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## A Cheap, Fast and Possibly Deadly Route to Beauty

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Like almost every woman, Fiordaliza Pichardo just wanted to look beautiful, so a few years ago, she began getting silicone injections from a woman she met through a friend in order to plump up her thighs and derriere.

She never expected to pay such a high price for her looks.

In March, a day after receiving an injection, Ms. Pichardo, 43, died of what the medical examiner later determined was a silicone embolism in her lungs.

The city's health department fears that the illegal use of silicone as an alternative to cosmetic surgery is on the rise. The city's poison control center has received three calls in the last 10 months from doctors who have treated patients injected with silicone; Ms. Pichardo's case was not among them. In the previous two years, there were only two such cases.

Health department officials say there may be other cases that have gone unreported, since doctors are not legally obligated to report silicone poisoning or even death, and since silicone is hard to detect through X-rays or CT scans. The department was planning Thursday to send an advisory by e-mail and fax to thousands of doctors advising them to watch for silicone poisoning cases.

Nationally, reports of buttock enhancement using silicone and similar thick liquids have surfaced from the Northeast to Miami, and the Food and Drug Administration is also planning to issue a warning on the dangers of such practices, Siobhan DeLancey, a spokeswoman, said Thursday.

"This seems to be kind of an underground occurrence, so it's difficult to get numbers of actual events and to know exactly what these people are being injected with," Ms. DeLancey said. "It's important to note that none of the products that are reportedly being used are approved for this purpose."

Ms. DeLancey said silicone was not approved for injection into tissues at all, only for use in the eyes and in certain implants where it is contained and cannot leak into tissue. She said the F.D.A. had the ability to conduct criminal investigations, and would encourage victims to come forward "so that we can document the problem."

Across the Internet, chat rooms, Web sites and blogs have sprung up discussing buttock injections.

The victims have become caught up in an underground beauty industry that uses injections of black-market, medical-grade silicone or industrial-grade silicone as a cheap, fast and easily accessible way to plump up

breasts, buttocks, thighs and even wrinkles.

The injections are popular among Latina women and transgender women, who may be unable to afford conventional plastic surgery and who tap into it through unlicensed practitioners working through word of mouth, city officials said.

Although side effects are fairly rare, silicone can migrate through the bloodstream, creating potentially fatal clots in the lungs, as it did in Ms. Pichardo's case, said Dr. Nathan M. Graber, director of environmental and occupational disease epidemiology for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. It can also migrate through tissues, leading to ugly lumps and chronic pain.

The injections are administered at home, in motel rooms, in makeshift offices or at "pumping parties," where the guests take turns injecting one another, officials said.

Young transgender women often seek out silicone injections because they are a quick way of making bodies more feminine, unlike hormone treatments, which may take years to work, said Dr. Nick Gorton, an emergency room doctor who treats transgender patients at the Lyon-Martin Health Services clinic in San Francisco.

"If you go to a pumping party, you can have it tonight," Dr. Gorton said. "It's a big temptation, especially among young people who, when you're 20, you're not thinking about your own mortality."

People are often reluctant to report side effects, because they feel that they are turning in a member of their community, health officials said.

Industrial-grade silicone can be bought at a hardware store. But Dr. Graber said there have been reports of the use of substitutes like castor oil, mineral oil, petroleum jelly and even automobile transmission fluid.

Dr. Suhail Raoof, chief of pulmonary medicine at New York Methodist Hospital, treated a woman with silicone poisoning in 2007. She came in complaining of shortness of breath, chest pain and coughing, reminiscent of pneumonia, he said, and told doctors that she had been injected with about 500 milliliters of silicone in each buttock about half an hour earlier.

Because silicone is not visible on an X-ray or a CT scan, Dr. Raoof said, diagnosis is difficult without a biopsy. Doctors used deduction to diagnose the cause of the woman's symptoms, and she survived, he said.

Ms. Pichardo was not so lucky.

Ms. Pichardo's 19-year-old daughter, Marinés Rodriguez, said that her mother began getting silicone injections several years ago after a friend introduced her to a cosmetologist.

Ms. Rodriguez said the cosmetologist went to Ms. Pichardo's home in the Bronx and to other clients in Manhattan and Miami. A cup of silicone cost \$800, and the cosmetologist would inject half a cup to two cups in a single session, Ms. Rodriguez said. Her mother, she said, "didn't really care about the price. It was more that she knew somebody who had this first."

Ms. Pichardo came to trust the woman. "She felt that was her friend, nothing could go wrong," Ms.

Rodriguez said.

Ms. Pichardo was last injected on March 17, and died the next day. Doctors thought she had pneumonia, Ms. Rodriguez said, and the family never thought to mention the silicone injections — which were discovered during the autopsy — because they thought they were harmless.

