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# Why do all these models in magazines look nothing like me?

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## Abstract

Favoriting fair skin tones over darker skin tones, also known as colorism, is still a current problem in Indonesia. Colorism-based beauty standards and ideals, perpetuated in the media through a lack of representation, could have a negative impact on Indonesian women's body image. Therefore, we wanted to study how a change in representation leads to a change in women's body image in Indonesia. In this experiment 189 Indonesian women ( $M_{age} = 24.95$ ,  $SD = 5.99$ ) were randomly assigned to either the traditional magazine condition, the diversity magazine condition or the control group. We manipulated representation by showing participants magazine pages of models that either represented diversity or the traditional representation with mostly fair-skinned models or an architectural magazine (control group). Afterwards, the participants completed a questionnaire about body image. We found that women with low internalized White ideal who read the diversity magazine had higher body esteem and well-being than those who read the traditional magazine. The hypothesis that women who read the diversity magazine have higher body esteem was not supported. However, partial support was found for the hypothesis that internalized White ideal moderates the relationship between representation and body image. Implications of our findings and further research ideas were discussed.

## Introduction

“Across South Asia, a common theme for skin-whitening commercials goes something like this: A dark woman is unhappy with her life—she is often portrayed with a saddened look as depressed, dejected, and discouraged. She cannot get hired, get promoted, or find a mate. She uses said cream and, voila! She lands the coveted job, the elusive promotion, and/or the handsome and successful husband” (Khanna, 2020, p. 3).

What effect does it have when you look inside a magazine, a medium that embodies the current standard of beauty, to find nobody that looks like you do? Research has shown that White, Caucasian women dominate the content of the Indonesian version of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (Saraswati et al., 2013). The lack of skin tone representation could possibly be explained by colorism and the associated preference for fair skin (Herring et al., 2003; Hunter, 2005; Maddox, 2004). Research has shown that images portrayed on social media, whereby body size is often emphasized, can have negative effects on women’s well-being and body image (Mills et al., 2017). This brings forward the question if lack of diversity in skin tone representation in popular media could also have similar consequences for women’s body image and well-being. Therefore, we aim to examine whether the effect of colorism on various outcomes among Indonesian women can be decreased by changing the representations within widely used media outlets such as magazines.

I will start conceptualizing colorism and how this links to skin tone representation in Indonesian magazines. Consequently, I will discuss skin tone representation (and the lack thereof) and its effect on several aspects of body image (i.e., body esteem, well-being and skin whitening behaviors). Studies exist on the relationship between social media and body image as well as studies on colorism. However, the uniqueness of the current study can be found in the contribution to research on colorism in Asia as there is a lack of cultural psychological research on this topic (Bettache, 2020). Altogether, in the current paper the relationship

between representation and body image was examined and analyses were carried out to analyze a possible moderation effect of internalized White Ideal.

### **Colorism**

Colorism is a socially constructed system that awards preferential treatment based on skin tone in such a way that people with darker skin tones are deprived of privileges that people with lighter skin tones do enjoy (Burton et al., 2010; Hunter, 2007). In many Asian countries, including Indonesia, this preference for fair skin can be traced back far into the past. Traditionally, many Asian countries were hierarchically structured, based on class, wherein fair skin implied wealthiness as that was an indication that one did not need to perform labor outdoors where exposure to the sun could take place (Glenn, 2008). For example, in India, dark skin was often associated with castes of lower standing who had to perform labor outdoors (Khan, 2009). Similar traditional trends of hierarchical structure can be observed in Indonesia (Rondilla & Pickard, 2007; Wertheim, 2017). Colorism deeply influences people's perceptions of others, seeing as people with lighter skin tones are perceived as brighter, more reliable and more appealing than people with darker skin tones (Herring et al., 2003; Hunter, 2005; Maddox, 2004).

Despite the fact that colorism influences both men and women's beliefs about themselves, it seems that stronger effects apply to women (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Women, more so than men, are affected by colorism, as women's attractiveness is derived from their physical appearances, whereas men are judged based on qualities regarding their social standing such as financial resources, education and so forth (Glenn, 2008). Fair skin tone is considered to be a beauty standard for women and beauty to women functions as a social tool which they can use to their advantage. Women who obtain this social tool can transform this into economic gains, academic gains or any other type of gain (Hunter, 2005). Research by Gabriel (2007) and Mirza (2003) reinforce this notion as, globally, women with

fair skin enjoy several privileges, such as more access to academia and well-paid jobs, higher rankings in their jobs and they encounter less discrimination at their jobs, whereas women with darker skin tones encounter many obstacles in domains in the social and labor sphere.

In Asia, skin fairness does not only influence judgments about women's beauty, it also influences women's chances to get married, chances on the labor market, social status and financial prospects (Ashikari, 2003; Goon & Craven, 2003; Leslie, 2004). Beauty is in this way indirectly linked to achieving these goals belonging to the more traditional discourse. But even if women do not want to be part of this traditional discourse, they will eventually internalize these beauty ideals because the pressure is too high.

Thus, women's skin tone is of great importance in various domains in their lives. This also applies to Indonesian women specifically, as many jobs (e.g., those in the hospitality sector, aviation branch, jobs in marketing and sales) in Indonesia often demand physical attractiveness (Arimbi, 2011). Therefore, this issue of colorism seems to deeply and disproportionately affect women in general and moreover Indonesian women, which is reinforced through beauty standards. Thus, it is of utmost importance to address the effect of colorism by changing the beauty standards set for Indonesian women in Indonesian media outlets, such as magazines.

### **Representation in the Media**

Media outlets, such as print or online magazines, are an important medium from which women derive information about what is considered to be beautiful (Yan & Bissell, 2014). The knowledge provided to women through mass media offers and bolsters beliefs, norms and standards regarding beauty, by using photos of models, actresses and celebrities on various platforms (Polivy & Herman, 2004). Different features in regards to physical looks, such as body size, skin and hair can be transformed into beauty ideals by the media (Mills et al., 2017). Mass media has a tendency to display alluring people as more attractive, honest and

motivational (Solomon et al., 1992). The previous studies have demonstrated the powerful effect media can have on beauty-related norms. This implies that continuous exposure to the perception of beauty created by the media can lead to women's increased internalization as well as imagination of trying to reach these standards of beauty (e.g., body size and facial appeal) set by the media (Polivy & Herman, 2004). Standards of beauty throughout Asia and thus in Indonesia consist, amongst others, of the preference for fair skin (Li et al., 2008; Ashikari, 2005; Karan, 2008; Prasetyaningsih, 2007; Saraswati et al., 2013).

