

War is Peace, Beauty is Misogyny: An Exploration
into Women's Euro-American Beauty Standards,
Competition, and Body Dissatisfaction

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Abstract

The feminist movement has made great progress over the past decades, yet the oppressive nature of beauty is “strikingly muted” (Bordo, 2023, P.31). This thesis explores how Euro-American beauty standards profoundly influence body dissatisfaction and competition among women and exposes the often-unspoken truths behind constricting societal beauty standards. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with ten female university students aged 18-23, I question the normalised practices of beauty and how they place women’s social power at a disadvantage. I extend Manne’s (2018) contemporary perspective on misogyny by proposing that beauty standards are a branch of misogyny; using Foucauldian thought to emphasise the overarching gaze that exists at its core. Subsequently, I expand the scholarly field on internalised misogyny by proposing a new definition with internal surveillance at its centre. This new outlook on misogyny is a necessary addition that is relevant to current feminist academia. My research asserts the danger of beauty standards by revealing their underlying power structures, and the detrimental stranglehold they have over the feminist movement. My analytical framework draws from Orwell’s seminal work *1984* (1949) to unveil how the dystopian architectures of power are relevant to my recent findings on beauty, body dissatisfaction, and competition. Whilst uncovering the multifaceted dimensions of beauty standards and their impact on women, I simultaneously reveal how beauty standards follow the historical patterns of oppressive power.

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Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work. I am the sole author of the thesis, yet it has been supervised by Dr Asha Abeyasekera. This thesis has not been previously submitted for any degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when [wo]men are different from one another and do not live alone - to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of double think - greetings!”

(Orwell, 1949, P.33).

Beneath the omniscient gaze of Big Brother, is a totalitarian society where individual freedom and liberty have long been forgotten. Orwell's novel *1984* (1949) follows Winston Smith, a disenchanting member of the Party, who resists the oppressive regimes of Big Brother's reign. Throughout the novel, Winston contends with doublethink (the act of holding two contradictory thoughts and believing them both simultaneously), thoughtcrime (resistive thoughts against the Party), a forbidden affair with another member of the party (Julia), and unending warfare. In a surveillance-led society, it was only a matter of time until Winston's revolt was caught by the thought police, and when the time came, he was subject to unimaginable torment. As the days of torture became weeks, and weeks became months, Winston was worn down into absolute support of the party and eventually declared his love for Big Brother. This novel is not only a fictional tale of oppressive power, but a disturbing depiction of the reality of individual resistance against societal power.

After reading Orwell's *1984* (1949), I began to feel an overarching familiarity with my current reality. Like Winston, I was overly disenchanting with the structure of societies and felt there was a deeper meaning to life that was lost within the narrowed constraints of beauty. Despite the growing influence of beauty standards, discussions around the subject seem “strikingly muted” (Bordo, 2023, P.31). Although second-wave feminism was highly critical of beauty standards, in the era of third-wave feminism, conforming to beauty standards is framed as empowering. Wherein, undergoing cosmetic surgery is considered a renewal of “femininity, confidence, embodiment, and empowerment” (Heggenstaller, et al., 2018, P.64).

Concurrently, advertisements position beauty products as feminist by using female empowerment to mask the gender ideology that has always existed at the core of beauty (Xu & Tan, 2020).

Thus, one of my major aims in this thesis is to expose the truth behind the captivating façade of beauty, or rather, “to expose the deep structures that underlie captivating surfaces, to show that fleeting experiences of enchantment and delight spring from long-standing

histories of suffering and subordination” (Felski, 2006, P.273). As Otto Gritshneder said, “who falls asleep in a democracy will wake up in a dictatorship” (Novotorova, 2020, P.20), and I fear that we have fallen into so deep a slumber, that we may never awaken. I use this thesis as an opposition to the third wave feminist views on beauty, by questioning the normalised perspective that beauty standards are ‘empowering’. In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), although the Party’s propaganda is framed as revolutionary, Winston suspects that all is not as it seems. In this thesis, I similarly challenge the supposed revolutionary thought of feminism regarding beauty.

There are three major questions central to my research:

- I. What are the current beauty standards in Euro-American societies for women and how are they enforced?
- II. How do the current beauty standards engender competition between women?
- III. How do the current beauty standards affect body dissatisfaction in women?

By collecting qualitative, semi-structured interview data, with ten female university students aged 18-23, I aim to understand the disastrous impact of beauty standards on women. I examine current Euro-American beauty standards and their effect on both non-romantic relationships between women, and a woman’s relationship with herself. More specifically, I investigate how/if women’s Euro-American beauty standards affect competition between women and body dissatisfaction. I position beauty standards as a form of misogyny, ultimately questioning whether the normalised practices of beauty are grounded in oppressive structures of power. By assessing conflict, conformity, and resistance through an Orwellian and Foucauldian analytical framework I produce an innovative perspective on misogyny and the more generalised structures of societal power.

In *1984* (Orwell, 1949) I identified a three-part structure of power that highly resonated with my understanding of the totalitarian nature of beauty.

- I) Part one: permanent visibility, where there is an all-seeing gaze that places a group of individuals under consistent surveillance.
- II) Part two: in-group separation, where within the group, people are individualised, and their relationships are divided so they cannot access collective power.
- III) Part three: torture, where individuals were subject to a form of torture that wore them down until conformity was conclusive.

For some time, although I possessed a deeper knowing that the power dynamics in my research topic were hauntingly similar to *1984*, I struggled to label the blatant parallels between the two. Yet, as I began my in-depth interviews, I found the explicit resonance with the three-part structure, which is presented in this thesis.

The three major concepts in my research are misogyny, or more specifically beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction.

Misogyny has previously been considered as simply a hatred towards women (Holland, 2006; Walker, 2022). However, this definition has proven insufficient over time, notwithstanding the modern progression of women's societal oppression (Manne, 2018; Walker, 2022). In more recent years, misogyny has been defined as a branch of patriarchal order which acts as a "law enforcement" mechanism for policing women (Manne, 2018, P.78). Furthermore, it is a system of power that deduces the 'good girls' and 'bad girls' based on adherence to gender norms, and subjects them to punishment or praise dependent on their level of conformity (Manne, 2018).

Misogyny's succession is derived from its ability to see, yet rarely be seen. It persists as omniscient yet imperceptible as its surveillance becomes normalised in societies, and subsequently evades scrutiny. Henceforth, misogyny's power, like Big Brothers, can be attributed to its relentless and persistent gaze.

Scholars have suggested that beauty standards are misogynistic (Jefferys, 2014), however, it has not yet been proposed that beauty standards are a branch of misogyny. In this thesis, I embark on this uncharted route of exploration. Using Manne's (2018) contemporary definition of misogyny, I situate the concept of surveillance at the core of beauty standards, defining misogyny in this context as the "law enforcement" (Manne, 2018, P.78) mechanism of beauty, acting as the beauty police. Under this specific gaze of misogyny, women are deduced as 'good girls' or 'bad girls' (Manne, 2018), or rather, 'pretty girls' and 'ugly girls' based on their adherence to beauty standards. The system of policing works on a shame/praise basis, where 'pretty girls' are praised, and 'ugly girls' are shamed. In this thesis I learn how this system works in Euro-American societies.

I understand beauty standards as the societal standards of beauty women are compared against to define their beauty. For example, there is the notorious 'thin ideal', where women must possess an overly slender physique, with a delicate stature and protuberant bones (Bordo, 1993; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Johnson, 2014; Lazuka, et al., 2020; Paquette & Raine,

2004; Spurgas, 2005; Volonté, 2019). Additionally, there is the 'slim yet muscular' ideal (Grogan, 2021; Gruber, 2007; Tiggemann, 2011; Tiggemann, 2012), where women must, like the 'thin ideal', remain slender, whilst also having muscular arms, toned abdominals, and strong legs/buttocks. Opposed to these ideals, there is the slim yet curvaceous or 'slim-thick' ideal, where women must be thin, yet curvaceous in the breast, buttocks and leg areas (Grogan, 2021; McComb & Mills, 2022; Overstreet, et al., 2010).

All ideals are equally restrictive, as they are impossibly unattainable. Thus, beauty standards may differ, yet their principles of disciplinary restriction, are alarmingly alike. In this thesis, I discover which standards are currently relevant in Euro-American societies, understanding how they are enforced, and their effects on women of different backgrounds.

In this thesis, I refer to the process by which beauty standards are enforced as 'the gaze of beauty' to highlight the way beauty standards seem to watch over women in Euro-American societies. In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), Winston is under consistent surveillance from the telescreens in his living quarters, his workspace, the dining hall, and other community spaces. He is constantly watched by the eyes of Big Brother.

The gaze of beauty watched women from all corners of societies. In their homes, women are subject to television and films which display beauty standards through the actresses and the content of the programmes (Anthony, et al., 2016; Puspitasari & Durahman, 2020). On their phones, they are subject to social media platforms and online fashion industries with countless images of societally beautiful women (Grogan, 2021; Jefferys, 2014; Joseph, 1985; Spurgas, 2005; Wilson, 2021). Outdoors, amid the land of capitalism, they are bombarded with billboard advertisements (Spurgas, 2005, Wilson, 2021), and the endless fashion stores often available in the smallest of towns. Even as children, girls are subject to beauty standards through children's toys (Wilson, 2021), such as the infamous Barbie. Thus, wherever women go, the gaze of beauty follows. In this thesis, through discussions with my participants, I explore the current ways in which beauty standards circulate in societies.

There is arguably a more relentless and consistent gaze that operates internally. That is, the internalised gaze of beauty, which I argue acts as a form of internalised misogyny.

Internalised misogyny has previously been defined as the "internalisation of misogynistic attitudes that manifests as stereotypical beliefs about women, devaluing and distrusting other women, and valuing men over women" (Piggot, 2004, P.60). However, like misogyny, I have adapted a new definition that relates to my research and current issues for women.

In this context, I define internalised misogyny as an internalised surveillance that centres around beauty standards, or rather, the internal beauty police. One could imagine here an internal authority figure within the mind, governing and policing one's body consistently. This type of surveillance is perhaps the most influential, according to Butler (2004), the individual is “the site of transfer for power itself” (P.187), meaning misogyny relies on an individual investment of power. In *1984*, Big Brother's power lies in his all-seeing consistent presence, yet his power would be useless without individual conformity. Like Orwell, I explore the complications of individual resistance, against oppressive power.

Although being beautiful has been historically important for women, there is evidence to suggest that we are currently facing the largest beauty epidemic yet. It is difficult to monitor the advancement of beauty standards, as they are often communicated through unspoken words and lack tangibility. However, by monitoring statistics related to some effects of beauty standards, a clear view is cast onto the advancement of the beauty industry.

To keep up with the growth of the beauty industry, women participate in disciplinary bodily practices. In simpler terms, women discipline their bodies through practices such as restrictive dieting, excessive exercise, and plastic/cosmetic surgery (Bartky, 2002; Jefferys, 2014; Patton, 2006; Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1995). Moreover, if one is to become beautiful, one must transform the female body (Patton, 2006); repressing their natural bodily appearance by participating in harmful cultural practices that shape one's appearance to societal beauty standards (Jefferys, 2014).

According to statistics reported by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS, 2023), in 2023 cosmetic surgery procedures increased by 102% compared to 2021. Popular procedures include breast augmentation, abdominoplasty, liposuction, lip fillers, and eyelid surgery, of which 93% were undertaken by women. In addition, in terms of food restriction and dieting, research suggests that 1.25-3.4 million people are suffering from eating disorders in the UK (Priory Group, 2023), 75% of which are women. Thus, I show how practices of beauty are “indeed disempowering to women” (Bartky, 2002, P.20), proving the infamous statement that for women ‘beauty is pain’ (Larrison, 2023).

There are two effects of being subject to the gaze of beauty that I explore, the first is competition. Competition between women has been explored regarding motherhood, male attention, the love of family members, clothes and fashion, home-keeping, and appearance (Anthony, 2016; Campbell, 2004; Fisher, 2017; Joseph, 1985; Tanenbaum, 2011; Wang, et al., 2021). Nonetheless, appearance-based competition is becoming a prevailing form of

female competition (Anthony, 2016). I assert that the rise in this type of competition is attributed to the growing intensity of beauty standards. Subsequently, I question the previously discussed evolutionary roots of competition (Fisher, 2017), whilst grounding in an understanding based on lack. Additionally, I explore the current presence and operation of appearance-based competition in Euro-American societies, tracing patterns of separation and warfare. Furthermore, I profess the tactical implementation of competition by relating it to the power tactics in *1984* (Orwell, 1949).

The second effect I explore is body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is defined by negative thoughts and feelings about one's body size, shape, muscle tone, and weight (Grogan, 2021). Yet, its main principle is to place women in a consistent battle with their bodies (Bartky, 2002). Where, their bodies become so loathed, that they become "an enemy, an alien bent on thwarting the disciplinary project" (Bartky, 2002, P.17). Body dissatisfaction is now considered so normalised for women, that it has become a natural part of the female condition (Anthony, et al., 2016; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Paquette and Raine, 2004; Young, et al., 2014). Its consequences vary from negative mood and low self-esteem issues (Grogan, 2021; Lazuka, et al., 2020), to disordered eating (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Johnson, 2014; Parker, 2003), anxiety/depression (Grogan, 2021; Northrop, 2013), and body hatred/shame (Northrop, 2013; Troop, et al., 2006; Parker, 2003). In this thesis, I unpick the naturalised nature of body dissatisfaction, to understand its unchecked and destructive presence in Euro-American societies.

Throughout, I link to wider concepts such as the complications of resistance, conformity, choice, and warfare; using Foucauldian thought as a theoretical outline. Ultimately, I assert the potential broader relevance of this structure to past and present structures of oppressive power.

In the following chapter I provide a comprehensive review of previous literature, where I relay the current academia around this subject and align it with my own. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed methodology chapter explaining the methodological processes of my research, as well as any ethical and personal implications. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 consist of my findings/analysis chapters. In Chapter 4, I discuss my findings on current Euro-American beauty standards. In Chapter 5, I present my findings on competition between women and the nature of their non-romantic relationships. In Chapter 6, I relay my findings on internalised misogyny and body dissatisfaction. Finally, Chapter 7 contains my concluding thoughts and future proposals.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

In this Chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the previous scholarly literature centred around the three major concepts in this thesis: misogyny, or more specifically beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction. I remain critical of complacent definitions and dictate my understanding of the concepts based on my research. Throughout the review, I source the connections between the concepts and situate my research within the relatively vast scholarly field of literature.

Section 2.1: Defining the Indefinable: Misogyny

I use the term 'indefinable' in the subheading of this section, as misogyny lacks a concrete understanding across previous literature (Rottweiler & Gill, 2021). In this section, I piece together two contradictory definitions of misogyny: the historic and the contemporary. Finally, I form my definition by merging Manne's contemporary definition with the literature on beauty and relating it to a Foucauldian perspective on power.

I will begin by presenting the historical definition. The term misogyny comes from the Ancient Greek term 'mīsoḡuniā' (μισοḡυνία); a construction of the two Ancient Greek terms 'misein' (to hate) and 'gyne' (women). Consequently meaning: a hatred towards women (Walker, 2022). This definition is the most widespread, and accordingly, dictates the customary definition of misogyny. Holland (2006) is a leading scholar within the scope of misogyny, where he explores the history of misogyny in Western civilizations, along with Gilmore (2001), who additionally touches on misogyny's historic roots. Misogyny, according to the historical definition, can simply be defined as "[m]isogyny, the hatred of women" (Holland, 2006, P.4).

This definition encompasses elements of disgust, abhorrence, devaluation, and intolerance (Gilmore, 2001; Holland, 2006; Rottweiler & Gill, 2021). All instances of hatred are described as targeted, or unjustified; warranted only by prejudice against women. Brogard (2020) extends this definition by stating that there are two types of misogynists: hateful and contemptuous. The hateful misogynists target behaviours or appearances that deviate from feminine norms, while the contemptuous misogynists view women as inferior to men due to their limited biology. Thus, the historical definition of misogyny revolves around terms such as "woman-hating" and "anti-feminism" (Bloch, 1987, P.1).

If one is to trace the historical roots of misogyny back to its core, or its beginning, which is claimed by Holland (2006) as the start of the 1800s, hatred toward women would quite possibly exist at the centre. However, after centuries of adaptation, this definition must become more expansive. Thus, I turn to Manne's (2018) definition which engages a more malleable and intersectional approach to misogyny.

Rather than approaching misogyny by view of the hatred that men yield, Manne understands misogyny through view of the hostility women face when gendered norms are not adhered to (Simion, 2021; Walker, 2022). Manne illustrates the significance of misogyny by describing it as a branch of a patriarchal order that acts as a "law enforcement" mechanism (Manne, 2018, P.78). She explains this by averting our attention away from hatred, and toward a system of policing where there is a punishment and reward system for women. In this system there are 'good girls' and 'bad girls', the former adhere to feminine norms, whilst the latter disobey them (Manne, 2018). For example, a 'good girl' may be characterized as quiet, elegant, and composed, whereas a 'bad girl' may be characterized as loud, boisterous, and expressive.

Through this altered perspective on misogyny, Manne moves from focusing on the individual with misogynistic tendencies, to patriarchal societies which aim to control women (Manne, 2016; Walker, 2022). Moreover, under this definition, misogyny goes on witch hunts to deduce the 'good girls'/'bad girls' based on adherence to gender norms and punish them accordingly. For example, the 'good girl' who obeys feminine norms would be praised, and the 'bad girl' who goes against feminine norms would be punished.

The explored punishments for the 'bad girls' who do not adhere to gender norms fall under two categories: physical and non-physical. The physical subjections can include, yet are not confined to female genital mutilation, sexual violence, domestic violence, strangulation, and foot-binding. Whilst the non-physical subjections can include, yet are not confined to shaming, sexualizing, objectifying, and the creation of female taboos e.g. menstrual/vaginal secretion, belittling, punishing, and caricaturing (Manne, 2018; Ussher, 2016).

