

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 OVERVIEW

This chapter gives an overview of the entire thesis which is elaborated in several sections. In the first section, a brief introduction to how language and visual are dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life is provided in order to situate discourse analysis within the context of social research. Hodge and Kress (1993: 193) argue that language “refers to a body of knowledge that is an essential component of enabling knowledges of everyday social life.” This sets the tone of this research, that language is a means by which we communicate our thoughts, express our perception of things, of life and of the world. By employing discourse analysis to examine language in a particular context of use, social life, to a certain extent, can be comprehended.

This thesis adopts a critical perspective to discourse analysis grounded in Norman Fairclough’s (1992a, 1995a, 2001, 2003) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) which in turn, is influenced by Michel Foucault’s (1972) notion of discourse and power. CDA considers “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), and sees the context of language use to be crucial in understanding social phenomena (Wodak, 2000) (for details, see Chapter 2).

Fairclough’s (2003) conception of discourse analysis in the social sciences departs from detailed attention to the linguistic features of text. Prior to this, Critical Linguistics focused solely on linguistic elements of text. In his approach, Fairclough (2003: 2-3) attempts to transcend the division between textual analysis and social theory. He reminds us about the importance of the integration between discourse analysis and social theory:

My own approach to discourse analysis has been to try to transcend the division between work inspired by social theory which tends not to analyze texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues. This is not, or should not be, an 'either/or'. On the one hand, any analysis of texts which aims to be significant in social scientific terms has to connect with theoretical questions about discourse (e.g. the socially 'constructive' effects of discourse). On the other hand, no real understanding of the social effects of discourse is possible without looking closely at what happens when people talk or write.

In line with Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis with the concern for "the socially 'constructive' effects of discourse", the present study attempts to examine the discourse of slimming advertisements in the light of how the discourse of slimming advertisements contribute to the shaping of the social while at the same time, being itself socially shaped (Fairclough, 1992a; 1995b & 2003). To illustrate, the discourse in slimming advertisements shapes the social by framing slimness as the ideal beauty while at the same time, the discourse in the slimming advertisements is shaped by those in power (i.e.: the world of entertainment and fashion, beauty and health industries).

In most slimming advertisements, the discourse is made up of both written text and visual representations. Sometimes, the visual representation in slimming advertisements is much more prominent than the written text. This is not surprising considering the fact that the 'end product' (i.e.: slimming effect) has to be visually evidenced. Besides, with the growing proliferation of digital capture devices and online social media today, many messages are visually constructed. The visual has been assimilated into the fabric of social life. In fact, as Rose (2001: 6) argues, "[a]ll these different sorts of technologies and images offer views of the world; they render the world in visual terms". This apparent centrality of the visual in contemporary social life is termed

“ocularcentrism” (Martin Jay 1993, as cited in Rose, 2001: 7). Yet, the paucity of resources in understanding the visual suggests a real lack in visual literacy. Moreover, the past emphasis on written literacy has largely overshadowed the importance of visual literacy. This explains the much neglected, underanalyzed visual data and paucity of visual-centric research (Ball & Smith, 1992; Silverman, 1993, as cited in Jewitt, 1999). This lack is evidently echoed in Hall’s (1997: 9) questions:

It is worth emphasising that there is no single or ‘correct’ answer to the question, ‘What does this image mean?’ or ‘What is this ad saying?’ Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will work in this area is bound to be interpretative - a debate between, not who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’, but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contesting, meanings and interpretations. The best way to ‘settle’ such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and try to justify one’s ‘reading’ in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing.

Hall’s rhetoric highlights the possible “competing and contesting [...] meanings and interpretations” in an image. Mitchell (1994: 13), like Hall, admits, “we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them”. Taking into consideration the importance of visual resources and the lack of visual literacy, this is the ground where this study attempts to analyze both aspects of textual and visual resources in the selected slimming advertisements.

As mentioned earlier, the data in this study has both linguistic and visual components. They are both equally important to answer the research questions raised in this study (see Section 1.2). Hence, an approach combining Fairclough’s CDA and Kress and van

Leeuwen's (1996) visual social semiotic (henceforth, VSS) is adopted for the study.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Advertising (especially on fashion and body management practices), one of the most sought after and popular channels of media messages, promotes ultra thinness through its display of very slender female models and athletic-looking male models. These idealistic displays of body image give the impression that being thin is beautiful for women, whereas, muscularity is for men.¹ Indeed, the concerns of the ideal body type involve both men and women. However, the scope of this study is confined to women only.² Jean Kilbourne (1987, 1995, 1999a, 1999b), a media activist, pioneered works that helped to develop the study of gender representation in advertising.³ Part of her research highlights how advertising turns people into objects. Women's bodies are dismembered, packaged and used to sell everything.

According to Kilbourne (1999a), advertisers spend millions on psychological studies to find out what makes people tick. Moody-Hall (2001: 18) adds, "[f]or women it is the fear of inadequacies, shortcomings, failure as wives, mothers and lovers". Images of beautiful, excessively thin women foster feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body and overall looks (Seid, 1989; Stice & Shaw, 1994; Moody-Hall, 2001; Grogan, 2007; Swami et al., 2010). One of the main sources which portrays these ideals is slimming advertising. This is a specialized type of advertisement that offers either products or services to lose weight and promotes conformity to the stereotypical ideal figure. The slimming advertisements are promoting slimness as the ideal female beauty, possibly leading to an unhealthy body image among consumers.

The prevalence of thin models portrayed in the slimming advertisements leads many women to feel dissatisfied and compels them to be engaged in weight change behaviours (Albani, 2005; Ng, 2005; Lee & Fung, 2006 and Tan, 2010). The pressure

for women to achieve the ideal body size and shape may arise from comparisons of their own figure with the ideal figure as portrayed in the slimming advertisements. The slimming advertisements' depiction of slender models and their association with attractiveness, social acceptance, happiness and success further reinforces women's insecurity and overestimation of their own body sizes (Stice & Shaw, 1994). These ideologies are so rampant and often repeated that they appear to be internalized by uninformed minds as common sense and natural. This is a real concern that needs to be addressed.

From the vast literature available on body image dissatisfaction for the past 30 years, this situation is widely known as the Western phenomenon (Grogan, 2007). Today, the situation in Malaysia is no less worrying. Studies undertaken to investigate body image concerns among Malaysian male and female adolescents raised concern regarding how a significant proportion of adolescent were dissatisfied with their body weight and how this affected their poor body image. Pon et al. (2004) assessed body image perception and eating behavior among fifty overweight or obese (OW) and fifty normal weight (NW) girls in Teluk Intan, Perak. From the comparison of both groups, Pon et al. (2004: 142) reported a "distressing finding" that shows:

[n]ormal weight girls were twice likely to have incorrect perception of their body weight as compared to their OW counterparts. [...]. Dissatisfaction with body weight leads to chronic dieting and eventually to full-blown eating disorders.

The other study on body image perception by Khor et al. (2009) was conducted among a total of 2,050 adolescents (1,043 males and 1,007 females) in 185 secondary schools in Kedah and Penang. Based on the finding results, it was discovered that

[f]emales had a significantly higher mean body dissatisfaction score than males,

indicating their preference for a slimmer body shape. More males (49.1 percent) preferred a larger body size while more females (58.3 percent) idealized a smaller body. Compared to normal weight and underweight subjects, overweight males and females expressed lower confidence and acceptance levels, as well as expressed greater preoccupation with and anxiety over their body weight and shape.

In another recent news report, Hera Lukman (2010) disclosed how adolescents in Malaysia are influenced by this body image dissatisfaction:

In a Malaysian study involving 13- to 16-year-old adolescents, it showed that more than 65% of girls want to be thinner, and about 10% of them are at risk for developing eating disorders. More than 75% of boys prefer to be bigger and more muscular. Of these, 15% to 28% of them are engaged in activities such as consuming protein supplements and lifting weights.

The general Malaysian adult population does not differ much from the studies conducted among the adolescents. In 2009, global information and media firm, The Nielsen Company (<http://my.acnielsen.com/news/20090122.shtml>) revealed that

[c]lose to half (46%) of the 500 Malaysians interviewed think they are overweight and 58 percent are on a mission to lose weight. The local scenario mirrors the global appetite for dieting and exercising to improve health with 50 percent of the 28,000 people surveyed in 52 countries saying that they are tipping the scales and want to start shedding the pounds.

In fact, Swami and Tovée (2005: 117) also highlight that “Kuala Lumpur is a modern city that has witnessed a noticeable rise in clinical eating disorders”. This is because the “rapid modernization that has occurred in Malaysia fosters risk factors for slim bodily

ideals and disordered eating” (Swami and Tovée, 2005: 125). Along with the increasing socio-economic affluence, it also intensifies the preferences for slim physiques and “legitimises the pursuit of thinness and a fear of fatness” (ibid).

The aforementioned studies and reports are a reflection of the growing problems related to body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) among teenagers in Malaysia (Swami & Tovée, 2005). According to Veale (2004: 113), BDD is defined as involving “a preoccupation with an imagined defect in one’s appearance, a slight physical anomaly, or the person’s concern is markedly excessive”.

BDD affects both men and women; in women, it reinforces the desire to be thin since thinness is what contemporary society regards as ‘beautiful’. Consequently, women tend to overestimate their body sizes and may wish to reject their own bodies. Many researchers regard this as the main reason behind women’s body dissatisfaction, and it has contributed significantly to eating disorders, low self-esteem and even depression (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2010; Swami et al., 2010; Grogan, 2007; Scriven, 2007; Luevorasirikul, 2007; Orbach, 2006; O’pry, 2003; Moody-Hall, 2001 and Myer & Biocca, 1992). It is reported that among various influences that predict the presence of eating disorder symptoms, slimming advertising in the mass media appears as the “strongest predictor” (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2010: 78). Men, on the other hand, are not excluded from being afflicted as well. In men, the typical body dissatisfaction has been termed as “reverse anorexia nervosa” or the fear of thinness, which may lead to the use of weight gain products and at worst, the misuse of anabolic steroids (Luevorasirikul, 2007: 57 and Pope et al., 1993).⁴

Over the decades, different disciplines - communications, marketing, psychology, language, gender, sociology and medical - have carried out research on different aspects of advertising (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Pingree et al., 1976; Williamson, 1978; Goffman, 1979; Schudson, 1981; Bartos, 1982, 1989; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Bretl

& Cantor, 1988; Kilbourne, 1987, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Hertzler & Grun, 1990; Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990; Craig, 1992; Wood, 2001; Moody-Hall, 2001; O'pry, 2003; Wolf, 2002; Zuraidah Mohd Don, 2003; Wykes & Gunter, 2005; Orbach, 2006; Luevorasirikul, 2007 and Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2010). Even with these numerous studies on advertising, little attention is given to a specialized advertisement such as slimming advertisements, especially in terms of the ideal female body as an ideology.

Previous research has not specifically examined how the ideology of the ideal female body is constructed, manufactured and transmitted in slimming advertisements. While most people have analyzed the more obvious forms of deceptive strategies in slimming advertisements (Hobbs et al., 2006; Federal Trade Commission Staff Report, 2003, 2002), many are still unaware of the ways slimming advertisement texts and visuals construct and support the ideology of the ideal female body. Researchers from different disciplines hardly collaborate to explore this social theoretical issue. Hence, the lack of realization or knowledge actually perpetuates the unquestioning internalization of the prescribed values and ideologies of the ideal female body by women. Those who prescribe to the slimming discourse hold the power to scheme, control and legitimize their agendas; thereby, these agendas gradually become an innocuous part of the social structure (Tan, 2010; Lee & Fung, 2006 and Ng, 2005).

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a close textual and visual analysis of printed slimming advertising texts. By examining the ideal female body through the linguistic and visual social semiotic lens, this study integrates different tools of analysis to provide insights into the possible causes leading to BDD. It attempts to show how the discourse in the selected slimming advertisements also contributes to the relentless pursuit of the ideal female body and constant attempts to lose weight among Klang Valley's Malaysian women.⁵ In the past, the perception towards body fat differs between the East and the West. Swami and Tovée (2005: 124) bring out an important

point with regard to this perception in most traditional and non-Western sociocultural settings:

Body fat is believed to be an indicator of wealth and prosperity (McGarvey, 1991), with obesity as a symbol of economic success, femininity, and sexual capacity (Ghannam, 1997; Nasser, 1988; Rudovsky, 1974).

With reference to this information, body fat is seen positively in non-Western settings. The Western societies, by and large, endorses thinner and less curvaceous female body as the 'ideal'. This is typically depicted by fashion models (Morris, Cooper & Cooper, 1989; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson & Kelly, 1986), Miss America contestants and *Playboy* centerfolds (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann & Ahrens, 1992). Therefore, it could be argued that in Malaysia, where globalisation and mass communication technology has culturally shrunken the world, the Western culture has infused an increasing influence on preferences for slim physiques in Malaysia. Certainly, Westernisation alone cannot be the only influencing factor. As Swami and Tovée (2005: 125) remind us that the rapid industrialization and urbanization that are taking place in Malaysia also

meant unparalleled changes in Malaysian women's condition, with regards to education, employment opportunities, mate choice, birth control and legal rights (Ariffin & Abdullah, 1997; Othman, 2001). These changes have created conflicting demands on young women to strive simultaneously for career accomplishment while maintaining their physical attractiveness.

This is a subtle but distinctive change within a non-Western setting that substantiates the need for further research.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study investigates the way the ideal female body image is constructed in Malaysian slimming advertisements. To investigate this issue, the study undertakes to analyze two sources of data: slimming advertisements and interviews.

General Objective:

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how multimodal resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body.

The following research questions (henceforth, RQs) have been formulated in order to guide the development of this investigation:

1. How is the ideal female body textually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?
2. How is the ideal female body visually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?
3. In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?

1.3 PROBLEMATIZING THE IDEAL FEMALE BODY

In this section, the research problematizes the ideal female body in terms of how slimness becomes a part of a social cultural system of representation. Before the researcher can begin to show this, it is necessary to briefly explain the words ‘construction’ and ‘ideal’ in relation to the female body (as seen in the title of this thesis).

The word ‘ideal’ carries the notion conforming to an ultimate standard of perfection or excellence. In the context of this study, the word ‘ideal’ is manifested in the forms of

body shape, size and weight perfection. The current fascination with the ideal female body is an ideal adopted by women in mainstream societies in the West which “resembles a newly pubescent girl’s body, rather than the curvaceous body of an adult woman” (Bartky, 2003; Bordo, 2003; Grogan, 1998; Seid, 1989 in Pienaar, 2006:16). It is a body which is tightly controlled by body management practices such as restrictive dieting (Lupton, 1996) and exercising (Grogan et al., 2004) in order to achieve the slim, toned and taut silhouette. In extreme cases, there were women who resolved to external intervention such as cosmetic surgery in order to attain the perfect body (Wolf, 2002 ; Gimlin, 2000; Davis, 1995).

The use of the word ‘construction’ in the context of the ideal female body refers loosely to the notion of “the socially constructed body” which has its root in “*social constructionism*” (Shilling, 1993: 62). Shilling (ibid) defines the term, “*social constructionism*” as “an umbrella term to denote those views which suggest that the body is somehow shaped, constrained and even invented by society”. According to Shilling (ibid), there are four key influences in the social constructionist views. Shilling ascribes Foucault’s view (1973, 1977, 1981, 1988 in Shilling, 1993: 65) as the “most radical and influential social constructionist approach”.

For Foucault, the body is not only given meaning by discourse, but is wholly constituted by discourse. In effect, the body vanished as a biological entity and becomes instead a socially constructed product which is infinitely malleable and highly unstable.

The contemporary ideas and social theories of the body as a site of social inquiry draw heavily from Foucault’s social constructionist view. The contemporary interest in the body is also a “reaction against the traditional belief that the material body is the domain of biology, not social studies” (Pienaar, 2006: 3). Pienaar (ibid, 4) also adds that feminist theorists regard the female body as a site of social struggle where women

have struggled to reclaim control over their bodies in terms of sexual rights (i.e.: birth control and the right to abortion).

The knowledge of Western philosophy and cultural studies informs the notion of construction of the ideal female body in this study.⁶ This study investigates a growing problem in Malaysian society. In fact, Swami and Tovée (2005: 125) referred to the work of Ismail et al. (2002) and reported that “[a]long with increasing affluence, there has also been an increase in the prevalence of obesity in Malaysia [...] that legitimizes the pursuit of thinness and a fear of fatness”. Swami and Tovée (ibid) go on to hypothesize that

the rapid modernization that has occurred in Malaysia fosters risk factors for slim bodily ideals and disordered eating, it can be predicted that fat-concern, dieting and ultimately eating disorders will become increasingly common experiences for Malaysian women.

For this reason, this study may contribute to raising awareness and challenge contemporary notions of female beauty. It examines how slimming advertisements work to frame slimness as the ideal female beauty. The ideal female beauty as advertised, over a period of time, becomes the norm and the standard towards which women aspire, and which is unattainable to most women. It does not reflect real women and their ‘imperfect’ bodies. The demand for a slim body assumes that the body is in a malleable form and in need of bodily discipline (ie. exercise regime, and/or diet control) (Shilling, 1993; Bordo, 2003; Wykes & Gunter, 2005 and Pienaar, 2006). Advertising images thus create an illusion that women can improve the size and shape of their bodies if they work hard enough. This ideal female beauty from which women draw their inspiration is essentially a consumerist tactic. This tactic involves dividing up a woman’s body and targeting its different parts: arms, belly, breasts, buttocks, thighs and legs. In this way, a woman’s body turns into a sort of commodity with value exchange,

and it is the maintenance of this very idea that the multi-billion dollar industries of beauty and advertising depends on.

It is argued that these advertisements provide proof of how slimness is a part of a social cultural system of representation where images of female beauty are limited to images of women that focus on the slim appeal. This system of representation is part of a social and cultural system in which femininity and womanhood are constructed as the ideal female beauty: a young, slender, toned and shapely body (preferably with fair complexion as well). This system of representation is also consolidated into a system of belief that positions, constrains and objectifies women and dictates how women should or should not look. This is done by constructing, promoting and sustaining false beauty needs or, more precisely, pressuring women to measure up to the social expectations of what women should look like. The perception of how women's bodies should fit into mainstream ideals is simply the advertisers' means to sustain a profitable market at the expense of women by creating needs and compounding a sense of insecurity in women. The notion of the perfect physical appearance is constantly underscored by the slim appeal as a means to personal happiness, success and social acceptability.

In so doing, the slimming advertisements influence and dictate the perception of feminine beauty where thin bodies become ideal, beautiful and desirable whereas fat bodies are rejected and deemed as ugly. 'Thin' becomes a normal form of beauty whereas 'fat' is abhorred and considered deviant.

The current emphasis on a certain acceptable slim appeal among women through the medium of slimming advertising is a troubling issue. Since the notion of the ideal body image or the drive for excessive thinness is currently the popular culture, this pervasive issue has gradually been accepted and internalized by society at large. There are those who are aware of the detrimental implications of these slimming advertisements, yet accept it as it is, as it has become a common goal among women to strive for the ideal

body image. As a consequence, the issues of slimming down and shaping up become a part of everyday set-up in social life.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The primary significance of this study is to show how advertisers, through the visual and textual strategies used in slimming advertising, use slimming advertisements to sell their products, services and indirectly, values, images as well as concepts (Kilbourne, 1987; 1995; 1999a; 1999b). The slimming advertisements are full of encoded messages which they transmit publicly. This may lead to an unhealthy body image among consumers. The preponderance of thin models portrayed in the mass media as the ideal body figure leads many women to feel dissatisfied and compels them to be engaged in weight change behaviours. The pressure for women to achieve the ideal body shape may arise from comparisons of their own figure with the ideal figure as portrayed in the slimming advertisements. Mass media depiction of slender models and associate slimness with the ideas of attractiveness, social acceptance, happiness and success further reinforces women's insecurity and overestimation of their own body sizes. These ideologies are so rampant and often repeated that they appear to be internalized by the uninformed minds as common sense and natural.

In this study, the ideology of ideal body image is explored and challenged. It is hoped that by highlighting this issue, women will learn not to be too gullible and will not fall prey to the 'promises' of the slimming products and services. This can help Malaysian women to be aware of these false advertising claims and to challenge the prevailing notions of slimness and beauty. This research also hopes to create awareness and a constructive 'suspicion' of all processes of text interpretation – where readers/perceivers will not just absorb information given at face value. In the context of reading/looking at the slimming advertisements, it is hoped that the readers will be aware of the prescribed

ideal female body as unrealistic and idealistic standards.

English as Second Language (ESL) learners should be exposed to such advertisements to increase their critical language awareness of embedded ideologies. This would make them more discerning in approaching any text. Curriculum planners could also include advertisements as a resource for investigating the practical contexts of studying English language.

Furthermore, it is hoped that the results of this study will draw attention to how media-literacy skills can be used as a health prevention tool. Educators and public health practitioners who are involved in designing media-literacy and health education curricula can use the knowledge of women's existing media-literacy skills to guide them. Educational approaches that use media-literacy skills, such as in nutrition education, will require a good understanding of the pre-existing levels of knowledge of slimming advertising and its impact in order to help in the development and implementation of such educational approaches.

In pursuing this research, we are exploring an 'old' but important issue which affects the aspiration and identity of contemporary society. Through our understanding of how multimodal components are used to create meaning and how the slimming advertising discourses construct and support the ideal female body, we are able to have pertinent insights into how to address the growing problems associated with the female body. Through this, the researcher wishes to highlight the overt as well as subtle physical and psychological impact the ideal female body has upon the young and old. Women, in reaching for the ideal female beauty, have been preoccupied with this relentless pursuit in the hope of attaining the promises of social acceptance, romance, success and happiness.

1.5 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter One gives an overview of the whole thesis. Chapters Two and Three review the relevant literature: theories underpinning the thesis, advertising and the female body and related empirical works respectively. Chapter Four explains the research design and methodology for the analysis that follows. Following this, Chapter Five, Six and Seven analyze the textual, visual as well as the transcripts of the interviews according to the methods that are best suited to each. Both Chapters Five and Six will address the first two research questions. Chapter Seven will address to the third research question. Chapter Eight discusses the findings in relation to all three research questions. Finally, Chapter Nine draws a conclusion to the study.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The combination of two approaches, CDA and VSS, to critically analyze textual and visual constructions of the ideal female body in the selected slimming advertisements can help to expose the opaque ideological construction of the ideal female body.

From the corpus of slimming advertisements, the slimming discourses are materialized textually and visually. For the textual components, selected headlines and body copies are extracted and analyzed using lexical analysis. This is to see how lexical choice constructs the ideal female body (cf. Chapter 5). CDA provides a method that helps in demonstrating how language constructs reality through ideological constructions of the ideal female body. The visual images, on the other hand, are comprehended using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual analytical framework. The choice of Kress and van Leeuwen's VSS method is apt and pertinent to achieve the understanding of the visual aspect of the slimming advertisements.

In order to carry out the study, it is essential to have an overview of the relevant

literature related to this study. With that, the next chapter provides the first literature review of the theoretical framework of CDA.

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA): its definition, historical origin, and a broad overview of CDA's main thrusts, premises, features, domains of enquiry are discussed in order to situate its significance within the present study. Various methods of CDA, including Wodak's discourse-historical approach, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, social semiotics approach and Fairclough's three dimensional framework are reviewed to find out which of these approaches will help to answer the RQs set out in Chapter 1.

2.1 WHAT IS CDA?

CDA is derived from what was previously known as Critical Linguistics (hereafter, CL). CL and CDA are interlinked, both are about language studies. The term CL was used by a group of scholars working at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (see e.g. Wodak, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; and Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). According to Kress (1990: 88 as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2001) the term CL was "quite self-consciously adapted" from social-philosophical studies and this indicates the crucial influence of critical thoughts in both CL and CDA (see Sections 2.3 & 2.6). By the 1990s the label CDA subsumed CL, especially when it pertains to a critical approach to linguistic analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

2.2 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

CL and CDA are closely related, especially in terms of their object of enquiry (see Section 2.5). CL takes a critical perspective to linguistic analysis. The term critical

linguistic was initially associated with the linguist Michael Halliday (see Fowler et al., 1979 and Kress & Hodge, 1979). Interestingly, the surge of a critical perspective within linguistics should be seen in the light of a reaction to contemporary pragmatics (for instance, speech act theory), the lack of critical awareness in traditional sociolinguistics (Williams, 1992) and the sociolinguistics of William Labov (Wodak 1995: 205 as cited in Titscher et al., 2000). Other proponents in this critical direction include Roger Fowler, Gunter Kress, Bob Hodge, Tony Trew and Jacob Mey. The critical linguistics stance espoused by Fowler, Hodge and Trew (1979) in *Language and Control* marks the beginning points for more critically oriented language studies, which aim to deconstruct ideologies found in different texts.

Fowler and Kress (1979: 185) observe that, “there are strong and pervasive connections between linguistic structure and social structure” and that, “there are social meanings in a natural language which are precisely distinguished in its lexical and syntactic structure and which are articulated when we speak or write”. Kress and Hodge (1979), in the same vein, state that the relationship between discourse and social meanings is inseparable. Mey (1985) advocates a critical stance in linguistic pragmatics and coined the term. This critical perspective within linguistics was gradually embraced by researchers from different traditions, such as formal linguistics, sociolinguistics, social psychology and even, literary criticism. CDA has certainly embraced the perspective and aims of critical theories. One of the goals, Wodak (2006: 3) argues, is how critical theory seeks to weed out “delusion”:

Critical theories, thus also CDA, are afforded special standing as guides for human action. They are aimed at producing “enlightenment and emancipation”. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion.

This goal was a crucial beginning of CDA and further developed with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the approach (Titscher et al., 2000). This also points to the heterogeneity of methodological and theoretical approaches which confirms van Dijk's (1993b: 131) point that CDA and CL "are at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic and discourse analysis". Wodak (2006: 19-20) in her survey of the historical development of both CL and CDA confirms that,

[t]he fields of CL and CDA are developing fast, and the 'critical' perspective is penetrating in more and more fields of investigation of language usage. [...] CL and CDA are also developing into interdisciplinary research domains par excellence, and thus offer interesting perspectives for integrated research on language in society.

From these shared perspectives, CDA is 'critical' in terms of two key influences. Firstly, the ideas of the Frankfurt School (with reference to the work of Jürgen Habermas) and secondly, a shared tradition with the work of some critical linguists. Habermas (1970, 1971 as cited in Titscher et al., 2000: 144-5) argues that,

a critical science has to be self-reflective – that is to say, it must reflect the interests on which it is based – and it must take account of the historical contexts of interactions. Habermas's concept of an ideal speech situation is the utopian vision of interactions or power relations. Through rational discourse, ideologically impaired discourse may be overcome and an approximation to the ideal speech situation may be achieved.

Wodak and Meyer (2001: 2) highlight Fairclough's (1985: 747) point "that, in human matters, interconnections and chains of cause and effect may be distorted out of vision. Hence, 'critiques' is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things". Wodak and Meyer (2001: 9) continue to add that the notion of 'critique' which is

inherent in CDA is also understood very differently with some gravitating to the Frankfurt School, others to a notion of literary criticism and some to Marx's notions. Wodak and Meyer elucidate, "[b]asically, 'critical' is to be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research."

The next section delineates the historical origins of CDA in order to trace the influences of the critical underpinnings of CDA.

2.3 HISTORICAL ORIGINS

From the 1960s onwards, many scholars adopted a more critical perspective to language studies. One of the earliest is Michel Pêcheux (1975). A French scholar, Pêcheux's approach is rooted in the works of Russian theorists, Bakhtin (1981) and Volosinov (1973). These Russian theorists, since the 1930s, postulated an integration of language and society processes (Wodak, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 13). In terms of linguistics, the works of Michael Halliday – in particular, the systemic-functional and social-semiotic linguistics, are seminal to CDA practices. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 454) declares that CDA has adopted "systemic-functional analyses of transitivity, agency, nominalization, mood, information flow, and register", besides looking at texts as consisting of three metafunctions or meanings: ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning.

CDA appeared on the scene of interdisciplinary studies in the late 1980s, spearheaded by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, and others. In January 1991, following a small symposium in Amsterdam, CDA became a network of scholars, the first few leading practitioners were Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak. Their work was typically considered as a "core CDA" (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000: 454). Kress (1990: 94) informs us that CDA by

then was “emerging as a distinct theory of language, a radically different kind of linguistics” (as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 5).

The start of this CDA network is also commemorated by the launch of van Dijk’s journal *Discourse and Society* (1990) and landmark publications, for instance, van Dijk’s pioneering work on racism in *Prejudice in Discourse* (1984), Fairclough’s *Language and Power* (1989), and Wodak’s *Language, Power and Ideology* (1989). This meeting determined an institutional beginning, and was an attempt both to start an exchange programme called ERAMUS for a span of three years where projects and collaborations between different scholars took place, and spurred CDA into an established paradigm in linguistics.⁷

CDA, in its current form, has changed much since its first inception. In existence since two decades ago, it is still considered a young science which is derived from an old school of discourse analysis that concerns itself with relations of power and inequality in language and takes into account sociopolitical and cultural aspects of discourse. It has since inspired a number of other related trends in CDA, such as the work of Michael Billig, Charles Antaki, Margaret Wetherell in the field of social psychology; Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen on social semiotics and multimodality in discourse; Jay Lemke on functional linguistics and in recent years, in collaboration with Ron and Suzie Scollon, has moved on to engage in multimedia semiotics, multiple timescales, and hypertexts/traversal; last but not least, Paul Chilton on political discourse analysis (see Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000 and Wodak, 2006).

2.4 AIMS

Teun van Dijk (1986: 4, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2001) highlights some of the aims and goals of CDA, which highlight the interdependence between research interests and political commitments.

[...] it starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyzes those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems.

By prevailing social problems, CDA aims to champion the cause to support the victims of oppression, marginalization, injustices or inequalities of all kinds and encourage them to resist and transform their lives. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 449) bring into focus the “moral and political” overtones in CDA:

It is not enough to lay bare the social dimensions of language use. These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation and analyzing them should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs.

As language is inherent in every aspect of life and given the power invested in it, CDA is necessary for analyzing, describing, interpreting and critiquing social life as reflected in any medium where language is used. CDA points out that linguistic representations are affected by social values, favouring specific views of reality to the detriment of other views. It attempts to shed light on ways in which the dominant forces in society construct versions of reality that favour their interests. Reality, essentially, is constructed at the level of word, context and confluence of various discourses. Thus,

manipulation of reality is done to prescribe certain views that favour the prescriber.

CDA systematically explores often opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes, and is fundamentally concerned with analyzing “structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak 1995: 204). It strives to investigate how these seemingly non-transparent relationships are a factor in securing power and hegemony, and in so doing, draws attention to power imbalances, social inequities, non-democratic practices, and other injustices in the hopes of spurring people to corrective action (Fairclough, 1993).

CDA is effective in exposing how social problems are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationships. It helps to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are constituted, disseminated, maintained, reproduced, legitimized and transformed within specific social, economic, political, and historical contexts (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1988).

The objective of CDA is to expose the ideological assumptions that are concealed in texts in order to resist and overcome various forms of power as well as to reach an understanding that we are exercising power over, unknown to us (Fairclough, 1989).

Though in different terms, and from different points of view, most of us deal with power, dominance, hegemony, inequality, and the discursive processes of their enactment, concealment, legitimation and reproduction. And many of us are interested in the subtle means by which text and talk manage the mind and manufacture consent, on the one hand, and articulate and sustain resistance and challenge, on the other (van Dijk, 1993: 132 as cited in Titscher et al., 2000: 147).

According to Herberle (2000: 117) CDA departs from the traditional language studies taking “a step further than the more traditional description and explanation of language-related phenomena”.

The next section outlines the theoretical foundations of CDA providing an overview of the general characteristics and domains of interest in CDA.

2.5 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Here CDA is positioned within the broader picture of a new critical paradigm which, over a short span of two decades has branched out to a number of language-oriented (sub-) disciplines. CDA conceptualizes “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), and regards the context of language use as crucial in any linguistic analysis (Wodak, 2000c). CDA focuses on the reciprocal nature between language and society, taking into account sociopolitical and cultural aspects of discourse. Herberle (2000: 117) explores deeper into the nature of this reciprocal relationship and informs us that,

[t]heorists in this area are interested not only in describing the different kinds of discourse through the analysis of explicit linguistic elements of texts, but also in showing how these discourses reinforce and are reinforced by the existing status quo, the existing socio-economic structure of society.

CDA also aims to make clear opaque relationships. It crystallizes the connections between the use of language and the exercise of power (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA attempts to make people aware of the reciprocal influences of language and social structure, in which they have accepted as it is and internalized so much so that it seems common sense (see Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 1989 and van Dijk, 1993b).

2.5.1 CDA's Central Tenets

A fundamental framework of CDA is grounded in social philosophical traditions. CDA's claims echo those of social theories, where "two directions" can be drawn (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 451). Firstly, theories of power and ideology stand as CDA's preeminence interest. An outline of key critical issues, such as power and ideology can be seen in Michel Foucault's (1971, 1977) conception of "power-knowledge," Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of "hegemony," and Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of "ideological state apparatuses". Further works where discussion on the connections between discourse and power processes are seen in the works of Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Thompson (1990) (see Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000 and Titscher et al., 2000).

Foucault is widely known for being a major influence on some CDA exponents in particular, Fairclough. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 452) explains:

[i]n Fairclough (1992a), for example, these theories and concepts are given a linguistic translation and projected onto discourse objects and communicative patterns in an attempt to account for the relationship between linguistic practice and social structure, and to provide linguistically grounded explanations for changes in these relationships.

The influence of the social philosophical traditions can also be traced to the influence of cultural studies on CDA, particularly, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of the University of Birmingham. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 452) informs that, "CDA still holds pace with cultural studies in that it continually, though critically, engages with new research trends in, for example, postmodern, feminist, postcolonial, and globalization studies" (for more on CDA association with social theory, see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Secondly, Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000:452) distinguish CDA as “an attempt to overcome *structuralist determinism*” (emphasis mine). According to them,

[i]nspiration here is usually found in Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, where a dynamic model of the relationship between structure and agency is proposed. Giddens serves as the theoretical background to CDA’s claim that actual language products stand in dialectic relations to social structure, i.e. that linguistic-communicative events can be formative for larger social processes and structures. Obviously, when the relationship between linguistic-communicative (or other semiotic) action and social processes is discussed, frequent reference is also made of the work of Bourdieu (1991) and Habermas (1984, 1987).

Even though CDA fundamentally is nestled within social theory, Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 452) remind that,

[i]t is important to realize that despite the input from a variety of social-scientific disciplines, CDA should primarily be positioned in a linguistic milieu, and its successes should be measured primarily with the yardstick of linguistics and linguistically oriented pragmatics and discourse analysis.

By situating CDA in a linguistic milieu, it is only understandable that CDA challenges us from seeing language as abstract; rather we need to go a step further to see how dominant discourse wields power to interpret conditions, issues and events in favour of the dominant forces in society (McGregor, 2003).

To understand the notions of power and ideology in CDA, it is necessary to make reference to CDA’s premise of “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This premise investigates the ways in which linguistic forms are employed in various expressions and manipulations or exploitation of power. To reach an

understanding of the reasons behind CDA investing so robustly in the notions of power and ideology as well as hegemony and dominance, a further look into the relationship between discourse, power and ideology is essential (see below).

2.5.1.1 Discourse

Fairclough (2001: 20) differentiates discourse from text. A text is “a product of the process of text production” and he uses the term for both spoken and written texts. Discourse, in comparison, refers to “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (ibid). Fairclough’s conception of text and discourse informs us that a text is an outcome of the process of production, while discourse is a broader term for the interaction between the processes of production and interpretation. The term ‘discourse’ includes how these processes are conditioned by the social context. This study takes on the definition of discourse as socially conditioned semiotic systems which influence the way we perceive, represent and constitute the ideal female body (Foucault, 1977, 1980; Fairclough, 1989 and Shilling, 1993). The focus of the study is on the linguistic (i.e. lexical choices) and visual aspects of discourse and how both semiotic systems express and constitute reality of the ideal female beauty.

The view that “language as a form of social practice” implies that discourse is socially generated.⁸ This, according to Fairclough (2001: 18-19), has three implications. Firstly, “language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it”. Secondly, “language is a social process”. Thirdly, “language is a socially conditioned process”. All three implications point to the fact that language does not exist in a vacuum outside of society, but exists within society. In Fairclough’s words, “[l]anguage is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena” (ibid, emphasis author’s).

In order to do an analysis of discourse, it will require a focus on process rather than product in order to trace the interaction between the processes of production and interpretation. Fairclough (2001: 20) says that the text is a resource where “the formal properties of a text [constitute] *traces* of the productive process [...] and *cue* in the process of interpretation”. Both are an important part of discourse analysis of productive and interpretative processes. However, the formal properties of a text are only a part that is involved in the processes of production and interpretation; the other part is how people produce or interpret texts in accordance to their values, beliefs, and assumptions. These representations of the natural and social worlds are referred to as “members’ resources” (MR). Fairclough (ibid) posits that,

The MR which people draw upon to produce and interpret texts are cognitive in the sense that they are in people’s heads, but they are social in the sense that they have social origins – they are socially generated, and their nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated – as well as being socially transmitted and, in our society, unequally distributed.

The interplay between properties of texts and MR shows the third implication of seeing language as social practice. Critical theorists stress the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice – where discourse is not merely reflective of social processes, but it is also constitutive of these processes. Hall (1988: 27 as cited in Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 63) deftly describes the role of discourse as a semiotic system which not only represents, but is constitutive:

[...] how things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the

scenarios of representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life.

2.5.1.2 Power

Power is put into effect and endorsed in discourse (Fairclough, 1989). Wodak and Meyer (2001: 11) explain that “[t]he defining feature of CDA is its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise.” Wodak and Meyer (2001: 11) explain further that,

[p]ower is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures. The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures. [...]. Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person’s control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text. It is often exactly within the genres associated with given social occasions that power is exercised or challenged.

In Fairclough’s (1989 [2001]) work, *Language and Power*, he discusses how power is both *in* discourse and *behind* discourse. Discourse is a site of power struggles where a dominant discourse by those in power enacts and sustains power through a process of “naturalization” (Fairclough, 1989: 91, cf. Section 2.5.2.3). Wetherell and Potter (1992)

perceive that this idea of a dominant group in a society that maintains power is in line with the Marxist view of power. For comparison, Marxist and Foucauldian conceptions of power are briefly explained to situate the view of power adopted in this study. Based on the Marxist perspective, power is homogenous and unilateral. It is located with “specific agents, structures and social classes” and thus, the source of power can be tracked down (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 80). Marxist analyzes of power focus on the macro-level of the state. While this does contribute to an understanding of how patriarchal structure constructs women’s body in ways which disempowered them, Foucault thinks that Marxism “has had a terrible tendency to occlude the question of the body, in favour of consciousness and ideology” (Foucault, 1980: 59; Bordo, 2003 and Bartky, 2003). Pienaar (2006: 39, emphasis author’s) distinguishes the different emphasis between Foucault’s conception of power from Marxist:

Foucault, by contrast (1972; 1975; 1978; 1979) is less concerned with how a particular social group ‘holds’ power over another in a society than he is with the *nature* of power. He reconceptualises power, not as something which one group ‘holds’ and wields unilaterally over another, but as a force which is dispersed and scattered over multiple locations, a force without origin or end. Thus, a Foucauldian study of power is concerned with the processes by which power shifts and mutates across the social landscape (Foucault 1972; 1979).

A Foucauldian analysis of power is concentrated at the micro-level. It is about micro-powers that are exercised at the level of the individual. One of the important contributions from Foucault on the “*nature* of power” is how it creates allegiance (ibid). Foucault (1980: 59) perceives power as not necessarily repressive; on the contrary, it works best when it creates desire.

[...] power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression [...] power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge.

In this study, the concern of power is seen in the effect of power at the level of the individual female body. The constant valorisation of the ideal female body is seen through the discourse of beauty in the slimming advertisements. Women are encouraged and persuaded to join the slimming services in order to attain the ideal female body. Women's bodies are in need of discipline (i.e: eating habits and exercising). Such disciplinary practices of the body are regarded as empowering (Foucault, 1980; Bartky, 1997 and Pienaar, 2006). According to Pienaar (2006: 12), "self-discipline [...] is a type of power". Pienaar's (2006) observation is in line with Foucault's (1980) analysis of how power is exercised at the level of an individual's desire for his/her body. Foucault (1980: 56) tells us that,

[m]astery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. All of this belongs to the pathway leading to the desire of one's own body, by the way of the insistent, persistent, meticulous work of power on the bodies of children or soldiers, the healthy bodies.

When a woman controls her appetite by dieting, she is exercising self-control and self-discipline. Bordo (2003: 130) adds that, "denying oneself food becomes the central micro-practice in the education of feminine self-restraint and containment of impulse". Such control is an example of the individual woman deriving a sense of personal power

for her self-discipline. Such behaviours are aimed at “producing docile, disciplined female body” (Pienaar, 2006:12; Bordo, 2003 and Foucault, 1977; 1980).

This is an important view that leads us to identify how power operates at the micro-level of the individual to perpetuate the ideology of the ideal of female body. Women continue to subscribe to the ideal female body because body control practices such as dieting endow them with a sense of personal power which is crucial to their sense of womanhood/identity. Over time, this constant need to discipline the body to attain an ideal body becomes an unquestioned preoccupation among women. The ideal body also becomes a yardstick to measure what is considered attractive and beautiful. With that, the next section outlines briefly the concept of ideology that is relevant in this study.

2.5.1.3 Ideology

The concept of ideology is central in CDA where discourse endorses and transmits ideological assumptions. This study deals with the discourse of the female body. Discourse, as mentioned earlier, represents socially-conditioned semiotic systems which frame the way we perceive, represent and constitute reality (cf. Section 3.5.3.1). This reality consists of, as Fairclough (2003: 124) said, a “‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings and belief [...] and the social world”. As a set of semiotic systems, discourses influence our conception of the world; they advocate and validate a certain outlook from which knowledge, concepts and objects are perceived and accepted. In this way, discourses have “a certain agency, not only to reflect, but actively to create ‘the objects of which they speak’” (Foucault, 1972: 49 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 9).

Following this, Fairclough (2006: 63) perceives discourse as a form of social practice where discourse is seen as “a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation”. Pienaar (2006: 9) adds that, “[t]he idea that discourse provides a lens through which we view the

world, presupposes that there is a relationship between discourses and a particular worldview. Thus, discourse encodes particular representations of the world or *ideologies* (Fairclough 1989; 2001)". Ideology, in this light, is a worldview that shapes and is shaped by the construction of realities. Language is the most common means through which we represent reality. Our experience of reality is mediated through language (Fowler et. al, 1979). Hence, language and ideology are related.

Fairclough (2003: 9) sees ideologies as "representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation". He conceptualizes ideology as a "modality of power": a means through which relations of power (often unequal relations) are maintained or challenged in a particular society (ibid). Therefore, discourse relationship to ideology can be seen where "discourse embodies ideological assumptions which come to be taken as mere 'common sense', and which contribute to sustaining existing power relations" (Fairclough, 2006: 63). Wodak and Meyer (2001: 10) also concur that ideology is viewed as "an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations".

Pienaar (2006: 41) cautions that "ideology typically masquerades as common sense [...] the power of ideology resides in its invisibility". In other words, ideology is often erroneously taken for common sense. This makes it even more powerfully pervasive. Pienaar adds, "under the guise of common sense, ideology can be (mis)used to legitimate unequal power relations in a particular society" (ibid). Fairclough (1989: 91) terms the process by which discourse (and in turn ideology) becomes common sense as the process of "naturalisation" takes place. When a particular discourse type dominates other discourse types to the extent that it is viewed as legitimate and natural (more importantly), this process is referred to as "naturalisation". This naturalization can happen to a greater or lesser degree. It makes an ideology commonsensical. Pienaar

(2006: 41) highlights that one of CDA's aims is to "deconstruct such notions of 'normality' and 'common sense' by showing how they are socially constructed to serve a particular group's interest". Discursive practices that construct texts in which certain ideologies are made commonsensical are discursive practices that reproduce asymmetrical power relations or domination. When naturalization of domination occurs, discursive practices maintain domination not through coercion but through consent. At the third-dimensional conception of discourse (social practice), the broad rubric of the 'ideal' female body is conceptualized as an ideological construct. One of the goals of this study is to uncover the particular sets of ideologies associated with the ideal female body as promoted by the discourses in the slimming advertisements (cf. Chapter 8).

In line with CDA's aims, this study is particularly interested in the discourses which construct the ideal female body. The selected extracts of the slimming advertisements demonstrate that the prevailing notions of what is considered as the ideal female body are enacted, sustained and propagated to entice women into the pursuit of slimness (cf. Chapters 5 and 6). The interview data, on the other hand, localizes the research and reveals how Malaysian women subscribe to this ideal female body (see Chapter 7).

This, all the more, necessitates one of CDA's chief aims, "to 'demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001: 10). The thorny issue of the 'ideal' female body pervades and is almost completely accepted as 'natural' or 'common sense'. It has blended in as a part of life in modern society, both locally and globally. It is through language and visual modes that this ideology is being disseminated, maintained and reinforced. Haque (2004) states that when certain ideological assumptions are overlooked and accepted unquestioningly, they may have a way of becoming oppressive in nature. Such is the case with the 'ideal' female body as presented in the slimming advertisements.

In order to inculcate a certain level of awareness in the issue of ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements and a critical ‘suspicion’ of the meaning-making within it, CDA is a good platform to advocate the ‘critical’ spirit. However, this idea of being ‘critical’ does not indicate a negative sense (see Section 2.2).

2.5.1.4 Dominance and Hegemony

The effects of power and ideology in discourse result in dominance. Wodak and Meyer (2001: 3) clarify:

Taking into account the insights that discourse is structured by dominance; that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted, that is, it is situated in time and space; and that dominance structures are legitimated by ideologies of powerful groups, the complex approach advocated by proponents of CL and CDA makes it possible to analyze pressures from above and possibilities of resistance to unequal power relationships that appear as societal conventions. According to this view, dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalize them, that is, the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning are obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: they are taken as ‘given’.

Pienaar (2006: 42) states that “[t]he notion of domination is important in understanding the process of naturalization since it points to the fact that naturalisation is a function of the power of one discourse type to suppress others within a particular social institution”. Therefore, the naturalisation of a discourse type renders ideologies common sense. As Fairclough (1989: 92) said, “[i]deologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that discourse types which embody them become naturalised”. Hence, the important implication for the dominant discourse type is that it makes it seem “ideological[ly] neutral” and “unproblematic” (Pienaar, 2006: 42). Likewise, the

dominant discourse in the slimming advertisements tells us that the ideal female body is slim, toned and shapely. It makes this notion almost ‘natural’ and unproblematic.

Like the concepts of power and ideology, hegemony and dominance work together to perpetuate the prevailing social problems. Therefore, to examine both concepts is a step nearer to dismantling the ideological imbued discourses. On this political concept of hegemony, Fairclough (2001: 124) enthuses,

[t]he political concept of ‘hegemony’ can be usefully employed in analyzing orders of discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Forgacs, 1988; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) – a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination, but hegemony will always be contested to a greater or lesser extent, in hegemonic struggle.

What is particularly shrewd in Fairclough’s observation is that hegemonic structuring of discourse legitimizes common sense and that works in prolonging relations of domination.

Obviously, both notions of dominance and hegemony reverberate through CDA claims. However, the term CDA is far from implying a homogeneous method within discourse analysis. Notwithstanding the unanimity of its general theoretical underpinnings, basic premises and general aims, its methodology, Titscher et al. (2000: 144) conclude that CDA, “can only be presented with reference to particular approaches and with regard to their specific theoretical backgrounds.” In light of this, the core CDA approaches are reviewed for a general understanding of the various approaches in CDA and to offer an explanation of the choice of Fairclough’s approach in this study.

2.5.1.5 The Order of Discourse

Following Michel Foucault's term, Fairclough (2001: 23) calls the underlying conventions of discourse as "*orders of discourse*". Fairclough (2001: 24, italics author's) sees "*orders of discourse* and *social orders*" as a form of constraint where discourses are divided up and structure into "interdependent networks" of discourses which are in use within a specific social domain. Social order, is a term that Fairclough uses "to refer to such a structuring of a particular social 'space' into various domains associated with various types of practice" (ibid). Fairclough adds that "[w]hat I shall call an order of discourse is really a social order looked at from a specifically discursual perspective – in terms of those types of practice into which a social space is structured which happen to be discourse types." Pienaar (2006: 11) explains the connection between orders of discourse and social orders as follows:

Orders of discourse are closely related to the social order (i.e. the way that society is separated into social institutions and associated social domains, situations and practices): they both reflect and constitute the social order.

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002: 72) see an order of discourse as "both structure and practice". They explain an order of discourse is a structure when it is seen as, "the sum of all the genres and discourses which are in use within a specific social domain" (ibid). They further explain that an order of discourse is also a practice, "in the sense that it both shapes and is shaped by specific instances of language use" (ibid). Phillips and Jørgensen (2002: 72) continue to describe the function of order of discourse:

The use of discourse and genres as resources in communication is controlled by the order of discourse because the order of discourse constitutes the resources (discourses and genres) that are available. It delimits what can be said.

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002: 72) further inform how orders of discourse “can change [...] by using discourses and genres in new ways or by importing discourses and genres from other orders of discourse”. We see how orders of discourse are particularly open to change when discourses and/or genres from other orders of discourse intersect (see Chapter 8). This happens because not all discourses within an order of discourse have the same prominence – one or more may appear more dominant than the rest. The dominant discourse will subsume the other discourses. This is, as Fairclough (2001: 163) describes it, a process of “colonization” (see below).

2.5.1.6 Colonization in Discourse

The process of colonization occurs when two or more discourses intersect within the same specific communicative event. When one discourse emerges more salient than the other discourses, this dominant discourse colonizes the other discourses. This is the colonizing discourse and the other discourses are the colonized discourses (Pienaar, 2006). Pienaar (2006: 12) further tells us that “[t]he colonising discourse holds the most sway in a given order of discourse and often exploits the related discourses to legitimise its aims”. For a concrete example related to this study, see the discussion in Section 8.2.

2.6 CDA APPROACHES

There are several major CDA approaches including Fairclough's Foucauldian post-structuralism (or usually addressed as Fairclough's CDA); Wodak's discourse-historical approach; van Dijk's socio-cognitive model and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual social semiotics.

