Women themselves performed this practice on their own daughters, without being forced or manipulated into it.

Women have a history fraught with oppression, hardship, and struggle. When examined closely, this history reveals a startling correlation between women themselves and their own participatory role in imposing control on each other. Why do women persist in practices that pose a myriad of health risks and limit their own rights in order to comply with the socially accepted ideals of beauty, purity, and femininity? Here, we discuss two such practices: foot binding in China and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Foot binding originated in the 10th Century and became historically rooted in Chinese culture, setting standards of what a "real" woman should look like. FGM is a process that involves partial to entire removal of external genitalia. Having this procedure performed raises the status of the recipient in various countries across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Through the analysis of primary and secondary scholarly sources, historical accounts, processes, and reasons for these extreme and life threatening practices, we will discuss these traditions from a Western perspective and from the perspective of the culture they originate from. The significance of this analysis is to gain a greater understanding of practices that our Western culture deems oppressive and inhumane towards women by first understanding the perspective of the women practicing these various "mutilations". Through the evaluation of Western customs in comparison to the rituals of other countries, we can gain a greater and more empathetic understanding of other traditions. By analyzing the ritual body modifications, women participate in that ultimately lead to control of the feminine gender, perhaps judgment can be diminished. In taking a closer look at similarities across countries and throughout history, it becomes increasingly apparent that practices common in Western cultures are viewed as equally violent, tortuous, and severe from the perspective of people from other cultures. From this comparison, we can conclude that what is beautiful and beneficial v.s. what is inhumane and mutilating varies across cultures. The conceptions surrounding the ideal of "beauty" perpetuates violent practices imposed on women, by women, across the globe.

In America, women continually change their bodies and appearances to fit more closely to the image that society deems beautiful. But just like Chinese foot binding and FGM, women are in control of this. This makes American women's relationship with control equally as prominent as that of the women in China and Africa. Although women have absolutely and undoubtedly faced oppression and discrimination throughout history in many different forms, with this notion that women have control over their own actions, it is hard to deny the fact that women have had a part in controlling their own oppression. So what is true freedom when women limit their own? Perhaps freedom is in the eyes of the beholder. Perhaps freedom depends on what the individual, or society deems to be liberating. And perhaps what is liberating, isn't always freedom itself, but is instead the ability to chose the amount of control to inflict on oneself.

"Most of the women I treat don't consider themselves mutilated. Many consider infibulation beautiful. When they first realize American women are almost all uncircumcised, they tend to react with pity and disgust, not envy." -Naval Nour, M.D.