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Malay Muslim Religious Ideology: Representations of Gendered Beauty

Ideals in Women's Magazines

Do not let a pure and clean heart be tarnished with black stains else we perish. It saddens me that some who used to cover their hair (with a cloth) are now “naked” without a stitch. When asked “Why did you remove your hijab?” they answer candidly, “It has been a while since I had my hair free.” It doesn't help that they are often supported by friends who say, “It's okay! Just be yourself darling...” (Editorial, *Nona*, June 2013, p. 10)

The *Nona* magazine excerpt demonstrates how beauty discourses propagate religiously charged symbolism from sociocultural and political forces entrenched in the larger community. We use magazines to expound on how beauty discourses reinforce or contest religious ideology in Malaysia. We draw from institutional logics to show how competing macro level belief systems both shape and constrain the micro level behavior of women. Malaysia is a secular state with Islam as its official religion and practices a dual judicial system of common law coupled with Sharia or Islamic courts. Malaysia's sociohistorical, political and economic background offer fertile ground to explore the intersections of religion, consumption and gendered perceptions of beauty. The country was governed by a single political coalition for sixty years that ruled as a hybrid political regime, making Malaysia an illiberal democracy (French, Koh, and Kananatu 2018). Furthermore, the mass media in Malaysia has over the years been used to maintain hegemony of the ruling party (Chang 2002). Drawing on the political, socioeconomic and religious intersections in Malay culture, we contribute to an understanding of gender in macromarketing by uncovering three

dialectical tensions: (1) embraced versus imposed; (2) I versus we; and (3) stand-out versus blend-in.

Drenten and McManus' (2016) review of research on religion reports that scholarship on the intersections of macromarketing and religion is lacking, although globally religion seems to be a major factor in marketplace transformations. Mittelstaedt (2002) discusses four forms of religious authority in the marketplace: political, institutional, social and competitive. On the one hand, political authority is market regulation, and competitive authority is direct involvement in the market where religious institutions offer competitive products or services. On the other hand, institutional authority is the external power that indirectly controls market behavior; social authority is moral and indirectly controls the behavior of market participants. Macromarketers have considered the relationship between religions and markets (Mittelstaedt 2002) and the diversity of religiously affiliated enterprises (Klein, Laczniak, and Santos 2017). Yazdanparast et al. (2018) demonstrate how a political system uses advertising to shape women's role in Iranian society as the effects of revolution are absorbed. This work, however, assumes a secular government. Fewer papers have looked at how religious ideology shapes perceptions, discourses and consumption in countries that claim to be secular, with the exception of Izberk-Bilgin (2012) and Sandikci and Ger (2010) in Turkey.

Izberk-Bilgin (2012) demonstrates how the religious ideology of Islamism and myths intertwine in the marketplace to inform brand meanings among low-income Turkish consumers. She makes the powerful argument that religion interlaced with ideology deploys consumer myths and calls for exploration of consumer discourses in other parts of the Muslim world. Sandikci and Ger (2010) explain how veiling, a once-stigmatized practice, has been transformed into a fashionable everyday practice in Turkey. They discuss stigma as socially constructed, often

demonstrating power struggles between groups and consumers, subsequently using the marketplace to either accept or challenge these hierarchies. Researchers have not explored how the local media has encouraged or discriminated against this practice or contributed to power relations and social practices that influence the development, preservation and transformation of social identities (Boreus and Bergstrom 2017).

In gender-related research, macromarketing has looked at gendered gift-giving rituals in Japan (Minowa, Khomenko and Belk 2011) and how sustainable brand discourses and practices that promote brand ideals are infused with gender ideologies (Ourahmoune, Binninger and Robert 2014). Gurreiri, Previte and Brace-Govan (2012) investigated three social marketing campaigns to examine ideologies of body images for women and focus on representations of women's experience. They discuss the embodied experience of women who are vulnerable to the social stigma of the normalized acceptable representation of their bodies. Thus, while social marketing promotes social good, there has been unintended cultural and social effects. Similarly, while women's fashion and beauty magazines offer an opportunity to relax and indulge (Stevens, Maclaran and Brown 2003), there are unintentional consequences as a result of larger macro-level forces at play.

We contribute to religious ideology and the marketplace from an institutional perspective that permeates the media, as a result of larger macromarketing factors. We present a view of Islamic beauty and gendered beauty ideals as they clash with religious ideology. We explore how women's fashion and beauty magazines express different problematic and ideological constructions of beauty and femininity. In the dialogic process of reading and the negotiation of meanings institutionalized in everyday life, we consider how larger sociocultural and historical

reverberations are reinforced or undermined. Drawing these facets together, we ask: How does religious ideology contribute to gendered representations of beauty ideals?

To answer this question, we review the literature on gendered beauty discourses and the media as a cultural intermediary. We outline the theoretical foundation drawn from institutional theory and religious ideology. The contextual background provides an understanding of the Malay dilemma, a race privileged constitutionally but stigmatized socially as a result. Ethnic stratification in Malaysia afford the Malays rights and privileges denied to the other ethnic groups in the country. Next, the methodology section addresses our selection of magazines and the procedure that we undertook in the analysis. We then present our findings and discussion.

The Media and Gendered Beauty Discourses

“Discourse is the term of choice used to describe communication that is fluid rather than fixed – an ensemble of voices, attitudes and values activated by participants in the process” (Stern 1998, p. 3) and meaning is socially constructed. It becomes a way of expressing and understanding the world (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002); both socially constitutive and socially shaped (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Meanings constructed from social and cultural subtleties indicate the importance of representation (Schroeder 2002) which looks at the ways in which language systems produce meaning (Stern 1998). Beauty for the Muslim woman is an overarching concept where fashion plays a dominant role because bodies have to be covered and the outward display of beauty is often demonstrated through fashion. Thus, fashion and beauty are intrinsically intertwined and used interchangeably in this paper because fashion is an expression of beauty for the Malay Muslim woman. Muslim fashion practices differ in styles and religious interpretations according

to culture and location (Moors and Tarlo 2007); for example, Muslim dress in Mali (Schulz 2007) has little in common with Muslim fashion in England (Tarlo 2007). In trying to understand cultural discourses of beauty, the semiotic concept of culture focuses on representation—how signs and symbols mediate between Malay Muslim women’s external world and their internal world (Kenney 2005). For example, a Malay Muslim woman would not hold out her hand for a handshake unless the male initiates it (French 2017) to avoid rejection. We draw from the semiotic concept of culture to build upon current literature on how text (including visuals) and language systems produce meaning.