Media outlets function as a source for women from which they derive information about current beauty standards. Women portrayed in media outlets, including magazines, embody the current beauty ideals. Notions of colorism, like the preference for fair skin, are also reinforced through beauty standards set in sources like the media, which also applies to Indonesian media outlets. Research has shown that White, Caucasian women dominate the content of the Indonesian version of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (Saraswati et al., 2013). This implies that fair skin is the standard of beauty set by the Indonesian media and therefore what is perceived to be beauty for Indonesian women. Moreover, this indicates a lack of representation regarding skin tone diversity within Indonesian magazines and a lack of portrayal and attachment of positive connotations to darker skin tones.

However, the problem is not that the skin of Indonesian women is not fair enough to fit into the current standards of beauty, the standards of beauty and the lack of representation are the problem. Not only is the notion of colorism thereby reinforced by Indonesian media by mainly portraying fair-skinned models, pressure is being put on women to achieve these skin tone ideals as many magazines contain advertisements promoting the use of skin whitening products to achieve these beauty ideals (Arimbi, 2011; Saraswati, 2012). The pressure of these beauty standards and trying to achieve them could possibly have negative effects on Indonesian women's body image. Accordingly, it is essential to reduce the negative

consequences beauty standards could have on women's body image by attempting to change the current beauty standards.

### **Representation and Body Image**

Body image is a versatile concept which can be defined as an individual's views and beliefs regarding the proportions and shape of their own body (Mills et al., 2017). According to Roosen and Mills (2014), body image consists of an awareness element as well as an evaluative element. The awareness element refers to how an individual perceives the size and shape of their body, weight, physical demands, achievements and motion. The evaluative element refers to our emotions about our features and how these emotions affect our actions. Discontent with one's body occurs when an individual becomes aware that their body does not meet the societal standards regarding proportions and shape in spite of their actual shape and proportions. This indicates that bodily discontent is not just affected by societal standards but also by the perceptions people hold about their own bodies. Thus, bodily discontent and attitudes regarding beauty cannot be separated and can have severe consequences. Bodily discontent is a key component when it comes to distorted behaviors like eating disorders (Mills et al., 2017).

According to Mills et al. (2017) media plays a key factor in constructing individual's self-perception through offering information and mirroring what society deems beautiful or appealing. One tactic that is used by the media is the promotion of the 'thin ideal', which refers to displaying thin and appealing models in the media. This portrays the message that people need to look like these models to become appealing and alluring to others. Research has shown that especially young women are severely affected by images of extraordinarily skinny models portrayed in the media and this can put pressure on women to reach these standards, which comes with harmful consequences such as eating disorders (i.e., anorexia, bulimia), depression and bodily discontent (Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Lavine et al., 1999). In



the case of Indonesia, the media promotes a skin tone ideal by mainly displaying White, Caucasian models and fair-skinned Asian models, and thus perpetuating a beauty ideal regarding skin tone (Saraswati et al., 2013). As mentioned previously, ideals presented in the media, like the ‘thin ideal’, can have negative effects on women’s body image. This could possibly also apply to beauty ideals regarding skin tone. However, there is a lack of research concerning colorism and its derived beauty standards in Asia, the role the media plays in this and its possible harmful consequences for women’s body image (Bettache, 2020).

### **The Current Study**

Therefore, in this experiment we studied the effect of colorism-based beauty ideals perpetuated in the media on body image in Indonesian women. We manipulated representation by creating three conditions: a diversity magazine condition, a traditional magazine condition and a control condition. Participants were shown pictures of an existing magazine with either models that represented diversity, models of which the majority had fair skin or participants were shown pages of an architectural magazine. Body image in this study consists of several components and was measured by body esteem, well-being and skin whitening behavior (i.e., if participants use skin whitening products to attempt to reach the beauty ideals regarding skin fairness set in media outlets, like magazines, and to change their body image). This has resulted in the following research question: How does a change in representation lead to a change in women’s body image in Indonesia? Accordingly, the following hypotheses were designed:

#### ***Hypothesis 1***

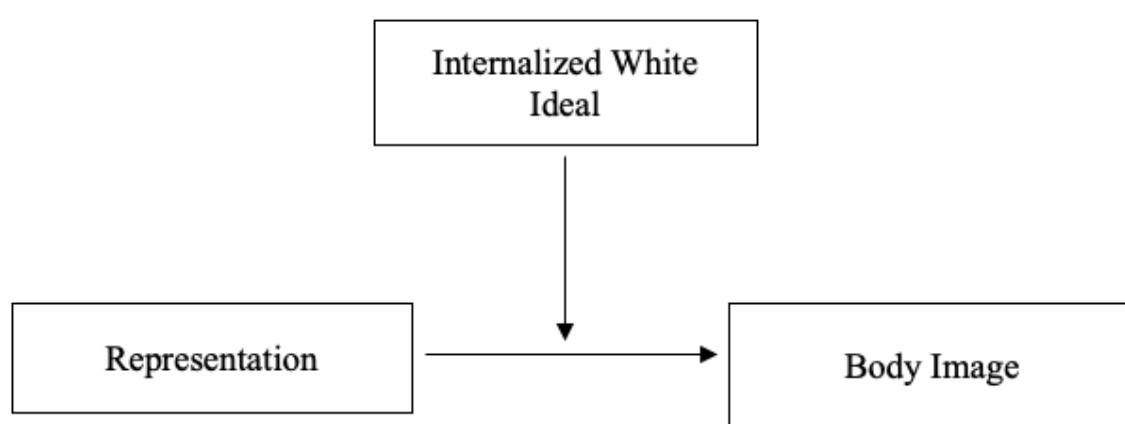
Indonesian women who are exposed to the diversity magazine will be more satisfied with their body image, such that they will have a) higher body esteem, b) higher well-being and c) lower intention to buy skin whitening products.

#### ***Hypothesis 2***

Internalized White ideal moderates the relationship between representation and body image in such a way that women who have higher internalized White ideal have better body image after reading the diversity magazine.

### Figure 1

*The Effect of Representation on Body Image, with Internalized White Ideal as a Moderator*



## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

The original sample included 241 participants, who were recruited by means of convenience sampling in Indonesia. Among these participants, 21 were excluded because they identified as male, another 12 participants were excluded because these participants did not fill in any value for gender and 19 participants were excluded as no value was filled in after manipulation so these participants were not included in the final analyses. The final sample consisted of 189 participants who all identified as female and who were all 18 years or older ( $M = 24.95$ ,  $SD = 5.99$ ). A large pool of participants (40.2%) were students, whilst the second largest pool of participants (33.3%) were full time employees. The majority of the participants (54%) identified as Javanese. Participants were not offered compensation for their

participation in this study. A power analysis was conducted a priori using G\*Power (Feldner et al., 2009) which showed that 244 participants are needed to reach a small to medium effect size = .20; alpha = .05; power = .80, using a 3-level independent variable and a continuous moderator. Unfortunately, currently this study is underpowered to detect some effects, but we carried out the analysis due to the time constraints of the thesis.

