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Shattering The Myth: Exploring Beauty Standards and Their Role in Perpetuating Gender Inequality

Dr. Dana Cole

Harold Washington College, The United States

Abstract

Beauty standards have long exerted a profound influence on individual psyches, social practices, and interpersonal relations. Yet, critical interrogation of these norms remains insufficiently represented in scholarly discourse. While conformity to prevailing aesthetic ideals may yield certain social advantages—frequently conceptualized as "Pretty Privilege," "Beautyism," or "Lookism"—such compliance simultaneously reinforces patriarchal structures and systemic gendered oppression. These standards propagate a narrowly defined and often unattainable image of beauty, engendering pervasive feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and self-objectification among those who internalize them. This presentation undertakes a critical examination of beauty standards through both cultural-historical and cross-cultural lenses. It interrogates the mechanisms through which unrealistic ideals are perpetuated at individual and institutional levels, and explores their intersections with broader systems of power, control, and social stratification. Employing a deconstructive and intersectional feminist framework, the analysis scrutinizes the origins, cultural-symbolic meanings, and beneficiaries of normative beauty discourses. Additionally, the presentation incorporates personal narrative as a means of contextualizing the lived experience of navigating beauty norms, while fostering an inclusive space for collective reflection. Through storytelling and critical dialogue, this work aspires to challenge dominant aesthetic paradigms and advocate for cultural transformations that affirm intrinsic human value beyond physical appearance, thereby contributing to the pursuit of gender equity and social justice.

Keywords: Beautyism, feminism; cross-cultural; objectification; capitalism; deconstruction