Magazine discourses perpetuate ideals of beauty and exemplify gender performance (Fairclough 2011) for example, prescribed regulations around body performance (Gurreiri, Previte and Brace-Govan 2012). Dress is not just an embodied practice but also as a spatialized and temporal one as clothed bodies assume meanings according to rules governing different times and spaces (Lewis 2007). Beauty discourses embody cultural meanings about femininity reminding women to “do” gender rather than “be” one. While we concur with the literature, magazine discourses using the semiotic concept of culture may magnify subtle meanings within that context. Furthermore, because fashion and beauty are intrinsically intertwined for the Malay Muslim, magazines become the excellent ideological apparatus in Malaysia drawing on larger shared understandings and institutional logics.

There are new forms of Islamic identification in public with different consumption practices demonstrating the changing “consumptionscapes” in Muslim societies (Sandikci and Rice 2011). Similarly, discourses are formed when Malaysia’s sociohistorical past intersects with global discourses propagated by the media. The media is power-inscribed because it conveys the meanings and values that influence social and cultural discourses (O’Donohoe 2000) often used to

promote ideological positions (Yazdanparast et al. 2018). Women's production (writing) and consumption (reading) of texts differ from men's as women read and respond differently to gendered texts on the basis of experiential versus utilitarian approaches to reading (Stern 2000).

Women as readers, have a role in the interpretation of symbolic meaning as they will interpret and produce meaning based on the relationship between themselves and the text or image. Stern (2000) proposes four models of reader response: (1) dominance, where the reader dominates the text; (2) submission, where the text dominates the reader; (3) interaction, where both interact in a dialogue; and (4) resistance, where the reader resists reading the text as the author had intended. The woman as a reader is not powerless and has a choice between the inscribed meanings. The commercial development of the different forms of Islamic dress in different countries suggests that religious identities are experienced and expressed in myriad ways. We suggest that women may choose to affiliate with a community of Muslim believers symbolized by the sartorial choice rather than believing that the style itself represents a Muslim perspective.

The media promotes ideological positions because of institutional and social structures that influence market behavior (Arnould and Thompson 2015). Literature has not looked at how the media as an institutional and social structure injects religious ideology to gendered representations of beauty ideals. Furthermore, while religious ideology is as an authoritative guideline for social behavior (Scott 2003), beauty discourses are often used to disseminate or challenge these ideologies. We turn to institutional theory as a theoretical lens in order to answer our research question.

Institutional Theory and Religious Ideology

Ideologies are transmitted through institutional logics rooted in five key institutions: the state, democracy, the family, the market and religion (Friedland and Alport 1991). Institutional theory provides a framework for understanding the development, maintenance and persistence of social structures, called institutions (Humphreys 2010, p. 491). It is concerned with ‘the processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemes, rules and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior’ (Scott 2005, p. 408). These institutional forces, for example religious ideology, influence identity negotiation as they impose certain institutional logics to achieve legitimacy. This perspective rejects the notion of unconstrained agency of individuals to negotiate their identities as they are situated within institutional environments where different institutional forces can enable or constrain identity negotiation (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Yang 2020). Legitimacy, a central concept in institutional theory takes various forms – cultural-cognitive, regulative and normative legitimacy. Cultural-cognitive legitimacy refers to the shared beliefs and knowledge for example, gendered beauty ideals achieved over time through public discourses, the media or the marketplace. Normative legitimacy is the degree to which the practice is congruent with norms of acceptable behavior, for example obligatory traditional attire for women at cultural events. Finally, regulatory legitimacy reflects the formal laws and rules of society, for example women will be provided a robe or cloak when visiting the National Mosque in Malaysia as part of appropriate attire (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Yang 2019). Various carriers that include symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artefacts (Scott 2001) transmit institutional elements and convey the regulatory, normative and cultural-cognitive facets of social life. Magazines act as conduits that echo and transmit institutional logics and ideologies of the state in Malaysia.

An ideology is a system of beliefs and values that originates from and broadcasts the worldview of society's most dominant or powerful group, helping to maintain and legitimize that group's power and control over social relations and institutions (Hirschman 1993). For example, a patriarchal society that presents the husband as the moral authority (Haddad 1998) is often implicitly resisted by women. Women can subtly rebel by reworking the ideological meanings, cultural categories and gender norms prescribed (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). At the same time, the marketplace, especially advertising and the mass media offer different ideological constructions of femininity and allow the creation of mythological meanings (Thompson 2004). Marketplace mythology is used to contest socially and institutionally dominant discourses of power (Thompson 2004). Hijab marketing in Malaysia has reconstructed the Malay Muslim identity in the public sphere as a determinant of social status (Hassim 2017). This coalescing of the media, market and religion construct and legitimize social hierarchies through which normative identity positions are institutionalized. This allows for an imagined community of mythical construction of collective identity to be formed in the minds of members expressed through fashion. Further, local socio-political developments have commodified the hijab as a product of Malay sovereignty rather than a symbol of religious obligation (Hassim 2017) revealing underlying reverberations of cultural hegemony (see Sürdem 2016).

Izberk-Bilgin (2012) points out how Islamist solidarity is founded on a shared religious identity and ideological appropriations of Islam and Ger (2013) describes three arguments on the resurgence of religion. First, people tend to crowd around symbolic reflections that unite a society, such as religion or even money. Second, authoritative impositions of secularism only increase religiosity. Third, she contends that secularization has caused religion to move from the collective to the individual. The politics of religion draws on economic, social, symbolic and cultural

resources (Ger 2013) and Islamic products become a social means of symbolizing affiliation with the Muslim community. The intermingling of religion and beauty ideals as a source of social cohesion and ideological methods of cultural hegemony where political ideology is masked within religious ideology is magnified in Malaysia. We begin by considering the broader role of Women's Magazines Discourses in perpetuating and contesting religious ideology. Further, despite much discussion of the role of religion in the marketplace in the literature, it often assumes a secular, Western context.

Contextual Background: The Malay Dilemma

Malaysia is a pluralistic society with three main ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and Indians. The Malays have always been numerically but not socially or economically dominant (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2013). In 1971, the Malaysian government launched the New Economic Policy (NEP), an affirmative action policy aimed at alleviating poverty and eliminating racial economic disparities. Malaysia is unique because the NEP offers preferential policies to the majority. Thus, the group that benefits from affirmative action also enjoys the power to formulate it. Malays, who hold power, are also two-thirds of the nation and take advantage of preferential policies. While this allows for a unique Malay identity it has also contributed to the dilemma of Malay Muslim women, who is privileged ethnically but stigmatized socially.

