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**CONSTRUCTIONS OF HEALTH, WEIGHT AND
BODILY APPEARANCE AMONG INDO-FIJIAN
WOMEN ACROSS THREE GENERATIONS**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
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ABSTRACT

Discursive constructions of a 'thin ideal' body shape today have often associated the slender body to the idea of a 'healthy weight' and physical beauty. While idealised notions of the feminine figure have trended from the curvaceous body to the thin ideal within western societies, for women from non-western cultures living in a western milieu, research in this area is limited. Culturally derived understandings about health, weight and bodily appearances affects the ways in which women construct idealised notions of body shape. This thesis explored constructions of health, weight and bodily appearances among Indo-Fijian women across three generations. Six focus group discussions were held with a total of 24 women spanning three generations, where four women participated in each group. Focus group discussions were taped, transcribed and analysed based on the principles of Foucauldian discourse analysis.

The analysis revealed that idealised notions of health, weight and bodily appearances were constituted as representations of the body as healthy and feminine among Indo-Fijian women across all three generations. The body as healthy was understood in terms of eating practices and physical activity. Eating practices were further negotiated as notions of diet, illness and weight, and in turn shaped the way in which women across three generations constructed the body as healthy. The body as feminine was understood as a way of exercising femininity and, discussed within understandings of physical appearance and slenderness. Across each generation, women discussed ideas about idealised notions of the body shape in culturally specific ways. Therefore, all participants drew on particular cultural and social practices of negotiating health, weight and bodily appearances as Indo-Fijian women living in New Zealand. It is concluded that the construction of societal idealised notions of body shape is not static, but rather contingent upon the context in which women live; therefore shaped and reshaped within interactions with dominant discourses of health, biomedicine and culture to construct idealised notions of the feminine body shape.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Western societies have increasingly become preoccupied with a woman's figure. Weight and body concerns have consistently been highlighted especially within body image research where, studies indicate that weight is the primary concern in terms of embodied experience for women (Jefferson & Stake, 2009; King et al., 2013). Contemporary societies focus on a weight which is difficult to achieve. Without doubt, it would appear rather surprising if a magazine gave 'weight-gain tips', however, a page on '10 quick ways to lose weight' will not come across as unusual to a typical female reader. Such discourses read in popular magazine articles for instance, encourage women to engage weight-loss strategies to achieve valued forms of the body like the thin ideal body shape.

Positivistic assumptions utilised by researchers such as epidemiologists, draw on statistical and biomedical approaches. Epidemiological research has indicated that only five to ten percent of women conform to the thin-ideal body (Wolf, 1991), suggesting that millions of women deviate from this ideal. Mainstream approaches theorise that failure to meet such ideals lead women to experience body dissatisfaction and concerns, leading to physical and psychological health issues (Becker, 2004; King et al., 2013; McKinley, 1999; Neumark-Sztainer, 2012). However, these mainstream ideas only focus on body image concerns as an individual problem, excluding wider accounts of the context in which concerns arise.

Feminists from various disciplines (e.g. sociology, philosophy, anthropology) on the other hand, have taken a critical stance and propose that contemporary ideals of women are constructed with cultural discourses of an ideal body image (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993; Germov & Williams 1999; Guendouzi 2004). Feminist research criticises notions about individualising body image and weight concerns and rather turns to the way in which wider accounts of social and cultural discourses construct feminine body ideals.

The background of the present research will be presented in nine segments. The first of these will discuss the way in which the feminine ideal has been shaped over time within

the western milieu. The second section of the background chapter will then turn to addressing the construction of the ideal female figure in relation to physical appearance. This part will look at cultural constructions of idealised notions of beauty, as well as address the way in which the expression of success is attained through physical appearance. This will be followed by understandings surrounding weight including ideas about obesity, anorexia and bulimia. The fourth section will look at ideas in relation to controlling weight. This will account for the idea that controlling weight is an important aspect of constructing idealised notions of the body within western societies. In the fifth segment of the background, eating practices among women will be discussed. Here ideas about control and discipline through eating practices, namely by engaging in dietary regime will be discussed. The final three sections will look at idealised societal notions of bodily appearances within the non-western context and eating practices. Discussions about eating practices will look at ways in which the notion of food is an important aspect for individuals from non-western cultures. The next section will turn to discussing the interactions of westernised cultural discourses with non-western community groups in relation to idealised notions of bodily appearances, followed by an overview of the present research.

