought I had to be more toned...
you know how you get conscious of yourself! Then you compare yourself to other models, you compare... so then I thought, no, I had to gym more. It became a part of my life... because all I had to do was look good!

I worked a lot on my body for the Gladrags contest since I knew that Gladrags laid more stress on having a good body. I also joined Bharat Thakur's yoga, I did that for about seven eight months. As a result I was really toned before I went for Gladrags. I was very confident that there was no way she (referring to the managing editor of Gladrags magazine) won't take me.

I went to a nutritionist when I was placed the second runner up in the Gladrags contest, and was supposed to represent India at this international contest called Miss Tourism International held in Malaysia. That time I visited a nutritionist – before that, in the phase between Gladrags contest and this contest, there was a gap of six seven months. So I visited these people in Delhi – Total Health or something – who train these Miss Indias and take their diet patterns .... And then I changed my diet pattern to include carrot juice and beetroot juice (laughs) and ya, it showed the difference. In the international contest, I came in the top five and won two subtitles Miss Congeniality and Miss Friendship.

I haven't been gymming now though for a while... when I came back from Malaysia I lost a lot of weight. I'm a vegetarian... and I really suffered in Malaysia! They were completely non vegetarian – they didn't even have a vegetarian burger! So I must have come back weighing 40 kg. So then I just concentrated on eating, eating, eating and I was regular with my yoga.

I have put on weight now... but I have put on weight intentionally. Because I want to shift to Bombay and concentrate more on commercials, I want to concentrate more on TV... I don't want to be tall and lean and thin looking anymore. I want to get into TV serials to be very frank, so that's why I have put on weight. But yes I will start gymming. I have just been concentrating on putting on weight till now. So I have put on weight as I needed. Now I am just going to go to the gym and tone that weight I've put on. You need a different body type for that kind of work in Bombay... they don't care if you're fat. they don't care if you're short... they just need that pretty presentable face. That lovely smile. And so for that reason I've got my smile corrected also.
In Denial: The Disputed Relevance of Anorexia Nervosa

Everybody can be beautiful, body beautiful (she corrects herself to specify what kind of beautiful she means) only if they take care. It's as simple as that. I have seen it with personal experience, when I've been 64 kg! It was the time when I was spotted on the beach by a photographer and offered the opportunity of coming to India and becoming a model. I knew I had to lose weight – as I was plump! So everyday all I was doing back home was running on the beach, jogging on the beach, swimming and going to the gym. And when I came here it was like one WOW! I got a great response. And you feel good about it. I think everyone can do it! Whether short, tall, long, thin, fat, not fat, dark, nothing like this. The best workout is not even the cosmetic surgery. nothing... you just have to go for your workout and be regular about it. That's it. And if you don't want to then watch your food. You cannot stuff yourself with desserts every evening and be as beautiful as the others who are really working hard for it.

-Vinita

One of the crosses that women in the industry bear is the allegation that they are 'anorexic' and they are responsible for encouraging and spreading the prevalence of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia (made most famous perhaps when the late Princess Diana once admitted to having faced the condition) are 'eating disorders' which is a category of illness which covers both a mental health dimension as well as a physical condition. It is considered to be a social disease too, the social impact of decades of stereotyping in Western popular culture of the idealized, desirable female body and the outcome of the idolization of the stick-thin bodies flaunted by models who walk the ramp. It popularly refers to an excessive obsession with body image, particularly being thin, and is popularly understood to manifest itself in the behaviour of (mostly women, it is a gendered illness in that sense) women and girls who either starve themselves in the fear of putting on weight, or induce themselves to forcibly vomit or purge themselves after eating meals so that the act of
eating itself does not affect their propensity to gain weight. The illness is well documented in Western countries where it is a prevalent problem among young women. Various civil action groups run campaigns every now and then to make women and girls aware of its symptoms and advertise helplines or treatment centres, or to instill self confidence in them and reiterate positive messages about a healthy body image.

Anorexia is an outcome of perhaps one of the most contradictory demands that globalized culture makes on a young urban population, especially women. On one hand we are living in a world of plenty, with abundance of food choices, cuisines, places to eat, a lifestyle that encourages eating out, socializing in restaurants and coffee shops – and on the other, a system that gives importance to being slim and rewards thin, shapely women (as Vinita says, people around her made her feel good because of her newfound thin-ness). In current debates, some scholars argue that what plagues developed societies is not anorexia but obesity and the obsession with pointing out eating disorders has left the serious problem of obesity out of focus for the last decade. What is evident however is the phenomenon of over-consumption and under-consumption are strongly debated in academic circles as issues that have an impact on the social mobility of people.

In the last decade there has been a sudden acknowledgement of this illness and public debate around it in the Indian context. In my interviews however I found insufficient evidence of any known medical case of anorexia or bulimia amongst the fraternity. I also found that inspite of this being a well-known term (bandied about in the media in connection with models) there were many women in the modeling industry – especially of the current generation – who did not even know what the term meant. Some even used the word 'anorexic' as a synonym of 'thin' to describe the preferred body type in the fashion industry, without realizing that it was a
reference to a medical condition or an eating disorder. While most models did mention that many of them smoked a lot and drank coffee, which was a surefire way to reduce appetite, it may not be indicative of an eating disorder - in many modern professions, smoking cigarettes and drinking too many cups of coffee is a standard practice. Only one case of medical anorexia was reported (of a third person) in one interview in which a young model underwent such a drastic weight loss that she was forced by the agency to quit modeling. However this was the only (and vague) incident related to me in the course of my interviews. One of the reasons given as to why people were not informed about it was that there had been no prominent cases so far to shed light on it within the industry. As Niharika says,

There is not enough knowledge about anorexia/ bulimia because it is not so widespread. To begin with the industry is also quite small. Abroad you can find 3000 girls auditioning for one show. So there must be at least around 9000 models of which 3000 have been short-listed to audition? Here the industry is not large enough for something like this to get so rampant. So knowledge is low because there's no one who has been majorly anorexic or bulimic. People do these strange things like... you may get models who try to lose weight by chain smoking or coffee... but beyond that you'll not get any models who have died of anorexia or touchwood have gone to that extreme a situation. Also the demand and supply, there is enough demand as well as supply. So it's not that the demand is just for ten models and there are 3000 models applying! The anxiety to get there is not so much. So you don't see these extreme cases.

Swati from the third generation however feels that it is possible anorexia is prevalent. She says,

I've seen some girls who... just don't eat! I've seen people who during shows, when we spend the full day together, they just don't eat. And I think about 95 percent of the girls smoke in the industry so that kills their appetite.

Even those who do know about it recognize it as a problem in the West that has not reached Indian shores - or at least the Indian modeling
industry. Those who did not know about the term anorexia however did
talk about their discovery of the problems with 'dieting', particularly after
some exposure to the fashion industry abroad. Pragati, who is with Elite
modeling agency for the last two years talks about her encounter:

Internationally I went to Shanghai for the Elite Model Look of the Year contest, I
was representing India. There I saw the other foreign models were so skinny, and
so young! They were 13-14 years old, and did not eat the whole day. Some of
them fainted also. Some would just starve themselves and vomit... I did not
understand what it was. Anorexia? No I have never heard of anorexia, no they do
don't tell us about these things in Elite... But these girls were so young it was
shocking. In it there was a lesson for me. That you should not starve yourself.

An insight as to why anorexia appears to be more prominent in the West
is provided by Leher, an Indian-Canadian model who came to India after
working for five years in Canada. She says,

In Canada, most models are also multi tasking and in other jobs as well. The
nature of the modeling profession there also is that models spend the whole day,
every day, going from audition to audition in search of work. As a result they have
very little time to go to the gym or work out at home or maintain their bodies in
an institutionalized way; for them dieting is everything, controlling their food
intake is the way they keep in shape. So they are more likely to be faced with
eating disorders. Whereas in India, I find that models have ample time for
themselves, and often work out in a gym for hours every single day - something
unheard of in the West!

Even while denying that anorexia is prevalent in the Indian modeling
fraternity, most do agree that the misconceptions around being thin affect
the younger generation today. This guilt, that the industry leads
thousands of gullible young girls to starvation in pursuit of bodies similar
to theirs, is a recurrent feeling in interviews with the better known models
and choreographers; the opinion is that there is a harmful trend towards
being unhealthily thin that –even though they are not to blame for it –
they shoulder some responsibility to change. Niharika, who is a prominent
face of the industry often comes across people who are trying to become thin through any means possible.

