

**Myth vs. Facts about Beauty Standards**

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Every day, we are surrounded with images of “perfection” and those standards are girls with glass skin, thin waists and sculpted features that seem impossible to obtain. These toxic ideals shame natural features, feed onto insecurities by making people feel unworthy and just not enough. Society pushes the idea that beauty is objective to certain features only. Such as thin bodies, flawless skin and straight hair. These unrealistic ideals tell us that if we do not look a certain way, we are not enough. These ideas make us question our worth and shame our natural features. The myth that if we follow along with societies beauty standards – flawless skin and having a perfect body. By having those things, it will make you more confident, wanted, and respected. True beauty should start with yourself and not based on society's impossible standards. Instead of chasing harmful ideas, we should start with self-acceptance, we should define beauty on our own terms by embracing our individuality and self-worth without the need for validation from others. We’re told that if we look a certain way, we’ll be happy and loved. But the truth? That is the myth.

Trying to fit into society’s beauty standards is impossible. When you consistently try to fit into society’s mold of beauty, it can become exhausting. But throughout history, the concept of beauty has continuously changed across different generations and cultures. Each era has shaped its own ideas, heavily influenced by cultural norms, societal pressures, social media and particularly in shaping expectations of women. An example from Tracey Owens Patton (2006) of beauty standards that was influenced by cultural norm is “The Chinese practice of foot binding was one that forced women to conform to beauty ideals that reified patriarchal privilege and domination” The Chinese foot binding was a practice to create smaller feet. This practice motivated several factors such as beauty being the main priority. Small, arched feet were considered a symbol of beauty, being modest and femininity. Women with small feet were considered more desirable for their partners. This painful practice of beauty also restricted their autonomy, making it difficult for them to walk or move freely, making them dependent. This lack of mobility towards a woman’s physical freedom also symbolized their restricted roles within society. It serves as a mechanism to maintain control over women, making them dependent and subservient to the male-dominated structures of the time. In many countries, beauty standards are different. According to Michelle Shin, she voices the concern about the makeup in South Korea is

“usually only offered for lighter skin tones, as companies rarely manufacture and produce products for the more tanned, natural Asian skin tones.” This idea is harmful to women and children. The beauty industry limits its products by offering for deeper or more natural Asian skin tones. Beauty should be about being inclusive towards others. We all deserve products that reflect who we are, not who we are told we should be. When the industry constantly promotes “pale” and “dewy” as the standards, it sends a message to others that: our natural features are not enough.

In female-dominated professions, hiring practices were influenced by appearance-based standards. These standards reflected on societal expectations and reinforced gender stereotypes and limit opportunities for women who do not fit the physical criteria. “Female-dominated professions, like nurses, secretaries, and flight attendants, were often hired based on appearance. Notably, Pan-Am, an American airline, had specific height and weight requirements for its female flight attendants during the 1960s.” (Alexander, 2024). During the 1960s, these standards reflected the societal expectations that women in these positions should be a particular image of femineity, elegance, and attractiveness. By prioritizing appearance over qualifications or skills, such as hiring practices, this reinforces gender stereotypes and limited career opportunities for women who did not fit the criteria. Even today, beauty standards vary from country to country. In South Korea, for example, Michelle Shin points out that “South Korean women who don’t conform to beauty standards set by men face disadvantages in the workplace” (Shin, 2019). This shows us how women are judged more for their looks and appearances than their skills. This reflects how deeply rooted sexism still are. As someone who has grown up surrounded by these beauty ideals, this is truly disheartening.

Unrealistic beauty standards imposed by society creates harm to women by pressure to conform unattainable ideas negatively impacting their self-esteem and mental health. “There are so many unrealistic beauty standards societies have placed on women, and it causes much more harm than good.” (Elcan, 2023). These beauty standards define a woman’s worth based on how she aligns with images on social media. The harm goes beyond just appearance. In addition, “Being beautiful was very important in Greek culture, and many women were willing to sacrifice their health in pursuit of physical perfection.” (Sterna, 2020). Refusing and ignoring the value of other qualities that you have are beautiful such as your