2.6.1 Wodak's discourse-historical approach

The discourse-historical approach (hereafter, DHA) was termed in 1990 after Wodak and her colleagues completed an interdisciplinary study of post-war anti-Semitism in Austria. DHA based its model on sociolinguistics in the Bernsteinian tradition and Jürgen Habermas's ideas (Frankfurt school). Fieldwork, ethnography and historical context are key features of the DHA. It examines the historical, institutional (in court, in school, in hospital etc.) and political data in an attempt to trace in detail the constitution of prejudice, racism, antisemitic stereotype and more recently, to investigate identity politics and patterns of decision-making in EU organizations. The analytical apparatus of the DHA consists of the following:

- 1) the specific *contents* or *topics* of a specific discourse
- 2) *discursive strategies*
- 3) *linguistics means* (as types) and the specific, context-dependent *linguistic realizations* (as tokens)

(Reisigl & Wodak, 2009: 93)

The DHA analysis ideally follows an eight-step:

- 1) **Activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge** (i.e. recollection, reading and discussion of previous research).
- 2) **Systematic collection of data and context information** (depending on the research question, various discourses and discursive events, social fields as well as actors, semiotic media, genres and texts are focused on).
- 3) **Selection and preparation of data for specific analyzes** (selection and downsizing of data according to relevant criteria, transcription of tape recording, etc.).
- 4) **Specification of the research question and formulation of assumptions** (on the basis of a literature review and first skimming of the data).
- 5) **Qualitative pilot analysis** (allows testing categories and first assumptions as well as the further specification of assumptions).
- 6) **Detailed case studies** (of a whole range of data, primarily qualitative, but in part also quantitative).
- 7) **Formulation of critique** (interpretation of results, taking into account the relevant context knowledge and referring to the three dimensions of critique).
- 8) **Application of the detailed analytical results** (if possible, the results might be applied or proposed for application).

(Reisigl & Wodak, 2009: 96, emphasis authors')

This ideal-typical eight-step is best realized in an interdisciplinary project with huge corpora of data and sufficient resources of time, personnel and money. Thus Wodak's DHA framework was not chosen for this study. This study does not take into account the ethnographical information and historical context of the slimming advertisements. In addition, the study is conducted single-handedly by the researcher with limited time and resources.

2.6.2 van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach

van Dijk is the chief proponent of the socio-cognitive approach which takes into consideration cognition in the critical analysis of discourse, communication and

interaction. According to van Dijk (2002), cognition includes personal and social cognition and his analysis of text involves the macrostructure (i.e. a study of global meanings, topics or themes) and microstructure (i.e. semantic relations) levels. His works on racism (van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a, 2005), on ideology (van Dijk, 1998) and context (van Dijk, 2008a, 2009) demonstrate that they “are *both mental and social phenomena*” (van Dijk, 2009: 65, emphasis author’s). van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach takes into account the mental processes involved in texts production and comprehension. However, this study does not look into how “cognitive phenomena are related to the structures of discourse, verbal interaction, communicative events and situations, as well as societal structures, such as those of domination and social inequality” (van Dijk, 2009: 64).

2.6.3 Social Semiotics approach

Social semiotics derived from three schools of thought: the Prague School, which developed the work of the Russian Formalists (in the 1930s and early 1940s); the Paris School, which applied ideas from de Saussure and other linguists (in the 1960s and 1970s); and social semiotics influenced by Halliday, O’Toole, Kress, van Leeuwen and Hodge (from early 1970s). The first movement explored how the notions of “foregrounding” were applied to language and the study of art (Mukarovsky), theatre (Honzl), cinema (Jakobson) and costumes (Bogatyrev). The second movement, under the term “semiology”, was developed further into media studies, art and design, photography (Barthes, Lindekens), fashion (Barthes), cinema (Metz), music (Nattiez), comic strips (Fresnault-Deruelle) and so forth. Pierce’s terms, such as “langue” and “parole”; the “signifier” and the “signified”; “arbitrary” and “motivated” signs; “icons” “indexes” and “symbols” were incorporated in the framework of “semiology”. Finally, the third movement took place in Australia where the ‘social’ aspect is integrated.

Halliday's ideas inspired studies of literature (Threadgold, Thibault), visual semiotics (O'Toole, Kress & van Leeuwen), music (van Leeuwen) and other semiotic modes (Hodge & Kress) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001: 5).

Generally, semiotics is the study of signs – where visual literacy was formerly considered secondary to the writing tradition. However, as pointed out by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), visual communication is becoming more crucial in the domains of public communication (i.e. via multimodal texts or multimedia). Therefore, visual literacy is tantamount to understanding “sign-making” where “forms (‘signifiers’) such as colour, perspective and line, as well as the way in which these forms are used to realize meanings (‘signified’)” (van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001: 5). They developed a comprehensive theory of visual communication based on the Western culture. Children's books, science textbooks, printed advertisements, newspapers, paintings and three-dimensional visuals (i.e. sculpture, architecture or stage sets) are some of the examples of visual materials examined on how the non-verbal modes create meanings. Kress and van Leeuwen's method of visual analysis rely heavily on social semiotic theory in developing system networks, a style of diagramming that derives from the work of M.A.K Halliday (1978), whose linguistic theories have been a decisive influence on this kind of visual analysis. In light of this, advertisement, one of the visual representations, is a very rich ‘text’ to be studied. A text is, in M.A.K Halliday's words, “language that is functional” (Halliday & Hassan, 1985: 10); in the same vein, a visual thus, is “an image that is functional, i.e. an image which has a precise communicative purpose in a social and cultural context [...]. Visual images, like language, have their own grammar, a system of forms for making meanings” (Nalon, 1997: 17).

VSS is functionalist in the sense that it sees visual resources as having been developed to do specific kinds of semiotic work. VSS as a methodological approach to discover

meaning potentials is used in this study to understand the meaning making in images from the selected slimming advertisements. It is an attempt to describe a meaning potential, a field of possible meanings in the selected slimming advertisements. According to Jewitt (1999: 266), the “[m]eaning is encoded in the structures of images: the form of representation; the presentation of people, objects and landscape; the composition, and its modality and medium. The description and interpretation of these structures forms the basis of the social semiotic approach to analyzing visual texts.” Rose (2001: 3) concurs that, “qualitative methods are more appropriate” in locating meaning and significance of visual images.

Social semiotic approach towards visual analysis provides a fine-grained and explicit method for analyzing the meanings established by the syntactic relations between people, places and things portrayed in images. The role of VSS in the study of the slimming advertisements helps to illuminate how the structures of the images contributed to the representation of concepts of femininity.

The theory does provide a useful framework for understanding the communicative potentials of visual materials. As the slimming advertisements are rich in visual images, the analysis of the images necessitates inclusion of the social semiotics aspect. However, in the case of this study, it remains secondary to support the main framework of critical discourse analysis (as below).

2.7 FAIRCLOUGH’S APPROACH

In her survey of CL and CDA, Wodak (2006) refers to Fairclough’s approach as “Foucauldian poststructuralism” because his idea of “orders of discourse” originated from the social theorist, Michel Foucault. He proposes CDA as an alternative way “in social scientific research on social and cultural change, and as a resource in struggles against exploitation and domination” (Fairclough, 1993: 134).

Fairclough's theoretical considerations and analytical schemata are hinged on specific definitions of a number of concepts. The following key terms will be useful in understanding his approach (Fairclough 1993: 138 as cited in Titscher et al., 2000: 148):

- *Discourse* (abstract noun) – ‘language use conceived as social practice’.
- *Discursive event* – ‘instance of language use, analyzed as text, discursive practice, social practice’.
- *Text* – ‘the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event’. Later Fairclough emphasizes the multi-semiotic character of texts and adds visual images and sound – using the example of television language – as other semiotic forms which may be simultaneously present in texts (see Fairclough 1995b: 4)
- *Interdiscursivity* – ‘the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres’.
- *Discourse* (countable noun) – ‘way of signifying experience from a particular perspective’.
- *Genre* – ‘use of language associated with a particular social activity’.
- *Order of discourse* – ‘totality of discursive practices of an institution and relationships between them’.

2.7.1 Fairclough's CDA

CDA, in Fairclough's (2001: 121) view, is “as much theory as method – or rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis (including ‘visual language’, ‘body language’, and so on) as one element or ‘moment’ of the material social process (William, 1977), which gives rise to ways of analyzing language or semiosis within broader analyzes of the social process.” In line with any other CDA

practitioners, Fairclough is also interested in the study of language and society. Fairclough (2001; 2003; 2006) views language use as a form of social practice in a dialectical relationship with other social factors and his social theory of discourse incorporates social context in its framework.

In light of this, Fairclough (1993: 134) proposes that “it is vital that critical discourse analysis explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and socially constitutive”. Heberle (2000: 122-123) explains Fairclough’s two assumptions about language use:

Being socially shaped, language use is related to the conventional, the reproductive side of language, that is, the perpetuation of social conventions. The constitutive dimension of language, on the other hand, relates to the potentiality to transform social relations.

By the “potentiality to transform social relations”, Fairclough contends that discourse facilitates in the construction of social identities, social relationships between people, and, on a wider scale, our systems of beliefs (Fairclough, 1993: 134).

In examining language use in both dimensions of discourse: “socially shaped” and “socially constitutive”, Fairclough admits that this is a very complex relationship. On one hand, several different discourses may co-exist within the same institution; whereas on the other hand, the non-linear relationship between actual language use and the underlying conventions and norms further complicates it (Fairclough 1993: 135). Fairclough proposes investigating this complex relationship using the concept of “orders of discourse” (following Foucault, 1981), which refers to “higher level conventions set up by social institutions and power relations” (Heberle, 2000: 123). Fairclough (2001: 124) explains what “an order of discourse” means:

It is the way in which diverse genres and discourses are networked together. An order of discourse is a social structuring of semiotic difference – a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning, that is different discourses and genres.

Fairclough points out the aspect of “dominance” among different ways of making meaning. In Fairclough’s words, “[o]ne aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse; others are marginal, or oppositional, or ‘alternative’”. Hence, “orders of discourse are an area of potential cultural hegemony” (Fairclough, 2000: 151) and explains that, “a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination” (Fairclough, 2001: 124). Fairclough refers to Gramsci’s (1971) political concept of “hegemony” to be useful in analyzing orders of discourse (Fairclough, 1992c; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

From a CDA perspective, discourse analysis is about the analysis of relationships between actual language use and the wider sociocultural structures. Fairclough believes that CDA, with its grounding in socio-theoretical perspectives, is able to explore the opaque relations between discourses and social processes, in terms of ideology and power relations. At the heart of CDA, questions of power are of central interest.

2.7.2 Fairclough’s CDA Analytical Framework

Fairclough’s analytical framework analyzes discourse to uncover the opaque relations between discourses and social processes. Fairclough (1995a) attributes three dimensions to a particular communicative event. The three-dimensional conception of discourse, where any specific instance of discursive practice is seen simultaneously as:

A language text, spoken or written
Discourse practice (text production and text interpretation)

Social cultural practice

Language is an element of the social at all levels

Social structures : language

Social practices : orders of discourse (various discourses: medical, scientific, etc)

Social events : texts

Discourse-as-text

(i) Discourse-as-text

The first dimension considers discourse-as-text; at the textual level, analysis involves examination of both linguistic form and meaning (see below for Fairclough's adoption of certain branches of linguistics). A linguistic analysis of a text examines linguistic features and organization of concrete instances of discourse. For example, choices in vocabulary (e.g. wording, metaphor), grammar (e.g. transitivity, modality), cohesion (e.g. conjunction, schemata), and supra-sentential aspect of textual organization as text structure (e.g. episodic, turn-taking system) are identified and systematically analyzed. The use of passive verb forms in discourse can obscure the role of the agent. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 448), following Fairclough (1992a), state that, "[t]his attention to concrete textual features distinguishes CDA from germane approaches such as Michel Foucault's". It is in this dimension that Fairclough adopts M.A.K. Halliday's (1978, 1985, 1994) systemic-functional linguistics (SFL). This SFL framework allows Fairclough to execute his text analysis in line with his social-theoretical perspective, as it takes into account every instance of language use as comprising three metafunctions at the same time: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual functions of language.⁹

In the case of this study, analysis of the first dimension involves an examination of the microstructure of the language used in the selected slimming advertisements (i.e. lexical choices). At this level, the major components of each selected advertisement are carefully described to see how the ideal female body is textually and visually

constructed in the selected slimming advertisements (answering RQs 1 & 2). Through a close examination of the visual and the verbal modes, the construction of the ideal female body image in the selected slimming advertisements is explained.

(ii) Discourse-as-discursive practice

The second dimension, discourse-as-discursive practice serves as a link between text and social practice. Discursive practice is an important form of social practice that contributes to the social world (i.e. social identities and social relations). The analysis of discourse-as-discursive practice involves the social processes of text production, interpretation, consumption and distribution. Fairclough views these social processes largely in terms of the circulation of concrete linguistic components (specific texts or text-types that are produced, circulated and consumed). The main concerns of the analysis are how people produce and interpret texts, and their relation to the orders of discourse. This is essentially the analysis of socio-cognitive aspects of text production and interpretation (or consumption). Tan (2010: 24-25) observes that,

Fairclough (2006a) also stresses that in different social contexts, texts are consumed in different manners. Texts like personal letters are consumed individually while texts like newspapers are consumed by the general public. Processes of production and interpretation are constrained by the internalized social structures, norms and conventions, orders of discourse, and conventions for the production, distribution and consumption of texts which have been constituted through past social practice and struggle. They are also restrained by the exact nature of the social practice that determines what and how elements of members' resources are drawn upon.

At the discursive practice level, the relationship between text and discursive practices is drawn from the interviewees' responses to see in what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body (answering RQ 3). Slimming advertisements are one of the marketing strategies to promote products and services. Not only do they promote, they also disseminate values and concepts pertaining to idealized body image. In this light, advertising is viewed as a form of social practice which constitutes distinctive discursive practices.

(iii) Discourse-as-sociocultural practice

The third dimension is discourse-as-sociocultural practice. The analysis of the level of social practice relates to the different levels of social organization: from the most localized to institutional or even wider societal contexts. At this level of analysis, the questions of power and ideology are dealt with.

Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, as delineated above, is conducted according to these three phases. All the three phases are independent and seemingly unrelated; yet they are interdependent and analysis at any phase can be conducted as long as the interrelation of the stages is reflected in the final discussion. The three phases of discourse analysis are:

Descriptive phase – focus on textual linguistic features of text

Interpretative phase – the way in which participant arrive at some kind of understanding of discourse on the basis of their cognitive, social and ideological resources

Explanatory phase – the researcher draws on social theory in order to reveal the ideological underpinnings of interpretative procedures

The sociocultural dimension further clarifies the relationship between discursive practice and social context, in particular, the focus is on how the slimming advertisements reproduce social practices that concentrate on gender (essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity) to trigger consumerism. The final dimension of sociocultural practice will be discussed in the discussion of findings (cf. Chapter 8).

2.8 CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the analysis of text concerns the study of micro and macrostructures of the language produced in a certain discursive event. The analysis of social practice is the examination of the discursive event in terms of what is happening at a certain time in a certain sociocultural context. The dimensions of text and social practice are mediated by the discursive practice, which refers to the social processes of text production, consumption, and distribution (see Figure 2). The three-fold analyzes address the gaps in CDA for being too text-centric and lacking in empirical data. In using this integrated approach, it aims to examine how multimodal resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body, as guided by the research questions (see Chapter 1).

Fairclough integrates theoretical perspectives and concepts from both social theories and from linguistics for his study of discourse, and his theoretical framework is applicable to everyday social practices. On that note, Fairclough's CDA is considered relevant, pertinent and appropriate in this study. However, CDA is not flawless. It has its limitations as well. Notwithstanding these limitations, CDA, on the whole, is still remarkable for its advocacy in championing the cause to support the victims of oppression, marginalization, injustices or inequalities of all kinds. It increases awareness of the hidden coercion existing in social contexts and encourages victims to resist and transform their lives. Indeed, the moral and political tones are an integral

part of CDA's principles. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 447) highlight that, "CDA explicitly intends to incorporate social-theoretical insights into discourse analysis and advocates social commitment and interventionism in research".

CDA, hence, provides a crucial and significant theoretical and methodological impetus for 'language as a social practice' paradigm. Certainly, it could benefit from a closer integration with new developments (for the way in which this study incorporates visual social semiotics as well as interview analyzes, see Chapters 6 and 7).

It is indeed apt, useful and viable to apply CDA in this study of the ideological construction of ideal female body image in slimming advertisements. The principles of CDA provide a method that helps in demonstrating how language constructs reality through ideological representations of the ideal female body. CDA, either as a theory or a method, provides useful tools to problematize gender issues mainly for its focus on the opaque connections between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1989: 49-51). Moreover, CDA is entrenched in critical social theory and this is especially useful and pertinent in locating representations of ideology within a particular discourse.

CDA seeks to link the text (micro-level) with the underlying power structures in society (macro sociocultural practices level) through three levels of analysis (Fairclough, 2000). To critique ideologies implicit and obscured in slimming advertisements, a methodology anchored in CDA is fitting. This framework is a "critical" approach to discourse analysis in the sense that it sets out to make visible through analysis and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts' (Fairclough, 1995a: 97).

This study delves into the ideological construction of female body image in slimming advertisements, fundamentally a gender issue. Issues of gender can be highlighted through the analysis of verbal and visual elements that deal with gender differences and

those which may reflect ideologically invested views of the female body.

CHAPTER 3: ADVERTISING and THE FEMALE BODY

3.0 OVERVIEW

This chapter reviews relevant literature concerned with the advertising's profile (Section 3.1), advertising's functions (Section 3.2), advertising's discourse (Section 3.3), advertising and the female body (Section 3.4) and the empirical research in advertising and the female body (Section 3.5). The information presented is not in chronological order. The purpose of this review is to provide a background to this study and to find out what has been done in order to determine in what way this study fills the gap in the research on advertising and the female body.

3.1 ADVERTISING: PROFILE

In this section, the word 'advertisement' is briefly defined. Following this, the advertising's profile in terms of the main layout of a print advertisement and its historical development are briefly described. The advertising profile traces how advertising evolved from a promotional means to a formidable influence when it began to dictate certain social practices, in the case of this study, the representation of the ideal female body.

An advertisement, in the simplest sense, makes known something to somebody by several means of communication: linguistic, audio and visual modes as shown through various media. Each mode can either stand on its own or be used in combination for best effect of drawing attention, notifying or informing. Stripped of most aids, one can advertise by word of mouth, which occurs informally without incurring any expenses. However, to inform a large number of people about something, a public announcement is necessarily employed. This is the more familiar sense of the word 'advertise'.

Advertisements communicate essential information about goods and services: on their price, quality, function, durability, availability and so forth. This wide range of information is important for consumers to make wise and rational choices.

3.1.1 Layout of Printed Slimming Advertisements

A printed slimming advertisement has a typical layout, consisting of five major components: a headline,¹⁰ body copy,¹¹ a signature,¹² a visual or a composite of visuals,¹³ and standing details.¹⁴ Each of these parts has certain characteristics (see Tash, 1983: 13-16; Vestergaard & Schroeder, 1985: 52 and Toolan, 1988: 55). While the heading and the signature line are obligatory, other parts are optional.

3.1.2 Historical Development

Advertising strategies and appearances have evolved from simple to sophisticated systems of communication. In the medieval days, public criers went through the towns and shouted out the wares of local traders and shopkeepers.¹⁵

Advertising, as we know it, did not start until the seventeenth century. It began to gain importance when by the middle of the seventeenth century newsheets or mercuries, as they were commonly called then, appeared on regular basis to display information on prices, stocks, imports and exports. Stimulated by the growing readership of the middle-class in England, the newspaper and publishing trades flourished along with the first daily, “The Daily Courant” which came into existence in Britain in 1702, followed by “social” journalism – the “Tatlers” in 1709 and the “Spectator” in 1711 (Dyer, 1982: 17). The growth of dailies increased the volume of advertising through them. A typical advertisement of the eighteenth century was printed, laid out like classifieds and rarely illustrated. Interestingly, the volume of advertising in newspapers soared despite the introduction of an advertisement tax.

Around the mid-nineteenth century, further growth was seen when the advertisement tax was abolished in 1853, followed by the cancellation of the newspaper stamp duty in 1855. It was then that the design and layout of advertisements began to change. From the characteristic of eighteenth-century generally superfluous sentences, the textual features in advertisement began to pay more attention to the appearance of the words in blocks, the use of more spacing or contrasting type sizes.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, advertising was not only gathering momentum, but moved on from promotion of novelties and fringe products to national advertising campaigns and brand-naming of products.

At the turn of the century, as the larger manufacturing units emerged and overtook the smaller enterprises, heavy reliance on mass advertising began and advertising copy employed the persuasive rather than proclamation note. In fact, the “reason-why” copy began to catch on, following Lord Leverhulme’s lead, one of the first industrialists to advocate that the “logical and considered” argument as well as eye-catching and witty slogans (ibid, 40). During the twentieth century, advertising ascended in greater importance and status, from mere communication to a “profession” and “public service” (ibid, 43). New methods were adopted, pertaining to the new science of psychology where the technique of “association” became one of the new strategies of appealing to and persuading people (ibid, 43). In fact, an American psychologist stressed that advertisements should carry a cheerful note and products should be linked to attractiveness, prosperity and social status. This must have been the starting point of the positive, idealized, utopian messages in advertisements.

It is more than likely that an advertisement’s effects are diffused and long-term, and there is some evidence that advertising plays a part in defining ‘reality’ in a general or anthropological sense. It projects the goals and values that are consistent with and

conducive to the consumer economy and socializes us into thinking that we can buy a way of life as well as goods (Dyer, 1982: 77).

When advertising expanded radically alongside the broadcasting medium, it began to exert its influence on editorial features and programming decisions in the media itself. James Curran (1978) delved into a study on advertising related editorial features during the post-war period between the years 1946-76 and discovered that advertisements placement had been strategically placed on the same or facing pages as features covering the same topic. Curran tells us that, “[t]his reflects the increasing accommodation of national newspaper managements to the selective needs of advertisers” (as quoted in Dyer, 1982: 67). Advertisers eyed spaces that are ‘right’ (most strategic/most prominent) and effective for their advertisements to reach their readers. Indirectly, advertising sponsorship dictates the coverage of the materials in the press. It is from Curran’s observation that we note the change within advertising’s role. From its general role to support the free market economy, a closer examination shows how advertisements are related to the economic systems of modern society. At the same time, Dyer (1982: 5) explains how advertisements transmit and perpetuate ideas and values which are indispensable to a particular system of economy.

Advertising’s profile, which was recognizably a marginal pressure group of “quacks” in the eighteenth century has risen up to be a formidable authoritative influence on the media (Dyer, 1982: 46). As Dyer (ibid, 69) remarks, it has become

[...] a highly developed and sophisticated institution which touches the centre of cultural as well as economic life and organizes newspapers and the broadcast media so that they are not truly independent but fall in with the demands of the dominant economic institutions. Advertising’s influence on the media is exerted invisibly without acknowledgement.

The overview of the advertising profile provides an important background to this study.

It traces the development of advertisements as promotional means to a “highly developed and sophisticated institution” (ibid, 69). As an institution, it holds the ‘power’ to do many things. In the context of this study, it concerns the ‘power’ to construct the ideal female body via slimming advertisements.

3.2 ADVERTISING: FUNCTIONS

Advertising is a ubiquitous, pervasive and influential force that does its work through different forms: flyer, poster, placard, prospectus, magazine, billboard, newspaper, radio, television, film trailer and even on mobile transportations, airplane, bus and train. Many of these are vehicles of conveying a product’s/service’s unique selling point, brand identity, image and certainly, values. Traditionally, print advertising relies on visual design and written language. Other mediums, such as radio advertising, uses music and speech; while TV and cinema advertising exploits the use of the moving image, speech, music and written language. In fact, advertising transcends a text-based mould; other forms – inter alia, celebrities endorsing brands, “sponsorship of teams, events and activities, using public relations tools such as press releases and involvement in political issues, and merchandizing and sales promotion such as stands, packaging, shop signs, coupons, free sample and competitions” (Delin, 2000: 125). These diverse forms of advertising media are unlikely to go outdated; on the contrary, they are moving with the times, with technological advancement and with popular culture, as advertising media continue to evolve into more sophisticated forms.

As we can see, advertisements permeate our environment. Some may appear banal, others, attractive and engaging. On the whole, advertisements are powerful – they perform both economic and ideological functions in our society (Dyer, 1982; Fairclough, 1989 and Delin, 2000).

3.2.1 The Economic Functions of Advertising

On the economic level, advertising is one of the means used by the manufacturer or business to secure a section of the market by organizing and controlling people's taste and behaviour in the interests of company profit and capital growth. The control is achieved by advocating highly selective and stereotypical ideas which are remotely related to selling.

Advertising, in the process of promoting and selling products, offers stereotypical notions of the appearance of men and women that reinforce socially constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity. This is basically playing around with the essentialist characteristics of men and women, setting them in binary oppositions of how each gender should behave and look like. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003: 199) succinctly summed-up how advertisements perpetuate femininity and masculinity discourse as, "a body of knowledge and techniques that organizes the structure of beauty and its power relations. It structures not only how we do things, it structures why we want to do them – it gives us our desires and the means to (almost) achieve them".

Advertising tries to manipulate people to think that by buying a certain product or service, it will reflect their lifestyle or social standing in society. Kilbourne (1995: 121), a social activist against the exploitation of women through commercial advertisements, says that, "[...] the advertisements sell a great deal more than products. They sell values, images and concepts of success, worth, love and sexuality, popularity and normalcy. They tell us who we are and who we should be. Sometimes they sell addictions." Subtly, advertising has been distorting 'reality' and asserting its influence and manipulating consumers into buying a way of life as well as goods. Drawn from Curran's study, Dyer (1982: 67) further informs how this process of stereotyping "women as mothers, fashion objects and home-makers" occurs:

In them [advertisements] women are defined as consumers of fashion, cosmetics and domestic goods, and feature articles are biased towards this aspect of women's lives. While there might be no direct endorsement of these consumer commodities, the fact that feature articles are product-related tends to reinforce a stereotypical view of women as mothers, fashion objects and home-makers.

When it comes to the level of dictating people into buying a way of life as well as goods, advertising is not only serving the economic functions but is also indirectly endorsing its ideological aims (cf. Section 3.2.2). It becomes an agent that appeals to our desires and creates false needs that are not essential to human survival. Dyer (1982: 6) succinctly points out how “desires are aroused and shaped” by the advertiser:

Advertising's central function is to create desires that previously did not exist. Thus advertising arouses our interests and emotions in favour of goods and more goods, and thereby actually creating the desires it seeks to satisfy. Our desires are aroused and shaped by the demands of the system of production, not by the needs of society or of the individual. It is thus the advertiser's task to try to persuade rather than inform.

Instead of informing, advertising manipulates persuasive marketing techniques and strategies that are geared to sell and to make profit. Thus, advertisements are unreliable as the choice of information is compromised, biased and only serve the interest of the producer. The information conveyed by the producer of the advertisement is rarely ‘transparent’ but a gross misrepresentation of reality.

The exposition of the economic functions of advertisements shows how advertisements *create false needs* (italics mine). Similarly, in the present study, we see how the slimming advertisements function to construct the notions of the perfect female body as easily attainable and desirable. The slimming advertisements construct slimness as the

ideal female beauty and how such a perfect body size and shape boosts confidence, builds social relationship and even advances one's career. In this way, a slim body is created as a desirable quality for 'every' woman.

From the aforementioned discussion, we see how advertising's functions do not just revolve around economic interest. There seems to be no clear line of division of where the economic and ideological functions begin and end. What is clear is that the ideological function works to serve the aims of the economic function. The next section delineates some of the main ideological functions of advertising.

3.2.2 The Ideological Functions of Advertising

Behind the economic functions of advertising lie the ideological functions where the advertisements create "[f]alse wants and encourage the production and consumption of things that are incompatible with the fulfillment of genuine and urgent human needs" (Dyer, 1982: 3). Dyer (ibid) further adds that advertising is an "irrational system"

which appeals to our emotions and to anti-social feelings which have nothing to do with the goods on offer. Advertisements usually suggest that private acquisition is the only avenue to social success and happiness – they define private acquisition and competitiveness as a primary goal in life, at the expense of less tangible rewards like better health care and social services. The consumer economy is said to divert funds from socially useful and human needs and make us greedy, materialistic and wasteful.

Dyer deftly exposes the workings of an advertisement which lead to insatiable wants and create a consumer society. As one of the main purveyors of values, ideas and concepts endorsed by our current socio-economic structure – advertising is an immensely powerful ideological tool. Dyer (ibid, 114), in disclaiming the unrealistic

assumptions and stereotypical notions in advertisements, calls attention to this:

Ads are what some critics call ‘specific representational practices’ and produce meanings which cannot be found in reality. There is no simple reality with which to replace the falseness of advertisements, and there are no simple alternatives to stereotypes. In order to gain better understanding of the role that advertising plays in our society, we need to ask how advertising organizes and constructs reality, how ideology and meanings are produced within the ad discourse and why some images are the way they are, or how they could have been constructed.

Critiques of advertising warn us that advertising influences our perception, thought and lives; we need to be aware of how it operates, how it constructs reality, how ideology and meanings are produced within the advertising discourse (Williamson, 1978; Goffman, 1979; Dyer, 1982; Kilbourne, 1987, 1999a, 1999b; Budgeon, 1994; Duffy, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Zuraidah, 2003 and Eckert, 2007) (for further details, see Section 3.3).

One seminal work on deciphering advertising as ideological is Judith Williamson’s *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1978). In her enquiry on exactly how advertisements “work”, Williamson synthesizes relevant theories to decode them. To do so, Williamson refers to a wide spectrum of theories to inform: semiotic theory derived from Barthes and de Saussure; Marx, in order to understand the function of advertisements in a capitalistic society; as well as Lacan and Althusser’s psycho-analytic frameworks are applied to understand the perceiver’s role and relationship to advertisement, and thereof, how meaning is formulated at the perceiver’s level. Similarly, Erving Goffman’s classic, *Gender Advertisements* (1979) offers a systematic semiotic analysis of advertisements. Goffman, a sociologist, investigated

how commercial advertising mirrors and moulds concepts of masculine and feminine behaviour. Both Williamson's and Goffman's investigations of print advertisements are ground-breaking works that point to the ideological nature of advertisements.

Just like slimming advertisements, other similar type of advertisements construct what is considered the ideal female body; at the same time, they create the desire for the ideal body. These are of the embedded meanings in advertisements which require deeper and critical analysis to uncover (Dyer, 1982: 94). These meanings have a rippling effect on one's life-style and identity.

As Hall (1997: 3) stresses, "meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we 'belong' [...]". He further explicates how meanings are made available:

Meanings are produced at several sites and circulated through several different processes or practices (the cultural circuit). [...]. Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part. [...]. It is also produced in a variety of different media; especially, these days, in the modern mass media, the means of global communication, by complex technologies, which circulate meanings between different cultures on a scale and with a speed hitherto unknown in history. [...]. Meaning is also produced whenever we experience ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural 'thing' that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value.

From Hall's exposition of how meaning gives a sense of identity, female-oriented slimming advertisements similarly draw women to "consume" and "appropriate" the cultural expectation of a slim silhouette. This slim silhouette is deemed beautiful,

feminine and *the* ideal. Hence, it is little wonder that women are constantly afflicted by the slightest weight gain. When such embedded meaning becomes part and parcel of life, it is then that this turns into a system of belief, which is eventually developed to justify the actions of those in power, even if it is a gross distortion and misrepresentation of reality. This is where advertisements' ideological functions are at work.

Along the same thread of Marxist and neo-Marxist understanding of ideology, the concern is with the way in which exploitation seems to be naturalized, so much so that the exploited are unaware of it (Williams, 1977 and van Dijk, 1998). van Dijk (1998) asserts that people are generally oblivious to these social representations, and to how they control the social practices and evaluations. Ideologies may seem so common that people accept and internalize them unquestioningly. When this happens, they are actually accepting a dominant ideology as a reflection of a common or otherwise legitimate social order. Their ideologies, over time, are consolidated into beliefs that are almost natural or immutable. It is when the dominated are unable to distinguish their own goals, interests or attitudes from those of the dominant group, dominant ideologies are deemed "perfect" (van Dijk, 1998: 102). Marxism believes "false consciousness" or the unconscious state during the process of accepting a dominant ideology is to the advantage of capitalism (Althusser, 1971: 140). It is an effective mechanism to maintain, legitimize and perpetuate asymmetrical power relations in society (Fairclough, 1989 and Simpson, 1993).

3.3 ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

As we can see from the aforementioned discussion, advertising is not confined to promoting products and services (i.e.: economic functions). We are looking at a deeper level of how an advert functions to influence our thinking and reasoning about the world in a deeper level (i.e.: ideological functions of creating false needs and desires). This is possible through various parts of an advertisement, in particularly the visual presentation as well as its linguistic content.

By the latter, we are actually looking at advertising language, which Fairclough (1989: 28) addresses as “one of the most populous and pervasive modern discourse types”. Hall (1997: 3) defines discourse as knowledge. In his words, “discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.”

Whether advertising discourse is knowledge or a medium of communication in the sociocultural context, advertising discourse permeates every area of life and infiltrates into other kinds of discourse. This happens when the advertising message is absorbed into our everyday conversation or activity. This, according to Fairclough, is the ideological process of absorption, where we view ourselves as consumers who “belong to a particular ‘consumption communities’ that have been defined by advertisers rather than any inherent cultural experience, and whose beliefs, attitudes and values are fundamentally shaped by the sets of consumption patterns seen in advertising” (as quoted in Delin, 2000: 130).

Simpson (1993) voices his conviction that language reproduces ideology. As an integrated form of social behaviour, language will be inevitably and inextricably tied up

with the socio-political context in which it functions. Language is not used in a contextless vacuum; rather, it is used in a host of discourse contexts, contexts which are impregnated with the ideology of social systems and institutions. Because language operates within this social dimension it must, of necessity *reflect*, and some would argue, *construct* ideology (ibid, 6, emphasis author).

The advertising discourse is situated within the broader social context in which the text is seen through Fairclough's (1989: 20) lens of discourse "as a form of social practice".

A particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure have a dialectical relationship where the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transform it (Wodak, 1997: 17).

In this light, advertising is seen as a social event and its discourse plays a pivotal role in structuring individual experience. Advertising discourse mediates relationships between the private and public domains where ideologies are maintained and legitimized to ensure social control and social reproduction. Therefore, discourse, seen in this way, is never transparent discourse where the language use is invested in different sets of meanings and values.

Fairclough (2001) tells us that consumerism dictates the discourse of advertising. These consumption patterns, in turn, are closely linked with commodities. Zuraidah and Knowles (2009: 2, following Coupland, 2007) explain what "commodities" and "commodification" mean in light of contemporary capitalist society.

In contemporary capitalist society, there seems to be no limit to what can be regarded as a commodity to be bought and sold, so that commodities include not only carrots and cars, but also education and knowledge, and even the ageing of the female body. The treatment as commodities of things not normally regarded as something to be bought and sold is referred to as *commodification*. [...]. The commodification of the body [...] regards the body as the “commodity self” where “each portion of the body was to be viewed critically, as a potential bauble in a successful assemblage”, and fixing the body has become a way in which people could fashion their selves and identities (emphasis authors’).

The authors’ insight into the “ageing of the female body” is a part of empirically grounded studies of discourses of the body as impacted by Foucault’s social scientific approach to the body where it holds two views on body: as a site controlled by institutions and an epistemological view of the body as socially constructed (Zuraidah, 2009: 2). The latter, as Bordo (2003) points out, germinates from feminism that first inverted the old metaphor of “body politic” to discuss the politics of the body: “the human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control” (ibid, 21). Hitherto, what constitutes femininity and beauty in contemporary culture need to be re-examined in the light of theories of the female body.

In this study, the concerns for the ideological functions of the slimming advertisements are particularly linked with issues of concern to feminist activists, those of asymmetrical gender notions on beauty, i.e. the ideal female body. As advertising’s formidable influence has been clearly established, we move into the following sections to see how advertising dictates certain social practices, in particular, the representation of feminine beauty.

3.4 ADVERTISING AND THE FEMALE BODY

The partnership between advertising and beauty industries generates a multi-billion dollar business. The beauty industries create and sell the notions of beauty and advertising companies help to disseminate these notions. Beauty product/service advertisements offer solutions to ‘problems’ afflicting woman-kind. Ironically, the problem-solution promise remains a promise. In fact, the post-modern quest for the much sought after ever-young and ever-svelte elixir serves to reinforce the body image anxieties (i.e., low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, body shame, etc.) (Moody-Hall, 2001; Holsen, Kraft & Røysamb, 2001; Bordo, 2003; O’pry, 2003; Pon et al., 2004; Swami & Tovée, 2005; Grogan, 2007; Scriven, 2007; Khor et al., 2009 and Swami et al., 2010). This has escalated to a complex, clinically body-related problem, such as BDD (cf. Section 1.1).

The following sections focus specifically on the body image concerns across lifespan (Section 3.4.1) and cultures (Section 3.4.2). Following this, the relationship between advertisements and its influence on the dissatisfaction of physical appearance among women is made apparent.

3.4.1 Body Image Concerns across Lifespan

Advertising, one of the main channels of media’s influence, may have deleterious impacts on an individual’s self-perception and adherence to gender-typed behaviours across all ages in one’s lifespan. From childhood, adolescence to adulthood, various social and cultural media messages prescribe popular standards of appearance and attractiveness. Body image perception, for instance, has significant impact on one’s self-esteem and psychological health (Swami et al., 2010; Scriven, 2007; Botta, 1999; Myers & Biocca, 1992). Children, from even a tender age of five years old, are known

to register body image dissatisfaction and this body image dissatisfaction increases as they grow older (Davison, et al., 2003; 2000 as cited in Luevorasirikul, 2007; Moody-Hall, 2001 and Rozin & Fallon, 1985). Studies have shown that those with body image anxiety at a younger age are likely to develop into more complicated problems, both physically and mentally later in life (Luevorasirikul, 2007). Norton, Olds, Olive and Dank (1996) concurred that the concept of body image can be formulated at a very young age. They found that the way children perceived their individual bodies can be influenced by the dolls the children use for play. By using anthropometry as well as the rules of allometry to scale Barbie to an adult height and dimension, this procedure yielded the finding that the chance of encountering an individual with the body shape of Barbie is less than 1 in 100,000. Not only that, Croll (2005: 156) explains that body size proportions of Barbie and Ken dolls are ridiculous and a sheer distortion of reality for children. Therefore, the very toys children hold in their hands are not as harmless as we think and may well distort their perceptions of normal body image.

According to several other research, exposure to the media, be they print media like pin-up posters, billboards, magazines and newspaper advertisements or broadcasting mediums such as television (TV), movies, music videos, video games, computer games and more recently, Internet sites, can potentially facilitate change of attitudes of self-attractiveness (Cummings, 1998; Myers & Biocca, 1992; Hisse-Biber et al., 1987 and Berger, 1972). Children, as young as 4- to 9-years old, have been found to emulate images they see in the media and learn body image discrepancies long before they reach adolescence. They were able to segregate and describe gender-typed behaviours (Durkin, 1984 & O'pry, 2003). By the adolescent phase, many of them would have been exposed to the stereotypes about male and female body images. The males prefer the mesomorph or muscular body type whereas women's social acceptability is based on several models: "the athletic woman with firm muscles; the seductive women with a

slender figure; and the motherly woman with soft curves” (Moody-Hall, 2001: 17). In fact, Moody-Hall also explains that, “[a]n analysis by the Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Females Development showed that many females think well of themselves in the primary grades but suffer a severe decline in self confidence and acceptance of their body image by age 12”.

Further studies by Rozin and Fallon (1985) reported this attitude to be carried into the college years. The female college students generally overestimate their body size; prefer to choose a smaller body size to represent their own body, their personal ideal body and their ideal body for girls and their ideal body for women (O’pry, 2003: 10). Males, on other hand, predominantly consider themselves to be underweight and desire weight gain as a means to achieve a muscular body shape (Luevorasirikul, 2007 and Croll, 2005). The prevalence of body image concern is widespread for both genders across all ages throughout the lifespan. Both men and women are perpetually dissatisfied with their bodies and on the elusive search for the perfect body. As mentioned before, this study focuses solely on the female body (cf. Section 1.1.).

Body image concern across lifespan, in short, signals the urgency for further understanding of the issues pertaining to the female body. The perceptions of beauty across cultures, as delineated in the following section, will add to the understanding of how the female body underwent and is still undergoing constant changes under the dictates of the prevailing beauty ideals.

3.4.2 Perceptions of Beauty across Cultures

There are various disciplines which discuss the issues of the body extensively throughout the last four decades (Orbach, 2006, 2009; O'Neill, 2004; Howson, 2004; Wolf, 2002; Wood, 2001; Goodman, 2000; Kilbourne, 1987, 1999a, 1999b; Grogan, 2007, 2006; Bordo, 2003; Turner, 1996 and Seid, 1989). Out of these concerns over the issues of body among male and female, it is discovered that the women comprise the greater proportion that are affected immensely (Khor et al., 2009; Grogan, 2007 and Tiggemann, 2004). This has been the catalyst to theorize the female body amongst feminist scholars (Lockford, 2004; Barcan, 2004; Peiss, 1998; Moore, 1997; Grosz & Probyn, 1995; Callaghan, 1994, Martin, 1992 and Kaplan, 1980).

In the earlier feminist studies, patriarchal exploitation was identified as the 'force' behind the cultural demands on women's obsession with achieving the mainstream ideal body (Chernin, 1983; Bordo, 2003 and Orbach, 2006, 2009). Over time, the ideal body became one of the criteria for beauty and femininity. It is not surprising that women live to pursue these beauty demands. The compelling pursuit of beauty demands becomes women's lifetime endeavours, yet, in reality, they do not carry much recognition or real power; nor do they change the status of women in society.

Several studies concentrated in the United States underscore the demands of what is considered vogue female body sizes from the antebellum years to present day (Albani, 2005; Ng, 2005; Moody-Hall, 2001; Goodman, 2000 & Seid, 1989). Before the Civil War in 1861, a kind of "wasted look" called the "steel engraving lady" was popular among the females (Moody-Hall, 2001:3).¹⁶ It was characterized by being pale, frail, thin and often followed by fainting spell. This wasted appearance was actually brought on by tuberculosis which at that time was an incurable disease that caused substantial weight loss. Though this contagious illness was anything but glamorous, operas and

novels of the time romanticized it. Almost three decades later, around the 1890s, the Gibson Girl came into view: the public saw an image of a strong and athletic woman. It was also during this era that women's ankles and legs were publicly revealed for the first time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the full figure or S-curve form was fashionable, achievable with the artificial aid of corsetry. However, by 1910 the S-curve form started to decline, and changed in favour of a slimmer and less restricted silhouette. Soon after, the First World War marked a new and drastic change in fashion and ways of seeing the female body. Women were required to help out with the war effort, thus they need to be able to move freely. Following this, the flapper era was born around the 1920s where pencil-thin, flat-chested, boyish and free-spirited flapper girls rejected traditional dress and behavior almost altogether. The "flapper girl" typically sported very short hair, increasingly shorter hemlines, so that more legs were shown, and consequently, the body shape became androgynous (Kitch, 2001: 122).¹⁷ The Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War (1939-1945) renewed the popularity of plump figures due to the scarcity of food. With the return of popularity to curves, voluptuous Hollywood stars such as Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, and Mae West became renowned beauties of the time. The forties and fifties were marked by notable post-war events and changes. The women of the forties longed for the image of Rita Hayworth, while the iconic beauties like Marilyn Monroe, Sophia Loren and Grace Kelly represented the "New Look" of the fifties (Albani, 2005: 20 and Wykes & Gunter, 2005: 43). Next, there were the Twiggy look-a-likes of the 1960s and 1970s, Jane Fonda wannabes in the 1980s and the Kate Moss copycats in the 1990s (Goodman, 2000).

From the aforementioned brief outline, the female body underwent and is still undergoing constant changes under the dictates of the prevailing beauty ideals. As Wood (2001) emphasizes, the idea of beauty differs from culture to culture and has

impermanant characteristics that change over time. Wood tells us that in the States, to be feminine is to be “attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships”, whereas in the Confucian cultures, “femininity is associated with virtue and modesty” (as quoted in Frith, et al., 2005). Frith et al. (2005) conducted a study on the construction of beauty across cultures informed that in the 1950s, a buxom Marilyn Monroe was the ideal beauty in the United States whereas two decades later, in the 1970s, the emaciated British Twiggy took over. In contemporary western society, thinness is highly esteemed, so much so that it perpetuates the misconception that this thin body is the ideal body. Women aspire to achieve such ideal (Dittrich, 2004 as cited in Brown, 2006). Such aspiration is misleading and potentially harmful. Likewise, the perception of beauty varies from country to country. The Chinese place highest regard for porcelain skin, contrary to some parts of Africa, where the scarification of the skin is considered beautiful. This goes to support the thesis that the body as an entity that is not immutable, but subscribes to the social construction (Zuraidah, 2003; 2009 and Wykes & Gunter, 2005). How do social practices create the ‘popular’ beauty standards from culture to culture across the globe? Evidently, such influence lies in the ubiquitous advertising media that perpetually sell the ideal beauty as youthfulness, celebrating the culture of femininity as they deem fit, and even in the process, distorts reality. As Zuraidah (2003: 265) deftly observes, “[o]nce a certain look is sanctioned by enough people, it redefines normal appearance, even if society has crossed over the borderline of sanity”.

This redefinition of normal appearance raises the need to pathologize the ‘ideal’ female body: how face, body, complexion or general physical appearance are to be considered as beautiful. The script of the ‘ideal’ female body is embedded into a culture and is transmitted over time through family, peers, media and cosmetic industries, by and large. It is a site of cultural imprints where the cultural imperative that women’s bodies

require size control, wrinkle free faces and porcelain fair skin are to be critically seen in the light of the product of discursive practices and social practices. From this, we need to problematize gender issues for its focus on the opaque contexts between language, power and ideology. As CDA proponents contend, dominant ideologies operate as a mechanism for constructing, maintaining and legitimizing asymmetrical power relations in society. As advertising discursive practices constitute this mechanism, advertisements need to be targeted as a specific site of struggle to be examined. As Simpson (1993:6) had it, by engaging in making the opaque relationship between language, power and ideology transparent, this stands a chance for change.

Analysis for the sake of analysis is not sufficient; instead, the analyst makes a committed effort to engage with the discourse with a view to changing it. In other words, by highlighting insidious discursive practices in language, these practices themselves can be challenged.

What is lacking in the aforementioned research is in terms of how slimming advertisements play a role in contributing to this old woe. To the uninformed mind, slimming advertisements are harmless; in fact, they are regarded as a mode to encourage people to watch their weight (see the Interviews' transcripts in Appendices F and G). We see how meaning making of knowledge is done and how they engage the reader to consume what they have churned out.

To keep abreast with how the 'ideal' female body is currently scripted in promoting the views about feminine beauty, we need to see how meaning making is produced through even the seemingly 'harmless' slimming advertisements. Unless we start to observe and highlight this, it will be just years away before women are subjected to accept unquestionably the ideologies prescribed through this means. We need to discuss what society conveys on womanhood, who exactly promotes these notions about femininity,

out of what possible motives, and what possible harms these prescriptive views have on women, their family and their posterity. In this way, we are showing how femininity has been mystified, manipulated, and taught back to women, in their homes, schools and churches, in novels, magazines and other literatures they read and so forth. This mystification of feminine beauty is a gross distortion of a person's life, resulting in emotional problems, marital and family tension, stifled careers, and general unhappiness.

In this study, we look closely at the way slimming advertisements play a key role in producing the same old ideologies in the pursuit of feminine beauty, in particular, that of the slimming discourse. It fills the gaps in the sense that it is analyzing a genre that is considered as innocuous; and far worse than that, even "helpful" and "useful" (as drawn from interviews' scripts, see Appendix F, (ii)).

The next section delves into the relationship between gender and the discourse of advertising in order to see the crucial role of advertising in transmitting an unrealistic standard of physical attractiveness to women.

3.4.3 Advertising Discourse through Gender Lens

In this current section, the complex relationship between gender and the discourse of advertising will be discussed to see how it contributes to a critical discussion of gender meanings at the intersection of language and visual image.

The term gender is understood as a social, symbolic creation. It is neither innate nor necessarily stable. Drawing from a vast repertoire of gender studies, we understand gender to be socially constructed and acquired through interaction in a social world and it changes over time (Jhally, 1989; Heberle, 1997a; Kilbourne, 1999a, 1999b; Wood, 2001 and Sunderland, 2006). Wood (2001: 22-3) explains how a culture constructs and

perpetuates meanings of gender by endowing biological sex with social significance. In Wood's words:

The meaning of gender grows out of a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life. A culture constructs and sustains meanings of gender by investing biological sex with social significance. [...] To be masculine is to be strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled. [...] To be feminine is to be attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships. Those who embody the cultural definition of femininity still don't outdo men (especially their mates), disregard others' feelings, or put their needs ahead of others. Also, "real women" still look good (preferably very pretty and/or sexy), adore children, and care about homemaking.

Wood adds, "individuals who internalize cultural prescriptions for gender reinforce traditional views by behaving in ways that support prevailing ideas about masculinity and femininity" (ibid, 25). Within social interaction, gender constructs are constantly negotiated in their norms, conventions and relations. Böhkle (2008), following Heberle (2001), tells us that one's experience of gender is related to other aspects of life, such as other socially significant categories like class, race, or ethnicity. This implies that gender is not simply two homogeneous social categories of being male and female. Gender is a learned experience when one engages in social practice.

Language, one of the primary tool in social practices, is used to construct each person as either different or as similar to others. One's choice is influenced and mediated by language use which conveys different sets of meanings and values, in this case, gender issues.

Influenced by the early works of Cameron (1992), West, Lazar and Kramarae (1997:

118) postulate that, “all choices symbolize political alignments. Through our choice of particular language forms, we can either tacitly accept and thereby help perpetuate the status quo, or challenge and thereby help change it”. Language use, then, is intrinsically related to “the construction of different ‘selves’: different discourses position us in different ways in relation to the worlds” (Coates, 1997: 292). The position of verbal communication expresses cultural views of gender became an impetus to a reservoir of academic research (Cameron, 1992, 1998; Talbot, 1992; Coates, 1993, Lazar, 1993; Mills, 1995 and Wood, 2001). Gradually, it inspired interdisciplinary research, such as sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, which blossomed and streamlined to the central role of language use in maintaining asymmetrical social relations through hackneyed patterns of representation (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Herberle, 1997a; Wodak, 1997 and Cranny-Francis, 2003).