Girls who aspire to be models start doing strange diets .... Dieting without knowing, without consulting, crash diets can be harmful also. Like I met a waiter of a hotel... his daughter was 13 years old and she wanted to be a model. He told me, she considers you a role model and all, I don't know what to do with her- she is dieting and she doesn't eat at all. She has been hospitalized once. I told him that I want to talk to her. Unfortunately she was not in the city at that time, so I told him. Please tell her, this is a personal message from me, to NOT do this. Because if she does this she is never going to make it because she is going to kill herself before that! And this is not what we advocate. And I say this at every interview, at every place I can to aspiring models. You can't go on a crash diet. Diets don't work. Try and change your style of eating, eating healthier food and eating the right quantity, the right combinations, rather than doing irrational things!

Mrinal, one of the pioneering choreographers in the industry, and also godmother to many of the older generations of models seconds Niharika's claim that it is people outside the industry, young modeling aspirants, who are more susceptible to the illness. She says,

Those who are aspiring to be models tend to take fairly drastic measures. And I am saying this from experience. I was a judge in one of these regional competitions in the elimination round (for a model hunt), and I do remember being alarmed - and I am reusing the word alarmed - because at the end of that, when I was waiting for my car outside, somebody who did not make it through to the next round came up to me with her mother. She was weeping and saying I want to know why I was not selected. And I said, listen, we can only take ten or twenty out of a hundred, so...

And she said, "But I haven't eaten a square meal in one year! And I have been so passionate about this as my profession! What don't you like about me?" I was getting quite psyched by the entire thing, because... I mean, I didn't even know which number she may have been as part of the competition! But she continued saying, "If you think my nose needs to be redone I can get a plastic surgery done." Now that's a...that's very very desperate which could lead to severe disorders, to
health problems, to mental self esteem problems. I'm afraid it does happen.

There is a widespread social impact of the thin body image associated with women in the industry, and women in the industry are only beginning to understand and grapple with the severity of this impact. Vinita feels that for society at large, it is parents and teachers who must shoulder the responsibility, not models.

You can't stop the media, you cannot stop Trendz or FTV. It is a part of life like anything else is in this world, whether its prostitution or anything else. It's up to the parents to know and guide. It's as simple as that. At 12 you have what, parents and teachers? So they have to make sure... you can't blame it on models.

Everybody wants would like to be a rock star, everybody would like to be a singer, everybody would like to be an actress, everybody would like to be a model. It's a child's dream. But it's up to the parents to guide them sensibly.

Ironically, magazines like *Femina* (who are the chief organizers of the Miss India pageant) deny that they have any role to play in the construction of this ideal body image. Instead they feel that they are doing their bit to raise awareness on the issue, and also put the onus on prevention of such disorders in the hands of the parents and on women themselves by enhancing their own self-esteem.

In a move that made headlines across the globe recently, the organizers of Madrid Fashion Week passed a ruling that no models with a Body Mass Index (BMI, ratio between height and weight) below the normal standard 18 would be permitted to walk on the ramp, as they contributed to an unhealthy body image amongst the public. The Indian media wrote various articles on the issue, held talk shows on the topic and designers debated the relevance of such a ruling. Models maintained a discrete silence on the issue and refused to speak to the media. What emerged again was the opinion that such a ruling did not affect India. The incident led me to calculate the BMI of my sample, revealing an alarming trend.
The graph below shows the BMI of the respondents, calculated as per the standard formula applied to their heights and weights.

**Figure 25**

Body Mass Index of Respondents Against International Standards

- Normal weight BMI range: 18.5-24.9
- Underweight if BMI < 18.5
- Overweight if BMI > 25
- Obese if BMI > 30

Not one person in the sample made the lower limit of the normal weight BMI range, that is, 18.5. All the models (including those from the second generation) who reported their heights and weights (20 out of 30 in the sample) are clearly underweight, and unhealthy, as per international standards.

It is obvious why models chose to maintain a discrete silence. The industry is currently in denial that it has a “weight problem”, and that it is not standing on a foundation of “health and fitness” as they imagine. The constant battery of queries faced by women in the industry on this issue have made the industry very sensitive to this issue – like sexual harassment and the casting couch. Any attempts to engage with it are met with denial, and now, silence. This is to its own detriment as it appears to
be a matter of concern to the industry and society at large. It is indeed an Indian problem too.

II. OVERCOMING NATURE: EXPERIENCES OF COSMETIC SURGERY, MOTHERHOOD AND AGEING

An exercise regime, or a dietary plan are still inadequate to fully exploit the potential of any body to be transformed. Technology today provides ample opportunities to change what you don't like (or think others won't like) about yourself. Invasive and non invasive surgical procedures are advertised in every neighbourhood - on street buntings, outside the local beauty parlour, in the leaflets that fall out of the daily newspaper, on the back of magazine covers lying on the table in the dentist's waiting room. New products - creams, lotions, hair-dye, serums, gels, vitamins - from competing brands promise to provide an 'ageing solution' and embalm you in a timeless vacuum.

**Going Under the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery**

Mita's account of her experience of a nose job was all I could think about while I was returning from a field work trip to Bombay. In my flight was a conspicuous duo. Two women, looking like mother and daughter, were going through the motions at the security check. What was striking was the plaster on the young woman's nose. She must have been around 17, or 20 years of age at the most. Both mother and daughter were clearly from an upper class background, the young woman was tall, thin and fair and could very well be a model, or aspiring to be one. The way the plaster was arranged looked like it was the sign-off for a nose job, and as mother and daughter donned their dark glasses shutting out the world before them, I sat thinking of the other young woman who had shared her experience with me.
Mita, a Delhi based ramp model from a middle class background who had joined the Elite modeling agency, was advised to get a nose job done by her agency, who felt she had tremendous potential, but for her nose. She was 19 years old at the time. She recounts the experience in detail:

I think what decided it for me was when I said to myself that there was no point in being in this industry if I didn't do it. Yes I was getting work. But what's the point in getting money and not getting recognition? So I decided to take the risk. I was scared of course. I cried a lot, I was worried, what if it goes wrong and things go bad? These thoughts were there. But I had decided. If I wasn't going to do this I should look for another career. There was no pressure from my agent. She's like my godmother. she went with me for the surgery to Bombay, she's been with me through thick and thin. She had only sat me down initially and said, look this is a problem. They saw it in the pictures. We feel you need to do this but it's completely up to you. No pressures. So it was left to me. Initially I thought, but what is wrong with me? This was the way I had looked for 19 years! I could not believe it, but when I thought about it. I reasoned it out. You have to have balls to do it basically! We consulted Dr. Trehan who recommended Dr. Pandya - we didn't want to just do it with anyone, obviously it had to be someone who was an expert. So we went to Bombay - me, my agent and my mom - met him one day and he explained the procedure to me. No he didn't show me any references or pictures. I was a bit surprised because I thought he would show me a computer image or something to show me an altered image what it would look like. But no such thing. He refused to meet my agent, because she was not related to me (he would not know that she is related to me in that sense, she's like mom!). Only I and my mother met him. He said it's a regular operation, lots of people undertake it... he told me that they would not change my face as such, but just straighten a bit of bone on the bridge of my nose that jutted out to the side, and bring in the nostrils a bit by reducing the cartilage. He didn't even draw a diagram. He only explained it indicating it on my face. He asked me to come to Breach Candy Hospital the next day at 9 am for the surgery.

That night – in between when I went to meet the doctor and the morning of the surgery - I went partying. I guess its different ways in which one deals with it. This was my way. My dad called and said, Good luck for the operation! And I was like, yeah ok. I was out with my agent, partying. On the flight to there also I
hadn't really dwelt on it. See first we went to Pune for a day before that, my agent had to do some selections (rolls her eyes and makes a wry face) and so I was distracted by that... then we went to Bombay. We didn't make it such a big deal.

It was a one-hour operation. When I was lying on the stretcher before the operation, I was nervous. One male nurse came to me and asked, toh theek ho na? He told me, don't worry, local mein hoga na aapka operation. Local, I said? Basically they were going to numb my face, the area around my nose, and do the surgery, so I would be awake through the procedure! That psyched me out a bit! But once I was wheeled in, Dr. Pandya told me to just go to sleep. And I found myself being a bit drowsy and actually going off to sleep. I even woke up once though in the middle of the procedure. They put an IV drip into my wrist, and that was the only thing that hurt actually.