intelligence, kindness, achievements, your passions, and you just being your authentic self. When I was younger, I was bullied constantly because I did not look like how the “popular” girls looked. I had a lazy eye; my style was not aligning with the trend then and I was simply different. I did not have blonde hair, blue eyes, I was bigger than most of the girls and I did not have straight teeth. This lowered my self-esteem, made me insecure and I forced myself to become somebody I am not because of the constant nagging and horrible bullying towards me. This only drained me because I was not living my authentic self. I should not have to change something about myself based on other standards, but my own. I was fine with who I was before of the bullying. I was made fun of so often, I stopped wearing my favorite clothes, I started watching 20-minute workout videos by Chloe Ting and it got so bad to the point where I ended up developing an eating disorder and constantly apologized when I did not do anything. It’s been years since this happened, but I catch myself apologizing when there is no need. Even to inanimate objects. The image of getting bullied is a burned image in my mind, that I cannot erase. I tend to constantly apologize because I am afraid of this experience occurring again.

Throughout generations, beauty standards have evolved constantly throughout decades. With each era idealizing different body types and physical features they have their own definition about beauty standards. In the 1940s and 1950s, the hourglass shape was popular. In the 1960s, a youthful, thin body and long, straight hair were favored. The 1970s ideal featured a thin, tanned physique and a “sensual look.” In the 1980s, the preferred body type was mesomorphic—thin, muscular, and toned with large breasts (Alexander, 2024). For many generations, beauty standards have changed. Instead of focusing on these expectations, it is empowering and important to take the time to define your own beauty standards. This means embracing your unique traits and understanding that true beauty starts with you. By you being comfortable in your own skin can help break you free from society’s impossible ideals. When you focus on what makes you feel good, rather than trying to mold yourself into something you are not, you allow the freedom to appreciate and love yourself for who you truly are.

Because of beauty standards, many women struggle with low self-esteem issues, the feeling of being unworthy and mental health challenges if they do not meet them. As Sartorial Magazine (2023) states, “The damaging beauty ideals and standards are dangerous and toxic, showing to have extremely negative

effects. So many women believe they must be “perfect” just to survive in this overly critical world.” The belief that perfection is necessary to succeed in society especially in a “critical world,” can contribute to unhealthy behaviors such as dieting, starving, excessive exercising and even developing an eating disorder. These toxic expectations that society places on young and older women, just does not affect how we look at ourselves. This limits a woman’s sense of self-worth, their physical appearance and what we are truly capable of.

Embracing our differences and individuality and defying societal stands empowers us to love and accept what we all have. Allowing us to make choices that align with our authentic self, our desires and comfort. “So defying society’s standards is how we learn to love our true, authentic selves. If you want to put on a full face of makeup, do it. If you are hungry, eat a meal. If you do not want to shave, then do not.” (Elcan, 2023). When we defy beauty standards, this allows individuals to break free and make their own choices. This change of mindset helps build confidence as we learn to appreciate who we are without seeking approval and validation from others. True confidence comes from feeling good in your own skin. It is about recognizing things that make you, you. When we choose to ignore these norms, we create self-expression and authenticity. Whether we choose to wear makeup, enjoy food without guilt or not shaving, we reclaim our worth and our true beauty comes from our own self-love and expression. It starts with you.

So yes, society’s beauty standards are toxic. It is clear that society’s beauty standards are unrealistic, negative, harmful, and impossible to reach. They are made-up ideas designed to control how we feel about ourselves. These standards have a significant negative impact on women by impacting their mental health and self-esteem. While drafting this essay, I gained a deeper understanding of just how damaging beauty standards are, especially on social media, and how they are embedded into our culture. Throughout research, I learned that women including those that I know and even myself, struggle with body image because of society’s expectations. Sometimes I find myself afraid to walk outside without makeup. But I am trying to let go of that fear because real beauty is not about how others view me. It’s about how I see myself. Reflecting on my own expectations, only to realize that true happiness comes from accepting myself as I am. I shouldn’t have to change myself for someone because they simply do not like me for me. Beauty standards are false and not real. The only expectation for beauty standards should not revolve around others

beauty standards, but your own. You should change only for you and no one else. Redefining beauty is not about appearance; it is about authenticity. It is about how we show up for ourselves and for each other. Whether it is smiling at a stranger, laughing with a friend, or just being kind. Those little moments of warmth and connections are just as beautiful. Instead of chasing impossible beauty standards, we should embrace our uniqueness and define beauty in our own terms.

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