This study has an experimental design. First of all, participants filled out the consent form in which permission is given for participation (see Appendix A) and then participants received information and instructions about the study (see Appendix B). Afterwards, general demographic questions regarding gender, age, education, employment status and race were asked (see Appendix C). Then, participants were randomly assigned, through Qualtrics, to one of the three conditions, consisting of two manipulated conditions (i.e., the traditional magazine condition and the diversity magazine condition) and one control condition. In the two manipulated conditions participants were shown several pages of existing magazines of which either the majority contained mainly fair skinned models or models with a diverse range of skin tones. In the control condition participants were shown pages of an existing architectural magazine (see Appendix D for an overview of the magazines used in all conditions). The pages shown in all conditions contained pictures, whereas the text was blurred out, as the objective was for the participants to only focus on the images portrayed on the pages. Subsequently, participants filled out several questions as a manipulation check (see Appendix E), followed by questionnaires regarding body esteem, well-being, skin whitening behavior and internalized White ideal (see Appendix F). After filling out these questionnaires, participants were directed towards the end study, debriefed and thanked for their participation (see Appendix G).

## **Materials**

Originally, all materials were written in English. Before the materials were presented to the participants, these materials were translated into Indonesian and validated by several native speakers. For an overview of all the questionnaires used to measure the dependent variables see Appendix F.

### ***Demographics***

Participants were asked demographic questions about age, gender, education, employment status and ethnicity (see Appendix C)

### ***Experimental Manipulation***

Three magazines were composed to be used for the three conditions: traditional magazine condition, diversity magazine condition and the control condition. To compose these magazines in these conditions, pages from existing magazines (i.e., Cosmopolitan Indonesia, Her World Indonesia, Feminina Indonesia and Casa Indonesia) were used (see Appendix D). The manipulation in the traditional magazine condition entailed that the majority of the models were fair-skinned. In the diversity magazine the models had a diverse range of skin tones (i.e., ranging from light to medium to dark). In the control condition the magazine pages were not in any way linked to skin tone representation, as these contained architectural images of objects instead of human beings.

### ***Manipulation Check***

In order to assess the manipulation, participants in the traditional and diversity magazine conditions were asked the following question: To what extent do you think the models represented diversity? Participants could answer this question on a scale ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*). Additionally, participants were asked some filling questions in order to conceal the true nature of the study: 1) Did you like the layout of this page? 2) Did you like the clothing items on this page? and 3) Did you like the beauty

items on this page? These questions could be answered on a dichotomous scale, with yes or no as answer options (see Appendix E for a complete overview).

### ***Body Image***

Body image in this study was measured using three constructs: body esteem, well-being and skin whitening behavior (see Appendix F).

**Body Esteem.** Body esteem was measured using the Bahasa Indonesia version of the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA; Garbet et al., in preparation). This questionnaire consisted of 17 items, which participants answered on a scale of 1 (= *not at all*) through 5 (= *completely*). An example item is: “I think my appearance would help me get a job”. The scale showed good reliability,  $\alpha = .854$ .

**Well-Being.** Well-being was measured using an adapted version of the Singapore Mental Wellbeing-Short Form (SMWEB-S; Fen et al., 2013). This questionnaire originally consisted of 16 items, but for the purpose of this study only 13 items were selected. Participants responded on a Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (= *never*) through 7 (= *always*). An example item is: “I am able to accept myself”. The adapted scale that was used in this study showed good reliability,  $\alpha = .922$ .

**Skin Whitening Behavior.** Skin whitening behavior was measured using an adapted version of the scale used to measure skin-bleaching behavior by Choma and Prusaczyk (2018). Originally, this scale consisted of 4 items, but for the purpose of this study 4 items were added in order to measure past, current and future skin whitening behavior. Participants responded on a Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*). An example item is: “I currently use skin bleaching creams to lighten my skin tone”. The adapted scale that was used in this study showed good reliability,  $\alpha = .958$ .

**Internalized White ideal.** Internalized White ideal functioned as a moderator variable, indicating that people with higher internalized White ideal were more likely to be

affected by representation and/or a lack thereof. Participants with higher internalized White Ideal in the traditional condition were expected to have a lower body image, whereas those in the diversity condition were expected to have a higher body image. To measure internalized White Ideal a measure was developed, based on previous research in which attributes related to fair-skinned looks were identified (Thompson & Keith, 2001; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). An example item is: “Women with fairer skin are more attractive”. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) through 7 (= *strongly agree*). The scale showed good reliability,  $\alpha = .904$ .

## Results

For each of the dependent variables (i.e., body esteem, well-being and skin whitening behavior) ANOVAs were carried out using Jamovi (version 2.3) with the general linear model extension (Gallucci, 2019). Condition was used as an independent variable and internalized White ideal as a moderator. For all three analyses, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality of residuals and the Levene’s test for residual of variances were checked. These assumptions were met, as these were all non-significant. ANOVAs were used to determine if there were any main effects or interactions. For this, conditions were automatically coded into two contrasts by JAMOVI: the diversity condition was compared to the control condition (dummy coded: diversity as 0 and control as 1) and the diversity condition was compared to the traditional condition (dummy coded: diversity as 0 and control as 1). In the case of significant interaction effects, the simple effects were computed to determine where exactly these differences were located.

### Manipulation Check

To find out if our manipulation check was successful, we ran an independent samples t-test. This showed that the participants in the diversity condition perceived more diversity in

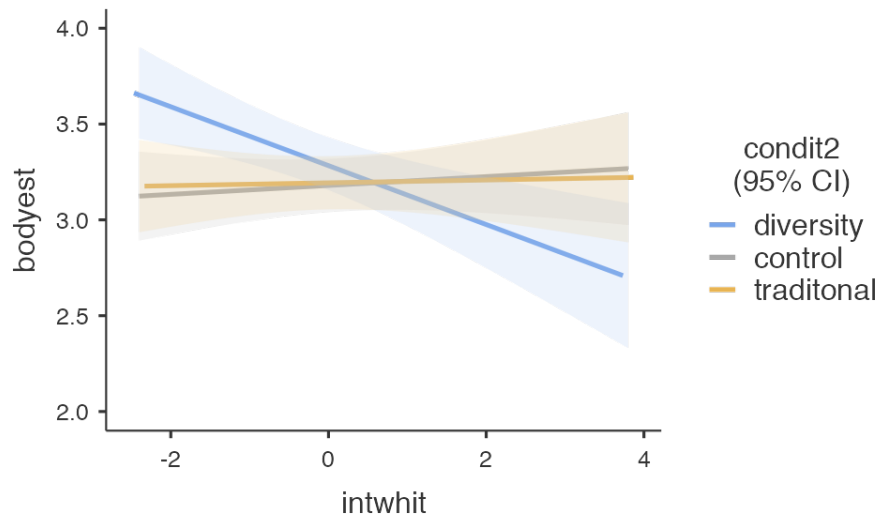
the models portrayed in the diversity magazine. We solely asked the manipulation questions in the diversity magazine condition as well as the traditional magazine condition and thus not in the control condition. Therefore, we only have data from these two conditions. A significant difference was observed between the two experimental conditions,  $t(126) = 2.88, p = .005$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.51$ . Participants in the diversity magazine perceived more diversity ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.44$ ) as compared to those in the traditional magazine condition ( $M = 4.05, SD = 1.65$ ).