Since the first wave of the feminist movement in the West, advertisements have been “exposed” for its glaring sexist contents and blatant exploitation, in particular pertaining to defining women in terms of commodity and thus, objectifying them. Eckert (2007: 19), a psychologist, informs us that

[i]n advertising, women’s bodies are split up into pieces, so we see sexualized photographs of a woman’s lips or hips or breasts. Women’s bodies are not women’s whole selves. When women are valued for their beauty and sexual appeal to the neglect of their many other capacities and gifts, it fragments them. It teaches all women, both the fashion models and the media consumers, that women are important primarily for the sexualized *parts* of them, rather than for their *whole* selfhood (emphasis, author’s).

Eckert (2007) contends that such a message is so embedded in our media that some of us have become accustomed to it, so much so that we do not question it anymore.

Along the same thread of resistance, Dyer (1982: 117) reminds us that an understanding of the portrayal of the female figure in an ad must begin by identifying

[h]ow she is signified and positioned in the ad as a female person, and to remember that any representation is also partially defined in relation to the material position of women ‘outside’ the ad, within what feminists call ‘patriarchal relations’ – their economic, political and ideological position in society.

Throughout history, women have been made to feel inadequate unless they subscribe to the cultural expectations of what is expected of them as females. For that reason, the effects of advertising on the female body need to be discussed. These effects on the female body offer proof of how female beauty is defined narrowly. In the case of this study, the slimming advertisements define female beauty in terms of the slim appeal.

3.4.4 Advertising: Effects on the Female Body

Time and again, society’s conceptualization of female beauty has been unquestionably accepted as the yardstick for prevailing beauty standards and over time, such constructions became legitimized and ingrained, so much so that women are “continuously dissatisfied with their own appearance” (Zuraidah, 2003: 261). One of the key agencies is none other than advertising.

As a media genre, advertising offers a unique opportunity to project and promote what seems to be ideal beauty for women. For a long time, advertising has been lambasted by feminists as a cultural institution that harps on stereotypical representations of women as passive (almost ornamental), inferior and typically, as sexual objects (Kate, Shaw & Garlorck, 1999). Following this, the literature on sex appeal in advertising was extensively researched. Between the years 1964 to 1984, Soley and Kurzbad (1986)

found that sexual overtones in magazines advertisements in the U.S. were not only on the rise, they were becoming more overt and highly visual in female nudity and erotic content. Jhally (1989) and Kilbourne (1999a, 1999b) are strong advocates against portrayals of women as sexual objects in advertisements. Underlying these representations of women in advertising, women's bodies are the object of "the male gaze" (Mulvey, 1975 and Shields, 1990). This is similar to what Zuraidah (2003: 263) refers to as "looksism", where it is seen as a "form of social control that influences how people perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others".

Both sexes, no doubt, desire to look good. However, the attitudes about attractive qualities have very different and asymmetrical social expectations and different psychological consequences for each sex. In Zuraidah's words (2003: 262-3), "[w]hile good looks seem to be prerequisite for femininity they are incidental to masculinity. [...]. Because beauty is linked with femininity, the influence of body image on women is greater for females than males". Zuraidah explains that this expectation has shown itself linguistically, where there are more words and proverbs which associate with feminine qualities rather than masculine. It has rippling effects in terms of employment, influx of newsstands with magazines on enhancing feminine beauty to the relentless pursuit of youthfulness through various skin care and anti-ageing products. Far more notoriously, the quest for female beauty is supported by the cosmetic surgery industry which promises to remove the ravages of time.

Cheek implants, chin implants, nose jobs, and breast reductions or enhancements are being performed not only on mature women but also teenagers as modern medicine and the media perpetuate the myth of female beauty. So women visit the "beauty shops" to repair the ravages of time. Many more women than men seek cosmetic surgery to turn myth [of female pristine beauty: supple, fair, wrinkle-free skin and shapely slim toned body] into reality. The vast majority of teenage aesthetic surgery patients are girls, not

boys. Likewise, anti-ageing cream and serum are specially formulated for women of a certain age because beauty product producers know that ageing women worry so much more than aging men about losing their looks (Zuraidah, 2003: 264, addition mine).

Alarming, advertising images dictate how women view their bodies. Women are bombarded with images that suggest an association between a slender shape and happiness, sweet success stories of romantic love and social acceptance by the mere conformation of their physical appearance to the idealized beauty. Such false assumptions are deceiving and may lead to behaviours that are both unhealthy and even fatalistic. In 1998, Sarwer, Wadden, Perlschuk and Whitaker reported that the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons performed in excess of 390,000 procedures, including liposuction, breast augmentation, nose alterations and face lifts. The authors estimate that the number of procedures performed in 1994 could be much higher as general practitioners also wield the knives for such procedures. O'pry (2003: 14-5) citing from Simonton's report that "countless numbers of women die from complications relating to elective cosmetic surgery in which ears are trimmed, faces lifted, breasts enlarged, noses are reduced, jaws are broken, collagen is injected into wrinkles and lips, ribs are removed, and fat is liposuctioned from their bodies". And these exclude the detrimental psychological consequences of eating disorders, yet another string of ills due to the relentless pursuit of thinness.

According to Luevorasirikul (2007: 560) and Bordo (2003: 165-182), eating disorders can be categorized into three major types: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and non-specific eating disorders. Genetics and environment are two key factors of the several that precipitate eating disorders. To screen eating disorder candidates, two major criteria are taken into consideration: high levels of body image concern and body image distortion. Anorexia nervosa, a condition manifested in compulsive self-restricted dietary intake can lead to severe emaciated body. Bulimia nervosa is characterized by

binge-eating alternating with any method of purgation such as laxative use and self-induced vomiting. Both eating disorders are mostly predominantly found in women, particularly between the ages of 15 and 25 years. Such incidence of eating disorders is ten times lower in men. The western biomedical model defines eating disorders as “psychosomatic pathologies” (as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 20).

Although this study’s main focus is on ideal body rather than on pathologies of the body, a brief discussion on the typically female “psychosomatic pathologies” is necessary as these eating disorders are a result of “high levels of body dissatisfaction and a poor body image” (Hepworth, 1999; Malson, 1998 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 20). Pienaar (2006: 21), following Bordo (2003), Hepworth (1999) and Malson (1998), clarifies that the psychosomatic pathologies of the body have a sociocultural explanation. They are “an embodied response to the asceticism/consumption dialectic of consumer capitalism”. By this, Pienaar means that a woman’s body is a cultural text that informs about ‘feminine beauty’. An ideal female body is materialised by bodily control and discipline – for instance, exercising, resisting hunger, refraining from excess eating and so forth. Bordo (2003: 168), in fact, inscribes the anorexic woman’s body as an emblem of “an ideological construction of femininity” of the twenty-first century.

Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (2002: 19) is a thought-provoking book that captures the innumerable harmful myths on the concept of “feminine beauty”. Wolf boldly postulates that “[t]he contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically”. Wolf examines the ideas of beauty as propagated by the media at large, which in time, have been perpetuated as ‘manuals’ to be adhered to. These ‘manuals’ function as a yardstick and demand that women to live up to their notions of beauty. Wolf’s examination shows how modern conceptions of beauty ripple into personal and public spheres. The areas of career, culture, religion, sexuality, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery have taken centre

stage in women's preoccupation to attain such ideals. Wolf informs that women across all ages in the West are deeply affected to conform to an idealized concept of female beauty. She further contends that the beauty myth is political; a means of maintaining the longstanding patriarchal system. In Wolf's words, these "images of female beauty [is as good] as a political weapon against women's advancement". Post-wars women have been liberated into the workforce yet continue to endure gender discrimination in society. Such a controlled system functions to keep women folk in their place, inferior and secondary to men, and discriminated against in terms of jobs, income and promotion. Wolf claims that this is done by keeping women under the weight of their own insecurities, particularly their physical appearance. Wolf (ibid, 51) brings to light that women suffer from paralyzing doubts about themselves that negatively affect their own self-esteem and self-worth:

In studies of body self-perception, women regularly overestimate their body size; in a study of economic self-perception, they regularly underestimate their business expenses.

Wolf displays information, supported by baffling legal cases, statistics, and her own compelling account of anorexia to demonstrate that the concept of 'beauty' is a weapon used to make women feel bad about themselves. Wolf is certainly not against beauty in any pejorative manner, in fact, she agrees that it does legitimately enhance one's living by all means. The problem, Wolf claims, is when beauty is seen in a straightjacketed, perpetual state of youthfulness which apparently translates into thinness, even for healthy women. Wolf (ibid, 10-11) claims that this problem has turned into the contemporary ideology of beauty:

The contemporary backlash is so violent because the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to

control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable: It has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage.

Our culture and society's imposition on images of beauty, as found in various media, are detrimental to women, as well as men's view of women. Culture that implies that women are better off being dead than ugly-looking or old is grossly unjustified and reductive. Just a generation ago, feminists, inspired by Betty Friedan in the landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1965), shattered the angelic housewife image as the arbiter of successful womanhood, an idea carried through in advertisements of household products. It seems that the beauty myth has replaced myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity and passivity with yet some other unattainable ideals of what it is to be a woman. The myth pits beauty, sexuality, intelligence and power against one another, rendering it hardly possible for women to see a balance should they feel they are not able to possess any one of them completely (Wolf, 2002). In short, popular culture's expression of beauty is dichotomous, either they are pretty and frivolous or intelligent and plain as Jane.

Researchers who scrutinized magazines targeted at women or girls agree with Wolf that magazines represent "women's mass culture" (Wolf, 2002: 70; Jaya Ranee, 2002; Zuraidah, 2003; Ng, 2005; Matthai, 2005; Brown, 2006; Jeffries 2007; Coupland 2007; Zuraidah & Knowles, 2009 and Chan & Cheng, 2012). Since "[t]he magazine's message *about the myth* is determined by its advertisers" (Wolf, 2002: 73-74, emphasis author), as such, Wolf chastises this female targeted medium for maintaining the beauty myth with emaciated models and airbrushed faces through advertisements for make-up companies because "[a]irbrushing age off women's faces has the same political echo [...]. To airbrush age off a woman's face is to erase women's identity, power, and

history” (ibid, 83).

At this point, it is also interesting to note that in quite a good number of slimming advertisements, before and after transformations are shown with raving reports of loss of weight and inches within an astonishing short time-frame (see Appendix I – Ads 6, 8, 9 and Appendix J). These next to impossible feats make us wonder if the “after-shots” were also digitally manipulated to highlight the effectiveness of the product/service offered. Orbach (2009: 109-10) tells us that,

[t]hese images convey an idea of a body which does not exist in the real world.

The photo shoots which produce the raw pictures of the models are carefully lit to exaggerate features prized today and then further perfected by being photoshopped, airbrushed and stretched. It takes a large team to create the images we see on the billboards or in the magazines or on the pop videos. There is the photographer and his or her team, the make-up artist, the stylist, the dressmaker, the fashion designer, the hairdresser. Behind them are the art directors, the account executives from the advertising side, the corporate sponsors or the magazine editors with their set of art directors, and so on.

As we can see, a picture in an advertisement is a concerted effort of a team of specialists. More alarmingly, as Wolf highlighted, it is a ‘conspiracy’ of erasing a woman’s identity through airbrushing.

These previous research do showcase the adverse effects of advertising in gender issues. They are not about the battle of the sexes – of placing men and women in opposition; rather it situates all on the side of the victims. It is about how some dominant ideologies play a key role in regurgitating the same old gender woes and hence, perpetuating assymetrical gender equality and further justifying hackneyed feminine ideals. Feminists, since the second wave had victoriously disengaged themselves from

the shackles of feminine mystique of domesticity, owing to Friedan's deft insights and critiques. The predicament of the "problem that has no name" has since been discovered and debunked (Friedan, 1965: 15). Women, generally, no longer fall prey to the ideas that a good woman is one that keeps her house spit and span and finds tremendous joy in pleasing others through her household toils. These are myths that incapacitate women from reaching their fullest potential and knowing that their selves' worth lies not only in the works they do. Yet, over time – almost half a century post-Friedan's exposé, women are still struggling with new forms of entrapments. The beauty myth has insidiously taken over the older myths, replaced them and continues their insidious social control over women's identity.

This brings us to the next section where some of the related empirical works on the issues of the female body are briefly outlined. Some of the common approaches (lexical, visual and interview) in analyzing the issues of the female body are also reviewed in order to identify gaps and contribute to the existing literature.

3.5 EMPIRICAL WORKS

The following literature reviews the past and current empirical research in advertising and female body. This section is divided into three sub-sections of reviews of literature in the empirical works related with the female body in beauty advertisements: review of literature in research using lexical analysis, review of literature using visual data and review of literature using interview. The empirical works in textual, visual and interview are reviewed to situate this chapter within the broader analytical sections in this dissertation (see Chapters 5 -7).

3.5.1 Empirical Works using Textual Analysis

For textual analysis, various data are analyzed using different tools, some of which are lexical choice, grammatical items, semantic and intertextuality. As this study also draws on lexical choices in its textual analysis, the following review focuses studies on lexical analysis done by other researchers.

In a Malaysian-based study, Jaya Rane Shanmugam (2002) conducted survey and collocates of the lexical items found in facial and slimming advertisements. The objective of Jaya Rane's (2002) study was to examine common stereotypes of the ideal Malaysian complexion and figure/body weight in the selected printed facial and slimming advertisements. The data was obtained from *Her World* and *Female* between January and December 2000. The researcher analyzed ten of each product or service advertisements. Jaya Rane (2002) categorized the lexical items as neutral collocations, positive collocations, negative collocations, nouns, adjectives and verbs. She counted the frequency and percentage distribution of collocations and connotations of the lexical items. In order to check the internal reliability of her quantitative analysis, a triangulation method was further employed. A survey was conducted among a hundred women who lived in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Malacca [Melaka] and Johor Bahru. They were readers of the magazines. Findings from the facial advertisements communicated how young and fair complexion is considered beautiful for women, whereas dark, ageing complexion is regarded as flawed and unattractive. In these slimming advertisements, beautiful is defined by slimness. Those who are fat or overweight are deemed unsightly. Jaya Rane (2002:103) concludes that the 'ideal' Malaysian beauty is "young, fair and slim". The strength of this research lies in its triangulation approach. Triangulation is a method that relies on multiple sources and it is "well known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study" (Merriam, 2009: 215). What is considered lacking in this research is the absence of discussion on how

these common stereotypes can be considered “non-ideological common sense” (Fairclough, 1995a: 28). These seemingly innocuous and common stereotypes are what the present study will further explore.

Pauline Tan Ching Lin (2010) in “A critical discourse analysis of the construction of the ideal woman's body image in print advertisements” focuses solely on slimming advertisements. Tan's (2010) study seeks to identify content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) used to construct the ideal and non-ideal body image in selected slimming advertisements in Malaysia. The data was obtained from two local newspapers, *The Star* and *The Sun* during the period of October 2005 and February 2007. The data comprises 132 print advertisements. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework was employed by the researcher to link the relationships between properties of texts, features of discursive practice and the sociocultural practice of the society in the slimming advertisements. The examination of the lexical choices aims to see what constitutes the ideal and non-ideal body images for women in Malaysia. The lexical items were analyzed according to four categories: negative lexicalization, negative labeling, positive lexicalization and positive association. Research analyzes are divided into two parts: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. In the first part (quantitative analysis): the frequency count reveals that certain body parts are given pre-eminence in the texts analyzed. For instance, *thighs*, *waist*, *hips*, *arms* and *tummy* (ranked in order of appearance) are the top five body parts that are given the most attention. Negative lexicalization exceeded positive ones, where words such as *fat/fats*, *fatty acids*, *flabby*, *fat cells*, *overweight*, *post-natal flabs* and *bulges* (ranked in order of appearance) are in constant use to portray the non-ideal body image. Under the category of positive lexicalization, the adjective *slim* and *slimmer* appeared the most, followed by the adjectives *contoured*, *curve/curvier/right curve*, *elasticity*, *shapely/shapelier* and so forth. Other popular adjectives are *great*, *ideal* and *desired*. Under the category of

“Words with positive association”, the highly repeated themes are *beauty*, *confidence*, *health* and *success*. In the second part (qualitative analysis): findings from the analyzes reveal that it is common for the advertisers to use negative lexicalization and negative labeling. Both strategies are set to draw attention to imperfections in a woman’s body shape and to stress how this is unacceptable, disfavoured and repulsive (Tan, 2010: 120-123). Positive lexicalization and positive labelling, on the other hand, serve to “promote and endorse the ‘slim’ body shape as the ideal body image for women” (Tan, 2010: 123). Tan’s (2010) research is rigorous in its lexical examination. However, it lacks empirical evidence to support whether this construction of ideal and non-ideal woman’s body image affects the Malaysian women. The present study sees the need to ascertain the direct/indirect ways women in Malaysia internalize this notion of ideal female body image by means of the slimming advertisements.

In “The Beauty Mystique: Language and Gender Inequality” by Zuraidah Mohd. Don (2003), the author delineates how advertising blurs the boundaries between myth and reality; hence, advertising is seen as a mythical discourse. The goal of the paper is to show how discourse perpetuates and reinforces outlooks and ideologies about feminine beauty and persuades readers to accept the message as truth rather than construct. The data was retrieved from women’s magazines with 13 extracts from beauty products’ commercials. The framework of CDA is employed to demonstrate the opaque relationships between “the constitution of social reality through discourse, the dissemination of ideology through discourse and the relations between discourse and social change” (Fowler, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Fairclough, 1992a; van Dijk, 1993b in Zuraidah, 2003). Both macro- and micro-level discursive strategies are used in the construction of feminine beauty myth. At the macro-level, the main tactic is by means of colonization of traditional advertising genres using “medico-scientific genres” and “informationally-oriented genres” (Zuraidah, 2003: 277). Analysis at the micro-

level discusses how this myth is perpetuated by lexicalization. In particular, semantic contrast (focussing on before- and after- transformation) and negative lexicalization (stressing the beauty ‘flaws’) are most notably used in order to persuade the readers that the product is effective to remedy any beauty ‘problems’. From the lexical analysis, it is shown how beauty myth is constructed as the truth in advertising discourse. Zuraidah (2003: 266) informs how this “fosters negative body image and self-doubt (i.e, deep feelings of inadequacies) resulting in the need for some kind of transformation”. In effect, this causes women to be continually preoccupied with their body image and perpetually dissatisfied with their own appearance. This, in a way, contributes to the perpetuating gender inequality in physical attractiveness standards and sexual objectification of women. Likewise, the present study also probes how the device of lexicalization is employed to substantiate the advertiser’s claims in the slimming advertisements. In addition, the present study analyzes of the images presented in the slimming advertisements, which is significant because visuals are important means of communication in this digital age.

Kiran Merle Pienaar (2006, following Fairclough, 1992a) conducted a vocabulary check on female body talk in the descriptive stage. As a guide, she follows some of the questions outlined in Fairclough (1989: 110-112; 2001: 92-3 in Pienaar, 2006). Using three stimuli to elicit discussion on topics such as dieting, overweight and ideal female bodies, Pienaar (2006) recorded body talk conversations of sixteen white English-speaking adolescent (ages between fourteen and eighteen) in South Africa. Pienaar’s (2006: i) interest is anchored in how these young women “reproduce, contest and possibly transform [what is physically ideal, feminine and beautiful in a woman] in conversation with their same age female friends”. From the body talk extracts, Pienaar (2006: 57-59) discovered that the term “feminine” is an ideologically-contested word. There were features like rewording (i.e.: “anti-diet discourse” – which is a good and

common behaviour, but described as compulsive and unnatural) and overwording (where expressions such as “*good for your heart, healthy, fit, wholesome and well*” fit within a particular discourse, emphasis original). Pienaar (2006: 59, emphasis original) also identified “hyponymy” as an ideological significant meaning relations where “part of the meaning of *feminine* is constituted by its relationship with its opposite, that which is *masculine or butch*”. The word, “curvy or curvaceous” is an example of euphemistic expression that substitutes for a more offensive term, “fat” (ibid). Phrases like “siff ass girl” and “swamp donkey” are instances of dysphemism (ibid, 60). They encode negative appraisal of the physical outlook of other women. Pienaar (2006) refers to these discoveries during the interpretative stage. One of the interpretations, in the use of “siff ass girl” for instance, connotes a disparaging remark on unattractive women. This, Pienaar (2006: 87) says, “is based on male notions of female attractiveness, compulsory heterosexuality and the belief in the supremacy of conventionally attractive women within the social order”. Following Fairclough’s (1989; 1992; 2001) three stages of analysis, Pienaar investigates the ideologies which inform the discursive construction of the ideal female body. From her findings, Pienaar (2006: ii) discovered how these young women used “healthy body” discourses as a conception of what constitutes the ideal female body. Pienaar (ibid) argues that “far from challenging the imperative to be thin, [the valorisation of the healthy body] actually reinforces it by constructing dieting as a necessary adjunct to the pursuit of health”.

Pienaar’s research, by the means of conversations, offers a novel empirical account of what constitutes an ideal female body among same age female friends. While it is interesting and insightful, the findings cannot be generalized as the sampling pool was small and only three extracts were carefully analyzed.

Justine Coupland (2007) in “Gendered discourses on the ‘problem’ of ageing: consumerized solutions” develops on a critical-pragmatic perspective of bodily ageing

discourses. To do so, Coupland (2007) collected 40 highly circulated lifestyle magazines in the U.K. which contained skincare products and sun-protection products advertisements aimed at both male and female consumers (published between January 2004 and April 2005). The women's magazines comprise *Cosmopolitan*, *Essentials*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Marie-Claire*, *New Woman*, *Red*, *She*, *Tatler*, *Vogue*, *Woman and Home* and *Zest*; whereas the men's magazines consist of *Men's Health*, *GQ*, and *Esquire*. The words/phrases/sentences in ten of the selected advertisements were examined. Coupland discovered how discursive representation of the 'problem' of ageing is visually and textually conveyed. Textual evidence exemplifies conspicuous gendered strategies to construct ageing as a problem for both men and women. Lexical sets such as "formulas, treatment, serum" reflect the "quasi-scientific discourse" in order to convince potential consumers of how signs of ageing can be reversed (Coupland, 2007: 44). Findings from the lexical sets were further aligned with critical-pragmatic perspective to examine how the advertising texts employed discursive strategies to suggest that anti-ageing products work on the body, especially the face. The findings found "markedly gendered strategies" in the promotional materials to "equate ageing with the *look* of ageing, problematize ageing appearance, and offer marketized solutions to the 'problem' of ageing" (Coupland, 2007: 37). This research draws out the "ideological presuppositions about [...] ageing and gender" and how discourse is constantly redefining cultural boundaries of ageing and gender.

3.5.2 Empirical Works using Visual Analysis

Images were analyzed using different approaches in different disciplines. For examples, Williamson (1978) synthesizes theories (Barthes & de Saussure's semiotic theory, Marxism & Lacan and Althusser's psycho-analytic frameworks) to decode advertisements. Goffman (1979), a sociologist, investigated how commercial

advertising shapes the concepts of masculine and feminine behaviour. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) develop grammar of images for a systematic way to analyze visual data. So far, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework is still considered relatively new and therefore, scarcely adopted. The following reviews focus studies on images done by various researchers.

In Francesca Albani's (2005) thesis, "Thinness Matters: The Impact of Magazine Advertising on the Contemporary Beauty Ideal", she delineates how magazine advertising projects thinness as the ideal beauty. She collected her data from three popular fashion magazines in Italy and the United States: *Vogue*, *Glamour*, and *Marie Claire* (March – June 2004). Albani's (2005) conducts a textual analysis on the depictions of fat/thin bodies in the selected print advertisements following the three-step methodologies of Barbara B. Stern (1991, in Albani, 2005) and Gillian Dyer (1982, in Albani, 2005). Albani's (2005: 37) findings show how these selected advertisements constructed the "myth of bodily perfection (thinness)", dichotomized female bodies into two "categories of normalcy [thinness] or deviancy [fatness]" and objectifies women into a sort of commodity with an "exchange value". Albani's (2005: 63) study is notably significant as it argues how thinness "becomes the 'natural' and 'innate' characteristic in women [...]". Oversize bodies become, thus, the badge of unnatural femininity that is synonymous with unhappiness, dissatisfaction and rejection". The present study follows Albani's idea, with the exception that a CDA perspective is preferred as it includes the roles of social theories such as power and ideology (i.e.: micro-powers that are exercised at the level of the individual).

Rossana de Felipe Böhlke (2008) in her thesis, "Constructing Ideal Body Appearance for Women: A Multimodal Analysis of a TV Advertisement", employs a multimodal analytical method for a critical examination of the discursive-semiotic construction of gender identities, social relations and representations in Xenical, a weight-management

drug. Böhlke (2008) obtained her data from Brazilian television channels between the years 2004 and 2006. The main aim of Böhlke's (2008: 3) research is to expose "ways in which discourses of apparent self-empowerment produce, maintain and constrain people within social positions and relations". Her investigation involves two levels of data analysis: micro and macro. At the micro level, an examination of visual (using grammar of images by Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006 in Böhlke, 2008) and verbal modes (using Systemic Functional Linguistics of Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) was conducted. Following this, Fairclough's (2003 in Böhlke, 2008) CDA was used to link the textual and contextual dimensions of the data.

The findings highlight how the pharmaceutical company (i.e.: Xenical) uses television advertising to persuade women of the possibilities of weight loss by means of pharmaceutical products. The advertising discourses used "a variety of rhetorical tools that were invoked to promote thinness as readily achievable, safe and scientific, and an attribute to be admired in association with the female body" (Böhlke, 2008: 168-9). The similarity between Böhlke's work and the present study is quite pronounced where both studies use a CDA perspective and Kress and van Leeuwen's analytical tool. However, the marked differences between both studies are: 1) the corpus of data are varied; 2) dissimilar aims – Böhlke (2008: 144) aims to "uncover the ways discourse produces, maintains and constrains people in certain social positions and relationships" whereas the present study examines the ideological constructions of ideal female body in the slimming advertisements. Moreover, the present study also includes empirical data to find out the extent of Malaysian women's awareness of and influence by the ideology of the ideal female body.

In another study, the ideal female body is also examined using conversational data. Kiran Merle Pienaar (2006) probes groups of young women discussing the topics surrounding the ideal female body: overweight, dieting and the ideal female body.

They are 16 White adolescent, English-speaking women, aged 14 to 18 years. To elicit the body talk, Pienaar (2006) uses 3 stimulus exercises consisting of twenty photographs taken from South African popular magazines, *FHM*, *Cosmopolitan* and *The Oprah Magazine*. Their conversations were recorded and transcribed using a selection of Jefferson's transcription convention (Schenkein, 1978 in Pienaar, 2006). The data was made up of 360 minutes of recorded conversation or 160 pages of transcribed conversations.

Using Fairclough's CDA (1989, 1992, 2001 in Pienaar, 2006), the research aims to draw out the underpinning ideologies in discourses associated with the ideal female body. From the analysis of three selected body talk extracts, some of the main findings are: 1) the disclosure of how traditional Western assumptions of what is beautiful and desirable (slenderness) in a woman prevail; 2) adoption of male gaze in judging female attractiveness; 3) beauty supercedes other aspects of female identity; 4) justifying the pursuit of female beauty in terms of health concerns; and finally, 5) valorizing female beauty entails anti-fat discourses (which include being overweight, ageing and flabbiness). Although Pienaar's and this research employed interview data, the key difference lies in the role of the researcher. While Pienaar took on an "animated conversationalist" role and contributed to the body talk (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 98 in Pienaar, 2006), the researcher in the present study did not, in any way, contribute to the respondents' input.

Ng Bo Sze (2005) also looks at advertisements that promote slimming products and services in her study entitled, "Slimming Culture in Hong Kong: A Sociological Study". The data was retrieved from slimming advertisements published in the *Next Magazine* in a five-year interval period (1993, 1998, 2003). By employing a triangulation method where discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, content analysis and in-depth interview with twenty-one women, Ng (2005: 135) underscores how the slimming culture in Hong

Kong emphasizes several dominant sets of ideals. These sets of ideals rely heavily on the “glamorous appearance”, such as “slim shape free of fat for display”, “a sexy hourglass beautiful figure”, and “being light and fat-free for health’s sake”. However, the study also discovered how the dominant discourses were contradictory. For instance, slimness is set against full breasts and hips; and slimness versus being active in sports. Such conflicting and multiple discourses create a space for resistance. As found in the interview, this resistance can be seen in how different groups of women, in various stages of life (students, working women, housewives) demand and show resistance (in varying degree) to the beauty discourses. The core strength of Ng’s study lies in its in-depth interviews where three groups of women were asked for their degrees of compliance and/or resistance to the dominant discourses of ideal body. However, with just three extracts though carefully analyzed, Ng did not provide an adequate focus on which lexical items were more pronounced in the advertisements as well as the women’s words.

Carey Jewitt (1999) in “A social semiotic analysis of male heterosexuality in sexual health resources: the case of images” discusses the visual social semiotics schema (by Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) in terms of the application of the method, both its strengths and weaknesses and underscores the value of visual representations as a resource of sociological data. Jewitt (1999) applies this method on 32 sexual health leaflets and posters which were circulated in England between 1986 and 1996. The objectives of Jewitt’s (1999) study are to reveal the discourses in image and how sexual health material perpetuates dominant ideologies of masculinity. From the use of social semiotic approach in the study, Jewitt (1999: 276-7) uncovers five key subtle gender messages: 1) the method points out the “visual over-simplification of male sexuality” where sex for men is principally a physical experience; 2) structures in the visual representations reveal how young men’s emotional capacities were undermined; 3) the

“visual polarization of men and women” in terms of their roles, action and sexuality; 4) limited depiction of sexuality where the men are mostly sexually active and licentious whereas the women guard their sexual boundaries constantly; 5) the social semiotics discovered the failure to recognize how young women’s sexual libido can be equally high which may lead to casual sex and sexual risks. Jewitt is one of the few researchers who applied the visual social semiotics schema on sociological data and she demonstrated the usefulness of the method. The current study uses the same tools of analysis on a different type of data (i.e.: slimming advertisements).

Following a social constructionist perspective, Jessica M. E. Cummings (1988) explores women’s attitudes towards, and opinions of the consequences of the visual media’s presentations of the ideal female body size and weight in “The Effect(s) of the Visual Media Upon Female Body Image”. In looking at the visual media’s presentations of the ideal female body, Cummings chose to focus on two key ideas: firstly, women’s interpretation; and secondly, what women do or do not do in order to attain this ideal female body image. Seven focus groups were used. They comprised forty fourth year female undergraduates (ages between 20s to 60s) from the University of Guelph. Their interpretations were tape recorded and transcribed into textual forms for coding. The open and axial coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, in Cummings 1998) were used. For this study, a symbolic interactionist framework from the works of Berger & Luckmann (1966, in Cummings 1998), Blumer (1969, in Cummings 1998) and Thomas (1928, in Cummings 1998) was employed to analyze the data. Findings concluded that the visual media presentation of the ideal female body image influences women’s views of their own body as well as their perception of other women. A person’s value is placed exclusively on appearance.

3.5.3 Empirical Works using Interviews

Maggie Cummings (1998) in “Living the Contradictions: Negotiating the relationship between feminist identity and the discourse of femininity” used semi-structured and informal interview to collect data. The interviews were conducted in groups of four; each session took around 30-60 minutes. A guideline was used to carry out the interview where participants’ opinions on three key interrelated areas were recorded: 1) feminine body image; 2) the development of feminist identity, and 3) the relationship between the two (Cummings, 1998: 22). For selection of participants, Cummings (1998) adopted the snowball sampling. She managed to get 12 participants who identified themselves as feminists (ages 20-35) but one of them did not make it for the group discussion. For relevance of discussion, only the findings for the first key area are discussed in this review. Cummings (1998: 72) discovered “the various ways in which the participants apprehend and cope with the complexities and incongruities which arise when a woman is both feminine and feminist”.

While Cummings explore women’s between ages 20-35, Ng, on the other hand, took on a wider range (from age 13 to age 52). Part of Ng’s (2005) data came from fieldwork where she conducted observations and interviews. The observations were carried out at sites of slimming practice, such as aerobics centres. The participants were observed in order to see their attitudes and behaviours towards the body ideals projected by these sites of aerobics. Field notes were taken upon each visit. The in-depth interviews, on the other hand, were aimed at finding out “how different groups of women appropriate the beauty discourses and perform resistance to a varying degree” (Ng, 2005: 6). The semi-structured interviews were done with the guide from pre-prepared questions. The responses were tape-recorded. The first ten recordings had full verbatim transcriptions and the rest were transcribed verbatim at certain main points. The 21 participants were chosen using snowball sampling, and they were grouped as students, working women

and housewives. Findings reflected how age and occupation affected the women's attitude towards the slimming discourses. The students were reported to adhere most closely to the promoted slimming ideals even at the expense of their health. They believed that by shaping up and being trendy would boost their chances at future courtship. While the working women also wished to follow the slimming trend, the demands of their careers restricted the possibilities of going all out for the promoted ideal. Of the three groups of women, the housewives were the least compliant to the beauty ideal. According to the researcher, they conformed to the dominant slimming ideals, but adjusted them to fit their situations.

Nunn (2009) in "Eating Disorder and the Experience of Self: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis" conducted semi-structured interviews with four females who had been diagnosed with, and were being treated for, an eating disorder (Bulimia Nervosa, Anorexia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder or Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified). Their ages ranged between 29 and 40 years. The reasons for the gender-based sampling pool were higher prevalence of eating disorders among women, and intention to increase the homogeneity of the sample. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009 in Nunn, 2009). The research aimed at exploring "[h]ow women with an eating disorder view and describe themselves; their thoughts and experiences concerning why they view themselves this way; and their thoughts and experiences regarding whether they think there is a link between their view of themselves and their eating disorder" (Nunn, 2009: 79). Four master themes were derived from the analysis of their sharing of their thoughts and experiences. These four master themes reflected the participants' struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self and showed how their eating disorder was an attempt to improve their sense of self.

3.6 CONCLUSION

From the literature review, the studies of advertising and the female body is notably important. It is a topic that has personal and social implications – whether in an individual's life or at the societal level. In short, advertising and body image research is extensive because it matters a great deal to everyone and the society.

To date, as late as January 2012, there was still publication related to the portrayal of females in magazines (i.e.: Chan & Cheng, 2012). While existing research into advertising and body image has explored views on ideal female body, this has mainly concentrated on how the lexical items construct the ideal female body (Tan, 2010; Zuraidah, 2003 and Jaya Rane, 2002), how women construe the perfect shape and size (Cummings, 1988 and Ng, 2005), beauty stereotypes (Albani, 2005 and Rane, 2002) and so forth. In terms of sources, most of data were retrieved from magazines (Zuraidah & Knowles, 2009; Coupland, 2007; Zuraidah, 2003), conversational recordings (Pienaar, 2006) and television advertising (de Felipe Böhlke, 2008). In this study, the primary data of slimming advertisements were obtained from the print advertisements found in *The Star*, a widely circulated local newspaper in Malaysia. The secondary data consisted of 40 interviews transcriptions with women between the ages of 25 to 45.

Studies employing CDA on beauty-related issues are still considerably few. Therefore, the literature validates the need for the present study to extend the current literature of how the ideal female body is being linguistically and visually constructed by slimming advertisements. The current research attempts to contribute to the gaps in the existing literature in two ways: firstly, the present study attempts to integrate three forms of analysis (textual, visual and interviews). Secondly, it is in line with CDA's social commitment to uncover how the notion that slim is beautiful is a social construction.

Those who prescribe to the slimming discourses hold the power to legitimize their agendas; thereby, these agendas gradually become the innocuous part of the social structure.

CHAPTER 4 : METHODOLOGY

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This section provides details of the methodology used in this study in terms of where and how texts are chosen, the theoretical grounding in critical discourse-cum-visual social semiotic analyzes, the interview, and finally the procedures involved to conduct the analysis.

4.1 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study investigates an issue that is prevalent in society. It seeks to examine how slimming advertisements work to frame slim as the ideal female form/shape. To do so, one main objective and three research questions (hereafter, RQs) are constructed to guide the study.

General Objective:

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how multimodal resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body.

Therefore, through this research, it helps to:

- 1) see how female body has been and is still being represented in print media
- 2) understand how multimodal components are used by the media to create meaning
- 3) expose opaque ideological constructs on the ideal female body.

To investigate this issue, the study undertakes to analyze two sources of data: the slimming advertisements and interview transcriptions. The following research questions have been formulated in order to guide the development of this investigation:

1. How is the ideal female body textually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?
2. How is the ideal female body visually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?
3. In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?

The purpose of this study is guided by the three RQs. For the first two RQs, how the ideal female body is textually and visually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements is examined using respective analytical tools (for further details, see below). The third RQ is explored in terms of the consumption of slimming advertisements among women through the interviews with 40 respondents. Both RQs 1 and 2 are important forms of social practice which contribute to the constitution of the social worlds, including social identities and social relations. They illuminate the ways in which the selected slimming advertisements promote the ideology of the ideal female body, as shown by how these advertisements are consumed in RQ 3.

Through these three RQs, the study explores opaque ideologies of the ideal female body that are embedded in the slimming advertisements found in a Malaysian English daily – *The Star*. It examines how ideologies are transmitted in the messages of the advertisers which in turn influence the readers and make consumers out of them. To arrive at this purpose, this research focuses on how slimming advertisements are used as the medium of transfer of ideologies in the process of transmitting the advertiser's message. It aims to highlight the hidden messages which are very often *naturalized* or regarded as *common-sense* (emphasis mine).

4.1.1 Diagrammatic Representation of the Study

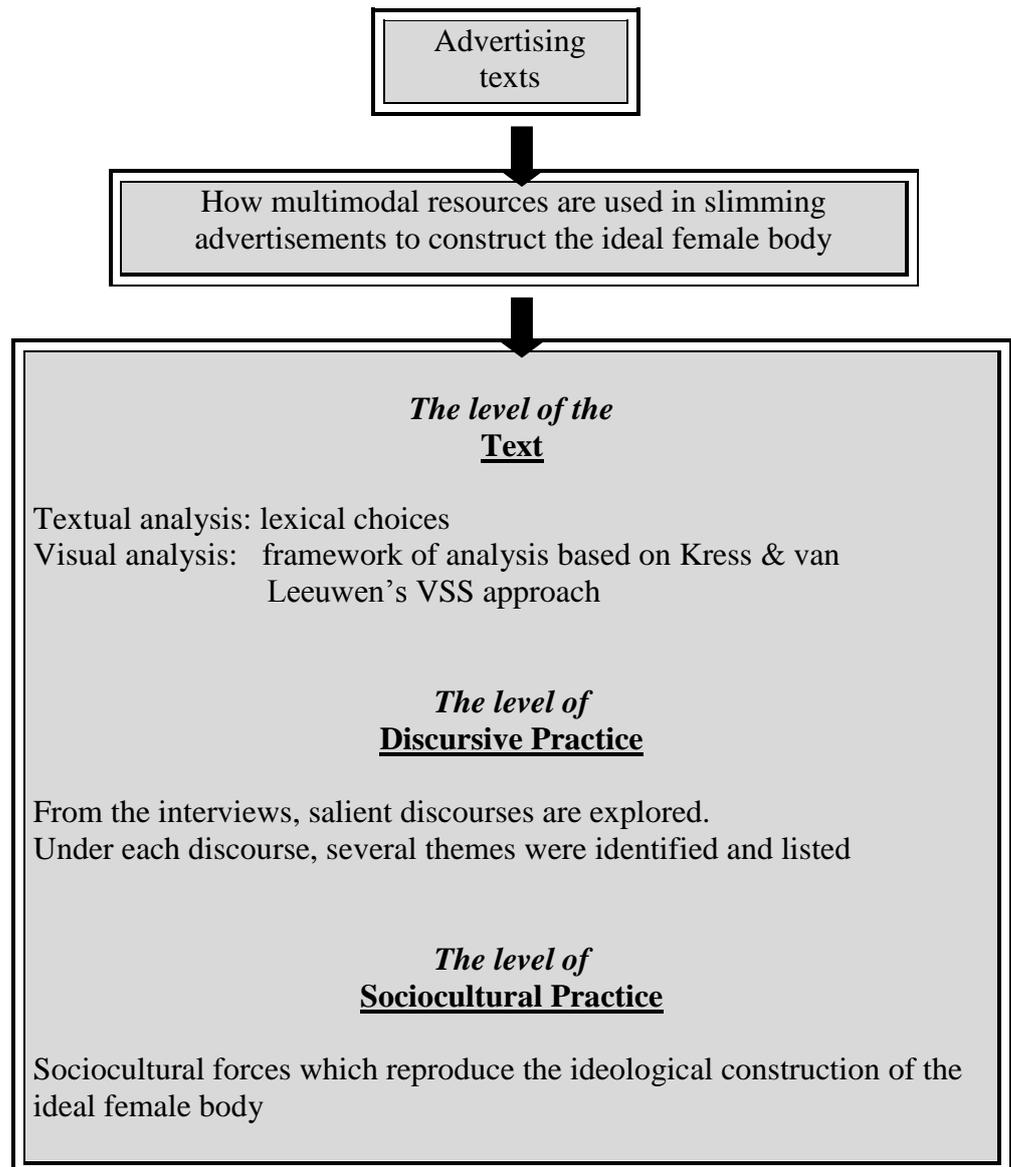


Figure 1: Diagrammatic Representation of the Study

4.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CDA is a pertinent epistemological grounding for this study as it provides a method that helps in demonstrating how language constructs reality through ideology and representation. CDA, either as a theory or an approach, provides useful tools to problematize gender issues mainly for its focus on the opaque connections between language and ideology (Fairclough, 1989: 49-51).¹⁸ CDA is entrenched in critical theory and is used to locate representations of ideology within a particular discourse.¹⁹

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Norman Fairclough's CDA.²⁰ This framework is a "critical approach to discourse analysis in the sense that it sets out to make visible through analysis and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts" (Fairclough, 1995a: 97). As a theoretical approach, CDA exposes oppressive, domineering and discriminatory relationships as manifested in social practices which seem opaque or transparent in society (Wodak, 2009).

The choice of words for expression in any cultural context refers to discourse. Reality, essentially, is constructed at the level of word, context and the confluence of various discourses. Fairclough (1995a: 97-98) posits that discourse is formulated from a three-dimensional link.

These three distinct facets or dimensions of event are:

- i) text (whether written or spoken),
- ii) discourse practice (involving the production and consumption/interpretation of the text),
- iii) sociocultural practice (pertaining to actions, ideologies or norms which shape the discourse in a certain way).

This method of discourse analysis incorporates

- i) *linguistic* description of the language text,
- ii) *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text,
- iii) *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes.” (op. cit, emphasis author).

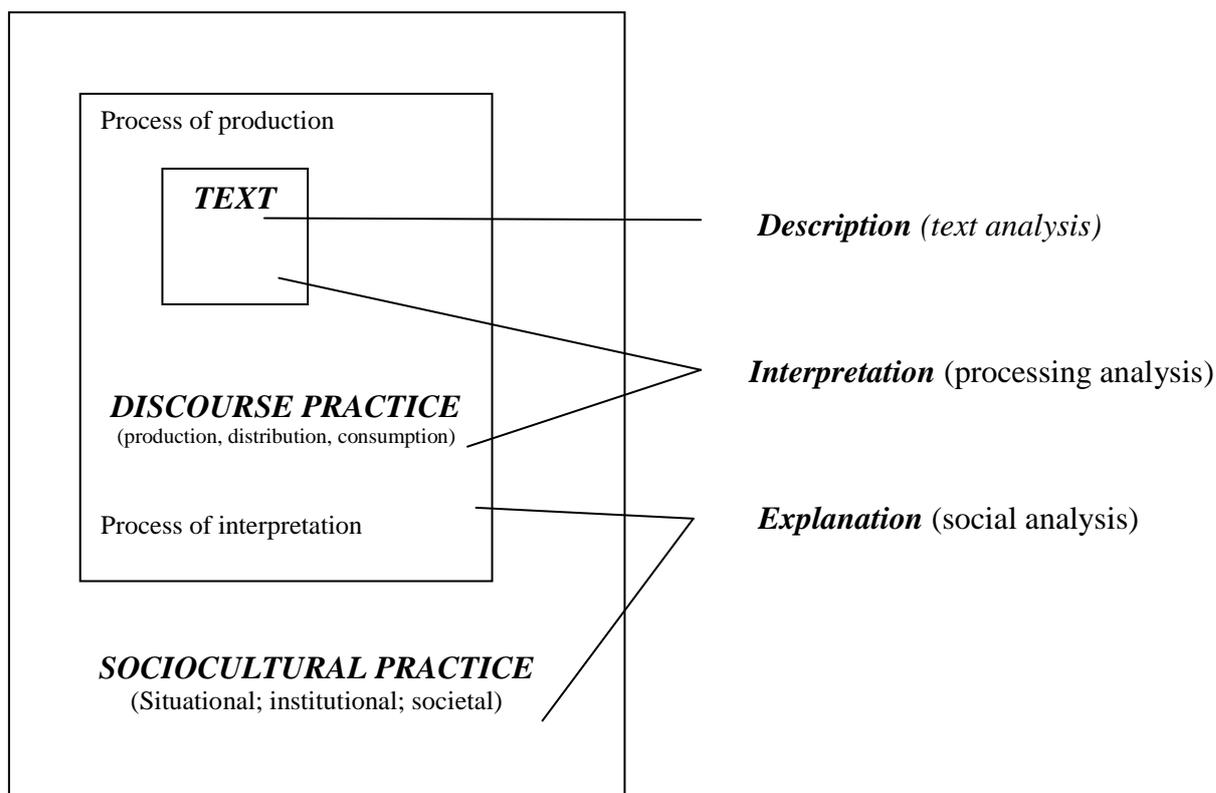


Figure 2: Dimensions of Discourse

Dimensions of Discourse Analysis

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of Fairclough’s CDA approach. It seeks to link the text (micro-level) with the underlying power structures in society (macro sociocultural practices level) through three dimensions of discourse (Fairclough, 1995a: 98).

4.2.1 Adaptation of Fairclough's (2003) Approach

Most advertisements are presented with minimum language. This is the case with the slimming advertisements. Moreover, the slimming advertisements contain non-linguistic features. Fairclough's tool for text analysis was best formulated to analyze language. He does not consider the non-linguistic elements which are considered central to slimming advertisements.²¹

Therefore, there is a need to adapt Fairclough's approach. To address this lack, it is necessary to supplement with another framework to analyze the visual resources. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) VSS framework is adopted (cf. Section 4.2.3). As social semioticians Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) contend, images are social cultural constructs. Since advertising thrives on multimodal strategies, a visual semiotic slant lends itself as a necessary analytical tool for the interpretation and composition of multimodal texts in order to bring to light the simultaneous construction of representation, identities and social relations.²²

According to Jewitt (1999: 265), there are at least three approaches to the analysis of visual materials: "What is in the producer's mind, what is in the reader's mind, or an interpretation of 'what is in' the image". In this study, the social semiotic method developed by Kress and van Leeuwen is used to discover further 'what is in' the image. However, as Jewitt aptly reminded us, "this meaning is understood as residing in a socially constructed environment of meaning". For this reason, the interpretation of data will take into consideration certain relevant social theories (for more details, see Chapter 8).

4.2.2 Approach of the Study

The study takes on a descriptive qualitative paradigm and attempts to provide an insight into how multimodal resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body. Fairclough's (1995a: 98) three-dimensional conception of discourse is employed to seek the link between the text (advertising's headline, visual and body copy) with the underlying power structures in society through three dimensions of discourse (see Figure 2).

On the textual level, lexical choices are examined to see the linguistic representations of female ideal body image in slimming advertisements. In addition, visual analysis is used to complement the lack in CDA (see Section 4.2.3). On the visual level, Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) VSS is employed as an analytical tool to analyze how different images "construct" the ideal female body image. To do so, three metafunctions: representation, interactive and compositional meanings will be explored. Certain deictic aspects: facial expressions, posture, portrayal of models' attitude are important considerations as well.

At the discursive practice level where the researcher delves into how the slimming advertisements have been consumed by women between the ages of 25 to 45. If we want to understand the world we live in, then we have to understand how people are making sense of that world. By doing this, we get a better sense of how members of that community are interpreting the world around them. The analysis of language used in the social context by respondents, therefore, is an attempt to uncover the relationship between language and social relation through the respondents' eyes. The empirical data collected through interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Based on their responses, three themes are derived and they link the text (slimming advertisements) with the

underlying power structures in society, which the final level of Fairclough's (1995a: 98) three-dimensional conception of discourse will discuss.

Subsequently, the findings from the textual and visual analysis of construction of the ideal female body image and the interpretations of the interviews are discussed and explained according to the three RQs (see Chapters 5, 6 & 7). Finally, the chief aim of the third level of analysis is to see in what ways the slimming advertisements promote the ideology of the ideal female body. This is discussed and explained at the sociocultural practice level. It is at this level that the ideological construct becomes apparent and comprehensible. It clarifies how ideology establishes, maintains and legitimizes certain values, images and concepts (see Chapter 8).

