
Beauty and Culture: The Effects of Beauty Perception on Cultural Assimilation

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Abstract: *The importance of beauty and youth permeates almost every culture, and magazine models and movie stars are usually the lucky few who can afford expensive beauty treatments and surgeries. Companies and researchers have spent millions of dollars seeking out the proverbial “fountain of youth” in a bottle, but there seems to be a lack of research on the psychological impact these beauty products have on the average consumer. This paper will explore the connection between beauty products and perceived psychological well-being, attractiveness, and attempts at assimilating into a new culture. Twenty non-Japanese participants living in Tokyo, Japan, were given two-week supplies of an anti-aging product, and asked to monitor changes in self-esteem and self-awareness, as well as perceived levels of cultural assimilation into Japanese society. After two weeks of use, participants took a survey and participated in a face-to-face interview. Results from the surveys and interviews revealed an increase in the perception of the participants’ own beauty, leading to increased levels of self-esteem, as well as a perceived acceptance from others and success in social integration and cultural assimilation.*

Keywords: *culture, assimilation, acculturation, self-esteem, beauty.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (2017) defines *mental health* as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” Mental health can be affected by a number of circumstances that may cause stress and anxiety, so much that it affects their ability to reach this level of mental health as described above. One significant way involves a person moving from their native country to a foreign country to work or study, as this situation applies an enormous amount of stress to expatriates, immigrants, and refugees: “A person's cultural background will affect how they interpret and respond to life experiences, . . . [and he or she] may experience stress due to culture shock—the need to adjust to a society with different social structures, values, expectations, political systems, beliefs and practices” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 1). They may also experience challenges organizing housing, signing up for adequate health care, schooling and other services for their children, and have no access to support networks of friends, family or people from their own culture (ibid). It is important to note that certain environmental factors, such as feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, anxiety, anger, or loneliness, changing jobs or schools, and social or cultural expectations may “trigger an illness in a person who is susceptible to mental illness” (WebMD Medical Reference, 2018).

Many aspects of beauty have been researched, and much of this research impacts not only our understanding of beauty, but also on how one may become more beautiful and, thus, more self-confident. Beauty, in the context of culture, is much more difficult to define. This is an interesting perspective to consider, and leads directly to the focus of this paper: What impact does beauty have on an individual’s process of acculturation and assimilation into a new culture?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Beauty

The fascination with and pursuit of beauty can be traced back centuries. It is a complex field with multifaceted areas to consider, such as body shape, skin tone, apparel, and, of course, beauty products. Beauty products have a fascinating history, much too lengthy to include in this paper, but one interesting point is the stereotype cosmetics once carried: “Cosmetics have often figured in the old stereotype of women as vain and foolish, a stereotype contemporary critics too often reinforce” (Peiss, 1998, p. 6). While there may still be some who believe in this stereotype, particularly in cultures where wearing beauty products may not reflect a “natural” beauty, the beauty

manufacturing industry is a significant area of revenue. With many claims of rejuvenation and reclamation of youth—exaggerated claims for many products over the years—it is difficult not to consider this question: “How could a rational being eat arsenic to improve her complexion, spread hormones on her face, believe promises of a wrinkle-free future, and pay exorbitant prices for an ounce of prevention?” (ibid.).

Regardless of the logic behind using beauty products, they are a part of culture, and used by both women and men in almost every country. There is a multitude of articles discussing the importance of beauty in a given culture, as well as the benefits of wearing make-up on a person’s mental health. A survey from the Renfrew Center Foundation found that “almost half of women have negative feelings when they don’t wear makeup,” and “44 percent of women surveyed suffer from negative emotions when they go natural” (Weaver, 2012). Rosen (2015) also discusses the negative impacts of beauty standards on teenagers and adults, and there are literally thousands of articles stating similar trends and struggles. The problem with these articles is that the majority of them appear in fashion magazines and online blogs, and border on opinion pieces rather than research-based academic articles.