This punishment can come in many forms, for instance, it may come from social institutions, media outlets, political ideology, or people such as friends, romantic partners, or family. For example, the 'bad girl' who defies feminine norms by being loud and abrasive, may be directly punished by being emotionally shamed or physically abused by others. Or she may be indirectly punished by watching 'good girls' in the media being praised for a gentle, quiet, and composed demeanour, whilst she simultaneously watches other 'bad girls' being

shamed for going against feminine norms. As my research is based on intangible beauty standards, I focus on the non-physical nature of misogynistic punishment, namely, the aspects of shame/praise.

Certain personal characteristics may affect one's status as a 'good' or 'bad' girl and increase one's likelihood of punishment. For example, women of colour, queer women, trans women, non-binary people, and two-spirited indigenous people are at a higher risk of being considered 'bad', or rather, defying feminine norms (Walker, 2022). Some studies have explored these intersecting systems of oppression in detail, creating nuanced terms such as 'transmisogyny' (Matsuzaka & Koch, 2018), which examines the intersection of transphobia and misogyny, and 'misogynoir' (Bailey, 2014; Cook, 2020), which outlines the intersection between misogyny and women of colour. Although these intersections of misogyny are a necessary addition to the field, they are acutely understudied and under-referenced. Going forward with a diverse sample, I continue to be reminded of these intersections during my research process.

I have so far filtered through the contradictory definitions of misogyny, though I must add my alignment. My research is situated within Manne's contemporary definition of misogyny. As Manne (2018) explains, accepting misogyny as simply - hatred toward women - alienates contemporary manifestations of misogyny. Henceforth, like Manne (2018), I define misogyny as the enforcement branch of the patriarchal order. However, I later extend this definition by backing up her definition with theoretical evidence and therefore bringing a completely new stance on misogyny to the field.

Misogyny's history has been traced back to Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, the beginning of Christianity, the Victorian era, Medieval Europe, and countless other points in history (Bennett, 1991; Bloch, 1987; Holland, 2006; Nzeyo, 2019). Following the entrenched history of misogyny, present-day manifestations have been explored in recent literature. I divide these societal manifestations into two categories: state systems and popular culture.

Misogyny lives within the foundational basis of Euro-American societies. Wherein, it is intertwined in state systems such as schools (Christy, 2009; Rackin, 2016; Sadker, 2000), political systems (both party members and voters) (Chesney-Lind, 2020; Dehlin, 2018; Dehlin & Galliher, 2019; Manne, 2018), and the criminal justice system (Chesney-Lind, 2020; Wistrich, 2022).

In terms of popular culture, misogyny has been found present in industries such as music (Armstrong, 2001; Holland, 2006; Sepheri, 2020), video games (McCullough, et al., 2020), online culture (Aiken & Velker, 2019; Jane, 2021), news media (Buiten & Salo, 2007), and beauty standards (Jefferys, 2014); which are particularly relevant to this thesis. Misogyny's presence in both state systems and popular culture practices reifies the embedded nature of misogyny and its tendency to infiltrate women's everyday experiences. I am interested in the misogyny that exists within popular culture, more specifically, beauty standards. In the next subsection, I address the relation of misogyny to beauty standards.

Section 2.2: Beauty is Misogyny

It has previously been considered that beauty standards and practices are rooted in misogyny (Jefferys, 2014). However, after an extensive review, no literature to my knowledge defined beauty standards as a branch of misogyny under Manne's contemporary definition. As previously mentioned, misogyny is the "law enforcement" (Manne, 2018, P.78) branch of the patriarchal order, policing women into adherence to gender norms.

Concerning beauty, I add that beauty standards act as a branch of misogyny by enforcing gendered appearance norms for women, in the form of beauty standards. Beauty standards then decipher their 'good girl/bad girl', or rather, 'pretty girl/ugly girl' status dependent on how close their appearance is to the current vision of beauty. In this context, misogyny acts as the beauty police by punishing the 'ugly girls' and praising the 'pretty girls'.

To employ this punishment/reward system, the gaze of beauty is projected in Euro-American societies through various media platforms (Berberick, 2010; Joseph, 1985; Paquette & Raine, 2004), such as television and film (Anthony, et al., 2016; Puspitasari & Durahman, 2020), advertisements (Spurgas, 2005, Wilson, 2021) social media, modelling and fashion industries (Grogan, 2021; Jefferys, 2015; Joseph, 1985; Spurgas, 2005; Wilson, 2021) children's toys (Wilson, 2021), and magazines (Anthony, et al., 2016; Spurgas, 2005).

This system works through the transference of subliminal messages. For example, it was found that body shaming is often presented on TV and film, this shaming manifests as fat-shaming (criticizing and harassing people who are overweight), skin-shaming (criticizing and harassing people based on their skin colour/tone), and style-shaming (criticizing and harassing people based on their choice of clothing/accessories) (Puspitasari & Durahman, 2020). Here, non-physical punishment is implemented by shaming the 'ugly girls' whose appearances do not comply with the vision of beauty. In my research I solidify this definition

with tangible results, extending Manne's (2018) definition into the under-explored field of beauty and misogyny.

Before I do so, it is necessary for me to comment on internalised misogyny. The literature on misogyny is often male focussed, yet internalised misogyny refers to how women adopt misogynistic thoughts. Previously, internalised misogyny has been defined as the "internalisation of misogynistic attitudes that manifests as stereotypical beliefs about women, devaluing and distrusting other women, and valuing men over women" (Piggot, 2004, p.60). However, this definition is not generalisable to my research. Instead, I lean more toward internalised misogyny as the level of "patriarchy that women take in and endorse themselves" (Johnson, 2014, P.26). Yet, I add to it by providing my own definition.

In the context of beauty and misogyny, I define internalised misogyny as the internalised "law enforcement" (Manne, 2018, P.78) mechanism of misogyny, or rather, the internalised beauty police. This operates the same as misogyny, yet internally. Moreover, women internalise beauty standards and judge their appearances, accordingly, acting as their own oppressor. Here, the punishment/reward system is still relevant. Wherein, a woman may shame or praise herself for compliance, or non-compliance to feminine standards.

Due to my theoretical understanding of misogyny, I also add that internalised misogyny is necessary to the operation of beauty related misogyny. Without women, beauty standards would cease to exist, therefore, misogyny relies on women. I delve into this discussion later in this chapter. Other scholars have not yet made this point, so this is a newfound addition to the field.

Section 2.3: The Gaze of Beauty

I use the term 'gaze of beauty' to describe how beauty standards circulate in Euro-American societies. There are several reasons for this. First, there is an all-seeing gaze that flows through my research project, so the term seems the most adequate description. Secondly, since my focus is on the practice of internalisation, I use the term 'gaze' because the beauty standards that are projected towards women are used as a lens for their perception of beauty. Lastly, surveillance is at the centre of my understanding of misogyny, thus 'gaze' encapsulates the existence of misogyny within beauty standards by producing an overtone that hints at the omniscience of misogyny. As Foucault does, I use the term 'gaze' to illuminate the active vision (Fillingham, 1993) present in the power of misogyny.

In this section, I present the previous literature on the many contradictory beauty standards in Euro-American societies. I begin by sharing the recent literature on the notorious 'thin ideal' to understand the development of the ideal slender frame. The thin ideal is the idea that slenderness equates to beauty. The ideal body image has varied over history, but one that Euro-American societies seem to continually return to is the idea of being thin. This ideal is a major discussion in literature I have surveyed (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Johnson, 2014; Lazuka, et al., 2020; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Spurgas, 2005). It supposedly became prominent in the 20th century (Bordo, 1993; Volonté, 2019), though after extensive research it is evident that the ideal existed far before this period.

In mid-18th and early 19th centuries, amidst Victorian upper-class societies, beauty standards revolved around Tuberculosis - an infectious disease that affects the respiratory system and lungs. Young women would desire the look which came from the often-deadly disease, which consisted of a pale face, rosy cheeks, protuberant bones, and an extremely slender frame (Day, 2017; Larrison, 2023). This may seem like an extremity when it comes to beauty practices, but its resonance with current-day procedures is remarkable. The bodily effects of tuberculosis are astoundingly similar to those of Anorexia Nervosa (Larrison, 2023). Such as an extremely slender frame, protuberant bones, paleness, a malnutritional appearance, illness, and often death.

However, as proposed in more recent literature, it is not enough to simply be thin, there are now contemporary additions to this beauty standard. Some scholars note that the ideal body is slim yet muscular, a contradiction which makes this body ideal attainable only under strict disciplinary practices, such as consistent training in the gym and high protein diets (Grogan, 2021; Gruber, 2007; Tiggemann, 2011; Tiggemann, 2012). There is also the slim-yet-curved, or 'slim-thick' (Grogan, 2021; McComb & Mills, 2022; Overstreet, et al., 2010) body ideal. This is characterised by a small waist, flat stomach, large thighs, and large buttocks. This body ideal is very rarely achieved and often needs plastic surgery to obtain. Thus, each variation of this ideal is grounded in discipline and restriction. In this thesis, I explore which variation of the ideal is currently applicable.

However, beauty standards do not simply contain standards of beauty for body shape, on the contrary, other characteristics can define one as beautiful. For example, skin colour is a predominant standard rooted in racist ideals. We have already seen a glimpse of this in the Victorian Tuberculosis ideal, where a pale complexion was desired (Day, 2017; Larrison, 2023). However, its roots extend far into Euro-American colonial history. Historically, bodies of colour have been estranged from white dominant beauty standards (Patton, 2006). As

Patton (2006) explains, the Juxtaposition of black and white beauty dates back to slavery, in 1619. Wherein, for African American slaves it was preferable for them to have characteristics that resembled whiteness, such as straight or wavy hair and light skin. Here, is when white dominant beauty ideals began.

Later, in the early 1900's, there was the infamous story of Sarah Baartman, a black South African woman who was enslaved and brought to Europe to appear in a freak show exhibition. Sarah was named the 'Hottentot Venus' (Henderson, 2014; Gordon-Chipembere, 2011), and was subject to unending abuse and ridicule due to her large buttocks which was considered abnormal compared to white ideals. This story is important because it highlights the historical comparison between black and white beauty, and the tendency for white dominant ideals to render black beauty as abnormal.

Although, this story is also important for another reason. Sarah Baartman was subject to ridicule, though she was equally subject to male desire and female envy. As white men began to desire her body, white women began to feel envious, and thus began the appropriation of black women's bodies. Throughout the entirety of the 19th century, there seemed to be garments that accentuated and enlarged the buttocks. These dresses have been reported since 1811 (the year after Sarah Baartman was captured), yet the popular trend of Bustle dresses started in the 1870s (Historical Sewing, 2013). There has been debate over where this trend originated, however, its introduction over the period of Sarah Baartman is more than coincidental (Mastamet-Mason, 2014).

Today, there are similar appropriated trends. For example, the 'slim-thick' trend that was discussed earlier, is also arguably appropriated from Black women's bodies. However, research suggests that despite this, there are still elements of white dominant ideals (Patton, 2006; Robinson-Morre, 2008; Spurgas, 2005; Tate, 2016). In a research article that explored body image and cultural background, it was found that beauty standards praised white women, or women with Caucasian features, straight hair, and light skin (Spurgas, 2005). Meaning, despite ideals that centre around black beauty, white dominance still exists at the core. In my research, I solidify some of the ideas surrounding beauty and racism presented in the previous literature.

In contrast to the pale, white dominant ideal, there was some literature on the upsurge of tanning beds in the 21st Century (Edge, 2009; Falzone, et al., 2017; Trekels, 2018). Beauty standards have moved from the pale Victorian standard to one which praises a golden complexion. Moreover, the gaze of beauty is equally changing and adapting, as it is

contradictory and restrictive. Therefore, it becomes oppressive through its ability to distract women from their lack of social power.

The history of beauty has been inflicted with the notion of pain. Beauty in Euro-American societies is often equated to, and intrinsically linked to bodily danger. The common, and highly problematic statement 'beauty is pain' is an accurate representation of beauty throughout history and the present day (Larrison, 2023). One must only retrace the steps of historical beauty to understand its devastating impact on women. From the foot-binding practices in c. 1600 BCE China (Patton, 2006; Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1995), to the popularization of corsets in Aristocratic court culture in 16th Century Britain (Fields, 2014; Patton, 2006; Steele, 2001).

Historic practices of beauty have always incited discipline and pain onto the female body for transformative purposes. These practices continue into modern-day disciplinary practices such as dieting, piercings, gastric bypasses, tattoos, skin lightening, wearing high heels, genital waxing, and cosmetic surgery such as breast implants and surgical alteration of the labia (Jefferys, 2014; Patton, 2006; Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1995). Further, to attain unattainable beauty standards, there is no other route than to transform the body with discipline. Therefore, after reviewing the literature, I can confirm that despite its captivating surfaces, beauty has become about control of the feminine body (Fields, 2014; Patton, 2006; Steele, 2001). In my research, I underscore how this control is supported by misogyny. After outlining the previous literature on beauty and misogyny, it is now relevant for me to add a theoretical perspective to aid in the development of my definitions.

Section 2.4: A Theoretical Understanding

In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), surveillance is the key to Big Brother's power. Big Brother sees all, yet, whilst the Party members know he is watching, they never actually see him in the flesh. Subsequently, they know someone is watching, yet they can never be completely sure who. According to Foucault (2008), power relies on this seeing/being seen dyad, where the power must consistently see, whilst never being completely seen. This is an architectural structure derived from Bentham's (1843) configuration of disciplinary power. As Foucault (2008) writes, this architecture is structured as so:

"at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have

two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (P.5)

Or, in regard of my research, a woman. Again, what is crucial to the Panoptical system, is that the supervisor is never seen. The prisoners know they are being watched, as they see the central watch tower, yet they must never know that there is only the mere power of one person behind the powerful facade of the tower.

Regarding my research, this relates to beauty standards. They are seen, very clearly throughout societies, yet their relation to misogyny and patriarchal power remains unseen. In contemporary Euro-American societies, beauty standards are increasingly becoming intertwined with feminism. Take the recent *Barbie* (2023) film as an example. This film was advertised as an empowering feminist film, and whilst it did present some strong feminist messages, every character heavily conformed to beauty standards. Accordingly, women see the solid structure of beauty standards but do not see misogyny as the core function. In this thesis, I reveal these hidden structures in more depth.

Another important part of the Panoptical system is to harness the power of the individuals in the cells. Since the collective power of all prisoners would invariably overbear the mere power of a singular watchman, the tower deceives the prisoners into thinking they are overpowered. As a result, the prisoners place themselves under surveillance, so that the watchman has no other role than to watch them conform with ease. Furthermore, the prisoners act "as a local source from which the power relations stem" (Raffnsøe et al., 2016, P.10).

This is why I argue that misogyny relies so heavily on internalised misogyny, as beauty standards are fuelling themselves with the power of women. To elaborate, I return to the *Barbie* movie. Here, misogyny relies on women internalising the beauty standards they see on screen and bringing them forward into real life. Without women, beauty standards would cease to exist. Moreover, this form of misogyny relies on the power of women.

It was surprising, even to Bentham himself, that the Panopticon operated with the lack of its physical structure (Foucault, 2008). Meaning, that there was no need for the physical cells to constrain the subject of power, there was only a need for the implementation of its main principles. That is, a group of people placed under consistent surveillance, clear separation

between subgroups and individuals within the group, and instead of a physical cell, something non-physical to keep individuals restrained.

Hence, this structure is related to my research. Women are the group of people placed under surveillance by Euro-American beauty standards. The walls between the cells are represented by competition which distances relationships between women and reduces collective power. Body dissatisfaction is what keeps women restrained and wears them down to conformity. Therefore, instead of viewing my concepts as separate to one another, I redefine them as a singular oppressive structure with different dimensions; all which are a part of the three-part structure I identified in Chapter 1. In this thesis, I delve deeper into this theoretical understanding, to carve out a clear understanding of oppressive power. Whereas, for now, I move on to a review of the literature concerning my other two concepts: competition and body dissatisfaction.

Section 2.5: Competition

Academia on competition is moderately broad. It has been explored regarding queer women, heterosexual women, queer men, heterosexual men, and drag queens (Clutton-Brock, 2007; Daniels, et al., 2019; Joseph, 1985; Lindenbaum, 1985; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; Tracy, 1991), yet I argue that the literature lacks an adequate contemporary feminist perspective.

Primarily, scholarly research laboriously focussed on men (Clutton-Brock, 2007; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; Wang, et al., 2021). Though, more recently, the inclusion of female competition has begun to expand. Where, it has now been considered that both men and women feel its instinctual pull (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). Subsequently, there have been reported differences between competition in men and women. For example, it has been noted that men embrace competition and women resist it (Fisher, 2017; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). Additionally, it has been said that male competition is more direct, whilst women's is more covert and acted out through indirect acts of aggression (Campbell, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). On the other hand, there is a differing perspective in the literature. One scholar concluded that women feel a higher sense of competition than men (Joseph, 1985). This resonates with the 'she-devil' depiction of women (Brogard, 2020). The 'she-devil' is a woman who views all women as competition, and the undertone behind this archetype is devious and malicious.

Although this literature is backed up by research findings, I take issue with both perspectives. On one hand, women are too meek and passive to be as competitive as men, and on the

other, they are maliciously devious. Both paint women in a displeasing light. In my research, I stray from these understandings and lean towards feminist understandings of competition, by viewing it as a product of patriarchal control.

Additionally, the motivations behind competition are thought to differ between women and men. For men, competition is centred around elements associated with status and resources (Campbell, 2004; Joseph, 1985). Whereas for women, the competition was deemed centred around appearance, attractiveness, love, acquiring a mate (namely, a male mate), male attention, the love of family members, the nicest clothes, mothering, and the best-kept home (Campbell, 2004; Joseph, 1985; Tracy, 1991).

An increasing reason for competition between women is said to be for appearance purposes (Anthony, et al., 2016; Campbell, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). Recently, there has been an uprise in the projection of beauty standards, which has caused women to position their appearance at a higher place of importance, leading to a greater sense of lack, and thus higher rates of competition (Tanenbaum, 2011). In my research, I explore appearance-based competition in more depth, adding to an increasing subject of interest.