4.2.3 Visual Framework Description

Figure 3 shows the metafunctions in Kress and van Leeuwen's choice of terminology: representation, interactive and compositional. Each of these three metafunctions is further expanded to its sub-categories. The key dimensions are as follows:

VISUAL ANALYSIS

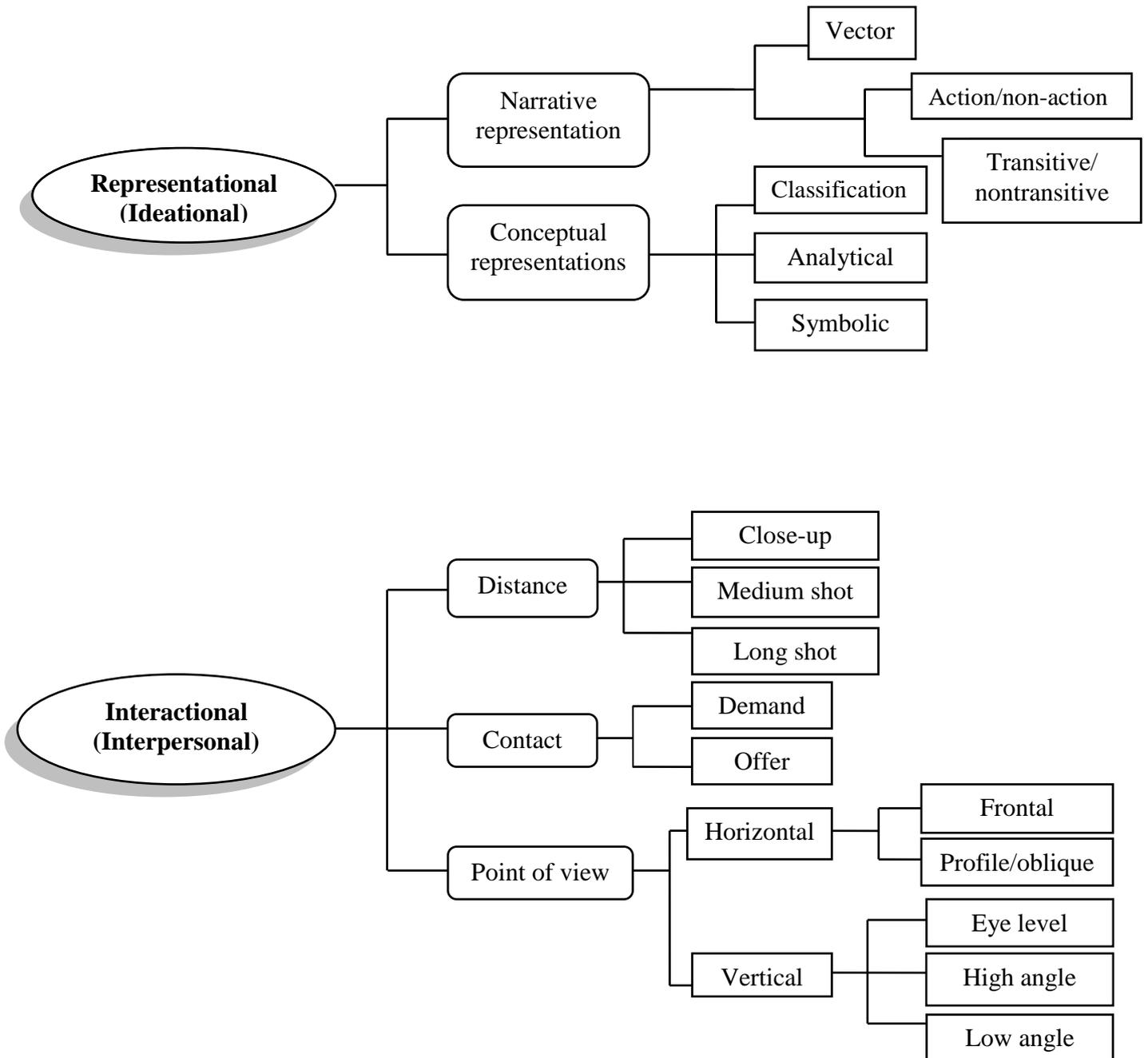


Figure 3a: Visual Social Semiotic Framework
(adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996)

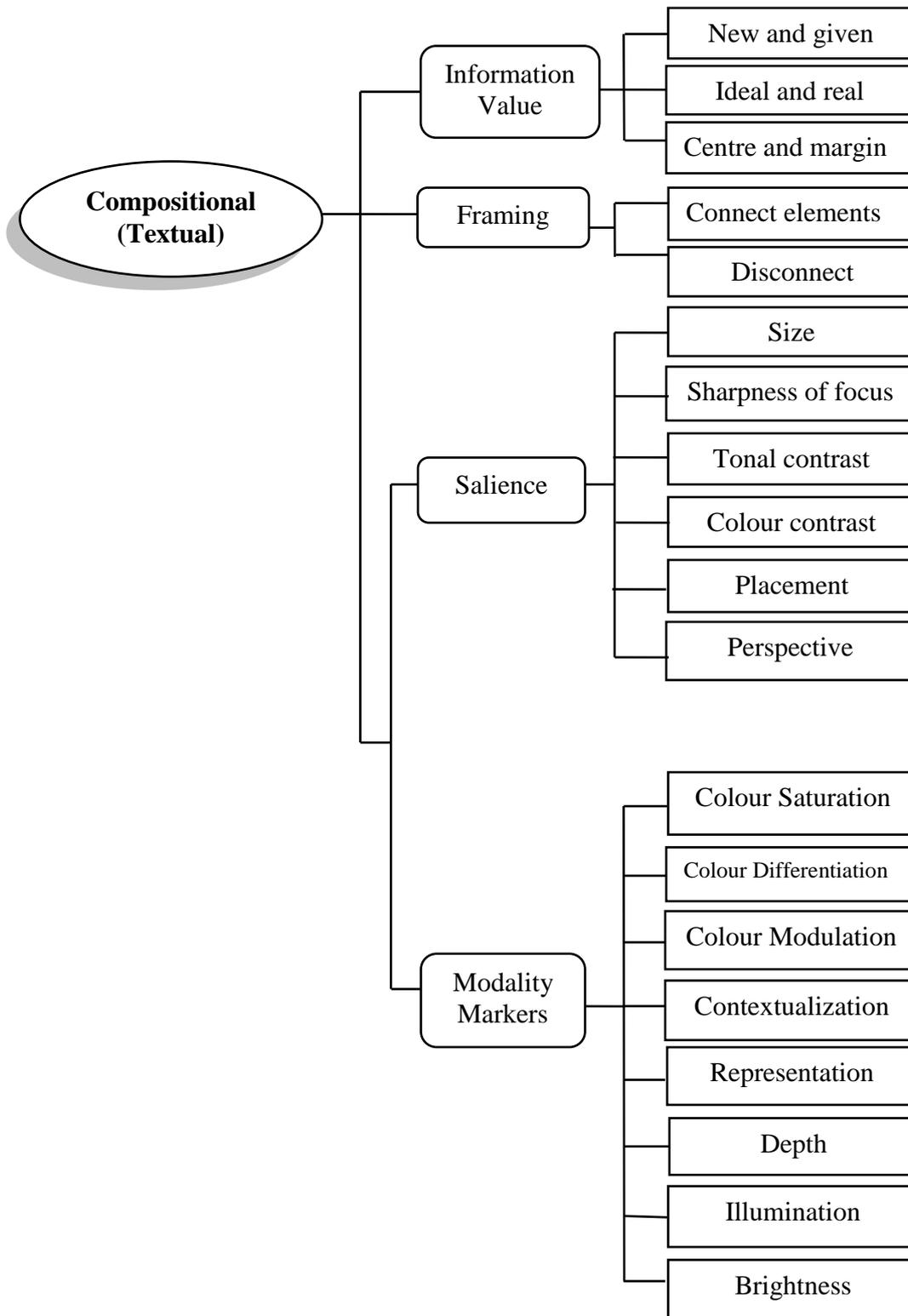


Figure 3b: Visual Social Semiotic Framework
 (adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996)

4.2.3.1 Forms of Representation

Representational meaning is represented by the (abstract or concrete) “participants” (people, places or things) depicted. On a more familiar note, the “participants” are the visual equivalent of lexis, of the vocabulary where its emphasis lies in the “syntax” of images as a source of representation meaning. Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 141) further clarify and add that,

[i]n time-based semiotic modes such as language and music, ‘syntax’ is a matter of sequencing order (for example, word order). In space-based semiotic modes such as images and architecture is a matter of spatial relationships, of ‘where things are’ in the semiotic space and of whether or not they are connected through lines, or through visual ‘rhymes’ of colour, shape, and so on.

Nalon (1997: 17) further distinguishes two types of participants: *interactive* or *represented participants* (emphasis author’s). According to Nalon (ibid), “interactive participants [are] those [who] take part in the act of communication itself” and “represented participants [are] those who are the subject of the communication”. This distinction is helpful because in the representational dimension of an image, the represented participants “play a major role”, whereas the interactive participants are central to the interpersonal dimension.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) depict visual syntactic patterns in terms of their meaningful relational function between the visual participants and this depends on the kind of vectors and the number of participants in an image. From here, different processes can be identified in two broad categories – the narrative and the conceptual.

In short, in any image, there are two kinds of representational processes: either narrative or conceptual. *Narrative processes* present the world in terms of “doing” and

“happening”, of the unfolding of actions, events, or processes of change (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:73; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001:141). *Conceptual processes* do not represent the world as “doing”, instead, participants are seen in more generalized, stable or timeless “essences”; for examples, “as being something, or meaning something, or belonging to some category, or having certain characteristics or components” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141).

To discern which choice is preferred by the image producer is significant. The decision to represent something in a narrative or conceptual processes is contingent to understand the discourses which mediate their representation (Jewitt, 1999: 268; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141). For instance, when a slimming advertisement portrays a slim, shapely and taut female body as attractive, feminine, and the ideal – then, this woman is depicted in terms of conceptual processes rather than narrative processes – it goes to mean that the focus on the ‘essences’ of being a woman lies in having a perfectly sculpted body.

(i) *Narrative Processes*

Narrative processes are identified by the presence of a vector. A vector is a line, often diagonal, that connects participants. A vector is formed by the depicted elements (bodies, limbs, tools) or a dynamic force in the image (diagonal lines formed by the line of props or backdrops) and it expresses a dynamic ‘doing’ or ‘happening’ kind of relation. It determines the point of one position in space relative to another. A vector can also be formed by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants.

The identification of the vector(s) in an image can be further distinguished by types of *action* and *reaction processes*. Both action and reaction can be either *transactional process* (doing something to or for each other) or *non-transactional process* (doing something on their own).

Action processes are marked by the presence of an Actor from which the vector begins and occupies a salient position in the overall image. Figures in 4, 5 and 6 illustrate the three common types of action processes. The vectors are formed by the human body.



Figure 4: Non-transactional action process

In Fig. 4 the Actor is jumping – this action is non-transactional as it does not involve any other object/participant. Linguistically, one probable way of describing it is by using an intransitive verb (She is jumping).



Figure 5: Bidirectional transactional action process

Fig. 5 presents two participants in a dance pose. They are linked by two vectors formed by their arms. This action is an example of bi-directional transactional process.



Figure 6: Unidirectional transactional action process

In Fig. 6 an Actor is playing with a ball (the Goal). This action is a unidirectional transactional process as the Actor is doing something to a Goal in a non-reciprocal manner.

Reactional processes are identified through a vector formed by the eyeline of a participant. The participant (the Reactor) is usually represented as looking at something (the Phenomenon) inside (i.e. at another object/participant in the same image) or outside (i.e. at the viewer) the frame of the image; the participant, thus, is engaged in a transactional or non-transactional action respectively.



Figure 7: Reactional process (non-transactional)

In Fig. 7 the participant faces outside the frame, probably looking at something (the Phenomenon) outside the frame; thus, is engaged in a non-transactional reactional

process.



Figure 8: Reactional process (transactional)

In Fig. 8 the participant is represented as looking at something inside the frame; here, it is an example of a transactional reactional process.

The distinction between either transactive or non-transactive processes is important as it delineates the transactive as active doer and non-transactive as passive doer. This kind of analysis of the narrative processes in the study of slimming advertisements can reveal subtle representations of women as passive, or less active. Being involved in non-transactive actions also carries the idea of being weak, powerless and merely the object of male gaze. Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 143) further explains that,

[t]he concepts of narrative visual analysis (action, reaction, transactive, nontransactive) can help ‘interrogate’ a visual text, help to frame questions such as who are playing the active roles of doing and/or looking and who the passive roles of being acted upon and/or being looked at in visual texts with certain kinds of participants [...]. Who are shown as people who act, who as people who react in visual texts about certain issues?

This question is pertinent in considering gender issues. For instance, this kind of

analysis of the narrative processes in a study is an important reflection of heterosexual relationship where women were usually represented as passive, or less active, especially in the context of sexual advances. They are usually portrayed as, in Jewitt and Oyama's (2001: 143) words, "'reacters' rather than 'actors', or as involved in non-transactive actions, actions that have no effect or impact on some other entity." Men, on the other hand, were more often shown in transactive actions: it was men who were represented as proactive in sexual advances and as most sexually active, literally in the driving seat, whereas women were more often seen as sexually passive.

(ii) *Conceptual Processes*

Images without vectors are recognized as conceptual representation. Conceptual representations involve three major processes: classification, analytical and symbolical. They visually "define" or "analyze" or "classify" people, places and things (inclusive abstract things) (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 143). Nalon (1997: 20) clarifies that conceptual processes "are not about unfolding events or actions but tend to present more generalised aspects of the participants, their intrinsic nature or permanent characteristics in terms of class, structure and meaning".

In *classification processes*, they presents the participants in an image in terms of a "kind of" relation, either overtly or covertly (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 81). Covert classification shows different people, places or things together in one picture, distributing them symmetrically across the picture space to show that they have something in common, that they belong to the same class (for example, see L3, Appendix K from London Weight Management, dated 1 August 2007). Overt classification usually appears in the form of some kind of tree structure with vertical orientation. Overt taxonomies have levels, and participants at the same level are represented as "of the same kind" relation. The participants can be realized verbally,

visually, or both verbally and visually, but the process is always visual (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 81-83).

In *symbolic processes*, they are about “what a participant *means* or *is*” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:108 *italic authors*). They define the meaning or identity of a participant (the carrier) and is established by either the attributive structure (“symbolic attributive processes represent meaning and identity as being conferred to the carrier”) or the suggestive structure (“symbolic suggestive processes represent meaning and identity as coming from within, as deriving from qualities of the carrier themselves”) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 112). Symbolic attributes have one or more of the following characteristics: they are made salient in the representation (i.e. foregrounding, size, use of lighting, focus, colour/tone, position and props); they are also made salient when “they are pointed out by means of a gesture [...], they look out of place in the whole, they are conventionally associated with symbolic values.” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 108).

A range of props can confer symbolic meanings or attributes on the represented participants. In slimming advertisements, hairstyle, body-hugging attire and high-heels, are potent cultural symbols of female feminine beauty in our society, they were used to confer femininity on the women in some of the images (for more details, see Section 4.2.3.2).

Analytical processes, finally, relate participants to each other in terms of a “part-whole structure”. Analytical structures always have two key participants: the carrier (the whole) and any number of “possessive attributes” (the parts) (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 89). In slimming advertisements, for instance, the female body is the carrier (the whole), whereas the parts of the body (arms, bust, thighs, calves, abdomen, buttocks etc.) are the possessive attributes (the parts). The emphasis on preferred sizes of the different parts encodes the producer’s view of the feminine ideal. In this way, the

analytical structures play a role in promoting, reinforcing and enshrining the norms of female ideal body shape.

There are further sub-types of many of these ‘syntactic’ patterns, but the ones discussed here are the most important (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: Chapters 2 & 3). However, in studies of visual representation of specific issues of social significance, another aspect needs to be added to the representational meaning: the visual appearance of represented participants. The dominant representation of women in the sample, as judged by the analysis of the participants’ hair, attire, posture, facial expression, the eye-levels of participants and their gestures/actions, is one of conventional hegemonic femininity (for more details, see Section 4.2.3.2). Within the images of women portrayed, female sexuality is visualized as sexy, alluring and desirable as conveyed by their appearance, posture and props.

4.2.3.2 Interactive Meaning

Visual communication, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 119) has resources for “constituting and maintaining another kind of interaction, the interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image”. This interaction involves two kinds of participants: the represented (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and the interactive (the producer/s and viewers of images); and in three kinds of relations:

- (1) relations between represented participants;
- (2) relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants’ attitudes towards the represented participants); and
- (3) relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants *do* to or for each other through images) (italics, authors’).

By that, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 120-121) see, “interactive meanings are visually

encoded in ways that rest on competencies shared by producers and viewers”. It also goes to mean that the values and beliefs of the producer/image-maker are encoded in the structures of the images (Jewitt, 1999: 273).

Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 145) tell us that, “[i]mages can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame. In this way they interact with viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented.” Such interaction is to project the represented’s world inside the picture frame to the viewers and to invite them to respond to it. Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 145) delineate that they are, “[t]hree factors [which] play a key role in the realization of these meanings: distance, contact and point of view”. These three factors, together with non-verbal communication (NVC) can create complex and subtle relations between the represented and the viewer, such as heighten a sense of expectation or identification. Some of the NVC that are crucial to observe in this study are: face (especially eye and mouth), gestures, posture and overall appearance.

Nalon (1997: 88) tells us that, “[t]he face is the single most important area for signalling emotions”. She goes on to explain how the colours of the skin can reflect psychological states: red for being flustered or angry, white for being fearful, and rosy for being shy or of robust health. The parting of one’s lips can convey different intentions too, for instance: a smile “has a strong interpersonal appeal” or potentially dissolves conflict; it may, depending on the degree of openness, express aggressiveness or sexual overtone. Nalon emphasizes the eyes as the most important aspect in making a wide range of meanings. It also depends on the “degree of openness, the dimension of the pupil, the kind of make-up”. She (ibid) adds,

[m]ore specifically, patterns of gaze play an important role in establishing relations between people: a direct gaze is used in the *initiation of interaction* and plays a central role in the development of attachments and sociability; depending on the context of situation, it may also be interpreted as a signal for *liking* and *intimacy* (especially if it is prolonged), with pupil size acting as a signal for interpersonal attraction. But gaze is also affected by power relations, so that in general a dominant person tends to use direct gaze less but s/he can break gaze last”.

As for gestures, they are formed by the limbs or body: for instance, hand and/or arm positions/movements may take on quite specific meanings (shrugging shoulders as negation/indifferent/disinterest or clenched fist for tensed feeling) and they can be culturally specific. Nalon (ibid) reminds that although “most gestures do not have “fixed” meanings; it is rather their combination with other factors which produces certain kinds of meanings, with a multiplying effect”.

In terms of posture, “standing, sitting/squatting/kneeling and lying” are three fundamental poses for human beings (Nalon, 1997: 89). The different positions/openness of the limbs and/or different angles of the body are further elements that help to indicate one’s attitude. Another common strategy involves exposing part(s) of the body. Overall appearance also involves clothing. By a certain dress code, it may suggest varied appeals: professional (doctor’s coat/full business suit), sexually available (revealing dresses), athletic (sports attire) and so forth. By the combination of these different NV cues, for example: direct alluring gaze, partial or total skin exposure, seductive posture and parted lips – they constitute a strong sexual overtone as realized visually by means of NVC (Nalon, 1997: 89-90). We will take a close look at each of the factors and see how interactive meanings are played out.

(i) Types of Contact

Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 146) explain that when the represented people in the picture frame look directly at the viewer, they attempt to “make contact” with the viewers. This, in turn, establishes an imaginary relation (i.e. social bond) between these two parties. The means for establishing this relationship between them is the direct gaze. The gaze of the represented participant/s’ at the viewer defines the type of contact between the represented and interactive participants. This gaze is identified by a vector connecting the represented participant’s eyes with those of the viewer. It can be further enhanced by, as Nalon’s (1997: 27) observed, “a gesture in the same direction, a particular facial expression or posture”, and “the type of bodily adornment”. According to Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 145-146), following Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 122-123), such picture is relegated to “demand” pictures where,

the people in the picture symbolically demand something from the viewer facial expression and gestures then fill in what exactly they ‘demand’ in this way: they can demand deference, by unblinkingly looking down on the viewers, or pity, by pleadingly looking up at them; they can address viewers with an ingratiating smile or unsettle them with a penetrating stare.

Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 146) explain that “[g]estures can further modify what is demanded, as in the famous ‘Your Country Needs YOU!’ recruitment poster (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001: 123). In slimming advertisements, the represented usually “demands” something from the viewer – and that something is often desire. The viewer is visually asked to desire the represented participant’s slim appeal or even visually demanded to identify with the represented participant’s “feelings signified by his/her facial expressions” (Nalon, 1997: 28).

In the absence of represented participant/s' direct gaze at the viewer, it seems that the represented participant/s is/are observed in a detached manner and impersonally as though they are specimens in a display case. Void of this kind of "imaginary contact", the people inside the picture frame are looked at quite differently. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 124) call such pictures "offers", where an "offer of information" is made.²³ In the case of slimming advertisements, contact between the represented participant/s and viewer is very often in the form of a demand; where images of the women are visually represented as demanding viewer's attention, adoration, desirability and identification.

(ii) Social Distance

Another way of discerning at the level of interactive meaning can be seen in the "distance" of people, places or things as appeared to the viewer. It can either narrow or expand the gap between the viewer and the represented in the images. Like day-to-day interaction, the norms of social relations decide the distance we keep from each other. This, according to Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 146), "translates into the 'size of frame' of shots". They further explicate that

[t]o see people close up is to see them in the way we would normally only see people with whom we are more or less intimately acquainted. Every detail of their face and their expression is visible. We are so close to them we could almost touch them. They reveal their individuality and their personality. To see people from a distance is to see them in the way we would normally only see strangers, people whose lives do touch on ours. We see them in outline, impersonally, as types rather than as individuals. This does not mean of course that the people we see represented in close-up are actually close to use, or vice versa. It means they are represented as though they belong or should belong to

‘our group’, and that the viewer is thereby addressed as a certain kind of person.

Distance, in other words, projects the possible relationship between the represented in the image and the viewers. Borrowed from electronic media’s terminology, Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 146) tell us that, “[a] close-up (head and shoulders or less) suggests an intimate/personal relationship; a medium shot (cutting off the human figure somewhere between the waist and the knees) suggests a social relationship [...]; and a ‘long shot’ (showing the full figure, whether just fitting in the frame or even more distant) suggests an impersonal relationship.”

In the study of slimming advertisements the relationship between the represented women and the viewer is, according to the social distance measurements, suggestive of an impersonal relationship. This is actually an unlikely justification for the study of slimming advertisements as the long shots are required to portray the full silhouette of the represented participant. This meets the need of the producer of the images to engage viewer to desire the ideal body figure of the represented.

(iii) Point of View

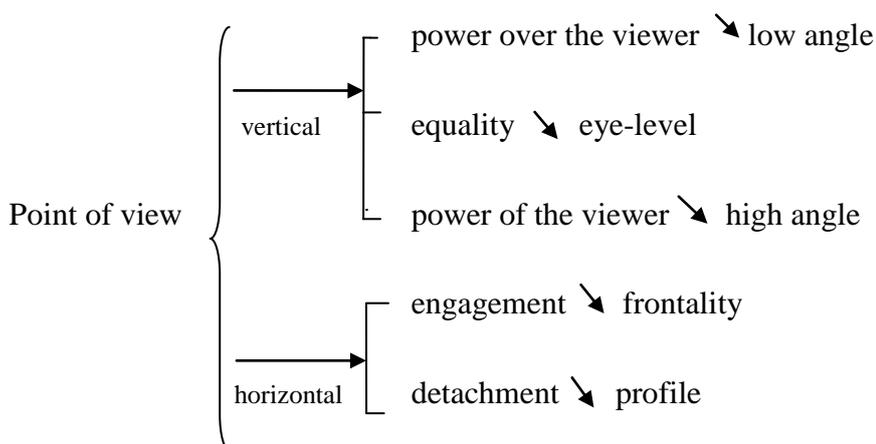


Figure 9: Resource of ‘point of view’ (adopted from Jewitt & Oyama, 2001:136)

Another means of drawing out interactive meaning potentials is ‘point of view’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 135-53).²⁴ The resource of ‘point of view’ defines the kinds of symbolic relations between image producers/viewers and the people, place or things in images. This can be realized from horizontal (frontal or profile/oblique) or vertical (aerial view, eye-level or low-level) dimensions.

In the case of the vertical dimension between the viewer and the represented participant, this relation encodes symbolic power relationship between the two: if you look down on something (high angle), you look at it from a position of symbolic power (viewer’s power); if you look up at something (low angle), that something has symbolic power over you (represented participant’s power). At eye-level, symbolic equality is projected.

In the case of the horizontal dimension, the variables necessitate different degrees of involvement with the represented participant/s. The relation will be one of involvement with, or detachment from, what is represented. A frontal angle allows the creation of maximum involvement between the viewer and the represented participant. Here, the viewer is directly confronted with what is in the image, hence, viewer’s identification and involvement with represented participant/s are heightened. Compared to a profile/oblique angle, when something is depicted from the side, the viewer literally and figuratively remains on the sidelines.²⁵

Both these dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal, are graded in a matter of degree. There is, for instance, a range of vertical angles between the aerial view and eye-level, and a range of horizontal angles between frontal and the profile/oblique. Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 135) clarify two points:

[f]irstly, “‘power’, ‘detachment’, ‘involvement’, and so on, are not ‘the’ meanings of these angles. They are an attempt to describe a meaning potential, a

field of possible meanings, which need to be activated by the producers and viewers of images. But this field of possible meanings is not unlimited. [...]. Secondly, symbolic relations are not real relations, and it is precisely this which makes point of view a semiotic resource. It can 'lie'. Photographs can symbolically make us relate as an equal to people who in fact have very considerable power over our lives (for example, politicians), or it can make us look in a detached way at people who we are involved with [...].

In saying this, what appears in an image may not be entirely true; it is only a representation and functions at a symbolic level. Yet, it is even in this symbolic projection, it is the very ground where the viewers are taken in to believe the possibilities, ideals or a parallel between the represented and the viewer as portrayed.

4.2.3.3 Compositional Meaning

The final specific kind of semiotic work, which follows Halliday's (1978) third textual metafunction, which Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) termed as "compositional" instead of textual, weaves together the individual parts of representation-and-interaction into the kind of wholes we recognize as particular kinds of text or communicative event (advertisements, interviews, lectures, meetings, etc.). They include three resources of compositional meaning: **information value; framing; salience** and **modality** (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 183; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147-54, emphasis mine). These three interrelated systems are the binding force between representational and interactive meanings of the image(s) to each other. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) stress the importance of the composition of images where the structure of the image composition provides the meaning of the image. A composition can be polarized along the horizontal or vertical axes. Below, the three sub-sections are mapped out and then discuss their application in several selected slimming advertisements (see Chapter 6).

(i) **Information value**

The placement of the elements of a composition dictates its information values. Any element placed on the *left* or the *right*, in the *centre* or the *margin*, on the *top* or in the *bottom* part of the space or page contributes to the overall meaning (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001: 147, italics mine).

It is argued that the direction of reading a text, commonly in Roman script (horizontal: *left-to-right*, vertical: *top-to-bottom*) influences the left and the right information value. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 186-192), *left-right* placement creates a “**given-new**” structure: the *left* element has the information value of “given” (as something known or familiar and therefore it is an agreed departure point for the message for the viewer or reader); whereas *right* element has the information value of “new” (as something not yet known and not yet already agreed upon by the viewer or reader). The “new” is therefore problematic, contestable, the information ‘at issue’, while the “given”; is presented as commonsensical and self-evident.

The meaning potential gets more “specific contours in the context of specific images” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001: 148). Slimming advertisements, with a specific category of ‘before and after shots’, carries two images of a supposedly the same woman, is seen in a *left-right* old-new body images. This placement of the elements of a composition realizes *given-new* information values. The left represents a former image of the overweight woman. The picture on the right is the ‘transformed’ slim ideal image that showcases her ‘new’ slim look. To the viewers, the *given-new* information value is presented as commonsensical and evidential. Through such an image, the viewer is persuaded to the effectiveness of the slimming products or services. The viewers also are constantly reminded that it is only those with ideal figure who are meant to be called beautiful, glamorous, desirable; and represents the image-maker voice that prescribes

what constitutes the ideal female body for women.

In the reading of Roman script, the *top to bottom* corresponds with the left to right placement of the elements of a composition and lead to its different information values. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 148), the *top to bottom* placement creates an “**ideal-real**” structure: the top element has the information value of “ideal” (“presented as the idealized or generalized essence of the information, hence usually also as its ideologically most salient part” or displaying “*what might be*”); whereas the bottom element has the information value of “real” (as something factual or practical or displaying “*what is*”) (Jewitt, 1999: 272, emphasis mine). In slimming advertisements, this distinction is not as clear as perfume advertisements where the top of the page is often displayed “supposedly pleasant hypothetical scenes (sensual encounters, [...]), while the bottom is devoted to technical information or to the presentation of the product in its container” (Nalon, 1997: 43-44). Another interesting insight highlighted by Nalon (ibid) of how the “**ideal-real**” structure may also mirror “text-image relations” is worth considering especially in multimodal texts such as slimming advertisements:

if the upper part of a page is occupied by a text and the lower by images, the text ideologically plays the main role and the images are only subsidiary (specification, evidence, consequence etc.). If the roles are reversed, then the Ideal is communicated visually and the text serves as an elaboration of it.

As for the position of the represented participant(s) in either the *centre* or the *margin*, the centre carries “the nucleus of the information on which all other elements are in some sense dependent” (Jewitt, 1999: 272). And the centre may be the mediator reconciling other polarized elements. Just as in a slimming ad, the predominant image will mediate with other polarized elements to further advance the ideal of the perfect body shape. This meaning potential will get more specific contours in the context of

specific images and its emphasis varies from one image to another.

In any multimodal text (as in the case of a slimming ad), the page is made up of composite linguistic and visual elements together. Therefore, the interplay of left-to-right, top-to-bottom, and centre-margin leads to a *reading path*. There is a particular hierarchy in such a reading path in terms of the movement of the different elements within and across a page: from the most salient element, moves to the next most salient element and so forth. However, this is not stated, it depends on the readers. Some go for an overall composition, some right down to the minute details; others may just opt for certain parts (either linguistic texts or visual images).

(ii) Framing

Framing is one of the compositional structures that “connects” or “disconnects” elements. Connection is created through “similarities and rhymes of colour and form, through vectors that connect elements, and [...] the absence of framelines or empty space between elements.”. Disconnection, on the other hand, is realized in the opposite way: “through framelines (which may be thick or thin: there are degrees of framing), through empty space between elements, but also through contrast of colour or form, or any other visual feature” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001: 150). Discontinuity or continuity of elements signifies which elements are separated or made to fit in together. By choice of framing, the meaning potential can be made clear and even more precise.

(iii) Salience

By “salience”, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 212) mean how some elements can be made more pronounced or eye-catching than others. This is achieved through a number of factors: “size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast [...], colour contrasts [...], placement in the visual field [...], perspective (foreground objects are more salient than

background objects, and elements that overlap other elements are more salient than the elements they overlap)". There are different degrees of salience in the composition of a picture or a page where "salience can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others."

(iv) Modality

Modality is another visual resource which renders an image more or less realistic or credible in value. Photographs, to the naked eye, remain the closest resemblance to reality or "imprint of reality". The theory is that the "greater the congruence between what you see of an object in an image and what you can see of it in reality with the naked eye [...], the higher the modality of that image" (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 151). It can be interpreted or classified according to "naturalistic" or "photorealism" standards which are determined by a series of modality markers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 163). However, since the slimming advertisements in this study are all monochromatic, the significance of modality is limited and shall not be considered any further.

On the whole, textual analysis serves as a analytical tool used to determine the presence of certain words or images or concepts within text or sets of texts. A textual analysis is employed to identify how the social reality of female body is represented to the reader in the slimming advertisements. The social effects of texts are mediated by meaning-making, or rather, its meanings that give social effect rather than the text in itself.

4.2.4 Reasons for the choice of Visual Framework

The following are some of the key reasons for the choice (adopted from Jewitt, 1999: 267).

1. Firstly, this method is clear, systematic and replicable instead of relying on subjective choices and processes; unlike the reader response theory that simply takes in faith the analysis based on the reader's interpretation. More often than not, the ability to do so is contingent upon the reader's knowledge, skills and sharpness. This is one of the common critiques of classical semiotics.
2. Secondly, social semiotics is entrenched social theories: the issues of power and the ideological function of images are two of its chief concerns. It espouses that images do not merely 'reflect' reality but 'construct' it. Along this study, the method facilitates the examination of how aspects of femininity are visually represented as the social norm and what is (dis)placed outside of this norm.
3. Thirdly, social semiotics process of arriving at the potential meaning is anchored on its framework and therefore can be justified (and even challenged), which again addresses another of classical semiotics criticisms.
4. Fourthly, the role of both producer and viewer in producing meanings are taken into consideration under social semiotics.
5. Fifth, unlike content analysis, the method does not reduce meaning to mere statistical quantification.
6. Sixth, other than this, social semiotics also looks at symbolic and hidden meanings of visual images through the use of modifying elements, such as the gesture, facial expression, pose, clothes, etc. These elements clarify the qualities and roles conferred upon the images.

7. Finally, it encompasses a view of image as a whole, rather than on fragments of meaning (a common criticism of content analysis).

From the key strengths of the method, it is believed that the use of a VSS approach in the study unveils the ideological ‘construction’ of ideal female body and enables discovery of gender issues that were not apparent in the written text.

4.3 DATA DESCRIPTION

In this section, the researcher reviews issues that need to be taken into consideration when conducting qualitative study. The study uses two kinds of data: slimming advertisements and interviews. This section explains each method in order to ensure the objectivity, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the study and its finding.

4.3.1 The Samples

The primary source of data comes from print advertisements. A collection of over 100 print advertisements was collected from *The Star* daily English newspaper from those produced between July 2007 and December 2008. According to Nielsen Media Research Q4 2009 (Jan 2009 - Dec 2009), it is reported that *The Star* daily English newspaper has the highest readership and circulation in the country (see Figure 11).²⁶ This confirms the wide readership and popularity of this daily amongst the people and also marks its sphere of influence of its news, reports, and even advertisements to the public.

Readership			
Star		Other newspapers	
The Star (daily)	926,000	New Straits Times	236,000
Sunday Star	887,000	New Sunday Times	218,000
* Source: Nielsen Media Research Q4 2009 (Jan 2009 - Dec 2009)		The Sun (daily)	152,000
Circulation			
Star		Other newspapers	
The Star (daily)	295,479	New Straits Times	120,770
Sunday Star	304,357	New Sunday Times	141,986
* Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations, Malaysia - 1st Jul 2008 - 30th Jun 2009		The Sun	287,935
		The Edge	23,369

Figure 10: Readership/Circulation of The Star and Sunday Star

Three selection criteria were used to compile the sample: medium, female-oriented and size of the advert. As the collection built up, an inventory of the collection was started to index and file the various advertisements. From the samples, the advertisements can be categorized under six main categories: celebrity-endorsement, post-natal, before and after, morbidly obese, medico-scientific methods, and slimming reality show campaign.

The secondary data was obtained from interviews conducted over a period of 3 months with 53 respondents. The respondents were interviewed and their views were audio-recorded. Verbatim transcription work followed. Following this, secondary data was obtained and ready for the next phase, the analysis (see Chapter 7).

4.3.2 Choice of Data

At the start of this study, the researcher actually began with gleaning print slimming advertisements from a local leading English daily, *The Star*. A corpus of eighteen months print advertisements were collected. They were indexed and filed.

Within the parameters of this study, the print advertising represents a unique/purposive collection of discourses. The ads are part of marketing strategies to promote, inform, sell the product/services.²⁷ In this study, these advertisements will be read as “texts” and the choice of the advertisements is strictly confined to promotion of products/services with or without the use of image and its suggestions of how to address the condition. These advertisements work on the presupposition that the potential client has a problem and this problem can be addressed through the use of the product/service.

4.3.3 Data Collection and Coding

Data was retrieved from the University of Malaya’s main library newspaper archive. Initially, data was collected and sorted out according to date, month and year. From here, copies were made and kept in clear folders. They were indexed and filed according to their dates. This collection is considered the primary data.

Next, this collection is further identified according to the most recurring claims by categories. The weight loss advertisements can be categorized under:

Claims by category: Celebrity Endorsement
 Fat to slim transformation / Before and After Photos
 Mothers / Post-natal
 Morbidly obese
 Medico-scientific methods
 Reality show on weight-loss campaign

Some of the slimming advertisements used more than one category of claims; hence, there were overlapping of claims in an advertisement. The researcher engaged an independent intercoder to ensure the reliability of themes categorization (Cresswell, 2003). The intercoder was requested to categorize the slimming advertisements into several themes. Then, both the researcher’s and the intercoder’s themes categorizations were compared. There were two categories where the themes were labeled differently (see above). To resolve this, the researcher chose to accept both categorizations with a

slash symbol (/). This step was taken to rule out the researcher's subjectivity which CDA analysts have often been criticized for.

As for the secondary data, the selection of respondents, the demographics of respondents, a description of the instruments utilized in the study, and a description of the procedure for conducting the interview are detailed as followed.

4.3.4 Data Presentation

The manners of data presentation and organization are important to facilitate the analysis and discussion. In this study, an excerpt extracted from a *Marie France Bodyline* slimming advertisement will be labelled as MFB, followed by a number and date (i.e.: MFB 11 & 25 August 2008) to identify the exact advertisement. Each excerpt is identified as Extract 1, Extract 2 and so forth.

The words/phrases obtained from the Extract(s) will be in bold, italic and underline. When these words/phrases appear in the discussion paragraph(s), they will further be indicated by double quotation marks (“ ”). This is to show direct quotation and no alteration is made to any of the extracted words/phrases.

For the lexical analysis in Chapter 5, the data will be analyzed at word/phrase-level. A compilation of list of words/phrases under various categories (i.e.: adjective, verb, adverb, etc.) will be displayed in Table, as shown in the following examples:

Table 1: Adjectives for Body, Figure and Shape

Table 2: Frequently recurring adjectives to describe the body parts

Extracts from different advertisements are enlisted and thereafter, a compilation of lexical items will be presented under the subheading ‘List of ...’ with a plus (+) sign to indicate the additional category/ies.

For example:

List of Adjectives + Adverb + Body/Figure/Shape

slim and perfectly sculpted silhouette
perfectly sculpted, slim figure
perfectly slim and slender you

As for the respondents, each one is coded with the letter 'R' followed by a numerical for identification purpose. When there is a need to refer these respondents in a group, the coding 'Rs' is used, followed by the numerical where comma is used to separate them.

For instance:

R5 represents Respondent 5
Rs 5, 6, 7 represent Respondents 5, 6, 7

Verbatim transcription is chosen for content analysis. The grammatical errors in the transcriptions are not edited. However, the researcher adds notes within the transcription where necessary for clarity. This is indicated within the symbols, < >.

4.3.5 Selection of Respondents

There were 53 women, aged 25-45 who agreed to be interviewed (approximately 20-45 minutes) in order to examine their perception towards slimming advertisements. The respondents are labelled starting from R5, R6, R7 until R57. A representative sample of a broad range of age groups is chosen in order to represent the diversity of adults in Malaysia.

In order to preserve and guard the objectivity in qualitative research, the researcher needs to align the representativeness of the respondent samples with the aims of the research. A common method applied is a non-probability sampling technique known as snowballing sampling, where initially the respondents are selected from a group of

people who possess similar characteristics (gender, age and sub-groupings: single/married, with/without children, working/non-working) and suit the purpose of the study. As the study involves perception of body image, the first batch of respondents is from people who are readily available – friends, colleagues and gym members. They are later asked to recommend some of their friends as well in order to meet the number required. This is generally termed as exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling (Castillo, 2009).

4.3.6 Rationale for Selection of Respondents

This age range is chosen for several reasons. These women are considered the target group that has the strongest purchasing power. They are established in their careers and relatively settled down in life. This range of age group is chosen based on two rationales. In Malaysia, tertiary education normally begins at the ages around 19-20 and generally, undergraduates complete their first degree within 3-4 years'. Bearing this in mind, women of 25 years of age are usually into the first two years of their careers after graduating with their bachelor's degree. Therefore, around this peak age group of 25-35, we see women that are generally active and watch out for their diet and lifestyle.

For the 36-45 age group, we see different life-altering situations at work. Generally, most would have been married and settled down with children. Moreover, their metabolic rate has normally taken a plunge. This is the time when they will not have the time and energy to exercise. Childbearing as well as child-caring will be their priorities. Both groups will give a wide range of samples where diversified roles that may affect their personal body sizes.

However, the aforementioned rationale does not necessarily mean that there are no cases where women of the age of 35 and below are not married or have not experienced motherhood. Neither does the selection imply that women above the age of 36 are all

married, settled down with their nuclear family nor biologically challenged.²⁸ There are always exceptions. The rationale is not meant to be a sweeping generalization, but as a guide to probable norms, or what psychologist Feldman (2005) called the “social clocks”:

Having children. Receiving a promotion. Getting divorced. Changing jobs. Becoming a grandparent. Each of these events marks a moment on what has been called the social clock of life.

The social clock is a term used to describe the psychological timepiece that records the major milestones in people's lives. Each of us has such a social clock that provides us with a sense of whether we have reached the major benchmarks of life early, late or right on time in comparison with our peers. Our social clocks are culturally determined: They reflect the expectations of the society in which we live.

Feldman (2005), referring to developmental psychologists (Helson, Stewart, & Obtrave, 1995), also said that “women's social clocks have changed dramatically as a result of social and cultural changes.” This tells us that the timing of marriage and motherhood has altered over the years and are “influenced by the social, economic, and the cultural worlds in which the woman lives”. Hence, the age-range choice is not meant to generalize or to demarcate women’s social standing.

4.3.7 Background of the Respondents

The respondents’ demographic information is taken down briefly for the record: age, marital status, highest education level, client/non-client of slimming centres and finally, yes/no exposure to slimming advertisements (see Appendix E for summarized demographic information). Out of the 53 respondents, 1 respondents (R56), did not

complete her demographic information. For this reason, only the completed 52 respondents' data were used for the following analysis. 34 of the women are between the ages of 25-35 years old whereas the other 18 are between 36-45 years old. In per-decade age coding, 18 women are in their 20s, 24 women in their 30s and 10 of them in their 40s. Out of these 52 respondents, in terms of marital status, 30 are single, 22 are married. There is no divorcee or widower in the sampling pool. Out of these women, 27 of them are educated at tertiary level, whereas the other 25 include primary, secondary and college educational levels. 5 of them were once clients of various slimming centres and approximately 96% of these women are exposed to slimming advertisements. However due to poor and spoilt recordings (Rs 14-23, R39, R54) and incomplete bio-data (R56), only 40 interviews were transcribed verbatim. Therefore, for the following interview analysis (Section 7.3), the aforementioned respondents will be excluded.

4.3.8 Rationale for conducting Interview

Interviews will help researchers obtain in-depth responses about what people think and how they feel. They are interactive and most appropriate when used at the early stages of a research programme or to examine topic/issues where there is little prior research.

Interviews are suitable for exploring new topics, investigating beliefs and attitudes towards sensitive topics,²⁹ reaching a better understanding of certain contexts and generating new theories (Britten et al., 1995).

A semi-structured interview is the most appropriate method for collecting data. Luevorasirikul (2007: 160) fully supports this method, citing that, “[a]s a result of a lack of research in the qualitative study of body image perception and its influences, a semi-structured interview was the most appropriate method for collecting data.” This method is appropriate as it allows the researcher to investigate the perspectives and experiences

of respondents by using open-ended questions rather than a restricted set of questions with limited possible answers provided. Through this, an opportunity is provided to explore any new and interesting information that might emerge from the interview. Interview is useful in exploratory studies (Pienaar, 2006; Ng, 2005 and Hammond, 1996). It is a fair representation of voices of the public, drawing out spontaneous responses from the respondents on sensitive issues and it certainly does tackle the gaps within CDA. It addresses the lack of ethnographic support in CDA - one of the critiques of CDA (Widdowson, 1995a, 1995b; Schegloff, 1997, 1998; and Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). While it plays an important role in mitigating the researcher's subjectivity, the interview also increases the objectivity of the research whenever empirical data is collected and used.

However, the downside of this method is the challenges of getting willing respondents as it is highly time consuming with very little reward afforded. Other limitations that might occur when conducting the interviews, for instance, are misinterpretation of data: the interviewees may fabricate their answers from what they consider to be socially desirable rather than describe what they actually think or do. The time-consuming and tedious process of transcription of audio recordings are also inevitable.

4.3.9 Developmental Stages for the Interview Schedule

Prior to the interview, the respondents were asked to choose from either one of the two files; each comprising a dozen of slimming advertisements from different slimming centres and labelled as Packet A and Packet B (See Appendices C and D). Further instructions required them to put tags on two or three advertisements that attracted them most.

There are three phases involved in developing the interview schedule. The first phase is to ascertain the contents and sequence of questions in the interview guide. The second

phase is to test the interview guide by conducting a pilot interview. The last phase is to resolve the problems arising from the first interview guideline and to improve the clarity and flow of the questions.

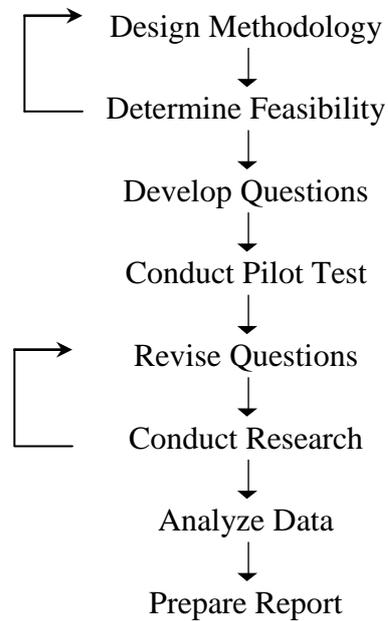


Figure 11: Interview Research Flow Chart

4.3.10 Developing questions for the Interview

As a guide to develop questions for the interviews, the researcher has to refer closely to RQ 3: “In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?”. Five questions were constructed. The first question deals with the respondents’ feeling as they were asked to compare their body with the women portrayed in the slimming advertisements. This initial comparison is seen as a stimulus in the process of getting their opinions with regard to the perceived advantages of being slim in the home/workplace, in their relationship with others and on building up their self-esteem. Finally, the last question was developed to find out if they find the slimming advertisements harmful or useful to women in any way.

4.3.11 Methods for data collection during Interview

Respondents will be going through a 20-45 minutes interview process in two phases. In the first, respondents will be asked to provide their age, marital status and exposure to print slimming advertisements or client of any slimming centres. Secondly, a dozen of print advertisements compiled in a file (Packet A or Packet B) will be shown and questions based on their understanding of the visual, headline and body copy of the slimming advertisements.

In relation to interviewing, it can be either one to one or group interviews. Typically, an interviewer will ask questions from a written interview guide and record the answers verbatim. Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used method for conducting one to one interviews. Though time consuming and taxing, one to one interview is considered the best option in this study as it allows respondents to freely express their opinions about one particular topic. Voice or video recording is recommended, depending on the researcher's resources and budget as it will definitely help in getting the data stored with minimal errors and allow the researcher to recall the interview moment as and when it is required. For this study, owing to constraints of budget and time, the researcher opted for mere audio-taping of the interview sessions. Verbatim transcription has to be done as soon as the whole interview is conducted.

In order to get genuine responses from the participants about their perception, it is important not to alert the respondent to the fact that the study is actually looking at recognition of the ideology of the ideal female body. Instead, the participants will be informed that the study is looking at how convincing these advertisements are. The Debriefing Form will later inform respondents as to the actual nature of the study and provide them with a contact, should they have any additional questions or concerns about the study.

4.3.12 The location of Interview

The location of the interview is another issue that the researcher needs to take into consideration. It has been suggested that interviews should be conducted where the respondents feel comfortable and in the most convenient location such as private domains. This is to ensure the respondents' confidentiality and comfort, and limit distraction during the interview process. The researcher can help to tone down the Hawthorne effect by conducting the interview in as inconspicuous manner as possible to ensure that the respondents feel her anonymity and confidentiality is fully preserved and protected.³⁰

4.3.13 The challenges encountered during the Interview

There are several limitations that need to be considered – the challenges of getting willing respondents as it is highly time-consuming with very little reward afforded. At times, cancellations or rescheduling of appointments occurred. Traffic congestion when travelling to or from the interviews' locations was unavoidable and terribly trying. The most challenging part involves post interview works. Other limitations might occur as well. For instance, when conducting the interviews, the respondents may fabricate their answers from what they consider to be socially desirable rather than describe what they actually think or do. This may lead to misinterpretation of data. Although some measures have been taken to tone down the Hawthorne effect, the interviews, nonetheless, were subjected to several complications as well. Sometimes, the respondents insisted on getting the interview over with despite of the noisy surrounding. Thus, some of the audio recordings were difficult to decipher. Many respondents were also 'audio-taping shy' as they were rather tense whenever the audio-taping instrument was placed near them.

4.4 ANALYSIS

The data from the slimming advertisements and the interviews are subjected to different methods and various stages of analysis. The analytical systems for the data from the slimming advertisements are divided into textual and visual analyses (for further details, see Chapters 5 and 6). The results from the analyses are interpreted and explained according to the research questions.

4.4.1 Textual Analysis of the Slimming Advertisements

The data from the slimming advertisements are critically analyzed based on Fairclough's (2003) tool for textual analysis and explained according to the first RQ: "How is the ideal female body textually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?". Textual analysis is conducted primarily in terms of lexical choices. Subsequently, these findings are described in terms of how slimming advertisements' text produces, maintains and constrains women in certain social position and relationship (at the social practice level, see discussions in Chapter 8).

4.4.2 Visual Analysis of the Slimming Advertisements

The visual data from the slimming advertisements are critically analyzed to answer the second RQ: "How is the ideal female body visually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements?". The analysis tool is anchored on the social semiotic approach developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). Visual analysis is done by categorizing images under three categories: representational, interactional and compositional. The interpretations of the images will be drawn and aligned with the second set of research objectives. Subsequently, these findings are discussed in terms of how slimming discourse plays a key role in producing the same old ideologies in the

pursuit of feminine beauty which influence Malaysian women's perception of beauty (at the social practice level, see discussions in Chapter 8).

4.4.3 Interpretation of the Interview

The interviews recorded are transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions are analyzed based on the emerging thematic concerns from the interview to identify common and contrasting views. All the emerging themes are then presented in quotes from the interview transcriptions. Then, the respondents' responses are discussed in relation to the third RQ: "In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?".

4.5 CONCLUSION

The first two research questions prompt the researcher to examine the textual evidence of how the ideal female body is textually and visually constructed in the selected slimming advertisements. To address the critique against CDA as lacking ethnographical support, this study incorporates evidence from interviews where the information obtained will fill the gaps in the CDA analytical framework. The third research question addresses the ways in which the slimming advertisements promote the ideology of the ideal female body at the social practice level.

In this thesis, we look closely at how slimming discourse plays a key role in producing the same old ideologies on the pursuit of feminine beauty. The importance of semiosis in various forms is recognized through the use of dual approaches of textual and visual analysis. The issue, concerned with the ideological construction of the female body in the slimming advertisements is examined. We see how words and images do not just reflect reality but 'construct' it. We see how meaning making of knowledge of the ideal

female body is done and how they engage readers to consume what they have churned out.

CHAPTER 5 : TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter examines the textual data. In each phase of the analyses, different analytical tools are employed to address the issue central to the thesis, i. e. how textual and visual resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body. This chapter is concerned with the analysis at word level focusing in particular on lexical choice. The researcher investigates how the choice of words contributes to the construction of the 'ideal' female body.