That being said, there have been many articles and books that have explored beauty ideals within specific cultures, as well as how beauty is influenced by globalization. Mazur (1986) explored feminine beauty trends in the United States; Bissell and Chung (2009) identified themes, patterns and predictors related to attractiveness ideals and appearance norms in the United States and South Korea; and Yan and Bissell (2014) examined how beauty is influenced worldwide by global fashion and beauty magazines.

To summarize in the simplest of ways, beauty is a vital component to any culture, and a necessary element of human existence: “For these women, beauty . . . is not only one method of enacting femininity, it is the essence of femininity” (Gimlin, 2002, p. 26). (This quote can and should also be applied to men and masculinity.)

Acculturation and Assimilation

The study of acculturation and assimilation into a new culture has been studied for many years, and there are a multitude of theories and approaches to how an individual goes through these complex processes. However, as Ward and Kennedy (1994) point out, “Few investigators have sustained a program of psychological research, and even fewer attempts have been made to integrate the massive and expanding literature” (pp. 329-330). Chirkov (2009) adds, “Acculturation researchers have been trying to apply a positivistic and quantitative approach to a phenomenon that is far beyond the capacity this approach has to comprehend it” (p. 94). With so many difficulties in the study of acculturation and assimilation, it would be even more demanding to attempt to bring clarity through a literature review in this paper. For that reason, definitions will be presented, along with a brief connection to the current study on beauty and perceptions of cultural integration.

It should be noted that the terms “acculturation” and “assimilation” are often used interchangeably; however, there are differences in their meaning. Chirkov (2009) defines acculturation as “when people were initially socialized in one cultural environment and then moved and started functioning in another one” (p. 95). Assimilation, on the other hand, is much more complex, as Schneider and Crul (2010) discuss: “To find about the actual ‘state of knowledge’ in integration/assimilation research is difficult, because of the increasing amount of studies on specific cases, groups or problems, but also because there is a lack of agreed-upon theoretical and methodological concepts and indicators” (p. 1143). Yet while Schneider and Crul (2010) continue on to define assimilation as immigrants becoming “similar” to the “mainstream” culture, (i.e., measuring the “degree of incorporation into patterns of economic and social success”), they agree that the term is “ambiguous” (p. 1144). In light of this ambiguity, for the purposes of this study, an individual’s perception of how much they are “absorbed” into the host culture will be used to measure levels of cultural integration, acculturation, and assimilation.

That being said, how an individual feels about the way her or his beauty is being perceived by those around her or him, particularly when he or she is in a different country surrounded by people who are culturally different, and how those feelings impact the sense of cultural belonging have yet to be thoroughly explored. Therefore, this study will explore the impact one beauty product has on perceived levels of cultural acceptance, acculturation and assimilation for non-Japanese participants living, studying, and working in Japan.

3. METHOD

Participants

During April 2018, twenty participants (n=20) were recruited from three Japanese language schools and two universities located in Tokyo, Japan. Table 1 shows the gender, nationality, age ranges and reasons for being in Japan. All participants met the following criteria: (a) not a Japanese citizen (either born or naturalized); (b) 25 years of age or older; (c) able to speak Japanese at least at a low-intermediate level (around Japanese Language Proficiency Test level N3); and (d) planned to either change their nationality to Japanese (thus revoking their current citizenship) or permanently live and work in Japan, expressing a strong desire to reach a level of acculturation or assimilation where they would feel culturally accepted by the Japanese.

Table 1: Participant Information

| Participant # | Nationality | Gender | Age | Reason for being in Japan |
|---------------|--------------|--------|-----|------------------------------|
| P1 | British | F | 25 | Learning Japanese |
| P2 | British | M | 26 | Learning Japanese |
| P3 | British | M | 37 | Working |
| P4 | French | F | 26 | Studying abroad |
| P5 | French | M | 32 | Working |
| P6 | German | M | 25 | Studying abroad |
| P7 | German | M | 25 | Studying abroad |
| P8 | German | F | 26 | Internship |
| P9 | German | M | 42 | Working |
| P10 | Russian | F | 29 | Studying Abroad |
| P11 | Australian | M | 50 | Working |
| P12 | American | F | 25 | Learning Japanese |
| P13 | American | F | 30 | Learning Japanese |
| P14 | American | F | 31 | Married to Japanese National |
| P15 | American | M | 43 | Working |
| P16 | Canadian | M | 41 | Working |
| P17 | Canadian | M | 54 | Working |
| P18 | South Korean | F | 28 | Internship |
| P19 | Chinese | F | 42 | Studying Abroad |
| P20 | Filipino | F | 39 | Married to Japanese National |

Before the project began, each participant was briefed about the nature of the study, which included the temporary use of an anti-aging treatment cream. Participants signed a consent form and received detailed information about the product before using it.

