

The ‘Perfect Body’ Myth: Gendered Beauty Standards and How They Benefit Capitalism

Janvi Navaneeth

Gems New Millenium Al Khail

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my teacher for their guidance, encouragement, and valuable feedback throughout the completion of this report. Their support helped me develop a clearer understanding of the topic and improve my approach to research and writing.

I am also thankful to my school for providing the resources and environment necessary to explore social issues such as gender norms and inequality. I extend my appreciation to my classmates and peers for their discussions and insights, which contributed to shaping my perspectives.

The ‘Perfect Body’ Myth: Gendered Beauty Standards and How They Benefit Capitalism Is perfection really a goal or just a product being sold to us?

In this world full of impractical beauty standards and suffocating social norms, it is impossible for the common man to not be influenced. The need for acceptance and the need to feel like you belong is what drives people to follow a lifestyle that molds everyone into becoming what these major companies shapes them to become. In a popular study done by social critic Herbert Marcuse clearly discerns the difference between false and true needs that people perceive mentally. True needs are needs that are deeply rooted in autonomy and it gives you a feeling of individuality, creative fulfilment and cognitively aids your human connections. Whereas, “false needs” are ones that are falsely created by the corporate culture around you which makes you believe in the perpetual ideas that they advertise you which in turn offers you simulated satisfaction.

The media plays a crucial role in conceptualising the idea of a ‘Perfect Body’ among men and women in our society. Beauty standards and norms vary in different countries depending on the beauty standards that the media puts out to the particular audience of that nation. These days it's more common to see an ongoing trend around the world through social media platforms like Instagram and Tiktok in which they put out content to cater to young adults and old aged people, but mainly Gen Z kids. They are known to follow new tiktok trends and detailed multi-step skincare routines that they don't even require and when indulging in these new products and trends that are put forth in the name of content, we forget to think logically and as a result we fall for agendas and norms that are then normalized.

Social media not only emphasize on makeup and beauty trends but also pressurize men into believing that they need to look a certain way which portrays them to be lean and muscular. Gym and training content for men promotes unhealthy habits and unrealistic beauty standards. This further escalates to body dysmorphia, anxiety, eating disorders, self harm, low self esteem and feeling insecure because they can not achieve what they see online, and that's when these companies push through with their marketing strategies to promote products such as protein powders They also constantly seek validation from others

online and even edits their own pictures to give themselves the ideal body they dream of but this is not sincerely talked about as guys refrain from talking about their true feelings.

These social norms are mentally attained at a young age and they are passed down from one generation to another, but just more extensively as time passes, capitalist markets grow and these large corporate companies market more with newer marketing tactics. This early exposure shapes their idea at a young age to believe that they are supposed to look a certain way to be accepted by the society and makes them easier baits. Their baseline of beauty becomes unfeasible and just an illusion they wanna thrive to portray, but would never realistically achieve. We all individually perceive different things as beauty but society has shaped it so that no one is able to break the barriers of beauty which we are made to blindly believe. Even filters and photo editing platforms become widely used to a point the users are unrecognisable and refuse to accept themselves without it.

Pressure asserted by societal expectations plays a part in the need to consume when it may not even be that essential for them, but the strategic marketing of these cogent companies makes them believe otherwise. Companies market themselves in countless ways in this generation to make people in every age group feel the need to invest in their products. So instead of helping these people break free from the cruel beauty standards, they intensify it to their needs so that they are able to profit from it. When a product is newly released into the marketplace, the company makes sure This is how capitalism shapes beauty standards to their own benefit.

Why do beauty trends shift every few years?

The shift of trends between years indicate a clear example of capitalism as shift changing standards helps release newer products into the market which results in large-scale profit for the companies and henceforth, showcasing a major uprise for capitalism. If beauty standards and trends in social media do not keep shifting then with the influence of marketing from these compelling companies then the industry would just stop growing as a whole, without any large target audience for their product. As trends deliberately change throughout the years people also feel the need to catch up to the latest trends and this pressure to constantly be valid and updated is what compels them to go after these marketing schemes for the advantage of the growth of capitalism.

Capitalism profits from narrow beauty standards and naive people who don't even realize the bigger troubles they are gonna face in the future from investing in these hurtful unrealistic trends.

It's imperative that we understand the tactics of these major companies' marketing schemes to gain profit is only hurting our bank accounts and mental health. Our future generations are going to face a much bigger backlash from these social norms and harsh trends as media grows and gets more accessible to young nurturing minds of the next generation.

Bibliography

1. iamanoushkajain. "Commodifying Beauty: What Beauty Trends Speak about Capitalism - Enroute Indian History How Capitalism Shapes Beauty Standards on Social Media: False Needs, Influencers, and the Business of Self-Image." *Enroute Indian History*, 13 May 2025, enrouteindianhistory.com/commodifying-beauty-what-beauty-trends-speak-about-capitalism/.
2. Stafford, Erin. "OPINION: The Beauty Standard Is a Damaging Function of Capitalism and Media Consumption." *OPINION: The Beauty Standard Is a Damaging Function of Capitalism and Media Consumption - Indiana Daily Student*, 29 Feb. 2024, www.idsnews.com/article/2024/02/opinion-

beauty-standard-capitalism-media-consumption-hollywood-film-instagram-face.

Student reflection

As a Grade 11 student at GEMS New Millennium School, writing this article helped me understand how capitalism and beauty standards shape modern society. While researching, I realized how beauty industries depend on insecurities to generate profit, especially among young people. This made me reflect on how often we absorb these standards without even noticing. I learned that many of the expectations we see online are not just cultural but also driven by economic motives. This article pushed me to think more critically about the media I consume and the industries behind it. Overall, the process helped me grow as a writer and think more deeply about issues that affect people my age.