5.1 LEXICAL CHOICE

In the following sections, content words which describe the female body are analyzed. The content words are central to the presentation of the message or image that serves the producer's interest.

The words are extracted from the data and listed under four main categories: adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns. This is done to examine the choice of lexical items selected to describe the product/service of the slimming advertisements. Lexical choice plays a vital role in evoking association with the concepts linked to the product or service in the selected slimming advertisements.

By associating certain descriptions with the female body, the advertisers define what is acceptable, what is beautiful and what is ideal for women. Zuraidah (2003: 274) argues, "lexicalisation is an *obvious but powerful* way of formulating description" (emphasis, mine). Analysis of texts in terms of vocabulary, though largely descriptive, does contribute to the findings where they show how the text producer has represented the ideas of the ideal female body.

5.1.1 ADJECTIVES FOR BODY, FIGURE AND SHAPE

Table 1: Adjectives for Body, Figure and Shape

NOUNS	DESCRIPTIONS	
BODY	Ideal	Non-ideal
body	flaunt a <i>sleek, sexy</i> body/ <i>firmer</i> body/ <i>svelte</i> body/ flaunt a <i>fabulous</i> body/ <i>ideal</i> body/ <i>tighter</i> and <i>firmer</i> body	<i>plump</i> body/ <i>apple-shaped</i> body/ <i>plump upper</i> body/ <i>round</i> and <i>overweight/ pear-shaped/ out of shape/ bulgy</i> body
FIGURE	<i>svelte</i> figure/ <i>perfect</i> figure/ <i>dream</i> figure/ <i>fabulous</i> figure/ <i>slim</i> and <i>sensational</i> figure/ <i>curvaceous/ shapely/ shapelier/ ideal</i> figure	
SHAPE		
curve/curves	<i>perfect</i> curves	
shape	<i>slimmer</i> shape	
frame		<i>bulky</i> frame
silhouette	<i>sleek</i> silhouette/ <i>slim</i> and <i>sculpted</i> silhouette/ <i>slim</i> and <i>perfectly sculpted</i> silhouette	

Table 1 presents the words associated with the body as body, figure and shape (curve, frame, shape, silhouette). There are two strategies employed by the slimming advertisements to describe the female body. They are ideal and non-ideal lexical descriptions of the female body. The slim, taut and shapely body is endorsed as the ideal body image for women; whereas the non-ideal emphasizes what are considered as the ‘flaws’, the unfavourable and undesirable. In both strategies of lexicalization, it is found that the data reveals several means to go about it (see below).

5.1.1.1 Single Adjective associated with the female + body/figure/shape

Extract 1 shows the use of single adjective to describe the female body/figure/shape. It is used before nouns like body/figure/shape. Here, the adjectives have positive association.

Extract 1

If you have been looking for a fast, effective, painless and non-invasive solution to your weight problem, your search ends at MFB. A *svelte* body and great looking skin, is just a call away.

MFB5 – 22 October 2007

With our experience, expertise and wide range of safe, non-invasive, pain-and-fuss-free slimming innovations, we can help you achieve your *desired* body weight and shape in no time! More importantly, our slimming solutions are proven with long-lasting results and no downtime whatsoever.

MFB7 – 11 February 2008

With its innovative 3-fold approach, this therapy targets and reduces stubborn fat and cellulite by stimulating cell metabolism and boosting the lipolysis (fat reduction) effect. Giving you the *sleek* silhouette you've always dreamt of – quickly, effectively and comfortably.

MFB9 – 24 March 2008

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Adjectives associated with the female + body/figure/shape

firmer body

svelte body

fabulous body

ideal body

perfect curve

svelte figure

perfect figure

dream figure

fabulous figure

curvaceous figure

shapely figure

ideal figure

sleek silhouette

From Extract 1, the adjective '*firmer*' is the comparative form of the word 'firm': the latter describes the body as tight and taut; the former, with the suffix '-er' – carries the meaning firmer or tighter or more taut. This further emphasizes the firmness or tightness or tautness. The female body does not only need to be tight and taut, in addition, a certain preferable shape is also endorsed. For example, the adjectives *svelte*, *curvaceous*, *shapely* and *sleek* are associated with the preferred shape of the female body. Only when the female body fits into both criteria of being firm and svelte, it will be regarded as the *fabulous* or *dream* figure. This is how the ideal female body is measured. The *fabulous* or *dream* figure is further heightened by the adjectives *ideal* and *perfect* which means the best, flawless or perfection.

5.1.1.2 Compound adjectives associated with the female + body/figure/shape

Sometimes, the promotional materials used more than one adjective for emphasis. The second and/or third adjective/s is/are usually synonym. Extract 2 is an example of this. It shows a sequence of adjectives before the noun (body/figure/shape).

Extract 2

After undergoing their proven and effective slimming programmes, I now boast a *slimmer healthier* body and am proud to be [a] beautiful mom. If I can do it, so can you!
MFB8 – 3 March 2008

So if you want to flaunt a *sleek, sexy* body like Bernice Liu, come talk to us today!
MFB2 – 17 September 2007

When it comes to achieving a *slim and sensational* figure, look no further as MFB is here to help you achieve that fabulous body you ever thought was possible. The BioThermie Plus therapy sculpts and tones problem areas such as thighs, buttocks, tummy and arms. This amazingly effective therapy is the perfect non-invasive replacement for tummy tucks and liposuction.

MFB13 – 16 September 2008

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Compound Adjectives associated with the female + body/figure/shape

sleek, sexy body
tighter and *firmer* body
sculpted and *slim* figure
slim and *sensational* figure
slim and *more sensational* figure
slim and *sculpted* silhouette
slimmer, sexier you
slim and *slender* you

In Extract 2, more than one adjective is used to describe the ideal female body. Compound adjectives add to the notion of the ideal female body by having double or triple synonyms before the noun, as in '*sleek, sexy* body' or '*slim* and *slender* you' or '*slim* and *sculpted*' silhouette. Sometimes, this compound adjective is further intensified by the presence of the suffix '-er' – for example, '*tighter* and *firmer* body' or '*slimmer, sexier* you'. Very often, an additional adverb is added for the same effect, like '*slim* and *more* *sensational* figure'. Notice that the compound adjectives are also frequently alliterated, for instance, through the sibilant /s/ as shown above. To ensure that these prescribed notions of the ideal female body is not easily forgotten, the advertiser/s used a combination of compounds, an adverb and the device of alliteration before the noun 'figure'. Repetition in various forms serves to reiterate and reinforce again and again, so much so that the same message is retained and remembered. The message is that the female body needs to be: first and foremost, slim and slender; secondly, it has to be tight and firm; thirdly, it also has to be sleek, sculpted and shapely in order to be considered beautiful, fabulous, sexy and even, sensational.

5.1.1.3 Adjectives associated with specific body parts

Analysis of the data reveals that the advertiser/s often divide the female body into many parts: arms, thighs, bums, midriffs and so forth. The constant demands for the ‘right’ size (either ‘too big’ or ‘too small’ mantra) drive women into an acute sense of body dissatisfaction. As Wykes and Gunter (2005: 50) lament, “[w]hatever situation women find themselves in and however they look they are always found wanting and needy.”.

Extract 3

FLAUNT *SLENDER, TONED* ARMS

Flabby, sagging arms will now be a thing of the past. The experts at Marie France Bodyline can help you trim away those unwanted inches.

MFB1 – 23 July 2007

From weight management to targeted fat reduction therapies, MFB has the answer to every slimming problem you face. Whether you want a *flatter tummy, trimmer* thighs or *slimmer* arms, our revolutionary technology and expertise can help you achieve the figure of your dreams. So if you want to flaunt a sleek, sexy body like Bernice Liu, come talk to us today!

MFB2 – 17 September 2007

THIGH *ENVY*

Finally, I had the *shapely, toned* legs that I’ve always dreamed of.

MFB3 – 3 October 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Adjectives + Body Parts

Table 2: Frequently recurring adjectives associated with the body parts

ADJECTIVES		
BODY PARTS	IDEAL	NON-IDEAL
Thighs	trimmer	chunky/ huge/ fleshy/ flabby/ thunder
Waist/waistline	slim/ slender	thick/ chunky/ expanding waistline
Hips	slim	droopy/ wide/ flabby
Arms	slender/ toned/ slimmer arms	flabby/ sagging
Tummy	flat/ flatter	bulging/ pot belly
Calves		stubborn fat accumulated at the calves/ lumpy
Buttocks	perkier/ firmer and more toned	saggy
Legs	shapely/ toned	chunky
Lower Body		plump

From Table 2, a list of adjectives that describe the body parts is identified. They are divided into ideal and non-ideal descriptions of the body parts. The juxtaposition of the ideal and non-ideal descriptions plays an important role in the construction of the ‘favoured’ or ‘disfavoured’ female body image. Almost every single part of the female body is under scrutiny. In fact, in Tan’s (2010: 68) study, the thighs, waist/waistline and hips rank the top three most frequently mentioned parts of the body in slimming advertisements (in respective order). Following that, the ideal and non-ideal adjectives to describe these three parts of the body will be examined simultaneously.

Some of the unfavourable descriptions of the thighs are “*chunky, huge, fleshy, flabby*”, and even “*thunder*”. The adjective, “*chunky*” means thick and heavy; “*huge*” denotes something extremely large in size; while “*fleshy*” and “*flabby*” suggest excess of flesh/flab. The word “*thunder*” however, is usually a noun or a verb – an element of the nature that occurs during a storm. But in this case, it is used as an adjective to

describe the thighs. “Thunder” indicates something dreadful, undesirable and to be feared. These adjectives are in contrast with those positive associations such as “*trimmer thighs*” or “*shapely, toned* legs”. The adjective, “*trimmer*” originates from the verb trim, which carries the meaning of cutting away unnecessary parts of something. With the suffix “-er”, it becomes a means of comparison where the word “*trimmer*” suggests that the female thighs have to be smaller. Besides that, the thighs, being part of the legs, must be “*shapely and toned*”. Again, this stresses the absence of fat, tightness and tautness.

The waist/waistline is constantly in focus. This is because the ideal waistline is always “*slender* or *slim*”. Both adjectives carry the idea of attractively thin. This relegates the “*thick, chunky, flabby*” or “*expanding waistline*” as unattractive. The adjectives focus on the thickness, heaviness, excessiveness or expansiveness of the waist/waistline, these are considered as non-ideal and flouted the norm of beauty.

Similarly, hips that are “*droopy, wide*”, or “*flabby*” are considered ugly. The adjectives “*droopy*” and “*flabby*” carry the ideas of loosened, saggy and excess fat around the skin. They suggest that the body has lost its firmness; therefore, it is a non-ideal body. The adjective “*wide*”, on the other hand, normally describes the width of street, river, area, range, variety or choice. To ascribe it to the hips, simply means that they are too big, too huge or oversize.

From the specific parts of the body that have both been described positively and negatively, the descriptions demonstrate the ‘power’ slimming advertisements have in constructing the ideal and non-ideal body image for women in Malaysia. It is the consumption of this ‘ideal’ that is of primary concern (for more, see Chapter 8). The slimming advertisements capitalize on the positive lexicalization to promote what kind of body is considered acceptable, beautiful and ideal; in the same vein, the negative

lexicalization dwells on the ideological notion of body fat as non-aesthetic, hideous and imperfect.

The following detailed analysis continues to unveil the opaque ideological notions of the ideal female body. Besides adjective, there are two other means of lexicalization: the use of adverb to increase the degree of intensity (Extract 4) and negative lexicalization (Extract 5).

5.1.1.4 Adjective + Adverb associated with the female body parts

As mentioned earlier, adjective describes the noun. An adverb, on the other hand, further modifies the following word. When adjectives and adverbs (in any order) are combined to describe something, this combination increases the reader's attention to what is being described.

Extract 4

If you yearn for a *perfectly sculpted slim figure*, let MFB help you achieve those perfect curves with the Bodytech™ Perfectionist System. With thousands of satisfied customers and lasting results, we pride ourselves as the pioneer slimming professionals.

MFB11 – 25 August 2008

If you yearn for a *perfectly sculpted, slim figure*, let MFB help you achieve your ideal body today. With thousands of satisfied customers and lasting results, we pride ourselves as the pioneer slimming professionals.

MFB12 – 8 September 2008

Best of all, these advanced therapies are relaxing, detoxifying and non-invasive. The result? One *perfectly slim and slender you!*

MFB4 – 8 October 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Adjective + Adverb associated with the female + body/figure/shape

slim and *perfectly sculpted* silhouette

perfectly sculpted, slim figure

perfectly slim and *slender* you

weigh down

In Extract 4, the phrases '*perfectly sculpted, slim* figure' and '*perfectly slim* and *slender* you' are made up of '1 adverb + 2 adjectives'. The adjectives *sculpted, slim* and *slender* ascribe a certain desirable characteristics to the female body. Only when a female body is associated with these characteristics it is deemed as attractive, pleasing to the eyes and regarded as the ideal shape. The adverb *perfectly* further reinforces the notion that this is 'the' ideal shape desired. When a woman is overweight, she is considered "*weigh down*" literally by the "extra pounds" and "prejudice". In this context, the adverb "*down*" is associated with the feelings of women who are overweight, i.e. distressed, sorrowful and unhappy. In this light, the message conveys the idea that if a woman does not conform to the ideal shape, she is presumed to be sad and unhappy.

Extracts 1, 2, 3 and 4 show several adjectives that glorify the ideal female form. Jaya Rane (2002) conducted studies on lexical choices in slimming advertisements. Part of her studies identified additional positive collocates such as "curves, shape, contours and contouring". Rane explains that positive lexicalization refers to, "words that are commendatory and highlight the desirable results that the products or services can bring" (as cited in Tan, 2010: 91). By associating the body with positive words, it is implied that the desired female body is one that is slim, shapely and taut. Tan (2010: 92) observes that:

[i]f we examine the minimum requirement imposed by the advertiser, we note that in order for a woman to fall under the ideal body category, she must first of

all possess a *slim* figure, secondly, her slim figure must also be *shapely* and lastly, her body must be *firm* and *smooth*. According to the advertisements, only by having all these three criteria, a woman will be regarded as having the ideal body image [italics, author's].

While the positive lexicalization works on drawing attention to notions of desirable, flawless and idealized female figure; the non-ideal, in contrast, draws on the flaws and imperfections. In short, the latter works by threats and warning – hence, instilling fat-phobia (see a discussion on this in Chapter 8).

5.1.1.5 Negative Adjective associated with the female + body/figure/shape

Extract 5 is the complete opposite of Extracts 1, 2, 3 and 4. It contains adjectives associated with the desirable female body form. The non-ideal descriptions are made up of negative lexicalization. In terms of the female body, the non-ideal adjective highlights the ‘flaws’ in women’s body.

Extract 5

WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS: Overall Vanessa has a ***plump*** body. Hence, the therapies should target at improving her body contour and droopy hips. The most ideal therapies are Mayfair SlimMedic 1 SF and CLA Chili Essence Slimming.

MB2 - 3 December 2007

WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS: Overall, Alicia has an ***apple-shaped*** body. Most of the body fat accumulates at the waist and tummy.

MB3 - 7 December 2007

WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS: Valerie has a ***plump upper*** body – her tummy bulges out and is wrinkled by stretch marks. The skin of her face looks dull and droopy.

MB4 - 31 December 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Adjectives associated with the female + body/figure/shape

bulgy body
plump body
plump upper body
apple-shaped body

round and *overweight*
pear-shaped
out of shape
bulky frame

For instance, the words *bulgy*, *plump*, *bulky*, *round* and *overweight* are words that depict bigger body size. These words connote a sense of disapproval for the female body that is too big, too round or too heavy. Grogan (2007), explains that within the Western ideology, being overweight is regarded as a violation of the cultural ideal of self-denial and self-control. Such an ideological stance only serves to breed discrimination and prejudice against those who do not live up to the standards of the “slender cultural ideal” (as cited in Tan, 2010: 73).

At the same time, the phrase *out of shape* again reiterates the idea that an ideal body must not only be slim and slender; it has to be in shape too. This phrase *out of shape* is also replicated in some other ways, such as hyphenated words like *apple-shaped* or *pear-shaped* body. Both describe the body as round, oversized around the waist and hips. And this is regarded as unattractive, unfavourable and flouting the desired hour-glass shape. Frequent repetition of negative lexis in describing the female body parts, body weight or body shapes also works to influence people’s view and to reaffirm what is/are acceptable or not. Negative lexicalization, like reversed psychology, constructs a perspective of what is considered the ideal female form. Zuraidah (2003: 274-5), in debunking the beauty mystique, discusses the use of semantic contrast and negative lexicalization in beauty product promotional materials in order to convince the readers the product is able to ‘transform’ a woman with ‘flaws’ (i.e. lacklustre skin, wrinkles, puffy eyes, dry-chapped lips, bulging tummy, fat thighs, sagging bottom). She also argues that “[i]t is not surprising that women are so often troubled by negative body image and by the loss of youth”. The negative lexicalization, hence, is employed as a

means to advocate for beauty transformation. In the case of this study, body transformation.

Besides that, there are certain qualities and values closely associated with the female body as well. This association can be lexicalized through several other categories. Some of the categories include verbs (Extracts 6 - 8), scientific-related lexicalization (Extract 9), promise/assurance-related lexicalization (Extract 10), and finally, positive/negative feelings (Extract 11). The following sections will explore the aforementioned.

5.1.2 VERB ASSOCIATED WITH THE FEMALE BODY + BODY PARTS/ BODY CONDITION/ SKIN

Besides using adjectives, adverbs and nouns to project what constitute the ideal female body, the slimming advertisements are also using verbs to further strengthen the claims of the advertiser/s. As analyzed in Section 5.1.1, some of the advertisers' claims endorse only the slim, taut and shapely body as the ideal body for women. Verbs are action processes that help to deliver this message. The action processes indicate a dependency relationship between the slimming agents (i.e. product/service) and the decreasing of the body size/weight or shaping of the body. The female body is constructed as dependent on the slimming agents to slim down or shape up.

Extract 6 demonstrates the use of verbs as a means to overcome the unfavourable conditions of the female body/body parts/skin. These verbs serve as an 'instruction' for various parts of the body to have a nip or tuck. Saggy skin needs tightening. Cellulite seems hideous and needs to be rid off. Fat becomes ugly and intolerable.

Extract 6

Marie France Bodyline is pleased to introduce the all – new lipo-Nano System. A fast slimming therapy that uses the cutting-edge nano Platinum Technology. This therapy combined with Infra Red Energy effectively targets and reduces stubborn fat and cellulite as well as rejuvenates skin tones and texture.

MFB5 – 22 October 2007

CafeiSilane C, a super fat buster that sculpts your body and gives you firmer, smoother and younger-looking skin.

Bodyfit, a wonder tissue reconstructor that relieves water retention and reduces fat storage.

Regestril, a miracle skin tightener that regenerates new skin cells, increases collagen production, reduces stretch marks and tightens saggy skin.

MFB12 – 8 September 2008

The BioThermie Plus therapy sculpts and tones problem areas such as thighs, buttocks, tummy and arms.

MFB13 – 16 September 2008

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Verbs associated with the female + body/body parts/body condition/skin

targets and *reduces* stubborn fat and cellulite

rejuvenates skin tones and texture

sculpts your body

gives you firmer, smoother and younger-looking skin

relieves water retention

reduces fat storage

regenerates new skin cells

increases collagen production

reduces stretch marks

tightens saggy skin

trim the tummy

smooth stretch marks

helps restore skin radiance and elasticity

sculpts and *tones* problem areas such as thighs, buttocks, tummy and arms

Finally, I had the shapely, toned legs that I've always dreamed of.

Just take a look at Bernice Liu, who transformed from flab to fabulous.

If Bernice can do it, so can you!

You too can get the figure you desire!

If you yearn for a perfectly sculpted, slim figure, let MFB help you achieve your ideal body today.

Some of the verbs suggest the product/service as potent agents to sculpt and tone the “problem areas”. For instance, “*targets* and *reduces* stubborn fat and cellulite” or “*sculpts* and *tones* problem areas such as thighs, buttocks, tummy and arms”.

Other verbs such as *rejuvenates* and *regenerates* call attention to the ability of the subject to restore or renew the skin. Implicit in the use of these verbs, they compel one to ‘correct’ the flaws. The verbs suggest the possibility of attaining the perfect figure. The sentence like, “[j]ust take a look at Bernice Liu, who *transformed* from flab to fabulous” indicates this notion. The verb “*transformed*” implies that a woman’s body is malleable and is easily subjected to desirable changes, such as the one suggested, “from flab to fabulous”.

The clause, “I’ve always *dreamed* of” encapsulates the desire for the “*shapely, toned legs*”. This desire is expressed by the verb “*dreamed*”. It suggests that the “*shapely, toned legs*” are the objects of desire for the women. The adverb “*always*” precedes the verb “*dreamed*” further heightens the intensity of this desire. Moreover, it is stated in one copy that, “[i]f you *yearn* for a perfectly sculpted, slim figure, let MFB help you achieve your ideal body today.”. Again, the verb “*yearn*” suggests a strong desire for “a perfectly sculpted, slim figure”. It is assumed that a perfectly sculpted, slim figure is the type of body shape that all women would long and wish for. And in fact, this desire seems to be within one’s grasp as reflected in these sentences, “If Bernice *can do* it, *so can* you!” or “You too *can get* the figure you desire!”. The use of modal verb “*can*” before the auxiliary verb/verb “*do*” or “*get*” suggests the same possibility of obtaining the “figure you desire”. To represent the ideal body as the object of desire of every woman is yet another ideological positioning.

Extract 7

FIGHT THE FLAB

Can't see yourself giving up your daily indulgences? No time for a proper workout? MFB takes away all your weight management difficulties – no questions asked.

As the world's slimming professionals, we're ready to take on the challenge of sculpting a whole new you! Plus exciting rewards for your weight management with our '**Fight the Flab**' contest.

MFB6 – 5 November 2007

Over-indulged in festive feasting? **Tackle the bulge** with MFB.

It's perfectly normal to over-indulge over the festive season. With all that good food and good company, it's hard to say no. But now that the celebration is over and you're with excess kilos and inches – it's time to get back on track and **tackle the bulge** with MFB.

MFB7 – 11 February 2008

BATTLE YOUR BULGE

Don't wait till you pop out of your clothes.

It's time you did something about those stubborn bulges. Luckily, slimming experts MFB has what it takes to help you slim down and show off a sensational silhouette.

MFB17– 10 November 2008

List of Verbs + Nouns

fight the flab
battle your bulge
tackle the bulge

Extract 7 shows the use of verbs in a rather 'aggressive' manner against the flab and the bulge (body conditions). By using certain verbs to position the perspective of the flab and the bulge as 'enemies'-like, this positioning of verbs strengthen the message of the advertiser that only a very slim, taut and shapely body is considered acceptable, beautiful and attractive.

Some verbs are used to encourage the potential clients to rely on the efficacies of the slimming agents. Other verbs are employed to create the desire to slim down. There

are also verbs that instigate the potential clients to “***fight*** the flab”, “***battle*** the bulge” or “***tackle*** the bulge”. The verbs connote immense struggle with weight issue. The verbs are a call to put on a ‘military’ stance, to “fight”, “battle” and “tackle”. There is a strong need to address the problem of “flab” or “bulge” as if it is something that needs to be defeated. Notice that “flab” or “bulge” is again referred to as the bad, ghastly ‘enemies’ to be affronted in an aggressive militant manner.

Extract 8

MB2 - 3 December 2007

Contestant No: 1
Name: Vanessa Chow Shin Mang
Age: 29
Marital Status: Married

Total Lost in 10 weeks
Before : 67.6kg
After : 52.5kg
Weights : 14.1kg
Body fat : 13%
Cm : 131.5cm

TAG: A beautiful melody for my husband

MY WISH: I want to slim down for my husband so that we can look good together. It is also to get me ready for pregnancy. I hope to appear in the show, playing piano and singing a love song for my husband. I do all these in the name of love!

WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS: Overall Vanessa has a plump body. Hence, the therapies should target at improving her body contour and droopy hips. The most ideal therapies are Mayfair SlimMedic 1 SF and CLA Chili Essence Slimming.

After undergoing the therapies, Vanessa’s hips have shown visible improvement. Her body contour has also improved significantly.

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Verbs + Nouns (in the context of spousal relationship)

I *want to slim down* for my husband so that *we can look good* together.

I *hope to appear* in the show, playing piano and singing a love song for my husband.

I *do all these* in the name of love!

I *can slip* into my wedding gown again and *relive* those blissful moments!

I *can dine romantically* with my beloved hubby!

Most importantly, the youthful spirit *rekindles* my marriage.

Now, my husband and I *can raise* our glasses and toast, celebrating our wedding anniversary with our 4 little angles [sic]!

According to Jeffries (2007) and Böhlke (2008), advertisements constantly stress the importance of being slim. From their research, it is found that advertisements promote slimness as means for a woman to appear sexually attractive to men or secure romantic love. Extract 8 provides an example of this in the context of spousal relationship. It is a compilation of slimming advertisements in the form of reality competition. In each ad, the textual components display a tagline, bio-data, “my wish”, expert voice and an itemized total weight lost in ten weeks (promotional items are excluded here). The bio-data briefly states the contestants’ name, age and marital status. The five finalists are between 29 to 45 years of age. For all the five finalists, the textual evidence of their success in reshaping to an ideal body is measured within a short duration of ten weeks of their total weight lost, percentage of fat lost and the total centimetres trimmed. The five finalists’ wishes convey their struggles in keeping their body shape, mainly after being married and childbirth. Four out of five of the finalists wish to slim down to please their husbands; the only exception is a single mother. All five of them, in one way or another, hope to slim down to feel beautiful and regain self-confidence. Each of the taglines echoes the wish of the respective contestants. The lexical items that express the notion of slimming down as a means to attract their spouses are listed.

The tagline, “A Beautiful Melody For My Husband” expresses Vanessa’s wish. She says, “I *want to slim down* for my husband so that we can look good together”. She

also hopes to “appear in the show, playing piano and singing a love song for [her] husband”. Vanessa’s single goal of slimming down is to please her husband or as she exclaimed, “I do all these in the name of love!”. The phrasal verb “want to slim down” is a strong indication of her desire to become slimmer. The verb, “do” in “I do all these in the name of love!” shows Vanessa’s real motive to “want to slim down” is solely for the reason that she “can look good together” with the husband. It is not for her own health.

The next three contest finalists, Valerie, Kelly and Yok Chin are lamenting the weight gain after childbirth, a fairly normal occurrence among post-partum women. This affects them in a number of ways: lack of self-confidence, feelings of envy and insecurity began to seep into their lives. More than that, dimmed marital life is repeatedly referred to due to their weight gain. Valerie wishes to “slip into [her] wedding gown again and relive those blissful moments”; Kelly desires to “dine romantically with [her] beloved hubby”; and Yok Chin enthuses, “my husband and I can raise our glasses and toast, celebrating our wedding anniversary with our four little angels [sic]”. The verbs these women used allude to romantic desire. This romantic desire as indicated here is only dependent upon weight loss. Only by losing some weight, these women are able to please their husbands. In other words, these three wishes are not much different from Vanessa’s, whose single-mindedly wishes to slim down to please her husband. The effort to lose weight in order to please the husband is a very patriarchal notion. It is ideological as it makes the women feel inadequate, somewhat an appendage to the men.

A lackluster conjugal life does not just depend on the body shape of the wife; there are many other reasons and both spouses are equally responsible. To lament their insecurities and desire to please the husband is tantamount to place the responsibility on the shoulders of women alone in making a marriage works.

5.1.3 SCIENTIFIC-RELATED LEXICALIZATION

Scientific-related lexicalization is an important aspect in this study. It helps to make clear how the modern day slimming advertisements actually include medico-scientific jargons in order to lend credibility to its claims. Studies done by Zuraidah Mohd Don (2003) and Zuraidah and Knowles (2009) dealt with hybrid genres – one of which is the scientific discourse in promotional materials (i.e. *La Mer*, *La Prairie*, *Clarins*, *SK-II*). Their studies report that the colonization of the advertising genre by other genres, in particular, “the new hybrid partly scientific genres” (Zuraidah, 2003: 271). By blurring the boundaries of contemporary promotional materials, the medico-scientific jargons tap into the authority of science to legitimize their claims (for further details, see Section 2.5.2.6).

Extract 9

At Marie France Bodyline, we understand your body. Different problem areas require specific targeting methods. Our slimming programmes use a combination of advanced technologies all aimed specifically at removing stubborn flab and toning the arm area. You'll feel confident with your new fit and fabulous arms!

MFB1 – 23 July 2007

From weight management to targeted fat reduction therapies, MFBB has the answer to every slimming problem you face. Whether you want a flatter tummy, trimmer thighs or slimmer arms, our revolutionary technology and expertise can help you achieve the figure of your dreams. So if you want to flaunt a sleek, sexy body like Bernice Liu, come talk to us today!

MFB2 – 17 September 2007

There, i was quickly introduced to BioThermie Plus, an excellent fat reduction programme that targets the most stubborn areas to help you shed excess pounds.

MFB3 – 3 October 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

List of Scientific-related Lexicalization

BioThermie Plus
CLS3
Cryocelle Phased Therapy (CPT)
Mesosound Biactive System (MBS)
Dynamic Sculpt Programme (DSP)
Infrared Thermo Ray
Mechanical Kneading, Techniques and Colour Mask
Thermolysis therapy
Mesotherapy
lipo-Nano System.
nano Platinum Technology
Infra Red Energy
Laser Pulse System (LPS)
Level Laser Therapy (LLLT)
Cryotherapy
Rhythmic Kneading
Mesosound BIActive System
Mesoporation
BIActive Cocktail
BioThermie Plus
Bodytech™ Perfectionist System (BTPS)
Bodyfit
Regestril
CafeiSilane C
SlimMedic 1 SF
CLA Chilli Essence Slimming
SlimMedic 1DD
VIBE-KT
RF Meso Shape Up
UTS
Fat Dissolving Mode

a combination of *advanced* technologies
revolutionary technology and expertise
revolutionary programmes
groundbreaking new slimming solution
the *cutting-edge* nano Platinum Technology
tonic agents such as Guarana, Cocoa, Papaya Leaf Extract and other natural ingredients

Slimming advertising straddles twin discourses of beauty and science whereby beauty is the goal and the science is the means of achieving it. With the choice of specific terminologies in the data, for instance, “*Cryocelle Phased Therapy (CPT), Mesosound Biactive System (MBS), Dynamic Sculpt Programme (DSP), Mesotherapy, Lipo-Nano System, BodyTech Perfectionist System (BTPS), Bodyfit, CafeiSilane C, Regestril* and

RF Meso” are but some handful of revolutionary medical terms to refer to some of the ingredients/methods used in the products/services. The choice of specific terminologies, couched in “the authority of science lends credence not just to the efficacy of the product but the legitimacy of the beauty that is the product’s goal” (Wykes & Gunter, 2005: 48). They promise to guarantee satisfying results. Medical terms reverberate the scientific knowledge and expertise. For example, the medical terms are usually exclusive, affiliated with authority in science and assumed expert knowledge. The use of medico-scientific vocabulary serves to advance the notion of reliability and trustworthiness towards the products/services. For instance, words like “*advanced, expertise, patented, revolutionary, technology/ies, effective solutions* and *excellent slimming results*” lend credibility in the names of science and technology. Very often, adjectives before the nouns like “*advanced technologies*”, “*revolutionary technology and expertise*”, “*revolutionary programmes*”, “*groundbreaking new slimming solution*” and the “*cutting-edge nano Platinum Technology*” are used to further heightened the products/services’ reliability and credibility. Again, this possibly works to legitimize the advertiser/s’ claims.

5.1.4 PROMISE/ASSURANCE-RELATED LEXICALIZATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE FEMALE BODY

Promises or assurances are important parts of advertising. Without those promises or assurances, the efficacies of the product/service are not clearly sounded out. Therefore, advertisers rely heavily on promise/assurance-related lexicalization to build up a sense of guarantee as well as proclaiming the novelty of the product/service.

Extract 10

Flabby, sagging arms will now be a thing of the past. The experts at Marie France Bodyline can help you trim away those unwanted inches.

At Marie France Bodyline, we understand your body. Different problem areas require specific targeting methods. [...] You'll feel confident with your new fit and fabulous arms!

MFB1 – 23 July 2007

From weight management to targeted fat reduction therapies, MFB has the answer to every slimming problem you face. Whether you want a flatter tummy, trimmer thighs or slimmer arms, our revolutionary technology and expertise can help you achieve the figure of your dreams.

MFB2 – 17 September 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

List of promises/assurances associated with the female body

The experts at Marie France Bodyline can help you trim away those unwanted inches. At Marie France Bodyline, we understand your body. Different problem areas require specific targeting methods. [...] You'll feel confident with your new fit and fabulous arms!

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Extract 10 gives a long list of assurances/promises associated with the female body from the slimming centres. The copies convey the advertisers' ability to "***understand***" the women's problems. The word "***understand***" is a verb. It is an action word. It gives a sense of empathy and a tone that is of care and concern. It appeals to the emotional empathy to the women's weight gain plight. Furthermore, the women are consoled not to worry in copies that say, "***no more worries about gaining weight***" or "***no more worries about cellulite, unsightly bulges and saggy skin***". The word "worries" is the plural form of the noun 'worry'. By using the plural form, it stresses on a state of being overloaded with 'worries' - not just one. The 'worries' take away one's peace of mind. Here, the slimming advertisements that use the noun "worry/worries" are having the

assumption that those who do not conform to the ideal female body are troubled or agonized. The phrase, “*no more worries* [...]” links the weight loss condition to a state of mind; also, “*no more* [...]” ensures a sense of assurance, certainty and guarantee because they can offer “*help*”, “*effective therapy*”, “*long lasting solution*” or “*ultimate slimming solutions*” in a very “*short time*”. Not only do these words promote the effectiveness of their slimming programmes or the efficacies of their products, these promises can be achieved almost immediately, as long as the women go to their slimming outlets. In fact, one slimming centre even “*has the answer to every slimming problem you face*” and can resolve the problems very “*quickly, effectively and comfortably*”. Besides dealing with weight issues, they offer help to achieve “*a slimmer and more sensational body*” or “*dream figure*” or “*ideal body*”. In other words, they also promote the perfect figure. Like the examples in a copy that says, “*When it comes to body perfection, we are the one name women trust for lasting results.*” There were even claims that they are “*the pioneer slimming professionals*” with “*thousands of satisfied customers and lasting results*”. Such claims boast of novelty and incredible achievements. With that, a sense of assurance or promise is provided through several means: empathy, efficacies of products/services, trust, worry-free and short duration for weight loss guarantees, and last but not least, “*body perfection*” promise.

5.1.5 POSITIVE/NEGATIVE FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FEMALE BODY

Advertisers construct the ideas that slim women are endowed with positive attributes. The advertisers position those who are slim as those who are happy, confident and successful. On the contrary, those who are overweight are afflicted with dissatisfaction, unhappiness and desperation. The researcher observed that the lexicalization used

usually states one's feelings in dichotomous extreme: either it is positive or negative.

This is often projected through 'feelings' of the spokesperson/s.

Extract 11

At Marie France Bodyline, we understand your body. Different problem areas require specific targeting methods. Our slimming programmes use a combination of advanced technologies all aimed specifically at removing stubborn flab and toning the arm area. You'll feel **confident** with your new fit and fabulous arms!

MFB1 – 23 July 2007

Actresses have **nightmares** too! Me? I've always been a **victim of thunder thighs and chunky legs**. Months of **vain attempts** to keep trim by dancing did nothing for me. This, coupled with my hectic schedule and diet struggles only served to **discourage me** further – as I always ended up **exhausted and unhappy**. Then i realised, "I can't be doing this forever!" So I turned to MFB for help. What a good move!

MFB1 – 23 July 2007

There, i was quickly introduced to BioThermie Plus, an excellent fat reduction programme that targets the most stubborn areas to help you shed excess pounds. The next thing I knew, I looked in the mirror one day and saw a total body transformation! Finally, I had the shapely, toned legs that I've always **dreamed of**.

MFB3 – 3 October 2007

[for more examples, see Appendix H]

Feelings such as pride, happiness and "**confident**" are commonly ascribed to those who have perfect figure. These women with the perfect figure exude a deep sense of joy and confidence that seems to be elusive to those who are overweight. They are living their dreams when they have the "the shapely, toned legs that I've always **dreamed of**". As a result, women would consider these positive attributes as something that are related to their body size or shape. For women with the non-ideal body size or shape, they are portrayed as "**desperate, fretful, discouraged**" and "**unhappy**". Such association of negative feelings with these women makes them feel unworthy and suffer from low self-esteem. As Tan (2010: 98) posits, "[t]he root cause for low self-esteem is actually

the ideology of the mass media that equates a slim body with beauty”.

This is an ideological notion because one’s self-esteem and self-confidence do not rely on the size or shape of their body. Constantly, advertisements’ messages thrive on self-depreciation, doubt and fear to literally drive women into buying the products or signing up for the services promoted. In fact, an extract from Stannard’s (1971: 10) essay, which was four decades ago, is still relevant today. Stannard strongly criticizes advertising on beauty products on how it promotes the stereotypical notions of female beauty. Women are constantly regarded as inferior beings by magnifying the imperfections of women’s body and reminding them of the need for a physical transformation (Stannard, 1971: 10 as cited in Zuraidah, 2003: 274):

Everyday in every way, the billion dollar beauty business tells women they are monsters in disguise. Every ad for bras tells women that her breasts need lifting ... every ad for high heels that her legs need propping, every ad for cosmetics that her skin is too dry, too pale, or too ruddy, or her lips are not bright enough. ... in this culture women are told they are the fair sex, but at the same time that their “beauty” needs lifting, shaping, dyeing, painting, curling, padding.

5.1.6 PERSONAL ADDRESS “YOU”

Delin (2000: 135) comments that, “[f]rom the different levels of linguistic structure (devices) being used, changed, or exploited, it aims at replicating “face-to-face conversation” to build relations in order to create normalcy, to personalize and to downplay power imbalance.”

In addition to promise/assurance-related lexicalization associated with the female body, the use of pronoun “you” is not just a form of address. The very choice is carefully selected to mitigate the sense of impersonal, mass communication mode of advertising.

Lexical items that refer the target consumers as “you” or the possessive forms, “your, yours” counter the problems of advertising being too impersonal as it is commonly addressing en masse public audience. The term “synthetic personalization”, as Fairclough (1989: 62) calls and describes it as “a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people ‘handled’ en masse as an individual” (see also Williamson, 1978: 50-51). Fairclough (1989: 128) surmises that by the use of ‘you’ as a direct address to the reader/viewer, it is enacting at least one conversational device and constitutes “simulated personal address [...] to remedy increasing impersonality”. As individuality is highly valued in Western society, people generally do not like to feel that they are being addressed as part of a mass audience.

Apart from addressing and connecting a mass of people as individuals through the pronoun “you”, personalization also involves an adoption of a conversational style that helps to narrow the gap and mitigate a sense of inequality. It also gives an impression of an equal power relation between reader and advertiser. This dispels a sense of being talked into or deluded into buying products/services. It shrinks the gap in mass communication and the personal addresses also enhance a sense of importance. In this way, it appeals to the reader’s sense of individuality and importance, hence, the reader may be more open and more willing to accept the notions advertised.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The data analyzes show how the female body is depicted in the slimming advertisements. The female body is usually referred to in two ways: generally, as body/figure/shape and specifically, in terms of body parts (i.e. arms, thighs, waist/waistline, and buttocks). Different types of lexicalization are employed to depict the female body: negative lexicalization, positive lexicalization, scientific-related

lexicalization, promise/assurance-related lexicalization and words associated with positive/negative feelings.

From the detailed textual analyses above, the positive lexicalization reveals how the slimming advertisements promote and endorse the ‘slim, shapely and taut’ body as the ideal body for women. Positively lexicalized adjectives such as “*slim/slimmer, slender*” are extensively employed to endorse the type of female body that is regarded as attractive, appealing and desirable. The body must also be in good shape, where “*curvaceous, svelte, shapely/shapelier, sleek, sculpted*” are some of the prevalent shapes that are considered sexy, gorgeous, fabulous and sensational. Besides, the body should also be “*toned, firm/firmer, tight/tighter*”. Adverb like “*perfectly*” further affirms the prescribed ‘ideals’ as perfect and desirable. Only when the female body fits into the aforementioned criteria, it will be regarded as the “*fabulous*” or “*dream*” figure. The advertisers, as the analyses show, projected women who have these ‘ideals’ as those who exude confidence, pride and happiness. The constant reminder of the ideal female figure is relegating women as inadequate and imperfect unless they subscribe to these ideals. The pursuit of the idealized body does not remain in a state of desire; it will eventually dovetail with attempt(s) to change their body (Orbach, 2009). The advertisers’ construction of the ideal female body is encouraging Malaysian women to pursue these ‘ideals’ as they are attributes that are highly prized by the society. It is demeaning and degrading for the women to be deemed inadequate and imperfect simply by their look. Such endorsed view of what is considered as ‘the’ beautiful body for women is but an ideology that thrives on elusive perfection.

Nouns such as “*fat, flab, cellulite, bulges, wrinkles*” and adjectives like “*droppy, flabby, sagging, bulging, chunky, wide*” and so forth dwell on all the negative aspects of the female body. The pervasive negative presentation of the female body seems to imply that only the prescribed ‘ideals’ are considered acceptable and beautiful. The data

analyses show that advertisers also associated negative feelings with women who are overweight. They are described as “*desperate, fretting, discourage, unhappy*” and even was addressed as the “*victim*”. Another implication through negative lexical items is conjuring up a sense of not being in the ‘normal’ circumference of things; in the case of slimming advertisements, the ‘normal’ is the prescribed ‘ideals’. These narrow claims and notions only put women in a state of dissatisfaction and make them feel dissatisfied with the size of their body. With such an idea constantly reinforced by the media it is of little wonder that women are easily perturbed by the slightest sign of being overweight (just like other natural biological changes, ie. ageing, greying/thinning of hair, wrinkles, pigmentation). The dread of fat sends them into frenzy diets, exercising and when they still fail to fit in that ‘perfect’ figure, some experience a sense of failure (Kim & Lennon, 2006; Nasser, 1994, 1997 as cited in Swami & Tovée, 2005), others may feel overwhelmed and many others plunge into low self-esteem (Scriven, 2007; Grogan, 1999) or even self-loathe. This sense of fat-dread may cross over to psychological disturbances that may affect the quality of life of a woman (for a more in depth discussion on some of the repercussions, refer to Chapter 8).

The juxtaposition of negative and positive expressions (somewhat parallel to before and after visual structure) suggests how the flawed bodies can be easily ‘fixed’ through their products/services. On one hand, the negatives call attention to the ‘flaws’; the positives, on the other hand, create space or opportunity to remedy the problems. Both presentations of positive and negative lexis represent pre- and post-use of products/services and in this way, present a cogent case for the recommended transformation. In other words, this is affirming the possibility of attaining the desired body and legitimizing the advertisers’ claims. Hence, the justification for the use of the products/services is laid out. With promises and assurances, as well as scientific-related

lexicalization, the advertisers drive home the message their product/service are effective, reliable and trustworthy.

On the whole, the findings from the textual analysis show how the advertisers constructed the ideal female body. In this culture and age, the constructed ideal female body is strongly advocated, highly esteemed and pervasive. This construction is positioned in such a way that it seems natural and common sense. This may shape the minds of Malaysian women into internalizing and desiring the ideal female body. If such ideology remains unchallenged, Simone de Beauvoir's famous aphorism, "[w]omen are made and not born" will indeed become women's worst predicament (as cited in Orbach, 2009: 171).

CHAPTER 6: VISUAL ANALYSIS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

The descriptive framework adopted is derived from Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory of grammar of visual design (see Section 4.2.3 for a detailed description). The data is analyzed according to three functions: representational, interactional and compositional. Each of these is further subdivided into several categories as outlined in Figure 3 (cf. Section 4.2.3).

This chapter begins with a brief description of the visual framework (Section 6.1), followed by several sections of analysis. The analysis is based on five main themes (see Sections 6.2 – 6.6). The selection of the advertisements considered a variety portrayal of the female body or claims by category (as listed in Section 4.3.3): celebrity endorsement, fat to slim transformation, mothers/post-natal, morbidly obese, medico-scientific methods and even reality show on weight loss campaign. Some of the slimming advertisements used more than one category of claims; hence, there were overlapping of claims in an advertisement. For the purpose of an in-depth analysis in this chapter, only 9 advertisements are chosen. The 9 selected advertisements are categorized according to five main themes: i) celebrity endorsement; ii) morbidly obese; iii) fat to slim transformation; iv) mirror gazing; and finally, v) mothers. They reflect the predominant themes that occurred in the 100 print advertisements. The 'mirror gazing' theme, though used the least, is included as it appears unique and noteworthy to analyze the different strategy (i.e. ways to attract potential clients) employed by the advertiser. In the next section, the selected slimming advertisements from the aforementioned five categories are systematically analyzed.

6.1 VISUAL ANALYSIS: FRAMEWORK DESCRIPTION

The framework offers a detailed, structured and systematic means of describing the images. Five main structures of the images are explored and illustrated in relation to the selected slimming advertisements from the corpus: forms of *representation*; *composition*; *interactive meaning*; *setting*; and *appearance of the represented participants* (emphasis author's). In the first dimension of the representational form, narrative processes and conceptual patterns are described. The setting, props and represented appearance (posture, facial expressions, gestures, attire, hair and shoes) are also taken into consideration should they contribute to the meaning making. These resources are considered as some of the resources of the non-verbal communication (NVC for short).³¹

By means of NVC resources, the meaning making can be further understood (cf. Section 4.2.3.2 for further details). The interactive plane, on the other hand, records the relationship between the represented and the viewer. This is done through encoding of viewer-represented point of view (angle, eye-level), contact (demand, offer) and distance classified under close, medium or long shot. On the compositional dimension, attention is given to the salience and framing of elements; whether elements are new or given, vertically or horizontally polarized, marginal or central to the overall composition of the image. In this way, the descriptions of the images are used to systematically explore and generate embedded assumptions of female body image. In Chapter 4, Sections 4.2.3.1 – 4.2.3.3 illustrate in detail the key dimensions (representational, interactional and compositional) of the method.

In this section, a detailed and systematic analysis of each visual in the selected slimming advertisements is carried out using the key dimensions by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory of the grammar of visual design. The descriptive framework aims at

looking empirically “what is in” the image. Jewitt (1999: 265) also reminded that this meaning should be seen as an embedded and integral part of our sociocultural environment.

6.2 CATEGORY 1: CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

The use of celebrities to endorse a brand/product/service is a popular marketing strategy. The association between two dissimilar objects is drawn, as Eisenstein (1977: 14-15 as cited in Nalon, 1997:80) clarifies:

We are accustomed to make, almost automatically, a definite and obvious deductive generalisation when any separate objects are placed before us side by side [...]. This tendency to bring together into a unity two or more independent objects or qualities is very strong, even in the case of separate words; characterising different aspects of some single phenomenon [...].

To see how the association between two dissimilar objects works, an example of a perfume ad is used. A bowl of fresh apples is placed next to a bottle of perfume. They are two unrelated objects: a type of fruit and a vanity aid; yet the connection is made - that the fragrance is as fresh as the apples. The essence of the perfume lies in its freshness. Similarly, when a celebrity figure endorses a certain brand or product or service, the association between both the celebrity figure and brand is also established. Drawing from McCracken's (1989) work, Choi and Rifon (2007: 307) explain how celebrity endorsement works:

When celebrities are hired as endorsers in advertising, marketers hope that consumers accept and consume the meanings celebrity endorsers represent and then link these meanings with their products. In today's society, consumers are constantly transporting symbolic properties out of products into their lives to

construct their self. [...]. Celebrities signify important cultural meanings that many consumers find personally relevant. When consumers find a celebrity's images desirable and resonant, they may aspire to be like the celebrity. Celebrity emulation may take the form of purchasing and using the product endorsed by the celebrity, thereby obtaining the celebrity-conveyed meanings and constructing a satisfying self-concept.

In the same way, when slimming advertisements use celebrities to endorse their brand/product/service – they are essentially transferring the symbolic meaning what these celebrities represent to their brand/product/service. The celebrities, known for their fame, success and slim figure, influence the consumers “to idolize celebrities and emulate their styles and behaviors.” (Choi & Rifon, 2007: 307). The following sections analyze the selected advertisements in details.

6.2.1 Advertisement 1: “Thigh Envy” (MFB 3)

This advertisements, by Marie France Bodyline, appeared in a full page of *The Star* on the 3 October 2007 (see Appendix I: Ad 1). The top and bottom bands are factual information: the slimming company’s name (top) with its various branches and contacts (bottom). This information does not contribute to the visual analysis. Therefore, it will not be considered further as it is not the main focus of this study. The space is vertically divided into left and right columns, both equally divided. The left column is a long shot display of the spokesperson, Bernice Liu Bik Yee, Hong Kong Actress and Marie France Bodyline’s spokesperson and on the right, the tagline, body copy and promotional details are set in three paragraphs.

Representational Meaning: Both narrative and conceptual processes are identified in Advertisement 1. Bernice Liu Bik Yee is the only featured person in this frame. In

terms of the narrative processes, she is portrayed in a non-transactional reactional process. This is seen from the main vector formed by her eyeline. Her glance is directed at a point outside the frame (at the viewer, for instance). Other vectors include her arms and how they touched her hips lightly. This is the first level of processes to show how the represented participant, Bernice is the “Reactor”. It also shows how she engages the viewers.

This shot also acquires symbolic significance conceptually. The dominant representation of Bernice, as seen by analysis of her hair, posture, attire, facial expression and props, is one of conventional hegemonic femininity. Her long tousled hair (with air-blown effect), standing pose with both arms rested at her hips, right leg is pointed to the front and left leg, perpendicularly angled, is slightly bent and open. She is dressed in a body-hugging, lacy plunging neckline top with a pair of fitting mini-shorts. Her direct gaze engages the viewer and her lips are slightly open. Here is a picture perfect of an alluring, slender woman – she looks sexy and desirable; she is the representation of what it means to be feminine, beautiful and desirable. In this light, Bernice’s identity as a woman is symbolically ‘being’ defined. She defines what it means to be an attractive woman. Symbolic attributes of femininity, attractiveness and sexual appeal are made salient in the representation; for example, by her pose, attire, tousled hair and facial expressions. The plunging neckline top, mini shorts and stilettos are props that bestow symbolic meanings on the represented participant. They are potent cultural symbols of female sexual appeal and are used to confer femininity on the women in general. Bernice, as the represented participant, is also related in terms of part-whole structure: she is the carrier of sensual femininity (the whole person) with a number of body parts being highlighted (breasts, arms, waist, hips, thighs). These parts are accentuated to define the whole: the plunging neckline shows the cleavage, body-hugging top accentuates the slim waist, tilting of the hip brings out the curvy hips and

the tagline clearly stresses how her thighs are to be envied. All these visual messages prescribed what is considered sexually appealing.