The NEP has given rise to a new Malay middle class community and is both an advantage and disadvantage for Malay Muslim women. The NEP has made education possible for Malay women whose opportunities for education and employment had traditionally been limited. However, today's educated Malay Muslim woman who wants to be recognized on merit, is now

likely to be less well regarded because she will always be judged as having benefited from the privileges that Malays enjoy. We see that while the affirmative action policy has brought positive change for Malays, it also stigmatizes them socially. Furthermore, Malay Muslim women are part of a society that exhibits a male-dominated culture that do not question or protest against authority.

In addition, the Constitution of Malaysia (1957, Article 160) defines a Malay as “a person who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks Malay and conforms to Malay customs.” As such the terms “Islam,” “Islamic” and “Muslim” as used in this paper are exclusive to Malaysia. With Islam as the official religion, a majority of Malay women wear the hijab although it is not compulsory despite Sharia laws (Hassim 2014). Magazines have played a role in propagating the choice to wear the hijab.

The first two publications of Malaysia women’s lifestyle and fashion magazines were founded in the 1960s and grew in the 1970s. Adnan (2014) says the 1980s saw a huge surge in the publications of women’s magazines in Malaysia because of the rise in education and the increasing number of women in the paid workforce. However, this was also when the first five Islamic-oriented women’s magazines were founded; one by a local Islamic political party, one by a religious sect and three by a non-partisan organization. These magazines had photos of attractive and modestly dressed veiled women. The magazines’ philosophy was not just to entertain women but also educate them to be good practicing Muslims (Adnan 2014).

Othman (2006) argues that these Islamic movements reorganized the practices of social life and set their sights on women and their bodies. Political parties fought for endorsements from the Muslim majority constituents and the contest for political power between the government’s United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the opposition Parti Islam seMalaysia (PAS) spearheaded “Islamization” (Othman 2006).

Mohamad (2014) calls the twenty-first century the period of hegemonic Islamization where the family law statutes of the 1980s were replaced with a modern patriarchal family in Malaysia. “The question of veiling or donning the hijab is a particularly sensitive and controversial issue as the debate has always focused on the questions of the women’s ‘authentic’ Islamic identity and the depth of her faith or piety is often equated with the act of covering” (Othman 2006, p. 341). Gendered ideals of beauty as represented in women’s magazines have larger sociocultural reverberations that make up the discourse of beauty (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Our research explores the impact of clearly enunciated and legally defined positions of religion and ethnicity on how gendered beauty ideals are presented in Malaysia’s women’s magazines.

Methodology

Selection of Magazines

Magazines were selected based on purposive sampling (Creswell 2013) that answered the research question: How does religious ideology contribute to gendered representations of beauty ideals? These were based on pre-set criteria (Miles and Huberman 1994): (1) either women’s lifestyle, fashion or beauty magazines; (2) monthly magazines; (3) published in English and Malay; (4) readership of similar age and demographics (urban, 20 to 35-years-olds / 30 to 60 year-olds); and (5) a representation of magazines published before and after the NEP. The magazines were purposely selected because their target readers are predominantly urban, middle to upper middle-class women. These magazines therefore represent women who have some familiarity with the global discourses of beauty in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Table 1 summarizes the magazines selected.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The sampling criteria was based on the following considerations. Proliferation of women's magazines for Malaysia's Muslim women gained traction (Adnan 2014) and subtly changed the discourse in women's lifestyle and beauty magazines. As photographs of veiled Malay Muslim women became more prominent, they exerted more power (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998). This escalated in 2012 with the launch of *Hijabista*, the first magazine of its kind to depict a more daring and *avant garde* portrayal of the veiled Muslim women. The magazine received criticism from the public, unlike another Muslim oriented magazine for the veiled woman, *Nur*, which launched in the early 2000s (Hassim 2014). The year 2012 was a turning point for Malay Muslim magazine beauty discourses which was the reason for selecting magazines published from July 2012 to June 2013.

Next, magazines cover the ideological spectrum (Mendes 2012) of conservative to liberal discourses (Schroeder 2002). We include magazines that were founded between 1960 and 2012. This allowed for a better representation of gendered discourses. Malay magazines targeted veiled and unveiled Malay Muslim women and English-language magazines read by Malay and Non-Malay women in the country were also selected.

The magazines were divided into two groups based on the age of the readership. Three magazines were geared to women aged 20 to 35 and the other three to women aged 30 to 60. The members of the younger group were born well after the NEP; members of the older group were born before or soon after it started. Each group of three comprised one English-language and two Malay-language magazines. Of the two Malay magazines, one was intended for veiled Malay Muslim women and the other for unveiled women.

For our study, one issue per quarter was chosen at random from a twelve-month period from July 2012 to June 2013. This would compensate for possible seasonal influences. Twenty-four magazines within a year were selected to offer a snapshot of gendered discourses in the country at a specific time.

Procedure

Our analysis followed a two-stage procedure. We read the magazines to familiarize ourselves with local beauty discourses. This took considerable time. We decided to use cover pages and editorials as our data. Cover pages and editorials were resonant with the local audience and reflected Malaysia's social and cultural norms (Frith, Cheng and Shaw 2004). Alternatively, many of the advertisements promoted international products using Western models while feature articles glamorized the lives and stories of Malaysian celebrities. The cover pages and the editorials of the 24 magazines were translated into English (where necessary) and interpreted giving us a final sample of twenty-four cover pages and twenty-four editorials as data. Cover pages offer a full-page visual of a model with headlines of selected content. Editorials were the opening remarks for each issue.

In stage one, textual analysis of editorial and headlines were conducted following Frith (1997) at three levels: (1) analyzing surface meanings; (2) identifying the intended meaning; and (3) uncovering the cultural or ideological meaning. In the first step, we looked for the impression and surface meanings of the editorials and cover page headlines. This entailed line-by-line coding which helped the researchers select, separate and sort data (Charmaz 2006) with a within-case coding of each magazine, followed by a within-case coding of the four similar magazine titles, and finally a between-case analysis to compare and contrast the magazine titles.

Next, we probed for the intended meaning conveyed to women as readers. This included the use of tone and the dominant voice, for example inducing the voice of an expert opinion to endorse a point of view (Hellgren et al. 2002).