Appearance-based competition has been explored in-depth in a research study into female comparison and rivalry. It has been observed that for women, competition manifests as an internal hierarchical structure of comparison (Anthony et al., 2016). Anthony, et al. (2016), discuss how when women compete, they create an internal scale of attractiveness and place themselves somewhere on it. If they perceived themselves at the top, they would feel a sense of satisfaction, and if they perceived themselves at the bottom, they would feel disheartened. Thus, women strive for a place at the top of the hierarchy to feel a sense of power. This has been termed as seeking 'petty power' (Tanenbaum, 2011). An example of this was illustrated in a research article into the sociocultural context of women's body image (Paquette & Raine, 2004). Here, in personal anecdotes from their participants, they found that in collective dieting groups (a place where women monitor each other's weight loss progress), competition is rife. Wherein, the women in these groups compete with each other about appearance and weight loss.

There has been debate over where competition originates from. A common stance is that competition is evolutionary, and embedded in human nature (Campbell, 2004; Fisher, 2017; Tracy, 1991). According to this perspective, competition cannot be avoided, or reduced, it is simply part of the human condition. However, this definition ignores the fact that competition arises because of feelings of lack or inadequacy. It has contrastingly been acclaimed that

personal inadequacies have a direct effect on competition between women (Cowan & Ullman, 2006; Tanenbaum, 2011). Accordingly, women compete with each other, because of feeling inadequate. For example, if a woman feels inadequate about her appearance, she may compete with another woman to fill this void. It has also been recognised that competition is additionally reinforced through television, films, media, magazines, social media, dieting groups, and advertisements (Cowan & Ullman, 2006; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011), much like the vision of beauty. These influences in popular culture normalise competition between women through reinforcing 'cat fights' and women's perceptions of other women as the enemy (Tanenbaum, 2011). My research adds to the field by exploring the connection between beauty standards and competition. This specific connection has not yet been explored in detail in addition to both misogyny and body dissatisfaction.

Competition has been explored regarding how it affects relationships between women. According to the literature, various non-romantic relationships between women can be affected by competition. It has been explored concerning friendships, sisters, mothers, acquaintances, and within organised groups such as sports and dieting (Booth, 2009; Fisher, 2017; Spurgas, 2005; Tracy, 1991; Paquette & Raine, 2004). Competition has been found to have a dividing impact on these relationships (Cowan & Ullman, 2006; Fisher, 2017; Tanenbaum, 2011). Meaning, that because of competition, women are more distanced from each other. It has been speculated that when women focus on gaining power from competition, they lose the strength of collective power because of the divide it creates in relationships (Tanenbaum, 2011). In my research, I explore competition concerning the dividing impact it has on relationships. Through my interview data, I understand how/if beauty standards cause this relationship divide through competition.

In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), Winston does not have a real connection with anyone. He is overly individualised and goes through his life feeling alone in his resistive thoughts. He suspects everyone as the thought police, and as a result, cannot harness the collective power to overturn the oppression of Big Brother. This resonates with Bentham's (1843) Panopticon, where there are walls that divide the prisoners so any chance of collective revolt is quashed. In my research, I not only wish to discover whether there is competition between women but how this impacts their collective power. I do so, to detect whether the three-part structure of Panoptical power is established in this context. This would expand previous feminist literature on competition by adding an uncharted theoretical understanding.

Section 2.6: Body Dissatisfaction

The literature on body image is an expansive field of interest in feminist academia. It has roots in the psychological, sociological, racial, queer, and philosophical spheres. The undertone throughout is often a dissentious one, where body image is explored concerning the complications that surround it. A general search of 'body image' on a scholarly search engine, brings with it an amass of literature regarding body dissatisfaction. I assume this is because of the heavily restrictive beauty standards that women are subject to.

Body dissatisfaction has been defined as:

“[a] person’s negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body and relates to negative evaluations of body size, shape, muscularity/muscle tone and weight, and it usually involves a perceived discrepancy between a person’s evaluation of his or her body and his or her ideal body”

(Grogan,2021, P.6).

When one is dissatisfied with their appearance, their body is considered an enemy (Bartky, 2002; Usher, 2006). If the body cannot adhere to beauty standards, it is despised, adorned, and hated; and as we already know, beauty standards are often a never-ending pursuit. As Winston states “In moments of crisis, one is never fighting against an external enemy, but always against one’s own body” (Orwell, 1949, P.120).

Due to its normalisation, body dissatisfaction has been widely considered to function as a natural part of the human condition, specifically for women (Anthony, et al., 2016; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Paquette and Raine, 2004; Young, et al., 2014). It has been explored in various subgroups of people, such as cisgender women and men, transgender women and men, non-binary/gender-queer people, and children (Gordon, et al., 2021; Grogan, 2021; Tabaac, et al., 2018).

Research suggests that there are differences between body dissatisfaction in various subgroups of people. Generally, cisgender women are thought to experience a higher rate of body dissatisfaction than cisgender men (Grogan, 2021; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Muzi, et al., 2023). Regarding transgender individuals, it has been found that body image concern is significantly higher amongst both transgender women and men, over cisgender women and men (Mofradidoost & Abolghasemi, 2020). With a cisgender female sample, this research

primarily focuses on the experiences of cisgender women. However, I suggest that similar research is also carried out concerning transgender women, as it would be beneficial to see whether there are differences around body dysphoria.

There are many contradictions in the literature regarding queer women and body dissatisfaction. Some scholars conclude that queer and heterosexual women experience body dissatisfaction at a similar rate (Morrison, et al., 2004). Whilst others state that queer women experience low levels of body dissatisfaction compared to heterosexual women and queer men (Grogan, 2021). With a sample of 8/10 lesbian and bisexual women, in my research, I clarify the discrepancies in the literature.

Historically, feminism has focussed on the experiences of white women, and until relatively recently, the literature on body dissatisfaction was not dissimilar. Scholarly research into body image, previously claimed that white women experienced body dissatisfaction at higher rates, however, this myth has recently been debunked (O'Neill, 2003). Following this, it has been concluded that non-white, and white women experience body dissatisfaction at similar levels (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). In this thesis, I solidify this stance with my ethnically diverse sample.

For women, there are many negative effects associated with body dissatisfaction. Namely, negative mood and low self-esteem issues (Grogan, 2021; Lazuka, et al., 2020), body dysmorphic disorder and other eating disorders (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Johnson, 2014; Parker, 2003), anxiety/depression (Grogan, 2021; Northrop, 2013), body hatred/shame (Northrop, 2013; Troop, et al., 2006; Parker, 2003) and competition between women (Cowan and Ullman, 2006; Tanenbaum, 2013).

Due to the many detrimental effects of body dissatisfaction, there has been a reported feminist backlash. As a way of opposing body dissatisfaction, the body positivity movement was introduced, as well as an overall feminist critique on diet culture, and the use of diverse models in fashion industries (Grogan, 2021; Lazuka, et al., 2020). However, despite their best efforts, these feminist movements seem to follow oppressive patterns. In a research analysis of the body positivity movement, it was discovered that this movement was counter-revolutionary (Lazuka, et al., 2020). When analysing Instagram pictures within the movement, it was found that while the captions promoted self-love and acceptance for a diverse range of bodies, the contents of the images were quite the opposite. The images posted often consisted of white, slim women, with contradictory hashtags which promoted diet culture and the thin ideal.

Likewise, Gibson (2022) found a similar anti-revolutionary aspect to the body positivity movement. After analysing Lindo Bacon's (2010) *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight*, Gibson outlined that the body positivity movement supports the "good fatty" - those that "do all they can to change their weight" (P.27) - yet neglects fat people that do not. Furthermore, the cultural acceptance of fat bodies, is tainted with the constraints of diet culture. This reminds me of the anti-revolutionary revolution in *1984* (Orwell, 1949). The novel is set in a post-revolutionary era, in a state which had previously rebelled against an oppressive leadership and supposedly valued freedom. However, as we learn from the narrative of Winston, post-revolution, Oceania is far from free.

Similarly, where feminism was once set in its mission to take down patriarchal structures, the lines between conformity and resistance are now blurred. In a world where the advertisements for beauty products are branded as tools for female empowerment and togetherness (Xu & Tan, 2020), and cosmetic surgery is considered by scholars as a renewal of empowerment, strength and femininity (Heggenstaller et al., 2018). How desolate our search for empowerment must be, that we must turn to the system that disempowers us.

Moreover, when resistance is built on the structures of oppression, its purposes become nullified. This idea is called 'social vertigo', where in their resistance, people revert to oppressive patterns as they have never known any different, which means it is impossible to imagine a future without oppression (Melo-Lopes, 2019). In this thesis, I argue that despite its façade of empowerment, the body positivity movement has become an anti-revolutionary practice of oppression.

In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), Winston is subject to immense physical and emotional torture, until he is worn down to conformity. In my research, by investigating body dissatisfaction and women's resistance against oppressive power, I understand the third part of the power structure: torture.

Section 2.7: Chapter Reflections

Within the scholarly fields of misogyny, beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction, this thesis provides a contemporary and uncharted route of exploration; opening a variety of fields across the social science disciplines. By drawing together three defined concepts and using them to shape a new understanding of oppressive power, I bring forth a contemporary understanding of the current issues women are facing and use my

qualitative interview data to understand the obstacles of feminist progress. This thesis is an important addition to the field and brings to the surface hidden and destructive issues.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I outline the research design, data collection methods, ethical considerations and data analysis techniques employed during the completion of this research. I additionally draw on my reflections of the research process, addressing the self-impact of undertaking this research, whilst outlining the limitations and strengths of the overall methodological process. This chapter is crucial in outlining the procedure of undertaking the research, before delving into the rich finding's/analysis chapters.

Section 3.1: Overall approach

My main aim is to reveal the oppressive structures behind the captivating surfaces of beauty (Felski, 2016). To do this, I must stray from societal perspectives and instead explore the experiences of individuals. As Simone De Beauvoir often does, I use the experiences and perspectives of women as my main source of data (Oksala, 2023). I use a critical phenomenological approach to understand how lived experiences shape our understandings of the social world. In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), as the novel follows Winston, we learn of the intricacies of individual resistance against an oppressive power. To most, Winston's incessant revolt is silent, yet it is heard loud and clear in his internal monologue.

Furthermore, I needed to understand the functioning of women's internal monologues if I was ever to bring to light the silent and invisible processes of misogyny. I use Harding's (1991) situated knowledge approach to assess how the environment of Euro-American societies reflects on women, and how sharing their experiences can bring plentiful knowledge on the function of such societies.

Thus, my overall methodological approach was qualitative. Although qualitative data does not allow for the collection of large samples of data, it allows the researcher to delve deep into a phenomenon (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015; Mulisa, 2022). Qualitative data often focuses on individual perspectives and beliefs, to draw out normalised lived experiences (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015; Mulisa, 2022). For, "qualitative researchers typically focus on meaning" (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015, P.686), and finding hidden meaning was my prerogative. By studying a small sample, and exploring individual experiences of women, I was able to reach the depths of knowledge I desired.

Section 3.2: Sample

The selected sample has a profound impact on the course of the research study (Morse, 1991). Thus, I carefully considered my sampling choices. The participants I chose to study all lived in the UK yet did not exclusively originate there. However, I use the term 'Euro-American', as the beauty standards I discuss are not exclusively relevant to the UK. The participants in my research often refer to American and European celebrities and popular culture. Moreover, I explore the perspectives of people who currently live in the UK yet am referring to broad Westernised standards of beauty.

Overall, there were ten participants in my research. My sample was somewhat diverse, but there were two characteristics that all of my participants possessed. All were cisgender women, and all were university students. I chose to exclusively study women because of the impact of misogyny on their marginalised status. Although other people suffer from the impacts of misogyny, such as non-binary people and queer men, I was specifically interested in the devastating impact on women. Unfortunately, due to a restricted word count, my research did not permit studying transgender women. Due to the intertwinement of gender dysphoria and transphobia; beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction may have all manifested rather differently.

In addition, my sample were all current university students at The University of York. This may have impacted the responses of my participants. I observed an overall feminist consensus amongst my participants and have based much of my analysis on this. Though, this may be impacted by my participants' situation in a more feminist space, than others who are not university educated. Thus, this research can specifically be generalised to university students and would need expanding in other projects to include non-university educated women.

The age range for my study was 18-25, however, the requirements were set for ages 18-30. I chose this age group as beauty standards have tightened over the past decades, which this generation has experienced. Additionally, this generation has influence over beauty standards, as they are the ones that can change the course of misogyny going forward. Therefore, exploration into this age range is beneficial to gain an understanding of how to combat misogyny.

I aimed to obtain a diverse range of participants with different racial and sexual identities, to test for any intersectionalities within the scope of this field. Often, researchers can ignore the

complexities of intersectional approaches, particularly those who are white British, like myself. Yet I ensured that these issues were always at the forefront of my research, by continuing to cross-examine the experiences of my participants across a range of ethnicities and sexualities.

My sample was relatively diverse. In terms of racial/ethnic identity, 4 participants were White British, 1 was White Irish, 1 was Chinese, 1 was Black and South Asian, 1 was Black British (African), 1 was White Hispanic, and 1 identified as mixed race. From this sample, I was able to hear from varying perspectives and gain an outlook into the impact of white-dominant beauty standards on non-white women.

In terms of sexual identity, 5 of my participants were Bisexual, 3 were lesbian, 1 was heterosexual, and 1 stated they were unsure. Unintentionally, I obtained a majorly queer sample and rectified the contradictions in the literature. There had been debate over the impact of body dissatisfaction and beauty standards on queer women, with some scholars claiming that lesbian women experience these issues to a lesser degree (Grogan, 2021). As a lesbian woman myself, I felt that these conclusions did not mirror my own experience, and my findings indicated that other queer women felt similarly.

Despite the different reactions to beauty standards depending on one's racial identity, all of my participants seemed similarly influenced by them. Likewise, all participants experienced competition and body dissatisfaction to a close degree. Thus, I can conclude through the diversity of my sample, that the issues I explore are not exclusive to any group of women. They are equally destructive to all, as they are oppressive.

Section 3.3: Sampling Methods

To recruit my participants, I used opportunity sampling, or self-selection sampling. This method of sampling entails the participants to voluntarily choose whether they would like to participate, rather than being approached by the researcher (Sharma, 2017). I chose this method of sampling because it increases levels of willingness to participate, saves time, and increases the likelihood of attendance (Sharma, 2017).

I erected posters around The University of York campus. The posters contained the general requirements for the study, i.e. one must be a university student, a woman, aged between 18-30, currently living in the UK, and able to speak English. In addition, my university email was provided, so that potential participants could contact me should they be interested.

When I received an email about participation I sent over the information sheet, and the interested party confirmed if they still wished to participate. When I received confirmation, I sent over an interview booking form via Doodle. Then the participants booked a suitable timeslot and decided if they wished to take part in the interview over Zoom or in person. 8 participants underwent Zoom interviews, and 2 participants underwent in-person interviews in a private booked room on campus at The University of York.

Section 3.4: Data Collection

To collect my data, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and consisted of pre-planned open-ended questions, as well as unplanned follow-up questions when necessary. These questions allowed for an in-depth exploration of my three major concepts.

I chose interviews over focus groups because private conversations were preferable for my topics of discussion. This was because of the discussions around competition and female non-romantic relationships. I felt that my participants may not feel comfortable opening up about these issues in front of other women, which may have skewed the validity of the data.

It may have been interesting to comment on the interactions between women in the focus groups, however, I learned that competition was highly internal, and would therefore most likely remain unseen. On this note, like Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Harding's (1991) situated knowledge approach, my research investigates the intricacies of individuals opposed to oppressive power. Thus, individual discussions were most beneficial.

Section 3.5: Interview Structure

When conducting qualitative research, there must be as little intrusion as possible (Lowhorn, 2007), to replicate the naturalised processes of exploration. In my research, I achieved this by using scenario-based questions. Whereby, in my interviews, I presented a scenario and asked several questions about it and how it relates to my participants' own experiences in Euro-American societies.

Scenario-based questions are beneficial for a variety of reasons. First, scenarios allow for exploration into sensitive subjects without causing immediate discomfort and harm to

participants who are not required to talk about personal experiences. In my research, I asked participants to comment on the scenarios, yet I left it open to personal comments only if they felt inclined to. Thus, harm from sensitive subjects such as body dissatisfaction was avoided by creating a distance between the participants and the research, which could be personalised if necessary.

Secondly, I often brought up subjects such as female competition, comparison and divided relationships. These are subjects that one might be reluctant to admit. If I blatantly asked my participants if they competed with other women, they would most likely deny it. However, if I asked my participants to comment on a scenario where women are competing, would most likely participate in the conversation due to the distance between herself and the subject of discussion.

Lastly, Mulissa (2022) states that "[s]ince truth and the means used to discover it are both dynamic, it is also essential to foresight innovative approaches" (P.131) to research. By using scenario-based questions, I have produced an innovative approach that replaces the usual interview structure with an interview that closely replicates the realities of women aged 18-30 in Euro-American societies.

The scenarios I created were based on my own experiences as a cisgender, 22-year-old, lesbian woman in Euro-American societies. With this identity, I provide an insider approach to the research by using my own experiences to shape the structure of the scenario. The scenario followed a 20-year-old woman's experience with my three main concepts: beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction. It was based on the woman's (Sara) experience as a university student and focussed on her personal interactions with friends in social settings. I used the setting of a bar, as alcohol fueled socialisation is a great interest for women of this age group, particularly university students. I used the same scenario in each interview to increase the reliability of my research.

Here is the scenario:

Sara is a 19 year old girl who is in her first year of university. She dislikes her body and feels very insecure about her appearance. Because of this she monitors her body often. She constantly looks in the mirror and checks her physical appearance, looking for imperfections and judging herself critically.

Do you think it is common for women to dislike their appearances? Why?

Do you think women often police/monitor their bodies like this? Why?

