



Through Thick and Thin
by Gok Wan, United Kingdom: Ebury Press (2010). 360 pp. NZ RRP \$39.99. ISBN: 9780091938956.
Reviewed by Christine Hart.

Gok Wan is most famous for his television makeover show *How to Look Good Naked*. The show first aired on the UK's Channel 4 in 2006 and has now aired in over 50 countries. From the moment he burst onto our TV screens in New Zealand, his enthusiastic flair and love for ladies of all shapes and sizes was obvious. His biography provides not only a backdrop for his flamboyant TV persona, but also exposes insecurities, latent and emergent, involving huge health problems and Wan's account of his journey through these is of significance to issues of sexual, physical and intellectual identity.

Working in his parents' Chinese restaurants throughout childhood, Gok filled his need for love and acceptance by 'filling up' on food. As a young adult in the 1980s, he began training to become an actor, and struggled with 'coming out' as gay to his family and friends. It was at this time that he attempted to regain some control of his life by starving himself. Wan's account of his battle with anorexia is both authentic and rare. It is estimated that only 10% of people with the disease

are male since men tend not to come forward for treatment.

Even as he became a successful makeup artist and stylist (sometimes through embellishing the truth, and at times by outright lying) Wan's health problems continued.

His stylist and makeup success lead to his television career and, on the first day of filming, despite personal insecurities, he tells how he used his own life struggles to enable him to be open and sympathetic to the women on his show. The result was immediate international success not only in terms of fashion, but also encouraging people to attend to their health, mental and physical.

Wan writes in an ebullient but sincere and humble manner, and credits his success to opportunities given to him despite his obvious lack of experience. Letters of thanks to family and friends are scattered throughout the book, but these may be more a form of self-therapy than a biographical account. Nevertheless, the narratives and images throughout *Through Thick and Thin* more than cohere.

Whether you're a fan of the show or have never seen it, *Through Thick and Thin* offers insight into a young man's intense struggle and ultimate rise to personal and professional success despite deep-seated anxieties and in the face of social prejudices. An inexperienced author, Gok Wan's heartfelt conversational style makes for an easy read, while providing a fascinating glimpse into universal issues of sexual, physical and intellectual identity.