In the third step, we uncovered the cultural and ideological meanings specific to the Malaysian context. This involved deconstructing the text to reveal deeper social structures such as gendered text using an androcentric voice in prescribing social expectations for women (Stern 2000).

In stage two, visual analysis of cover pages showed us how images are communicated and subsequently decoded and understood by viewers (Schroeder 2002). We used a combination of critical visual analysis techniques (Schroeder 2006) and some of the tools proposed by Schroeder and Borgerson (1998) for visual analysis to understand how visual images produce social meaning in the interaction with the audience (Scollon and Scollon 2003). Each cover page image was described as the starting point in expressing the form, subject matter, genre, medium, color, light, line and size; this is what Schroeder (2006, p. 304) terms “the building blocks of images.” The medium for these magazine cover pages were color photographs and while the distinctive genre is fashion photography, the group portrait was evident as a technique for representing identity (Schroeder 2006). This allowed us to focus on the models as the subject and the form or way they were portrayed in the representation of gender. We also noted the angle of the shot, focus, social and psychological factors, salience and involvement with or detachment from the viewer (Schroeder 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004). The angle of the shot or point of view determines the symbolic relations; a shot taken from above assumes symbolic power over the woman. Social and psychological factors such as eye contact can be used to engage with or intimidate the viewer (van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004). As discourses in these magazines

are articulated through different visual images and text, intertextuality is important in uncovering meaning (Rose 2012). Identity issues such as gender, race and religion within visual representations guided the analysis. Represented identities express something about those represented within the social contexts of cultural differences (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002).

In addition, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2011; Fairclough and Wodak 1997) of the editorial and cover page headlines was conducted to allow for an understanding of the Malay Muslim woman's world. This allowed for careful study of the power relations and social practices that influence the development, preservation and transformation of social identities (Boreus and Bergstrom 2017). While many government policies have economically benefited Malay Muslim women, as far as Malaysian Sharia law is concerned, women's rights are not protected. The new family Sharia laws introduced in the 1980s suggests that "masculinity has become a quality in which rights are conferred rather than earned" (Mohamad 2014, p. 185). This has given rise to a new Malay Muslim rhetoric that has cultural consequences for women.

The six magazines ranged from no references, mediocre references and abounding references to religious ideology in their beauty discourses. Three of the six magazines, *Female*, *Her World* and *Cosmopolitan* did not indicate any references to religion and are therefore not used for this paper. The findings that are discussed next, will focus solely on three magazines which are *Nona*, *Nur* and *Hijabista*.

Critical discourse analysis reveals the power dynamics that are embedded in gender, beauty and religion. The combination of visual analysis techniques (Schroeder 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2011; Fairclough and Wodak 1997) was captured in three dialectical tensions: "Embraced" versus "Imposed," "I" versus "We" and "Stand-Out" versus "Blend-In" and allowed for a discursive

formation concerning the way that meanings were interconnected. These beauty tensions are presented with a discussion of the negotiation evident in the texts.

Findings

The findings reveal one overarching theme and three sub-themes of beauty discourses in Malaysian women's magazines. The overarching theme is Exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse displayed in three sub-themes that offer dialectical beauty tensions: (1) embraced versus imposed; (2) I versus we; and (3) stand-out versus blend-in.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Exclusively Muslim as a Beauty Discourse

An overarching theme that emerged from our analysis is the exclusivity of being Muslim as a beauty discourse. Exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse is a socially constructed aspiration and mark of distinction for the Malay Muslim woman symbolized by gendered beauty ideals, identity and spirituality displayed in physical appearance. Exclusivity is often associated with luxury consumption but these magazines delicately champion the association between the consumption and display of beauty with the religious community. The exclusivity of being Muslim is demonstrated in the text and visuals allowing for identity spaces to be created where women can construct what it means to be Malay Muslim. There are, however, contradictions, parallel meanings and ambiguity within the beauty discourses on exclusivity. These ambiguous discourses create gendered scripts of beauty ideals that exert cultural and social meaning as they indirectly act as a normative social control for women (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003). From an

institutional perspective, the normative system infers what preferred or desirable behavior (values) is and defines the legitimate means (norms) to pursue them (Scott 2001). We suggest that dialectical tensions of exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse help to contextualize the media's reflection of beauty in Malaysia, because of larger political, cultural, socioeconomic and religious intersections (Figure 1). The next section discusses the three sub-themes.

“Embraced” versus “Imposed”

The first sub-theme discusses how exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse presents gendered beauty ideals both as something to be embraced and something that is imposed. Being exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse is depicted as something to be embraced, celebrated and declared. Embracing and celebrating this identity requires the construction of beauty from a Malay Muslim perspective; it is declarative, celebratory and resistant to Western values. The body, as something sacred and revered, is concealed. Moral superiority is implied and this is accentuated on cover pages with two or more models stressing a shared identity (Image 1). This is evident in three magazines where the use of a pair or a group of models suggests a strong affinity towards being Malay Muslim, subconsciously fostering a bond, encouraging women to identify with other Malay Muslim women as a community.

[Insert Images 1A and 1B here]

The models in Image 1A look comfortable; they are smiling as they invite the reader into their world. There is playfulness and confidence in their faces. The angle of the shot has them slightly elevated, suggesting superiority and exclusivity. Image 1B shows five celebrities in hijabs of different shades of yellow, with the focal model in the center wearing a pastel yellow outfit. Yellow is the color of royalty in Malaysia and it is an unspoken rule that no commoner wears yellow for official functions attended by royalty. The use of yellow here suggests superiority. The

models are looking directly at the viewer and smiling, and even though it is a personal close-distance shot, there is a noticeable detachment. The photograph of the yellow-clad, aloof models suggests a regal transformation of ordinary women into impressive and powerful Malay Muslim women. These representations signify breaking away from patriarchal cultural traditions and seeking gender equality that is more compatible with Islam and acts as a subtle institutional force that affects individual interest pushing for a change in behavior (Yang 2019). Gendered beauty ideals symbolically represent the universal values of equality, justice and a life of dignity for women as they rise up against claims that women and men are not equal in Islam (Othman 2006).