A control group consisting of ten participants (n=10) was also used to compare the results of the participants using the beauty cream. The control group members were recruited from the same locations, but did not receive the anti-aging treatment cream. Table 2 shows the gender, nationality, age ranges and reasons for being in Japan. All members of the control group met the same criteria as the participants: (a) not a Japanese citizen (either born or naturalized); (b) 25 years of age or older; (c) able to speak Japanese at least at a low-intermediate level (around Japanese Language Proficiency Test level N3); and (d) planned to either change their nationality to Japanese (thus revoking their current citizenship) or permanently live and work in Japan, expressing a strong desire to reach a level of acculturation or assimilation where they would feel culturally accepted by the Japanese.

Table 2: Control Group Information

| Participant # | Nationality | Gender | Age | Reason for being in Japan |
|---------------|-------------|--------|-----|------------------------------|
| P21 | American | F | 25 | Learning Japanese |
| P22 | American | F | 30 | Internship |
| P23 | American | M | 34 | Working |
| P24 | Canadian | F | 25 | Studying abroad |
| P25 | Canadian | M | 32 | Working |
| P26 | Canadian | M | 25 | Studying abroad |
| P27 | French | M | 25 | Studying abroad |
| P28 | German | F | 26 | Internship |
| P29 | Malaysian | M | 42 | Married to Japanese National |
| P30 | Russian | F | 29 | Learning Japanese |

Procedure

Participants (n=20) received a two-week supply of an anti-aging treatment cream called LifeCell—Group 1 (P1 through P10) received the product at the beginning of July 2018, and Group 2 (P11 through P-20) received the product at the beginning of December 2018. Several beauty products were considered for this research project, but LifeCell was chosen because of their aggressive print and online ad campaigns, and the claims that were made to consumers, notably what the company referred to as the “61 Second Effect”: “The antiaging formulation of LifeCell delivers results you can instantly see within seconds of application. With help from micro fillers and the incorporation of light reflecting micro technology to smooth and virtually eliminate the look of fine lines right before your eyes, while also mitigating the look of skin discolorations” (LifeCell South Beach Skincare, 2018).

The product was distributed to each participant in a clear, unmarked plastic container. Participants were not given the name of the product, but, as stated above, received detailed information about the skin cream, including the ingredients, product claims, and directions for use (see Appendix A for specific product information). They were also warned to immediately discontinue using the product if their skin became irritated. Participants were instructed to apply a small amount of the product on their face every morning and evening, paying special attention to areas with wrinkles or small blemishes.

Participants were instructed to apply the beauty product to their faces twice a day (once in the morning and once before bedtime) for two weeks. There were three reasons for choosing this length of time: The first reason was to ensure there were no skin irritations caused by the skin cream; the second reason was to allow participants to get into the routine of applying the face cream twice a day; the final reason was to allow some time for their skin to show signs, if any, of changes brought on by using the product; i.e., for the long-term effects to begin to show (according to the company, long-term effects include the reduction of “wrinkles, puffy eyes, sagging skin and skin discoloration”) (LifeCell South Beach Skincare, 2018).

At the end of the second week, participants answered a 5-statement survey that reflected their overall perceptions and feelings for the past two weeks (see Appendix B for survey). The survey used a standard Likert scale format and contained five statements that gauged how participants felt in relation to their attractiveness, their self-confidence, their Japanese language skills, how they were being treated by native Japanese people, and if their appearance contributed to their feelings of self-confidence, social integration, and acculturation/assimilation into Japanese culture.