Sara has a close group of 8 girl friends who all met at university and are around a similar age group. When around her friends, Sara often feels worse about her appearance, she constantly compares herself to her friends; comparing their bodies, their hairstyles, their clothes, their skin-tone, and anything else related to her appearance.

Why do you think being around her friends makes her feel worse about her appearance?

One evening, Sara and all of her friends go out for some drinks in a bar. On arrival, Sara greets all of her friends politely and excitedly. Though, whilst doing so she internally monitors their appearances, looking for qualities she deems more attractive than her own and qualities she deems as less attractive than her own; placing the group in almost a hierarchical structure based on their appearance. She looks at her friends imperfections and their perfections; judging them without even meaning to.

Do you think women often monitor/police each other's bodies like this?

Do you think women often place each other in this hierarchical structure based on appearance in their own minds? Why?

When she deems one friend as more attractive than herself, she feels disheartened about her own appearance, and when she deems another friend as less attractive than herself she feels a sense of relief. For example, she thinks her friend Laura looks more attractive than herself, and so feels like her own body is inadequate. Laura has Sara's dream body. Sara fixates on the differences between her and Laura's body and feels ashamed of her own body in comparison to Laura.

Do you think women often compare their own bodies to other women's bodies? Why?

Why do you think instead of feeling happy for Laura, she instead feels ashamed about her own appearance?

However, when Sara compares herself to her other friend Saskia, she feels better about her appearance. Sara believes her body is more attractive than Saskia's, and Sara finds comfort in this.

Do you think women often find comfort in other women's physical flaws? Why?

Within this comfort, Sara also feels shame. She is a feminist and wants to empower women, but she cannot help but feel a sense of relief when she perceives someone else's appearance as less attractive than her own. She loves her friends and does not like feeling this way.

Do you think women often feel guilty/shameful about comparing themselves to others?

Overtime Sara distances from the friends she perceives as more attractive than herself and gravitates towards the friend's which she perceives as less attractive than herself.

Why do you think she does this?

Do you think women's insecurities about their bodies affect their relationships with other women?

Overall, the participant responses to the scenario were positive. My participants understood the questions and provided detailed answers. Providing an account of Sara's perspective on interactions, opened up a discussion that could not be gained with the usual interview structure questions and answers. However, as a first-time researcher, my interview skills were hindered by inexperience. As I re-listened to the interview's I noticed that there were many points that I could've used improvisation and asked further questions to some of the answers provided by my participants. However, this did not greatly impact my ability to conduct my research and will be a consideration of improvement for my future research.

Section 3.6: Data analysis

Since my research methods were qualitative, my research analysis followed qualitative methods of analysis. Once my interviews were complete, I hand-transcribed each interview, removing filler-words and punctuating the data accordingly. I named myself as 'interviewer' and each participant as their assigned pseudonym. Each interview took approximately 3-4 hours to transcribe.

Once I had completed the transcriptions, I collated all responses to the same interview question. In doing so, I condensed notes for each participant response, with important quotations included. After, I used descriptive analysis to summarise the ten different responses to each question. Each summarisation came to approximately 700-900 words. Once summarised, I identified themes in each question. For example, for the question 'Do

you think it is common for women to dislike their appearances? Why?’ I outlined the consensus, which was affirmative, and identified themes such as ‘normalised body dissatisfaction’, ‘media influence’, and ‘friend and family influence’.

I used thematic and descriptive analysis, rather than Nvivo because of my rich qualitative data. By using the question analysis method, where I collated all responses to each question, I ensured that I considered all responses for my finding's chapters. These analysis methods allowed for a detailed exploration into the individualities of each response, rather than a generalised broad account which ignores the intricacies I wished to explore. To accurately understand and process all transcriptions, thematic and descriptive techniques were best suited.

Section 3.7: Ethics

This research was approved by the Centre for Women’s Studies Ethics Committee. My research proposal, consent form, information sheet and ethics form were surveyed and approved.

All participants voluntarily participated by first being informed via the information sheet of all details of participation and possibilities of harm. Once informed, they could freely decide on their willingness to participate.

All personal information I collected such as email address, name, age, and racial/sexual identity remained anonymous. I also stated on the information sheet that this information was not necessary if participants did not feel comfortable sharing it.

All identifiable information was stored securely and labelled with a pseudonym rather than their actual name in case of a data breach. No personal information was shared with any third party or stored anywhere identifiable. At the time of participation, I asked my participants to fill out a consent form where they consented to participation and allowed their direct quotations to be used.

Once the interviews were completed, I stored all data securely on my university Google Drive account. This account is password protected and has a two-factor authentication system where I must accept sign-ins on an additional personal device. Once my thesis has passed the examination, all information will be deleted.

I protected my participants from any harm by informing them of potential resultant distress from the discussion of body dissatisfaction. I assured my participants that they were free to withdraw at any point should they feel it was distressing in any way. Additionally, I provided links for further support such as:

- [Body image and mental health | Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Homepage - Girls Out Loud](#)
- [Kyra Women's Project - Helping Women in & Around York](#)
- [About Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](#)

After participation, all participants were debriefed and reminded of important ethical considerations.

Section 3.8: Positionality and Reflexivity

"He felt as though he were wandering in the forests of the sea bottom, lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster. He was alone. The past was dead, the future was unimaginable"

(Orwell, 1949, P.31).

I started this research because of an enduring inner knowledge that my current reality resonated with *1984* (Orwell, 1949). At first, it was unexplainable, yet as I began to analyse the power structures beneath the novel, I recognised the remarkable resonance.

In time, I realised that the discomfort I felt in my own life, was largely similar to Winston's. Where Winston felt pressure from Big Brother, I felt pressure from beauty standards. Under the gaze of beauty, I was subdued. The pressure of its weight led me to crushing self-torment, consistent self-critique, and unimaginable sadness.

However, as my conscious state floundered, some part of my subconscious guided me to take on this project. For every part of oppressive power, is an equal and opposite force of resistance (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, beside the weight of oppression, was an equally powerful resistant force that led me here today.

Whilst completing the research, my resonance with Winston grew stronger. Throughout the novel, Winston felt at odds with his environment. Whilst others seemed to live and breathe

the word of Big Brother and the party, Winston writhed in his conformity, possessing a strong hatred toward the propaganda of the party. Similarly, whilst learning about the destructive power of beauty standards, I rebelled against them, halting my conformity. Though, it seemed that whilst I stood strong in my revolt, those around me continued to conform with strife. Thus, like Winston, I “was alone” and “the future was unimaginable” (Orwell, 1949, P.31).

However, after speaking with my participants, my loneliness lifted. Listening to the experiences of my participants helped me realise that despite the internal competition we may experience, we are united in our struggle against misogyny.

Reflexivity “has transformed the question of subjectivity in research from a problem to an opportunity” (Subramani, 2019, P.1). Furthermore, my personal affiliation to this research can be used as a tool, rather than a detriment. By connecting to the research, I allowed for a deeper exploration into the subject, as well as a non-judgemental insider perspective.

When viewed from the outside, beauty standards, competition, and body dissatisfaction may be viewed as petty issues unworthy of academic focus, with women who obsess over their appearance often perceived as vain. Though when viewed from the inside, I understand the pressing weight of beauty, and its profound influence on women. My position in this research, allowed my participants to open up to me about the issues they were facing, and allowed me to listen without judgement.

Henceforth, read on with the knowledge that judgement is absent from this thesis, and that these issues are just as relevant to myself, as they are to the participants in this study, and countless women around the world. I hope that, in even the slightest form, we can be empowered simply by the fact that we are not alone.

Chapter 4: Beauty is Misogyny

"Winston sat in his usual corner, gazing into an empty glass. Now and again he glanced up at a vast face which eyed from the opposite wall. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said"

(Orwell, 1949, P.344).

On the front cover of *1984* (Orwell, 1949) is the glaring eye of Big Brother. Beneath his omniscient gaze, the state of Oceania is at the party's beckon call. Resistance is muted, and conformity is conclusive. In this chapter, I explore the relevance of Big Brother's gaze, to the persistent gaze of beauty, by using Foucauldian thought and Bentham's (1843) Panoptical architecture of power.

I present the findings on my participants' perceptions about current beauty standards and 'the gaze of beauty'. More specifically, I delve into which characteristics define one as a 'pretty girl' by exploring three themes in my participant responses: thin, white, and feminine. Whilst I underscore how these beauty standards circulate in Euro-American societies by outlining societal and personal influences.

Overall, by assessing the consistent gaze that exists at the core of beauty standards, I show how beauty is a branch of misogyny. In addition, I carve out the continuous nature of beauty and how its pursuit is a war that cannot be won. I outline how beauty standards exist in a repetitive cycle, where "[e]ven after enormous upheavals and seemingly irrevocable changes, the same pattern always [...] reassert[s] itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other" (Orwell, 1949, P.219).

Section 4.1: "You're Not Beautiful Unless..."

In this section I reveal my participants' perspectives on what current Euro-American beauty standards are, outlining three consistent characteristics within the tumultuous gaze of beauty. That is, to be somewhat thin, to be white, and to be feminine. My findings indicate that there is a predominant characteristic that underscores the preceding three, unattainability. I explore these consistent characteristics of beauty and consider their implications and roots. By drawing on Bentham's (1843) Panopticon structure of power, my perspective mirrors a Foucauldian analysis of power.

Section 4.1.1: You are Thin

In the literature review, there was an indication of competing beauty standards. Wherein, the notorious 'thin ideal' (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Johnson, 2014; Lazuka, et al., 2020; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Spurgas, 2005), the 'slim-thick' ideal (Grogan, 2021; McComb & Mills, 2022; Overstreet, et al., 2010), and the slim yet muscular ideal (Grogan, 2021; Gruber, 2007; Tiggemann, 2011; Tiggemann, 2012) were all alternately considered the fashionable body type according to different scholars. However, I clarified this point of contrast by defining the prevailing body ideal in Euro-American societies. In my research, both the 'thin ideal' and the 'slim-thick' ideal were mentioned. Yet, as one ideal slipped away, another rose to the surface; claiming its space as the sought-after body type.

In my interviews, the 'slim-thick' ideal was a significant topic of discussion. Mia - a 20-year-old White British Bisexual - spoke of this ideal when asked what she thought the current beauty standards were:

“at the moment it's very much like slim-thick, and like a big bum, big boobs but sort of being curvy and having a flat stomach, very much like Kim Kardashian, yeah I'd say that's what it is at the moment”.

Like several scholars in the field, my findings indicate that the 'slim-thick' ideal is current (Grogan, 2021; Harrison, 2003; McComb & Mills, 2022; Overstreet, et al., 2010). However, despite its supposed growing relevance, the interview data was largely overshadowed by the notorious 'thin ideal'.

Delia - a 19-year-old, Black British (African), Bisexual - commented on a recent shift from the 'slim-thick' ideal to the 'thin ideal'. She explained that, although 'slim-thick' was relevant over the past decade, there was a new body ideal that was becoming more pertinent. Delia shared:

“I remember watching a video recently about how the heroin chic trend, it's sort of back with Bella Hadid and all of the attention that she's getting. But, I wanna say 10 years ago, what was it, 10 years ago? 2019. So like 2013, 2015, 2016. You know, the Cardi B, BBL sort of look, or Kim Kardashian look was in.”

The “BBL sort of look” is a surgical procedure called the Brazillan Bum Lift, where fat from one's stomach is transferred to one's buttocks. This is a dangerous surgical procedure that

was readily adopted by women who wished to attain the unattainable 'slim-thick' beauty standard. Despite its popularity, this procedure poses major health risks, retaining the highest mortality rates of all surgical procedures (Fadavi, et al., 2020). However, although Mia talks about the current relevance of the 'slim-thick' ideal, Delia does not comment on this ideal as if it is a present beauty standard. Instead, my participants mainly noted the significance of the thin ideal. Delia does this when she talks about the aspiring "heroin chic" trend.

When interviewing, rather naively, I had assumed that 'heroin chic' meant a strong heroin female figure, like that of a powerful superhero. However, after further research into the trend, I learned it had a more sinister meaning. 'Heroin chic' is based on the stereotypical appearance of a heroin addict: hollowed face, protuberant bones, dark under-eye circles, and little to no fat on the body (Smith et al., 2023). Meaning, it is a newfound version of the 'thin ideal'. The features of 'heroin chic' are overtly similar to that of the Victorian Tuberculosis ideal, and more recently, Anorexia (Day, 2017; Larrison, 2023). In that, an extremely slim image is desired, to the point of ill health.

Thus, like the 'slim-thick' ideal, danger resides at the core of the 'thin ideal'. "Heroin chic" not only glamorizes addiction but leads to young people becoming increasingly vulnerable to eating disorders and other psychiatric disorders (Smith et al., 2023). Not only this, but in the 1990's 'heroin chic' came "to be associated with notions of weakness, and therefore femininity" (Arnold, 1999, P.281). Meaning, in contrast to 'slim-thick' this ideal plunges us back into dangerous associations between femininity and weakness. Moreover, the renowned pain that lingers within cognitions of beauty (Larrison, 2023) was heavily reinforced in my research.

The thin ideal was also a significant topic in my conversations with Maya - a 21-year-old, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual. Whilst discussing a Facebook post that stated "you always want to be the skinniest in the room", Maya underscored the wide importance of being thin in Euro-American societies. She explained that the Facebook post had thousands of likes and reposts and that she highly resonated with the statement. This reminds me of a biographical book on the experience of Anorexia *Empty: A Story of Anorexia* (Pettit, 2006). When recollecting her struggles with eating disorders, Pettit said "I had to be the skinniest girl in the room in order to not feel fat" (P.61). Thus, this reveals the synonymy of this statement with disordered eating and provides evidence for the link between the thin-ideal and disordered eating. Maya was aware of the synonymy of this post with disordered eating, and later stated "I was talking to someone, and we were saying it's like they feel like

having disordered eating is also, just a part of womanhood". Moreover, perhaps this evidences the widespread phenomena of the 'thin ideal' and the dawn of a new must-have beauty standard.

Furthermore, I can assert that the 'thin ideal' was far more prevalent in my interview discussions than the 'slim-thick' ideal, with no mention of the slim-yet-muscular ideal. This came as a particular surprise to me. When starting this research, I was heavily influenced by the 'slim-thick' ideal, feeling my lack of curves were insignificant in comparison to the current beauty standards. Yet, as I began interviewing I witnessed the gradual phasing out of this standard. As thinness was re-introduced, my desire for curves slipped away, along with the 'slim-thick' trend of Euro-American societies. Thus, I observed the "substitution of one piece of nonsense for another" (Orwell, 1949, P.49).

As was evident in the literature review, the 'thin ideal' has been significant throughout history; clouding women's judgements for centuries. However, we must "consider now what meanings are inscribed in the ideally feminine body" (Bartky, 2002, P.29). Firstly, compared to the 'slim-thick' ideal, the 'thin ideal' holds weakness at its centre. To be thin is to be weak, and to be weak is to lack the power to overturn patriarchal power. Thus, possibly as a defensive mechanism to a rising feminist society (Bartky, 2002), a meek frame is advertised as the sought-after body ideal. Secondly, perhaps 'slim-thick' was too attainable. Some women, particularly black women (Adegoke, 2014; Appleford, 2016), can achieve this ideal with minimal effort. With the necessity of racism at the root of beauty standards, this could not hold popularity for long. In the following section, I continue to consider the prominent racism I identified in my interviews.

Section 4.1.2: You are White

Racism was a key element in the beauty standards I explored, revealing a deep colonial history in the present-day perceptions of beauty. Two of my non-white participants expressed feeling astray from white dominant ideals, due to the colour of their skin or predominantly black features. Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) and Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) both discussed, at one point in their lives, feeling astray from beauty standards due to their predominantly black features. Delia expressed:

"If you are a person of colour like myself, you are not beautiful unless, you know, you have fairer skin. I have quite curly hair. It's full of texture. So, I was often told when I

was younger, you're not beautiful unless you can have, you know, straight flowing hair".

The characteristics Delia notes such as fair skin and straight hair resonate with historic conceptions of beauty dating back to slavery (Patton, 2006). Revealing that whiteness remains a consistent feature of beauty (Patton, 2006; Robinson-Moore, 2008; Spurgas, 2005; Tate, 2016), whilst non-white beauty is alienated and sometimes abhorred.

Additionally, Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) spoke about a similar feeling of alienation. She refers to her teenage experience of comparing herself to Instagram models:

"looking at them, they were so different in appearance. I mean, not only cause I was a teenager, but also they would be really slender white women, and which I'm not. So I would be constantly comparing myself to them which is completely unattainable, cause I'm never gonna look like that, I couldn't even begin to achieve that".

Maya's description of the "slender white women" is noteworthy. Attitudes against fatness emerged post-slavery in the Enlightenment era when it was thought that fatness was an indication of racial inferiority (Sanders, 2019; Strings, 2010). Moreover, there is a clear element of racism interlaced within the re-emerging 'thin ideal'. As well as minimising a body ideal that is more common for black women, beauty standards are promoting a body ideal that is historically linked with racism.

That said, despite the potential leniency of 'slim-thick' for black women, it also contained racist ideology. Adegoke (2014) proposes that this beauty ideal comes from black women's bodies and is appropriated by white Euro-American culture. On this topic, she asks "[w]hy does a black butt only look good in white skin?" (The Guardian, 2014). I reply, because racism lives within the Euro-American constructs of beauty. Due to this ever-present racism, this ideal was argued to be a combination of black and white beauty (Appleford, 2016). Meaning, as well as its oppressive nature, it is an unattainable body type for most women. From the freak show exhibitionism of Sarah Baartman (Gordon-Chipembere, 2011; Henderson, 2014; Strings, 2019), to the adoption of the 'slim-thick' body ideal, a pattern of racist appropriation continues from past to present perceptions of beauty.