While the visuals in Image 1A and 1B foster a shared identity between veiled Malay Muslim women, a different approach is used for the unveiled woman (Images 2A and 2B). Here the models are dressed and styled very similarly, again suggesting a shared sense of self. The use of similar outfits and hairstyles is not common, since most women want to maintain some form of autonomy in their appearance unless social behavior is evaluated with reference to others and one's appearance is compared to others who are judged as similar (Maslach, Stapp and Santee 1985). Over the last two decades in Malaysia, veiled Malay women have become the norm and unveiled Malay Muslim women are subtly stigmatized (French 2017) so these beauty discourses accommodate these unveiled women, leaving them the choice to veil or not. This strengthens the solidarity among Malay Muslim women that wearing the hijab should focus on choice rather than compulsion.

Belk (1988) suggests that clothing is an extension of self and a second skin we put on for others. This would suggest that Images 2A and 2B symbolize and emphasize an affiliation with or kinship in being Malay Muslim. The visuals illustrated seem to steer a response towards

perceptions of a collective Malay Muslim identity. This strong identification with the Malay Muslim community allows for shifts in the gendered scripts that surround beauty discourses.

[Insert Image 2A and 2B here]

We suggest that the modern Malay Muslim woman uses fashion including the hijab as a means of constructing identity and expressing self. Wearing the hijab has become the norm in Malaysia and a social expectation for Malay Muslim women. In deferring to social norms and expectations, women manoeuvre around these fashion restraints by subtly undermining them. The restriction that a woman should cover herself in the public sphere is adhered to with different styles and ways of adorning the hijab, and in the bright, colorful garments worn, all within the parameters of culturally acceptable attire. Drawing from institutional theory, we know that normative systems usually impose constraints on social behavior but in doing so empower and enable social action (Scott 2001). Magazines promote socially constructed meanings of beauty that influence the modern Malay Muslim woman's sartorial style in the context of Malaysia. Magazines promote fashionable hijabs and brightly colored traditional costumes as modern Muslim fashion. Fashion is used not only as an expression of self, but also as a means of regaining control and power over circumstances and social expectations. The modern Malay Muslim woman can rise above the assumption that, as a female, she is defined by her body (Steele 2003) and sexuality. Instead, she uses fashion to signify power and femininity. The hijab and the wearing of colorful fashionable clothes are used to symbolize liberation for the modern Malay Muslim woman. They epitomize independence and modernity. The traditional dark veils and robes associated with Muslim women in many other Islamic countries have been replaced with Malaysia's own style, allowing these women to draw distinctions between modern and traditional, local and global fashion, but at the same time representing themselves as Muslim. Dress is used symbolically to assess, compare and

legitimize the dissimilarity of Malay Muslim from women in other Islamic societies and provide normative guidance and rules that simultaneously constrain and empower social behavior (Scott 2008). The normative pillar in institutional theory with its prescriptive, obligatory expectations as the basis for social order is unwittingly imposed (Scott 2003). As a result, behavior is morally governed; and these internalized norms are as important as if not more important than external sanctions (Scott 2003). Attractively feminine clothes that conceal and do not implicitly call attention to the body become powerful symbols of the modern Malay Muslim woman and worn as an accolade of distinction.

However, just as being exclusively Muslim is something to be embraced and celebrated, some countervailing discourses take issue with this exclusivity. Strong undercurrents of discourses for religion to be portrayed and reflected outwardly are evident here, affecting individuals' moral and religious stand:

“Dress according to Sharia – 100 tips for you” (Cover Page, *Nur*, April 2013)

Be fashionable according to Sharia

“You can be fashionably beautiful as God himself loves beauty. However, let that fashion be within the stipulated guidelines” (Editorial, *Nur*, April 2013, p. 6)

These quotations refer to Sharia which is the official prescriptive moral code and religious law for Muslims. Its believers must follow this set of instructions, once again setting them apart from non-believers. In a collectivist culture, the desire to be a member of a group is stronger than the desire to be independent. As such, this platform uses the word Sharia as a coercive mechanism to legitimize what it dictates as appropriate fashion imaginatively acting as a regulative pillar. Being

Malay Muslim is more important than personal goals and a woman's appearance should conform to what is socially acceptable. In other words, covering and concealing is not enough. Restrictions on *how* to cover or conceal are suggested. Contradictory beauty discourses suggest that the way in which a Malay Muslim woman is judged is based on what she wears and how she wears it. We can assume that a woman will manage and monitor how she presents herself depending on how concerned she is for what her community sees as socially appropriate (Karatas and Sandikci 2013). The extent to which she feels the need for social acceptance and psychological associations to her community will influence how she responds to the text (Stern 2000) and whether or not she accepts these suggestions (Hogg and Ridgeway 2003).

The title of the editorial in the June issue of *Nona* was "The Hijab of the Heart." It discusses the importance of a pure heart, with the title symbolizing shielding and guarding one's heart. The word for "shield" or "guard" is "hijab," which implies much more than just covering one's hair. It implies protecting the heart and mind. The main issue here is the symbolic representation of the hijab as socially and culturally constructed for the Malay Muslim woman. The editorial states:

The Hijab of the Heart

...it is more difficult to cover your heart compared to covering your hair. Every drop of perspiration that a woman sheds because she uses the hijab and covers herself is counted as a reward. Whether it is done sincerely or for wrong reasons is immaterial because even something that is imposed upon us eventually becomes a habit and if ever, we try to break that habit, it feels strange. (Editorial, *Nona*, June 2013, p. 13)

While the tone of the editorial was to encourage and praise women who wear the hijab, it disapproves of women who start wearing it and then change their mind. The assumption is that

once a woman dons the hijab, even “for wrong reasons,” the decision is irreversible. The editorial was an attempt to explain to women what social norms were acceptable.

We see here a contrast to the anti-conformist narrative expressed by participants in Thompson and Haytko’s study (1997), where self-identity is defined and redefined through perceived contrasts with others. In a strongly patriarchal culture like the Malay Muslim one, the female defers to the male, which would explain the editor’s androcentric stance. Although the text here is written by and for women, it assumes an androcentric role in prescribing what social expectations of women should be. It is interesting that while most of the text was written from an androcentric stance, the last paragraph switches to a geocentric voice in identifying the sacrifices made by women who wear the hijab. This is because female readers are more likely to identify and respond emotionally to the bittersweet experiences of those who wear hijabs.