The procedure itself... they didn't really make any cuts on top of my nose... only two slits under both my nostrils which were stitched up later, and the stitches removed. They inserted some equipment, they could see the inside on a monitor in front of them and drilled, chiseled away at the bone on the nose bridge and brought the cartilage at the sides in. After the operation I could breathe only through my mouth for a while, and that was tough. Yes there was pain, so I was having painkillers. They had inserted two gorges up my nostrils for one day or so, and after that a metal cover was placed on my nose for protection. It took about a week for it to be better. I could eat more or less anything, I found it difficult to speak as it was all connected, and mostly because of the tight bandages on the nose. The thing was that my eyes were all bloodshot and the area under my eyes - both eyes - became black and blue and yellow... it was like I had been boxed in the eyes. But apparently that was normal, that happens if you do any kind of surgery to the face, the trauma is taken by the area around the eyes. It was really black though, my eyes would be red... and it took more than a month for this to go. No, the doctor had not told me about this! So for one month after I was having to try and cover it up and put make up, or something or the other! Immediately after the surgery yes I could see the blood, so it was a bit scary. Blood would drip down from the nostrils and I would have to keep wiping it off. But it was more psychological, I mean, that happens, but it's just the thought of blood that is a bit scary. I only saw my face after I got home. Home as in home in Bombay, where we were staying – with my distant cousins. Yes they knew about it, we had to tell them as we were to stay with them, because I think it was important for my
mother that she be with people she knew, to have her own support... Yes it was
difficult for her, she was worried, crying a bit... but she was ok.

When I returned to Delhi, people could not really tell. It was only in my pictures
that you could make out the difference. And it did make a difference. No there
were no restriction or anything, I could do anything really as before. But by and
by people came to know so it was not such a secret. Lots of people do it, but don't
say... I don't know why.

While most of the women I had interviewed acknowledged that cosmetic
surgery was increasingly acceptable and common amongst those in the
glamour industry and a matter of 'personal choice', few were ready to
disclose further details or share their experiences in detail, even if they
admitted to having gone under the knife. "Everyone wants the world to
think that they are naturally beautiful!" said one of the respondents, as an
explanation. Only a few of the sample admitted to having undertaken
certain cosmetic procedures; these are shown in the bar graph below.

These procedures – skin polishing, hair treatment, laser treatment etc. -
are seen to be more normal (and less controversial or taboo) than other
procedures such as breast implants. What was striking was that in most
cases, respondents undertook multiple procedures. For example, the same
respondent who admitted to having undertaken teeth whitening also said
they went for dental surgery and laser treatments as well. Of those who
admitted to having undertaken any procedure, only one was from the first
generation – this being a first generation model who is still working in the
industry, who had her hips reduced (she is now a mother, but did not
mention if the procedure was undertaken before or after becoming a
mother). All others were from the current and third generation of models.
Those from the second generation did not fill in any details regarding
cosmetic procedures in their demographic profiles. While there is still
some hesitation in turning to cosmetic surgery in this generation
(although there is certainly contemplation, as their narratives reveal) the younger generation has already tried out various procedures – from non invasive procedures like laser removal of facial hair, to invasive ones like rhinoplasty (a nose job).

![Cosmetic Procedures Undertaken](image)

Respondents were more forthcoming in discussing the procedures that were generally common in the industry (as opposed to those they had undertaken themselves). Again, some procedures were mentioned with ease as being more normal than others – these included (what are called non invasive procedures) dental procedures, Botox injections, laser hair removal, liposuctions.

All respondents mentioned that while surgery was extremely common in the film industry, it was still relatively less amongst women in the modeling industry. However the transition from modeling work into the film industry was assumed to require some amount of ‘fixing’, with popular legends being narrated of beauty queens winning titles like Miss Universe or Miss World and then undergoing nose jobs, Botox, bust enhancement surgery afterwards (even though they had just been judged the most beautiful woman in the world or universe!) to enter the film industry. Shaheen, former model who was the ‘face of her time’ over a
decade ago narrates an amusing anecdote about the masses who want, it seems, her nose.

I met Dr Pandya (the renowned cosmetic surgeon) from Bombay at the airport once. He came up to me and said, are you Shaheen Singh and introduced himself. I said Dr Pandya I've heard so much about you, lots of my friends have had things done from him. He said yes, I'm so happy to meet you finally because I do 20 of your noses every year! And I said, excuse me? And he said, yes! People come to me with your photograph and say, 'I want her nose'. So finally I get to see you! Let me have a look at your nose! I said I think that was the finest compliment that I have got in some sort of reverse psychology way! That's a compliment, he said, it's a great compliment, Mrs. Singh (speaking in a wise tone mimicking the old doctor). I mean... but my nose may not look good on you. You know my nose just looks good on me because of the rest. So people forget that.

The graph below shows the perceptions of the respondents as to which procedures are common in the fashion and beauty industry.

**Figure 27**

![Common Cosmetic Procedures](image)

The most common procedures that were mentioned were laser treatments
or the removal of hair on the face and body using laser technology, reshaping of the nose commonly called a 'nose job' (as we have seen in Mita's account above) and dental surgery – almost a necessity in the industry where it is crucial to have 'the perfect smile'.

Swati underwent a painful dental surgery to correct her smile, in order to facilitate her transition from being a model in print commercials to television (see her account earlier in the chapter of working on her body for the same transition). Swati is from a middle class Jat family and was 24 years old at the time of surgery. She had left her job as an airhostess two years before the surgery to pursue modeling, and had been getting regular work in mid-level assignments. Swati was a runner up at the Gladrags pageant, which gave her a platform to get exposure to the industry abroad, and also model for a different league of brands such as Bombay Dyeing (as part of the Gladrags win). She undertook the surgery after her win at the pageant. Here is her account:

I've got my smile corrected, because I had a slight problem. Photographers always told me that I have a little line jutting out here... So I went to Apollo, consulted a dental surgeon and got my smile corrected. What they do is that they grind your teeth – your original teeth – to that length (about half way) and then they cap it. So they grind it really really fine and then caps are put on. (at even length). So now you can make out the difference. My smile was really really... these used to be jutting out (indicating the side canines) and this was really protruding (indicating top front). This one. Now it's become fine.

How they do it is, they take off your tooth from all the sides. Suppose this is your tooth, they cut it, grind it from all the sides (indicating with hands on an object nearby)... so there is space on all the sides... And they put this cap, there are separate caps, ceramic caps. It's a very expensive treatment... in fact a lot of my savings went on it... but it's worth it. And it's a very very common treatment. I mean all the Miss Indias get it done.

I consulted my parents, my mother was clued into my job. So she knew I had this
problem. I had really noticed it. You know, by this time you have seen all the pictures so you know where the flaws are. So we consulted this doctor, lady doctor there; immediately she found the solution. She said you have to go for this because you can't have braces put – obviously, because then you can't do your modeling for six seven months. So there was no other option at all. The doctor gets a lot of people coming in for this treatment. Not only models, people from everywhere. I was quite surprised. Lot of people – like she said lot of women have come to me... those who are about to get married, specially airhostesses, people in the service industry came to her. And of course models. At least ten references she showed me... so she had a lot of people.

It was quite painful. (Laughs)... She didn't tell me it was going to be so painful! So I wasn't really scared... in fact I went for my first sitting... she just told me (in casual tone) 'oh these are your teeth, we are just going to grind it and we are going to put caps'. So I thought that was that. They were just going to grind it and I was not going to feel anything! (Short laugh) And then she started working on me... and I realized... that it wasn't easy. They had to give me local anesthesia and two three shots... and there was a lot of bleeding, lot of pain. I really suffered for a month. I couldn't do any work. So... you know, for three sittings she is just grinding your teeth. And (meanwhile) she just gives you the other cap which you are just wearing temporarily. So obviously you can't work with that cap. Because you look horrible.

I couldn't work while the caps were on. Neither could I go out and meet people. I stayed at home. I didn't want to tell people that you know... but of course, people noticed. People noticed immediately. Like the make up artists who usually work on me regularly, immediately she saw me and said what happened to your face! You know? It changed the whole face of how you look! So I told her. My friends noticed it, immediately. So it was worth it. The whole thing was completed in about one and a half months, each sitting was at a gap of ten days, a week – ten days. But it was worth it. I was quite satisfied.

I was getting worried in between... because it was a lot of pain and suddenly I wanted to back out... But then it was half way there, I couldn't go back on it. I had second thoughts after the second sitting. It was a bit too much, you know, all this... bleeding and... it was horrible. (shudders) And anything sweet just went and hit my gums so badly that the pain... just lasted for two days, three days. But
I managed. The doctor was very confident... I took a lot of painkillers! I could eat anything, but then I couldn't bite... but no sweets. Certain things, like having tea in the morning, I couldn't have, because it had sugar. Sugar because... the other caps that she had given me, it's not exactly made for your gum size. So it is just (a loose) fitting. So there's a gap between... and those gums had already bled, right? So they were still raw. So suddenly if anything sweet hits your gum (in that state) there's a very very bad pain... I can't explain it to you, you just are like ...OH (makes a painful face, as if passing out) - in a different world. But I was very confident with my doctor. That's why I went to Apollo (a private hospital, amongst the most expensive in the country). I didn't want to go to any here and there dental surgeon... I went to Apollo. She was very very convincing. She showed me a lot of references of people who had got it done. And she really took me in her confidence. And even when she was working on me, she was very very patient, she gave me enough time - if it hurts, then she said, ok you sit outside... she made it quite easy. So finally the last day I had them, and there have been no problems since then! But I have to be careful ...