The feminine ideal body shape

Within western societies, understandings about idealised notions of the feminine figure have changed in particular ways throughout the centuries. In the 1920s, the ideal figure of a woman was a thin lean body, with slender hips and legs (Fangman, Ogle, Bickle & Rouner, 2004), later replaced by the hourglass shape in the 1950s, where the voluptuous body was idealised by sensuous figures such as Marilyn Monroe (Lloyd, 1996). Since the 1980s, the voluptuous body was once again, replaced by preferences for a slim physique or the thin ideal. Thin ideal women were expected to carry an angular, lean and 'fat-free' image (King et al., 2013), where this image continued throughout the 21st century (Seid, 1994). Attainment of the thin ideal thereby, were often endorsed and glamorised in *Vogue*, where models tended to be portrayed through fashionable slimness in figure-hugging dresses (Fangman et al., 2004). Some researchers (Altheida, 1985; Banner,

1983; Latham, 2000) argue that the content and imagery have contributed to constructing the thin-ideal body image for women. That is, the pervasive use of slimness in such magazines constructs such women as glamorous, sophisticated, fashionable, youthful, vital, and physically attractive (Fang et al., 2004). Hence, over the last century and today, western world culture has prescribed discourses framing femininity through an ideal body shape. Over the years, idealised notions of the body have been trained, impressed, and shaped as a result of the 'triumph' body forms and have been presented through these historical ideals of femininity (Bordo, 1993).

These historical and social processes indicate that the cultural scaffolding of the feminine figure is negotiated and re-constructed in ways that are narrowly defined and restrictive. Although once curves of a woman defined her femininity, the feminine ideal of today has been reshaped to a narrowly defined and slim figure. Bordo (1993) posits that "slenderness has consistently been visually glamorised, and as the ideal has grown thinner and thinner, bodies that a decade ago were considered slender have now come to seem fleshy" (p. 57). This suggests that despite variation body shapes, women are expected to conform to societal idealised notions of a body shape (Seid, 1994).

Beauty and femininity

The body serves as a medium and metaphor for culture (Bordo, 1989). The feminine figure is often placed in the spotlight as a symbol of consummate beauty (Fangman et al., 2004; Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz and Thompson, 1980). Dominant discourses or social understandings within modern societies around 'beauty' today lies within the idea of women's slenderness as the accepted and attractive body form (Lamb, Jackson, Cassidy & Priest, 1993; Mask & Blanchard, 2010). These social constructions of feminine embodiment are often illustrated through pageant organisations, such as Miss World and Miss Universe and in fairy tales, television, movies and other forms of contemporary media. Contestants who enter pageants events for instance, compete to be identified as the 'most beautiful' woman where notions of feminine beauty are judged often by the perfection of bikini clad contestants, in which slenderness plays a crucial factor (Garner et al., 1980). The winner of a pageant is applauded for being a perfect

illustration of 'inscribing' beauty through the thin ideal body image and as such, a successful portrayal of the idealised woman. Contestants, exemplify the way in which commonly shared social and cultural discourses about feminine embodiment are constructed and reconstructed (Gergen, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), resending a shared meaning about what society may constitute as physically attractive. This suggests that the prevailing contemporary ideal of slenderness in such cases, act as a requirement for feminine beauty, rather than an option for women to practice femininity within western societies.

Discourses such as 'first impressions make lasting impressions' tend to be related to self-presentations or physical appearance. Within the western milieu with physical attractiveness emphasised to attain successful interactions or relationships for women in everyday life such as in employment and intimate relationships (Bartky, 1990; Puhl & Peterson, 2012; Wolf, 1991). Hence, this implies that beauty is a prerequisite for successful practices of femininity. Bordo (1993) further argued that dominant social discourses played out in the contemporary media have collectively constructed a fashion industry to promote slimness as a culture of defining youthfulness and success. Therefore, managing embodiment is an exercise of shaping femininity in culturally salient ways with the slim figure an important feature in accounting for female beauty (Guendouzi, 2004), and in turn constructed as one of women's most important assets.

