ANDERSON SERANGOON JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC 2 Preliminary Examination 2022

GENERAL PAPER **8807/02**

PAPER 2 **26 August 2022**

INSERT **1 hour 30 minutes**

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

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Colette Marron considers the role of attraction in the modern world.

1   When Paris of Troy stole the beauteous Helen from her husband King Menelaus of Sparta, a lengthy war that cost the lives of millions ensued. Referring to these inordinate consequences of Paris' act of passion that enraged King Sparta to the point of him mounting a war by sailing ships across the Aegean Sea, playwright Christopher Marlowe memorably described Helen as "the face that launched a thousand ships" in his 16th   5 century play. An explanation for this remarkable beauty of Helen's, and indeed, of the notion of attractiveness itself, has been prominently attempted by the ancient Greeks, who believed perfect proportions were the key. Coined the Golden Ratio, the ancient Greeks claimed that this universal mathematical symmetry algorithm underlies our perception of attractiveness. Is beauty just in the eye of the beholder? Or do we all accept   10 the same objective standard of attractiveness?

2   According to a facial beauty template inspired by the Golden Ratio (and popular opinion), famous celebrities Beyoncé, Robert Pattinson, Brad Pitt, and supermodel Bella Hadid have some of the most attractive faces on earth. While the Golden Ratio may not be embraced by all, natural beauty, it seems, is a coveted gift bestowed by the heavens.   15 Due to such an enduring fixation, it is easy for unappealing individuals to envy those who are beautiful. It seems that the latter have won the genetic lottery. However, they need not despair about their physical visage. The beauty industry has potions and apparatus galore, guaranteed to turn any ugly duckling into a self-made swan. Globally, the beauty industry is a staggering $532 billion business and is projected to continue to grow.   20 Likewise, the global apparel market encompasses every kind of clothing, from sportswear to businesswear, from value clothing to statement luxury pieces. The make-up we put on and the clothes we wear have taken centre stage so much so that we regard them as necessities. In fact, they are a statement of our personality and values, through which we make ourselves attractive to other like-minded individuals. And it is   25 little wonder why attractiveness is contingent on these fashion choices. As expressed in modern parlance, "the clothes maketh the man".

3   Besides that, with fast-growing technology, more and more young people are empowered to curate the appearances they wish to project to others. So many young people are eager to portray themselves as beautiful. With the magical wave of the filter   30 wand, anyone can become drop dead gorgeous. Testament to this would be how millions of heavily filtered selfies with plumped lips, smoother skin, narrower noses, and wider eyes bordered with luscious lashes are constantly being shared on social media. This is especially so amongst teenage girls who use filters that promise to deliver model-esque looks. For those looking for swift and convenient solutions, neighbourhood beauty salons   35 are a one stop solution for all your cosmetic needs, and for the more digitally savvy, you are one click away from your beauty therapist. Furthermore, aesthetic technology is now so advanced that 20-minute slimming procedures have become a fashion trend. You never lose time looking your best.

4   The ancient Greeks would not have prized the quirky beauty of the likes of modern movie   40 stars Meryl Streep or Sissy Spacek. Victorian women, following the conventions of their day, adorned themselves with starched crinolines[1] and high necklines that nevertheless drew attention to their curvaceous figures. They, who regarded feminine features as the pinnacle of a woman's attractiveness, would be aghast at the gender-neutrality of modern stars such as Tilda Swinton and Cara Delevingne. Things have radically changed today.   45 In these modern times, celebrities' clothes push the boundaries of decency, presenting their emaciated bodies for public admiration. Regardless, the onerous ascent towards the pinnacle of beauty has been the labour of many historically as well as in modern times.

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[1] *Crinolines refer to a frame that was worn under a skirt by some women in the past in order to give the skirt a very round and full shape.*

5   The premium placed on beauty confounds no one. Physical attractiveness may serve as   50
      a gatekeeper directing us toward partners who are in good physical shape, age-
      appropriate, and able to reproduce. Scientists have found that the preference for
      symmetry is a highly evolved trait in many different animals and is equated with a strong
      immune system and good genes. While it is certainly no social leveller, the importance
      of beauty is immutable because we associate other positive qualities with a pleasing   55
      appearance. Perhaps this is the result of self-fulfilling prophecies. Attractive individuals
      are treated with more kindness than those who are less attractive. Growing up in such a
      bubble of positive experiences will in the end lead them to actually develop these positive
      traits. It is to no one's surprise that these attractive individuals have an easier time
      maintaining a healthy self-esteem and a better mental state.   60

6   However, as with most stereotypes, our expectations overly simplify reality. In fact, this
      focus on physical attractiveness has also received much criticism. It is considered
      shallow as being concerned about being beautiful on the outside means that there is too
      little care about the deeper, meaningful matters. It often leads individuals to jump to false
      conclusions about others – their personality, abilities, and lives – based on what is merely   65
      skin-deep. Consequently, discrimination based on physical attractiveness is prevalent.
      Within the workplace, attractive people are given unfair advantages in the workplace by
      being more likely to get hired, receiving better work evaluations, and being remunerated
      more than an equally skilled but unattractive person. According to a 2017 study in South
      Korea, both adolescents and adults reported appearance discrimination, and those who   70
      experienced discrimination due to their appearance were more likely to be suicidal than
      those who did not.

7   Due to such an obsession to be outwardly attractive, more and more are willing to go to
      extreme measures to make alterations to their appearances. For some, pursuing their
      ideal body type leads them down the path of eating disorders, bringing about devastating   75
      risks. Others put their bodies through painful, irreversible changes in a bid to feel better
      about their appearance. However, all too often, these "solutions" cause these individuals
      to end up neglecting the underlying issues. They fail to deal with the deeper issues that
      are rooted in poor self-image and researchers believe that around 15% of people seeking
      plastic surgery have body dysmorphic disorder[2], Despite undergoing surgery, these   80
      patients often end up transferring their anxieties to another aspect of their appearance,
      triggering profoundly unhealthy plastic surgery addictions. The irony of such skin-deep
      obsessions is that they are often deeply-seated.

8   Over the years, we have become increasingly determined to dispel the ill that is
      unrealistic standards of beauty. This determination is why we have arrived at a more   85
      expansive definition and inclusive world where the belief that "everyone is beautiful" is
      bolstered by both media and societal support. Indubitably, the attraction which beauty
      rouses in our minds is as unfathomable as it is inevitable. Hence, what remains
      unchanged is how beauty continues to captivate our attention and is a desperate quest
      for many. Paris of Troy probably would have never imagined that his actions would lead   90
      to the destruction of his kingdom, but he is certainly not alone in his helpless submission
      to the power of beauty.

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[2] *Body dysmorphic disorder refers a mental illness in which a person spends a lot of time worrying about how they look and wrongly believes there are problems with their appearance.*

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