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The Beauty Myth

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY



THE
beauty
myth



WOMEN'S STUDIES 101 2018

SUMMER REUNION

ANNIKA BRISKI

JACQUELINE BOTZ

INTRODUCING...

The Beauty Myth

Defined by Naomi Wolf (a well-known badass, feminist, author, etc.) as "a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement," the *beauty myth* is exactly that—a MYTH. While the concept of beauty has been historically relevant, its standards have shifted over time. This isn't an evolutionary adaptation, though, because the beauty myth is not biologically justified, it is merely a desperate demand of today's patriarchy to create a "counter-offensive against women" (Wolf 182).

BEAUTY MYTH BASICS

(on a Need-To-Know Basis)

- Beauty is neither Universal nor Changeless
 - Each generation creates their own beauty ideals, imposing them onto women from all walks of life.
- The myth is a way to undermine any and all achievements, no matter how minor, of women
 - Women's appearances can be used as a way to restrict their voices, an idea further explored in Valenti's "Beauty Cult."
- "Beauty" = a currency system in this contemporary society dominated by the myth.
 - Women's value and worth becomes systematically rooted in their physical attractiveness.
- The myth is "always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance" (Wolf 183)
 - Traits referred to as beautiful by a certain generation are just representations of feminine behavior believed to be "desirable"



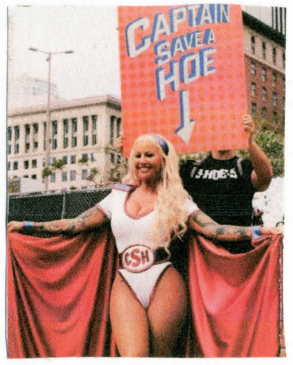
Appearance as

A "shut-the-fuck-up!" Tool

The stereotype of the Ugly Feminist, like the Beauty Myth, was established as a way to lessen the impacts of the women's movement and form a one-size-fits-all definition for feminists. This image functioned as a caricature so hideous it could stifle the female cry for change.

As Valenti stated in *Full Frontal Feminism*, "Nothing makes a gal clam up faster than someone telling her she's ugly" (206), and no matter how badly we wish to believe we're above such a reaction, Valenti is correct—ugly is the ultimate shut-the-fuck-up tool. Insulting a woman's appearance in response to her admittance of feminism, or any other statement, relies on superficial traits to define her worth; if a woman is "ugly," then she cannot also be a feminist, for in this case, two negatives do not equate to a positive. The only viable response to being classified as unattractive, then? *Shutting the fuck up.*

What Does a Feminist Look Like? →



Handwritten scribbles and symbols.

"Ugly" Feminist (Stereotypes)

- Ugly
- Hairy
- Unfeminine
- Lesbians
- Men hater
- Bra burners
- Reject motherhood
- Want matriarchy

Real Feminist

- All women (like all feminists) = beautiful
- Some are hairy, some keep it hairless
- Some are "feminine" some are not
- Feminists are both heterosexual and from all LGBTQ+ identities
- Bra burning is a stereotype
- Feminists are likely to be mothers
- Feminists are to be mothers

HINT!!

If you ever find yourself attempting to be a feminist: DON'T.

Handwritten scribbles and symbols at the bottom of the page.

The Mythical Norm

stereotype of the 'normal' woman, the mythical norm functions as the standard women are held to:

WHITE
HETEROSEXUAL
ABLE-BODIED
MIDDLE CLASS
THIN
YOUNG ADULT



establishing this ideal as "normal," its dichotomous counterpart is also defined (at a lesser value): abnormal, different, unusual- other.

With the beauty myth and this mythical norm alike are "debarate... in the way 'beauty' so directly contradicts men's real situation" (Wolf 185). Not every woman is white, abled, thin, young, and in the middle-class. If we were to focus on this specific intersection of life, it'd quickly become apparent that few are all the above.

What is the reality? There is no set standard for womanhood; 'normal' is a social construct that restricts tangible bodies of human beings- of women. With this unattainable expectation, female voices are silenced, thoughts deemed irrelevant when projected from a supposedly unattractive being. Like appearance overall, the mythical norm is utilized as a "shut-the-fuck-up" tool, reminding women that their importance and value can solely be traced to their 'beauty.'



Campaigns, like Aerie (left), make it their mission to spread body positivity, featuring women of all shapes, sizes, colors, ages, and

abled and disabled models. Inclusivity like this is ideal in ads; without representation, women are made to

BEAUTY MYTH

time line 1920-PRESENT

It seems that every time women gain independence, something comes along to slow the pace of advancement. Since the first wave of feminism began and even before then, the beauty myth has been introducing new and even more unattainable goals for in order to halt the progress women achieve.