It has previously been noted that beauty is intertwined with racism. This is seen in beauty products such as hair-straighteners, fade-creams, eye-slant removing operations, and nose jobs (Bartky, 2002). My findings add to this, as I claim that regardless of the body ideal, racism lives on in Euro-American beauty, as it does in the other normalised parts of Western societies. If racism is the spine which supports the body of beauty, misogyny is the blood which flows through it. Nonetheless, my findings only scratched the surface of the immensity

of the issue. The racism I observed in beauty standards is only a small percentage of the depths it reaches. Meaning, this field of research must be extended in future studies with varied intersectional approaches.

Section 4.1.3: You are Feminine

Before delving into my findings on this subject, it is first necessary to explain what it means to be feminine in this context. As gender is a social construct, femininity is not confined to a singular understanding. Nevertheless, in this specific context, I discuss the oppressive definition of femininity as it is defined in patriarchal societies. Patriarchal femininity is defined by fragility, submission, compliance, empathy and non-threatening behaviour (Connel, 1987; Spence & Buckner, 2012).

In my interviews, I discerned features comparable with this patriarchal definition of femininity. Alaya - a 25-year-old, White Irish, Lesbian - provided evidence of these traits in her understanding of Euro-American beauty when she said “we’re catering to this idea that caters to men, you know being pretty or you know really feminine or really sort of non-threatening to masculine people”. The term “non-threatening” is particularly revealing. Alaya’s understanding indicates that beauty standards are put in place to oppose the growing threat that women pose to the patriarchal order. Since their advancement in the legal and corporate industries, there has been a beauty backlash aimed at ensuring women’s societal power does not advance any further (Tanenbaum, 2011). Further, perhaps the “non-threatening” aspect of beauty has emerged alongside women’s increasing space in Euro-American societies.

Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) added to this discussion by stating “the thing is, the best body is all based on misogyny and the way that women are kind of put down to make them more submissive”. Many of my participants possessed a similar conscious understanding of the connection between beauty standards and oppression. They all, throughout the entirety of the interviews, held a critical stance on beauty standards and understood their degrading power. However, it was interesting that despite this knowledge, they all still chose to conform in some way, participating in the act of *doublethink* - the process of knowing two things to be contradictory, yet accepting them both as true (Orwell, 1949). I will delve further into this point in Chapter 6, however, it is an important note to remember as we progress through the finding's chapters.

The former two themes I identified in beauty standards - being thin and being white - are associated with femininity. Being feminine has been argued to be associated with both

whiteness (Spence & Buckner, 2012), and thinness (Leung, et al., 2001). Regarding whiteness, white women are frequently viewed as the ideal feminine body (Spence & Buckner, 2012) and concerning thinness, the thin body is delicate, fragile, and non-threatening (Bartky, 2002). Thus, patriarchal femininity rings through all observed ideals.

Each of the three themes I observed dictate the current beauty standards in Euro-American societies, answering my research question 'what are the current beauty standards in Euro-American societies?'. These findings narrow the minefield of literature, by drawing out three characteristics present in beauty standards. However, because of the constant shifting in standards, I do not wish to define beauty simply by external qualities. Instead, I underscore the core construct beneath all three: unattainability.

As Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) explains, "you are not beautiful unless" you are thin, white (or light skinned), and feminine. To be thin, one must repress the natural bodily instinct of hunger, and even then, one may still be classed as overweight. In most cases, unless you resort to ill-health and a restricted diet, the 'pretty girl' level of thinness is difficult to achieve. To be white, one must inherit this trait, or use dangerous skin-lightening creams to lighten the colour and pigmentation of the skin. To be feminine, one must go against human nature, and possess an overly gentle, and non-threatening demeanor. Thus, beneath each standard is repression and discipline. Nonetheless, they are possible to achieve, yet the unattainability comes from the element of beauty I discuss in Chapter 5: competition. Before I move onto this discussion, I illustrate how beauty standards are enforced.

Section 4.2: The Gaze of Beauty Part 1: Media Influence

To begin I wish to draw the focus outwards, to explain the wider social conduct that influences women. Throughout the interviews, all of my participants commented on the prevalence of beauty standards in the media. Previous literature dictates that beauty standards are projected through television and film (Anthony, et al., 2016; Pupsitasari & Durahman, 2020), advertisements (Spurgas, 2005, Wilson, 2021) social media, modelling and fashion industries (Grogan, 2021; Jefferys, 2015; Joseph, 1985; Spurgas, 2005; Wilson, 2021) children's toys (Wilson, 2021) and magazines (Anthony, et al., 2016; Spurgas, 2005). My participants referenced television, films, advertisements, tabloids/billboards, modelling, fashion industries, magazines, and most importantly, interactions with others as impacting their perception of beauty. Therefore, revealing the glaring gaze that governs the power of beauty, and links it to misogyny.

Olivia - a 23-year-old, White British, Bisexual - began the discussion in our interview by referencing the marketing industry as a common form of socialisation; framing this industry as heavily critical of women's bodies. She said:

"I'd say it has a lot to do with how we're conditioned to think, I think in terms of how we receive information about our bodies is all very critical, so with marketing and stuff like that it's all pitched at how you can change your body, what you need to do to make your body better".

As Olivia elucidated, marketing is often based on bodily transformation as opposed to bodily acceptance. The natural female body has long been considered an "abject monstrosity that needs careful regulation and control" (Ussher, 2006, P.18), and the focus on transformation in the media outputs, subliminally sends this message. This reinforces the idea that one must fight against the body to obtain beauty. The body is therefore viewed as a site of construction; an object to be harshly critiqued against the Euro-American gaze of beauty.

Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) added to this discussion by recalling another form of media association that began in childhood, magazines. When talking about beauty standards, she voiced:

"that's something that's sort of, I feel like promoted from the time of being really, really young, like even the kind of magazines they give little girls, like the ones about, sort of, teen celebrities that you read when you were like 11, even they are like how to look more beautiful".

These findings were not surprising, nor did they deviate from past understandings of the female body. From the foot binding practices in c. 1600 BCE (Patton, 2006), to present-day marketing and magazines, women have always been informed that their bodies must change to become beautiful (Patton, 2006; Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1995). Countless centuries later, the same messages are being projected through modernised societal measures which assess "how to look more beautiful". Maya continued by explaining some of these messages in greater depth:

"the magazines were all like how to achieve this look, it was like, ooo how to get rid of a flabby arse or, I can't remember what it's called the bits that when you're wearing trousers, like the bottom of your stomach would hang over your trousers".

Here, the shaming mechanisms of misogyny are visible. In the literature review, I used the examples of fat-shaming, skin-shaming, and fashion-shaming (Puspitasari & Durahman, 2020) to demonstrate how misogyny targets women who do not adhere to beauty standards.

The magazines Maya references display shaming techniques by criticising the "flabby arse" and the stomach that "would hang over your trousers"; positioning these characteristics in line with the 'ugly girl' appearance. To ensure that women who do possess these features feel shamed so that they are more inclined to adhere to whatever the current beauty standards were at the time. Furthermore, instead of an authoritative rule, like that of Big Brother, the power of misogyny, in this context, works under the radar by discretely coercing women into conformity.

Ava - a 20-year-old, mixed race, Bisexual from Milan, Italy - provided another example of the shaming mechanisms of misogyny by talking about tabloids. She talked about the messages that are received by women: "oh they're fat they should go on a diet, or how to lose 10 pounds in 2 months or, everything's about losing weight and looking as skinny as possible". In this example, by exhibiting thin bodies as favourable and fat bodies as unfavourable, I have observed the dual system of praise/punishment that misogyny pursues (Manne, 2018).

Disciplinary power, such as that of misogyny, "not only punishes, it rewards" (Fillingham, 1993, P.125). Therefore, there is not only shame but a system of praise that acts as a coercive method of control, lying under the radar and subliminally convincing women to adhere to beauty standards. In Ava's recollection, thin bodies characterise 'pretty girls' whilst fat bodies characterise 'ugly girls'. Further, this is evidence of how misogyny polices women into accepting beauty standards. As, if they conform, and become thin, they are 'pretty girls' who are praised and held in high esteem. Yet, if they do not conform, they are 'ugly girls' whose bodies are shamed and abhorred.

The shaming techniques are often direct; however, some techniques of praise are sometimes hidden. Ava (20, Mixed, Bisexual), Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual), and Zaya - an 18-year-old, White Hispanic, woman who was unsure on her sexuality - all commented on how television and film covertly influenced their perceptions of beauty. Ava recalls: "I was watching friends the other day and they are all super super skinny and, in the media they are all really thin". In this instance, instead of directly praising and shaming particular bodies, women are shown an image on the screen which is desirable. However, there need not be any spoken words, just the fact that the actresses who are considered desirable and successful, are 'pretty girls'. Meaning, that to be desirable and successful, one must be a 'pretty girl'.

This tactic had a particularly profound impact on my participants. Recurrently, my participants spoke of celebrities such as "Kim Kardashian", "Cardi B", and "Bella Hadid", and based their personal perception of beauty on the bodies of these public figures. Thus, perhaps the most subtle messages, are the most potent. This is because, with power, always

comes resistance (Foucault, 1980). For, [r]esistance does not exist outside of the system of power relations. It is, instead, inherently part of the relation" (Fillingham, 1993, P.145). Furthermore, subtly may be the key to power, as if we do not know oppressive power is present, we cannot resist it.

However, some of my participants did discuss some societal resistance against the oppressive messages in the media. Chloe - a 22-year-old, Chinese, Lesbian, Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) and Delia (19, Black British, Bisexual) all spoke about how marketing and advertisements for clothing companies have progressed positively, and now often use a diverse range of models in advertisements. Chloe remarked:

"nowadays there are more clothes that are available for plus size girls, so they feel this inclusiveness among the society. I think that's something that's been helping and those advertisements from those underwear companies, they try to include some plus-sized girls and models. I think its Anne Summers in town, in York, the company, they had a giant poster on the window and for a while they featured different body type girls, different colours, different ethnicities".

Several of my participants commented on "the body positivity movement", and noted that seeing a diverse range of models made them feel more accepted. However, despite this perception, my participants still experienced the implications of beauty standards to a high degree. As was clarified in the literature review, the body positivity movement is not as progressive as it seems. With restrictions placed on the acceptance of fatness (Gibson, 2022), and body-positive captions attached to images of women conforming to beauty standards (Lazuka, et al., 2020; Spurgas, 2005). Evidently, beneath the 'body positive' façade of contemporary Euro-American societies, misogyny still has a profound impact.

Ava (20, Mixed race, Bisexual) was aware of the counter-productive element of the body positivity movement. She recognised the confusion caused by conflicting messages:

"there's so many messages all over the place, so it might be overwhelming to people because they're like, oh, you shouldn't feel anything about your body. You should feel positive about it. You should feel neutral. You should do this, you should do that. You should aim to look the way you are or you should look better or whatever, and it's just, there's too many messages."

Despite its good intentions, the body positivity movement is birthing conditions of conflict that manifest as warfare. For, "in the smallest of it's cogs, peace is waging a secret war" (Foucault, et al., 2003, P.50). However, this is a discussion that is continued in Chapter 6.

For now, I progress onto another arguably more insidious way that beauty standards watch over women.

Section 4.3: The Gaze of Beauty Part 2: Interactions

In the previous section, celebrities and public figures in the media were an influential source of projecting beauty standards; revealing the evident gaze of beauty. In this section, however, I reveal how closer interactions with women can be even more influential to conformity. Although there is a great distance between the majority of women and celebrities, the closeness between women and their female friends/family produces a further hardened glare to the gaze of beauty.

Returning to *1984* (Orwell, 1949), Winston is subject to the blaring telescreen that projects the messages of the inner party. However, what mutes Winston's resistance is the behaviour of those around him. He constantly assesses the reactions of the other outer party members and modifies his behaviour to mirror theirs. I monitored a similar process that existed amongst women, wherein individuals watch women in their close circles adhering to beauty standards and copy this behaviour.

When asked how women were influenced by beauty standards, Zaya (18, White Hispanic, Not sure of her sexuality) explained the many dimensions of women's lives which contained the projection of beauty standards. However, one comment stood out to me, she said: "when you have a conversation with anyone, like men or women... the woman is always trying to look particularly good". Although she did not explicitly comment on the influence of this, this passing comment holds great importance. With this comment Zaya identified one of the major impactful influences of beauty.

In my conversation with Chloe (22, Chinese, Lesbian), she provided an overt example of this. She discussed an interaction with her neighbours upon her return to China after leaving for education purposes "I visited my parents back in China and then immediately I got judged by all the neighbours, calling me too fat, I've put on too much weight, I need to lose weight". In this interaction, the gaze of beauty is channeled through the judgement of her neighbours. Where we previously saw magazines and tabloids fat-shaming women in the media, here we see women internalising these messages and projecting them outwards, acting as if they are police officers for patriarchal power.

Chloe continued by explaining that this interaction “put me into strong insecurity about my body and I became Bulimic”. Therefore, after Chloe was policed by her neighbours, she, in turn, policed herself by disciplining her body. For, when other people watch you, you learn to watch yourself (Fillingham, 1993).

Nonetheless, although this form of policing was described by Chloe as common in China, she understood that it was uncommon in the UK. Instead, my participants noted a more indirect influence. Georgina - a 23-year-old, White British, Lesbian) used social media as an example when explaining the influence of beauty standards:

“I know I’ve said this a lot but, social media is awful for it, I think a lot of insecurities stem from there, and especially like Instagram, and things like that [...] how your friends pose in a picture and how they want their body to be portrayed, you know a lot of people use like editing things, because they want to look a certain way or yeah, you just see it all the time.”

Rather than a distant image of a celebrity conforming to beauty standards, women are subject to seeing women they know on social media conforming to the same image. This grounds beauty standards into their reality, and makes for a more impactful form of socialisation. Despite the mass of literature concerning media-projected beauty standards, there was a lack of academia that addressed friends/family interactions as a point of importance. Moreover, my research has filled a gap by concentrating on smaller-scale interactions.

A large topic of discussion in my interviews was the mother's influence on beauty standards. Alaya (23, White Irish, Lesbian), Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual), and Chloe (22, Chinese, Lesbian) and Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) all conversed on this issue. When talking about how women learn beauty standards, Alaya asserted:

“I think it also comes from seeing other women critiquing their appearances then that is internalised, for example, if my mum is saying something really horrible about her appearance like why, stop saying that, I think you’re really beautiful and I also kind of look like you so it’s like a rough start”

Perhaps this “rough start” illuminates the cyclical nature of internalising beauty standards. It begins with the mother and subsequently infiltrates the younger generations, and so the cycle continues. Maya (Black and South Asian/Heterosexual) explains this phenomenon in

further depth, stating that “they [mother’s] are passing down the same trauma that they were subjected to when they were growing up”. Toprak (2023) found a similar connection between mother-daughter relationships, where when a young woman experienced high levels of body dissatisfaction, so did her mother and vice versa. My research solidified this point, highlighting the strong influence of mother-daughter interactions.

Furthermore, witnessing beauty standards in the media may be harmful, but watching those who you interact with everyday conform and reinforce the same messages is far more impactful. For example, if you witnessed a celebrity do something obscure, you most likely ignore it and pass it off as abnormal. However, if you witnessed your friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances doing the same obscurity, you would be far more likely to participate.

Section 4.4: Chapter Reflections

In this Chapter, I have answered the question 'What are the current Euro-American beauty standards and how are they projected?' by carving out three themes which have an interchangeable characteristic: unattainability. I provide an overview of part 1 of the three-part structure I identified: consistent visibility, by delving into the intricate ways that beauty standards act as a form of misogyny by circulating societies on a shame/praise system.

Regarding the Panopticon (Bentham, 1843), beauty standards the tall tower in the peripheral of the structure, projecting authoritarian messages of conformity. In addition, the friend/family interactions would represent the visible cells that allow the prisoners to view one another. By seeing others behave beneath the central tower, they too are persuaded to conform.

Chapter 5: Uniformity is Strength

“[E]verywhere, all over the world, hundreds or thousands of millions of people... held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same people who had never learned to think but were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world”

(Orwell, 1949, P.262).

In the following two chapters, I explore the effects of being subject to the gaze of beauty. Instead of exploring the overseer, as I did in Chapter 4, I will be exploring the effects on the overseen. In this chapter, I review part two of the power structure - in-group separation - by revealing my findings on competition between women.

In Orwell's *1984* (1949) Winston holds a consistent dislike and distrust toward other members of the outer party. As he wanders the corridors of their shared accommodation, he passes judgment over the other party members' level of conformity, particularly despising those who avidly conform. Whilst suspecting all as being part of the thought police (members of the party that hunt those who show signs of revolt and resistance against Big Brother). However, this would never be known due to his party-supporting actions that greatly juxtapose his internal revolt.

As a result of the mistrust, Winston does not hold friendships with anyone, apart from Julia (the party member he is having a secret affair with). However, in the end, after the avid torture he endures from his revolt, Winston's love for Julia fades away, and he is alone again, and powerless against the party.

In this chapter, I consider the relevance of *1984* (Orwell, 1949), to my research. I do this by exploring non-romantic relationships between women and how they are affected by an undying internal competition. Instead of a porous wall that existed between women's relationships in the previous scholarly literature (Fisher, 2017; Piggot, 2004), I observed a more undefined barrier that existed within intact relationships between women.

Throughout the chapter, I question the tactical implementation of female competition in societies, whilst also considering the influence of feminism on these issues. I use *1984* (Orwell, 1949), as well as Foucault's discussion on power to analyse the shifting nature of

conflict and warfare. Ultimately, I outline the necessity of uniformity to overthrow oppressive power.

Section 5.1: Beauty is Competition

All participants agreed that competition is a common experience for women. However, it did not reflect the 'she-devil' (Brogard, 2020) depiction of a woman who maliciously sees all others as a threat. Rather, the competition I observed came from a place of sorrow. Nevertheless, I did observe a similarity with the previous academia on competition. Several scholars concluded that competition between women was internal and discrete (Campbell, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). Similarly, my participants experienced competition as a purely internal affair. Mia (20, White British, Bisexual), stated that competition is “more of an internal struggle over most people”.