The liberation of Malay Muslim women from objectification does not isolate them from social norms. This is evident in the magazine discourses. In contrast to the ascent of the powerful Malay Muslim woman, we see the simultaneous rise and promotion of the submissive, deferential, compliant woman whose main role is in the home. The Malaysian government’s pro-natal policy in the 1980s, with its unstated goal of increasing the Malay population, was based on the Islamic aspiration to increase the *Ummah*, the Muslim community. Malay culture emphasizes conformity to social norms. Authorities are to be obeyed, since they are the guardians of the community. The non-confrontational nature of Malays (Mahathir 1970) and the voice of authority these magazines signify, foster the image of the deferential Malay Muslim woman. The institutional forces at play are demonstrated with the regulatory pillar in institutional theory being deployed sanctioning submissiveness to God as a requirement of Islam. Similarly, drawing from the cultural cognitive pillar that shapes social identities, the belief system drawn upon is that submissiveness to authority

is the obligation of being Malay. While this is a larger shared understanding that is not questioned, the logics of action are demonstrated at the individual level (Scott 2003). The compliant Muslim woman who is devoted to her religion, will strongly resist change, and believes that it is an honor to be a devout Muslim wife and mother – an identity portrayed as an emblem of distinction. Exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse presents gendered beauty ideals both as something that is embraced and imposed and beauty magazines are used as subtle mechanisms to promote Malay Muslim religious ideology.

“I” versus “We”

The second sub-theme discusses how exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse presents gendered beauty ideals both as collectiveness and individuality displayed in fashion. Being exclusively Muslim promotes a strong sense of collective self as a morally distinct social group. This requires the readers to balance individualism against belonging to an important community. Moral distinction is drawn as an expression of psychological distinctiveness (Beloff 2001) both as an individual and as a community. Their dress both unites them and sets them apart. The Malay Muslim woman's identity is affirmed when she dresses according to the cultural expectations of her community (Elliott 2004) but it is also to distinguishes the Malay Muslim community as a people.

As discussed earlier, Malay women consumers have progressed socially and economically as a result of the affirmative action policy. In the past, the Malays have always remained politically dominant but economic power has always rested in the hands of the ethnic Chinese. Exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse becomes a means of psychological distinctiveness for the Malay Muslim woman. While political power was used in the past to improve the economic position of the Malays, today political parties in Malaysia often use religion for propaganda purposes. Evident

here is the use of religion to differentiate Malay Muslims morally and socially from non-Muslims, and from the rest of the Muslim community. However, the dialectical tension between the individual's autonomy and sense of affiliation displayed in attire is evident.

Hey Fashionista

And who says hijabis are backward.....observe the fashion forward and stylish hijabi.... more and more Western celebrities are adorning the turban as a fashion style. Who knows if we've managed to influence them? (Editorial, *Hijabsita*, Nov 2012, p. 12)

The editor starts with a rhetorical question: Who says that veiled women are backward? This is a subtle defense of the Malay Muslim in relation to the non-Malay Muslim world. The image of “fashion forward” women wearing hijabs creates the perception that the hijab is a fashion statement that is influencing the West. This allows consumers to use fashion discourses to forge self-defining social distinctions and boundaries (Thompson and Haytko 1997) of imagined distinctiveness as a people. These distinctions and boundaries are exhibited at two levels: between the Malay Muslims and the non-Malay Muslims; and between veiled and unveiled Malay Muslims. In the quotation, the editor draws a distinction between Malay Muslims and the Western world. In the second instance, distinctions are drawn between veiled and non-veiled Muslim women. Veiled Muslims are often acknowledged and encouraged in the magazines.

The Hijab of the Heart

For those of you who have migrated to wearing the hijab, you have made a big change in your life... (Editorial, *Nona*, June 2013, p. 10)

Be fashionable according to Sharia

....to share with those of you who are still new to the change since wearing the hijab.... God willing you will sustain the change that you have made. (Editorial, *Nur*, April 2013, p.6)

The use of the word 'migrated' suggests that the decision to wear the hijab is a life-changing decision, and not an easy one to sustain. There is unity and consensus among women who wear the hijab regarding the consequences of making this decision. For example, there is the issue of the heat of a tropical country like Malaysia and the behavioral expectation placed on veiled Malay Muslim women. Gendered beauty expectations are tied to religious ideology that women should cover their hair to fulfil their religious duties, no matter how much discomfort it entails. Drawing from the cultural-cognitive pillar, the rationalization that it is ultimately good as it is God's command, unites women in this discourse (Scott 2001). Religion acts as social authority and exerts control over cultural beliefs and expectations of market participants on socially acceptable behavior in the marketplace (Mittelstaedt 2002). Suggestions of shared similarities and characteristics within this collective move the locus from "I" to "we" and affect perceptions, emotions and behavior (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002). Promoting beauty from a Malay Muslim perspective becomes instrumental in forming social comparisons and highlighting group inclusivity.

In Malaysia, religion is very much a part of public life and is used as social capital to unite members. Magazines promote the exclusivity of Muslims as a morally superior group by using dress as a feature of self-presentation and distinction (Beloff 2001). This psychological distinctiveness gives Malay Muslim women a sense of belonging, a sense of being part of a larger collective of Muslims and allows them to forge social distinctions and boundaries. Goffman's

(1964) concept of in-group takes on a new power in social value to discredit Malaysia's historical past; gendered discourses are used in mainstream fashion as a unifier. The Malays had never held economic power, although today there are many who have far surpassed other races. However, for the majority of the middle and working class, fashion and clothes signal psychological distinctiveness and therefore moral superiority. Being morally superior allows them to distinguish themselves in ways they cannot economically. Their shared identity allows them to rationalize a logic of understanding about their behavior and the associated culturally supported meanings (Scott 2008).

The image of womanhood portrayed to the public by the magazines falls within the cultural construct of a beautiful practicing Muslim woman. The veiled Muslim woman is seen as part of an elite group of practicing Muslims, according to local discourses and distinctions, based on an everyday defined experience. Women have become important religious and political agents through the emergence of the veil as a symbol of politicized Islam within modernity (Stivens 2006). "Religiosity operates as an equalizing and homogenizing factor that dissolves individual identity within a uniform and anonymous Islamic identity. But uniformity is difficult to maintain. While religious identity enables a woman to differentiate herself from her 'less' religious others, it alone is not enough to create distinction among those who are similar" (Sandikei and Ger 2007, p. 197). This is evident from the strong emphasis on individuality.