See now for the rest of my life I can't bite into anything hard with my teeth. Like an apple or... you know, I have to slice everything and eat. Uhh... anything hard I can't eat. She's just told me as far as the apple goes! And then I realized... corn on the cob was my favourite, and I couldn't just bite into it... (Laughs) I just realized this some four months back! Then I called her and said, you didn't tell me I couldn't have corn on the cob! So there are pros and cons.

Swati's account also reveals that these procedures are not limited to people from the glamour industry, but are coveted by people in all walks of life. While it is in a sense institutionalized as part of the glamour industry (Miss India contestants receive advice from cosmetic surgeons as part of their training) cosmetic surgery has also been welcomed with open arms by people outside this sphere, not just for vanity but for practical reasons - marriage, a better job, a smoother climb up the corporate ladder (a newspaper report finds that men in the corporate world are undertaking surgery, as looking good has become increasingly important in the boardroom). Shaheen talks about her position on the different reasons for
people wanting to undertake these procedures and

If you are looking at cosmetic surgery to help you better some parts of you that need bettering I think it is fantastic. I think if you are going to do it out of vanity I think that's dangerous. So, today, if you have an accident and you can fix yourself better. I look the way I am and I have a slightly crooked nose, I have an accident, my face was smashed and I can opt for a better nose, wonderful. I disagree when you are a good-looking person and you are trying to fix things. Because it is not natural and it is going to have a side effect. All the girls who have their implants done, implants don't last more than five years they know that. They go in and they know it'll either burst or start deflating or start leaking after five years. Are you going to change it? They don't listen. Five years, they think, ok we'll see then, let's just do it now. So that bothers me that you are not safeguarding yourself from the future, you are not thinking about - who are you doing a bigger boob for? Is it really you or is it somebody who's keying you up or some boyfriend who thinks its fun or something else... I think the main thing is that you have to be really true to yourself and go out and do something that is really going to make you feel better, not for somebody else and not for something else. And it is dangerous. I mean it's not always guaranteed that you are going to come out all right. A lot of them get botched up, a lot of them don't want to pay an expensive doctor. You go to Dr Pandya in Bombay and he is going to take 1.5 lac or 2 lac, and then you can go round the corner to a Mr Gupta or someone else he is going to charge 17,000 or 20,000. You can't do that. It is your health at the end of the day.

The director of the Elite Modeling agency puts forward their stand on the use of cosmetic procedures below in an extract of a conversation.

M: What do you think of cosmetic surgery? Is it common in the industry?
D: It's common and I have nothing against it. Because if that little change can make that much difference to your career... so...

M: Does it make such a difference?
D: A little change in the shape of your nose can make an immense difference. Because it's all about - photo shoots, it's all about being seen at that close proximity. It's not just... everyone doesn't just see you on the ramp.

M: Abroad do a lot of agencies make specific requests to models to get that little
nose job...?
D: Ya, if they feel it's going to impact that much... if it's going to make that much of a difference then ya sure. I mean we do too. Sometimes in terms of teeth, sometimes in terms of nose... and it's a safe surgery now you know, it's not complicated.

M: Do you refer any doctor or any particular?
D: Ya, ya. I would suggest people go to Bombay, and go to a particular doctor. But... and teeth is very important...So we are constantly telling people to get cosmetic dental treatment.

M: What are the common treatments? Teeth, nose, laser hair removal...?
D: No laser hair removal is not so important. I mean it's really their choice - whether they want to do that or go through the hassle of shaving everyday or whatever. But yes, teeth, nose, I've suggested ear tucks... because that can make a lot of difference. Mmm, what else... Sometimes maybe Botox, which is also sort of easy and safe. (In Delhi?) Ya Botox you can get anywhere... and Botox is normally anyway just two or three thousand rupees...

M: How much does it cost?
D: Botox is very cheap. A nose job will probably cost you between 50 and 70,000 - and that's if you go to the best in the industry. Dental will depend on what you need - you may just need filing of teeth... long term, we don't recommend...we don't take on people who would need great changes and a two year treatment because that's too long a period...

It is too early to gauge whether Swati benefited from doing the surgery and giving up simple pleasures like eating com on the cob, but Mita did indeed get much more work after the nose job. Her career grew from strength to strength; she became the agency's top model and even went on to win the Miss India title. On an interview (as the New Miss India) on television in a chat show, where the host enquired about using such new techniques, Mita made no mention of the nose job she had undertaken a year back, but confessed to having undergone gum surgery to fix her smile. She explained that when she saw the videos of herself winning the crown, she
realized she had a “nervous smile” which she felt was a flaw. So in the throes of the post-win analysis, she went through a minor gum surgery which she hoped would steady her smile, and increase her chances of winning at the international level. The host in turn applauded her honesty and herself confessed to having taken a few Botox shots to smoothen the lines on her forehead and how she was feeling just fabulous about it. In the conversation that followed they were echoing what many of the interviews had shown – the overall refrain that cosmetic surgery is a matter of choice, it is a ‘right’ like any other, and (as a generation) we were lucky that we had the opportunity to avail of such advances in technology and were entitled to make the best of it.

Mita’s second surgery also validated what many of the respondents had said: it doesn’t end at one procedure. Those who once cross the mental inhibition to surgical procedures, get into a cycle and become “surgical junkies”. First you do a dental job, then a nose job, then a facelift, then a liposuction to reduce the hips, then one injection of Botox… the cycle goes on. Mrinal, who has been a choreographer in the industry for about 25 years and has seen many young women ‘change’ even physically as time went by, says,

Just before their going for, say a Mrs. World, or that sort of contest, many of them take shots of Botox to be able to get rid of the laugh lines or frown lines or the creases and all that.. because its such an easy way out for that one photo shoot, or for that one spell of one or two days to be looking picture perfect. But I think what’s alarming is what happens thereafter, because it’s like a merry-go-round, you cannot step off it, you know. Which means that, whatever the frequency is supposed to be (Botox I think needs to be re-administered every three months, six months, or every three weeks)... whatever the frequency of whatever you’re getting done for that instant fix – then, do you ever get off that? Can you ever have the guts to get off that, having experienced the ease with which you can improve and enhance your appearance…? But what do you do... it’s all, sort of, part and parcel of the package that comes with the ‘look good’ industry.
Recent studies point out that cosmetic surgery is becoming increasingly popular not only in the 'look good industry' but in general, and is popular amongst men as well as women, not necessarily from the elite. A study by Max Healthcare at its three Delhi hospitals analysed the profiles of 400 consecutive cosmetic procedures done in 2005 and found that as compared to 2004, the demand for cosmetic surgery had gone up almost 3 times, by 280%. It also found that 30% of those undertaking surgery were men, and the greatest demand (77%) for the surgeries were from people in the age group 18 to 40 years. 67% of those who came for surgery were from the middle class; patients from rural areas or suburbs went up from 5% in 2004 to 16% in 2005. This phenomenon is now being termed as the “democratization of beauty” – anyone can avail of surgery to make themselves ‘masters of nature’ and open up wider life opportunities.

**When The Body Changes: Modeling and Motherhood**

The changes that take place in the body with motherhood are often feared by women in general, and for women whose career is so linked to their bodies, obviously the fears and anxieties are stronger. The problems arise also because the productive working years for women in this industry are also those that are socially acceptable as the ‘right time’ to bear children. Hence many women find themselves struggling with these pressures. It was startling that most of the models from the current generation that I interviewed, who were mothers, were no longer active in the industry, even those as young as 29 years of age (and looking perfectly in shape). Another young mother, aged 30, talked at length about her efforts to return to the

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3 Report ‘Cosmetic surgery goes macho: Delhi men ready to go any length for looks’ in Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 28 December 2005

4 It is pertinent here to note some statistics from China. A newspaper report claimed that the Chinese beauty industry is now estimated to be worth more than $24 billion a year. One hospital in Shanghai, the Shanghai Ninth People’s Hospital conducted over 30,000 cosmetic procedures in 2003, a jump of 40% from the figures in 2002. (Indian Express, Sunday, 7 November 2004) Dominant reasons for the procedures were for greater social mobility and wider opportunities in careers, jobs (to get an ‘edge’ over others in a competitive job market) and in social life.
field but the inability to break through some unspoken resistance by the community to accept her return. The experience of motherhood was obviously at the cost of their career, and while some resented this, others put up a brave front and bravely listed out other options that were sure to open out for them as offshoots of this career.