Participants were required to attend one of two 2-hour social gatherings that were arranged and controlled by the researcher—Group 1 (P1-P10) attended a gathering at the end of July 2018, and Group 2 (P11-P20) attended a gathering at the end of December 2018. Ten Japanese nationals between the ages of 20 and 50 were invited to both gatherings, which were held in a meeting hall on a university campus in Tokyo. Green tea and Japanese snacks were provided, and traditional Japanese music was played; no alcohol was served, and participants were asked not to drink alcohol before the gathering; and the invited Japanese guests were asked to speak minimal amounts of English to participants. Participants were required to write a journal entry no later than one day after the event took place, documenting who they talked to and how they felt during the event. For this research project, the journal entries acted as notes for the final interview so participants would not forget important details.

Finally, each participant attended a 1-hour, face-to-face, structured final interview with the researcher in order to discuss the journal entries, as well as gather their final thoughts and experiences about using the beauty product and how it may have affected their self-esteem and sense of belonging to a foreign culture (see Appendix C for interview questions).

Data Analysis

Content analysis, which takes verbal data and transforms it into quantitative data, was used to analyze the data from the interviews (Bailey, 1994). One way Bailey (1994) suggests to quantify verbal data is by documenting the frequency in which a word or phrase appears. The interviews were transcribed into separate Microsoft Word documents, and categories were created based on the frequency of words mentioned by participants. The five categories with the highest amount of mentions were: 1) attractiveness, 2) confidence, 3) approval, 4) acceptance, and 5) identity (referred to below as Category 1, Category 2, and so on).

Results

Survey.

At the end of two weeks, the participants were instructed to return any unused portion of the beauty product along with their surveys. Table 3 shows the individual responses for each statement (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree).

Table 3: Participant Survey Results

| Participant # | Statement 1 | Statement 2 | Statement 3 | Statement 4 | Statement 5 | Mean | SD |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------|------|
| P1 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4.2 | 0.84 |
| P2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3.8 | 0.45 |
| P3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.8 | 0.45 |
| P4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3.6 | 0.55 |
| P5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.6 | 0.55 |
| P6 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.4 | 0.89 |
| P7 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4.2 | 0.45 |
| P8 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.8 | 0.84 |
| P9 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3.6 | 0.89 |
| P10 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3.2 | 1.09 |
| P11 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4.0 | 0.00 |
| P12 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3.8 | 0.45 |
| P13 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4.0 | 0.71 |
| P14 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4.2 | 0.84 |
| P15 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3.4 | 0.55 |
| P16 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3.2 | 0.84 |
| P17 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3.8 | 0.45 |
| P18 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4.2 | 0.45 |
| P19 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4.2 | 0.45 |
| P20 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.4 | 0.55 |

Statement 1 first measured how attractive the participants felt while using the beauty product, and fifteen (15) out of twenty participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more attractive while using the beauty product than they usually did when they had not been using the product ($M=3.95, SD=0.69$).

Next, Statement 2 asks participants if they felt more confident about their interpersonal skills, which can be “defined as the social and interpersonal qualities or capacities required to effectively deal with and promote positive human relationships, interactions, personal and interpersonal development, or social participation (Hatala, Erickson, Isbister-Bear, Calvez, Bird-Naytowhow, Pear, Wahpasiw, Engler-Stringer, & Downe, 2018). Surprisingly, all twenty (20) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that during the two weeks they felt more confident about their interpersonal skills than they usually did.

Statement 3 asked participants about the level of approval that they experienced when attempting to speak Japanese. “Approve” (n.d.) was defined as either having or expressing a favorable opinion of something or someone, or accepting something or someone as satisfactory. Although only eleven (11) participants either agreed or disagreed with this statement, the remaining nine (9) participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

The next statement, Statement 4, has participants reflect on the positive attention they received from the Japanese people they encountered, but more importantly, whether the participants felt they accepted them into their culture rather than treat them as outsiders who don’t fit in. Thirteen (13) participants either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 4, five (5) participants neither agreed nor disagreed, and two (2) participants disagreed.