Interactive Meaning: In this particular ad, Bernice Liu interacts with the viewers and suggests the attitude they should take towards her image. In terms of *contact*, she gazes directly at the viewers, hence, making contact with them. This in turn establishes an imaginary relationship. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1997), such an image is considered as a “demand” picture where the represented symbolically demands something from the viewer. To point out exactly what is/are demanded, facial expression and gestures can fill in the blank: here, Bernice – being an actress who are proud of her “shapely toned legs” demands admiration and even envy from her viewer. As she claims, “I’m now the envy of all women. [...] Hey, if you’ve got it, flaunt it!”. The tagline, “Thigh Envy” is presented in upper case and enlarged font and is strategically placed next to her thighs – drawing attention to them. Her very words and the tagline support her demand for envy and adoration. The *frontal angle* with hands on hips and legs slightly astride further increases viewer identification and involvement with her. However, the *long shot distance*, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), would carry the idea of impersonal relationship and yet, in cases like slimming advertisements, more accurately, the long shots are meant to bring into focus the entire slim silhouette of the represented. It is not really about distancing the represented from the viewer. Just as her *contact* and *front angle* pointed out – they are structured in such a way to engage the viewer, specifically, to increase their identification, involvement and to be envious of her.

Compositional Meaning: The placement of three key elements of a composition – information value, framing and salience is important. The compositional structures serve to enhance the meaning produced through the image(s) and text. Ad 1 has very definite compositional structures: image on the left and text on the right. The equal

division of image and text suggests that both image and text are important to support the intended message of “thigh envy” to the audience. Two different modes are clearly in use to realize different communicative functions – the visual to convey the evidence of weight loss (or thigh trimming), the writing to convey the personal voice of the spokesperson. There is no distinct frameline. The absence of frameline helps to connect both modes where no barrier segregates them. This helps to strengthen the message. In terms of salience, the different font size, also makes some elements more eye-catching than others. The words “THIGH ENVY” are in uppercase, enlarged font, white wording contrasted against a framed shaded box and strategically placed in the middle of the page next to Bernice’s left thigh. Even the text is made salient through bold print to highlight the testimonial from the represented.

6.2.2 Advertisement 2: “Flaunt Slender, Toned Arms” (MFB 1)

Similar to Advertisement 1, this advertisement focuses on “slender, toned arms” instead of thighs (see Appendix I: Advertisement 2). Also by Marie France Bodyline, the Advertisement appeared full page on the 23 July, 2007 of *The Star*. Again, the space is vertically divided into left and right columns, both equally divided. The left column contains the tagline, body copy and promotional details are set in three paragraphs and on the right, a long shot display of spokesperson, Andrea Fonseka. Her credentials include: Miss Malaysia/Universe 2004 and Marie France Bodyline client.

Representational Meaning: Through the narrative and conceptual processes, both processes inform us with regards to Andrea’s portrayal. In what seems like a reclining pose, Andrea is shown leaning against a wall with her right arm raised, slightly above her head. Her left arm is resting lightly against the wall. She is wearing a spaghetti strapped top with almost a quarter of her breasts in view. The beads adorning the top draw attention to the cleavage. The mini-shorts show the side view of her buttocks and

slim legs. The visual strikes a sexy and alluring appeal which attracts both males and females alike. Again, Andrea is seen in a non-transactional reactional process where the main vector is formed by her eyeline. She looks directly at a point outside the frame. Symbolic attributes of femininity and sensual sex appeal are made salient in the representation, for example, by her pose, attire, long hair and facial expressions. Andrea's facial expressions further add to her sex appeal. With her pouted lips and direct gaze which speaks of sensual desirability, she is the representation of what it means to be sexy, beautiful and desirable. Andrea is symbolically defining her identity as a woman.

Interactive Meaning: On the interactive plane, Andrea strikes an imaginary contact with the viewer through direct eye contact and body language. She invites the viewer to desire her. Although there is no verbal testimony as the spokesperson in Advertisement 1 has done, Andrea flaunts her "slender" and "toned arms". Above all, she flaunts her feminine assets to gain the viewer's admiration and increases desire for identification with what she has to offer.

Compositional Meaning: The placement of the three key elements of a composition – information value, framing and salience are seen in the light of how they serve to integrate the many different components into a cohesive piece. Advertisement 2 presents a clear vertical left and right division between the image and text. The image of Andrea Fonseka is strongly engaging, as shown through the representational and interactional metafunctions. Words enhance and highlight the information value of the catch-phrase, "flaunt slender, toned arms". The subsequent body copy, for example, has a much smaller font size compared to the catch-phrase. Here, it goes to show where the advertiser's premise is laid: to draw the audience's attention to the key catch-phrase. Besides, the extra information on the package deal of RM2,999 for 88 sessions with thirteen therapies listed. A thin line frames another two attractive offers: "SMS Now To

Receive A Free Slimming Session” and “1st 10 SMS senders will receive a Mineral Remodelling Therapy FREE”. Together with the image, the creative use of orthography draws attention to the catch-phrase. The offer of the seemingly irresistible freebies, in addition, helps to strengthen the salience value of this advertisement.

6.3 CATEGORY 2: MORBIDLY OBESE

Fat or obese people are rarely featured in slimming advertisements unless it is to show the fat-to-slim transformation or before and after photo shots. But for Esthetika Slimming Beauty Centre (ESBC), it is found that there are a few advertisements that featured the obese. The following advertisement is first published on the 5 March 2008 (see Appendix I: Advertisement 3). Another similar advertisement can be seen in Advertisement 4 (cf. Section 6.3.2).

6.3.1 Advertisement 3: “Going nowhere with hard work?” (E 4)

Advertisement 3 differs from Category 1 advertisements (celebrity endorsement). It depicts a fat, unnamed woman instead of slim and trim renowned spokesperson. Here, it shows an obese struggling while exercising on a treadmill.

Representational Meaning: The narrative and conceptual processes are identified. The fat lady is represented in terms of unidirectional transactional action process. She is working out at a machine. Although it was not told where she was exercising one can safely say that she is probably working out in a fitness centre. She wore a sleeveless work-out top, with a sweat band on the wrist. Unlike Advertisement 1 and Advertisement 2, feminine appeal is not employed to ‘sell’ the message here. This image, on the contrary, is far from flattering. She is portrayed at her worst moment – exhausted, desperate and miserable - struggling to shed some weight by exercising. The

vector from her raised left hand to wipe her sweat points to the hopeless expression on her face: downcast eyes, droopy lips and saggy double chin. The thick rimmed spectacles and her dishevelled curls further accentuate her distressed look. She is, in short, symbolically portrayed as an icon of obesity: bloated face, saggy double chin, fat hands and arms, huge broad shoulders and enormous upper torso. Her look and gesture represented her as someone suffering from exertion and being fat.

Interactive Meaning: Void of eye contact, this is clearly a form of an *offer* form of information. With this kind of *offer* contact, the represented comes across as a specimen on display – to be observed. She seems rather impersonal and detached. The image is captured in a medium close shot – which is suggestive of a social relationship. In fact, the frontal angle draws the viewer even closer with facial expression and body language. With everything up close, it easily increases the viewer's identification and involvement. Just as Nalon (1997: 30) tells us, “[i]n effect, participants that are represented frontally are meant to be considered as belonging to the world of the viewer and to provoke a high level of involvement or interest on his/her part”.

Compositional Meaning: The various elements of a visual text can be distributed along two main axes: the horizontal (left/right) and the vertical (top/bottom). Horizontally, the main row is divided into two (borderless) columns: the left column containing a text (contains a tagline sandwiched between two promotional texts) and the right column containing an image (a frightfully obese and tired looking woman exercising on a treadmill). Vertically, the space for the advertisement is divided into two rows, the top row taking up about 90% of the space, and the remaining 10% making a narrow bar at the bottom. The bottom band gives straight information about the company. The interplay of centre/margin, top/bottom and left-to-right guides a reading path from the most salient element, to the next most salient and so on. The image of the woman is made salient through size. It takes up more than half the top of the page. Size and tonal

contrasts can make these elements more eye-catching. As the represented is foregrounded against a formless background (in terms of framing), both the visual and written elements appeared to belong together. The lack of framing connects the various elements in a visual composition and creates a unity of information. Therefore, the message of the fat lady's futile effort is registered textually ("Going nowhere with hard work?") and visually (icon of obesity).

6.3.2 Advertisement 4: "Are you living dangerously?" (E 5)

Similar to Advertisement 3, Advertisement 4 showcases another fat female body. She is addressed impersonally as 'you' given the faceless and back profile of a woman in the advertisement. In a way, she can represent just anybody who is struggling with weight issue. The publication details are as followed: appeared in a full page of *The Star* on the 3 October 2007 (see Appendix I: Advertisement 4) by Esthetika Slimming Beauty Centre (ESBC).

Representational Meaning: It is quite uncommon to have an image of the back torso – faceless and detached as promotional material for slimming. It is accompanied by a tagline in the form of a warning, "Are you living dangerously?" which runs across it. The tagline builds a presupposition that being fat is living dangerously. The image and the tagline work together to foreground the danger of being fat. The most salient element in the advertisement is the image of a frightfully faceless obese torso. The image is presented in terms of "being something", as in the case of Ad 3, being fat. Conceptually, the symbolic processes delineate the faceless lady as another icon of obesity: her torso is crammed into a tight fitting top where this causes the skin on her back to be folded and bulges appear at her waist. Her hair is pushed to one side so that the viewer can have a full view of her enormous upper back. Just as her back is objectified, she is objectified too. She becomes an object to be looked at rather than to

be engaged with. The woman is standing with her fat arms hanging down unnaturally at her sides. From such a portrayal, the representation of fat is established. Fat is problematized not only in the visual but also in the writing.

Interactive Meaning: From the Kress and van Leeuwen's framework of distance analysis, this is a medium close shot, frontal angle without the represented eye contact. At the interactive meanings plane, the represented is being observed by the viewer. The viewer looks at the represented participant as someone who is grossly fat and struggles with her weight problem. It stirs up the fear of fat in just about anybody. This tells us that the visual is definitely carefully 'crafted' to convey the fear-of-fat message. From the textual evidence, the question posed across the mid-page warns, "Are you living dangerously?" and a body copy that threatens and follow-up by their "breakthrough technologies". Threats and warnings abound in this advertisement simply to draw viewer to abhor fat – fat-phobia being the means whereas threats and warnings are the justifications. The promotional text has a 'problem-solution-promise' rhetorical structure which interacts with the viewer. The problem is the irrefutable and inevitable reality that "You can't run from fat", the solution is "Esthetika's proven range of rewarding slimming solutions" and the promise is "we can help you win the battle of bulges in less time".

Compositional Meaning: The layout of the second advertisement is the same as Advertisement 3 as described above, except that the positions of the columns dividing the upper row are reversed. That is, the left column contains text and the right column contains image. The advertisement gives three different but interrelated sets of information: the image of a back torso; fat is inevitable but there is a solution to the problem, and contact information as above. Placed on the left, the image is presented as given, something that we are familiar with and already know (i.e. overweight problem). The written elements are placed on the right (the promotional texts) are presented as

new, in the centre (the tagline) presented as central and at the bottom presented as real. The bottom band contains specific information about the company including details about the name of the slimming beauty centre “Esthetika”, its location, opening hours, contact number and the website. The written text in the upper row is structured as a question-answer sequence.

Below the tagline is the offer of services for slimming and facial. It is given a separate identity with borders and the background in a different shade making it stand out from its surrounding. The opening line, “It’s your choice!” is somewhat like a continuation of the question, “Are you living dangerously?”. This line suggests that it is in the hand of the addressee, and it is for the addressee to decide whether to accept the offer or not. The offer itself is free and the word “free” is made salient by the font size.

6.4 CATEGORY 3: FAT TO SLIM TRANSFORMATION

Fat to slim transformation or also commonly known as, before and after photo shot is one of the longstanding strategies to sell the slimming deal. It is considered one of the most effective means to convince the potential clients. As the ‘before’ and ‘after’ shots are from the same person, it is a tangible proof of the slimming process or transformation. They are one of the oldest forms of showing slimming possibility through professional slimming service or product. It is also one of the popular choices as it seems most convincing with the evidence of the before and after shots. Many slimming centres favour this method to attract potential clients.

6.4.1 Advertisement 5: “Go from imperfect to perfect” (MFB 14)

Advertisement 5 is divided into two equal columns with the visual on the left side and bodycopy, promotional details and the spokesperson, Bernice Liu on the right side. The visual of the advertisement is creatively designed of a collage of fat and slim body

seemingly displayed as one body. It registers possible transformation as reflected in the tagline, “Go from imperfect to perfect”. The publication details include: a full page appearance in *The Star* on the 22 September 2008 (see Appendix I: Advertisement 5) by Marie France Bodyline (MFB).

Representational Meaning: The representation of possible body transformation is artistically designed. The Advertisement displays a collage of two headless half-bodies as one: on the left is a clearly “imperfect” fat half-body, and on the right is a “perfect” sculptured slim silhouette. The images of two headless half-bodies describe body beauty in extreme opposites: “perfect” and “imperfect”. Although this is clearly a collage of two different bodies, it presents fat-bodied as “imperfect” and the slim silhouette as “perfect”. Advertisers never fail to ram home the message that fat is horribly ugly and needs to be rid of. It is little wonder that women are driven to try different methods to lose fat, by dieting, taking diet pills, skipping meals, starving themselves, succumbing to bulimic and anorexic practices, and resorting to body modification (Orbach, 2009; Wykes & Gunter, 2008; Harrison, Taylor & Marske, 2006; Hobbs et al., 2006; Bordo, 2003 and Featherstone, 2000).

Interactive Meaning: Although the headless represented cannot have eye-contact, the appearance of the represented (Bernice Liu Bik Yee) on the bottom right is resolutely connecting with the viewer. She is portrayed in a non-transactional reactional process. The main vector is formed by her eyeline, where her glance is directed at a point outside the frame (at the viewer, for instance). She makes direct eye contact, smiles pleasantly and stands in full frontal body angle – these are all a means of establishing “imaginary contact” with the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 124). A frontal angle, as Nalon (1997: 89-90) informs, allows a maximum involvement between the viewer and the represented participant. Here, the viewer is directly confronted with what is in the image, hence, viewer’s identification and involvement with represented participant are

heightened (for further details, see Section 4.2.3.2). With two sets of images, they drive home the same message: a fat body can be transformed to a slim silhouette of the attractive spokesperson. The creative display of her ‘transformed’ body offers the idea that one can “go from imperfect to perfect”.

Compositional Meaning: What Marie France Bodyline is advocating is the ‘perfect’ body, with a slender body shape like that of their spokeswoman, Hong Kong artiste Bernice Liu. To achieve this, the strategic placement of three key elements of a composition – information value, framing and salience is important. The compositional structure serves to enhance the meaning produced through the image(s) and text. Advertisement 5 shows two visuals: firstly, on the left (full page) and secondly, the bottom right (1/10 of the page). The first visual embodies the *left-right* information value where the left-right placement creates a “*given-new*” structure. The *given* is the fat body whereas the *right* is the shapely trimmed body. There is no distinct frameline. In fact, the absence of frameline works to connect the messages from both different visual and verbal modes. This helps to strengthen the message of, “Go from imperfect to perfect”. The different font sizes of the text increases saliency. It makes some elements more eye-catching than others: for example, the words, “Target your problem areas with BodyTech™ Perfectionist System” were in bold, enlarged font and strategically placed at the top of the bodycopy. To strengthen the message, the Advertisement proclaims high-end technology to “target your problem areas with BodyTech™ Perfectionist System”. The “problems” are body parts: ‘flabby arms, bulging tummies, chunky thighs, cellulite, stretch marks, saggy skin’. To combat these problem areas, the viewers are invited to go for treatment, namely, ‘CafeiSilane C, Bodyfit, Regestril, BTPS serum’. Then, at the end of a lengthy body copy, the advertiser enlisted the contacts (via toll-free phone call and website address) to give a “free personalised consultation”. Again, these are means to arrive at contact with the

viewer. Two different modes are clearly in use to realize different communicative functions – the visuals are to convey the possible transformation from “imperfect to perfect” and the write-up to give details of the “all-new advanced slimming therapy”. This is how the composition plays a vital part in strengthening the message of the transformation, “Go from imperfect to perfect”.

6.4.2 Advertisement 6: “The Experts solved our weight problems professionally!”

(L 2)

Advertisement 8 features London Weight Management's covert presentation of four women before and after photo shots. Covert classification shows different people, places or things together in one picture, distributing them symmetrically across the picture space to show that they have something in common, that they belong to the same class (for more details, see 4.2.3). It is published on the 26 August 2008 (see Appendix I: Advertisement 6). On top of each of the four women is the display of weight lost in kg. Also shown is the weight prior to the weight lost, reasons behind these women weight gain, their names and ages. First in the line is Low Yi Ling, age 19. She is the youngest of the four. Her weight problem is due to “adolescent weight gain” and she has shown a remarkable drop of 16kg to 58kg. Next, is Yasinah Bt. Abdul Rahman. Age 29, she is recorded as having “heavy bottoms”. She lost 9.5kg and currently weighs 59.8kg. Thirdly, 28 years old Junainah Bt. Jaafar has “lower body weight gain”. After losing 10kg, she currently weighs 47kg. Finally, Paggie Aw has been identified with “hereditary overweight problem”. She is 23 years old. She lost the most, from 102kg to 68kg, a total of 34kg weight lost. The before-shots of these women were taken at a time when they were overweight; all of which were taken in medium frames.

Representational Meaning: In this particular Advertisement, the covert display of the four women is shown in taxonomic relation. They are all in the same boat. It

showcases what these women want: to be rid of fat. The visual representations of these women before and after shots are showing the possibility of slimming down with the help of the aforementioned slimming centre. As the tagline announces, “The Experts solved our weight problems professionally!”. The “experts” refer to the LWM's personnel as well as the company itself. The phrase “our weight problems” represent the voices of these women, speaking out loud their different weight issues as stated. Whether it is adolescent weight gain or heavy bottoms or lower body weight gain or hereditary overweight problem, it will be “professionally” dealt with by the “experts”. The representation of different ages also indicates that women of all ages face the woes of being overweight. Late teen, Low Yi Ling (age 19) also participated and lost 16kg. From a very rounded girl, she stands and exudes the gregarious confidence of a teen. Hands astride on the hips, she is clad in a white tee and black vest. This helps to accentuate the waistline. Her short skirt flaunts the much trimmed legs. The other three women were in their 20s. Yasinah and Junainah are seen in sitting position, wearing figure flattering clothes. The silhouettes of both ladies are showing their curves. Both of them represent those in their late 20s. Paggie (age 23) lost an astounding 34kg. She wore a tube floral dress. These four women's facial expressions colour in further details of satisfaction and confidence: they were shown to look directly with smiles on their faces. They are represented in terms of “being” women who successfully shed off their extra pounds/inches. Their representation symbolically defines the identity of satisfied and confident women. Symbolic attributes of femininity, satisfaction and confidence are made salient in the representation, for example, by their poses, attires and facial expressions.

Interactive Meaning: The four women, in a way, interact with the viewers and suggest the attitude they should take on towards their representations. In terms of *contact*, they look directly at the viewers, hence, making contact with them. This in turn establishes

an imaginary relationship. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1997), such an image is considered as “demand” or “offer” picture where the represented symbolically demand/offer something from the viewer. In the case of this Advertisement 6, it offers these women's successful weight loss transformation for the consumption of viewer. To point out exactly what is/are offered, facial expression and gestures can fill in the blank: here, all four women offer the possibility of weight loss by the help of the “experts”. The full *frontal angle* with hands on hips and legs slightly astride of Low Yi Ling, sitting with bodies tilted by Yasinah and Junainah and Paggie standing sideway - these portrayals are used to further increase viewer identification and involvement with the represented participants.

Compositional Meaning: The placement of three key elements of a composition – information value, framing and salience - reflects the advertiser's strategy. The compositional structure serves to enhance the meaning produced through the image(s) and text. Advertisement 6 has very definite compositional structures: covert image at the top as well as another image at the bottom left corner and promotional details at the bottom. The unequal division of image (two third) and text (one third) reflects the advertiser's emphasis on the fat to slim transformation of these four ladies. On top of the pictures of these four ladies, there is a tagline that says, “The experts solved our weight problems professionally!”. Two different modes are clearly employed to realize different communicative functions – the visuals to convey the evidence of weight loss, the text to further entice the viewer with the promotional details. The top and bottom division was framed by the different background shades. This increases the saliency of the information given.

6.4.3 Advertisement 7: “Noryn scales down to a fabulous figure” (MFB 18)

Advertisement 7, advertised on the 3 December, 2008 features a singer - Noryn Aziz (see Appendix I: Advertisement 7). She is the “satisfied client of Marie France Bodyline”. Besides, it is interesting to note that there is a portion for “lucky draw” where it is stated that “with every purchase of RM5,000 and above, get a lucky draw to Paris, Milan Japan, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Bali and Phuket worth RM40,000. With every purchase of RM2,000, get a lucky draw for exclusive therapy vouchers worth RM10,000”. This kind of attraction, though unrelated to physical slimming, is an additional incentive to take-up the slimming deals. It is noted that in Malaysia, even the festive seasons are included as part of the attractions to join slimming centres (see Appendix C).

Representational meaning: Noryn is symbolically ‘being’ defined of her identity as a “fabulous” woman, as the tagline says, “Noryn scales down to a fabulous figure”. Symbolic attributes of femininity, attractiveness, confident and glamorous appeals are made salient in the representation. For example, her pose with legs astride and left hand on her hip exude her confidence. The criss-crossed body hugging and plunging neckline top (with a tube-top cleverly concealed any possible exposure of her cleavage), mini short-skirt and stilettos are props that confer symbolic meanings on Noryn. They are potent cultural symbols of ultra femininity. Noryn, as the represented participant, is also related in terms of part-whole structure: she is the carrier of sensual femininity (the whole person) with a number of parts being highlighted (breasts, arms, waist, hips, thighs). These parts are accentuated to define the whole: the plunging neckline shows the cleavage (except that it is cleverly concealed with a tube-top), body-hugging top accentuates the slim waist, tilting of the hip brings out the hips and the shapely legs in black stockings. With tousled curls and alluring facial expressions, her sexiness is

displayed. These serve to realize the norms of what is considered sexually attractive. The creative displays of three other images strengthen the attractive deal. A weighing scale with several silhouettes ranging from thin to fat as the measuring scale's pointers. Marie France Bodyline iconic silhouette is displayed to be holding the middle point, emphasizing that that is the ideal slim figure to be desired. There is an insertion of a smaller picture of Noryn before her transformation. She was pudgy then. And girding the bottom band is the glittering famous landmarks from cities all over the world. This further highlights the "lucky draw" attraction.

Interactive Meaning: In this particular Advertisement, Noryn, in a way, interacts with the viewers and suggests the attitude they should take on towards her representation. In terms of *contact*, she gazes directly at the viewers, hence, making contact with them. This in turn establishes an imaginary relationship between Noryn and the viewer. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1997), such an image is considered as a "demand" picture where the represented symbolically demand something from the viewer. To point out exactly what is/are demanded, facial expression and gestures can fill in the blank: here, Noryn – being a singer with a fabulous figure, demands admiration and adulation from her viewer. As the text below the tagline invites, "you too can get the figure you desire!"

Compositional Meaning: the layout of this Advertisement is predominantly divided into left-right columns and a narrow bottom band with the company's information. On the left, it is a mixture of texts with images. The scale is placed on top of the tagline and Noryn's before shot is inserted next to the promotional details. On the right is a full frontal appearance of Noryn. Just before the lowest band, there is a composite of famous cities across the globe, with the Eiffel tower on the far right. The placement of three key elements of a composition – information value, framing and salience are seen in the light of how they serve to integrate the Advertisement into an attractive deal.

6.5 CATEGORY 4: MIRROR GAZING

Mirror gazing, on the other hand, is a much lesser used method in slimming advertisement. By using this method, the advertiser is again emphasizing the importance of one's physical appearance – in the case of the following advertisement, her body size. The mirror gazing is symbolically significant; it signifies women looking at themselves. More interestingly, following Berger's "prescient statement", Orbach (2009: 108) claims that:

women watch themselves being looked at has been transmuted into women assuming the gaze of the observer, looking at themselves from the outside and finding that they continually fail to meet the expectations our pervasive and persuasive visual culture demands.

Indeed, according to the representational metafunction, the person looking into the mirror sees his/her own reflection. She (the Reacter) observes herself as reflected in the mirror (the Phenomenon) (T. van Leeuwen, personal communication, August 15, 2011).

6.5.1 Advertisement 8: "Is this the way you trim your HIPS to stay hip?" (U 1)

Advertisement 8 is from Unisense: The Slimming Boutique, dated 7 April 2008 (see Appendix I: Advertisement 8). The advertisement has very few words on the right column: "Is this the way you trim your HIPS to stay hip? There's a sensible way to trim your hip. It's UNISENSE!". On the left column, it is a creative play of a lady looking at her own reflection in a mirror. It is a full length mirror but the lady's whole body reflection is divided into two (top and bottom) with the middle or the lady's hips being concealed. Obviously, the ad is highlighting the fact that the lady has oversized hips, measuring 110cm before the therapy in which the mirror reflection purposely concealed. The final one-third of the advertisement page comprises three details: on the

left, the promotion; on the right, the unnamed lady who successfully had her hips trimmed; and at the bottom band, the straight information about Unisense.

Representational Meaning: A person gazing at herself in the mirror is a transactional reaction process in which the woman is both reactor and phenomenon (the mirror reflection looking back). She (the Reactor) observes herself (the Phenomenon) (T. van Leeuwen, personal communication, August 15, 2011). The example from this advertisement is an unnamed lady. Her anonymity works in two ways: firstly, the unnamed lady can be just anybody who has wide hips; and secondly, her anonymity works to engage those who have a similar ‘problem’. For the very reason that she is not a renowned celebrity, it helps to increase identification with her by just about anyone who shares similar wide hips ‘problem’. The mirror is divided into two portions, showing her body (top mirror) and legs (bottom mirror). The middle portion of the mirror, where her 110cm hips are, is not shown. This ‘trimming’ of the mirror reflection is strongly suggestive of how wide hips are disapproved. The hips need ‘trimming’ as the copy says, “There’s a sensible way to trim your hip.” Only in her reflection, a projection of what she can look like with trimmed hips can bring the smile to her face (as shown by the Phenomenon). The smile is affirmative. It is suggesting that if only her hips were smaller, she would be a happier person. In fact, at the bottom right corner of the advertisement, a full length of the same lady is shown. She stands with her face turned towards the viewers. Clearly, she has a beaming smile on her face. Next to her hips, it is stated, “Hips after therapy: 89 cm”.

Interactive Meaning: With her back against the viewer and her self-reflection in the mirror, the lady does not in any way interact with the viewer. She offers herself as a specimen to be watched by others, and in particular, her back pose deliberately focuses on her wide hips. Yet, the same person appeared with trimmed hips at the bottom right corner, looking directly at the viewer, hence establishing contact. At this

particular point, with the smile on her face, she is conveying the idea of a satisfied and successful client of Unisense. Her direct gaze and beaming smile are suggestive that, ‘if she can do it, so can you!’. What she has just achieved is possible for others with a similar wide hips ‘problem’.

Compositional Meaning: Given the compositional structure, two thirds of the Advertisement 8 is presented in a very uncluttered left and right compositions of image and text respectively. The bottom occupies one third of the advertisement. This acts as a sort of frameline to divide the placement of information. The bottom band takes up one thirds of the advertisement and it is divided into three divisions: on the left are the promotional details, on the right is the contact via sms and a smaller icon of the unnamed lady with trimmed hips and full straight details of the company on the bottom band. The structure division reflects the different degrees of prominence: where the “the way you trim your hips to stay hip” is the chief idea. This chief idea is embodied by the unnamed lady – who successfully trimmed her hips from 110cm to 89cm. From her far right placement, it is a given feature indicating new information or the possibility of trimming down to a slim figure. It is, therefore, deserving a special attention.

6.6 CATEGORY 5: MOTHERS

6.6.1 Advertisement 9: “Shaping Branded Figure For New Mother” (MF 8)

In many slimming advertisements, mothers are targeted. This advertisement, by Mayfair is clearly aiming to attract post-natal mothers. It is advertised on 5 May 2008. The advertisement is made up of composite images with three main texts from top to bottom of the advertisement page. Jaccelyn Ng is the successful client who recorded a total loss of 23.2kg and 104.5cm. On the left, she is shown in full length figure and

carrying her daughter. On the far right, in a much smaller medium shots, she appears in before and after shots. There is also Mayfair's ambassador, Lynn Lim, featured next to Jaccelyn, albeit smaller. The Advertisement also includes "What the expert says", promotional details, Dare2Lose slimming reality show, new outlet opening and Mayfair's various branches.

Representational meaning: Jaccelyn Ng clearly represents most post-pregnancy women. Standing confidently, she carries her toddler girl in her arms. To depict a mother and child together points to motherhood. She is wearing a spaghetti strapped top that shows the lean right arm. The mini-shorts heighten her slim legs. Her portrayal strikes a chord in all mothers to the very possibility of regaining their shape after childbirth. Jaccelyn's facial expressions colour in further details of her sheer joy: smiling and direct eye contact. Jaccelyn symbolically defines her identity as a woman and a mother. Symbolic attributes of femininity and motherliness are made salient in the representation, for example, by her pose, attire, long facial expressions and her daughter in her arms. The insertion of the smaller frames of a before and after photo on the right further drives home the message of her successful slimming attempt. Besides Jaccelyn, Mayfair also includes its ambassador. Lynn Lim stands astride with both hands on her hips. Her face is turned sideways. Ultra-chic with short hair and wearing a turtleneck top and a pair of hot pants, Lynn exudes a sense of confidence, feminine and sexy appeal. Her pointed toes stilettos further add to the potent symbols of femininity. The expert personnel, is shown on the left corner, right below Jaccelyn. With both arms neatly folded around her waist, hair combed neatly to the back and attired in a jacket, she appears to be professional, objective and confident. She offers "high-tech bio-engineering and professional intelligence-tech formulas" to slim down. She is the voice of clinical expertise. All three representations of the female figures are attempting to convince the viewers from different aspects: Jaccelyn, the satisfied and successful

client, Lynn exudes the sexy appeal while the expert substantiates the claims with the science behind the methods used.

Interactive Meaning: Jaccelyn strikes an imaginary contact with the viewer through her direct eye contact and body language. She invites the viewer to desire her attractive appeal even after childbirth. She flaunts her shapely motherly curves. On top of Jaccelyn's before and after shot, there is a verbal testimony that is endorsed with her signature. The written testimony verifies her account whereas the signature authenticates her testimony. Additionally, with Lynn in the background flaunting her feminine assets, both figures draw in the viewer's admiration and increase desire for identification with what they have to offer. The expert further engages the viewers' attention with her recommendations. Her direct eye contact and a smile on her face exude a sense of amicable and ever-helpful persona.

Compositional Meaning: The layout of Advertisement 9 is divided into two main bands: the top band takes up about 80 percent of the space, and the remaining 20 percent at the bottom. The top band is subdivided into two unequal columns, the left column depicts Jaccelyn and Lynn. The right column consists of Jaccelyn's testimony, her before and after shots and the new opening of Mayfair outlet. The bottom band is also subdivided into two: the top is made up of three boxed details: "What the expert says", "SlimMedic 7 Days Slimming Programme" and "Dare2Lose contest". The lowest part is the straight information of Mayfair branches throughout the country and additional contact details.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Sections 6.2 – 6.6 analyze the selected advertisements under five main themes: i) celebrity endorsement; ii) morbidly obese; iii) fat to slim transformation; iv) mirror

gazing; and finally, v) mothers. From the analysis, it answers to the second RQ: How is the ideal female body *visually* constructed in the selected slimming advertisements? (emphasis author's).

The use of the VSS framework provides a systematic and explicit method for examining how the ideal female body is constructed in the slimming advertisements. From the above advertisements, the focus of each Advertisement may vary: some zoom in on parts of the body (for instance: Advertisement 1, Advertisement 2 and Advertisement 8) and others on the overall body shape (for instance: Advertisement 3, Advertisement 4, Advertisement 5, Advertisement 6, Advertisement 7 and Advertisement 9). The VSS resources attempt to describe a field of possible meanings in the images from the selected slimming advertisements.

On the whole, the analytical tool is successful in drawing out the predominant construction of the ideal female body. From the previous chapter, the textual analysis demonstrated the construction the ideal female body in terms of: first and foremost, slim and slender; secondly, it has to be tight and firm; thirdly, it also has to be sleek, sculpted and shapely in order to be considered as beautiful, fabulous, sexy and even, sensational (see Chapter 5). The portrayal of women, as depicted by the images in the selected slimming advertisements, concurs. Every slimming advertisement suggests that the female body is imperfect unless it conforms to the slender, taut and shapely body. The message of slimming transformation is equated with beauty, attractiveness and confidence. The physical appearance of the female body becomes a site for 'construction' – where it requires constant attention, care and change. It seems that our "bodies become our personal missions to tame, extend and perfect" (Orbach, 2009: 31). Featherstone (2010: 197) stresses the formidable influence of visual, "[i]mages are often used to summon up and crystallize utopian and exotic desires. Images invite comparisons: reinforcing who we are not and who we would like to be." Hitherto, the

visual representation intensifies the message of body dissatisfaction. As Orbach (ibid, 5) puts it:

our visual world is being transformed through an intensification of images which represent the body and parts of the body in ways that artfully convey a sense that our bodies are seriously in need of reshaping and updating.

VSS approach, as the analysis points out, depicts visually the ‘ideal’ size and shape of the female body – whether it is the thighs, arms, hips (for instance: Advertisement 1, Advertisement 2 and Advertisement 8) or the overall body shape (for instance: Advertisement 3, Advertisement 4, Advertisement 5, Advertisement 6, Advertisement 7 and Advertisement 9). However, there is another additional advantage of VSS approach in the study. This descriptive framework takes into consideration the ‘social’ aspects pertaining to images. Social semiotics has been characterized as concerned with the study of images in their social context. Semiotic analyses lend itself to analyze images, “not as evidence of the who, where and what of reality, but as evidence of how their maker or makers have (re-constructed reality as evidence of bias, ideologically coloured interpretation, and so on.” (van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001: 5). The visual analysis elucidates the values associated with the particular dimension (representational, interactional or compositional) operating in the images. Hence, it is useful in the context of this study – where it reveals gender messages that are not so apparent in textual analysis (for further discussion, see Chapter 8). On that note, the next chapter of interview analysis gives a glimpse into what women think of the ideal female body as portrayed in the slimming advertisements.

Drawing from the compositional resources as aforementioned, the social semiotic approach to image analysis in the context of slimming advertisements can show concretely what elements are being highlighted and what are not. The sample analysis elucidates the values associated with the particular compositional structure operating in

the images; it is found that the images generally present female sexuality as a means to attract, engage and draw on desirability of others, male or female. For the men, it is in the context of heterosexual relationship where the assumption that only the 'ideal' female body is considered attractive to men. For the women, on the other hand, it is in terms of inviting the desire to be as slim as the represented in the slimming advertisements. Therefore, the selected images in the slimming advertisements show how the ideology of the ideal female body is maintained and perpetuated.

CHAPTER 7: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

7.0 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

In this study, information obtained from the interviews serves as secondary data in order to see if the responses from the interviews support or contradict the findings in the primary data. The entire interview process was described in Chapter Four (see details, Sections 4.3.8 – 4.3.13). To adhere closely to the focus of the study, RQ 3 was created to guide the interview process and analysis: In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?

Based on this RQ 3, the 40 transcribed scripts were summarized and categorized according to several major discourses: discourse of health, discourse of beauty, discourse of heterosexuality, and discourse of success.³² These discourses were derived from the highly repetitive responses from the respondents. Under each discourse, several salient themes were identified and listed in Table 3 below. In the discussion according to the themes, different discourses may have similar themes. For instance, the themes of femininity (discourse of beauty) and attractiveness (discourse of heterosexuality) can be considered overlapped in terms of their thematic similarity. For this reason, they are combined as they are essentially saying the same thing where female beauty is seen as a means of seeking attention and attracting the opposite sex.

Table 3: Themes identified according to discourses

D I S C O U R S E S			
A T T R A C T I O N	B E A U T Y	H E A L T H	S U C C E S S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ attractiveness ✓ attention-seeking ✓ male gaze ✓ romanticism ✓ sex appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ beautiful ✓ feminine ✓ dainty ✓ slim looks good on any clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ depressed ✓ fear of fat ✓ unhealthy ✓ unhappy ✓ obesity ✓ overweight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ confidence ✓ self-esteem ✓ social upward mobility

7.1 ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

In order to guide the process of interview analysis, one main theme was extracted for each category of the discourses. The themes were confidence, beauty/sex appeal and social upward mobility. These three themes were considered most prominent themes based on their high frequency of repetition among the respondents.

The ways these women were shown to be influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body were operationalized in the light of the three overarching themes of confidence, beauty/sex appeal and social upward mobility. All three themes were the core influences that attract the 40 respondents to subscribe to and accept the notion of the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements. The 40 respondents, the desire to have the ideal female body because they believe that ‘slim equals confidence’ (or ‘slim equals beauty/sex appeal’ or ‘slim equals social upward mobility’) (sometimes appear in truncated form, ‘slim equals [...]’).

The following sub-sections discuss the responses categorized according to the three themes, i.e. slim equals confidence, slim equals beauty/sex appeal and slim equals social upward mobility.

7.1.1 Slim Equals Confidence

Slim appears at me to be more outstanding. That boosts my confidence la.
(R 34)

I will also look beautiful if I am slim. So I feel attractive that give me
confidence. (R 35)

Responses such as the above exemplify how the ideology of the ideal female body affected women's perception of themselves, that their confidence was influenced by the way they look. A strong 80% (32/40) of the respondents thought in this way.

R5 felt that it was important for a sales person to be slim. Because of the negativity associated with the fat body, being fat makes it more difficult to approach people and to convince them. She puts herself in the position of an obese and thought that it affected her energy level. She also linked obesity with laziness and the lack of self-discipline. In her opinion, obese people were seen as those who "eat a lot", "don't exercise" and "couldn't even bother with [their] body". She added, being a sales person, she felt that being overweight will dampen her ability to approach and convince people. She strongly felt that obesity decreases one's self-confidence and sales opportunity (in her line of work).

Self-confidence ah ... I think is very important, because if I [am] really really obese right, I don't feel that I'm energetic, I don't feel that I can actually approach people. You know... like ... ah ... in ... like ... convince people ... ya ... because it's like...you know, obese ... I don't know ... I always have that kind of attitude, like, you know, it's always a bit in my mind like if you are obese, it means that why you are obese, because you are lazy...you don't exercise that's why you are obese. You eat a lot and you don't exercise. You couldn't even bother with your body, so how to convince people if you are like obese. (R 5)

Likewise, R7 admitted to the importance of outward appearance to boost self-confidence:

Ya, I think to a certain extent because everybody likes to feel confident and looks are to a certain extent important [...] it would be a psychological boost to whoever who is able to... it just has to boost your self-confidence. [...] I just feel really sometimes tempted to go and try but [it's] never become an

obsession for me to actually getting to but I always wonder will it be get rid of all those unwanted fats...But the thought just stops there I've never really gone one step further than this. (R7)

She saw body fat as something “unwanted” and in need of getting “rid” off. She even had the urge to actually try out the slimming methods/centres, yet this urge remained a thought. This was a genuine case of being “tempted”, yet remained restrained for some reasons. R9, like R5, linked physical fitness with the ability to perform better at work, in her words, “slim make you feel more confident [...] more spirit to do our work, [...] more energy [...], advantage”. She also brought out two important aspects of physical fitness: firstly, the power of visual to influence; secondly, even women who were actually healthy or not overweight (“they are already ok”) were persuaded to be dissatisfied with their body and want to change their figure.

[...] slim make you feel more confident and um, then more spirit to do our work. [...] More energy [...] Advantage ... Uh, I feel more satisfied, ah, because I feel healthy, no need to think a lot about controlling diet. [...] Uh, being slim make you feel more confident and um, then more spirit to do our work [...] Maybe women who look at these advertisements they will [dis]satisfied with their figure and they want to change it, even though they are already ok they still want to change it because they see the ad. [...] So when, when the women ... uh, with the same figure like this ad of course they want to change their figure to be like this one right? So um, how to say, maybe she will try to get even though the slimming cost is very high still they want to try to get it because of the picture, portrayal of the picture. (R9)

R10 believed in “slim equals confidence” in a different manner. For her, slim people get compliments, presumably for their looks. She gave a scenario of one who had been overweight and later lost some weight. Then, she got “compliments” that boosted her self-confidence. Thus, she encouraged women to “go for it (slimming)”:

[...] to me, if you're always slim, er, again, yes, you are confident, but if you're an overweight person, and you grow and you lose weight after that the compliments that you get gives that self-confidence, [...] I think for other women who wants to go for slimming treatment it's just to help them gain that confidence so I think it's important for women to keep their confidence in any way they think that they can get. [...] if being slim gives them confidence then, [...] go for it. (R10)

R11 confided that she had been feeling “positive” as she had always kept her figure.

This, in a way, supports the strong association between one's attitude and body weight/shape. R11 felt "positive" when she managed to keep her figure, and would have a "very low self-esteem" if she were fat:

[...] because I think if I would have been big, overweight I would have a very low self-esteem because, [...] ... I've been positive because I've not been going through any body changes or anything, drastically. (R11)

Though R12 disagreed with R11 on the source of self-esteem (i.e. "self-esteem I think is from inner, not really from outlook, appearance" [sic]), she confessed to a feeling of being "more comfortable if [she] can [...] reduce a little bit [of] weight.". For her, by losing some weight, it helped her to "choose clothes" and "wear clothes". The fact that she chose clothing as a reason to lose weight tells us that she could be influenced by the fashion world. Clothing serves not only to cover the body but it is also a means to enhance one's physical appearance and style. Therefore, for R12, her self-esteem was also linked to physical appearance. Yet, there were women like R13 who felt a battered self-esteem in relation to her body image. She had been taunted with nicknames like "fat girl" and the name-calling hurt her self-esteem. She describes her feelings as follows:

It does la, because I think human mentality ah...when they look at you, a bit good looking la, in the sense, you're more to the average thin, you know, when you are fat, they will practically call you name la...eh...fat girl. You know. They come up with names. [...] It will definitely hurt your self-esteem. [...] Yes. It will definitely hurt your self-esteem. (R13)

R24 concurred with R13 on discrimination towards fat people and expressed her view that "people who are slightly overweight" are subjected to social stigma in this society. Another respondent, a Kosé promoter by profession, also agreed that being slim mattered for her (R25).

Ah ... I do feel that ah ... fat people are being discriminated in some extents. So ... being slim in this society is actually an advantage. So...what kind of advantage ah... In work place ... ah ... maybe would get to work more efficiently. [...] stigma towards people who are slightly overweight in this

society. (R24)

I feel very important, because I'm working in Kosé here lo. As a beauty advisor, and image is very important for me la. [...] And slim also...ah...give body image help uh help me to pick up yourself la. (R25)

Not only do respondents equated “slim equals confidence”, they also equated slim with feeling good, sexy, less sensitive over their physical appearance and getting admiration (Rs 27, 28, 29 & 33). These attributes pertaining to how they feel were closely linked to self-confidence.

I would feel better if I look good. Should I be fat, or wearing a dress that expose the area of my fat body, I definitely feel something. (R27)

Ya ... Well if I am over weight. Yes, I think I would la...being a little bit ... um, you know sensitive. [...] Ya ... over my physical appearance. [...] Ooh... of course you can wear sexy clothes. (R28)

Slim body helps self esteem, but I also have to put on makeup and dress up. (R29)

If I am slim, people will admire me. And then, nobody wants to be fat. People go gym to slim down, so I won't feel low confidence. Being fat is not attractive. (R33)

For others, the fear of ridicule, of being made a laughing stock and the lack of self-esteem were some of the situations that affected their self-confidence:

It's made me more confidence. And then not made me fast tired la. Some time when I very fat, when I fat before, I very fast get sweaty and tired. [...] No people laugh at me, but I don't know at my back la [...] but in front me all people say I cute when I fat. (R30)

If I am slim, I have more confidence and not afraid of a ... of other laugh at me or made joke on me. (R31)

Now, I have no confidence to meet customer, because I am not attractive. [...] Fat people are not taken into consideration. So like not value at all. (R32)

R32's words were particularly troubling, “[f]at people are not taken into consideration. So like not value at all [sic].” This description of the self relates to fat stigma and a great sense of worthlessness. Just like what R36 explained how she valued herself better when she was slimmer:

I used to be bigger than I am now. And, definitely didn't feel good about my

body. I was always embarrassed wearing bigger clothes. [...] my character and my confidence was different. But after I started exercising and feeling slimmer, [...] it's definitely made me more... confident of myself and a little more. [...] so because I think that maybe I value myself a little bit more. (R36)

Slim appear at me to be more outstanding. That boosts my confidence la. (R34)

I will also look beautiful if I am slim. So I feel attractive that give me confidence. (R35)

Both Rs 34 and 35 expressed their views on how slimness made them feel more confident. R34 felt slimness “boost[ed] [her] confidence” whereas R35 equated slimness with beauty and thus, it gave her the confidence. Although R37 claimed that one's looks did not actually help in the career's advancement, she was essentially of the mind that “female” in particular needed to be slim or thinner. According to her, female with a slim body can have the confidence to “mingle around with others”. She repeated that being slim helped her “feel good”.

Building up my own self-esteem. [...] especially female, uh when they are slim, they are thinner, they will be more confident and have more self-esteem to go around and to mingle around. As for the fatter one, or slightly plumb people they might not be so comfortable to mingle around with others. [...] And I feel good. [...] Not to the extent of getting promoted, because I look ... of my body shape and things like that. But in the sense of I feel good about myself. (R37)

It is indeed very troubling to hear that women need to fit in to a certain ideal body size in order to have the confidence for day-to-day socializing. Even internal feeling such as how she feels about herself is dictated by her body size. In fact, this is not a surprising response. Many other women, similar to R37, admitted to feelings such as “useful” (R38), “pretty” (R40), “I look good, I will feel good as well” (R50) and “I can put on many pretty clothes, I can look nice, I look pretty, and that really give me more confidence” (R57). From these seemingly positive comments about themselves, they were actually conditional upon how they look. The good feelings were actually

predicated by having a 'right' body size.

So, to me, if I'm slim, which equate to us to being fit and healthy, then it actually increases my self-esteem, cause I feel useful, I don't feel like I'm useless, cause I can work. (R38)

Does a slimming body image... [...] build up my self-esteem...when especially I'm in relational with people. I see, and then, people who look at me, I don't have to feel so self-conscious...and then, when I go out, or when I go travelling, I take photos and I put in Facebook, you know I can look pretty and not overweight. (R40)

If let's say, ah ... I look good, I will feel good as well. And it will build my self confidence more to walk out and to talk to people. (R50)

Like being, as I say earlier on just now. Being slims, beside slim, of cause my facial look good, that give me. How to how to put it, I can put on many pretty clothes, I can look nice, I look pretty, and that really give me more confidence ah. (R57)

For the next five respondents (Rs 45, 47, 48, 51 and 52), they all emphasized on how slimness helped to boost their confidence. For these women, having a slim body enabled them to have the confidence to "dress up nicely" (R47) or "wear" (R45, R48, R52) some clothes that were flattering to their figures. For them, physical appeal enhanced their confidence in order to engage in social situations like facing people, communicating and being "presentable" (R51). Slimness was constantly drawn as a confidence booster in order to "communicate with others" (R47).

I would say that, if I am slimmer, ok, uh I would be more confident of myself. Because, there would, of course be a lot of dress or, or clothes that I would be able to wear, compare to if I'm, I'm fat or bulgy. [...] Ya, I would be more confidence in speaking in front of audiences. You know, and I would feel like perhaps sometimes when you go out, you can manage to turn some attentions on yourself which could be kind of nice, alright. Erm, not denying that. So, ya, I think it would build a little bit of confidence. (R45)

I can dress up nicely and I have confident in communicating with others. (R47)

If ... you're not supposed to [laughter] I, actually have this slim body image, of cause it will boost my self-esteem. [...] In...like... what I wear, where I go, uh and the person I meet. Because the confidence will, will, will, how to say, will will increase. Then uh ... Ok I don't know what to say. (R48)

As I say...like...slim body image is a trend la. It's a trend, so...ah...of course...uh if you have a slim body image, ah....you will...you will...feel very, you will feel more confidence la. So...it does help building up the self-esteem la. [...] You are very re...presentable. Ya, presentable. So, when you go out, you won't, won't feel like, you won't feel awful, you won't feel a...bad, bad mood or what, whatever. Because you feel confidence and you

feel...even whatever cloth you wear, you'll just feel confidence la. (R51)

Mmm... Also can represent my... my [giggle] I mean that show out my body, because uh for girl, I mean, I mean majority girl in this town, the... the good body figure actually can actually shows up their, their confidence level. Yes, you will see a girl wearing a, uh I means... tight skirt, with having a high stilettos, they walk, when they walk, they tend to be, I mean, show their confidence level, even double than 100% [...] I mean if I wearing shirt that day, I'll walking so fast, and my confidence level is there. But, if I'm not, I know my confidence level that day is not ... not... uh... I mean not there. (R52)

R51, besides agreeing on how the slim body image built up one's self-esteem, she also thought that "slim body image is a trend". In saying this, she drew a similarity between fashion and body image. As discussed in Chapter 3, female body size underwent different vogue body sizes change from time to time (cf. Section 3.4.2).

For R49, being slim had "some advantage over [...] people [...] on more heavier side [sic]" and as R53 shared, "bigger size" people were discriminated against. This explains the reasons behind the compelling obsession with being slim; partly to avoid discrimination and ridicule, partly a personal desire, more so when physical attractiveness is the pervasive societal construct of how only the slim are beautiful and desirable. The societal demands are a yardstick to measure what's in and what's out. Hence, the belief that "slim equals confidence" generates ideals that are considered desirable, feminine and symbolic order of signifying self-worth.