However this was in stark contrast to the experience of an earlier generation of models, who recalled continuing to work even late into their pregnancies without letting it affect their careers. While an older model in her time talked of working until her 7th or 8th month, a younger model talked about how once she entered her 4th month of pregnancy, she went underground and disappeared from the circuit so that no one would see her expanding belly, because she felt that was how the industry would remember her.

Shaheen, once the top model in her time during the late 1980s, says:

I never felt that having children would mean I would lose out on anything... I mean I worked right through it. I remember I shot for this whisky and for Pepsi for the Far East both when I was seven-eight months pregnant. They put me into this gown and I couldn't breathe! And every now and then somebody would unzip me and I would be on the set with this unzipped complete back and this stomach... (laughs at the memory) I mean it didn't bother me at all, to me it was not... but I would attribute that to my Western mentality. In the West having a baby is no big deal, you don't put on that kind of weight. I mean I put on 20 kilos but I never looked like I had 20 kilos. I had a small bump of a belly and it was fine you know... I did every thing, I swam and worked and did everything till my eighth month or something like that. I shot in this black dress. If you ever saw that film you would never know that I am pregnant at all. I was 7½ months pregnant. I shot Fay soap in a tub in a field full of flowers for four days with a huge belly... everybody used to laugh, every time I used to step out of the tub, and they would be like, gosh this is ridiculous!
Neeti – a Miss India in the 1990s and a popular model on TV and the ramp who is now mother to a two year old- on the other hand speaks of a different experience. Motherhood certainly did put an end to her career; she has not modeled since the fourth month of her pregnancy. She says,

Did I have any fears about my body changing with the baby? Well as I had always been working out I knew I could lose weight even if I gained. I just had a good diet and put on about 14 kilos during my pregnancy, I knew I could lose that so it was alright. Of course there were fears about having a baby, I had help but no help also – I don’t have a mother in law so I did not have that kind of support. Yes your mother is with you but for how long. Ultimately it’s you and the baby. After the delivery I went into depression, for one week, but I believe it’s a normal form of dealing with all the changes that are happening.

Did the industry write me off? Yes in a way it did. Even though I continued to use my own name, marriage did not make a difference, but after the baby, yes. I think people thought I would have become fat, become out of shape, or just won’t have time with a baby around… Strangely though motherhood made me thinner! Breast feeding, working out every day. And I realized that breast feeding is really the best way to lose weight, even more than working out! My mother told me that having a baby changes your body forever, your hormones are doing things that have never happened before. Still even though I was not fat or anything, it doesn’t matter. People’s perception is that once you have a baby you sit at home. Only YOU know that you are perfectly capable, but others don’t really want to know. And yes you do go out of circulation for a while, the parties stop, you get the rare call occasionally – but that’s it. So out of sight, out of mind, that’s what happens. It’s a very temporary profession anyway, either you’re there or you’re not.

I think I did my last show in the fourth month. Until then I was not showing, but in that show it was a little evident, people could see my belly then. After that show I stopped working. I stopped going out and being seen also. In this business if you are fat in the last show, you are fat forever in their minds! However they have seen you last is how they remember you. It’s a looks based industry anyway. When I came I replaced people, so other people will replace you also. That’s how it is.
Neeti has now hired a PR agency to start getting some pictures of her out in the press and has started attending industry parties in the hope that people will see that she is back in shape and ready to resume work. Twenty nine year old Leher, who also stopped working in her fourth month (she is now mother to a ten month old), feels that after having a baby you have to play the waiting game and just wait for people to realize that you are back in shape. Leher was surprised when recently asked by a choreographer to model for a show. It was her first show after becoming a mother and Leher was more nervous about the experience than ever before. She also did not happen to have baby-sitting assistance that day and decided to take her baby with her to the venue after consulting the choreographer. It turned out to be one of her best experiences so far of being in the industry. She recalls,

Recently I was asked to do a show with this old choreographer duo at the Pearl Academy of Fashion Design. I had no baby sitter that day and so took my ten month old baby with me. It was wonderful! So nice to see the other side of models, it was the first time I was seeing a different side to them - all the other girls took turns in playing with him, they were all helping out without being asked, and they even left the room to smoke because the baby was in the greenroom. I really felt good about that show.

Many role models have emerged in the popular media in the last few years of women in the glamour industry who have become mothers, yet remained 'in shape' (with considerable help from personal trainers, labouring single mindedly in gyms and following strict fitness regimes). This has created a new attitude towards motherhood amongst the newer generation who do not immediately associate motherhood with a retreat into the home or the end of their career, and believe that one can return to the field. Ironically, of course, this is possible if only they are able to overcome the effects of nature and return to their 'virgin' body - that untouched by the natural effects of birthing, as if, as Niharika says, "time had stood still and nothing had happened". Even a prominent film actor
like Karisma Kapoor was required to use a hand double (another 'hand model' to substitute for her hands) when she endorsed a jewellery brand during her pregnancy. The hand model says, "Since she was pregnant, her hands were big when she was shooting for the ad, and they couldn't use them." During the shoot, the model sat on a low stool behind the actress and "stuck (her) arms out underneath Karisma's shoulders, so that on camera it looked like they were hers.

**Coming to Terms with 'Ageing'**

We have seen in previous chapters that age is a touchy topic amongst women in the industry. Ageing is also a relative issue - being 30 is considered an issue of "ageing" for some, far removed from what a lay person understands as ageing. Why this is an issue, of course, is because the industry is one that thrives on youth and images of youthfulness, and ageing brings with it the end of their career. While all informants felt that the actual age did not matter and women could continue working in the industry as long as they did not look old, that is they maintained themselves using various techniques and products - either by maintaining their weight, body, or using certain products and so on. Most had a ready example in a well known Indian model, but some also pointed out that there was only that one example - and so perhaps she was the exception.

Shaheen (who is approaching forty and has modeled for an anti ageing cream) feels that this new attitude towards idealizing youthfulness or maintaining a youthful body is not unique to the industry, but a general trend. Here, she points out the changing attitude in general towards ageing, and the aggressive preservation and maintenance of youthfulness that she feels defines women of her generation today.

I think fear of ageing has been a Western issue in the past. We, in India, are

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5 Article “Anatomy Lesson” in The Indian Express (op. cited). The author refers to this as "the business of making perfect bodies out of rented parts".

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inherently not afraid of ageing. Here women especially automatically age faster than they are supposed to. My mother will say, ‘Oh! My daughter is over 18, how will I wear long earrings?’ How ridiculous! They came from a different generation. Our generation is not like that. We are forever young. We are the baby boomers. We do not ever want to be old. If you look at me and five of my friends at an evening out... there have been times when we are standing to my elder friend’s children and somebody has asked me, so are you in the same college with her. Or like where do you study? ... we are more aware of age, like preserving ourselves. We are aware of nutrition and what do with it. We are aware of vitamins and how much to take and when. Osteoporosis, breast cancer.... we have twenty awarenesses! We are aware of clothing and how it best suits us, what we look like and how we should use it. We are aware of products and creams and shampoos and dyes all these things. So I think there are so many products out there to give you that awareness. And our role models are totally different. I am looking at Kylie Mynogue who is 37 years old; I am looking at Madonna who is 43 years old. I am looking at all these women who are my contemporaries, who are going strong. All the actresses, Julia Roberts everybody else in late 30s. Sandra Bullock who is 40. So I mean you are looking at a scape where you have no reason to look sloppy or miserable or anything else because you have the wherewithal in all these products. You have products to help you. You have the ideals, which are all these woman, to help you. And you have the possibility, which is that you can still wear something short, look glamorous because you can still exercise and eat well and drink well and all that. So - you should be ashamed of yourself if you look any less! In my mother’s generation if the children were teenagers, beti badi ho gayi then all is done. What was your security? Your husband is there, he didn't leave you, you have enough money and your children are going to get married soon. You gave up at 40. Today, at 40 you begin because finally by the time I am 40 my kids are going to boarding school or college.

