

Self esteem, social norms and cultural values



Dominique Desjeux, anthropologist,
Professor at the Sorbonne
Paris Descartes University

www.argonautes.fr

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Self esteem as an anthropological issue is at once constantly moving and a stable structure

- Self esteem is not only an individual and psychological phenomenon
- but also a sociological and anthropological issue.
- It depends on three main factors :
 - Social belonging effect (social classes, generations, genders and ethno-cultures)
 - Social and family norms linked to life cycle effect from childhood to old age
 - Cultural History, Imaginary and Material Culture appropriate for countries such as Brazil, China, France, the US
 - where I carried out numerous qualitative field studies thanks to L'Oreal, Patricia Sunderland, Roberta Dias Campos and Yang Xiao Min.

What is self esteem : identity, tensions, social codes and diversity management

- It is an image of self given by significant other glances (family, friends, colleagues) which builds personal and collective identity
- The human body is one of the main support of this image
- The body image is based on the use of many objects, such as clothes, bags, shoes, gloves (Italy), beauty care products, hair care (Brazil), etc.
- Using beauty care products depends on the triple social effect see above
- Self esteem is organized by an anthropological tension between being unique and being identical to others
- Making up is a part of the social diversity management

Identity construction: “id” de Bare Escentuals at New York



[Managing Diversity]



[Hair culture in Brazil]



BELEZA NATURAL COIFFURE FILM GESTE MOV06064.MPG

[Bag and Glove culture: Italy]



The body image in China and western countries

- According to François Julien, in the tradition of Chinese culture representations of human body are « non realistic », as well as in modern ads
- It could be more realistic in western countries
- Collective culture is a part of the self esteem

Cultural representation of naked body



According to François Julien 2000, *De l'essence ou du nu*, Seuil the objects around people are more signs of eroticism than their naked body



A 2007 ads in a Chinese magazine on taking care of Body, based on a sketch drawing but not on a realistic photo

Western ads



Roma, Italy, 2004



New York, US, 2007

Decorating the body depends on three social norms

- Using beauty care products in order to achieve self esteem is embedded in three social norms
 - What is prescribed
 - What is permitted
 - What is prohibited
- These norms are continually moving depending on social belonging effect, life cycle, and use itinerary of beauty care products

Life cycle effect and social norms in France

- In France making up for children is forbidden, except used as a game,
- but is permitted for teens in some families and could be prescribed for some special events (party, wedding, birthday, etc.).
- At work, the main prescribed informal rule for women is: not too much,
 - not too much make up
 - not too much jewels
 - low necked not too low
 - skirt not too short.
 - And for men : not too much color

Cantonese norms and material culture evolution

- In many Chinese Cantonese families teen making up is more strictly forbidden than in France or in the US.
- It is prescribed in some international companies, as a professional duty. It is often forbidden during family week end time. A women could be seen as a “bad” women if using making up at a family lunch on Sunday
- But these norms are always changing.
- For example in 1997, in Guangzhou (South China) it was very rare to see young people with colored hairs which were seen as bad boys ; in 2009, it is very frequent. It doesn't mean these young people are bad boys.
- It expresses a new social conformity, a part of the self esteem based on being unique and being identical to others
- Material culture has been changing a lot for 1997 such as bathroom. Bathroom is the main space in building self esteem

[A 1997 bathroom in Guangzhou]



- A few equipment



Starting beauty care product at home

[A 2005 bathroom in the Chinese upper middle class]



[1997-2005]



1997



2005

[US social norm of making up]

- A social duty :
 - “to cover the mess”; “Tyranny of appearance”
- Which is not good for skin:
 - “Crap” “garbage” “not quality” ”fake, Yukie” (“beurk)”
- But it is a condition in feeling well:
 - “To look professional” “competent”, “you are in control”.
- Mineral make up, a possible solution thanks to the fact it is “natural”

Before and after mineral make up



Making up a comprehensive practice from brush to skirt

New York, 2007

Making up



Making up tools



Evening skirt



Office skirt

In New York the world of making up is a blending of science, magic and religion

- We observed some examples in New York about making up:
 - DR : the Neutrogena brand uses the word *Beneficial* what means active and it is written that it is « recommended by a physician »
 - Sephora : « Alternative to esthetic surgery = MD skin care. Laser in a bottle”
 - At Sephora shop there is a brand which name is *Philosophy*:
« Where there is hope, there can be faith; when there is faith miracle can occur” \$32
 - Another brand name is « *Supernatural* »
- It means there is a link between self esteem and the world of magic

SACHS department store (NY 5th avenue)
Clarins syringe packaging : mean of serious
product



Sephora (New York City): signs of serious products



« Cosmedecine »



Dr Gross



laboratory test tube

[Conclusion]

- Self esteem is a complex human mechanism made of:
 - identity building process between being unique and being identical to others
 - social norms control and transgression
 - Diversity management
 - A magic world
- It is a moving world the practices of which are various but often based on stable cultural believes
 - Thank you for your attention