### **Hypothesis 1. Body Esteem**

For body esteem, there was a significant interaction effect between condition and internalized White ideal,  $F(2, 187) = 5.27, p = 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.06$ . Parameter estimates show that this interaction effect was significant for both the diversity versus control contrast and the diversity versus traditional contrast, as expected. Regarding the simple effects, it was observed that the effect of condition was significant at the low levels of internalized White ideal as opposed to what we expected. For diversity versus control, the effect was significant,  $b = -0.74, t = -3.02, p = .003$ . For diversity vs traditional the effect was significant,  $b = -0.67, t = -2.70, p = 0.01$ . As can be observed in *Figure 3*, this means that those with low internalized White ideal had higher body esteem after reading the diversity magazine ( $M = 3.29, SE = .07$ ) as compared to those in control ( $M = 3.18, SE = .07$ ) or traditional condition ( $M = 3.19, SE = .07$ ). For BIS, there was not a significant main effect of condition,  $F(2, 187) = .78, p = .46, \eta^2 = .01$  or internalized White ideal,  $F(1, 187) = 3.00, p = .09, \eta^2 = .02$ , which was not expected beforehand.

### **Figure 2**

*The Effect of Representation on Body Esteem, with Internalized White Ideal as a Moderator*



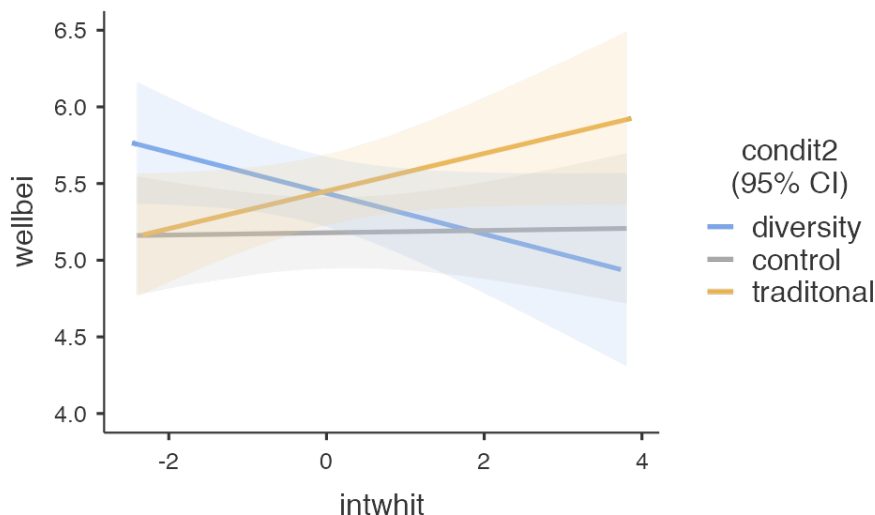
### Hypothesis 2. Well-being

For well-being, there was a significant interaction effect between condition and internalized White ideal  $F(2, 187) = 3.18, p = .04, \eta^2 = 0.03$ . Parameter estimates show that this interaction effect was significant for the diversity versus control contrast, as expected. Regarding the simple effects, it was observed that the effect of condition was significant at the low levels of internalized White ideal, as opposed to what we expected. For the diversity versus control contrast the effect was significant,  $b = -0.55, t = -2.21, p = 0.03$ . As can be observed in *Figure 3*, this means that those with low internalized White ideal had higher well-being after reading the diversity magazine ( $M = 5.45, SE = .12$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 5.18, SE = .12$ ). For well-being there was not a significant main effect of condition,  $F(2, 187) = 1.82, p = .16, \eta^2 = .02$  or internalized White ideal,  $F(1, 187) = <.01, p = .98, \eta^2 p = .00$ , which was not expected beforehand.

### Figure 3

*The Effect of Representation on Well-being, with Internalized White Ideal as a Moderator*



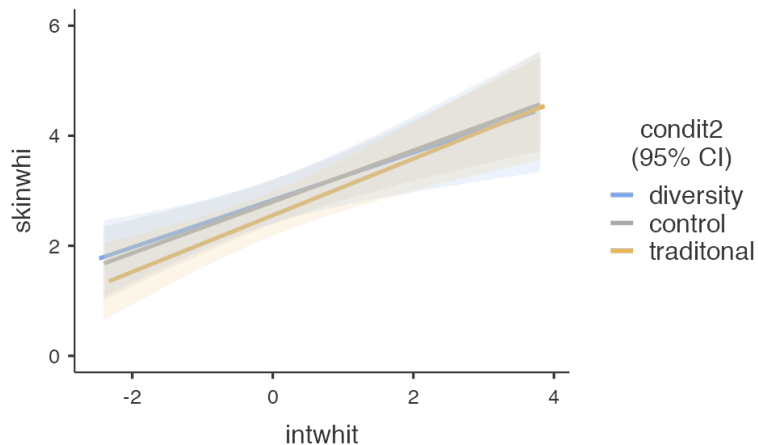


### Hypothesis 3. Skin Whitening Behavior

For skin whitening behavior there wasn't a significant interaction effect between condition and skin whitening behavior  $F(2, 187) = 0.12, p = 0.89, \eta^2 = .001$ , nor was there a significant main effect of condition  $F(2, 187) = 0.37, p = .69, \eta^2 = .004$  (see *Figure 3*) as opposed to what we expected. However, for skin whitening behavior a significant effect was found for internalized White ideal,  $F(1, 187) = 47.09, p = <.001, \eta^2 = .21$ . As can be observed in *Figure 4*, this indicates that the more participants have internalized the White ideal, the more they want to buy skin whitening products.