In past academia, it was argued that appearance-based competition manifested as an internal hierarchy, where women would place themselves and the women around them on a hierarchal scale in their minds (Anthony, et al., 2016). This hierarchy was evident in my research and is what Zaya (18, White Hispanic, not sure) termed “attractiveness scales”. Delia (19, Black British, Bisexual) provided an example:

“I could go into a lecture. Like, I went to a lecture and I'll, you know, I'll see it as everyone that's sort of within my view range. And I'll think, oh, she's pretty, but she's prettier than her. Or like, I think I'm prettier than her and I'll give reasons why in my head.”

By comparing herself to each woman in the room, Delia is unintentionally creating a hierarchy of attractiveness; placing herself in between others in the room, dependent on their level of societal beauty. My participants expressed a strong desire to be at the top of this hierarchy. They often used terms such “prettiest”, “skinniest”, “the best skin”, “the best hair”, and “the most put together”. Maya explained that when you feel as if you are the “prettiest” it is as if you have reached “the finish line” (Maya, 21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) of beauty.

Henceforth, to be considered beautiful, one must be the *most* beautiful. Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) clarified this point: “We're made to think as women, we can't be as beautiful because we can't all be beautiful. One of us has to be, you know, the Queen bee”.

Moreover, I discovered that competition was not simply linked to beauty, it was a part of its structure. Beauty is not only defined by how close one is to beauty standards, it is also defined by how close one is to beauty standards *in comparison* to other women.

This point was made by Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) who explained that beauty is “a game of comparison”. She continued by stating “the whole nature of beauty in society is, it’s a lot of comparison. So, you’re beautiful because somebody else looks, or doesn’t look like you, or doesn’t look as good as you”. Moreover, as long as beauty standards exist, so does appearance-based competition.

Later in the interview, Delia explained the impact of being at the bottom of one’s own internal “scales of attractiveness” (Zaya, 18, White Hispanic, Unsure of sexuality). Delia ascribed:

“if you find somebody else that has more of those characteristics and checks more of those points, you’ll feel inferior to them by virtue of the comparative nature of beauty. So women are constantly having to check themselves against their peers and their friends to be like, okay, out of all of us, who’s the most beautiful one?”

Furthermore, to avoid feeling “inferior” women are constantly comparing themselves to others, searching for the finish line that will never arrive. This pursuit is entirely distracting, drawing women’s attention away from their decreasing societal power, and onto an endless road of disappointment. This is because, it is very unlikely that women will naturally be able to adhere to beauty standards, and if they do, there will always be someone who reaches them more efficiently.

Section 5.2: The Gaze of Competition

Although scholars have deemed that competition is embedded in human nature, governed by an instinctual, evolutionary pull (Campbell, 2004; Fisher, 2017; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; Tracy, 1991), my research suggests differently.

I found that competition between women is learned behaviour. In every interview, each participant understood that competition is something that women are socialised into. Mia (20, White British, Bisexual) outlined: “I feel like women have always been kind of taught to compete against each other. I think that’s quite ingrained”. Further, instead of the supposed instinctual pull (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007), competition, in this context, was found to be a taught behaviour.

Similar to various other sources of literature, my participants declared that competition is reinforced through television, films, media, magazines, social media, and celebrity culture (Cowan & Ullman, 2006; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). Delia clarified her example of the hierarchical process of comparison by stating:

“it's terrible that, that we do that. But, we don't know how to think beyond that because we've never been socialised any other way. It's always been, oh, look at her. You see, you see how she's so slim. She's so nice. She has her hair done so nicely. Why can't you be like that?”.

In the literature review, I discussed the notion of lack, and how I believed competition was only evolutionary in the sense that humans are conditioned to compete when they are lacking something. I do not believe, a human being who feels they are abundant in resources, would feel the need to compete. This is the same with beauty. If women felt abundantly beautiful, they would not feel inclined to compete. Further, Delia says that the media demonstrates a desired image, and questions "why can't you be like that?". Therefore, informing women that if they do not appear as this image is, they are undesirable, and lacking beauty. Meaning, that an instinct of competition may be triggered, and if not, they are taught that it must be.

Maya provided an informative example when referring to a Film that was popular in her teenage years called 'The DUFF', which translates to the 'Designated Ugly Fat Friend'. She explains that this film declared that everyone has an ugly fat friend in the group, and if you do not know who it is, it is you. She talked about how this made herself and girls of her age anxious about being the 'DUFF', inspiring competition among them. She said: “that gave a lot of kind of body competition and that kind of thing. It's like no one wanted to be the DUFF which is really, yeah, quite gross”. Therefore, because no one wanted to be at the bottom of the "scales of attractiveness", they fought to be at the top.

It must also be considered, as it must in any discussion on socialisation, that women are obliged to compete, they choose to. However, 'choice' is perhaps the wrong word. As Foucault understands:

“power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure

upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them”

(Foucault, 1979, P.31-32).

My participants expressed an investment in competition, that swayed their 'choice' to conform. Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) understood that women were competing for a "prize", but she was unsure of what this prize was. Similarly, Mia identified the feeling of a "confidence boost" that came from being at the top of one's internal hierarchy. Or, as Georgina (23, White British, Lesbian) termed it "a burst of confidence". So, perhaps the "prize" is a temporary moment of relief or of power.

Thus, the perceived notion of a positive outcome amongst the hardship of beauty is what convinces women to keep conforming. Tanenbaum (2011) explains this as the pursuit of 'petty power', where women strive for instant relief against the turmoil of beauty standards, by comparing themselves to other women.

Maya understood that the need for this "confidence boost" was because "you feel so far from, I guess the finish line" and competing makes you feel "slightly farther along". Moreover, competition is not experienced by a 'she-devil' (Brogard, 2020), who maliciously tears down other women. It is experienced by a woman who has been worn down so meticulously, that she claims any relief available.

Unfortunately, however, as Maya explains "there is no finish line". Meaning, that competition continues to thrive, as a desperate clasp at inner peace.

Accordingly, is difficult to say what the exact causation of competition is. Instead, it may be argued that there are a range of factors responsible for this phenomenon. Whilst evolution may play a part, the media certainly has a profound impact. Moreover, as I do in my literature review, I argue that competition may be instinctual, but it must be triggered by feelings of inadequacy (Tanenbaum, 2011).

However, women are not simply subjects controlled by instinctual pulls and brainwashed by societies. My participants clearly understood the destructive nature of competition, yet they 'chose' to conform. Albeit, they 'chose', as a subject of torture 'chooses' death to be free. Likewise, the allure of the temporary relief of torment convinces women to 'choose' competition.

In *1984* (1949) Winston wished that the masses would rebel against the party, and if they did so, Big Brother's power would not stand a chance. However, Winston remained largely alone in his resistance, and thus his power remained minimal. In my research, I wished to understand if this process was similar for women, to solidify my understanding of the three-part structure. Accordingly, I explored how women's non-romantic relationships were affected by competition. In the following section, I examine this impact.

Section 5.3: Divided Relationships

In this section, I analyse three frequently discussed relationships: acquaintances, friendships, and sisters; providing varied discussions on each. In terms of already defined relationships, between friendships was an unspoken internal competition, and between sister relationships was a harsh spoken judgement based on the gaze of beauty. In terms of acquaintances, I found that women often avoided connection with others dependent on their level of beauty.

Section 5.3.1: Acquaintances

Between female acquaintances, my participants outlined a clear-cut barrier which resulted in in-group separation. According to my findings, if there was not an already instated relationship, women avoided other women, that is, if said woman was a 'pretty girl'. Georgina (23, White British, Lesbian) provided an example through a discussion about a conversation she witnessed between two female colleagues at her place of work:

“I remember recently one of my friends from work was saying that she was going to a dinner party, and there was another girl there, but she was looking through her Instagram and saying she looked like a massive slag, so she wasn't looking forward to seeing her. The girl didn't look like a slag, and I don't even know what you'd say that looked like”.

By using the term “slag” to describe this girl, Georgina's colleagues are devaluing the girl they are speaking about, employing the use of slut-shaming and name-calling to avoid connection and the possibility of friendship (Bates, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Georgina continued by explaining why she believed her colleagues were talking in this way:

“she was feeling insecure about what to wear, is what I discovered later in the conversation, so she was worried about what she was gonna wear and she knew that

this girl was really pretty and she didn't want to feel bad about herself. So she was calling this girl a slag before she'd even met her."

The quotation "[a]ll their ferocity was turned outwards, against the enemies of the state, against foreigners, traitors, saboteurs, though-criminals" (Orwell, 1949, P.29), is relevant here. As the misogyny in beauty standards is faceless, women are directing their discomfort with beauty standards at other women; particularly the 'pretty girls' who are walking embodiments of conformity. Winston often felt similar in *1984*, where he particularly hated "the adherents of the Party, the swallows of the slogans" (Orwell, 1949, P.12).

Although many may use the 'she-devil' (Brogard, 2020) description for these colleagues, I do not. Instead of devious women out to tear another woman down, I believe they use slut-shaming as a form of self-protection. By creating distance between themselves and the 'pretty girl', they prevent any hardship that may be experienced because of the friendship.

This interaction Georgina observed is similar to that of the interactions in Piggot's (2004) understanding of internalised misogyny. Wherein, women devalue and disrespect each other, and porous walls exist between their relationships. If these interactions continued in my findings on sister relationships and friendships, I could definitively conclude that part 2 of the structure -- in group separation -- is concretely in place. However, this was not the case.

In the following two relationship variants, my findings were similar to Georgina's perspective, rather than her two colleagues. Throughout her recollection of this conversation, Georgina remained critical of her colleagues' conversation. She claimed that she was "so uncomfortable and shocked that people still talked like this". She explained that she felt like this because she is "always around women who support other women". In the remaining dialogue of this chapter, I engage in a thoughtful discussion about the complications of feminist revolt, against misogynistic conformity. I do so by assessing the juxtaposition of my participant's perspectives and their actions.

However, before I move on to friendships, it is also relevant to mention the fact that Georgina identifies as a lesbian. Grogan (2021) found that lesbian women are less subjected to the vision of beauty within their communities, and thus its lasting effects. Georgina's, Chloe's (22, Chinese, lesbian) and Alaya's (24, White Irish, lesbian) interviews were consistent with these findings. They expressed how they believed in-group separation between heterosexual women, far exceeded in-group separation between queer women. Chloe demonstrated this by speaking of her experience in queer communities:

“when it comes to feminist and queer girls, they tend to be more friendly with each other and they give lots and lots of compliments to each other all the time... no matter what their body is like, sometimes they feel, they are insecure about their own body but at the same time they still keep giving compliments to other people.”

Whereas the heterosexual colleagues used their insecurity to distance themselves from other women, Chloe describes an opposite process for queer women. She explains that instead of distancing from each other, queer communities use their insecurities to enliven their connection. The difference between the two is that lesbian women are free from the pressures which surround the male gaze, whilst heterosexual women are not. For example, women who are attracted to men may feel they must live up to beauty standards because that is what men value.

Nevertheless, this attitude toward female empowerment persisted amongst my heterosexual and bisexual participants when discussing friendships. Moreover, the slight alleviation from beauty standards is a noteworthy point, but it is not strong enough to be a significant finding in my research. This is because the lesbian participants in my research were still affected by beauty standards to a significant level.

In the following section, I explore the effect of competition on friendships, outlining the manifestation of an undefined barrier between women's relationships which creates an air of conflict, yet not one strong enough to completely divide women's relationships. However, this positive shift forward to a more feminist future, may not be what it seems.

Section 5.3.2: Friendships

My participants discerned that their own friendships were not presently affected by beauty standards and competition. Yet, I identified an air of conflict between women - where there was a lingering resentment between their friendships - that I inspired a barrier between them. Resulting in a lessened for of in-group separation. Whereas female acquaintances devalued each other, female friendships empowered each other; following the newly popularised 'girls supporting girls' movement.

A variety of my participants expressed that their current relationships were not divided, but that in the past they were. Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) provided an example that was telling of this point. She articulated a memory from her teenage years:

“one of my closest friends from home, we've been friends since we were like 11... but she was always thinner than me and had, well again, I don't wanna use terms like

nicer or not or better, because I know that's not true, but to me as a teenager, I felt like she had a nicer body. I always felt like when I was younger, maybe not so much now cause I feel like I've gotten over it and we've both developed in different ways. But I feel like when I was younger made me kind of resentful towards her.”

Evidently, this resentment came from an annoyance that her friend was more consistently meeting the requirements of the vision of beauty standards. Maya mentions that her friend was thinner than herself at the time, and this was the cause of the resentment. This finding is concurrent with research the research that exemplifies that appearance-based competition is increasingly prevalent between women (Anthony, et al., 2016; Campbell, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). Again, this finding may suggest that conflict may still present between women, however, I draw the discussion back out to the perspectives of my participants. All of my participants remained distant from the notion that women’s friendships were divided. They acknowledged that other women’s friendships may be divided, but that their current personal friendships are not at all affected. Such as is seen in Maya’s perspective on this previously experienced resentment.

Maya talked about this incident as if it was confined to the past, and a feeling not presently experienced by herself. Although the progression of age could be considered a cause of this shift in perspective. I instead relate it to an actualization of the shift in collective feminist consciousness and the creation of the “women supporting women” norm (Tanenbaum, 2011) that was revealed in the previous section. I do not consider age as a significant factor as both Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual), and Zaya (18, White Hispanic, not sure) commented on their experiences of witnessing older women policing younger women. Delia suggested that millennial women do not personify the same feminist consciousness that younger generations do:

“I don't think they feel particularly bad [about policing women] because for them it's, it's all or nothing. Like if you don't [live up to the vision of beauty], you're not attractive, you're not gonna get a husband, you're not gonna fulfill your sort of expectations that are placed on women in society”.

Thus, perhaps instead of growing out of her resentment, Maya has grown into the contemporary generational shift which is more focused on feminism. Moreover, the literature that focuses on devaluing, distrusting, slut-shaming, and name-calling women (Bates, 2016; Piggot, 2004; Ringrose & Renold, 2012) may have greater significance for older generations of women and be less relevant in the wake of the “women supporting women” movement. All

of my participants reassured me that their personal friendships were intact, as they framed their perspectives by aligning with this feminist movement, however the contents of our conversations proved different.

Despite this movement and my participants' reassurance that their personal friendships remained intact, I noted a still existing barrier between their friendships. Based on their discussions, their friendships do still remain intact, but I traverse that the experiences they recall on must produce some kind of resultant barrier. Lin (20, White British, Bisexual) recounted a friendship with a close female friend who said she often felt insecure around because she is "petite" and therefore more closely fits the vision of beauty:

"so the girl I think is really petite, I think like she gets a lot of male attention, but I'm not distancing myself from her because I think she's more attractive, cause in a way I don't think she's more attractive. I think she's just a bit different type of attractive and sort of my insecurities come out in her. But yeah, I don't think I would never distance myself because of that."

Lin explains how she would not intentionally distance from her friend, but I confer that her feelings of insecurity around this particular friend must instill a tension of some kind between their relationship, even if it is purely internal. If one feel's more insecure around their friend, then there is bound to be a barrier of tension established between the two.

Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) explained a similar situation in detail. She talks about her internal processes that manifest when around her friends that she perceives as more attractive than herself. She relays:

"when I'm hanging out with my friends that I think are more attractive than myself. There's a small voice in the back of my head that's like, she's judging you. She thinks that you are ugly. She thinks that you could do your hair differently, wear different clothes, maybe lose a bit of weight, this, that and the other."

Thus, through assumption that these friends are passing judgement over her appearance, there is a tension created between the relationship. The simple act of expressing that her friends are more attractive than herself reveal the mechanisms of comparison that exist between relationships. With that said, it was not a porous wall that divided the relationships described, but rather, an air of tension that surrounded the relationships. Further, I did report a barrier between relationships, but it is entirely different to that which I expected after

reading the previous literature. Women are no longer at war with one another, instead, it seems that the tension that exists is more of a way of self-policing. Delia, through framing thoughts such as “you are ugly” and “you need to lose a bit of weight” as coming from her attractive friends, is policing herself with the same mechanisms as the mass media projections of the vision of beauty. Moreover, perhaps this is an indication that the previously discovered conflict between women, has advanced into a conflict within the self. Nevertheless, there is still a significant barrier between women that must be explored, but before I delve into this I move onto relationships between sisters.

Section 5.3.3: Sisters

Previous academia relayed that sister relationships were often affected by competition (Booth, 2009; Fisher, 2017; Spurgas, 2005; Tracy, 1991; Paquette & Raine, 2004). In my research, I added to the field by specifying how sister relationships were affected compared to female acquaintances and friendships. Contrary to acquaintances and friendships, sister relationships were overtly judgemental, rather than internally based.

Both Georgina (23, White British, Lesbian) and Lin (20, White British, Bisexual) expressed feeling judged and belittled by their sisters. Georgina spoke about how her sister openly puts her down:

“often when I go out she’ll comment on what I’m wearing or my weight or something like that, and I know it makes her feel better. Even though she’s trying to say she does it to help me, it’s actually just to make herself feel better, because, she likes to be taller than me, she likes to be skinner than me she likes it when I feel worse, because I’m more openly confident than she is. So, to kind of knock some of that confidence makes her feel more confident”.

Regarding friendships, there was underlying tension that existed due to internal competition. However, regarding sister relationships, this tension is brought to the surface and verbalised. To provide an example, I return to Delia's account of her experience of internal competition in her lectures. In her lecture, Delia explained that she internally judged others in the room, placing herself on a scale of 'pretty girl' to 'ugly girl'. However, in Georgina's example, her sister outwardly does this by judging Georgina's weight out loud, placing herself above Georgina on the "scales of attractiveness". Moreover, a competition that was largely internal with acquaintances and friendships, was outwardly expressed in sister relationships.

I assume that this outwardly expressed competition is due to the closeness of sister relationships. These findings bring to the surface what is hidden beneath friendships. What

friends would leave unspoken, sisters would shout out loud. In Georgina's case, she assured me that she and her sister were "still very close". Meaning, their relationship remained unaffected, despite the outward competition. However, in my conversation with Lin, she expressed a different opinion.