Shaheen’s account shows the kind of dependence and loyalty that anti-ageing products and procedures seem to demand in the market today. It also reflects the overwhelming importance of 'looking young'. While for Shaheen (who has other careers to engage herself with) life may begin at 40, for a working model it is certainly the end of her career.
Beyond the actual ageing, the perception of others in the industry that you were past your prime was felt to be dangerous and nebulous. This perception had nothing to do with real age or even the way a person was looking. It was a product of unidentifiable circumstances, and once the word went round that you were no longer 'with it', work would stop coming to you, and your career could come to a premature end. The optimism that Shaheen shows – and the belief that they have somehow conquered the ghosts of ageing – seems ironic and doubly tragic when we see the reality of the way many careers are brought to an end. Niharika talks about this at length:

When your career ends I feel that is the biggest problem... I have seen in the past... and I think to a certain extent even I have had a little bit of trouble dealing with, you know, The Chop. And how people forget - people you have done favours for, worked with, grown with. I entered the industry also when it was changing. The evolution had just started, of turning from an entertainment into serious business. So I have started with a lot of designers who started out, we grew together. Today I have seen the attitudes changing, because maybe they have become huge as designers. And I realize that they don't value people, because they've lost touch with reality. They've let themselves lose touch with reality, which I think this industry can do to people. You can lose touch with the fact that everyone is a human being. The fact that everyone is sensitive, everyone is bleeding. So they start treating people badly. Because they are on their high horse. And then when they see careers ending, they just cut you... loose.

I have been smart enough to do alternative things, so I haven't felt that...and I'm still modeling... so I haven't felt that...but I've seen other models in the past and felt really bad. And I have made an effort to keep in touch with them and make them feel... you know... that someone (is bothered). Because when you are cut off from this industry, it happens almost overnight. And by overnight I mean over a couple of months. Suddenly you are not getting work because someone has decided that you're looking too old, too grey or too wrinkled... or you're just not "it". And for no tangible reason! You couldn't have aged in just those six months! You couldn't have become "out" or not "hot" in six months. But someone - maybe some choreographer, or designer, or photographer, or just the media - has decided and made it applicable to you, and just cut you loose. And then they can
be very, very cruel.

Like MJ for example, was such a supermodel - she is the same age as me, but she stopped modeling ten years ago. Initially she had all this media hype, because she was on top... but suddenly for whatever reason they started writing, saying, 'oh she looks old, she looks old'. She says she retired... but I think she was forced to retire. Because the media went so against her, and wrote so much about her, that she's looking old, she's looking tired, she's got the same expression, she's looking this that... so poor thing, she must have gotten disgusted and said, I'm quitting. It's not that she was not getting work, it's just that the criticism had gotten too much.

Who judges whether the person has become old, or still looking young? In a firm, a government firm, you have 58 or 60 as the retirement age. Because they have considered that, for the mental facilities to work that is the cut-off point. But here there is no such thing... it's intangible! Who is the one who is drawing the line? So that's why, it becomes a very subjective kind of situation to be in.

Niharika's narrative shows perhaps the worst part of being in the industry - what she calls 'The Chop'. The fear or ageing is more than the fear of wrinkles, it is to do with the end of a source of livelihood, the end of a lifestyle. It is all the more acute because women in the industry do not feel any control over this 'end'. Even those who may be at an age where they may be many work years still possible in them, can face sudden and unwarranted 'expulsion' from the industry according to the whims and fancies of a more powerful person or medium - a bit like getting the pink slip in the new global economy, where outsourcing and mergers and acquisitions have made jobs unstable and workers insecure.

Niharika speaks of how women come to terms with this end...

Some people become recluses, some people retaliate, some people keep still trying... and can't let go. Some people just get married and kind of barely manage. Some people move on. But I am sure everyone who has been through that, there will be a period of trauma or shock... some people handle it better, some people don't. And then there were some who I know couldn't give it up... and kept trying
and kept trying and kept trying... saying "oh my weight must be the problem, I'll lose more weight"... or "this must be a problem, I'll do that"... and you know not being able to LET GO. And I felt terrible. You know?

Now I get much less work than I used to. But because I have other things to fall on I am able to deal with it... and I'm not talking about (family). Family and all that can help a little bit, can't completely help you. Because the void is inside you. And work is work. You can't say, ok I have given up work because I have a child and my family and that is my priority. That's a different facet of life, which you can also do while work is happening. Because that's another space, another category! I am completely fulfilled when my daughter is around. but work wise I might still be feeling a nagging restlessness. Because I know I can take it easy now so I am doing that... but it's not that I didn't feel that... anguish. There was anguish when the work stopped coming, it just didn't carry on that long...

Finally, for the physical occupation that modeling is and the physical transformations that define it, it is mental resilience that will pull them through this final stretch.

III. LIFE IN THE PANOPTICON: REMEMBERING FOUCAULT

It is possible to see a direct relation between the processes in progress on the model's body in the glamour industry and some of the concepts brought out by Michel Foucault (1977) in his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault examined the history of penal reform, and using the prison system as a metaphor for society came to a theory of social control, in which "docile bodies" are created by disciplining the body and therefore the mind. Everything becomes a technique of domination. By 'discipline' Foucault is referring to a series of techniques by which the body's operations can be controlled; they work by coercing and arranging the individual's movements and his
experience of space and time. This is achieved by devices such as
timetables and military drills, and the process of exercise. Institutions like
the school, the army, a monastery, and of course the prison are examples
which use these techniques to control masses of people at a literal and a
metaphorical level. The aim of this idea of discipline is to both deprive the
individual of their freedom, and more importantly to reform them through
a process of correction. These techniques of disciplinary power include:
"objectification" through hierarchical observation, examination and then
classification, and a process of normalization (or normalizing judgement).

Through primary techniques such as observation and the gaze, and the
discourses created by the human sciences the notion of the norm is
developed. Norms are concepts that are constantly used to evaluate and
control us, the impact of which is that those who do not conform are
excluded – the category of delinquents is thus formed. This kind of a
system based on discipline and punishment is called the carceral system –
and Foucault points out that it is bound to produce delinquency. In this
system, failure is an essential part of the working of the system.

Although a primary criticism of Foucault's work is the absence of gender,
these concepts have been used by feminist critics to explain the
construction of 'gender' – and states that gender, specifically femininity, is
a discipline that produces bodies and identities and operates as an
effective form of social control. Feminist critics also highlight how the
female body in particular is targeted with certain forms of disciplinary
power. Foucault has been accused of "neglect(ing) to examine the
gendered character of many disciplinary techniques" (McNay 1992) and of
"treat(ing) the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily
experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women
bore the same relationships to the characteristic institutions of modern
life." (Bartky 1988). Bartky asks:

Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men?... Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine.

While discipline for the female body has a different meaning under patriarchy - using tools such as violence, control, rape, fashion and beauty practices over the years have also been forms of discipline. There have been a range of historical disciplinary practices which have served to define "femininity": from corsets in the 19th Century to high heels today. Simone de Beauvoir (1988 reprint) wrote:

Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity.

Susan Bordo (1993) also points out that, in addition to causing physical pain, the corset for example also "served as an emblem of the power of culture to impose its designs on the female body."

Today fashion and beauty practices, and the norms of glamour, continue to discipline the female body, and in a lesser instance, the male body, through disciplinary techniques such as: dieting, exercise - the gym, beauty regimes/ routines/ cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, stretch fabrics, laser technology for hair removal, false eyelashes, hair, nails, skin protection and the like. As we can see from the narratives in this chapter, this is most evident in the example of women in the glamour industry who live out these norms on an everyday basis as part of their working world. For a model, there is no scope for the evident duality between the fantasized body and the real body - her real body is the fantasized body, and the everyday struggle is to maintain this convergence. The irony, of course, is that this convergence never really materializes: even as her real body is the fantasized body of another's, she is still seeking her own ideal

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of the fantasized body. The model’s body therefore is one such ‘docile body’ and her everyday life is ordered around the maintenance of a disciplined life that repeats itself driven by a desire to transform, reform, or ‘correct’ one’s body. This is not merely a physical activity, but one that is normalized inside her mind, as well as in the minds of masses of people – evident in the narratives of Niharika or Mrinal when they speak of how young girls are starving themselves unknowingly wanting to look like them. Moreover, objectification through hierarchical observation, examination and classification (see Appendix 1) as per Foucault’s concepts are also inbuilt into this world through the institutionalized face of the glamour industry such as the Miss India pageant and other such contests. Models become role models for young women, and in this way control becomes pervasive.

**Institutionalising Discipline: The Case of Miss India and Get Gorgeous**

Foucault’s concepts are *structurally* ingrained in the industry and *institutionalized* through the practices followed in contests such as the hallowed Miss India beauty pageant as well as other training grounds for young models such as the reality TV show ‘Get Gorgeous’ (a national talent hunt for supermodels) produced by Channel V of the Star TV group.