Um ... I think the ... when ... I suppose when you are slim and all that. Then, that itself already gives you some sort of self-confidence, it gives you some advantage over the...uh maybe other people around you who are not, maybe they are on more heavier side. [...] I think naturally that already gives you self-confidence. (R49)

For people with bigger size, probably they will feel a burden if let's say they are... surrounded by those very slim people. Understand from a friend, this is real, real story from a colleague from me, of mine, because she used to be quite a big size, so she say that she used to be bullied or being isolated. Ya, by the school mates during the school days. So, I think that is why she felt, why, how to say, I don't have a friend, used to be. Now she change, she is very happy go lucky, don't care la. [...] I think, doesn't, I think it's not wrong to be fat. As long as you, I mean you yourself can accept it first la. That's it. [...] I mean, at least your appearance to others. Your first image. [...] <Researcher has to reiterate the question if being slim help her in her confidence> [...] Of course yes. (R53)

There were two respondents who did not conform to the notion of how one's looks gives them confidence in life. R6 did not think that one's confidence came from "body size", yet she projected the thought that "if I'm fat, [...], I definitely will feel out of place,". The presupposition that she will certainly "feel out of place" if she were fat tells us that she believes in the discrimination against those who are overweight. In fact, she went on to comment that fat people were regarded as "lazy", "very impulsive over eater" and they were predisposed to suffer from "heart attack" and "high BP". In her own word, she said:

[...] like I'm so lazy ... a ... no exercise, unhealthy, going to get heart attack soon, high BP, ya, maybe very impulsive over eater. (R6).

Although R6 seemingly refuted the idea that self-confidence came from "body size", what she did not realize is that she also drew on the common assumptions that fat people were the unhealthy lot, "lazy" and "very impulsive over eater". R26, like R6, disagreed that confidence is "based solely on appearance". Yet, she quipped that it did matter for fat people. The phrase, "it matters for fat people" implied the assumption that fat people will not have the kind of confidence that the slim ones possess.

A little bit affected, because confidence is not based solely on appearance. However, I do feel that it matters for fat people. (R6)

7.1.2 Slim Equals Beauty/Sex Appeal

Using beauty or sex to sell is not a recent conundrum for women. It has been identified and discussed since the rise of advertising. Yet, to this very day, the same message reigns and pervades in the sociocultural settings. In this sub-section, the spontaneous responses of these respondents were replete with the concept of 'Slim Equals Beauty' or 'Slim Equals Sex Appeal'. Responses drawn exemplify how the ideology of the ideal female body affects women's perception of themselves, that their sense of beauty was

predicated by physical outlook alone. More than 67.5% or 27/40 of the respondents thought in this way.

R5, for instance, remarked that, “Men are always men. Men [are] always looking for beautiful things.” She fitted the notion of beauty fetishized by male interests, where women saw themselves through men’s eyes. In short, women’s desire to be beautiful is really a desire to be admired and looked at by men. They internalized the male gaze in the expectations of who they should be in terms of their identity and perhaps, aspirations too (i.e.: good wife, doting mother and sexy vixen in beds).

Men [are] always looking for beautiful things. [...] But at least you have to take care of yourself la ... as a woman. [...] Men are always men. Men [are] always looking for beautiful things. Even though they mentions that oh, I would not mind, regardless you like, round, fat...so fat...fat...obese la eh ... [laughter] you know, but in their hearts o ... don’t mean you always look at those la, very round things, round things like that ... you know, like obese, it’s boring ... nothing as the first attraction. You know ... of course I don’t expect you to be back to your own original figure before you married. But at least you have to take care of yourself la ... as a woman. (R5)

R5’s response was not any different from similar responses from Rs 10, 11, 13, 24, 27, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 45, 47 and 48. R45, for instance, drew the connection between slimness and heterosexual attractiveness.

I feel that, nowadays, attractiveness is measured by how slim you are. [...] of course the fatter or fatter friends that I have, they are less attractive to uh the other sex. So, you can’t help but think that you are slimmer, perhaps you will be more attractive towards the opposite sex (R45).

For the married ones, as R10 pointed out, “if she’s fat she won’t be attractive to the husband [...] a lot of women are not slimming down for themselves, they’re slimming down for their husbands, they’re slimming down because they’re ashamed to be the way they are, so that’s why they’re slimming down for their husbands.” Likewise, R35 happily quipped, “[i]f I am slim my husband will be happy as he is proud of me. My husband is happy, I am happy also.” In these instances, body dissatisfaction is associated with a feeling of insecurity – where there is a compelling sense of

inadequacy should one fail to have the ideal body. R10, for example, even added that married women will tend to feel insecure about their spouses' fidelity, "a lot of married women, a lot of moms are feeling that, um, they're in competition with the younger girls who may or may [...] attract their husband's attention".

If you're slimmer you wear clothes it looks nicer, uh it sits well on slimmer people than it does on an overweight person. [...] the same kind of clothes when you put on a curvy, uh ... a curvaceous woman but then it wouldn't look good on women with bulges um in the wrong areas. [...] I don't think really thin girls or girls who want to be really really thin are attractive and to appreciate figures, [...] it doesn't change at all actually. [...] the impression that if she's fat she won't be attractive to the husband and I think that happens. [...] a lot of married women, a lot of moms are feeling that, um, they're in competition with the younger girls who may or may [...] may attract their husband's attention, [...] but then it's a sad thing that they're not slimming down for themselves because a lot of women are not slimming down for themselves, they're slimming down for their husbands, they're slimming down because they're ashamed to be the way they are, so that's why they're slimming down for their husbands. (R10)

Ah ... a guy choose a, a partner... they will go for the more attractive woman. (R24)

If I am slim my husband will be happy as he is proud of me. My husband is happy, I am happy also. (R35)

For the singles, they were also banking on having an 'acceptable' body size in order to be attractive to the other sex. Just like R34 spontaneous response, "[i]f I [am] slim, I feel pretty, and I get many friends. Boys or men more attracted to me la [sic]." R24 concurred that "a guy [...] will go for the more attractive woman". Some would even thought that having a slim body was an asset to certain aesthetic aspects of life, i.e. wearing clothes (R11, R28, R32, R33):

[...] it's easy for you to get clothes and everything is just easier because the sizes are there for you. [...] be in a relationship in a, in a uh romantic relationship when you're... when you're slimmer, [...] they're conscious about how their partner will look like before and after marriage I guess. (R11)

when you feel attractive, [...] yourself, and then uh others will find you attractive. [...] Makes it easier for you to interact um freely. [...] of course you can wear sexy clothes. (R28)

I'll have better relationship, because I can mingle easily. Unlike now, I feel not so comfortable, I think people will think negatively on me. [...] It's a stigma for fat people, others think of them as clumsy, lazy and not beautiful. [...]

normally women like to be thin, beautiful and follow fashion, fans, [...] Today world fashion almost all for slim people. (R32)

Now fashion cloth size are all for small size people. So difficult for me to get what I like. [...] Normally men like slim girls. So, I am not that slim, disable for men. I am not so for men. [...] Being fat is not attractive. (R33)

As mentioned earlier (Section 7.3.1), clothing is not just a necessity for covering up one's body. It has become a part of 'accessories' for body beauty.

For many others, they thought that having a slim body was an advantage in terms of making friends (R36, R40, R43, R47, R50, R57):

it may just be my opinion but I suppose like people who are attractive, and who have that slim body and etc...they project a more confident image and thereby have a better, [...] ability to talk to people and get them to be interested. [...] from what I've seen from the male colleagues who talk behind the people who are attractive. [...] I do want to lose weight, but I don't want to be sex goddess. (R36)

A.....of course if you are slim and beautiful then, um when you talk to people, you have better self-esteem of yourself. So, you probably can develop a better relationship with others. If not, if you are always feel that you are on overweight side, then you very conscious and you also don't want to spend so much time talking to other people, because they start asking question about why you haven't lost weight. [...] people still ask me whether I am still pregnant or not. (R40)

If I am slim, then a lot of people will, a lot of people attract by others people. Then people will make friends with you la. (R43)

For those who are slim, men, even though, even though married seems to be attracted to the slim girls. They go out lunch together, they joke together, they smoke together. (R47)

I believe that uh having appearance is very important. Whereby if someone take care of their appearance, it's proof that they are a responsible person. So... image does play an important role. [...] People always say that beautiful woman always take the most advantage. People would always want to talk to them, people would want to meet them. So, I believe that having a right appearance is important. (R50)

Oh... relationship with others. How to say. I said if I'm being look, I mean I look good in my body shapes, I'll have more confidence go out and socialize with uh other people and friends. Otherwise, I will have low self esteem, then I would not go to and mingle with friends. (R57)

Not only do women thought that having a slim body helps in making friends, some related this to boy-girl relationship. They felt that being slim made them the 'trophy

girlfriends' for their partners (R13, R48).

the first impression for someone is always very important [...] I just feel that people would want to be closer to you. And they will feel more proud bringing you out. [...] Maybe your boyfriend or your husband. They might, [...] be more proud. [...] People will compare. [...] It will be affected. [...] if you are not slim, then people will talk about you [...]. (R13)

[...] let's say you are looking for a job, especially like when you are looking for the job that requires you to be at the front desk, or HR, or what so ever. Then, the boss or interviewer will take those which is uh beautiful and slim. They won't really prefer the very thin, or those overweight ladies, or men. But, another thing is that, uh, like uh let's say between friends, among friends ah...if you are very, if you are, you have this perfect slim body la. Uh, if let's say you go camping, or go to beach with your friend. And if all of them wearing bikini, then you tend to be like, you feel a bit, uh you feel uh what do you call that, you feel threatened, because you know you can't wear like that with them la. [...]. The 3rd one is, more to, most guys they prefer girl friends who are slim. Because when they go out, and they bring girlfriend, their girlfriend around, of course they show, introduce their girlfriend to their own friend, so their friends will, will give comments on their girlfriend. So, then the girl will tend to have this, I need to be the perfect one. The, the ... I have to look perfect, so that this guy or boyfriend bring you out, can be proud of you. (R48)

The association between body as a sex appeal is not new. Thus, for many women, they wanted to be sexually appealing to the males by having slim silhouettes. Rs 24, 27, 31, 34 and 41 testify to this:

ah...a guy choose a partner...they will go for the more attractive woman. [...] you have more chance of wearing ah...clothes that fits you and ... these clothes that actually will help you to build up your self esteem when you meet up with people. (R24)

In a girl to girl relationship, it will not affect so much. But may be a boy girl relationship. (R27)

Men will favor with me and like me better. (R31)

If I slim, I feel pretty, and I get many friends. Boys or men more attracted to me la. (R34)

I think it helps a lot <Building up self-esteem>. Because, well you only have to open the newspaper and see all these advertisements left, right and center. So, whether you like it or not, even if it is norm or not, it has been implanted in all our brains, this is how the perfect woman should look like. So ... Unless you can look like that you can never attain the level of satisfaction that you want to with how you look. [...] Female relationship, I think it's not so much of an issue. You know. And male female relationship, is guys like pretty women. [...] I can try to achieve the achievable, but there is always a limit that I can do la. That why I'm here at gym. [...] Because I think new mothers uh should be a target group. [...] Because, she owes it to herself to look as good as before she was pregnant and after she was pregnant. And I think it is great for her own self-esteem. (R41)

The heart of the concern is not just which of these aspects of life are enhanced when one has a slim body: whether it is fitting in the ‘right’ clothes, friendship, socializing or be appealing to men. Underlying these concerns are really manifestations of their insecurity: fear of falling short in appearance and/or fear of inability to interact with others or engage their interest. R38 and R49 refuted this kind of conditional relationship:

I think relationship with friends, with other people whether friends or more than that, or less than that, should not be equated to self image. Because a relationship supposed to be deeper than skin. [...], first of all it should be internal, that means it should be from the heart itself. And, uh so I would think that, image probably at first sight image might be important, but it will not last a relationship. So, if that is the, if that is the point, then image is no longer important. [...] being beautiful inside is better than beautiful from the outside. [...] that usually males are more skin deep person, they look at the first image. The first sight. [...]. If want to maintain a relationship, um the first thing to get is probably is the skin deep of course. That mean looking good, looking good does not equate to wearing sexy, [...] looking good as in there’s some touch up, looking organized and tidy physically, not messy probably, but then again it depends on the guy. Maybe some guy like somebody who is more organized and structured, but some probably think that a bit messy out of the norm looks attractive. (R38)

Umm ... I think when it comes to this, it’s not about being slim, I think, if talk about relationship it’s really about the person’s personality and character. I think there’s nothing about being slim....I mean it’s like some people they can be big and they can be like super nice people and they can have a very good charisma and yeah they get along well with a lot of, a lot of people. [...]. Boy girl relationship ah ... I think it’s very subjective lo. Sometimes you see, you can see very pretty, is very often you see very pretty girl with very ugly guys so. [...] , I say, I say what the guy deserve to, ya, the guy may not be good looking, but probably he’s, he’s got a sweet character. We don’t know him, but then again we like to judge people with what we see from the outside. So, in that relationship, but well then again, sometimes you see, ya, let’s say, ya, this is more common when it comes to, like ugly guy or fat guy with very skinny girls and only sometimes very seldom then you see, like maybe very good looking guy with a very average girl that sort, but, ya, so I think sometimes, it’s not that really important la, the end of the day. Of course it’s an added advantage la then. Because people always say that, when you get married, you don’t want to wake up at the next morning, you look at your husband and you feel like to throwing up. (R49)

Although R49 emphasized “personality and character” and proposed not “to judge people with what we see from the outside”, she still agreed that good looks was an “added advantage”. For those who had been discriminated against for their bodies’ sizes, they tend to shun from the people that make comments on their body size by “avoiding them, not seeing them, because they don’t make me feel comfortable

anymore” (R45). There was even a respondent who got this kind of discrimination from her own mother (R42):

But, more so than work place, I’m actually more disturbed about my weight from home. [...] Because you grow up with your family, and what they think of you impact you in the most fundamental way. If your family [doesn’t] think you are beautiful, you go out into the world thinking you are ugly. You know, that is a big deal la. And my mum actually has asked me to go to try out all these slimming centers and see if it works. Ya, so it’s ... it’s like an insult, as well as like a slap to the face la. And everytime I see her, I would really have a really heavy heart. [...] I’m the kind of person like am stress I eat more. [...] but most importantly to her is... this is what she tell me la “I’m worried about your health [...] You don’t have to look thin and beautiful. Just lose some weight. So, she tries to go into the health side. She knows I’m an activist, and it’s really hard. You know, to argue on the image. Because I always talk to her about gender stereotypes. How come men can be fat, and not women, la... la...she is like, no...no...it’s not that, I just worry about your health. [...] Last time, I used to think, cause it took me a long time before I could get my first sexual partner. I lost my virginity only at 24. And it was frustrating, you know, when you are in college, and everyone has boy friend and girl friend. (R42)

The feelings of threat, pressure and insult abound for those who did not fit in the ideal female body:

Relationship with others, ok. If you have a group of slimmer friends. Let’s say friends who are slimmer than you, uh speak personally from my own experience, if I have a group of slim friends, ok, and who are very conscious about their weight, you know those body watchers and all that. At first, it will irritate me or irk me when they try to always say, ohh.. I shouldn’t eat this, I’m fat, I’ve put on weight, and all that. Ah. I become very upset. Ok. And later on when it happens over and over, the only thing I can uh solve this problem is avoiding them, not seeing them, because they don’t make me feel comfortable anymore. [...] but, however, if you mix with a group of let’s say slightly overweight or overweight friends, you tend to get too comfortable with your own body, because you know that in comparison to them, you are not as fat as them which is I know is bad. But you do that inevitably because we are humans. You tend to get lax with yourself too, you know, you eat, you don’t care about what you eat. [...] And so you know, there’s there’s pro’s and con’s. ok. You, tend to...you tend to not to pay attention to your weight so much. And, it can be dangerous, you will eat, you know. As you like which will also make you put on weight. And, but, sometime when you are alone, you don’t have company and then so you don’t, you tend uh to ignore your hunger most of the time. So, relationship with others, the slimmer ones I tend to avoid, the fatter would tend to make me fatter. I suppose if you don’t mix with people, you...it doesn’t really help either, because you can either starve yourself or binge at the same time. [...] I feel that, nowadays, attractiveness is measured by how slim you are. [...] of course the fatter or fatter friends that I have, they are less attractive to uh the other sex. So, you can’t help but think that you are slimmer, perhaps you will be more attractive towards the opposite sex. (R45)

I think we have to encourage women to eat healthy and exercise rather than just focusing on the flabs. [...] You feel pressured. Especially at my age now I’m in my 30s those who are 20s and are able to maintain their body and even

at I feel I know 100% that they could have their body because of their age I would still feel the pressure. (R8)

While they are people who felt “threatened” (R48), “pressured” (R8) and “insulted” (R42), there were others who recognized that having a slim body is a popular “trend” (R51) and advocated for healthy life (R55):

I think this one, you will be, a lot of time, it will be, maybe the first image la, the first image you bring to people. You will easier to attract people, or get people attention la. I think that that’s the advantage la [...] I notice this is a trend, but doesn’t mean I agree of this trend la. I think the trend, we can not a ... deny that is a trend, and we cannot disagree is a trend. But, in the sense that I don’t really like go after this trend la. [...] I won’t really go along with this trend la. Because, anyway, I ... I ... mean, ultimate end, I think is still back to the healthy ah. If you slim but you need to ... uh same time need to slim and healthy la. It’s not slim but unhealthy la. (R51)

Er ... there will be an advantage in the sense that you are healthy. Ok. Imagine you are 200+ pounds, you know, you can be very clumsy, you know, when you go out with people. People want to climb mountains or travels. You can be, you can’t go with them. Or, if you go with them, they have to slow down to wait for you. To that extent, I think it’s a disadvantage. But it’s all up to that person. It’s your life, you want to live a healthy life, you are supposed to do about something yourself. Eat right, do right exercise. Maintain a very healthy weight, or body shape. You know, that you are happy about. (R55)

From the interviews’ responses above, only 2 respondents refuted the notion ‘slim equals beauty’ (Rs 38 and 49); 5 others were just piqued and pressured by it (Rs 8, 42, 48, 51 and 55); while a majority (27 of the respondents) were for ‘slim equals beauty/sexual appeal’. Interestingly, though “slim equals beauty/sexual appeal” appears to be superficial, it remains one of the oldest sexist affronts of all time. R42 rebutted the difference, “I always talk to her [mother] about gender stereotypes. How come men can be fat, and not women [?]”. She drove home that the predominant support for the notion that ‘slim equals beauty’ was unfair and unwarranted.

7.1.3 Slim Equals Social Upward Mobility

When asked, ‘In your opinion, to what extent is being slim an advantage at home or at the workplace?’, 72.5% of the responses were in agreement with how slimness is a stepping stone to a better prospect at work (R5, R6, R7, R9, R11, R13, R24, R25, R26, R27, R28, R29, R31, R32, R33, R34, R35, R36, R37, R40, R41, R42, R46, R47, R48, R49, R50, R51, and R57). Two respondents have never been fat in their lives, thus they do not know if being fat is a disadvantage at the workplace (about 5% = R53 and R55). The rest of them, i.e. 4 respondents (about 10% = R8, R12, R30, and R45) were indecisive of whether being slim affects their work experience and only 3 others (about 7.5% = R38, R43, and R44) were claiming that it did not affect them in any way. Generally, a majority of over 72% believed that ‘Slim Equals Social Upward Mobility’ was an illustration of the powerful influence of this ideological construct of ideal female body image.

For the majority of the respondents, being slim was an advantage in the work environment. There were comments like how it was assisting performance in terms of energy level, movement and being less lethargic (R7, R11, R24, R26, R32, R48). However, to say being slim is as an advantage entirely in the physiological sense is not a unanimous voice. As a matter of fact, it is rather surprising that health/well-being is rarely mentioned as an advantage (only R38). On the contrary, the focus seems to be in terms of likeability factor (R5, R27 R41), boosting confidence (R29, R32), dress-up matters (R31, R57), opportunities for sales (R25, R49, R50), promotion (R13), and getting favours from different quarters (R46, R47, R51).

On physiological advantage, 6 respondents (Rs 7, 11, 24, 26, 33 and 48) mentioned mobility, being physically fit, energetic and efficient as the key physiological advantages of being slim. R7 and R11 concurred that it was much easier to move

around whereas R24 thought that slim people were more efficient. R33 commented that it was less likely for slim people to feel “easily tired [out] at work” and R48 saw the advantage of being slim in the context of less likely to breathe heavily while climbing stairs.

It’s just that I feel it’s more lighter to move, and, er, it’s easier to find clothes, and because most of the clothes I think cater for thin women [...] majority of them and somehow the media has portrayed that concept. (R7)

[...] not to say that you are healthier, but you can move around more easily and at work right, [...] I mean when you’re heavy it just makes it more difficult for you to move around. So I guess that, that’s the advantage of being slim. (R11)

[...] in terms of efficiency, slim people maybe are more ... an advantage. (R24)

At the midst of male colleagues they are more helpful to me. I’m slim, so I’m more energetic compare to fat people. (R26)

Slim make me feed good, not easily tired at work. Won’t get diabetics. (R33)

Um... My opinion in the work place, there is a few, I think there is a lot of advantage, advantages. The first one, let’s say in the office, you have to climb stairs. Let’s say if you are fat or over weight. Then let’s say you go to the 2nd floor, you start breathing heavily. Then all your colleagues will look at you like.... So, that that is the disadvantage if you are fat. [...] The second one, is when, uh, uh let’s say, if if you are, more... colleagues more view another colleagues, in the sense that they...they look at, especially ladies, let’s say if you enter the work place and you dress in a certain fashion, and ladies will tend to, to view you know, how you wear, what you wear, your shoe. And let’s say, you are very slim. And you look like in the attire, then of course colleagues will tend to like, oh...that shirt is nice, then you know, then somehow everybody knows you. [...] But let’s say if you are fat, and you dress in certain way, people tend to criticize, that’s the second one. Then the third one, the advantages of being slim, is uh, in the work place ah, is when like, example you want to climb the ladder. [laughter], you want to reach something higher, climb the ladder, you will be more confident. Because you the ladder, let’s say certain chair can take your weight. Let’s say you are fat, [laughter] you might not, uh you will avoid all this kind, you know, taking things from higher level or something. (R48)

Rs 5, 27 and 41 believed in better likeability prospect when one is slim. For the three of them, appearance mattered at their workplace – all three of them agreed that being slim helped them to have more confidence when they meet their clients:

Ah because I'm in sales, [...] it's actually very important for your figure to look slim [...] client is always like this, [...] they always look at the beautiful things. [...] it's actually very important for your figure to look slim, instead of like, you know, out of proportion, like, you know, here fat there fat, taking care of your own health, your own figure, look nice, in order to ... client is always like this, you know ... they always look at the beautiful things. (R5)

Advantage in the workplace, because I think that some people they will like the people which is a... better in their appearance. (R27)

Well. I'm an architect, so, so I meet people, and it is very much people oriented job, you know, so definitely when you meet people it's always easier when people like the way you look. [...] So, it is important to what I do, because I need people to feel comfortable with me. [...] Well, I think in terms of work, like I said, it is definitely an advantage. (R41)

Even at the workplace, being slim is considered to boost one's confidence. For R29, it helped to project the image of professionalism. R28, being slim "generates that kind of good feelings" at the workplace while R32 sees herself being "more motivated":

I've to be more confident in my work place, seems more professional. (R29)

first of all, it gives you the confidence, and ah...having a good self image of yourself, makes your happy. And you are able to interact freely without being concerned. [...] you know, of what people think of you. [...] It also generates that kind of good feelings and that's why it boosts your self-confidence. (R28)

I will have more energy, uh confidence, happy with myself. So my work will be more efficient. Um I will be more motivated in my job, marketing line. (R32)

Some saw the advantages of being slim in terms of dress-up choices (R31 and R57). R31 was glad that she "can wear anything" and "be fashionable". She saw this as an advantage where she can "get favour from other easily [sic]". Along the same thought, R57 felt that she looked "prettier" and being able to "draw more attentions":

I can wear anything I like and be fashionable and it will give more confident, and I get favour from other easily. (R31)

Ok, go to work. Advantage. Advantage, that's mean...nowadays, I mean you have been slim. An-Anything that I wear on it will, it will look more prettier if compare to if I'm fat. And, of course, if I, if I look prettier, I will draw more attentions. And advantage in my work, I think, I think most of the people would like, love and like to mingle with pretty girls. (R57)

5 respondents saw being slim as a means to business. R25 is a Kosé (skin care and cosmetic) promoter. For her, it was “very important” to be slim and the image appeal helped to convince the potential clients. R36 said it helped to make one look more attractive and therefore, it helped to create “opportunities to networking more [sic]”. R42, who was a free lance corporate film producer, was mindful that “if you look better, you will definitely [be] given a more chance to be in front of the camera. R49 was in car sales business – she compared her sales guys and girls and remarked that her “sales girl is the top performer” as attractive female promoters got most cars sold.

I feel very important because i'm working in Kosé here lo. As a beauty adviser, and image is very important for me la. (R25)

[...] know body image and everything is definitely something that made you look more appealing, more successful to people. [...] People would approach you more, would, would want to engage with you more. [...] It definitely contributed to um... opportunities to networking more. (R36)

Uh... Work place wise, because am a free lancer, I guess, I've less kind of a uh reason to interact with people on face to face. So most of the time, I get my jobs on the phone or through e-mail. [...] So, it's not really to do with how I look. But to a certain extent, when it is in the corporate film industry, if you look better, you will definitely given a more chance to be in front of the camera. (R42)

We are in a sales business. I've sales guys and sales girls, my sales girl is the top performer compare to guys because like, you are in the car business, so, ya, guys will actually prefer to deal with girls over guys. Especially the girl is attractive, it will a bigger advantage at the end of the days. (R49)

Of course now, I'm in the real estate line, whereby I meet a lot of people. Whereby if, let's say if I look better, people will have more respect on me and maybe will buy the houses from me. (R50)

Rs 13, 40, 46, 47 and 51 observed at the apparent incongruity in terms of treatment towards those who are slim as opposed to the overweight ones. R13 observed that the “good looking” and “average thin” employees tended to get “more advantage” at the work place. R40, R46 and R47 shared the same thought and affirm that the bosses were showing that kind of favouritism towards those who were physically attractive. R51 also added that the “opposite sex” will be inclined to treat those who were slim “better”.

[...] because I think human mentality...when they look at you, a bit good looking la, in the sense, you're more to the average thin,[...] people will tend to like to stay along with you, go out, with you, chat with you, even in your work place [...] people always feel that when you are fat, your are quite lazy, and don't work, [...] if you look pretty, they will give you more chance, [...], give you more advantage. (R13)

Work place, of course everybody looks at those who are slim and pretty, [...] The bosses do. [...] Yes, in my ex-work place. (R40)

In my opinion to what extent oh advantage. In my work place there is a lot of single guys, they are so handsome and they target for those that slimming lady. That's why I hope one day I could married one of them. Some more they are directors, bachelor. [...] Indeed because my boss is a guy, and he is more like, er how do I phrase it. He more to side someone more physical attractiveness, instead of their intelligence. (R46)

It make no difference, work place depend on intelligent, but appearance do play a part. [...] I notice my boss will favour more to those who are slim and attractive. He talks to them more frequently. (R47)

A...being slim of course, uh... is a...I think...a...is a is a trend la, everyone like to look at slim people, guy or ladies, even ladies like to look at ladies who is slim. [...] So, of course in the office, working office, the..the...,especially the oppo... opposite sex like, ah....they will treat you better la.[laughter]. I think so la. [...] Ya, more favor la, in the sense la. (R51)

Some even went to the extent of assuming how others would be envious of their appearance (R37) or be proud of the attention given (R34). For another (R35), her happiness was dependent on how others perceive her. R9 felt that the advantage of being slim was being free from “controlling diet” and feeling “healthy”. R45, on the other hand, is a lecturer. She has students who are always “younger” and “slimmer”. Hence, she compared herself to them and she was worried of losing her students’ attention should she fail to be “attractive enough”.

Advantage ... Uh, I feel more satisfied, ah, because I feel healthy, no need to think a lot about controlling diet. (R9)

It's made a different in work place. When I go to shopping people admire me for my... for my look, I feel proud with my body la. (R34)

In my work place, people will see me as attractive. I will feel happy. (R35)

Work place. I made people envy. About my body. [...] I feel like light to move around and a lot of people actually, um, jealous about it, though they don't say it out. [...] My colleagues um [...]. Of course female. [...] It go by really our performance as well. [...] Not to the extent of getting promoted, because I

look... of my body shape and things like that. But in the sense of I feel good about myself. (R37)

Home I can't really comment on that. I don't think there would be any uh implications as in very evident ones. But work place perhaps, because you meet a lot of people, and being a teacher or a tutor you have to stand in front of the audience constantly. So you tend to always assess yourself as well. How would you look in front of so many people. And it gets worse if you know your audience are people who are slimmer than you. Which in my case will always be so. Because they are students and they are young. OK, they are younger people than you, they have a lot of time to take care of their looks, they groom themselves, so you feel very self-conscious. Obviously, and sometimes the students can dress up, can be more dressy, those things happen. And when you have students like this, you tend to compare yourself to them, and feel that you perhaps you might not be so attractive, you know, you feel perhaps maybe, people can't pay so much attention to you, if you are not attractive enough. [...] So, sometimes, there is a sort of like, choosing your clothes differently when you have class compare to when you don't have classes. Ok, and when you don't have classes, you tend to be more slack on yourself, you don't really mind wearing uh more sloppy clothes. [...] And when you have classes or when you're meeting students or whatever, you tend to dress more professionally, to project the image of being professional rather than like those in the ads, sexy and all that. Because of ... partly because of decorum. (R45)

The next three respondents R42, supported how slim body has its advantages at the workplace but also thought that fat people were “look[ed] down” (R6) and “discriminated” (R24). R42 opposed strongly to relying on just appearance to achieve something in life. She snubbed, “I hope, do hope that more girls out there are able to get opportunities that really has nothing to do with theirs looks cause we have brains really and sometimes slimming advertisements make you forget that, that women have brains [sic].”

I think fat people are very look down upon. [...] Like what did they do to get so fat, you know, it's definitely an advantage because I can give an image that I work so hard that I don't have any fat accumulation. (R6)

[...] fat people are being discriminated in some extents. So...being slim in this society is actually an advantage. [...] maybe would get to work more efficiently. [...] because...I can see that some are very fat people, they walk very slow [...] in terms of efficiency, slim people maybe are more...an advantage. (R24)

Uh... Work place wise, because am a free lancer, I guess, I've less kind of a uh reason to interact with people on face to face. So most of the time, I get my jobs on the phone or through e-mail. [...] So, it's not really to do with how I look. But to a certain extent, when it is in the corporate film industry, if you look better, you will definitely given a more chance to be in front of the camera. [...] But lucky for me, I still don't really need to rely on my look to pay the rent la. Which is a good thing. Um ... And I do believe, and I hope do hope that more girls out there are able to get opportunities that really

has nothing to do with theirs looks cause we have brains really and sometimes slimming ads make you forget that, that women have brains. (R42)

The next four respondents (R43, R44, R53 & R55) did not support the notion that being slim would be an added advantage at the work place. However, upon careful scrutiny of their responses, the reasons behind their views were fundamentally related to body size as well. R43, for instance, is office-bound. She reasoned that she was not bothered about her body size since she did not have to meet people in her line of work. For her, the office-bound work lessen the common anxiety to be presentable to others. R44, on the other hand, mentioned that her working environment did not necessitate 'body shape' talk as the usual attire amongst employees was 'baju kurung'. To her, the 'baju kurung' hid the real body size. Indeed, it is note-worthy that "baju kurung" is typically meant for concealing the female figure. The very word "kurung" carries the idea of encasing one's body for modesty sake. It has the cultural ties where the female body is supposed to be hidden rather than exposed; the latter is regarded as potentially alluring. Therefore, R44 did not see slimness as an advantage at her work place.

For me is like, my work place, I don't face these problems. Because I don't see customer, always in the office like that. (R43)

At my work place, it doesn't have any effect la. Cause in terms of the people that, that work in my office, mostly they wear "baju kurung" anyway [...] In the work place environment where I am at this point of time, there is no... compel, [...] Because, in conversation they don't talk about body shape. How do I get slim, I must diet, I don't eat, things like that. So, to that extent, to being slim is not an advantage in the work place. (R44)

It is interesting to note that some are not bothered whether body size matters or not; yet, simply for the reason that they had never been fat before. For these respondents (R53 & R55), unless they were fat, they "don't care" or "don't really feel that there is anything wrong".

I mean, I mean slim or fat. To me in the work place, I think my boss don't care. I also don't care. [...] Because I think, being my average I mean body shape, so I think I don't care. Unless, if I'm more fat, maybe ya, I think is that. [...] Unless you're fat. But I think still ok la. I can still maintain myself. (R53)

Um...never thought about that. Because maybe I've never been so fat before in my life. [laughter] so, it's never comes to me that, I have to be slim in my work place. (R55)

Maybe it will make you uh work faster. [giggle] if you are being slim, then you don't have that, you don't have to carry extra weight to do house work, uh that is at home la. Perhaps, maybe at work place, it does, work place, because you see, other people working together with you correct, so sometimes, it makes you feel slightly better not being overweight la. [...] Well, because I'm not fat myself, so, I don't really feel that there is anything wrong with me. (R56)

For R8, a former beauty queen and currently a lecturer cum part-time model, body size mattered as she had to “ensure that [she] maintain[s] [her] figure. [She] feel[s] that people in this industry were constantly being judged”:

At my workplace... irrelevant because it's education the education industry [...] because I'm a former beauty queen, and because I model part time,[...] I have to ensure that I maintain my figure. [...] I feel that people in this industry are constantly... being judged and penalized so there's no choice but to... I don't know, unless you're a confident girl, or lady, which is very hard to find, or unless you're Heidi Klum, it's very hard. It will... that stigma will always be there. (R8)

For the rest, instead of body size, what mattered in work place depends on more on one's “self-confident” (R10) and “performance” (R12) rather than appearance. Only R38 stressed on “being slim, if it is equivalent to [being] fit, it is good [sic]”. In other words, she did not conform to the rest who placed emphasis on physical appearance rather than health.

I don't think being slim is an advantage um [...] in the workplace so much but it's more on, it's an advantage on when you wear clothes, and it's an advantage when you're self confident. (R10)

I don't think the body shape will affect er in my work place or home. [...] Because I think working place, [...] is what ... is your performance, your relationship and all these things, I don't think is really related to the body shape. (R12)

I think being slim, if it is equivalent to fit, it is good. Because it usually means being healthy. [...], in my matter if I'm healthy, then I can, I can do my daily chores or my work as usual, without interruption. So I can get the amount of the work that I need to do in my work at home or work place done within the time frame. [...] If I were to put slim and image together, and talk about it, I would think, um image is the qualitative ... uh measurement from the beholder. The eye o, of the beholder, so um...slim...to look at slim from an image point of view, can vary from a person to person. Because some people

might look at, because at this point of time a lot of people think, slim equals, equip to better image of beautiful. [...] As long as that person is healthy, no matter how the person look like, as long as that person look healthy. I think that, that is all that matter. Especially in work place. (R38)

7.2 CONCLUSION

The interview analysis resulted in three salient themes drawn from the main discourses found (discourse of health, discourse of beauty, discourse of heterosexuality and discourse of success). The first theme, 'Slim Equals Confidence', conveyed the respondents' belief that being slim enhances their self-confidence. The second main theme was 'Slim Equals Beauty/Sexual Appeal', where the respondents equated slimness with beauty. The third main theme, 'Slim Equals Social Upward Mobility', included the relationship between physical body appearances and career advantages.

The results found a strong 80% (32/40) of the respondents who thought that their confidence was influenced by the way they look. About (67.5% or 27/40) confided that being slim was equivalent to being attractive, beautiful and sexy. More than two-third of the respondents 72.5% (28/40) agreed that being slim was an advantage at their work places.

The findings are consistent with the previous two chapters, where both the textual and visual analyzes demonstrate how multimodal resources are used in the selected slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body. Therefore, the current chapter provides additional support to ascertain how the women in Klang Valley, Malaysia were influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body. The current research highlighted how the ideology of the ideal female body affects women's perception of themselves. From here, we can see that the notions of female attractiveness and beauty are not just a matter of physical appearance but they are also invested with culturally specific meanings such as an index of moral and personal

worth. Reischer and Koo (2004: 315) tell us that, “[a]s much as we may find solace in the well-worn adages that ‘beauty is only skin deep’ and ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder,’ our daily experience in the social world, and even our own responses to the body beautiful, tell us otherwise”. For this reason, a discussion of the socio-cultural practice of the society in question would give us an account of how the ideal female body is positioned by the slimming advertisements in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Fairclough's three-dimensional framework establishes the connections between properties of texts (i.e: the slimming advertisements), features of discursive practice (i.e: consumption of the slimming advertisements) and the sociocultural practice of the society in question. The relationship between text and sociocultural practice is mediated by discursive practice (Fairclough, 1995a). Hence, it is only through discursive practice that the text shapes and is shaped by sociocultural practice. As shown from this study, the discourse of the slimming advertisements has the power to shape the social and at the same time, is socially shaped (Fairclough, 1995a and 1995b).

In this chapter, the discussion is based on the research findings from the previous analytical chapters (cf. Chapters 5-7). Essentially, this chapter explores the relationship between the discursive practice and its order of discourse. As mentioned earlier, an order of discourse is actually "interdependent networks" of discourses which are in use within a specific social domain (Fairclough, 2001: 24; for details, see Section 2.5.2.5). For a concrete example of the order of discourse from this study, the Respondents expressed the following discourses: discourse of health, discourse of beauty, discourse of heterosexuality and discourse of success. These discourses are related under a broad rubric of the ideal female body. They form an interdependent and interrelated network or order of discourse. To illustrate their interdependence, consider the discourse of beauty (i.e.: the theme of femininity) and the discourse of heterosexuality (i.e.: the theme of attractiveness). In a heterosexual context, female sexual attractiveness typically depends on the gendered binary, feminine/masculine. Pienaar (2006: 11) tells us that, "[t]he archetypal feminine body is viewed as (hetero)sexually attractive because

it complements the opposite sex partner's masculine body (Pienaar & Bekker, 2006a)". This discourse supports the belief that the "body's aesthetic merit resides in its ability to attract the opposite sex" (Butler 1999; Jaworski, 2003 in Pienaar, 2006: 11). The interdependence is seen in how they are essentially saying the same thing where female beauty is seen as a means of seeking attention and attracting the opposite sex. Therefore, from this insight, the discourse of the sexually attractive female body (heterosexuality) and the discourse of the feminine body (beauty) are interdependent. Both rely on and implicitly invoke one another in the construction of the ideal female body.

From the research findings in the second level of Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse, the interview analysis yielded results in four major discourses (see above). Under each discourse, several themes were identified and listed (see Chapter 7). For an in-depth discussion, one main theme is extracted from each category of the discourses for identifying the non-discursive forces (i.e.: social cultural theories) that influence each theme. The themes of femininity, fat phobia, slim equals confidence, slim equals beauty and slim equals social upward mobility are considered some of the more salient themes. These themes reflect the wider social practices to which the communicative event (i.e: advertising) belongs. They point to the fact that the ideal female body is a social construction by the authority in power.

This study arrives at its aim at the discussion of the relationship between discursive practice and the broader social practice. It is here that questions relating to "ideological consequences" are addressed (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002: 86). The following sections discuss the sociocultural forces which reproduce the ideological construction of the ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements.

8.1 THE SOCIOCULTURAL FORCES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL FEMALE BODY

Many critics have described advertising as “a bellwether of cultural trends, a mirror of social values, and a powerful, usually malevolent force that shapes those values.” (Duffy, 1994: 5). These descriptions tell us the strong influence of advertisements. What most criticisms are uneasy with is the troubling fact that advertisements prescribe assumptions of what it means to be a woman (Berger, 1972; Duffy, 1994; Kilbourne, 1987; 1999b; Williamson, 1978; Wood, 2001; Wolf, 2002 and Zuraidah, 2003). In fact, art historian, John Berger (1972) goes even further by noting that advertising has infiltrated and become a central part of the culture of consumer society. In its power to ascribe and communicate meaning, advertising moves from business enterprise to becoming a social institution, replacing the functions traditionally held by art or religion (Berger, 1972 and Williamson, 1978).

What appears to be problematic is that advertisements do not just reflect the social world but a highly selective reconstitution of the day-to-day life. As Saco (1992: 25) contends, while the meaning of femininity and masculinity is constructed through advertisements representations, these constructions are usually projected as though they were direct knowledge of the social world – that is, representations of reality. Subtly, advertising has been distorting ‘reality’ and asserting its influence and manipulating consumers into buying a way of life as well as goods. Herein marks the subtle but serious problem: advertising distorts reality and functions to dictate certain social practices. A case in point from this study is the interrogation of the ideological construction of the ideal female body in slimming advertisements.

The following sub-sections discuss the sociocultural forces which reproduce ideological construction of the ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements. Three main non-discursive forces are found to be of great influence in the reproduction of the

ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements: the first explores the link between the female body and the self; the second delineates the link between the consumer capitalism and the objectification of the female body; and finally, the female body as heterosexually desirable through the gender lens.

8.1.1 The link between the female body and self

Firstly, Anthony Giddens' (1991) theory of post-traditional society claims how the contemporary Western society regards the body as a "vehicle of self-expression which the subject can transform at will to reflect his/her constantly changing identities" (Pienaar, 2006: 154). This claim shows that there is a link between body and identity where the body is constitutive of identity. In Giddens' (1991, as cited in Davis, 1997) words,

[b]odies no longer represent how we fit into the social order, but are the means for self-expression, for becoming who we would most like to be. In an era where the individual has become responsible for his or her own fate, the body is just one more feature in a person's 'identity project'.

To say that "the *body* is just one more feature in a person's '*identity project*'" (ibid, emphasis mine) points to the notion that one's body is not fixed but malleable and constantly changing. So when a body changes, the identity of the person changes as well. Phillips & Jørgensen (2002: 87) draw attention to Giddens' claim which shows that "people's social relations and identities are no longer based on stable social positions, but are rather created through negotiations in everyday interaction". Pienaar (2006: 24), following Davis (1997), Gimlin (2000) and Bordo (2003), highlight the malleable form of the body using the phrase, "plasticity of the postmodern body". To liken the postmodern body to 'plastic' emphasizes the current fixation with endless

transformative potentials of the postmodern body. Gimlin (2000: 80 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 154) stresses the “unlimited” ways of transforming the body, “[n]ot only has the body come to stand as the primary symbol for identity, but it is a symbol whose capacity for alteration and modification is understood to be unlimited.” This is best reflected in the discourses of cosmetic surgery and weight loss (Gimlin 2000; Bordo, 2003 and Pienaar, 2006). For instance, according to the discourse of weight loss,

a woman who diets to lose weight is doing so because she has made the ‘choice’ to improve herself by transforming her ‘deficient’ overweight body into a ‘flawless’, thin body. In fact, the ‘choice’ to subscribe to this ideal is circumscribed by what counts as a socially acceptable body (Pienaar, 2006: 25).

Pienaar (2006: 128-9), following Bordo (2003), describes this transformative desire as “the fantasy of postmodern culture” where “endless self-improvement and even miraculous transformation of the body” are considered plausible. She adds, the Western cultural mythologies, such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *Cinderella* and *Pygmalion*, fuel “the belief in the power of physical transformation as a means of attaining happiness”. Indeed, the contemporary versions of these cultural mythologies are reflected in reality shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition*. Both shows use the weight loss discourse to promote the transformative power of body yoked with the “happily ever after” stories.

The current study also discovered similar discourses in the slimming advertisements (especially the ones on reality show slimming campaign, see Appendix J) and at the discursive practice level (respondents’ talk). The relationship between the body and self is reflected in the discourse of how body size matters for one’s personal confidence, happiness and sexual desirability. From the interview analysis, three major themes are found to be the chief motivations behind women’s relentless pursuit of the slim body

appeal. According to the findings, a strong 80% (32/40) of the respondents think that their confidence is influenced by the way they look. About 68% (27/40) say that being slim is equivalent to being beautiful, sexy and desirable. More than two-thirds of the respondents (72.5% or 28/40) agree that being slim is an advantage at their work places. Responses such as the above exemplify how the ideology of the ideal female body affects women's perception of themselves.

This explains how body management practices such as slimming, dieting and exercising flourish in a culture which places an excessive value on physical appearance as a measure of internal worth. The Malaysian women's belief in the indivisible link between physical appearance and internal well-being reproduces the ideology that the body is constitutive of identity. When slimness is drawn as an equivalent to beauty, confidence and social upward mobility, it ceases to be a mere means of addressing physical problems; rather, it is a cultural and ideological problem. Body slimming, as Lee and Fung (2006: 10) contended, is exploited "as a strategy for a woman to compete as a sexual being and a gendered aesthetic object in a patriarchal order". When slimness is traded in for standardized beauty, regaining confidence, building up self-esteem and targeting social upward mobility, it is constructed as a measure of women's internal worth.

The sociocultural conception of the link between the female body and self is a powerful one. It makes women believe that her body is vital to her sense of self, her sense of female identity and her social worth. The orders of discourse related to this study construct slimming as transforming a woman's self-image, particularly her level of self-confidence, happiness and social worth. The causal relationship constructed between physical and psychological transformation functions to legitimise slimming as a boost for one's identity, rather than a mere health management practices (Gimlin, 2000; Bordo, 2003; Davis, 2002 and Pienaar, 2006).

8.1.2 The link between consumer capitalism and the objectification of the female body

Secondly, the consumer capitalist society links the female body with economic interest. The female body is regarded as an ‘asset’. The economic value of the female body is even stretched to the “commercialization of girls’ bodies” in Korea (Kim, 2011: 333). This is following the Korean Wave where Korean popular culture gains tremendous boom since the new millennium (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008 as cited in Kim, 2011: 341). Kim (2011: 335) highlights the “establishment of girl industries as a major part of Korea’s contemporary cultural economy and popular culture” where “girl bodies are manufactured as cultural content and converted into economic values”. In placing a currency upon the female body, the cultural economy and popular culture objectify the women and position them as erotic ‘objects’ of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Writing some thirty years ago, the art historian John Berger (1972: 47) explored the ways of seeing women from renaissance painting and how they are objectified:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. [...] The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. Berger (1972: 47) explains the cause and effect of this:

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman’s self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across the room or whilst she is

weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

A woman constantly surveys herself and she is constantly being surveyed by men. Corollary to this, it is not surprising that women are perpetually preoccupied with their physical appearance. In the past, women had to conform to what was considered desirable body sizes: from rotund to emaciated. To be thin-waisted, women underwent torturous measures – whalebone corsets and even the surgical removal of the lower ribs – and all in the name of fitting in with the social ideal (Hymowitz and Weisman, 1978). Today, instead of ribs, women resort to extreme methods to remove fat, including strenuous exercising regimes, high-tech methods of ‘lipocavitron’, ‘laserlipolysis’ or ‘ultrasonolipolysis’, or going under knife in liposuction procedures, in which case a part of the skin is cut open, fat is surgically sucked away, and the skin stitched back again (for the aforementioned terms, see Appendix H). These extreme means to remove fat are done in the name of attaining the ideal female body shape and size. Changes in the images portrayed in the mainstream media create confusion about what ideal female bodies should look like. One ideal focuses on a strong and healthy image, the image promoted in health and sports magazines; another is the image of voluptuous sex sirens, made mainstream through the popular media; while in the fashion world, the image of skinny models continues to thrive (Cohen, 1984). With these variations, it is hardly surprising that women feel ill at ease with their bodies, and are in a constant state of dissatisfaction (Orbach, 2009).

According to Wykes and Gunter (2005: 4), this dissatisfaction with the body image resides “within a discrepancy between the perceived self and ideal self”. The ideal self-image may be considered as either an ‘internal ideal’ or a ‘societal ideal’ resulting from the dictates of the surrounding cultural and societal environment as to what constitutes

the perfect body. Perceived-ideal discrepancies that cause dissatisfaction in relation to aspects of the body that are regarded as malleable, such as weight and the distribution of fat, are believed often to provoke attempts to narrow this discrepancy through body management practices such as dieting, exercising and even body modification.

Slimming advertisements are part of a sociocultural system which contributes to the ideology that equates thinness with beauty. A definition of feminine beauty in terms of the ideal female form: a thin, toned and flawless body is narrow and discriminatory. They offer stereotypical notions of the appearance of women that reinforces socially constructed ideas of the ideal body shape. In the context of a consumerist and capitalist society, a woman's body becomes a commodity with an exchange value and is a source of profit for the beauty industry on which the advertising depends. Besides ascribing a commercial value on the female body, the consumer capitalist society is also a society that places "great importance on physical appearance as an index of *moral* and *social worth*" (Pienaar, 2006: 138, emphasis mine). Stigmatization of fatness is a reflection of one of the moral coding of the body. As a general cultural phenomenon, the fat body symbolizes moral transgression because the fat body represents overindulgence, a lack of self-control and a lapse in managing the body in a socially acceptable ways. For the presumed irresponsibility for their body size, the fat people are constructed as a failed, unattractive and unproductive citizen. This state of affairs is succinctly described by Mackenzie (as cited in Cohen, 1984: 9), as follows:

Fear of fat grips America by its most tender part: its moral code. Fat, in short, is seen as bad, and thin is good. Preoccupied as people are with food and dieting, fat people and thin people alike seem to share the notion that fatness means a loss of self-control – considered the ultimate moral failure in our culture, and perhaps the most frightening of all fears.

Given the sociocultural discrimination against fatness, it is not surprising that the social worth of overweight body is negatively constructed as well. The stigma surrounding excess weight abounds where negative traits are associated with fat people; they are perceived as gluttons, lazy, clumsy and lack of self-control.

The current study also identified the dominant discourse of *fat phobia* from the discourses in the slimming advertisements as well as the empirical data (emphasis, mine). This is one of the salient themes under the discourse of health. The researcher situates the dominant discourse of fat phobia within its sociocultural context to show how this discourse and the ideology it promotes are socioculturally conditioned. This particular discourse discusses the construction of the overweight women in terms of multiple lacks and flaws. Some of the lacks and flaws, inter alia, are lack of self-control, lack of discipline, socially unattractiveness, unhealthy and associated with negative human traits such as over-indulgence, laziness, gluttony, clumsy, unproductive and irresponsible. It is thus clear that fat individuals are blamed for their condition, for not having self-control. This lack of self-control manifests itself in stereotypical characteristics of fatness, that fatness is equivalent to laziness, clumsiness, gluttony and many other unfavourable attributes. All these point symbolically to inferiority and worthlessness. Being overweight becomes a social liability and invites ridicule. This discourse reflects the sociocultural system of belief where the fat body is regarded as deviant or transgressive.