The final statement, Statement 5, asked participants whether or not they believed their appearance contributed to their feelings of self-confidence, social integration, and acculturation or assimilation (whichever was their stated goal at the beginning of the study) into Japanese culture. For this statement, fifteen (15) participants either agreed or strongly agreed, three (3) participants neither agreed nor disagreed, and two (2) participants disagreed.

At the end of two weeks, the members of the control group (P21-P30) were also given the same survey. Table 4 shows the individual responses for each statement (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). For survey questions 1 through 4, most of the control group members' responses were considerably lower compared to the participants' responses. However, all control group members, aside from one (P30), responded with "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with question 5. These results further support the notion that physical appearance is connected to feelings of self-confidence, but also feelings of acculturating or assimilating into a new culture.

Table 4: Control Group Survey Results

| Participant # | Statement 1 | Statement 2 | Statement 3 | Statement 4 | Statement 5 | Mean | SD |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------|------|
| P21 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1.8 | 1.30 |
| P22 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3.0 | 1.00 |
| P23 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3.6 | 1.14 |
| P24 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2.2 | 1.09 |
| P25 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3.4 | 1.14 |
| P26 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2.2 | 1.30 |
| P27 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1.8 | 1.30 |
| P28 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3.4 | 0.89 |
| P29 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4.2 | 0.84 |
| P30 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2.4 | 0.54 |

Interview.

One-hour, face-to face, structured interviews were held with the participants in order to provide an opportunity for them to express their thoughts and experiences beyond what was presented in the survey. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the content was analyzed for common themes and patterns. From the twenty interviews, as mentioned above, five categories were created: 1) attractiveness, 2) confidence, 3) approval, 4) acceptance, 5) identity.

Regarding Statement 1 (Category 1), participants reflected on using the beauty product, and how attractive it made them feel when interacting with Japanese society:

"I was surprised when I started to actually feel the skin cream working. I couldn't believe it. I suddenly felt like my skin became tighter, and the dark circles around my eyes, which I've always been self-conscious about, became lighter. Whatever this is, it made me feel better about myself." (P3)

"I consider myself above-average attractive, so I don't really feel the need to ever use creams like this. I has a few people tell me my skin looked brighter, so I definitely can see the merits behind stuff like this." (P8)

With Statement 2 (Category 2), participants considered their level of confidence in relation to their interpersonal skills:

"I'm not a very confident person anyway, so having this miracle cream on my face made me feel like I was wearing a new face—the face of a confident person. I don't know why, but Japanese people must have seen that 'cause they seemed captivated by my every word." (P1)

"Being from the Philippines, I experience a lot of racism in Japan, so it was nice having a confidence booster. Being beautiful helps, but *feeling* beautiful helps more when dealing with people, I think." (P20)

Statement 3 (Category 3) focused on feelings of approval in relation to interpersonal and language skills, which varied among the participants, but many of them believed that confidence levels increased language ability and persuasiveness, leading to perceptions of cultural approval:

"My Japanese is terrible, and it doesn't help that I speak with a thick Aussie accent, so I usually stay quiet. I don't want to be the 変なおじさん (translation= strange old man) at parties. But feeling better about myself helped break me out of my shell. Maybe it was psychological, but whatever it was, it worked, and suddenly I was part of the group instead of on the outside looking in." (P11)

"Language is a weak point, for sure. Although I did have people showing interest in me, I still found it difficult to communicate my ideas, regardless of how I looked. I was like a statue. I was beautiful to look at, but couldn't talk. In spite of that, I wasn't ignored." (P12)

Statement 4 (Category 4) reflected participants' desire for acceptance from Japanese people, which, as they described, is the feeling of being treated as equals in Japanese society. In some cases, participants had experience feeling like a second-class citizen in Japan, and stated it was very clear at times:

"This is the one area that scored the highest for me. With all the tension between Japan and South Korea, it was nice to receive attention from men. For once, they didn't look at me like an exotic fruit to taste, but a person with thoughts and feelings. For the first time, I felt what it was like to be accepted as a Japanese woman." (P18)