The Miss India contest is one among many nowadays which draws several thousands of young women every year. Around twenty five contestants are selected for the final, all of whom are put through a rigorous 30-40 day training before the televised pageant. (This year however 2006 the training itself was also televised in a serialized manner.) For these 40 days, the finalists face a grueling and tight regime of discipline, guided by experts who they are told never to question. Each contestant also has a chaperone who remains with her at all times, to ensure that there is no breach of discipline.
This tight regime includes morning call at 5.30 am followed by fitness training with experts, ramp walking, diction classes, meditation, sessions with dieticians, dermatologists, ‘grooming experts’, cosmetic dental surgeons, make-up artists, and fashion designers. There are strict rules to be followed – no alcohol, no food outside the diet regime (specially created for each participant after consulting with the dietician expert), no smoking in public, curfew at 10 pm, no leaving the hotel premises, and no visitors except at designated times. There is one hour every night in which participants can talk to/ meet family members (only, no friends) in a place which is not private – coffee shop, lounge, etc. – and that too, attended by a chaperone.

The diet is focused on most women’s losing body weight, and is always the center of conversation at every meal (Runkle, 2004). In fact the body fat composition is scanned at the beginning of the programme, when the contestants are made to lie down and each passed through a huge scanning machine that is used to scan body fat. According to this report and the unknown (and impossible) ideal – some “international standards” - that they are supposed to meet, they are advised to eat accordingly. Chaperones are particularly asked to observe (police) and ensure that contestants stick to the diet. They are also prescribed medication by the dermatologist to make their skin lighter.

With what the contestants described as a “killing” exercise routine, Susan Runkle (2004), who spent the training period with the girls observing the process, says “With an inadequate diet and a schedule that demanded fifteen hours of active participation every day, it was never much of a surprise to see young women propped against chairs, their bodies physically exhausted by the effort of trying to be beautiful.”

Twenty five year old Monica, originally from Faridabad, who has been
modeling for the last three years spoke of her experience as a Miss India finalist a few years ago. The daily schedule was as follows:

It was truly challenging to work out every morning. To wake up so early, so tired...I used to cry every morning... thinking oh my God what am I doing here! I had never worked out before. Before that never! They told me that overall toning was required in my body. Because when fat analysis was done through the machine there for all of us, mine was second last. That means I had the least fat - I was second one. But otherwise I had to tone up. When I used to come back from the exercise, after the full regime...get ready, in fifteen minutes and be downstairs! Fifteen minutes, how?! You have to take breakfast also in between. So get ready in five minutes at max, go and have breakfast - otherwise you'll miss out on that. Because your classes start at eight. So it was too much!

We were staying at the Le Meridien and they had a separate diet for the Femina Miss India girls. Our diets were drawn up after they did a study of our body and did some tests and whatever - you know, like, you require this, you don't require this... so accordingly we used to have. Like juices also we had separate - like you have to have watermelon, you have to have coconut... it was differentiated. Then there were few girls who were advised to have pastry, ice cream so they used to go the other side and have! Although we did have our share of parties... where you can eat anything!! But I think that's how it should be! Otherwise how will you learn? School is where you learn, isn't it?"

Charu, another finalist from another year recalls 'those days' of training with mixed feelings and echoes Monica's memories.

My day began at 6 am and it ended at about 11.30 in the night. And it's non-stop. We were staying at the Grand Maratha in Bombay, and it started with Mickey Mehta teaching us exercises and all for two hours - including yoga and de-stressing, and bits and pieces of this and that. Immediately after that you have your breakfast which was obviously low calorie and low sugar... sometimes they used to give us pohas sometimes idlis without any sambar... I think everybody was analysed - they had a body chart of everybody - the specific areas on which you should be concentrating and what your body requires, what you really need. We didn't go through any machine. Fat analysis was done by VLCC. They were providing us the food and everything. So they took everybody's body measurements, your height so that you're not lying about it (emphasis added).
your weight... everything. They measured you. And at the end they said, in a one month period did you lose weight? On which specific part? But that was for your own self. So that you get a shapely body. And they were targeting everybody. Not like they had a preference for an x person, they were targeting all the contestants so that one of us, whoever it could be, we don't know the probability of who it could be... they would have to go to America or wherever to go and compete with international beauties, so they wanted proper sculpted bodies... After breakfast its one hour exercise, skin care, its speech, then its ramp-walking then dance, then... I mean its so many things. The doctor who comes to guide you about your teeth and cosmetic surgeon, the physician... The check up was done every morning. Weight, what you ate, they count the number of calories, then... they will ask you (questions) like how are you feeling today? I'm feeling dizzy. Why is that? Did you sleep well? No! Maybe because of the exhausting schedule, because I slept at 11.30 and got up at 6!

The rules were also tough, and with the chaperones watching over us... No meeting anybody, not giving your numbers out to anybody. And then not stepping out, people used to come and meet their children in the hotel... you're not supposed to smoke in the room, no sugar, no chocolates, chewing gums and all that. It's only one and half months, you might as well give your all to them after that you're on your own so it's fine. I was happy... but I was creating a fuss where food was concerned because I'm very picky and finicky about food. So I did create problems there in terms of saying no I want to eat this and they would try their best to give me a low cal dessert or something - that was really kind of them. I think we were lucky with food because what I have heard was that the previous years, they were more strict. Like they were not even given a low cal sweet. They were not given sweets at all. It was managed by some other event organizers. This was VLCC (in our time) so they tried giving us low cal phirni. Someone had a birthday during then... so she celebrated her birthday there and they made an eggless cake and low sugar cake, so it was good... if celebrations come you don't miss out on it. So they tried their level best to make us comfortable. There were ifs and buts, like having karela juice and all, but I just never had it!

I tried to keep my cool and be at ease... and be like, ok so what if they're not giving me food. I did buy chocolates... and I think eventually they got to know about it, from the hotel shop itself - so that was banned. But it was a good experience, we were like pampered in a way. I mean parents pampering you at
home is like eat whatever you want, but there it was like we are pampering you but we CARE about you – we don’t want you to put on weight unnecessarily.

Under the garb of 'care', the contestants face constant chastisement - they are constantly scolded and made to feel completely inadequate: A rhetoric of improvement and hard work and discipline, as well as obeisance to experts guides the programme. This inadequacy of course is in contradiction to one of regular tools used to build self confidence – an exercise in which the girls must look at themselves in the mirror and say with conviction, “I, XYZ, love myself”. In a BBC Channel 5 documentary on the pageant, titled Bitches and Beauty Queens one of the contestants calls the entire training “40 days of correction!” The result is one of reform. A contestant reveals how her boyfriend was shocked at the transformation “wow, he told her, your English has improved, your diction, your pronunciation too!” According to Runkle, “young women enter the Miss India pageant fully expecting to change not only their bodies, but also to emerge several months later as fundamentally altered human beings.”

The experience is similar in other contests too. The reality TV show Get Gorgeous is organized by the music channel Channel V of the Star TV network with the aim of finding the 'next supermodel in India'. The 16 finalists selected from over 5000 applicants across India, were put through a week long training programme similar to the Miss India programme, guided by experts and framed within a set of rules perhaps even more daunting than the Miss India ones – they were not allowed to step out of the hotel the event was being held in, cellphones were confiscated for the entire duration and they were allowed one phone call at night from family members only. Claiming to be teaching the “business of modeling”, one producer insisted that this was the only way to discipline the unruly girls.
One of the winners (who now has a 5 year contract as a VJ with Channel V) says:

I was really tired of cameras in my face all the time. After the first two days I was like, I have to go back, I don’t know what I’m doing here. It was just constant correction... people telling me how I suck at walking the ramp...making me feel like shit... I didn’t really care but others were really into it, serious as hell. It was like back to being in school - rules, rules, rules, although I broke all of them. Wake up at 5 to Micky Mehta’s exercises (mocking action with hands), then 2 hours ramp, then print, then make-up... And no cellphones! No calls allowed into our room also, my boyfriend had to make excuses like 'I'm her father, its urgent etc.' to just get to talk to me. But I broke all the rules and had my own fun...there was lots of competition, lots of tears too. Even I cried! It was just the environment, they made us cry. And when the camera is in your face then it's really bad. Sometimes you just want to be. But the cameras are there, always.

The observation was not just from the experts, the judges, the camera and an audience across South Asia, but also from one another. One of the youngest contestants, a 17 year old, said:

My roommate made me feel short, fat and ugly. I felt unfashionable and ignorant...I didn’t know anything about make-up and had just brought regular clothes. And it’s just too much to keep thinking about your weight, what you’re eating, not eating...

Reform or transformation (as the name of the hunt says, Get Gorgeous) is imminent. In some cases permanent. She also admits to emerging 'changed' from the experience – one example is her body.

Even though I was generally quite sporty, my body definitely toned up. I was not a regular at any gym before the contest, now I work out now every alternate day.