### Figure 4

*The Effect of Representation on Skin Whitening Behavior, with Internalized White Ideal as a Moderator*



## Discussion

In this study, we focused on designing an intervention to be used to counter the lack of representation in widely used media and its unfavorable effects on women's body image. The foundation for this intervention was created by looking at the principles of colorism, representation in the media, beauty standards and ideals and the role the media plays in perpetuating these fair skin tone ideals. We found that internalized White ideal indeed moderates the relationship between representation and body image. Body esteem was highest for those who read the diversity magazine, compared to those who read the traditional magazine as well as those in the control condition, but only if their internalized White ideal was low. Well-being was highest for those who read the diversity magazine, compared to those in the control condition, but again only when their internalized White ideal was low. Subsequently, it was found that the more people had internalized the White ideal, the more they wanted to buy skin whitening products.

Support for the first hypothesis, that reading the diversity magazine would lead to higher body image, was not found as there were not any main effects of condition on the dependent variables. These results are not in line with the expectations. A possible explanation for this outcome can be found in our sample size. We had expected to find a small

effect if any effect were to be present and in order to find this effect our sample size had to be of a considerably big size. However, we did not manage to gather enough participants within the given timeframe. It could be possible that the expected effects could be found once we reach the desired sample size.

Support for the second hypothesis was partially found, as it was found that internalized White ideal indeed moderates the relationship between representation and body image. However, we expected that the moderating effect would take place at the higher levels of internalized White ideal. Instead, this effect was observed at the lower levels of the moderator. A possible explanation for these conflicting results could be that at first being confronted with beauty standards and ideals that contradict one's own, highly internalized, standards and ideals causes cognitive dissonance and thus resulting in lower satisfaction and body image. In hindsight, it would have been wiser to frame the second hypothesis differently as it makes more logical sense that people with lower internalized White ideal would be more positively affected by the diversity magazine. Whereas people with higher internalized White ideal would experience more internal conflict as the beauty ideals portrayed in the diversity magazine contradicts their internalized beauty ideals at first. However, long-term exposure to contradicting beauty ideals and standards could possibly have the effect we had expected to begin with.

Colorism in Asia is an important topic of study, as there is a great lack of research concerning this subject (Bettache, 2020). Differential treatment based on the color of one's skin is a grave issue, which should be actively combatted. The current study actively contributes to the knowledge surrounding colorism, the harmful effects of colorism, beauty standards and ideals based on colorism, the role the media plays in perpetuating colorism-based standards and ideals and the detrimental effects this can have on women's body image in the context of Indonesia. Additionally, this study not only offers knowledge but also

provides ideas for interventions and tools to bring about change to these colorism-based standards and ideals and thus improve women's body image.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this current study. First of all, body image is an intricate concept consisting of several aspects (Mills et al., 2017; Roosen & Mills, 2014). For an individual to develop a consistent body image consisting of personal preferences and characteristics it takes time. During this time of development, an individual is continuously exposed to several beauty standards and ideals on different media platforms, which leads to internalization of these standards and ideals. Similarly, this internalization process also occurs over time. In the current study, participants were only exposed to beauty standards and ideals in the diversity magazine once. An attempt to alter the existing body image, by reshaping the internalized beauty standards and ideals, should consist of repeated exposure on a regular basis for a longer period of time. However, it should be still noted that even such short exposure was helpful in altering body esteem and well-being for those low in White ideal. Perhaps, repeated exposure can alter the levels in the moderator and change people's levels of White ideal. In this way, they will be more likely to be positively affected by diversity representations in magazines.

Secondly, the pool of participants in the current study was relatively small. In total, there were 187 participants, randomly divided over three conditions. On average, this indicates that there were around 62 participants per condition. As we expected to find a small effect, a large number of participants were needed to find this effect which in this study was not the case. Including a large number of participants would provide more clarity as to what the actual effects of the intervention are.

Consequently, for the exposure to colorism- and non-colorism-based beauty standards and ideals in this study, magazines were used. Participants in the diversity magazine condition briefly saw five images of models with diverse skin tones ranging from fair, to medium, to dark. These images were gathered from existing Indonesian magazines and no pilot study was carried out to test whether these images did or did not represent diversity. We merely expected these images to function as such. The images functioned as a means of exposure to try and change the internalized beauty standards and ideals women had. However, women are confronted with beauty ideals and standards on multiple, different media platforms like social media and tv (Yan & Bissell, 2014; Polivy & Herman, 2004). In order to achieve long-term change in internalized beauty standards and ideals and as a result improved body image, not only long-term repeated exposure is needed but also exposure on different platforms should be implemented. Additionally, for the current study the focus was solely on Indonesia. As Bettache (2020) clearly stated, colorism is present throughout Asia. Focusing only on Indonesia is a good starting point, but only a starting point. To create a long-lasting impact, other countries should also be targeted.

Lastly, within Indonesia there are around 1300 different ethnicities divided into 31 ethnic groups (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011). It is possible that within these different ethnic groups, different ideals of beauty prevail. In the current study we did not particularly focus on including different ethnicities. The majority of the participants identified as Javanese and were mostly from the greater region of Jakarta. Other ethnic groups might show differences pertaining to the internalized White ideal and additionally might be affected differently by representation. Therefore, including participants from different ethnic groups is also important to determine the precise effect.

### **Practical Implications**

Greenwood et al. (2017) investigated how “representation” and physical features, like skin tone, lead to experiences of invisible discrimination among immigrant women in Ireland. It was found that White women with an immigrant background were less likely to encounter situations in which overt discrimination takes place compared to women with an immigrant background who belong to ethnic minority groups. Likewise, White women with an immigrant background have a higher chance of enjoying the unmerited benefits of White privilege as explained by McIntosh (1988). This proves once again that colorism is still existing and adjacently demonstrates the negative consequences attached for women who do not fit the beauty ideal of being fair-skinned. Our study has contributed to ideas for solutions on how to tackle the negative consequences not only Indonesian women, but all women who do not fit the colorism-based ideal encounter by altering representations in media outlets and thus changing people’s perceptions.

These negative consequences also apply to Indonesian women with darker skin tones in particular, who are deprived of certain privileges and treatments that Indonesian women with fairer skin do enjoy. The current study has focused on addressing problems that Indonesian women who differ from the fair skin ideal encounter and thereby has contributed to improving Indonesian women’s body image. This is crucial when it comes to achieving equality in the broadest sense, including gender equality and racial equality. Additionally, this study has contributed to bridging the existing gap regarding the lack of research on colorism in Asia that Bettache (2020) emphasizes. This is of great importance as colorism is not solely a problem present in Indonesia, but throughout Asia as well as in other parts of the world.

### **Future research**

Therefore, future research should focus on achieving a long-term impact as a goal. In contemplation of this goal, first of all a longitudinal study should be conducted in which

participants are repeatedly over a longer period of time exposed to a beauty ideal that represents diversity. As constructing an individual's body image occurs over time which includes the internalization of beauty standards and ideals, changing these ideals most likely also occurs over a longer period of time. Moreover, magazines, especially printed versions, are becoming less popular whilst online social media platforms gain more popularity.

Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are very favored amongst the younger generations and these platforms contribute greatly to the transmission of beauty ideals and standards. This could be implemented, for instance by using a dark-skinned influencer, to display campaigns of popular beauty and clothing brands that use models that represent skin tone diversity.

Hence, multiple media platforms, like social media, should be implemented in future research to achieve a long-term change. Another way to accomplish this goal in a long-lasting manner is to incorporate representation in educational materials. In this way, women are introduced from an early age to beauty ideals that emphasize diversity, rather than beauty ideals that only embrace a certain group of women.

Conjointly, it would be very interesting as well as beneficial to expand this study to other countries within Asia and even Asian minorities abroad. If long-term change is to be achieved, targeting one country is not sufficient. As Bettache (2020) explains, colorism is present throughout Asia and thus not only in Indonesia. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out if the current intervention would also be applicable to other countries within Asia. Additionally, for Asian minorities abroad, it is interesting to see if they internalized the local beauty standards and how these influence the standards coherent with the Asian beauty ideals. In this way, not only can the negative consequences of colorism-based beauty ideals for Indonesian women be tackled, but for all women residing in Asia who deal with these consequences and possibly even on a global scale. Consequently, this could lead to a broader

understanding of the ways in which colorism affects women in different countries within Asia and how this could be tackled ultimately resulting in improved body image for these women.

Furthermore, women are disproportionately affected by the consequences of colorism-based beauty ideals and standards. However, colorism goes beyond the scope of beauty ideas and standards and this is an issue that affects men, even though in lesser proportions, as well. For this reason, it is important to see how colorism affects other areas, how it affects men as well and to seek solutions for this. Because in this way, body image and thus well-being on a broad scale can be improved.

### **Conclusion**

Differential treatment based on one's skin tone is a very serious issue. Especially in today's era where equality and equal treatment are current topics of utmost importance. This concerns all kinds of equality; political, social and economic equality. It is important for the well-being of all within a society to create equal access and opportunities for all people, regardless of their gender or the color of their skin. Currently, in Indonesia, as well as in other parts of Asia, fair skin is still perceived to be the beauty ideal. The media heavily contributes to perpetuating these beauty ideals and standards. Not meeting these standards can have serious repercussions for women, resulting in unequal treatment and lower body image.

However, the problem is not that women's skin is not fair enough to fit into this beauty ideal. The actual problem is the beauty standard itself and the lack of representation and diversity. The results have shown that adding in that component of representation and diversity within the media can improve body image to some extent, taking into account that for that to happen internalized White ideal has to be low. Therefore, aiming to tackle the internalization of the White ideal is very important as well. An important foundation has been laid with this current study, but the work is far from complete. Equality in the broadest sense



has still not been achieved and women are still disproportionately affected in many areas. It is an ongoing battle seeing as rights that guarantee equality and should be self-evident in this age, such as women's right to bodily autonomy, can be revoked at any time. But it is exactly those battles that are hard to fight, that are the ones worth fighting for.

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## Appendix A: Consent form



**university of  
 groningen**

**faculty of behavioural  
 and social sciences**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH AND INFORMED CONSENT**

#### **Evaluating beauty standards in magazines PSY-2122-S-0199**

You are being invited to take part in a study about evaluating beauty standards in magazines. You will be asked to read a magazine about international fashion and beauty trends and answer questions about these magazines and yourself.

The project aims to run between 06/09/2021 and 28/02/2023, and it has been approved by the Ethical Committee of Psychology at University of Groningen. This study is being supervised by dr. Yasin Koc (Assistant Professor) and conducted together with Josie Krijgsman (Master student).

You will first be asked for consent to participate, then you will be asked to read a magazine that contains fashion and beauty trends. Afterwards you will be asked questions about the magazine that you have read and about yourself. The expected duration for the study is 20 minutes.

Participation in the research is voluntary. However, your consent is needed. Therefore, please read this information carefully. If you decide to not participate, you do not need to explain why, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You may leave the study even after you have consented to participate. There are no negative consequences of participation.

You will be asked to indicate the following personal information: your age, your gender, your race, and religion, but no other personal information (e.g., name, email address) will be collected. You have a right not to answer any personal information. You will also be asked about sensitive information (i.e., your race). All data will fully be anonymized. Only dr. Yasin Koc will have access to the personal data. The anonymized data will be securely saved for 10 years. The anonymized data will be used for presentation and publication in scientific journals.

If you have any questions about the research, you can email dr. Yasin Koc at [y.koc@rug.nl](mailto:y.koc@rug.nl). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the Ethics Committee of Psychology of the University of Groningen: [ecp@rug.nl](mailto:ecp@rug.nl). If you have questions or concerns regarding your privacy, or regarding the handling of your personal data, you may also contact the Data Protection Officer of the University of Groningen: [privacy@rug.nl](mailto:privacy@rug.nl).

Please indicate below that you have read the information about the research, and you understand what the research is about, what is being asked of you, which consequences participation can have, how your data will be handled, and what your rights are.

In relation to participation and in relation to consent to processing my personal data (gender, age, religion, race):

Yes, I consent to participate and I consent to the processing of my personal data as mentioned in the research information.

No, I do not consent to participate and I do not consent to the processing of my personal data as mentioned in the research information.

## Appendix B: Research instructions

### Research instructions:

In the next pages, you will be presented with a few pages of a magazine. We will ask you to take a look at these pages. Some pages will contain pieces of text on them, it is **not** necessary to read these texts. Look at the pictures and layout carefully. Once you have seen the pages, you will be forwarded to the next page where we ask you to answer questions regarding what you have just seen in the magazines and about yourself.

|



## Appendix C: Demographics

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - I want to specify myself:
2. What is your age?
3. What is your highest educational qualification?
  - Primary education
  - Junior secondary education
  - Senior secondary education
  - Higher education
4. Your employment status:
  - Full-time employee
  - Part-time employee
  - Self-employed
  - Not employed and seeking work
  - Not employed and not seeking work
  - Retired
  - Currently student
5. Your racial group:
  - Javanese
  - Sundanese
  - Batak
  - Sulawesi
  - Madurese
  - Betawi
  - Other:

## Appendix D: Manipulation of representation

*Magazine pages used for the traditional magazine condition:*









MILK

Beauty



COSMOPOLITAN.CO.ID | 14/11/2020  
48



Beauty



COSMOPOLITAN.CO.ID | 14/11/2020  
49

*Magazine pages used for the diversity magazine condition:*







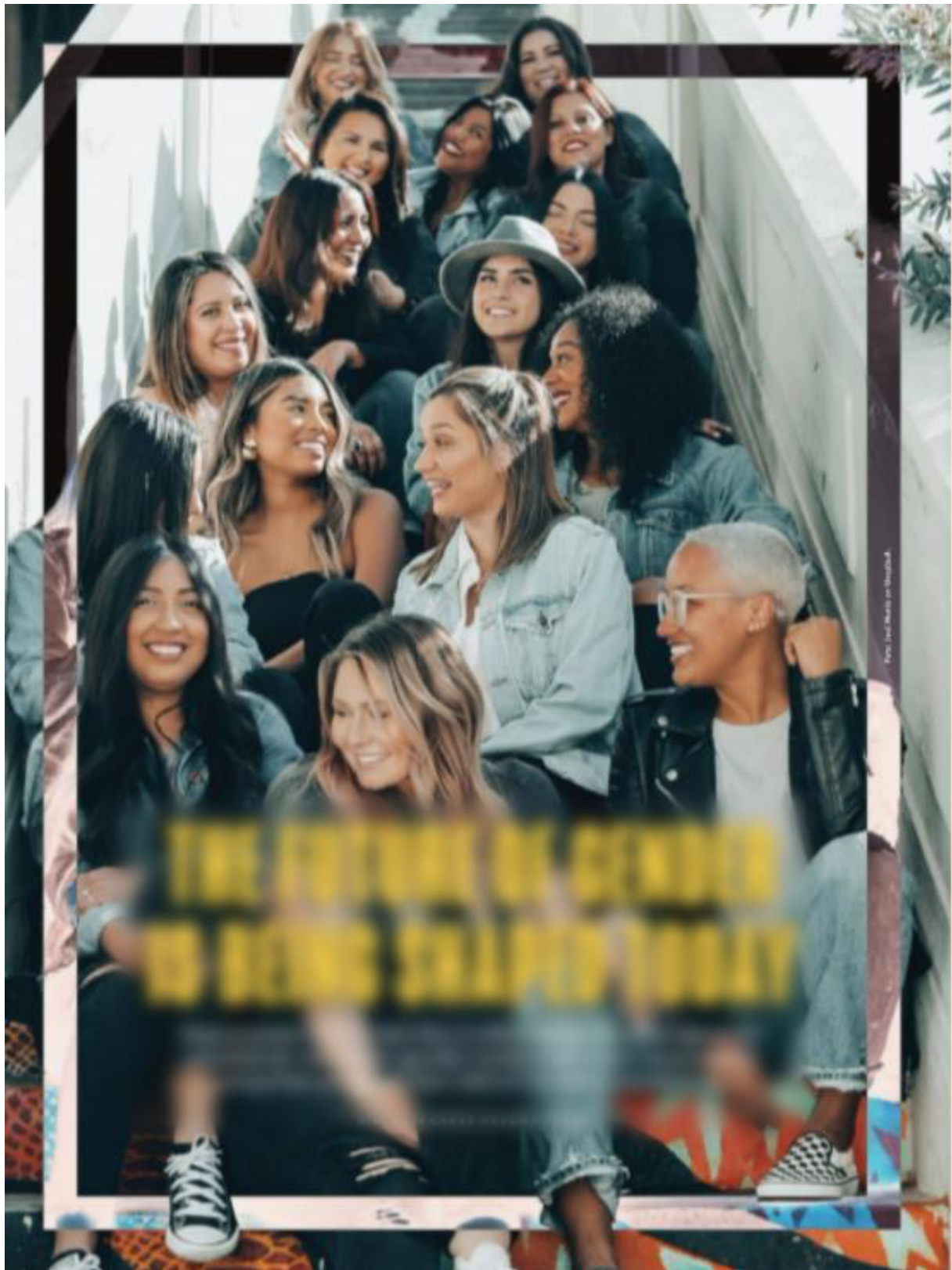
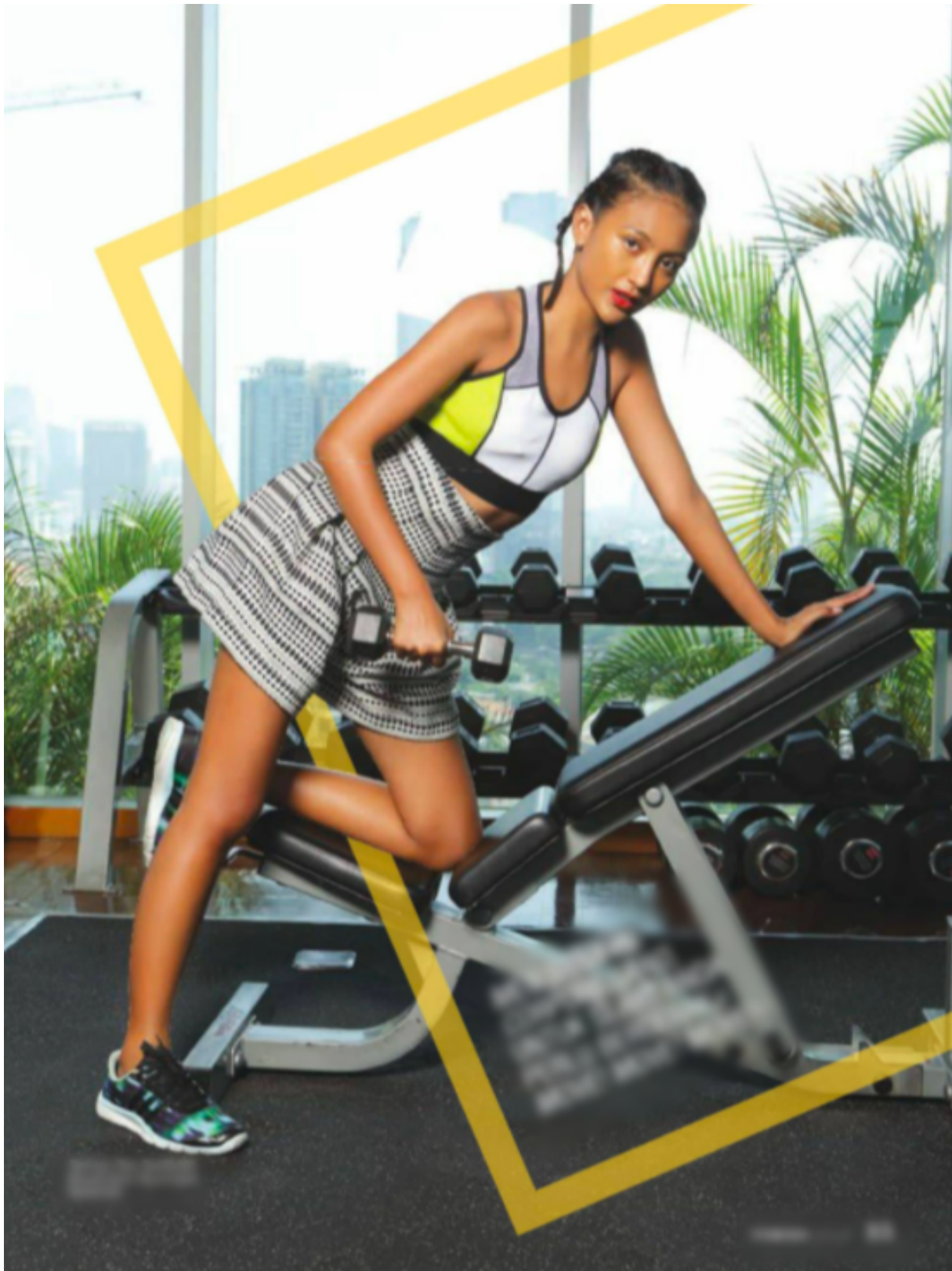