Aspiring for slimness among women is not only connected to the idea of losing weight for aesthetic purposes but also health reasons. The ideal standard of beauty of a thinner body size within contemporary societies is typically viewed as being associated with physical fitness and optimum health (Brunson, Overup, Nguyen, Novak & Smith, 2014; Puhl & Peterson, 2012). Health and fitness professionals claim that a slimmer physique means less risks for illnesses, such as cardiovascular diseases and obesity promoting ideas of health improvement among individuals (Haskell et al., 2007; Lyons & Burgard, 1990; Sobal, 1999). These ideas are typically reinforced within media sources which often display thin attractive women delivering health messages, such as conveying nutritional advice and outlining the 'health' benefits of joining a gym and regular exercises. Hence, health-related information places much emphasis on physical attractiveness rather than the physical functioning of a slim body itself. Barlett, Vowels

& Saucier, (2008), point out that media sources tend to sell products, such as weight-loss products, using images through inadequately clad models. This indicates that such weight-related discourses associate a healthy body image to a 'thin ideal' body shape through use of slim and attractive models who are portrayed as being healthy due to using such weight-loss products. Therefore, the display of a thin body physique is linked to qualities of beauty and health which women have been encouraged to attain over time.

Issues with weight

Western world culture features an immutable understanding about the ideal woman as being connected with weight (McKinley, 1999), often emphasising that less is best (Seid, 1994) in order to meet the standards of a thin ideal. Aspiring to the thin ideal means managing weight in practices such as restrictive diet and exercise. Women who go above or below the cultural expectations of the thin ideal body image are often labelled as either, being obese (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012), or anorexic or bulimic (Burns & Gavey, 2004), respectively.

A large amount of literature suggests that obesity is typically associated with negative experiences and stigmatization (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Puhl & Peterson, 2012; Stice, 2002). Bodies that do not comply with slenderness, and represent the opposite end of this are seen as deviating from feminine ideal and therefore, portrayed as "unattractive" or as poor representation of women's health (Bordo, 1993; Burns & Gavey, 2004). Women who are overweight are less likely to experience success in important areas of their lives such as career, health and romantic relationships (Boyes & Latner, 2009; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Puhl & Heuer, 2008). As such, stigmatization practices of 'obesity' are no doubt, commonly understood through weight-bias within communities exemplifying the set standards of one's body size. For example, overweight individuals are viewed as, unhygienic, unpopular and as more likely to face ill-health than their slim counterparts (Dixey, Sahota, Atwal & Turner, 2001; Coutwright, 2009).

Howarth, Foster & Dorrer (2004) point out that marginalisation and stigmatisation of obesity can have marked constructions of labelling individuals as 'ill'. Other researchers have reinforced this idea, claiming that being overweight is connected to various health issues, including physical health concerns (Mokdad et al., 2003) and psychological and social problems (Friedman, Reichmann, Costanzo & Mustante, 2002). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014) declares obesity as a form of 'disease' and seeks to initiate programs which reduce the worldwide rates of 'the obesity epidemic'. Discourses of weight around obesity reinforce the notion of 'thin is ideal', and pathologise bodies that do not emulate such standards creating to some degree a 'fear of fat' (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012). Women who fail to conform to ideal constructions of the feminine body often face prejudice and are constructed as ill or unhealthy. Deviance from 'thin-ideal' understandings creates stigma and negative experiences for women as an invalid form of femininity (Orbach, 1978).

To a lesser extent than obesity, excessive weight-loss has been constructed as deviating from the normalised thin ideal through the medical taxonomy of anorexia and bulimia (Malson, 1997). While the terms anorexia or bulimia were barely heard of in the 1970s (Mazur, 1986), these are now the most recognised form of a 'culture-bound syndrome' (Bordo, 1993) caught up with prescriptions of the feminine ideal body in western societies. For instance, Orbach (1993) argued that anorexia or bulimia is an expression of women's confusion about being thin. From this viewpoint, an anorexic or bulimic body does not conform to the feminine ideal body shape or size because of the 'struggle' a woman faces to meet cultural standards of the thin ideal body image (Malson, 1997). Subsequently, a woman's struggle indicates psychological distress by upholding implications of fragility and loss of control in emulating the thin ideal (Bordo; 1993; Malson, 1997). This suggests that such distress separates her from the social context and rather pathologises the woman as weak and ill.

While women who are understood as being anorexic or bulimic portray a body shape that is slim, the disordered women does not construct idealised notions of feminine embodiment in a way that it should be done. The challenge lies within whether disorders such as anorexia or bulimia are an exaggeration of idealising the feminine traits (i.e.

attractive and slim), or a persistent search for an acceptance for the body within western societies.

Contemporary society has constructed weight as an important practice of femininity. Failure to meet idealised standards of the body shape and size frames women's weight as being problematic. Mainstream practices such as medicine and psychiatry have conveyed weight as largely individualised, whereby marginalising weight in particular ways carries connotations of illnesses (e.g. obesity or anorexia). Within this view, clinical entities illustrate a way in which overweight or extremely underweight individuals are unsuccessful constructions of the feminine ideal.