Going through this ‘institution’ fundamentally alters the way young women look at their bodies and at others around them, and the way they are going to experience their body everyday from then on.
The experiences of participating in the Miss India pageant and *Get Gorgeous* are reminiscent of the school timetable or the military drill that Foucault uses to illustrate his concepts in *Discipline and Punish*. It is no wonder that similar analogies are used by the women in the industry. The editor of *Femina* which is the chief organizer of the Miss India pageant says about the training prior to the contest,

If you are asked to work out, or sit for lectures or whatever you are asked to do, you do it in school don't you? You do your PT, then you sit for class, then you go home and do your homework. Right? If you have to learn, you have to sweat over it.

Many women also feel that women from army backgrounds invariably do better in the glamour industry because they have more discipline, and are able to 'fit in' better. In both the contests, all the characteristic techniques of disciplinary power as used in Foucault's prison are being used here. From hierarchical observation, to examination, classification, normalizing judgement, to complete objectification and finally reform. This objectification is even articulated - an organizer of the Miss India pageant tells the girls in the Channel 5 documentary - “You are a package (emphasis added), a package has to be perfect.”

This process of social control has an impact which extends far beyond the space of the event itself. It is also a carceral system – one that creates obvious deviants – the fat, the aged, the 'out-of-shape', the dark and so on. For example, a controversial advertisement for a fairness cream shows a young woman dreaming of being a sports commentator on television, yet being unable to because of her washed out personality (because of her dusky skin). Following advice from a kindly soul, she turns to the fairness cream and within two weeks has turned into a radiant, fair beauty. As a result (and not because of any innate talent in commenting on sports) she is picked up by a TV channel and becomes their star commentator.
adhering to the 'rules' therefore, she is able to avoid being a failure. In real life, this kind of carceral system can lead to tragic outcomes for those who see themselves as failures – in a twisted real life incident, newspapers reported a shocking case of a young girl in Delhi who killed herself because she felt she was too fat\textsuperscript{6}. The incident brought out various other reports by counselors in schools who shared their concerns about the mental trauma that they were witnessing fat and less beautiful children going through\textsuperscript{7}.

As Foucault showed, the failures only prove the validity of the system. Hence the social ostracisation of fat people, or dark people continue to feed the belief in the system itself.

Objectification is reinforced by fragmentation of the female body into body parts by the visual discourse and by the market, for example reflected in the conceptual differentiation of women's body parts by the proliferating range of different products - specialized services and products for the hair, skin, lips, nails, waist, height and so on (Thapan, 2004).

In the end, the everyday experience of a model's body seems to be rather like being in Bentham's Panoptican (a building in which all the prisoners can be observed at all times) where like in the prison system's Panoptican they are so closely observed and classified (by their audience, by their clients, by experts, by people who hire them and by each other) that they begin to monitor their own behaviour in their everyday life in much the same way that institutions like the Miss India pageant or other contests

\textsuperscript{6} Report 'Lean and Mean: The looks that kill', Times of India, 13 April 2003. Anjali Goyal shot herself in April 2003 in New Delhi believing that she was too fat; she was reportedly 5 feet in height, weighing 50 kgs.

\textsuperscript{7} This apparently has prompted public schools such as Delhi Public School to tie up with weight-loss clinics like VLCC (Vandana Luthra Curls and Curves Clinic) to draw up special diets for children which would be served in the school canteen. (Times of India report, op cit)
Agency and Discourse: A Return to Science

One would say that a prison however is different from the voluntary nature of a beauty pageant, and that human beings are not passive recipients of these techniques of disciplinary power. This is both true, yet it is a difficult issue. Despite being under constant observation and a disciplinary regime, the constant assertion of agency is evident. For instance, in the quotes by the contestants of Get Gorgeous – the constant assertion that ‘I broke all the rules’, or that ‘it wasn’t so important for me’ reflect a tension between being a victim and agent and stress their self image of being in control.

Contestants at the Miss India pageant are often heard saying “I have always dreamt of winning this crown”. The editor of Femina in fact states that the reason why the fashion and beauty industry is such a success here is because “Indian women were craving glamour”. Part of the reason for this kind of agency is of course, the fact that there exists an entire discourse of beauty and glamour which women, and men, are complicit in.

Foucault talked at length in his work on power/ knowledge the power of science in creating hegemonic discourses that would construct the norm. This can be seen too in the fashion and beauty industry – increasingly a scientific bases has been used to create a global discourse of beauty. Newsweek’s cover story of Nov 2003 is revealing. It talks about the “perfect face”, the global standards of beauty that are being created, and is

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8 Newsweek, November 10, 2003 The Perfect Face (How a Global Standard of Beauty is Emerging and What People Are Doing to Get It); interestingly the cover story “The Global Makeover” came under the ‘Science and Technology’ section of the magazine
solely focused on technological developments that help 'ordinary people' get a global makeover. It's legitimacy is propped on the pillars of an unquestionable "science", medicalisation of jargon and expertisation of the 'professionals' - as we saw above, there are experts on health, fitness, grooming, styling, a nutritionist, cosmetologist and so on. (we can see this is in the beauty pageants also – use of machines like the body fat scanner, the panel of experts) The most striking however is the relentless preoccupation of science with the creation of this perfect face and body for the female form. In fact scientists claim to have hit upon the perfect ratio for the perfect face, called the 'Golden ratio decagon complex'.

Besides this, mainstream media – magazines like Femina, Cosmopolitan, new forms of creating visual discourses like fashion photography - has a large role to play in creating a visual and textual discourse of glamour and beauty and to normalizing it. In fact, issues like cosmetic surgery are by and by being portrayed as natural, easily accessible and an extension of an ordinary routine of cosmetic care for a person, or a natural extension of a woman's toilette. The editor of Femina, in response to my question on her views on cosmetic surgery said

If you can wear contact lenses, if you can wear glasses, that's again a cosmetic change. It's also a need. Because once you put on those contact lenses, you are still interfering with nature. To a certain extent, (you do it) when you are conscious of a cosmetic need to hide something that would otherwise not make you look as glamorous...so if you can do that, if you can wear lipstick... I mean, these are all questions of degree.

It is therefore seen to be a natural extension of being 'feminine'...akin to 'wearing lipstick'. Actor Pooja Bedi feels that the 10 minute treatment (a "lunchtime procedure" says the media) Botox is like a magic wand, and says, “Botox is a natural (emphasis added) purified protein that relaxes wrinkle-causing muscles creating a smooth, rejuvenated and more
youthful appearance." Vinita also used 'human nature' to justify the impetus to "improve oneself"; as she says, "Human beings are like that, they never feel their body or face is good enough."

Glamour therefore becomes a projected site where it is possible for an individual to maximize life by becoming "new, improved" versions of themselves, employing the latest in science and technology. This 'false consciousness' is based on the assumption and experience of material gains; people increasingly feel that physical appearance and a glamorous image will widen economic, career and social opportunities and facilitate social mobility.

In the institutionalized spaces of the glamour economy - like the beauty pageants - and in the visual discourse of the glamour economy - especially in the advertisements for beauty products - we see a return to science (see Appendix 2) and a renewed belief in man's (natural!) calling to control or have mastery over nature and natural processes.

The glamour economy can therefore be seen as a tool of social control of urban society, where discipline and power are exercised through the sphere of fashion and beauty by the market. The "science-ized" and "naturalized" discourse of glamour is internalized not just by the women in the glamour industry but by consumers, both men and women, on the whole, exhorting them to voluntarily discipline themselves by having them believe they are exercising agency, and making themselves (in the words of a popularly used advertising line) the "best they can be".

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9 Cover story "The power of beauty" The Week, 3 October 2004
Appendix 1: Boxed.

Above: Neatly boxed - scores of CVs/ portfolios of models classified at a model coordination agency in Bombay. Note the boxes with folios of ‘fat ladies’ and ‘fat man’.
"Double perfection exists: Less spots and a brighter skin!"

MICHELE REIS

L'Oréal

Paris White Perfect

WHITE PERFECT

Deep Whitening Double Essence

1. Deep action on brown spots
   With Melanin-Block X2
   Brown spots visibly reduced: 87%

2. More brightness for a luminous complexion
   With Vitamin C
   Skin visibly brighter: 97%

MICHELE REIS, International Model & Actress.

L'Oréal Paris White Perfect Deep Whitening Double Essence is available at select stores across India. To locate the store nearest to you, or for any advice, call on the toll free number 1800 22 5646 or e-mail at advisor@lorealindia.com
Ceramide Skincare

Ultra luxurious formulas.
Advanced anti-aging technology.
Extraordinary results.

The encapsulated purity of Ceramide Advanced Time Complex Capsules. The skin plumping, moisture boosting benefits of Ceramide Plump Perfect. Powered by state-of-the-art ingredients, each formula is packed with the potency of next generation science and infused with the luxury of pampering indulgence. Ceramide Skincare brings the future of anti-aging technology full circle.

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