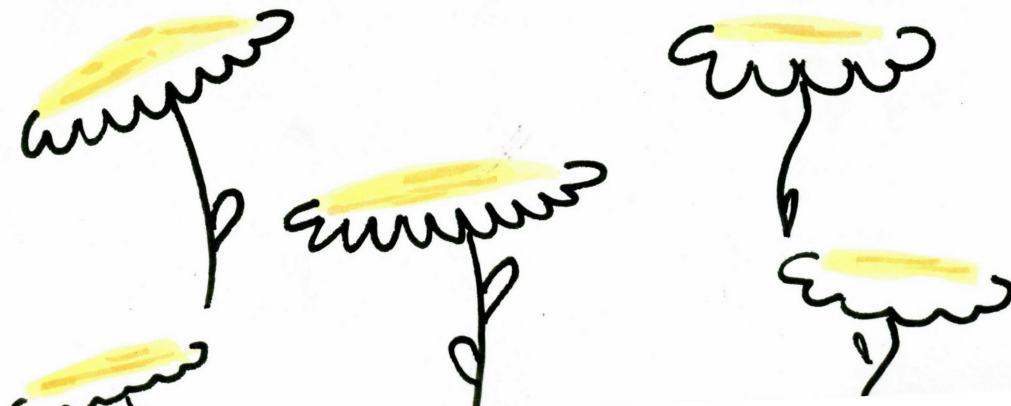
1920- After women gain the right to vote as a result of the 19th amendment, the flapper ideal became big. This ideal brought many changes to how the west viewed beauty because of the introduction of mass media.

Through television and movies, a more recognizable and uniform beauty standard was created, and the main focus of many women shifted towards the yearning to be thin above all else.

1963- When Betty Friedan put a name to the collective dissatisfaction women across America were feeling due to the monotony of being bound to housework, women began to feel a connection where they previously felt alone.

With this solidarity however, came a way in which women were set back. The rise in the popularity of the model Twiggy, created a focus for women on wanting to look like her rather than on the goal of escaping the routine and tedium of being a housewife. The recurring idea of the beauty myth used to slow women's advancement is extremely effective, as it uses appearance as a weapon.

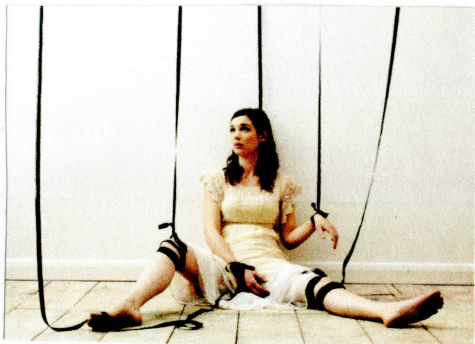
1973-Present- We are currently stuck in the desire of attaining the beauty myth, or the idea that beauty is objective and it should be a goal to be beautiful. The most recent gains for women include the availability of the birth control pill as well as abortion.



HOW the PATRIARCHY → PERPETUATES → the BEAUTY MYTH

The patriarchy is defined as "a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it." Although at times it is blatant that women in society are expected to go to greater lengths in order to fit a given idea of beauty, it is often unknown why this pressure to conform is becoming so increasingly present in modern times. Because we live in a male-centered society, it is maintained that the females should be the ones to alter their appearance in order to fit to the given standards and appeal to the male gaze.

However the ideals that are believed to be natural are nearly impossible to attain without the use of makeup or even surgery. In fact, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, of all the cosmetic surgical procedures in 2017, 13% were males, and 87% were females. Although some of the surgeries included in this statistic are for medical reasons, the majority are cosmetic surgeries done in order to change one's appearance. The fact that the majority of people receiving plastic surgery are women strongly suggests that the idea of the beauty myth is pressuring women to change in order to fit in more so than men.



The PERFECT lady

for dummies and even the most
UNLADYLIKE CREATURES

Given the backwards status of today's society, characterized by its growing job opportunities, "body positivity," equal pay, and other distasteful progressions, we often lose sight of what we are responsible for as wives, daughters, and females of any breed—of our womanly duties. With this guide, females will be reminded of their proper workplace (the home) and position (subordinate) in life. The reality is that women have not advanced or shifted, only the expectations assigned to us.