Controlling weight

Understandings of anorexia and bulimia have indicated excessive control over the body, and obesity a lack of it among women. Controlling weight is an important way in which 'beautiful' bodies can be shaped and re-shaped in order to emulate the cultural body icon of the thin ideal. Conforming to such cultural imperatives of the thin ideal is often achieved through constant regulation of the body through weight-loss strategies, such as dieting and physical activity. The idea of controlling weight is now normative in contemporary societies where disciplinary acts of managing weight is often linked to taking charge in constructions of a slender body. Accordingly, Burns & Gavey (2004) argue that given the association between overweight and underweight bodies and the association to ill-health (e.g. cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, blood pressure, anorexia and bulimia) (Malson, 1997; Ministry of Health (MOH), 2014) and unattractiveness (Puhl and Peterson, 2012), slenderness portrays a way of exercising control over the body and illustrates health and fitness among women.

Research indicates that weight-related social control and discipline are greater among women compared to men because, as mentioned earlier, seeking approval of others, such as dating or romantic relationships, are important in constructing femininity (Brunson et al., 2014). In addition, women are more likely than men to face consequences in various aspects of their lives due to the dominant discourses

constructed in relation to stigmatization towards obesity (Puhl & Latner, 2007), threats to the feminine identity (Phares, Steinberg & Thompson, 2004) and other factors such as peer and parental/maternal influences (Armstrong & Janicke, 2012; Orbach, 1978; Phares et al., 2007).

Negotiating the 'political anatomy' of the body, as Foucault (1979) argues involves a constant surveillance of the individual's body, and acts as locus of social control. From this Foucauldian perspective the body is disciplined by western culture through taking up the notion of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1979) in which, women are required to attend in the constant regulation, subjection and transformation of the body through acts of discipline and control (Bordo, 1993). Sociocultural discourses (e.g. health promotion programmes, weight-loss discourses) create public displays of the ideal female body shape and size for women to situate themselves under a form of body-surveillance (Germov & Williamson, 1999) and thereby, reinforce the thin ideal body image. To have the power and ability to shape the body therefore, portrays a woman's control to shape her life through the expression of femininity through popular understandings of the thin ideal body image (Bordo, 1993). In other words, the appearance of the body may be a site of a woman's accomplishment and pride which conforms to the norms of physical attractiveness and health.

Managing the body contributes to subjectivity and experiences of feminine embodiment through practicing control and discipline (Bordo, 1993). Striving to meet cultural standards of idealised notions of the body acts as a constant reminder for women to engage in embodied practices such as dieting and physical activity to achieve 'gold standards' of a feminine figure. Chernin, (1981) argued that women suffer the notion of 'tyranny of slenderness', and engage in rigorous control and discipline in order to meet unrealistic ideals and avoid consequences of 'failing to be feminine'. Therefore, women who engage in weight-loss strategies illustrate a way of exhibiting control over their body. Hence, disciplining themselves and regulating such strategies place value on the fact that women take up popular notions of female embodiment for all sorts of particular benefits.

Eating practices

Food and eating practices are a vital part of an individuals' life as one must eat food to ensure survival. However, the concept of eating is complex and means more than simply ingesting food. Lupton (1996) suggests that food consumption serves to mark boundaries of culture within societies. For women within the western context, eating practices are caught up with an expression of control in relation to feminine embodiment (e.g. attaining ideal feminine figure). Dieting then, plays a role in women's lives through monitoring of food-intake and changes to eating patterns and practices (Bakhshi, 2011). Dietary practices symbolise restraint and control over the body as to how much and what kinds of food are consumed (Lupton, 1996). This could mean that eating practices within contemporary societies can be shaped through the way in which people negotiate and construct the notion of diet. Hence, the notion of diet becomes a way of constructing the thin ideal body form for some women, and influenced by the dominant culture one rewards, values and admires (Bordo, 2009), such as conforming to the popular culture of the thin ideal body image.