Photo: iStockphoto.com/Blissful





*Magazine pages used for the control condition:*



THE KITCHEN: A HEART OF THE HOME

Designing a Kitchen

The kitchen is often considered the heart of the home. It's a place where family members gather, friends meet, and memories are made. When designing a kitchen, it's important to consider both functionality and aesthetics. The layout, materials, and lighting all play a role in creating a space that is both practical and beautiful.

Layout

- The kitchen layout is crucial for efficient workflow. Common layouts include U-shaped, L-shaped, and island kitchens. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.
- Consider the size of the kitchen and the number of people who will be using it. A well-planned layout can make a small kitchen feel much larger.

Materials

- The choice of materials for kitchen cabinets, countertops, and backsplashes is important. Popular options include wood, stone, and solid surface materials.
- Consider the durability and maintenance requirements of the materials. A kitchen is a high-traffic area, so choosing materials that can withstand wear and tear is essential.
- Mixing materials can add visual interest and texture to the kitchen.



Lighting

Lighting is a key element in kitchen design. It can create a warm and inviting atmosphere or a bright and functional workspace. A combination of ambient, task, and accent lighting is often the best approach.

Recessed ceiling lights provide a clean, minimalist look. Pendant lights over the island or breakfast bar add a touch of style and focus light on the workspace. Under-cabinet lighting is a great way to illuminate the countertop and create a soft glow.

Decorative lighting, such as chandeliers or sconces, can be used to highlight a specific area or add a focal point to the kitchen.

Dimmer switches allow you to adjust the lighting levels to suit the occasion, from bright and cheery to soft and intimate.

Energy-efficient LED lighting is a smart choice for the kitchen, providing long-lasting illumination with minimal energy consumption.



THE BATH: A PLACE OF RELAXATION



IT'S BATH TIME!



# New Era of Working

Keywords:   
The text is blurred but appears to be a list of keywords or a short paragraph related to the 'New Era of Working' theme.



The text is blurred but appears to be a list of keywords or a short paragraph related to the 'New Era of Working' theme.



### **Appendix E: Manipulation check questions**

*Version for the diversity magazine condition and the traditional magazine condition:*

For the following statements, please answer by choosing a number range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):

1. To what extent do you think the following models represent diversity?
2. How much do you like the layout of this page?
3. How much do you like the clothing items on this page?
4. How much do you like the beauty items on this page?

*Version for the control condition:*

For the following questions, please answer by choosing a number ranging from 1 if you strongly disagree, to 7 if you strongly agree:

1. How much do you like the layout of this page?
2. How much do you like the interior design on this page?
3. How much do you like the furniture on this page?

## Appendix F: Questionnaires

### Bahasa Indonesia version of the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) – validated for use among Indonesian adolescents.

Please select how much do you feel the following **RIGHT NOW** on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*):

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	A lot	Completely
1. I like what I look like in pictures (photos).	1	2	3	4	5
2. Other people consider me good looking (beautiful/handsome/pretty).	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am preoccupied with trying to change my body weight.*	1	2	3	4	5
4. I think my appearance would help me get a job.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I like what I see when I look in the mirror.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am satisfied with my weight.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I really like what I weigh.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I wish I looked like someone else.*	1	2	3	4	5
9. People my own age like my looks.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My looks upset me (sad).*	1	2	3	4	5
11. I'm as nice looking as most people.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I'm pretty happy about the way I look.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel I weigh the right amount for my height.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel ashamed of how I look.*	1	2	3	4	5
15. My weight makes me unhappy.*	1	2	3	4	5
16. My looks make me attractive (beautiful/handsome/pretty) and popular.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I worry about the way I look.*	1	2	3	4	5

### Well being

For the following items, please answer how you are feeling **RIGHT NOW** on a scale ranging from 1 (= never) through 7 (= always).

1. I appreciate my own self-worth
2. I am able to accept myself
3. I am able to offer help to others
4. I am able to make friends
5. I am able to seek help when needed
6. I am appreciative of life
7. I am happy
8. I am content
9. I am able to accept reality
10. I am optimistic about the future
11. I am able to cope with life's challenges
12. I am able to make good decisions
13. I am able to think clearly.



**Skin whitening behavior**

**For the following statements, please answer on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*)**

1. In the past, I have purchased skin bleaching products
  2. I currently use skin bleaching creams to lighten my skin tone
  3. In the past, I have used skin bleaching products on a regular basis
  4. I will continue using skin bleaching creams to lighten my skin tone
- 
1. In the future, I will purchase skin bleaching products
  2. In the future, I will use skin bleaching creams to lighten my skin tone
  3. In the future, I will use skin bleaching products on a regular basis
  4. In the future, I will continue using skin bleaching creams to lighten my skin tone

**Internalization of White Ideal**

**For the following statements, please answer on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*)**

1. Women with fairer skin are more attractive
2. Women with fairer skin look friendlier
3. Women with fairer skin are more likely to find a partner
4. Women with fairer skin are more likely to find a job
5. Women with fairer skin are more successful

### **Appendix G: Debrief**

In this study, we asked you to read a magazine about international fashion and beauty trends. You should have been in one of the conditions whether the magazine was presented as only containing fair skinned models or models with a diverse range of skin tones. Yet, these magazines and their content were composed specifically for this study. Our study aimed to understand in what ways Indonesian women are affected by representation (or a lack thereof) in regards to skin tone. Studies show that people with lighter skin tones are treated more favorably than people with darker skin tones. Additionally, some research shows that skin tone is monitored by women and thus an important aspect of women's physical appearance which could affect their body image. However, there is a lack of research on this topic. Therefore, in this study, we wanted to test this idea.