"I've got nothing against that cream or your research project. I'm just biased when it comes to Japanese people. Wherever I go, I'm always treated like a dog that can talk, so now I just expect that behavior. Admittedly, I didn't go into this study with a positive attitude, so I think it's impossible for me to ever feel like I'm accepted here no matter how well I look or perform." (P15)

Statement 5 (Category 5) attempted to shed more light on an individual's desire for and process of acculturating or assimilating into a new culture, essentially creating a new identity:

"It took me a long time to circle my answer for this one. Society is so concerned with looks and fashion, and I didn't want to admit that looks mattered when it comes to foreigners in a new country, but they really do, and I'm guilty of treating people better based on appearance. The cream helped smooth some laugh lines and dark circles, and that made me feel better about myself, and more confident in my ability to blend in. I felt like part of the community, and even got the nerve to participate in a local festival! I literally felt like a new person with a new identity." (P5)

"I'm married to a Japanese guy, and he's always concerned about how I look when we meet his coworkers or friends. I associate looking good with assimilating into Japanese culture. It's part of my identity now, so for me this has all been very interesting." (P14)

The final question was not connected to any category, but instead gave participants an opportunity to discuss their experiences at the two gatherings that were held:

"I needed to look and feel my best. I wasn't expecting too much from the cream, but I definitely saw and felt results, and this helped me interact more smoothly with the Japanese there. Anyone who says that your level of attractiveness has nothing to do with how well you integrate into a new culture is fooling themselves." (P16)

"I'm older than most Japanese students, so I usually keep to myself because I know it's unusual for older people to go to uni here. I was shocked when the Japanese at the party started telling me they thought I was 25! I've had a really hard time here, but I've never been happier. Feeling attractive to Japanese people put my mind at ease, and I hardly thought about race or culture, let alone not being Japanese. We were all just people getting along. I want to feel this way all the time." (P19)

The control group (P21-P30) did not attend one of the two 2-hour social gatherings that were arranged and controlled by the researcher, nor did they participate in the one-hour, face-to face, structured interviews.

4. DISCUSSION

The results from this study on the effects of beauty perception on cultural assimilation reveal that it is possible to integrate and feel accepted into a new culture by increasing perceived levels of attractiveness. In other words, if someone perceives that his or her communicative partner finds him or her physically attractive or appealing (not necessarily in a romantic way), then this interaction increases the level of perceived acceptance into that person's culture.

There were many different levels of this research that led to this hypothesis and conclusion. In the first phase, the participants applied a face cream that claimed immediate disappearance of wrinkles and other blemishes by tightening the skin and deflecting light from the tiny crevices that make up wrinkles. The application period lasted two weeks.

In the second phase, participants completed a 5-statement survey that was based on Alba and Nee's (2003) New Assimilation Theory. This theory asserts that societal institutions play a large role in foreigners achieving assimilation, and that the majority (in this case, the Japanese) must adapt and be accepting of foreigners into their culture.

With that in mind, a large percentage of participants (see Results section for precise numbers) either agreed or strongly agreed with the five statements, verifying their positive feelings and perception toward assimilation based on levels of attractiveness and cultural acceptance. It should be noted that while definitions for multiple terms were given to participants before beginning the study, an argument can be made that several parts of each statement could be interpreted in different ways. However, the point of this study was to record the subjective experiences of each participant, thus the statements remained open to the interpretation of each participant.

In an additional phase, participants were required to attend a 2-hour social gathering attended by other participants and Japanese attendees. It is important to note that the ten participants who attended each gathering did not know each other, and did not know they were participating in this study. From each participant's point of view, they were the only one attending the gathering who was a participant in the study. Likewise, the Japanese attendees who were invited to the gathering did not know about the study, but were told that it was simply a social gathering. After the gathering, participants wrote a journal entry about their experiences, which were shared in the final phase.

In the final phase, participants attended a one-hour, face-to-face, structured interview, and were asked to reflect on their experiences over the last three weeks. Their answers, some of which can be read in the Results section, showed an understanding of the difficulties encountered while trying to assimilate into a new culture, but also of the positive perspectives and encounters each participant experienced, and how that relates to their personal journey of cultural assimilation.