Your individualized style

Having your own individual style...what fashion style do you aspire to? Nothing is more dazzling than individuality. (Editorial, *Nona*, Sep 2012, p. 12)

Perfection and Distinctiveness

Beauty is so subjective and everyone has their own distinction – they just need to be wise in seeking and safeguarding their individual exquisiteness.....we strive to find our unique distinction. That is what differentiates each individual's beauty in the eyes of others.
(Editorial, *Nona*, Oct 2012, p. 12)

These articulations of beauty that accent individuality demonstrate the need to distinguish one's beauty. These discourses suggest that the individuals' collective self as Malay Muslim strive to maintain a balance between the need to for inclusion and the need for individuality. Fashion is often used to make women stand out and being exclusively Malay Muslim is expressed as a privileged social category. However, when these women focus on their individuality, they identify themselves by their distinguishing features and the struggle to balance “me” and “we.”

While these women celebrate being exclusively Muslim with a strong sense of belonging to a collective, they have a simultaneous need for agency. Thus, while some conform to culturally established norms, others assert their sense of individuality and autonomy in their expressions of self. Some of these women use fashion to moderate the autonomy-conformity struggle (Sandikci and Ger 2010; Thompson and Haytko 1997) while others blatantly reject labels that are used to define them. French (2017) found that veiled and unveiled women assert their autonomy in different ways. The veiled Muslim woman tries to define, assert and represent herself as an individual with different hijab and fashion styles. The unveiled Muslim woman asserts her autonomy by not succumbing to social pressure to wear the hijab. Other women desire to be acknowledged as individuals and to be seen as more than daughters, wives, mothers, professionals or even members of a race. Social proscriptions suffocate them because education and economic independence have offered them the freedom to pursue their individual desires and goals. Dress is

used to assert some form of autonomy over self within the constraints of a culture and society that injects religious ideology into every aspect of a woman's life. Thus, we see how magazines are used as devices that offer contrasting discourses that affirm or contest religious ideology, promoting a strong sense of a collective "we" that acts as social capital against "me" as a distinct individual, offering autonomy and agency.

"Blend-In" versus "Stand-Out"

The third sub-theme discusses how exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse presents gendered beauty ideals as contradictory discourses over blending in and standing out in physical appearance as a demonstration of spirituality and distinction. Standing out suggests being tastefully fashionable and modern exhorting beauty as spirituality. Blending in looks at clothes as a means of displaying piety and denouncing beauty as an indicator of spirituality. Physical appearance is used to appraise individuals' religious piety and commitment to being Muslim:

Modestly Stylish

Exclusively for the hijab-wearing fashionista (Tagline for *Hijabista* magazine)

Change yourself – be your best! God willing.

For all you stylish Muslims, we post different fashion and hijab styles for 2013 that are modest and comfortable. (Editorial, *Nur*, Jan 2013, p. 8)

The word "modest" is used frequently in the magazines, implying that it fulfills the Malay Muslim stricture to cover or conceal. The principle of modesty in Islam is that specific parts of the female

body should be concealed from the male gaze. The word “modesty” suggests a differentiation and distinction between Malay Muslim and other women. It does not, however, prevent them from pursuing beauty. This is achieved with different hijab styles and clothes that fall within the requirements of Islam. The pursuit of beauty that is exclusively Malay Muslim allows for self-categorization, separating “we” Malay Muslims from “them,” non-Malay Muslims, in the pursuit of beauty.

Exhortation of beauty as spirituality sees the veiled Muslim woman accentuating her beauty and celebrating being beautiful. On the authority of Abdullah bin Masud “Allah is beautiful and he loves beauty” (Hadith Sahih Muslim 164) is often cited; Muslim believers must contain and reflect beauty. Malaysian magazines cite and promote the accentuation of external beauty within Islam. Muslim fashion and beauty are applauded and celebrated, contributing to a rising Islamic fashion industry that reflects the demand for modesty. In Malaysia, highways are lined with billboards promoting this industry and contributing to a consumption culture of beauty and femininity within Islam. This has led to new Malay Muslim styles. Its implicit message is spirituality in accentuated beauty and a new form of Islamic cosmopolitanism (Tarlo 2007) with its distinct non-Western style (Akou 2007). The creative styles of new Muslim fashion have gained traction globally leading to a rise in Islamic fashion consumer culture (Lewis 2007) Locally, dress becomes imbued with symbolic value that transmits institutional ideas to assist in the performance of gendered scripts (Scott 2001) of spirituality in accentuated beauty. Spirituality in accentuated beauty is celebrated as distinctively superior, promoting Islamic fashion and positioning it as the fashion of the future. Legitimacy is drawn from shared understandings of the recognizable rise of modest Muslim fashion globally, that carries its own meaning of spirituality displayed in Malaysia.

Within this Malay Muslim community, however, women can stand out as fashionably modest and wear different styles:

Your individualized style

Dress moderately and be wise in balancing your attire (Editorial, *Nona*, Sep 2012, p. 12)

Beware. Inner and leggings do not fulfill Muslim dress requirements. (Cover Page, *Nur*, Aug 2012)

The words “modest” and “moderate” also suggest not calling attention to oneself. The contradictory connotations of the word “modesty” and “moderate” are extremely subjective. Modesty can be interpreted as not drawing any attention, or covering and concealing to create beauty. Women will negotiate these often-competing ways of dressing to define themselves as Malay Muslim. Inner in the second excerpt are long sleeved tops women wear under their hijab so that their hair and neck are properly covered and to ensure that if a blouse is transparent, parts of the anatomy remain concealed. A normal long-sleeved top that slightly accentuates the contours of one’s figure can be interpreted as an inner, thus the excerpt is basically saying that being modest or moderate means wearing loose clothing that does not draw attention to self and that a Muslim woman who only wears a long baggy top with leggings is not fulfilling the Muslim dress code.

Against exhorting beauty as spirituality, denunciation of beauty as an indicator of spirituality focuses on a woman being chaste or virtuous and downplaying physical beauty. Fundamentalist Muslim literature propagates denial and condemnation of the body and the woman

is supposed to have an ascetic appearance (Zakaria 1988). Malay women are encouraged to wear loose, neutral-colored clothing. This idealized femininity places women at the center of family honor and value. Denouncing beauty by blending in therefore becomes a way for women to demonstrate that they are chaste or virtuous. The Quran (An-Nur 24:31) notes that believing women should lower their gaze and guard their modesty and that should not display their beauty and ornaments. This verse has been subject to many interpretations but these women take it literally to mean that spirituality is attained in denouncing beauty. They choose to dress modestly in public, believing this to be a form of sacrifice and religious obedience. These institutional systems of meaning inherently impose regulative legitimacy and are used as a surveillance mechanism that sanctions behavior (Scott 2003). Thus, magazine discourses become ideological tools that suggest paradoxical assumptions of spirituality in terms of outward appearance.

