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A Body of Perfection

**"The Increasing Standardisation of the Female Body
in Televised Miss New Zealand Beauty Pageants 1964-1992"**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns the standardisation of female body image in the media over time and its implications for women who are bombarded with images of ideal physique. The research project was based on video data from four Miss New Zealand beauty pageants spanning the period 1964 to 1992. The main reason for using televised beauty pageants is that they operate to reinforce a particular ideology of gender identity. In addition to these four videos I have drawn upon the printed programme material for beauty pageants from 1960 - 1992. Whilst some of this material is incomplete it nevertheless provided some insight into changes that have occurred. The methodology employed to conduct this investigation is content analysis. Results suggest that a standardisation of ideal body image has occurred since the early 1980s. The ideal body of the 1990s is a taut, long legged body which is attainable only by a few women. This stereotype is powerfully deployed by the media to convey messages to women and other groups in society about what types of behaviour and 'look' they should model. One theoretical consequence of this project is that in spite of recent critiques, both of content analysis and the idea of the stereotype, these continue to be very useful tools in studying the role of the media in a patriarchal society.

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