In western societies such as, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, many women engage in dietary practices as a form of a weight-loss strategy (Orbach, 1993). Numerous diets are available and targeted at women, such as lemon detox, Jenny Craig, high-protein, low-calorie diets, Weight Watchers and Palaeolithic diets to name a few. These diets set limits to the types of food one can consume. Substantial research illustrates that social and cultural discourses have encouraged dieting practices among women in order to conform to the cultural imperatives of the thin ideal body image (e.g. Cash, 2005; Garner et al., 1980; Grossbard, Lee, Neighbors & Larimer, 2009; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Hausenblas, Janelle, Gardner & Focht, 2004; McCabe, Ricciardelli, Waqa, Goundar & Fotu, 2009). Therefore, certain diets can be understood as 'guidelines' for women for regulation and control towards attaining the thin ideal body type. As such, Lupton (1996) argues that the restriction to certain food exemplifies the degree to which overeating can be prevented, making it less likely for women to deviate from the feminine ideals of body shape and size. Therefore, within the western context losing weight to meet feminine ideals becomes an important social achievement (Sobal &

Maurer, 1999) and perhaps the practice of dieting is somewhat inevitable within industrialised societies whereby notion of trying to lose weight has become normalised.

Healthy eating practices are often constructed and shaped by the individual's diet. The notion of dieting has been associated with promoting a healthy lifestyle (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004). The idea of a healthy diet carries implications for attaining a 'healthy body'. Hence, eating practices that are considered to be 'healthy' displays the notion of morality (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004) and are viewed as more likely to achieve idealised notions of the slender body. In modern western societies the slim figure, signifies "physical health, athleticism, mental wellbeing and fitness", (Burns and Gavey, 2004, p. 555), in which discourses around slimness are also associated with the reduced risk of disease (Puhl & Latner, 2007). New Zealand, like many other western societies offers healthy guidelines such as food pyramids, in which eating more vegetables and cutting back on food which is high on sugar and salt defines healthy eating practices. Lang (1998) argued that choices surrounding food constructs diet as one's moral responsibility as to what impact choice of food may have on personal health. Therefore, by eating healthily, a woman is seen to act morally in accordance with societal demands of producing a body which is healthy. Thus, notions of eating practices, health and physical attractiveness are interrelated. Framing it as the food/health/beauty triplex, Lupton (1996) argued that the appropriate food choices can construct a healthy body which also displays women as slim and physically attractive, features which are valued and admired within western societies.

Body ideals among non-western societies

While there is general consensus around cultural beauty standards as a thin ideal figure for women within the western context, feminine ideals of the body can vary across cultures. Contrary to the preferences of the 'slim' figure in western societies, other academic literature has shown that women from non-western societies appreciate large and robust body-size and shape, specifically for women from Pacific Islands (Becker, 1995, McCabe et al., 2009; Williams, Ricciardelli, McCabe, Waqa & Bavadra, 2006), Middle-Eastern women (King et al., 2013); Hispanic women (Javier, Abrams, Maxwell &

Belgrave, 2013) and, the African-American (Javier et al., 2013) ethnic group. Thinness is instead devalued and, constructed as unattractive.

Women from non-western contexts tend to construct meanings around a fuller shaped figure as indicators of health, such as fertility which is indicative of womanhood (Nasser, 1988), and wealth, such as access and affordability of food (Pollock, 1995). Hence shifting from idealised notions of the feminine figure among western societies other women place less emphasis on physical attractiveness as an indicator of successful femininity within the non-western cultural milieu (Bush, Williams, Lean & Anderson, 2001). Instead, societies such as the Fijian culture for example, traditionally construct weight loss as a construction of ill-health and weakness (Becker, 1995). McCabe et al. (2009) indicated that the idealised feminine figure in Fiji was constructed as having hips and being strong in order to portray and enable physical functionality. This implies that construction around body ideals is contingent upon the cultural context in which a woman lives in.

Eating practices among non-western cultures

Much attention has been paid to the way in which cultural discourses shape the meanings surrounding food and eating practices within a particular context (Lupton, 1996). Within many Pacific Island nations, the manifestation of high food resources is an indication of wealth, health and wellbeing among individuals (Swami & Tovee, 2005). Therefore, members of Pacific nations have historically constructed preferences for larger and robust figures as such body forms indicate higher access and availability to food, which are qualities highly valued within the Pacific context.

Contrary to the way in which dieting is valued within western societies, women from non-western cultures value preparation and consumption of food. The preparation and consumption of food is understood as an interactive component, where families get together to prepare, cook and eat meals (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996). The idea of food itself moves beyond something women contest and exercise restraint over by engaging in dietary practices for losing weight to a way of socialising and conforming to traditional

practices. Food and eating practices within non-western nations are, therefore valued and embedded to the individual's culture (Turner, 1984). From this cultural point of view, the preparation, provision and exchange of food between the Fijian community is a potent symbol of unity, kinship and affinity (Turner, 1984). Within this setting, eating practices and food are performed in culturally salient ways, which is in contrast to the dominant discourses around dieting valued within the western milieu.