Lin talked about her experience with her sisters at home, "I personally find every time I go back home, I get more insecure about myself because of my siblings". She understood that "everyone's looking and judging each other" but that sisters were "too real" and verbalized the internal comparison that she believes is present in all relationships between women. The verbalisation of internal competition is consistent with Georgina's example. However, Lin continued by asserting that she often avoided going home because of the discomfort she felt around her sisters.

Furthermore, these findings clearly show us what hides beneath the surface of friendships. However, the effect competition has on sister relationships is unclear. I argue that this may be because of the obligation sisters feel to one another. In family relationships, it is difficult to be divided because of the obligation or necessity to spend time together. Moreover, I cannot provide a concrete answer to how sister relationships are affected by competition. However, what I do is provide evidence that sister relationships are affected by appearance-based competition.

Section 5.4: Chapter Reflections

In this chapter I answered the question 'How do beauty standards engender competition between women?' by outlining my findings on competition and how it manifests for women. My findings indicated evidence for part two of the three-part structure: in-group separation. In acquaintance relationships, the divide was clear due to the resentment of 'pretty girls' Yet, in friendships and sister relationships the separation I monitored was discrete, rather than overt. These relationships remained intact, yet there was a lingering tension, that was internal for friendships and verbalised in sister relationships.

Regarding the Panopticon, this chapter would represent the walls that exist between the prisoners, ensuring they are kept apart to avoid collective power. In Emmanuel Goldsteins *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, it states "it had long been realised that the only secure basis for oligarchy is collectivism" (Orwell, 1949, P.245). Thus, by using competition as an undefined barrier between relationships, collective power cannot be accessed, and oligarchy is nullified.

Chapter 6: Resistance is Conformity

“How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?”

Winston thought. ‘By making him suffer’, he said.

‘Exactly. By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing’”

(Orwell, 1949, P.319).

In Chapter 5 I relayed my findings on how beauty standards affect competition, showing how women's relationships with each other are influenced. However, in this chapter, I delve deeper by exploring the internal minds of women, revealing how beauty standards affect a woman's relationship with herself.

In 1984 (Orwell, 1949) as a result of his growing rebellion, Winston is subject to harsh and torturous punishment ranging from starvation to his ultimate fear which is awaiting him in Room 101. Gradually, as Winston's mind is torn apart, any hint of revolt is replaced with the propaganda of the party. Eventually, to avoid the harsh torture in Room 101, Winston chooses servitude over rebellion. Eventually, in replacement of his previous hatred for Big Brother, he declares his newfound love for Big Brother and the Party.

In this Chapter, I explore how beauty standards affect body dissatisfaction. I draw on part 3 of the structure by assessing how body dissatisfaction acts as a form of self-inflicted torture. The internal tumult of body dissatisfaction, I assert, manifests as battle-like conditions in the mind.

Whereas Chapter 5 was focused on women's relationships, this chapter is solely focused on the internal functioning of individual women. By discussing internalised misogyny, body dissatisfaction, and the internal battle between resistance and conformity, I underscore the rich internal world of women in Euro-American societies. By examining the metaphorical 'Room 101' in women's lives, I assert the tendency for women to 'choose' conformity over

resistance. By probing the invisible functions of the mind, I examine the "highly intricate mosaic" (Foucault, 1980, P.62), which is the human reaction to oppressive power.

Section 6.1: Internalised Misogyny

In Chapter 4, I provided a definition of misogyny regarding beauty standards. Where I defined misogyny as the enforcement branch of the patriarchal order (Manne, 2017; 2018). Under this definition, misogyny works as the beauty police by shaming and praising women based on their status as a 'pretty girl' or 'ugly girl'. Overall, I express the relevance of the overarching gaze that exists at the centre of beauty standards.

In this subsection, I outline a new definition of internalised misogyny, based on my definition of misogyny. Unlike previous scholars, I underscore the necessity of internalised misogyny in this branch of misogyny. However, by deviating from previous scholarly literature on internalised misogyny, I align with Foucault's understanding of power by stressing the role of micro-relations of power (Novotorova, 2020).

Similar to my findings on misogyny, I found that there was an overarching gaze present in internalised misogyny. However, instead of being subject to an external gaze, my participants were subject to a gaze from within. Beneath every discussion with my participants was the presence of an internal overseer; a gaze that watched and judged the appearance, actions, and interactions of themselves and other women.

The internalised gaze was a product of the external gaze of misogyny. For example, where beauty standards in the media deemed that 'pretty girls' were thin and 'ugly girls' were fat, so did the internalised gaze. As a result, women altered their appearance so that it fits the 'pretty girl' appearance. Thus, this gaze functions as so:

“[t]here is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that [s]he is [her] own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, [her]self” (Foucault, 1980, P.155).

Therefore, by internalising the gaze of misogyny, women become a product of beauty standards, ingraining them further into reality.

During my interviews, I presented a scenario where the character, Sara, was constantly monitoring her appearance. This provoked reflections on an internal gaze. All of my participants agreed that "keeping an eye" (Georgina, 23, White British, Lesbian) on their appearances had become ingrained into women's everyday lives. Georgina answered:

“yeah definitely, I think it's really common. I think I've definitely seen myself do that quite often, like check my appearance on a daily basis and make sure that I look all right and I've definitely seen it with my girlfriend and my friends as well”.

My other participants responded similarly, all commenting on the normalisation of frequently watching one's appearance. These responses sketched out the presence of the internal gaze of misogyny.

I wanted to understand more precisely how internalised misogyny worked, so I asked my participants how women surveilled themselves. I identified two manifestations: mirrors and the gaze of a friend.

Regarding internal surveillance, mirrors were a frequently discussed topic in my interviews. The presence of the mirror has gradually increased over the past decades, with mirrors now a given object in most homes (Northrop, 2013). My findings clarify the growth of internal surveillance with the increase of the mirror in every day settings.

I learned that by using mirrors, women could personify the internal gaze. Delia (19, Black British (African), Bisexual) spoke of the mirror as a way to surveil her appearance:

“if I walk past a mirror, I'll know, oh my God, I have a spot there. Or like, oh my gosh, I have a massive chin, or something like that. Like you'll notice those things and even if it's not another person pointing it out, you will notice yourself”.

Here, Delia uses the mirror as a tool for the internalised gaze, by watching over her physical appearance and giving assurance or discouragement dependent on her levels of adherence. Just as the gaze of misogyny deems one a 'pretty girl' or 'ugly girl' based on their adherence to beauty standards, Delia deems herself an 'ugly girl' based on characteristics that deviate from beauty standards.

My findings on internalised misogyny deviate from previous scholars. Piggot (2004), who is a leading scholar on the subject of internalised misogyny, defined internalised misogyny by attributing it to women's devaluation and distrust of other women, as well as their preference for men over women. Whilst Piggot's definition focussed on how women acted toward other women, mine centres on how women act toward themselves by positioning self-surveillance at its core. Moreover, this thesis provides a newfound understanding of internalised misogyny.

Delia later asserted that she consistently monitored herself in the mirror "simply cause you kind of have an image in your head of what beauty is, so you're constantly checking yourself against that". This statement is significant because it underscores my point that misogyny relies on internalised misogyny and vice versa. This is because Delia surveils herself by

internalising beauty standards and judging herself accordingly. On the other hand, by surveilling herself, Delia upholds beauty standards through her willingness to comply. Thus, Foucault's (1980) understanding that power "exist[s] within a net of reciprocal connectivity" (Novotorova, 2020, P.8) is proven.

In the absence of a literal mirror, I found that women have adopted another form of self-surveillance by using other women as points of surveillance. In my interview with Olivia (25, White British, Bisexual) this form of surveillance was mentioned "when I'm out with female friends they're either policing themselves or asking someone else to, like: do I look ok, is my outfit all right, is my makeup okay, is my hair fine, that kind of thing". Instead of the literal use of a mirror, the latter woman's dictation defines whether the former woman's appearance is acceptable according to beauty standards. This form of surveillance acts as a double-edged sword by simultaneously surveilling both women involved in this interaction. While the former woman asks if she looks okay, the latter woman is simultaneously helping her adhere to beauty standards, while being reminded that she too must adhere.

In addition, there is a point to be made about community. In this interaction, the women involved are supporting each other and are therefore using surveillance as a form of communal support. Although these women sustain the 'girls supporting girls' movement, we must question what it is they are supporting each other in doing. In an attempt to support others, women are aiding their friends with meticulous self-surveillance. Furthermore, the 'girls supporting girls' movement is being used in a non-productive way by upholding misogyny. Relationships between women had the potential for combatting misogyny, but instead, they are used as a mechanism of misogyny. Meaning, the potential progress I noted in Chapter 5 toward a more supportive future for communities of women, is muted by the undying light of misogyny.

In my conversations with Georgina (23, White British, Lesbian), I explored the predominance of this form of internalised misogyny in women's lives, as well as the emotions that are experienced as a result. She said:

"every morning I get up, I look in the mirror, do my hair, put on makeup, and its kind of just to make sure my appearance is ok, and make sure I look presentable. I even go as far as to look at myself in reflective windows as I pass by them. I don't even really know why, it's just like I'm drawn to do it".

My conversation with Georgina informed me of how persistent internalised misogyny is. Georgina's first action in the morning, is to surveil herself, ensuring her appearance is "presentable" according to beauty standards. Throughout the day, she then seeks reflective surfaces to reassure the surveillance. Thus, ensuring that the beauty standards are upheld.

She continued by explaining how this process made her feel, "sometimes it can give me a small boost of confidence, but sometimes it makes me feel so disgusting and I feel awful for the rest of the day". This comment provides evidence that the praise and shame of misogyny is also relevant to internalised misogyny. If Georgina perceives herself as a 'pretty girl', she receives a "small boost of confidence". Yet, if Georgina perceives herself as an 'ugly girl' she feels "disgusting". Consequently, she has internalised the same process we saw in the external gaze of beauty. Wherein, the media shamed women who did not adhere to beauty standards and praised women who did.

In the following section, I delve further into this feeling of disgust that occurs after perceiving oneself as an 'ugly girl', by delving into my findings on body dissatisfaction.

Section 6.2: Body Dissatisfaction

In the opening quotation of this Chapter, I displayed a conversation between Winston and O'Brien (Winstons personal oppressor). O'Brien reveals that suffering is the necessary precondition to power. For any oppressive power to gain traction over a large group, it must inflict pain, and tear minds to pieces (Orwell, 1949). In this subsection, I show how by inflicting incessant pain and suffering, body dissatisfaction works in tearing women's minds apart, so they can eventually be moulded into conformity.

As a reminder, body dissatisfaction can be defined as:

“[a] person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body. Body dissatisfaction relates to negative evaluations of body size, shape, muscularity/muscle tone and weight, and it usually involves a perceived discrepancy between a person's evaluation of his or her body and his or her ideal body.”

(Grogan, 2021, P.6).

An example of body dissatisfaction can be taken from Georgina's (23, White British, Lesbian) comment about self-surveillance. Wherein, she said she "feels disgusting all day" if she views herself in the mirror and does not like what she sees. Therefore, this consistent critical judgement that produces feelings of extreme dislike and shame towards one's body is an example of body dissatisfaction.

In addition, body dissatisfaction can be defined by feelings of inadequacy. Wherein, women feel their appearance is inadequate because it does not fit the 'pretty girl' image. With each participant, I observed the presence of body dissatisfaction, through their perception of their body as distant from beauty standards, or rather, the 'pretty girl' appearance. For example, Lin (21, White British, Bisexual) said, "sometimes I look at my body and I think oh yeah I wish I had a little bit less weight on me". The sense of inadequacy was reflected in her consistent referral to her "petite" friend and how in comparison to this friend, she felt large.

When one solely engages with their body in this way, there is a conflict created between body and mind. The body is treated as if it is an abject being, an enemy which must be controlled because of its inability to adhere to beauty standards (Bartky, 2002; Usher, 2006). Thus, there is a consistent battle against the body which creates war-like relations, that is "relations of perpetual and irreducible reciprocity between adversaries" (Raffnsøe et al., 2016, P.211). The adversaries being, body against mind.

My findings indicate that the experience of body dissatisfaction is so common for women, that it is now considered a natural part of the mind. When I presented a part of the scenario which explained Sara's body dissatisfaction, Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) shared her thoughts by relaying her resonance with Sara's experience and making a generalised comparison to other women in Euro-American societies. She said: "it almost feels like it's a subconscious part of being a woman and every single woman is conscious of their body in some way", later stating "it feels natural to have body image issues as a woman". These findings resonate with previous academia that found that body dissatisfaction is considered a natural part of the human condition (Anthony, et al., 2016; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Paquette and Raine, 2004; Young, et al., 2014).

Mia (20, White British, Bisexual) expanded on this discussion by outlining how body dissatisfaction is "ingrained" into women's minds, acting as a part of the subconscious. Therefore, as body dissatisfaction acts as a "continuous uninterrupted process" (Foucault et al., 2003, P.28), women are continuously placed under self-inflicted torment.

The most apparent example of body dissatisfaction is disordered eating. In my interviews, Chloe (22, Chinese, Lesbian), Georgina (23, White British, Lesbian), Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual) and Ava (20, Mixed, Bisexual) all either referred to a personal eating disorder or the knowledge of others with eating disorders. Maya deemed that eating disorders are so predominant among women that they “are almost like a part of womanhood”. Whilst, Ava recalled Anorexia being “the ideal body type” when she attended school in Milan, Italy. With 4/10 participants who experienced disordered eating, my findings support the research that suggests in the UK between 1.25 and 3.4 million people are affected by eating disorders, 75% of which are women (Priory, 2023). As their bodies refuse to yield to the slender standard of beauty, they must counter-attack it with starvation and strict disciplinary practices (Bartky, 2002). Hence, they fight against natural bodily impulses until eating disorders become, “a part of womanhood”. Therefore, revealing the war-like relations of beauty standards.

This consistent war between the mind and body should not be ignored. For “war can serve as the most radical and general framework for power” (Raffnsøe, et al., 2016, P.211). Behind all power is “a hidden continuous historical warfare” (Raffnsøe, et al., 2016, P.212). Foucault often references the example of the race war. He talks about the racial divide as a form of social warfare that benefits the people in power by creating conflicting conditions that distract civilians from authoritarian power. In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), this tactic of power is implemented quite literally, when Winston understands that war is “continuous” (Orwell, 1949, P.40) in Oceania.

Thus, one can imagine here a loud, continuous sound playing on a loop. At first, it would be bothersome, yet as it continued to blare out of the speakers, day in, and day out, one would become used to the sound. It would continue to be a distraction, yet after years of the same sound on repeat, it would become natural.

Regarding my research, like one in a storm of continuous sound, women have become immune to body dissatisfaction, yet still affected, and distracted by the turmoil it causes. In the following subsection, I underscore another element of internal warfare that has been produced alongside feminism.

Section 6.3: Misogyny vs Feminism

Whilst previous scholars have addressed the normalisation of body dissatisfaction, they have not assessed the counter-balance of resistance. For every instance of oppressive power,

there is an equal and opposite force of resistance (Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1990; Novotorova, 2020). For, “[r]esistance does not exist outside of the system of power relations. It is instead, inherently part of the relation” (Fillingman, 1993, P.145). Subsequently, if I am to address the power of internalised misogyny, I must also address its feminist counterpart. In this subsection, I embark on this route of exploration.

In the previous subsection, I addressed the naturalised nature of body dissatisfaction, deeming it a part of the subconscious mind. However, to oppose this subconscious formulation, I found that my participants embodied a feminist consciousness that fought against the subconscious. These contradictory thoughts, act as doublethink, by simultaneously holding true in the minds the minds of women.

The resistant consciousness was a result of the feminist 'women supporting women' movement. Olivia (25, White British, Bisexual) explains:

“I think there are a lot more conversations about sort of like feminism these days and women supporting women and women lifting each other up. So, I think if your internal dialogue is not looking like that it can definitely make you get a sense of guilt over it, for sure”.

It may be assumed that the introduction of the feminist movement is restorative. However, this supposed "sense of guilt" holds more power than one would think. Although she discusses the feminist messages in societies, as was clarified in Chapter 4, women are additionally subject to misogynistic messages within beauty standards. As a result, women internalise their surroundings and embody subconscious misogyny and conscious feminism. Therefore, these conflicting messages are what result in guilt.

Ava comments on these contradictory messages:

“the thing is, there's so many messages all over the place, so it might be overwhelming to people because they're like, oh, you shouldn't feel anything about your body. You should feel positive about it. You should feel neutral. You should do this, you should do that. You should aim to look the way you are or you should look better or whatever, and it's just, there's too many messages”.

Evidently, this contradiction is internalised meaning women are overwhelmed by messages that juxtapose and cause conflict within the mind. This has been observed by previous scholars (Tanenbaum, 2011), yet my research brings this ideology to life. Unfortunately, despite the potential positive motives, feminist messages create an additional element of warfare by producing internal battle-like conditions. By causing conflict and confusion, this warfare acts as a weight that holds women into oppression.

Foucault states that "[p]ower, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body" (Foucault, 1980, P.56). My findings indicate that there is truth in this statement, as I found that as a counter-attack to internalised misogyny, there is an element of internal feminism. Mia (20, White British, Bisexual) revealed how women seem to be stuck in the crossfire of misogyny and feminism by stating "in this day and age, it's all, you know, empowering women and girls supporting girls and everything. I feel like, you feel like you shouldn't feel that way, but I can't help it." When Mia states she "shouldn't feel that way", she is referring to her negative thoughts about her body and her tendency to internally compete with other women. This is a classic act of doublethink - the act of thinking two contradictory thoughts, and accepting them both as truth (Orwell, 1949) - which is used in *1984* as a tactic of power. This is because even if resistant thoughts are available, oppressive thoughts can simultaneously be believed. Meaning, the mind becomes engaged in a contradictory battle.