The most crucial aspect in determining a woman's worth is, as it always has been, her physical appearance. In order to reach peak beauty, one must be thin, but curvy in all the right places; tall, but not taller than a man; blonde, but only if naturally so; and sport a plump pout, but remain silent unless laughing at male humor. For inspiration, see Kate Moss, Paris Hilton, or the original icon, a perfect balance of sexy and sweet: Barbie. Outside of looks and domestic services, women are superfluous, their existences necessary only in providing a nice piece of arm candy. It is crucial to remember that women are meant to be seen, NOT heard, and to speak only when spoken to. Acting out and defiantly voicing opinions are guaranteed to result in one being labeled a "feminist," or a supporter of equal political, social, economic rights for women. With this label comes stereotypes of being ugly, hairy, a man-hater, a lesbian, anti-motherhood, etc.; are our basic human rights worth that critique? Wouldn't you rather be attractive than successful?

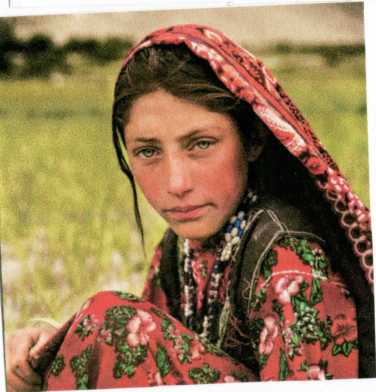


Because for women, there is no decision between beauty and brains—making that choice would require having a brain in the first place.

BEAUTY is SOCIALLY and CULTURALLY CONSTRUCTED

In western society, the ideal beautiful woman is present almost everywhere, from magazines, to television and movies. Features of the idealized western women include large breasts, a tiny waist, big lips, among other standards. We are told as a society that this is the image that every woman should strive for, and that it is healthy, desirable, and universal across countries. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.**

The ideal image is nearly impossible to attain without the aid of surgical enhancement or photoshop.



AFGHANISTAN

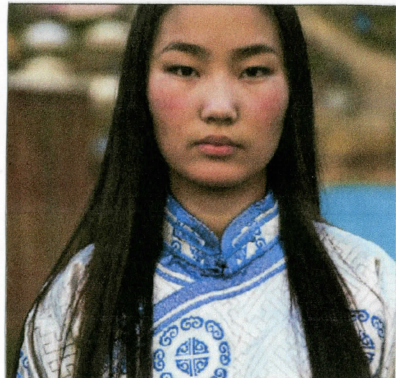
WHAT similarity do all of these women share?
THAT'S RIGHT! THEY ARE ALL BEAUTIFUL.

Beauty does not have a single definition.

Furthermore, beauty is not objective, and this becomes clear when comparing the concept across cultures. In her book "The Atlas of Beauty," Mihaela Noroc compiles 500 portraits of women from around the world to show the beauty of diversity. This book is a clear example of how false the idea of objective beauty is.



Ukraine



MONGOLIA

dirty lollipop



Virginity is an important aspect of a woman's life. If you give it away too quickly you will be a "used piece of gum" or "a dirty lollipop," **THIS WILL MAKE YOU LESS DESIRABLE by everyone in society.**

SLUT SHAMING

PEOPLE USE SLUT SHAMING TO CAUSE FEAR.

God forbid a woman takes pleasure and control of her own body.

This is a similar tactic to lesbian baiting because as a person, you don't want to be categorized. The patriarchy uses these tactics to bring women down.

the Kardashians



This family is known for their big butts, big lips, and small waists. They generate large amounts of income from their TV show, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, as well as various fashion and cosmetic lines they own. There is defiantly an influential factor that they bring to the younger generation in todays society. Their business is superficial, built on nothing but a brand. Their influence does not benefit our society in a genuine way, but their show can provide you with some ridiculous and binge-worthy entertainment.

To place such large expectations on women's bodies is confusing and frustrating to many girls & women. Most people don't have the money to get plastic surgery like these celebrities do. When exposed to these "beauty norms" it can severely threaten people's self confidence and body image.

TESS HOLLIDAY

&
LOVE
your
FAT
Self

by Courtney
E. Martin

Tess Holliday is an American plus size model based in Los Angeles.

She was discovered by a plus size clothing company and was accepted into their brand. At the same time she was chosen to take part in A&E's television series "HEAVY." She has been the face of many magazines & campaigns since. Tess Holliday has started a lot of controversy within social media & the fashion industry. There are many cases where people attack Tess Holliday for her size and disregard her for the message she is actually trying to share. Many people question if they should support Tess Holliday because of her health.

ARE PEOPLE ACTUALLY concerned about her health? OR ARE they simply UNCOMFORTABLE because of her WEIGHT?

145 lbs → 175 lbs OVERWEIGHT
175 lbs + OBESE

According to MARTIN "JUST because someone is predisposed to fatness and struggles with the complex psychological implication of food and body image does NOT disqualify them from being brilliant talented & effective."

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To conclude, although the beauty myth has not always been recognized for what it is, does not mean that it has not been oppressing women for many years.

ANNIK