This leads to an anti-fat discourse which indirectly promotes slimness as the ideal. The overemphasis in slimming practices on the 'ideal' body size and shape creates a kind of shackling fear: the fear of fat. Fat becomes an oppressive force, an instrument of control over a woman's body size and shape. It does not just affect those who are obese; in fact, it keeps almost everyone on her toes (Cohen, 1984). Tuan argues that "fear is in the mind but, except in pathological cases, has its origin in external

circumstances that are truly threatening.” (Tuan, 1979: 6).

In promoting slimming products or services which encourage women to do something to their bodies in order to conform to the ideal slender body, women are made to believe that fat is ugly, fat is to be feared and most certainly, fat is dangerous. Such discourses construct fatness as physically unattractive, socially undesirable, problematic and unhealthy. For this reason, it is of little wonder that there are a considerable number of women who aspire to conform to standards of beauty determined by what other people find attractive, pleasing and desirable.

This study sees this in terms of how the capitalist discourses construct slimness, youthfulness and beauty as highly esteemed, whereas the overweight and ageing female body is increasingly pathologised and devalued. In the Western culture, Lupton (1996) and LeBesco (2004: 154 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 137) inform that one of the reasons fatness is vilified is due to its perceived unattractiveness, low market value and regarded as “threatening in terms of the suggestion of downward mobility”. Pienaar (2006: 138) deftly points out the irony of holding the overweight body as counter-productive to the capitalist economy:

[d]espite the perceived unmarketability of their bodies, overweight women constitute an obvious market base for diet and fitness products. In respect of their spending power and their consumption of the products designed to help them attain the ideal body, overweight women represent the ideal consumer, servicing the very industry which constructs them as deficient and unmarketable.

Stigmatization of fatness, as discussed above, is a cultural phenomenon. From the textual analysis, it was discovered that negative adverbs and adjectives are frequently employed to depict the fat deposits in various body parts. For examples, the use of the adverb, *unsightly* and adjectives such as, *stubborn*, *unwanted*, *ugly* are transmitting the

idea that ‘fat’ is problematic, unacceptable and strongly abhorred by the society. As revealed by the literature review, many women are internalizing this ideology so much so that even the normal size women and young girls are afraid of gaining weight (Levine & Smolak, 2006; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1985 as cited in Clarke, Murnen & Smolak, 2010). Similarly, as discovered in the visual analysis, there are several ways of advocating for slimness as the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements. This use of fear tactics in slimming advertisements is one of those ways. Both Ad 3 and Ad 4 used images of obese women to communicate the messages of how fatness is greatly despised and lack aesthetic value (see Section 7.3). The use of morbidly obese images of women suggests that the female body is imperfect unless it conforms to the slender, taut and shapely body. By the standards of the ideal female body as advocated by these slimming advertisements, the fat body is viewed as unattractive, unhealthy and transgressive.

We are living in an image-based culture that not only celebrates youthfulness and thinness, but defines the identity of people as individuals in terms of what they possess, buy, or look like. Representations of idealized bodies in slimming advertising construct a visual reality to convince women that what they see is real and achievable. On the other hand, there is a tendency to hide the fat or obese, and when it appears it is intended to humiliate and to generate a fear of fat. Positive images of fat women are not presented. By visually reducing the representations of a woman’s body to one prevailing image, advertising asserts control of what women should look like, and if they do not conform they are considered to lack self control.

These advertisements provide evidence of the way in which the fear of not conforming to the beauty standards of thinness is enacted in discourse through a combination of linguistic and visual means, creating a binary opposite of the skinny and the overweight: the former represents the ‘ideal’ and the latter, the ‘other’ (Zuraidah & Lau, 2010). The

study looks at the way slimming advertisements work to frame thinness as the ideal of beauty, and instill in women a ‘fear-of-fat’ by representing fat bodies as abnormal and deviant. The picture of the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements aims to make women feel insecure about their own bodies, so that they may resort to dieting, strenuous exercise, anorexic and bulimic practices, and even body modification through cosmetic surgery. What is worst is that being overweight does not just affect someone’s body image and self esteem; it also affects her life in relation to other people in different settings including social (Hammond, 1996), educational (Bell & Morgan, 2000)³³ and employment settings (Roehling, 1999).³⁴ The latter, as seen in the interview analysis, is shown to be a predominant conjecture that supports the idea that being in good shape also propels one into better career prospects where over a strong 72.5% of the respondents are in agreement with how slimness is a stepping stone to a better prospect at work (see details, Section 7.1.3). This confirms LeBesco’s (2004: 154 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 137) observation that “[Fat bodies are read as] inferior in terms of beauty, and threatening in terms of the suggestion of downward mobility”. This explains the constant low self-esteem and high anxiety over their body weight and shape among the overweight people (Grogan, 1999; Scriven, 2007 and Khor et al., 2009: 303). Inevitably, this results in the fear of fat and could lead to a cycle of internalized stigmatization and self-deprecation, anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and a strong desire to lose weight. Far worse, this develops into psychosomatic symptoms, those of anorexia, bulimia or any other body dysmorphias (Orbach, 2009). Hammond (1996) adds that obese people suffer from cultural consequences such as discrimination, economic disadvantage, social stigma and negative social interactions. It is not surprising then that overweight women are in danger of being marginalized and oppressed, hence becoming the ‘other’. This ‘othering’, as Orbach (2009: 126) sees as a “growing” problem, is

“[t]he designation of fat as worthy of scorn and dislike, and of fat people as outsiders who should not only dislike themselves but also be discriminated against”.

Cohen (1984:1), quoting from Judith Stein (1981) tells us that such overemphasis only serves as a form of social and psychological control.

Fat oppression doesn't just affect fat people or fat women. It really works to keep everyone in line. It's a whole system of social control that keeps thin women absolutely terrified of being fat or thinking they are fat, and a whole lot of energy goes into dealing with fat. It keeps women who are medium-sized absolutely panic-stricken because they are right on the border. Those of us who are fat are over that border into some state of evil, basically, very much outside of what is permissible within white American culture. If you are fat, then what you are supposed to do is strive desperately to get non-fat.

If this form of social and psychological control is unchecked and unchallenged, women will come to accept and internalize the ideology of ‘thin is good and fat is bad’ as a matter of common sense. Living in a fat-phobic world, an overweight woman may have negative conceptions of self, making it difficult to live a normal life. Obesity has a way of making the obese woman put her life on hold, just as the self-proclaimed mantra, ‘when I’m thinner, then I’ll ...’. The quest for thinness drives women into deeper traumas of physical discomfort, self-denial and self-sacrifice -- a kind of bondage worse than the Chinese foot-binding practices of the past.

In general, slimming advertisements adopt a number of discourses to persuade women to conform to the ‘ideal’ female body. In the textual and visual analyzes, fear tactics are found to be one of the strategies in the Malaysian slimming advertisements examined. These advertisements encourage women to despise fat on their body in order to make them buy the slimming services and products advertised. The exploitation of fear for promotional purposes is a serious matter and needs to be highlighted and addressed.

Cohen, in referring to Chernin's book, *The Obsession* (1981), describes succinctly the damaging effect of the fear of fat on women:

The image of women that appears in the advertisement of a daily newspaper has the power to damage a woman's health, destroy her sense of well-being, break her pride in herself, and subvert her ability to accept herself as a woman.

There is a need to highlight the damaging effect of slimming advertisements that persuade and induce women to think that they need the service or product to help them achieve the desired perfect body. What is more damaging is the use of fear tactics to frighten women into slimming practices.

8.1.3 The female body as heterosexually desirable through the gender lens

Advertising, in the past and present, has been and still is, using gender as one of preeminent social resources, where gender is an integral part of the social structure and psychology of advertising (Barthel, 1988:6 and Jhally, 1989: 134). Given the popularity of advertisements in our contemporary culture and the representations of gender within them, it is hardly a surprise that advertising has become a focus of analysis for researchers concerned with the ways in which advertisements produce forms of knowledge about femininity and beauty.

Admittedly, even since the 1960s, the portrayals of women in advertising and their impacts have been topics of contentious debate. The depictions of women in slimming advertisements are varied. In each slimming ad, it depicts a very narrow aspect of size and shape of female body to be regarded as beautiful. Together with other types of advertisements, however, they reflect the complexity of contemporary womanhood. Some of the advertisements that target women exclusively range from head to toe: skin care, hair care, cosmetic, fashion, perfume, jewellery, slimming, just to name a few. At

best, they all intend to enhance female beauty; at worst, they are really saying that there is something wrong in every female which needs correction, either through the products or services promoted. The growing concern with the ways in which women have been constructed within popular media is founded in how media representations constitute gender identity, rather than simply reflecting or representing that identity.

The portrayals of women in contemporary advertisements are varied. All of the advertisements prescribe assumptions of what it means to be a woman. In isolation, each group of advertisements depicts a very narrow aspect of gender definition. Together, however, they reflect the complexity of contemporary womanhood. In product and service weight-loss advertisements, slimness becomes a means of defining femininity and beauty, reconstituting it, and disseminating it as direct knowledge of the social world – that is representations of reality.

The images of the ideal female body, as they appear in slimming advertisements, have the power to narrowly define and construct the ‘feminine’ and ‘beauty’. These images have been a site of struggle over meanings of femininity, beauty; by and large, gender stereotypes and gender ideologies as produced by the mediated discourses of the slimming culture. The increasing concern over it is motivated by the implications it has over women’s lives, for example, the grave implications for the self-conception, identity, and social values of women (cf. Section 8.1.1). The importance of understanding the images of women in slimming advertisements, as well as the power these images have in defining femininity and beauty, is related to the growing co-optation of women’s insecurity as capital for consumer market (cf. Section 8.1.2). Slimming advertisements therefore can be understood as carriers of a dominant ideology of femininity and beauty. Advertisements define what forms of femininity are acceptable and desirable. They define what is beautiful and what is not (implied).

Experiences that contradict with prevailing values of those given are either excluded or denied, hence, reinforcing existing limited meanings of femininity and beauty.

Feminist theorists, through the “lens of gender”, exposes how female body slimming is used to promote femininity and thus, enhances sexual desirability (Gimlin, 2000; Davis, 2003: 75 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 134). From the slimming advertisements, the overarching messages seem to point to how slim and shapely body is considered desirable, ideal and a *sine qua non* to feminine beauty. The female body comes in all sizes and shapes; the quest for an ideal female body is akin to the quest for the Holy Grail. The way body slimming is projected and promoted “as a strategy for a woman to compete as a sexual being and a gendered aesthetic object in a patriarchal order” is a cultural and ideological tool rather than a means to address physical problem (Lee and Fung 2006: 10).

In the context of this study’s investigation, one of these problems pertaining to advertising’s ideological functions is in line with Shelley Budgeon’s (1994: 56-7) concerns:

The images of femininity, as they appear in advertisements, have the power to narrowly define and construct the ‘feminine.’ Therefore, feminist analysis of these mass-produced and mass-circulated images has been a struggle over meaning. This struggle has been motivated by a concern for the implications that definitions of “femininity” have for women’s lives. The importance of understanding the images of women in advertising, as well as the power these images have in defining femininity, is to be found in the connection between these images and the wider social context within which they exist.

The word “femininity”, like the term ‘gender’ is understood as a social, symbolic creation. It is neither innate nor necessarily immutable. Gender, from a vast repertoire

of gender studies, is understood to be socially constructed and acquired through interaction in a social world and it is malleable (Jhally, 1989; Kilbourne, 1999b; Wood, 2001 and Sunderland, 2006). Wood (2001: 22-3) explains how a culture constructs and perpetuates meanings of gender by endowing biological sex with social significance. In Wood's words:

The meaning of gender grows out of a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life. A culture constructs and sustains meanings of gender by investing biological sex with social significance. [...] To be masculine is to be strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled. [...] To be feminine is to be attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships. Those who embody the cultural definition of femininity still don't outdo men (especially their mates), disregard others' feelings, or put their needs ahead of others. Also, "real women" still look good (preferably very pretty and/or sexy), adore children, and care about homemaking.

Wood (2001: 25) adds, "individuals who internalize cultural prescriptions for gender reinforce traditional views by behaving in ways that support prevailing ideas about masculinity and femininity". Drawing from this, femininity is also malleable in every sense as it is constructed within social interaction and is constantly negotiated in its norms, conventions and relations.

The ideal female body as promoted in the slimming advertisements is closely tied in with the notion of feminine appeal; hitherto, what constitutes femininity and beauty in contemporary culture need to be re-examined. As Wood (2001) stresses, the idea of beauty differs from culture to culture and its characteristics are not immutable; in fact, they are constantly undergoing changes. Wood tells us that in the States, to be feminine

is to be “attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships”, whereas in the Confucian cultures, “femininity is associated with virtue and modesty” (as quoted in Frith, et al., 2005). This goes to support the assumption that the body as an entity that is not immutable, but subscribes to the social construction (Zuraidah, 2003 and Zuraidah, 2009).

Advertising perpetually sells the ideal beauty as young, flawless skin, perfect curves and features – all these ‘manufactured’ as they deem fit and in the process, distorts reality or in Zuraidah’s (2003: 265) remark, “[o]nce a certain look is sanctioned by enough people, it redefines normal appearance, even if society has crossed over the borderline of sanity”. It is exactly when a distorted reality is sanctioned as acceptable and normal, the ideology of femininity is considered most successful. van Dijk (1998: 8) in developing “a new notion of ideology that serves as the interface between social structure and social cognition”, informs us that:

[...] ideologies may be very succinctly defined as *the basis of the social representations, shared by members of a group*. This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, *for them*, and to act accordingly [emphasis, author’s].

The normalization of a distorted reality calls for the need to pathologize femininity: of what it is to be considered as the beautiful face, body, complexion and body shape. Messages of femininity are, over time, become enrooted in culture and shared by kith and kin, literature, media, and especially beauty industries. It is a site of cultural imprints where the cultural imperative that women’s bodies require size control and, unblemished fair faces, certain looks will be critically seen in the terms of product of discursive practices and social practices.

Slimming advertisements, as a specific type of discourse, in the process of promoting services and selling products, offer stereotypical notions of the appearance of women that reinforce socially constructed ideas of femininity and beauty. This is manipulating the essentialist characteristics of women, setting them in a highly fixed mould of how a woman should behave and look like. As shown from the textual and visual analyzes, the lexical items and the visual images selected in the slimming advertisements are promoting and endorsing the idea that ‘slim’ body shape is feminine, beautiful and desirable.

To frame slimness as feminine, beautiful and desirable, positively lexicalized adjectives to ‘prescribe’ the desirable size and shape are employed in the slimming advertisements. An ideal female body size is described as *slim/slimmer, slender, svelte, trim/trimmer* (for more examples, see Section 6.1.1). The ‘ideal’ shape such as *curvaceous, firm/firmer, taut, tight/tighter, toned, shapely, sculpted* are frequently used to endorse what is considered perfect female body image (for more examples, see Section 6.1.1). The ideology of slimness as feminine beauty as reflected in the dominant discourse of beauty is a mere construction by the advertisers. Therefore, the researcher underscores the fact that many Malaysian women may not realize that such descriptions of the ideal female body are but a construction by the advertisers.

The importance of physical attractiveness to increase their sexual desirability is evident in dominant discourses of beauty where the respondents invoke the male gaze to construct the slender body as desirable. Slimming is constructed with such fairy-like power of transformation of women’s lives in which the “happily ever after” myth is exploited (Pienaar, 2006: 128). Slimming fortifies the fantasies of transformation (i.e.: from the ‘ugly duckling’ to a ‘beautiful swan’) and self-improvement (cf. Sections 8.1.1 and 8.1.2). The researcher problematises this construction because such beauty discourses derive from and replicate the prevailing Western consumer capitalism belief

in the value of self-improvement and individual capacity for transformation. A construction as such only serves to feed on one's fantasy of the unattainable ideals of life. This places increasing pressure on women to pursue an ultimately unattainable ideal - the ideal female body. It is like advocating to "transcend the limits of our corporeality" (Pienaar, 2006: 129). Bordo (2003: 245-6) posits,

[postmodern culture] has generated an industry and an ideology fuelled by fantasises of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, an ideology of limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and, indeed the very mortality of the body".

To yoke femininity (discourse of beauty) with sexual desirability (discourse of heterosexuality) is "a strategy for a woman to compete as a sexual being and a gendered aesthetic object in a patriarchal order" (Lee & Fung, 2006: 10). Discourses which promote the ideal female body as the ultimate beauty efface the fact that a woman's choice are hemmed in by what counts as a socially acceptable, heterosexually desirable body (Bordo, 2003).

8.2 Colonization within an order of discourse

The discussions above highlight the social construction of the ideal female body. We see how the body is social and the social is constructed. Promotional discourses such as slimming advertising construct the ideal female body as healthy, attractive, beautiful and desirable (from the four major discourses found in this study). One would not expect them to present the objective 'truth' about women's bodies as their aim is to persuade women to buy what they are promoting. In this context, discourses of slimming (textual or visual) can be regarded as a constructive tool representing particular versions of reality that are not 'true' or 'valid'.

Of the four main discourses found in the text and the discursive practice dimensions, the discourse of health ‘seems’ more preeminent than other discourses. This is what Fairclough (1989: 198) called “colonization”. The process of colonization refers to “changes in salient relationships between discourse types within the societal order of discourse” (ibid). The discourse of health is used in service of the slimming pursuits to legitimate the quests for beauty, confidence and social upward mobility as being primarily motivated by a concern for health. On the surface level, the discourse of healthy body promotes physiological health and well-being as the attributes of the ideal body. In so doing, the discourse of a healthy body appears to position aesthetic and relational concerns, such as the pursuits of beauty and heterosexual attractiveness as being secondary to the primary goal of being healthy. The discourse of the healthy body has been allied to the discourses of beauty and heterosexuality to legitimate the pursuit of slimming as being driven by a concern for health. The blurring of the order of discourse within a particular communicative event endorses the complementary relationship between health, beauty and female sexual attractiveness. As Seid (1989: 10 as cited in Pienaar, 2006: 168) comments on the power of such a complementary relationship where “[t]he unusual alliance between our beauty and health standards gives the imperative to be fat-free a special potency [sic] and has bred the ancillary convictions that thinner is also happier and more virtuous.”

In a careful examination of this concern, the researcher discovered that the discourse of a healthy body is *not* distinct from other discourses which promote the ideology of female sexual attractiveness; in fact, it is found to be covertly promoting this ideology (emphasis mine). In the past, weight-loss is linked to health consideration for men and women. Obesity related diseases like hypertension, osteoarthritis, heart problems, diabetes, and so forth require individuals to watch out for their diet and engage in active lifestyles in order to prolong life. Weight-loss was due to an individual’s medical

condition that was clinically diagnosed and observed for a period of time. However, by the latter part of the 1990s, the discourse on weight-loss went through dramatic change: from “weight-loss” to “body slimming”. The change of terms reflects the emphasis on the “body” over the “weight” as well as the stress on “slimming” instead of “losing” (Lee & Fung, 2006:11). This has spurred people into a lifestyle pursuit rather than a temporary attempt to lose weight. Jane Michell, a nutritional consultant and weight loss expert reported that, “[m]en see dieting as a one-off event, whereas dieting is a way of life for many women,” (Topham, 2011). The discrepancy between male and female responses to dieting reflects the gravity of the problem of the female folks, where image is central and of paramount interest. Lee and Fung (2006: 11, emphasis mine) noted,

[t]he shifting from a discourse on a clinical condition that has more in common with other health problems to a new discourse on body slimming reflects the fact that the *image* takes a prominent place in the new currency of weight loss.

From Lee and Fung’s (2006) observation, image has been elevated to a level of importance and significance in the discourse of slimming. Stressing on the discourse of body slimming shifted the emphasis from health to image, where the external presentation of self is extolled and identity is defined by what one buys, wears, uses and consumes. Like the portrayals of many animated characterizations of people or animals, being slim is arbitrarily associated with commendable virtues such as agility, beauty, diligence, gracefulness and self-control.

The movie industries are certainly savvy and swift in cashing in on profit by harping on the current slimming culture. Since movies are largely seen as entertainment and also a form of mass communication, its role in perpetuating the stereotypical notions associated with being fat/slim is absolutely viral. The movie, *Love on a Diet* (2001), starred by Sammi Cheng, Hong Kong popular singer and actress, features how the

extremely obese Mini Mo (the protagonist played by Sammi Cheng) went to desperate means to shed pounds in order to meet up with her old-time beau. This theme seems to be of an international interest: in Malaysia, *Cinta Kolesterol* (2003), in Thailand, *Cholesterol Teerak* (2005), and many other similar spins to the ideology of how slimming serves as a solution for women to acquire romance and happiness in life. In real life, these actresses are also icons of slimness, beauty and success. This compels ordinary women to idolize them even more. The cultural setting sets up an utopian note of hope that such drastic slimming is achievable and the hope that romance is attainable once the body is subjected to the desirable shape and size.

In this way, the 'new' emphasis on the image/body slimming discourse dictates what is more desirable. As Lee and Fung (2006: 15, emphasis mine) stress, "body slimming is a *mediated discourse* that women as social actors produce and consume for the construction of their gendered identities." To achieve a slim body is synonymous to having "a false sense of self"/of beauty, diligence, graceful manners, self-control and other fine qualities (Lee & Fung, 2006: 11). This displaces the importance of weight-loss in terms of health and well-being. Also, body slimming does not seem to be a life-threatening concern, rather it is a lifestyle. Stressing on lifestyle seems to spread the message that this is something to be adopted. It is more about achieving and maintaining an image-based way of life where consumers are constantly bombarded with different products or services to stay in this lifestyle. These products or services range from "diet" food and drinks, gym, attire to cosmetic industries. Lee and Fung (2006: 12) inform us that,

[t]he culture of body slimming has become so pervasive in Hong Kong society that the advertising discourses of other products and services have to conform to those of body slimming in order to succeed. For example, dairy products cannot

be merely promoted as being food for health; they have to be promoted as being low in fat so that they do not “harm” the slim body.

Evidently, many products: diet coke, 0% yogurt, less-fat milk, synthetic sugar, less sugar products and so on, are in line with the philosophy “that they do not ‘harm’ the body”, as mentioned by Lee and Fung (2006: 12). The body slimming culture has infiltrated into every sphere of life and it dictates what is more desirable – body image instead of health.

The current body-slimming cult as promoted by slimming advertisements is a powerful tool in constructing beauty ideals for women. Aside from using advertisements and campaigns that use body slimming as selling points, the discourses employed are ones that invoke the notions of how slimming can enhance a woman’s confidence, enable her to be attractive and sociable, to find happiness, romance, to feel good; hence making friends and attracting the opposite sex is made easy. To boot, it is a stepping stone to upward career mobility. This sense of autonomy and success does not really endow the women with real power actually. On the contrary, engaging in slimming culture enslaves them.

Besides, the slimming centres have invested heavily in hiring spokespersons, such as popular actresses, models, singers, TV hosts, radio DJs and other socialites, to further convince the grassroots public. Lee and Fung (2006: 13) tell us that “spokespersons” play an important role:

To be spokesperson of a beauty salon means more than advertising their services; the spokesperson becomes synonymous with the brand. The spokespersons bring their images forged in other domains (such as from the movies) and their social histories to sell the body slimming culture. The

spokespersons are rarely overweight; in fact, some are underweight to the extent that they can be mistaken as anorexic.

The spokespersons' representation draws on cultural understanding of body slimming and gender relations, of existing values of what is beautiful, feminine, successful and sexually appealing. These accounts of their representation are nestled within their experiences of gender and consumption in the material world. They tell the women that 'slim equals beauty', 'slim equals confidence', 'slim equals success' and so forth. Owing to the high-profile media coverage and the publicity of lucrative endorsement deals of the spokespersons, the common women are drawn to their representations, hence body slimming becomes a pursuit of just everybody, the obese, the single, the unhealthy, as well as by the skinny, the married, and the healthy.

From the expositions above, the changes within the slimming emphasis: from "weight-loss" to "body slimming" conveys the pre-eminence of *image* which replaces that of weight loss for healthier body (Lee & Fung, 2006: 11, emphasis mine). The discourses on slimming, on the other hand, displace women's worth, where beauty is tantamount to gaining confidence, necessary in order to make friends, enhance career and exuding sex appeal. In other words, beauty is defined narrowly by youth and a shapely body. In so doing, it legitimates heterosexual norms and maintains and perpetuates women as erotic objects of the male gaze (cf. Section 8.1.2).

8.3 CONCLUSION

Indeed, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework provides the resources for the researcher to explain the social practice that is believed to be both constitutive and constituted. As the study reveals, the discourses of the slimming advertisements have the power to shape the social and at the same time, it is socially shaped (Fairclough, 1995a & 1995b).

This chapter delineates some of the sociocultural forces which reproduce the ideological construction of the ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements. Another interesting insight is how the female body is a site of discursive struggle. Several competing discourses vie to promote the pursuit of body slimming. As the study illustrates, body slimming is "a cultural and ideological problem, rather than a way of addressing a physical problem." (Lee & Fung, 2006: 10).

The findings of this study argue that these advertisements offer proof of how slimness is a part of a sociocultural system of representation where female beauty is limited to images of women that focus on the slim appeal. It is part of a sociocultural system in which the 'ideal' female beauty is constructed as such: a young, slender and shapely body. It is also consolidated into a system of belief that objectifies women and dictates how women should look or not look like. This is done by constructing, promoting and sustaining false beauty needs or, more precisely, measuring up to the social expectations of what women should look like. This beauty ideology and belief system, as seen in the interviews, has been internalized by most of the Malaysian women interviewed.

This study, therefore, is timely and significant as it exposes how this 'ideal' female body is a social construction. By examining the ideal female body image from the linguistic and visual social semiotics lens as well as supported with interview data, the

integration of different tools of enquiry provides insights to possible causes leading to body dysmorphic disorders.

CHAPTER 9 : CONCLUSION

9.0 INTRODUCTION

This study examines how slimming advertisements work to construct slimness as the ideal female beauty. To investigate this issue, it analyzed two sources of data: slimming advertisements and interviews. The slimming advertisements were examined using Fairclough's (1995a) three-dimensional theoretical framework and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual social semiotics (1996). Three research questions guide the investigation of the research problem, i.e. the construction of an ideal female body in the slimming advertisements (cf. Section 1.2).

The first two research questions deal with issue at the first level, i.e. discourse-as-text (see Figure 2; Fairclough, 1995a: 98). It examines how multimodal resources are used in slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body using linguistic and visual modes (RQs 1 and 2 in Chapter 1). At the textual level, the analysis focuses on the lexical items used in describing the ideal female body. The lexical analysis enables the researcher to investigate how the choice of words used in the slimming advertisements contributes to the ideological construction of the 'ideal' female body. The analytical framework of visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) provides a systematic and explicit method for analyzing the visual meanings established by the syntactic relations between people, places and things portrayed in images.

The third research question deals with issues at the second level, i.e. discourse-as-discursive practice (RQ 3 in Chapter 1). The concept of discursive practice is defined as involving processes of text production, distribution and consumption (Fairclough, 1995a). Given the scope of this study, only the practice of text consumption was examined through interviews conducted with 40 respondents. The responses from the

40 respondents were analyzed thematically according to four major discourses: discourse of health, discourse of beauty, discourse of heterosexuality, and discourse of success. In each discourse, several themes emerged (see below). These themes were derived from the respondents' desire to have the 'ideal' female body.

Finally, discourse-as-sociocultural practice is discussed in relation to the findings in all three research questions. It is in this dimension that the ideological consequences are addressed. How the slimming advertisements promote the ideology of the ideal female body is seen in the light of the social practice that plays the key role in maintaining, disseminating and propagating the ideology behind the ideal female body.

9.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

9.1.1 Discourse-as-text

Following Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse, the first research question seeks to address the issue concerning how the ideal female body is *textually* constructed in the selected slimming advertisements.

Overall, from the lexical analysis, the ideal female body is constructed as slim and slender; secondly, it has to be tight and firm; thirdly, it also has to be sleek, sculpted and shapely. These characteristics of the ideal female body are reflected in the choice of words used. Adverbs and adjectives with negative descriptions were frequently employed to depict the fat deposits in various body parts. For example, the use of the adverb, *unsightly* and adjectives such as, *stubborn*, *unwanted*, *ugly*. The lexical choice supports the ideology that 'fat' is problematic and unacceptable by society. The female body with fat deposits is constructed as a body that is flawed. Therefore, it is in need of being fixed. The use of verbs like "*targets* and *reduces* stubborn fat and cellulite", "*sculpts* your body", "*tightens* saggy skin", "*trim* the tummy" constructed the need for

the female body to be fixed. The female body is regarded as malleable and in need of fixing (i.e: cosmetic surgery, diet, exercises). The lexical choice in the slimming advertisements reflects a process that influences and is influenced by ideology. When the lexis used to signify the female body is naturalized, the reality constructed by that lexis becomes naturalized and accepted as 'common sense'. For instance, the slim or slender female body is constantly depicted as the ideal female body, thus, over time; this lexicalization is accepted as natural. Slimming advertisements construct perfection (in terms of slim, firm and shapely) as normalized expectation of a female body.

The second research question is: How is the ideal female body *visually* constructed in the selected slimming advertisements? The selected advertisements were categorized under five main categories for analysis: i) celebrity endorsement; ii) morbidly obese; iii) fat to slim transformation; iv) mirror gazing; and finally, v) mothers (see Section 6.0). From these five major categories, it was discovered that there are several ways of advocating for slimness as the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements. The female body in the slimming advertisements is constructed as imperfect unless it conforms to the slender, taut and shapely body that they promote. The female body becomes a site for 'construction' requiring constant attention, care and change. At the same time, the pictures showing before- and after- transformation came with the messages that slimness attracts, boosts confidence and is regarded as beautiful. Again, women are made to feel inadequate if they do not fit into the slim, firm and shapely body.

These slimming advertisements provide evidence of the way in which the fear of not conforming to the beauty standards of thinness is enacted in discourse through a combination of linguistic and visual means, creating a binary opposite of the skinny and the overweight: the former represents the 'ideal' and the latter, the 'other' (Zuraidah & Lau, 2010). The study looked at the way slimming advertisements work to frame

thinness as the ideal of beauty, and instill in women a ‘fear-of-fat’, constructing fat bodies as abnormal and deviant. This picture of the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements aims to make women feel insecure about their own bodies, so that they may resort to dieting, strenuous exercise, anorexic and bulimic practices, and even body modification through cosmetic surgery.

9.1.2 Discourse-as-discursive practice

In the second level of Fairclough’s three-dimensional conception of discourse, the study seeks to answer the third research question: In what ways are women influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body?

The interview analysis identifies four major discourses: discourse of health, discourse of beauty, discourse of heterosexuality, and discourse of success. Under each discourse, several themes were found and listed in Table 3 below. In the discussion according to the themes, overlapping themes from different discourses were collapsed; for instance, the themes of beauty (discourse of femininity) and attractiveness (discourse of heterosexuality) were combined as they essentially say the same thing that female beauty is seen as a means of seeking attention and attracting the opposite sex.

Table 3: Themes identified according to discourses

DISCOURSES			
ATTRACTION	BEAUTY	HEALTH	SUCCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ attractiveness ✓ attention-seeking ✓ male gaze ✓ romantic ✓ sex appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ beautiful ✓ feminine ✓ dainty ✓ slim looks good on any clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ depressed ✓ fear of fat ✓ unhealthy ✓ unhappy ✓ obese ✓ overweight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ confidence ✓ self-esteem ✓ social upward mobility

For an in-depth discussion, the most salient themes were extracted from the aforementioned categories. The first of which was ‘Slim Equals Confidence’, which conveyed the respondents’ belief that being slim enhances their self-confidence. The second main theme was ‘Slim Equals Beauty’, where the respondents equate slimness with beauty. The third main theme, ‘Slim Equals Social Upward Mobility’ is concerned with the relationship between physical body appearances and career advantages.

The results showed that 80% (32/40) of the respondents think that their confidence is influenced by the way they look. About 68% or 27/40 confide that being slim is equivalent to being beautiful and sexy. More than two-third of the respondents (72.5% or 29/40) agree that being slim is an advantage at their work places.

The findings are consistent with the findings from the textual and visual analyses which demonstrate how multimodal resources are used in the selected slimming advertisements to construct the ideal female body. The findings provide additional support that women in Malaysia (at least in the case of the 40 subjects interviewed) were influenced by the ideology of the ideal female body.

9.1.3 Discourse-as-sociocultural practice

In discourse-as-sociocultural practice level, the discussion focuses on the relationship between discursive practice and the wider sociocultural practice to which the communicative event (i.e.: advertising) belongs.

It is discovered that there are three main non-discursive forces that influence the reproduction of the ideal female body image in the slimming advertisements. The roles of these non-discursive forces are discussed as follow:

- i) the link between the female body and the self;
- ii) the link between the consumer capitalism and the objectification of the female body;
- iii) the female body as heterosexually desirable through the gender lens.

The three central non-discursive forces are found to be crucial in reproducing the ideological construction of the ideal female body in the slimming advertisements. In sum, women are persuaded to believe that their body is vital to their sense of identity and social worth. The consumer capitalist society attaches to the female body a certain economic value, i.e. like an asset. At the same time, it recommends transformation and/or self-improvement through body management practices (i.e.: dieting, exercising, cosmetic surgery). By both objectifying the female body and stressing the need of physical attractiveness in a (hetero)sexual relationship, the sociocultural forces decide, maintain and perpetuate what is deemed as attractive female body. In so doing, women are compelled to constantly measure up to the social expectation and watch their diet or body size/shape.

9.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study provides insights into how the ideal female body is constructed textually and visually, as well as how it is consumed by the 40 subjects interviewed. As in any other study, there are several limitations which are presented below for discussion:

1. The first limitation is the demographic information of the respondents. Since the interview did not include questions regarding Body Mass Index (BMI), ethnicity and socioeconomic status, it was not possible to consider the influence of these factors which could potentially affect the results.
2. The age range (between 25 to 45 years) excludes the young girls or older

women. Otherwise, it would be interesting to find out how young girls and older women perceive the slimming advertisements.

3. The location of the interview was limited to Klang Valley. This is hardly reflective of the general population of women in Malaysia as a whole. Therefore, the results of the findings cannot be generalized.
4. Another problem pertaining to the interviews relates to the social desirability bias where the respondents may answer the questions with socially desirable responses. For example, respondents tended to give answers that were socially acceptable rather than describe what they honestly thought. This could potentially lead to erroneous data analysis and interpretation.

The limitations as described above open up possibilities for considerable scope for future research on the same topic. The following section enlisted some of the avenues for further research.

9.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a few suggestions on how future research can improve on this study. For example, future CDA scholars who intend to conduct further research related to the female body may want to consider the following suggestions:

1. Triangulation method with a survey: In this study, the researcher used interview to obtain in-depth responses about what people think and how they feel. However, it is rather time-consuming and reaches only a small number of the population. A survey, on the other hand, can reach a mass population within a short period of time. This could really help to strengthen the study with statistics to support the findings.

2. It is discovered that the study will benefit more if the researcher has included the Body Mass Index (BMI) as one of the demographic details. This could provide a very important detail to see how those who are thin, normal or fat react to the slimming advertisements and whether their body sizes affect their reactions.
3. The use of Stunkard's Figure Silhouette can also enrich the study. One possible aspect where future researchers could include is the comparison of self-perceived body size to the desired body size. This could provide a comparison of the actual body size with the desired body size by the respondents. In this way, it could ascertain if women are preoccupied with thinness as the ideal body image.
4. Inclusion of ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds could possibly contribute to the socio-cultural factors that may influence the result of the finding. For example, it will be interesting to see how different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds affect a woman's perception of her own and others' body image.
5. Besides analyzing the lexical choice used to describe the female body, other linguistic devices such as puns, presupposition, metaphor, modality and transitivity can further enhance the depth of the textual analysis.
6. Intertextual analysis on the use of different voices in advertisements could also be included to see how different voices are used to make the advertisements sound more convincing and persuasive.
7. On the visual aspect, the use of colour as a modality would also provide a different perspective in the compositional structure.

9.4 CONCLUSION

The consequences of the portrayal of the slim ideal in the slimming advertisements are not to be taken lightly. The construction of the ideal female body has very deep impact on the general well-being of women. Women are becoming more preoccupied with their physical appearance, so much so that, even the natural process of ageing becomes an unacceptable fact of life (Zuraidah, 2003). This has tremendous repercussions in the wider social context. First and foremost, the co-optation of women's insecurity as capital for consumer market becomes insidiously rampant. To profit from one's fear is devious, only that this has not been sanctioned legally. Secondly, the psychological implications are further noted when anorexia, bulimia or many other forms of ills have become growing social issues among the young and old. Thirdly, and certainly not the least, at the macro social contexts, we see how a narrow meaning of femininity has been perpetuated for economic sake. At best, these images of femininity alert us to the potential for the inadvertent effects of advertising messages and portrayals of women; at worst, they perpetuate sexist stereotypes and encourage exploitation by marketers (Duffy, 1994: 18). Tiggemann (2004) asserts that constant exposure to the thin ideal in the media may cause women to internalize it and therefore, use the thin image as the yardstick to evaluate themselves. As a result of internalizing the dominant discourses in the slimming advertisements, women see their bodies as imperfect and strive to discipline themselves to achieve the ideal body (Kwan, 2004; Hammond, 1996 and Albani, 2005).

This study highlights to Malaysian women that the ideal body is merely a social construction. This social construction is supported by the dominant discourses in the slimming advertisements. As mentioned earlier, the ideal female body is never static but it evolves all the time according to the definition of what is considered as ideal by the dominant forces in the society. This study also supports CDA's premise that the

discourse of advertising has the power to shape the social and at the same time it is socially shaped (Fairclough, 1995a & 1995b).

This study is significant as it can be used to create awareness among Malaysian women to recognize that the media portrayal of the slim ideal is merely a construct and subject to change. It is hoped that Malaysian women will learn to accept their bodies as nature intended it and to be empowered to resist the ideology of the slim ideal, the tyranny of the thin appeal and be less critical and more sympathetic towards those who are obese.

It is hoped that this study provides insights into how the slimming advertisements in Malaysia are ideological apparatus to influence women to embrace the thin ideal as perfect feminine beauty. By exposing the ideological construction of the female body, it is creating awareness and resistance to the stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman or a beautiful woman.

Notes

¹ Throughout the whole thesis, a variation of terms: anorexic, bulimic, weight-loss, slimming, slender, thin, thinness, svelte, and so forth will be used invariably by the researcher to mean the attempt to attain an ideal body image.

² The parameter of this study has to be curtailed to ensure focus of the ideal female body and avoid from going overboard in trying to overachieve. It certainly does not mean that men are not subjected to masculinity related issues. It will be interesting if a juxtaposition of male and female issues can be done. However, given the tight time-frame allocated to complete this academic endeavour, this is not possible.

³ In her video documentaries, “Killing Us Softly: Advertising’s Image of Women” (1979), “Still Killing Us Softly” (1987), and “Killing Us Softly 3” (1999), Kilbourne exposes a pattern of disturbing and destructive gender stereotypes. Her groundbreaking analyzes of advertising’s depiction of women challenges us to consider the relationship between advertising and broader issues of culture, identity, sexism and gender violence.

⁴ “Reverse anorexia nervosa” is one type of BDD that specifically occurs in men. BDD could affect personal health, both physically and mentally (Luevorasirikul, 2007: 57).

⁵ The reference to Malaysian’s women in this study cannot be generalized. This is because the location of the interview was limited to Klang Valley and therefore the findings are hardly reflective of the general population of women in Malaysia as a whole.

⁶ The Western philosophy and cultural studies pertaining to body play an important role in illuminating the female body as a site of social struggle. Some of the key feminist theorists (Chernin, 1981; Bartky, 1990; Wolf, 1991; Butler, 1993; Davis, 1997; Bordo, 2003) and sociological theorists (Bourdieu, 1995; Shilling, 1993; Featherstone et al., 1991; Frank, 1990; Turner, 1989; Foucault, 1979; Elias, 1978) are instrumental in bringing to the fore the material body as not just the domain of biology, but also social studies. They contributed pertinent perspectives on the ways in which the body can inform social processes. Of these philosophers and theorists, Susan Bordo’s work has been central to my study. I found Bordo’s (2003: 24-25) feminist readings of the body management practices such as obsessive dieting, exercising and cosmetic surgery as cultural “representations [that] homogenize” and how “these homogenized images normalize” the female body to be socioculturally embedded than most contemporary studies of the female body. Besides, the contemporary fixation with female slenderness and with modifying the body has been a valuable source in explaining the intersecting factors which contribute to the reproduction of the contemporary female physical ideal in Western society, and in the case of this study, Malaysian women.

⁷ The ERAMUS network is a multiple joint projects and collaborations between different scholars, namely Siegfried Jäger (Duisburg), Norman Fairclough (Lancaster), Teun van Dijk (Amsterdam), Gunther Kress (London), Theo van Leeuwen (London) and Ruth Wodak (Vienna).

⁸ Fairclough’s (1993: 138 as cited in Titscher et al., 2000: 148) conception of discourse can be looked at in two ways: discourse as an *abstract noun* or *countable noun*. When discourse is referred to as an *abstract noun*, it is referred to language use conceived as social practice. This is the case when the researcher points to the discourse in the slimming advertisements. On the other hand, when discourse is referred to as a *countable noun*, it is a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective. For instance, in Chapter 8, the researcher categorized the 40 interviewees’ responses into discourses of attractiveness, beauty, health and success (See Table 3).

⁹ Reference to Heberle (2000: 124-125) on Halliday’s three metafunctions: “The ideational function concerns, as Fairclough (1993: 136) says, “the representation and signification of the world and experience”. This representation is analyzed in terms of the grammatical category of transitivity, which specifies the different processes (types of verbs), the participants and the circumstances involved in the social interaction (Halliday, 1994). There are verbs of action (material processes), of feelings and thoughts (mental processes), of saying (verbal processes), or those which establish relations, classify or identify entities (relational processes). The interpersonal meaning refers to the meanings of the social relations established between participants of the social interaction, to the interactive aspect of the event, the kind of involvement between the participants of the event: the speaker/writer and audience. Analysis of the interpersonal meaning concerns the way in which the writer/speaker is interacting with his/her interlocutor: mood (whether the social exchange is being conveyed in statements, questions, commands, or offers) and modality (the degree of assertiveness being used in the exchange). The textual function of the text refers basically to the thematic structure of the text, to what Fairclough (1993: 136) refers to as “the distribution of given versus new and foregrounded versus backgrounded information”.”

¹⁰ A heading or headline, is typically presented in minimalist style. It is usually written as briefly as possible. It is designed to attract attention and to bait the reader into reading the advertisement further. A headline grabs attention through several means. It draws attention to itself generally through orthography, strategic placement of the headline and specifically by means of linguistic manipulation. Some of the linguistic manipulations are in the forms of eye-catching or intriguing or questioning or even shocking phrases or short sentences.¹⁰ Usually, the headline draws attention to the flabby parts of a body. For instance, in an advertisement for Marie France Bodyline, the image presents a flabby midriff and pants which cannot be zipped up are matched by the headline: “When your clothes get too tight, it’s time to lose the flab” (MFB 8, Appendix C). In another example, the image of an overflowing muffin in a pair of pants makes the headline, “Say goodbye to your muffin top” (MFB 19, Appendix C). These headlines are normally most strategically placed in the advertisement and often come in fonts of different sizes and thickness. Carter and Nash (1990: 79), on the other hand, draw a similarity between narrative genre and advertising genre. Headlines are referred to as “titles”, where the headline is akin to the title of a story, therefore, some mutual characteristics are shared. Other frequently used devices include alliteration, allusions to certain lines in poems, plays, novels or films, rhymes, repetition of certain phonic, as in the /b/ sound in “battle your bulge” (MFB 17, Appendix C) and so forth. The headline, together with the image, is carefully constructed to capture the reader’s attention.

¹¹ The body copy, also known as just ‘the copy’, is the full text part of the advertisement (copy is often used to refer to the entire advertisement – illustrations and text). It elaborates the theme of the headline and carries the main information. To advertisements that rely solely on language, the body copy remains the most informative and persuasive part of the advertisements. Most

advertisements employ on what Delin (2000: 128) describes as the “‘reason why’-style argumentation, in which a cogent case is made for the consumer to buy the particular product”. A ‘problem-solution’ logic is a common structure adopted in this “reason why” style. Delin explains that, “[i]f the consumer can be made to accept that some situation in his or her life is a problem, then solution is justified in the form of the product.” Carter and Nash (1990: 69) suggest that there are more to these two logics of problem-solution as seen below:

- 1 Situation: some situation exists
- 2 Problem: a problem is associated with that situation
- 3 Solution: there is a solution (product or service)

¹² The signature is the trade name of the product or company; in this case ‘Marie France Bodyline’. It is often accompanied by a small graphic that best represents the product or company. This may also be called a logo. Marie France Bodyline’s signature is preceded by a silhouette of a woman and accompanied by its slogan, “The World’s Slimming Professional™: A Member of Global Beauty International”.



Figure 12

¹³ In almost all slimming advertisements, the visual is as important as the text itself. It is made up of either one or a composite of images on display. In fact, the visual coupled with the headline, serves as the advertiser’s “first aim of attracting attention to the ad” (Delin, 2000: 126). This highlights the importance of image, placing it on par with the text itself. The image can appear in various forms: be it the silhouette of a celebrity or spokesperson; before and after shots; focusing on certain parts of the body and so forth. It plays a vital role to lure readers into believing the effectiveness of the product or service advertised.

¹⁴ The standing details in slimming advertisements are constantly the promotional offers available. They also list the types of services provided for the package offered; apart from this, sometimes there is a “lucky draw” and/or an invitation to send a text message to inquire further and the respondent is promised freebies of some sort. This is a means to establish initial contact with potential clients as well as a non-invasive way to acquire an interested party’s contact information.

¹⁵ The historical account of how advertising has evolved is closely referred to Gillian Dyer’s book, *Advertising as Communication* (1982).

¹⁶ The naming of “steel engraving lady” was derived from the lithograph printing process that was used to promote this image.

¹⁷ It was in 1921 that the inaugural Miss America pageant took place. The contestants’ bust-waist-hip measurements were publicly made known. With a launching of public beauty pageant, the female body size and beauty go into a completely glaring spotlight.

¹⁸ This chapter aligns its focus on using Fairclough’s CDA in this study, therefore, its discussion is confined on how CDA, as the analytical tool, helps to answer the aforementioned research questions. Chapter 2, however, traces its historical background and delineates CDA in terms of its concerns, emphasis and different domains of enquiry.

¹⁹ Stemming from Habermas’s (1973) critical theory, CDA aims to highlight social issues that are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationship, all perpetuated by the means of communication in written or spoken words.

²⁰ Justifications on the choice of Fairclough’s over other CDA are elaborated in Chapter 2, see Section 2.9 for further reference.

²¹ CDA, as a young science of two decades, has been under fervent scrutiny and several critiques have been addressed in hope of tightening its theoretical and methodological underpinnings.

²² The term ‘multimodal’ refers to all texts where there is more than one resource (e.g. written, visual, colour, spoken, musical, movement). The various resources can be deployed in a single channel of communication. For example, in an advertisement, various modes are carefully chosen to deliver a message. Nalon (1997: 10) informs us that, “each semiotic mode conveys meanings that are specific to itself and these meanings somehow blend into the construction of the overall message”. In written text, language is co-deployed with visual resources, such as the page layout, font type/size and images. All of which have a precise meaning-

making role. In the case of this study, the printed slimming advertisement is a type of multimodal text where both written and visual modes are present. One of the goals of a multimodal enquiry into texts is to find out how each mode conveys its meanings or to see the patterns of interactions between modes.

²³ This terms 'offer' and 'demand' were taken from Halliday (1985) who uses them to distinguish between different classes of speech act, questions and commands, which 'demand', respectively, 'information' and 'goods and services', and statements and offers, which 'offer', respectively, 'information and 'goods and services'.

²⁴ Jewitt and Oyama (1999: 274) label this as 'attitude' instead of 'point of view'.

²⁵ However, in the case of slimming advertisements, the profile/oblique angle does not really indicate detachment between the viewer and represented participant(s). More often than not, the image maker in using the profile/oblique angle by showing the represented having to lean against a wall or reclining on the floor, it is attempting to display the represented participant's body silhouette to highlight the 'S'-shape.

²⁶ <http://thestar.com.my/info/thestar.asp#readership> (assessed 26/11/10)

²⁷ Advertiser's targeted goal, advertising forms and ads features vary accordingly. This part of the discussion will be thoroughly explored in the literature review. See Chapter 3.

²⁸ Women above the age of 45 are apt for the study as well; however, the researcher found that they were not easily approachable. Thus, those above 45 are excluded.

²⁹ When a subject as sensitive as body weight or body size is concerned, people are not readily available to respond to other survey methods. Therefore, personal interviews are recommended. Personal interviews are an effective means to explore the women's perception of body image and slimming advertisements. Personal interviews enable in-depth, comprehensive and detailed information to be obtained. They involve one-to-one and face-to-face interviewing between researcher and the selected respondent.

³⁰ The Hawthorne effect describes the impact of the researcher on an individual's responses given that the respondents may have a sense of being observed or interrogated during an interview process. To reduce this effect, researcher is advised to be as inconspicuous as possible to ensure that the respondents would be comfortable and at the same time, ensure their anonymity and confidentiality.

³¹ Non-verbal communication (NVC) is an acronym used by Nalon (1997: 87 - 88). Nalon, following Argle (1975), Ruesch and Kees (1972 [1956]), informs that NVC is "primary related to emotional states, attitudes to other people and information about the self". Some of main resources are face, gestures, posture and appearance. They are "interpersonal in nature" and are mainly "addressee-oriented". Nalon highlights the importance of taking NVC into consideration:

This activity of predicting possible consequences and inferring emotional states is important in advertising, for it is precisely on the creation of expectation and identification that most of it is based.

³² The use of the word, discourse here is in the sense of the countable noun – a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective.

³³ S. K. Bell, & S. B. Morgan, 'Children's attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a peer presented as obese: Does a medical explanation for the obesity make a difference?', *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 2000, vol. 25, p. 137-145.

³⁴ M. V. Roehling, 'Weight-based discrimination in employment: Psychological and legal aspects', *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 52, 1999, p. 969-1016.