Mia's statement that she "can't help it" suggests that women are controlled by their thoughts which are a product of their environment. However, Mia's awareness of these thoughts shows that despite the controllable parts of the mind, there is a consciousness that overlooks the many internal battles. Nevertheless, the internal battle between misogyny and feminism prevails, and with warfare as the "most radical and general framework for power" (Raffnsøe, et al., 2016, P.211), dominion triumphs.

As mentioned earlier, as a result of this internal battle, Mia (20, White British, Bisexual) illuminated a "sense of guilt" that is experienced by women. Delia provided an example:

"let's go back to the lecture example. I've watched the lecture and I've said, oh, she's bigger than her, but I'm prettier than her, and I will feel bad. I'll be like, oh my God, why did I do that like this? You are all still people at the end of the day. It's not even like it's a beauty pageant or anything. It's literally just a lecture. So yeah, we definitely feel guilty".

By questioning her critique of other women, Delia is demonstrating the internal battle between her subconscious and conscious mind. Her initial reaction was to compete with other women, though later she questions her subconscious thought patterns. One may consider this a step forward for feminism, however, because of guilt, she is locked into this mindset and cannot move forward.

Perhaps if the action of "feeling bad" or "guilty" was removed then Delia would be able to simply acknowledge her subconscious patterns and accept the conscious feminism as truth. However, because she is encompassed by the feeling of guilt, her progression forward is halted. This phenomenon is termed 'rumination' and is often discussed concerning research

in combating psychiatric disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder. Psychologist's Dr Challacombe, Dr Bream Oldfield, and Professor Salkovskis discuss how OCD is locked into place when one fights against intrusive thoughts and ruminates on the reasons why they are present. They deem that it is not the intrusive thoughts that are dangerous, it is the fight against them which causes guilt and shame that causes issues (Challacombe et al., 2011). Similarly, the subconscious patterns of misogyny, in this context, are not the problem, the fight against them which produces unfounded guilt is the issue. In reality, the subconscious formulation of misogyny is an inevitable product of socialisation, so there is no need for subsequent guilt.

To illustrate a picture of how this works, one may again imagine the scenario where one is living in an environment with an overbearingly loud sound. To add to this, picture a weight holding one into this environment, so that they are locked in, and cannot flee the distracting and bothersome sound. This is the weight of guilt, that holds women into the battle between their subconscious misogyny and conscious feminism.

Although the findings in this subsection prove unfortunate for the feminist movement, fear not, because there is antidote to the warfare. This antidote is captivating and offers brief encounters of peace. However, be aware that the antidote to misogyny, is a product of misogyny.

Section 6.4: Agency and Desire

Despite the heavy oppression I observed, there are moments of peace to be found in the turmoil of warfare. In this subsection, I explore how misogyny has provided an antidote to the warfare it created itself, which is, to conform. As a result, this captivating peace endorses women to 'choose' to conform. The element of 'choice' and agency must be considered, as “[p]ower is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in the position to both submit to and exercise this power”. However, I use the term 'choice' loosely, as one would if a subject of torture 'chose' death over a lifetime of torture.

In the previous subsection, I found that my participants occupied a consciousness separate from the internal battle, one which reflected and understood the oppression women were facing. In this subsection, I illustrate how this consciousness reacts to the oppression of warfare, and 'chooses' to submit to misogyny.

To be at war with one's body is to feel an inescapable and persistent disdain toward oneself, as was noted when I examined body dissatisfaction. In my research, I found that to escape

this interminable torture, women must either 'choose' to conform to beauty standards or 'choose' to compete with other women. If they did so, they could achieve a small sense of accomplishment, as opposed to the lifetime of despair they must face.

Many of my participants commented on the immediate "sense of relief" (Zaya, 18, White Hispanic, Unsure of sexuality), or "boost of confidence" (Georgina, 23, White British, Lesbian) that was experienced if one conformed to beauty standards, or one felt higher than other women in the "pecking order" (Delia, 19, Black British, Bisexual) of beauty. This relief relates to what Tanenbaum (2011) terms 'petty power'. Tanenbaum discusses 'petty power' concerning competition, noting that by competing with other women, women achieve a small sense of power. However, as Tanenbaum explains, this power is minimal in comparison to the collective power women could access in the absence of competition.

As well as this "boost of confidence", my participants expressed the desire to feel beautiful. This was no surprise, as the feeling of beauty alone is enchanting and somewhat magical. Nevertheless, my participants commented on the often-unspoken benefits of beauty, as an endorsement to conform to beauty standards. In my conversations with Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Heterosexual), she often displayed informed knowledge of the oppressive structures behind beauty and competition. However, at the same time expressed a strong desire to be considered beautiful. She commented on a pattern in her everyday thoughts: "Do they find me the most attractive? Am I the prettiest? [...] Do I look the nicest? Is my hair the best? Do I look the prettiest all the time?". Henceforth, despite her knowledge of the misogyny in beauty standards, her desire to conform was unaffected and still held strong. Arguably, this could be an indication of the neo-liberal feminist subject - where women playfully and freely choose their level of conformity (Stuart and Donaghue, 2011). However, there is no playful spirit within the confinement of beauty. Beneath its unbearable weight, there is little choice but to conform, even with knowledge of its destructive impact (Bordo, 2023). Instead, this is a blatant example of doublethink.

In addition to the enticement of peace that conformity allures, there are other seductive benefits to conformity. In my conversations with Lin (20, White British, Bisexual), she frequently referenced her "petite" friend and mentioned the everyday benefits this friend was granted for simply being considered beautiful. When discussing their size difference, Lin stated that "someone can be treated differently" based on their size, and "if you look nice then someone might be more likely to approach you". She confirmed this assertion by discussing the higher likelihood for her petite friend to be romantically approached over herself. Thus, the allure to conformity, in this instance, is to gain romantic interest, and

subsequently the feeling of being desired by others. In a mind plagued with body dissatisfaction, this feeling is a prized treasure.

Further, many of my participants often spoke of the connection between beauty and popularity. In my conversations with several participants, beauty was linked to the power of popularity. Maya (21, Black and South Asian, Bisexual) explained that in the past, she used to look for the leader of a group of women by assessing who was the most beautiful. She noted: "you can tell she's the leader of the group because she's the most pretty". In this view 'pretty girls' are powerful, whereas 'ugly girls' lack power. This notion is interlaced into accounts of beauty, where conforming to beauty standards is said to empower women (Heggenstaller, et al., 2018; Xu & Tan, 2020). In a world where women have limited power, the allure of power through popularity, or conformity, is captivating.

Due to the power of resistance, for power to remain unchecked, there must be the enticement of desire, or rather, a reward (Foucault, 1980; Novotorova, 2020). My findings have illustrated that there is a desire created, which entices women to 'choose' to conform. However, I return to the loud environment scenario to underscore the conditions of choice. Imagine you are in an unbearably loud environment, and you are weighed into it by mounds of guilt. When suddenly, someone informs you that you may be granted a moment of peace, yet each moment of peace you accept, makes the sound play for 1 day longer. Of course, one would choose to deny the peace, if there was a chance of fleeing the sound one day. However, in this environment, there is no guarantee or indication that one will ever escape the sound in their lifetime. Thus, even if they choose to deny the peace, they still may never be granted silence. Thus, inevitably, it would be probable one would consistently choose the moment's peace, as it would likely be the only peace one would ever acquire.

In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), Winston is subject to unimaginable torment, yet persists in his resistance, up until he is subject to his greatest fear in Room 101 (a cage of starving rats ready to eat through his face and devour his brain). After this, he commits the ultimate betrayal of Julia and pledges his allegiance to Big Brother. Thus, the last straw for Winston was Room 101. I must consider, what is in women's metaphorical Room 101, and understand what it is that women are truly afraid of. Perhaps they fear being undesirable, or perhaps it is the thought of being powerless, or the universal fear of being unloved. Whatever it is, it is harsh enough to force them into choosing a lifetime of conformity. It is the trade of one source of pain for another, the substitution of war for peace, or vice versa. How convenient it is that the source of their pain is their saviour.

Section 6.5: Chapter Reflections

In this chapter I answer the question 'How do beauty standards affect body dissatisfaction?', by delving into a disorderly labyrinth of thought which encompasses warfare, conflict, resistance, choice, and conformity. I assess part 3 of the three-part structure - torture - by underscoring how internalised misogyny and body dissatisfaction are used as an internal method of torture.

Concerning the Panopticon, this chapter engages with the prisoners themselves. Body dissatisfaction, warfare, and guilt represent the cells that entrap the prisoners, as when one is shrouded in conflict, they become trapped in it. Additionally, Internalised misogyny represents the most important function of the Panopticon. Wherein, the prisoners are responsible for surveilling themselves and keeping their behaviour in check.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

I began my research journey with the following questions:

- I. What are the current beauty standards in Euro-American societies for women and how are they enforced?
- II. How do the current beauty standards engender competition between women?
- III. How do the current beauty standards affect body dissatisfaction in women?

I explored the current beauty standards in Euro-American societies by listening to my participants' perspectives on beauty, carving out three restrictive underlying beauty standards: being thin, being white or light-skinned, being feminine. Despite the physical picture that I illustrated with these standards; each had the same metaphorical consistency. That is, a basis of restriction and unattainability. Additionally, each standard was banded together with racism, and patriarchal assumptions of femininity; contributing to oppressive ideals that retrace the patterns of history to bring forward into the present, past oppressive ideology.

Most significantly, whilst completing my research, I observed the in-between stage of the shift from the 'slim-thick' ideal - a slim figure with curvaceous hips, thighs, and breasts - to the 'thin-ideal' - an overly slim physique, that renders ill-health. The function of beauty standards exists in a cycle, wherein, body types swing in and out of fashion, "just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other" (Orwell, 1949, P.219). Therefore, my findings differ from previous literature, in that, instead of purely recognising an ideal beauty standard, I observed the process of the shift between two popular standards.

To uncover how beauty standards are enforced, I explored the different routes that beauty standards circulated in societies; comparable to an omniscient gaze, watching over women from every corner of societies. In doing so, I outlined various mass media influences, such as television, film, magazines, and advertisements. Whilst also indicating that everyday interactions, such as conversations with friends and family grounded the media messages into reality. In this section of my thesis, the link between beauty standards and misogyny became evident. Wherein, while misogyny praises the 'good girls' and shames the 'bad girls' (Manne, 2018), beauty standards praise the 'pretty girls' and shame the 'ugly girls' by projecting messages that outline beauty standards. My contribution to the field of misogyny

is profound, in that, a new branch of misogyny has been evidenced. Thus, by extending Manne's contemporary definition of misogyny as the "law enforcement" (Manne, 2018, P.78) branch of patriarchal order, I understood beauty related misogyny as the beauty police.

To understand how beauty standards engender competition, I explored the links between beauty and competition by focusing on appearance-based competition. This branch of competition occupied increasing traction in scholarly literature (Anthony, et al., 2016; Campbell, 2004; Tanenbaum, 2011). Yet, this thesis adds to the field by declaring that instead of asserting bold links between beauty and competition, I asserted that competition is a part of beauty. This association between the two concepts contributes to the unattainability of beauty and is therefore an essential part of its power. I delved further into competition by assessing its function as a hierarchical structure, aligning with previous research into the subject (Anthony, et al., 2016).

My thesis outlines the affect that competition has on relationships, by assessing the contradiction of the 'girls supporting girls' movement against the heavy internal competition that exists behind the façade of female empowerment. I found differences in the way acquaintances, friendships, and sister relationships were affected. With a clear-cut divide created by resentment in acquaintances, a hidden undefined barrier of tension between friendships, and undefined barriers between sister relationships due to the verbalisation of competition. Although overall, women's relationships were intact, they were influenced negatively by the ongoing competition that lay beneath the surface. Unlike previous literature (Booth, 2009; Fisher, 2017; Spurgas, 2005; Tracy, 1991; Paquette & Raine, 2004), these findings did not reveal a clear-cut divide in relationships. Instead, undefined hidden conflict was evident.

Nevertheless, a clear indication was revealed when I attempted to explore how beauty standards influenced body dissatisfaction. When doing so, I first delved into the rich internal minds of women, underscoring the process of internalised misogyny and how it affected rates of body dissatisfaction. Like misogyny, internalised misogyny operated on a dual basis of shame/praise. However, instead of receiving messages, women internalised and produced the same messages toward themselves. This was rather different to previous work on internalised misogyny (Piggot, 2004) which centres on how women devalue and disrespect each other. Instead, I positioned internalised misogyny as a process that was acted out towards oneself, rather than other women.

By becoming internalised, beauty standards contributed to high levels of body dissatisfaction. To the point that, body dissatisfaction was considered a natural part of the female condition. These findings mirrored previous literature (Anthony, et al., 2016; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Paquette and Raine, 2004; Young, et al., 2014), affirming that this assertion is still relevant. However, as opposed to previous academia, my thesis brought to life, the highly intricate and hidden functioning of internal resistance against the oppression of naturalised body dissatisfaction. Following this, I considered how the inevitability of resistance, filtered into the mind and created conditions of warfare that act as the weight that holds down the oppression of beauty standards. In addition, my findings illustrated the complexities of conformity by providing an understanding of how discrete coercion is used by temporarily easing the storm of conflict.

In Chapter 1, I outlined a three-part framework of power that I identified in *1984* (Orwell, 1949). The resonance of my research with this framework is as follows:

- I) Part one: permanent visibility: through the consistent circulation of beauty standards in Euro-American societies women are under permanent and consistent surveillance.
- II) Part two: in-group separation: because of the restrictive nature of beauty standards and their consistent gaze, women's relationships with each other are divided by competition so that they cannot access collective power.
- III) Part three: torture: because of the restrictive nature of beauty standards and their consistent gaze, women become so dissatisfied with their bodies that it becomes internally torturous.

From this, it is evident that the dystopian world of Oceania, is not so far from our current experience with beauty standards as women. This thesis proved that beneath the captivating surfaces of beauty, is a hidden mass of oppression. This is an important subject in feminism, as I fear beauty standards are taking over Euro-American societies. It seems since we gained traction legally and, in the workplace, we have become blinded to the detriment that beauty standards have on women. Through this research, I hope that if I have achieved only one thing, it is to bring awareness to the oppressive structures of beauty.

This thesis provides a new outlook on both misogyny and internalised misogyny, opening a new route of exploration. It is an important addition to feminist academia, as it explores the complicated processes of resistance against oppressive power. Moreover, it explains how our current societal approach to feminism is disempowering, by assessing the façade of

empowerment that the beauty industry poses. The three-part structure can be used in other social science disciplines, as a simple way to test for the presence of a Panoptical structure of power.

Based on Orwell's *1984* (1949), I can assert several predictions for the future by positioning the current state of our society to a part of the novel. My findings indicated that part three of the three-part power framework was most significant. Meaning self-inflicted torture, or body dissatisfaction and internal conflict, is currently most relevant. Subsequently, women in Euro-American societies are in the torture phase of our conditioning. To predict what may occur in the future, we can turn to the following part of the novel. The only action that free's Winston, is the action of betraying Julia by retracting his love for her and experiencing a newfound love for Big Brother. To do so, Winston had to come face to face with his greatest fear in Room 101. Currently, as beauty standards are increasing in restriction, many women are about to face their greatest fears and become 'ugly girls' according to societal standards. As a result, perhaps what follows is the breaking of connections between women's relationships; completely individualising women and leading to distinct in-group separation.

What must not be ignored, is Orwell's inspiration for his novel, *1984* (1949). He wrote this novel, against the backdrop of Soviet Russia. His description of Oceania, and the torture Winston experiences is hauntingly similar to the Soviet Gulags. In fact, part of my inspiration for this thesis was based on a trip to The House of Horrors, a museum that traces the terrifying truths of Soviet rule in post-war Hungary. After learning the intricacies of the Gulag, and quickly piecing it to *1984*, I began to realise that the framework of power used in the Gulag's were similar to those used in beauty standards. In the beginning, I felt afraid to make this comparison, fearing it was a farfetched and insensitive assumption. Yet, as I began learning more about the structure behind both instances, I learned that it did not matter what the instances were, all that mattered was the framework of power that governed both. In this light, I understood the Gulag not as a specific situation, but as a framework of power able to shapeshift into whatever form necessary. As Foucault (1980) understands "[e]veryone has their own Gulag, the Gulag is here at our door, in our cities, our hospitals, our prisons, its here in our heads" (P.134).

It is difficult to imagine a way of moving forward from a framework of power so ancient, hidden, and destructive. However, as Foucault (1988) reminds us, our role as academics is not to provide a program for the future, as "[w]e know very well that, even with the best of intentions, those programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression" (P.10). Rather, our role is to "show people that they are much freer than they feel [...] [t]o change something in

the minds of people” (Foucault, 1988, P.10). Therefore, I will leave a pocket of hope amongst the rich dystopian reality I have brought to life. Within the darkness of misogyny, is a dazzling beacon of light.

The entirety of the framework of power relies on the compliance of human beings. In *1984* (Orwell, 1949), amid his torture, Winston ponders why the Party, profound in its influence, has put so much time into his mind control. Surely, he wonders, they would rather swiftly end his life. However, what has become evident to me throughout this research, is that humans are the source of power. Each part of the three-part structure relies on the influence of human beings, for women act “as a local source for the function of the institution” (Raffnsøe, et al., 2016, P.210). Human beings are the source of every part of the framework of power I have underlined. The inevitability of human beings to strive to fill unmet needs, to search for love, to resist oppression, and to feel guilt, are the catalysts for the framework. Moreover, if women source the power of misogyny, surely, under the right circumstances, they hold the power to overturn it.

So, continue with faith that “our world may be a backward we cannot escape. But that does not mean we are simply powerless” (Fillingham, 1993, P.150). Nevertheless, how we reclaim this power, I am unsure. Therefore, in the fashion of *1984* (Orwell, 1949), I end by returning to a dystopian outlook. For:

“What certainty had [I] that a single human creature now was living on [my] side? And what way of knowing that the dominion of [beauty standards] would not endure *for ever*? Like an answer, the three slogans on the white face of the Ministry of Truth came back to [me]:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH”

(Orwell, 1949, P.31).

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