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate an overarching theme of the exclusivity of being Muslim as a beauty discourse expressed in three dialectical tensions of gendered beauty ideals (Figure 1) as firstly both something that is embraced and something that is imposed; secondly it is collectively and individually displayed in fashion and thirdly offers contradictory discourses over blending-in versus standing-out in physical appearance. These tensions in the negotiation of self and meanings ascribed to beauty correspond to changes at the national level where political ideology is espoused as religious ideology and used as a weapon of control in the contest for power and endorsement. Yazdanparast et al. (2018) demonstrate how marketing systems such as advertising can be used by political systems to advance their own ideologies. In contrast, we highlight how magazine

discourses can both support and contest religious ideologies imposed by political powers competing for their Muslim majority constituents.

The first tension demonstrates the necessary action that at the micro level women can take to navigating behavior and making meaning in social life as a result of macro level normative systems of acceptable behavior. These gendered scripts are used to infer and legitimize fashion behavior and women in turn rationalize these constraints as both liberating and fulfilling the morally governed expectations of society. The second tension exemplifies the shared beliefs as a result of macro level classifications of Malays and used as a symbolic frame at the micro level to support social sense-making of who they are as a people based on the historical past of the nation. Economic and social progress of the Malays over the years allow for this subtle but culturally supported sense of collectiveness and individuality displayed in fashion. The third tension reveals at the macro level the indirect form of religious authority in the marketplace displayed in the media which women at the micro level negotiate as spirituality displayed in physical appearance. Drawing on these, we propose an institutional logic immersed in Malay society that shapes identity and suggest that exclusively Muslim as a beauty discourse signifies a *logic of distinction* for Malay Muslim women. These are socially constructed and historically patterned assumptions, values, and beliefs that people of a specific context ascribe meaning to their daily lives or experiences (Dolbec and Fischer 2015, p. 1449).

This logic of distinction is revealed in three ways. In the first tension, the logic of distinction is used to define who the Malay Muslim is as a woman as she negotiates being modern and empowered while maintaining her role as a good wife and mother. In the second tension, the logic of distinction is used to define the Malay Muslim ethnic group within the context of a pluralistic Malaysia in which the NEP has led to a ‘hyper-ethnicization’ of all aspects of political,

social and cultural life in Malaysia (Ismail 2020). In the third tension, the logic of distinction is used to define who the Malay women is as a Muslim in a country where the gradual politicization of Islam in the country has led to religious adherence being a matter of state as much as personal choice (Ismail 2020).

Conspicuous Muslim consumption that is declarative, celebratory and resistant to Western values echoes Sandikci and Ger (2010), where the choice and transformation of the *tesettür* (veil) provides women with a sense of pride and affords them a higher moral ground. These women regain control using modern Muslim fashion to free themselves from the male gaze, positioning themselves instead as powerful subjects in representing self. However, while Izberk-Bilgin's (2012) informants were resistant to Western brands, they opposed any conspicuous consumption, since humility is demonstrated through austere consumption practices. Thus, while the modern middle class in emerging markets consume in creative ways as a means to reconcile disjuncture (Kravets and Sandikci 2014), those with more Islamist dispositions, particularly if they are disadvantaged and disempowered, reject material indulgence. In addition, modern Muslim women do not want to be perceived as backward or radical Islamist, and use fashion to forge self-defining social boundaries, further delineating the classes. Sandikci and Ger's (2010) participants attempted to differentiate themselves from the lower classes or older women. In Malaysia, the aim is to establish the perception that the Malay Muslims are no longer economically or socially backward and used as an emblem of distinction.

Our research set out to extend the discussion on how religious ideology contributes to gendered representations of beauty ideals. Drenten and McManus (2016) discuss that scholars suggest religion is of decreasing importance in consumers' market-driven life but in contrast we demonstrate how religious ideology permeates nearly every area of Malay Muslim women's lives.

Secularization and modernity relegate religion to a private space yet the resurgence of religion, particularly Islam contradicts this (Eickelman 2000). Ger (2013) has made an excellent argument for the resurgence of religion. Malaysia is unique; although it is a secular state, meaning it is officially neutral in matters of religion, it has an official religion. At the same time, an Islamic state is formed when its government is based on Sharia law. Here beauty discourses are used to challenge or reinforce an ideology that contributes to gendered experiences and reflects the uniqueness of Malaysian culture. We contribute to a discussion of how religious ideology represented by the media influences the marketplace that in turn affects behavior. Subsequently, behavior is rationalized using shared understandings and normative rules that legitimize behavior. We offer a unique perspective of the indirect forms of religious authority in markets (Mittelstaedt 2002) institutionally and socially in influencing gendered beauty ideals.

Gurrieri, Previte and Brace-Govan (2012) discuss women's bodies as sites of control and the inadvertent stigma and exclusion because of social marketing that often leaves women vulnerable. Women's bodies have to be disciplined into being viewed as acceptable; social marketing conveys normative shaming messages about women's bodies. In contrast, we demonstrate how bodies are to be concealed as sacred; fashion becomes a form of sanctification. In removing the pressure for women to accentuate their perfect bodies, a different expectation is placed on attire as a beauty ideal. We thus contribute to macromarketing by looking at the social shaping of fashion and beauty in the marketplace as gendered beauty ideals collide with religion.

Conclusion

As with any research, this study has its limitations. The magazines were only taken over a period of one year, but we believe this was enough to provide the current beauty discourses that are circulating in the nation. Future research can explore the historical development and ideological shaping of beauty discourses over time. Our research extends the discussion on how religious ideology shapes perceptions, discourses and consumption. Our findings highlight the powerful role of cultural representations in media and marketing that shape and direct discourses and consumption. We show that although Muslim fashion has grown globally, the issues faced differ in terms of the political, institutional and social sources of authority (Mittelstaedt 2002). The interplay between cultural representation of gendered beauty ideals in the media and macromarketing is paramount and we have brought this conversation forward. The Constitutional definition of what it means to be Malay, the sociohistorical and socio-political past of the nation are specific to Malaysia. However, the rise of Islamism globally brings about socio-cultural issues that intersect with nation states and future researchers may want to push the boundaries further.

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