In short, by applying a self-described "miracle" anti-aging treatment, participants increased their perceived levels of attractiveness, leading to increased levels of self-esteem that assisted in navigating and integrating into a foreign culture. The participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the skin cream, as well as their successes in acculturating or assimilating into Japanese culture, are personal experiences, but one can argue that if a person who identifies as Japanese (or any culture different than the one they were born into), he or she has successfully completed a process of assimilation, and therefore has a right to lay claim, either personally or legally (as through a process of naturalization) to that new cultural identity. Regardless of which side of the argument one falls, this study supports the notion that beauty and cultural acceptance are linked in important and critical ways.

5. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations with this research. First, the sample size was relatively small, and focused only on foreigners wishing to assimilate into Japanese society. More extensive research with a larger group of diverse participants who are living in countries other than Japan needs to be conducted in order to further validate the research instruments. Also, a variety of beauty products for both men and women need to be tested in order to generalize the results using the LifeCell face cream.

It may also be beneficial to first briefly educate participants on the process of assimilating into another culture so they could track their own progress throughout the study, and determine whether full assimilation is possible (Boyer, 2001).

Also, there are other aspects of assimilation other than beauty that should be considered. One study on how successful immigrants assimilated into American culture focused on "education, occupation, residential segregation, language acquisition, poverty, health, crime rates, family type, intermarriage, and naturalization," and found that immigrants were, in fact, assimilating successfully (Snibbe, 2015). These areas are beyond the scope of this paper, but several of these areas did appear in participant interviews, although they were not discussed enough to include them as variables in this study.

However, the findings in this study support the notion of beauty and beauty perception leading to feelings of cultural acceptance, assimilation, and integration into a foreign society. The results may be useful to researchers, educators, and other professionals working with diverse populations in their native country or a foreign country,

particularly when engaging with a non-native population wishing to assimilate into a new culture. The results may also benefit scientists and manufacturers in creating new beauty products that promote self-confidence and cultural diversity.

6. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to state an abstract and subjective concept such as beauty is unequivocally linked to cultural integration, acculturation, and assimilation, but the effects that beauty has on an individual, a community, and even an entire culture are well documented (Bissell & Chung, 2009; Bissell & Yun, 2014; Black, 2004; Gimlin, 2014). Open any fashion magazine or tabloid paper in any country, and one will find photos and articles on movie stars and models that are respected and adored by a majority of the population. Beauty is everyone, and it influences many areas of life, from personal abilities to politics. Feeling attractive can boost self-esteem, and an increase in self-esteem can provide an avenue to enhanced abilities and awareness. Plastic surgery and miracle beauty products line store shelves across the globe, because many people believe that a “pretty face” can open many doors. Cosmetics and other beauty companies fully understand that using a beauty product can make people feel better about themselves and their situation, which is why the beauty industry is so successful. Skin care industry alone is expected to generate 11 billion dollars in 2018 (Sena, 2018).

The old cliché saying about beauty and the beholder still holds truth, but what if the beholder is the person applying the product to bring forth a transformation of beauty, and what if that physical transformation causes an internal one that is so powerful that it influences the people around him or her? That was the intent of this study—to see if a product has the power to cause this transformation upon transformation.

In a time of globalization and mass immigration, either by choice or because of few other choices, more attention should be given not to beauty itself—the world places too much emphasis on that now—but to the power and influence that beauty may have on culture, cultural identity, and the opportunities foreigners in a new country may have of successful assimilation. Although the connection between beauty and self-confidence is easy to grasp, discovering that one’s beauty impacts the process of acculturation or assimilation into a new culture by fostering the formation of a new identity can provide an important tool, and perhaps a key, for those living, studying, and working abroad.