Nevertheless, migration or transition to the western culture can often affect the way in which eating practices are shaped among individuals. Devine, Sobal, Bisongni and Connors (1999), found that migrants from non-western countries typically reconstruct their eating practices after they shift to a western milieu. Specifically, the way in which traditionally meals are cooked and prepared is altered, where individuals reduce food portions and engage in changing their choices around food in order to conform to the dominant discourses that surrounds eating practices, such as dieting (Devine et al., 1999). Bordo (2009) pointed out that while it is already a well-known phenomenon within western cultures, the idea of dieting and contesting food is also beginning to reshape and construct women's eating practices among non-western cultures. This suggests that individuals from non-western nations are taking up dominant ideals of slenderness by engaging in dietary practices.

Spreading the ideal feminine figure across cultures

The construction of the feminine body ideal among women from non-western cultures has received a great deal of attention, particularly after the introduction of westernisation within the non-western milieu (Becker, 1995; McCabe et al., 2009; Javier et al., 2013; Reddy & Crowther, 2007; Swami, Knight, Tovee, Davies & Furnham, 2007). Countries like Fiji have seen rapid changes within their environment through migration, modernisation and urbanisation over the past two decades (Anderson-Fye & Becker, 2004). These changes have included the introduction of television and broadcasts of westernised television programmes (Becker, 2004). This could mean that such changes have shifted attention from traditional understandings and practices around notions of food, health and bodily appearances to westernised constructions related to the cultural

ideal of a slender body. Individuals who move to a western context are increasingly becoming concerned about body presentations and cultural aesthetic ideas (Bush et al., 2001). Ideas around weight-related issues, and concerns in relation to bodily appearances have increased within non-western cultures (see for examples, Becker, 1995; Becker, 2004; Bush et al., 2001). Particularly, cultures such as African-American, Asian and Fijian have reconstructed values in relation to feminine ideals as a slim figure (Becker, 1995; Javier et al., 2013) which closely resembles the thin ideal in western cultures. Bordo (2009), recently argued that weight-concerns in relation to the slim figure is no longer a 'cultural-syndrome', but has diversified across non-western cultures, such as African-Americans and Hispanics. According to Bordo (2009), women from non-western cultural groups, who once constructed preference for curvaceous body types, are now constructing the idea about narrower figures. Taking a clinical approach, Bordo (2009) identified the way in which women among diverse cultural groups are being diagnosed with illnesses, such as anorexia nervosa. Similarly, Becker (1995; 2004) found a shift from preferences for a robust figure to idealising a slim feminine figure among women in Fiji after the introduction of television, which broadcasted westernised feminine ideals. This indicates that body shape and size is contingent upon societal change and therefore, that shifting from a non-western cultural context to a western milieu illustrates the idea that idealised notions of the body is not static, but rather valued and accounted for by taking the wider socio-political context. Hence, constructions of the ideal body shape and size for women is often understood by the dominant culture that one values and admires; specifically reshaping and cultivating the body in culturally salient ways through accounting for the wider socio-political context.

Present research

Notions of bodily appearances, weight and health play a significant role in constructing idealised notions of the body among women. The food/health/beauty triplex (Lupton, 1996) reveals that notions surround eating practices, health and physical appearances is interwoven with the way in which women construct femininity. These have also been

emphasised as important features within the western community, and hence often, valued and rewarded through wider social and cultural practices.

Nevertheless, compared to idealised notions of bodily appearances in western societies, a limited number of studies have been done within the non-western context, specifically with Indo-Fijian women. Yet, when exploring the connection between ideal body types and appearances among non-western cultures, most studies have focused on the presence of preferences for a thin ideal body image, but placing less emphasis on the way in which such feminine ideals have been reconstructed and negotiated by these individuals. In addition, while eating practices has previously looked at the way in which individuals make choices surrounding food, little attention has been given in relation to negotiating ideal bodily appearances, weight and health. Therefore, the present research will investigate notions of health, weight and the bodily appearances and the way these are negotiated within social and cultural practices for Indo-Fijian women across three generations. The research thereby, explores how Indo-Fijian women negotiate the ideal feminine body across three generations.