The medical examiner has ruled her death a homicide because she was injected by an unlicensed nonmedical practitioner, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the medical examiner. No charges have been filed. Paul J. Browne, a police spokesman, said, “We believe she has fled to the Dominican Republic and we are in discussions with the district attorney as to next steps.”

Ms. Rodriguez said the family was distraught, but found it hard to be angry. The day after her mother died, she said, the cosmetologist visited to pay her condolences. “We didn’t think she did it on purpose,” she said.

# 17 Beauty

International beauty contests promote and export a white, Western standard of beauty. Globalization is accelerating the adoption of these standards around the world. As new governments seek global economic integration, they often signal this by jumping on the Western beauty bandwagon. The proliferation of beauty contests in the former Soviet bloc countries is particularly striking.

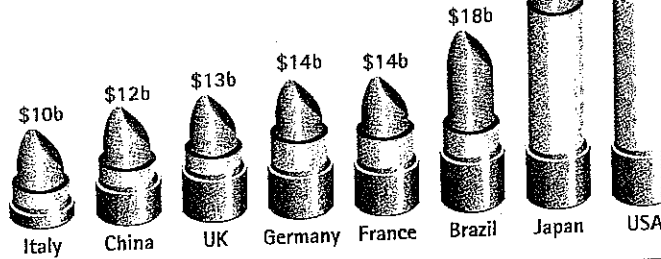
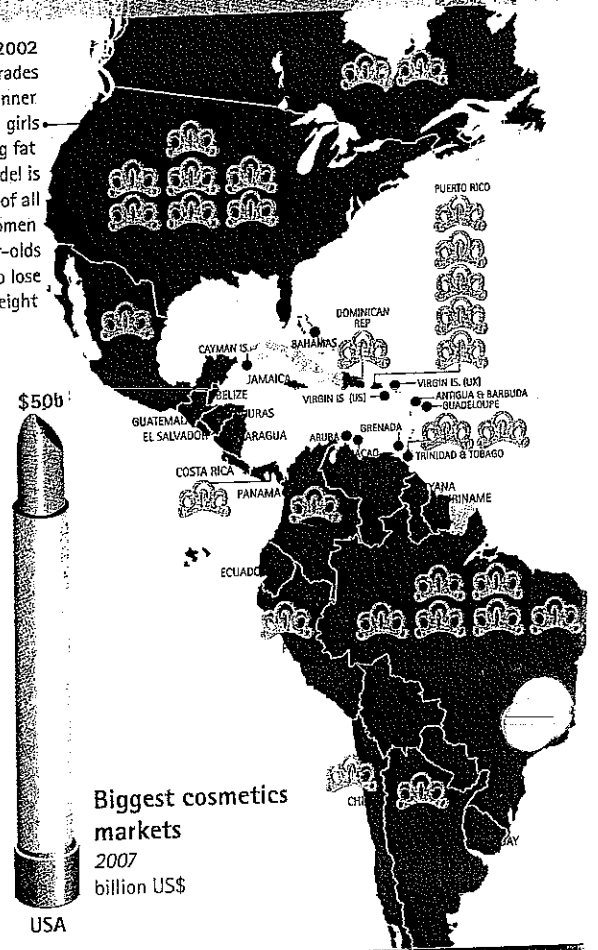
There are now few places in the world untouched by the commerce of beauty. A handful of companies control the international cosmetics market.

Women undergo a staggering amount of suffering in the pursuit of beauty. Around the world, but especially in the rich countries, tens of thousands of women each year have their bodies cut, shaped, stapled, tucked, and manipulated to conform to prevailing standards of beauty. A preoccupation with weight and body image has become an intrinsic part of the lives of women and girls. This is particularly so in the USA, but eating disorders are also noticeably increasing in Europe, Japan, and the former Soviet Union.

Contestants first participating in Miss Universe or Miss World:

- |  |                                   |                |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 1991: Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Ghana         | 1994: China, Slovakia, Zimbabwe   | 1998: Angola   |
| 1992: Croatia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary | 1995: Ukraine, Zambia, Seychelles | 1999: Botswana |
| 1993: Estonia, Swaziland                       | 1997: Croatia                     | 2002: Vietnam  |
|  |                                   | 2005: Mongolia |
|  |                                   | 2006: Cambodia |

- USA 2002
- 42% of girls in Grades 1-3 want to be thinner
- 81% of 10-year-old girls are afraid of being fat
- The average US model is thinner than 98% of all US women
- 80% of 13-year-olds have attempted to lose weight



2007

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 2000: Singapore, South Korea  
 2001: Greece, Morocco  
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