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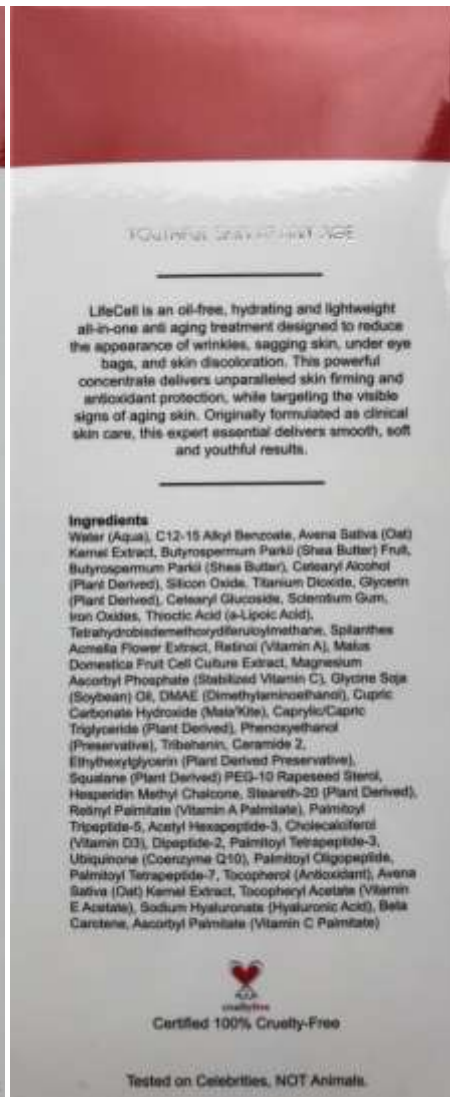
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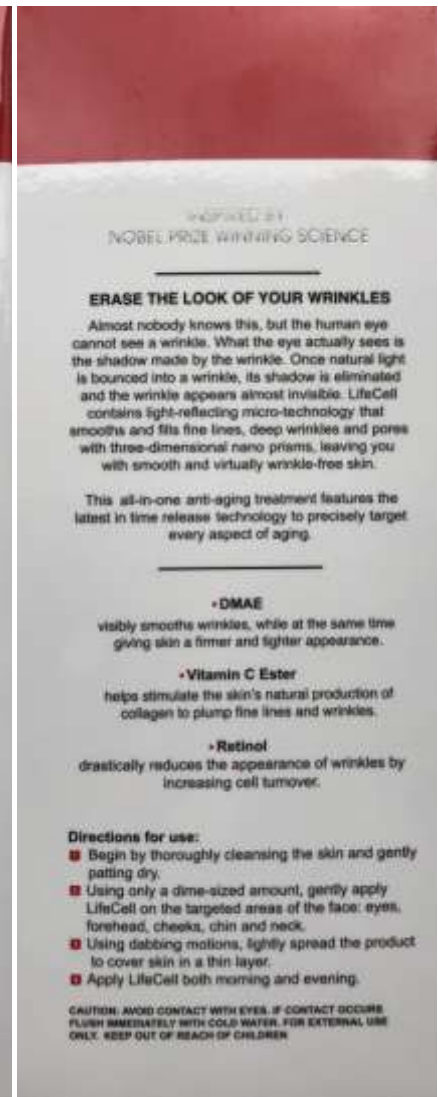
APPENDIX A



Product Information:
Cover



Product Information:
Ingredients



Product Information:
Claims and Directions

APPENDIX B

Survey

Considering the two weeks you used the beauty product, please respond to the following statements.

1) I felt more attractive than I usually do.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

2) I felt more confident about my interpersonal skills than I usually do.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

3) When I spoke Japanese, I was met with approval from those around me.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

4) I received positive attention from the Japanese people I encountered, and felt they accepted me into their culture rather than treated me like an outsider.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

5) I believe my appearance contributed to my feelings (either positive or negative) of self-confidence, social integration, and acculturation/assimilation into Japanese culture.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

- 1) On a typical day, how attractive do you usually feel?
- 2) How confident are you in your interpersonal skills?
- 3) When you speak Japanese, do you feel you are typically met with approval from the Japanese people around you?
- 4) What changes in your behavior, as well as the behavior of the Japanese people around you, did you notice after you started using the beauty product?
- 5) Do you believe a person's appearance is connected to how they identify and assimilate into a new culture?
- 6) Tell me about your experience at one of the gatherings you attended.