

Throughout history, women have been subjected to contradictory standards. Society is constantly telling them they're too skinny, too large, a prude, a slut, too much makeup, too much acne, and on and on. They are criticized far more often than their male counterparts. Society judges women largely based on their looks, while men are viewed based on their strength. "A man does something, it's strategic, a woman does the same, it's calculated. A man is allowed to react, a woman can only over-react... A man stands up for himself, a woman throws a temper tantrum" (Taylor Swift). In an age of social media and influencers, women and young girls are often pressured to adhere to an unrealistic standard of beauty. In addition to the constant objectification of women, men are also being objectified as well. In the past couple of years, the idea of toxic masculinity has become more prominent. Men, as they are growing up, are too often chastised for being emotional or vulnerable. The "ideal" man should possess strength; be competitive; be assertive, confident, and independent, but show no emotions. These toxic standards often create mental health issues or eating disorders. Although these unrealistic standards are slowly becoming more talked about, there is still a long way to go.

Growing up, the models I saw in magazines were paper thin with flawless skin and sky-high legs. It was an idea implanted in my head, that for me to look like them, I had to change myself. Since women are portrayed in such a specific way through mass and social media, it creates an unhealthy obsession for others to want to look the same as those they see on social media. Thus, this idea compromises the ability of women to be accepted in today's society. Women are also taught to dress for the male gaze. Girls in school are prohibited from wearing sleeveless shirts and jeans with holes in them under the guise of them being inappropriate. However, a teacher personally told me in middle school that my shoulder was distracting my

seek validation from the males in our lives to ensure we measure up to their standards. The beauty myth plays a role in how beauty is perceived in society today.

When I go out on the weekends, I dress for myself; I like to look nice and dress up a bit. However, the majority of the time I go out with my friends I regret choosing the outfit I did. Men, much older than me, stare; they blatantly stare. It is, frankly, unwanted attention. Comments they mean to be flattering come off as creepy and uncomfortable. I have been told multiple times that my dresses are too short, I am showing too much skin, or I am not covered enough. This type of standard has caused me to become very insecure about myself and what I choose to wear. I have heard several other women my age complain about the same type of behavior they received on social media. It is quite honestly sad that girls are scared to get dressed in the morning; they are scared of what others will have to say about them. I consider myself to be quite sensitive. I am the type of person that wants to please everyone. I tend to take to heart what others have to say about my appearance. I always look at the girls that I see on social media and wonder why I do not look like them. I think about all the things I would have to change about myself to look like that. I have heard from a couple of people who I thought were my friends, “you’re gonna go out in *that*?” or “*that’s* what you’re going to wear, are you sure?” These comments made me feel bad about myself. It hurt that those closest to me did not believe that I fit into their standard of beauty. I shouldn’t have to change different things about myself in order to fit into someone else’s box.

Many of my friends have shared instances where they have felt objectified by guys or even by other women. One of my friends was kicked out of a grocery store because they required a shirt and shoes to be worn at all times, we live at the beach. To some people what she was

friend mentioned to me a time she was at a party and kept being hit on by guys because of what she looked like and what she was wearing. Now at parties, we tend to not interact with the guys there and stick with the group of friends that we came with.

Noami Wolf explains in her book why women are often judged based on their appearance; she calls this the beauty myth. “Women both young and old told me about the fear of aging; slim women and heavy ones spoke of the suffering caused by trying to meet the demands of the thin ideal. (Wolf, 1). Beauty myths create an environment of competition for women. The only way women are ever going to come together is if they realize that they are being suppressed, but they can not come together if they are in constant competition with one another. This type of structure keeps men in power and creates a beauty standard that is completely controlled by men. Although women may play into the beauty myth standard this is largely due to the power the men hold, and not what the women believe. The beauty myth in a sense is an unattainable standard that women are expected to follow. This standard punishes women physically and psychologically for their failure to achieve and conform to it.

While women are portrayed more sexually, men have to appear tough and masculine. Hegemonic masculinity explains why men are able to maintain dominant social roles over women. It also acknowledges that men should display behaviors of courage and strength and includes the refusal to acknowledge weakness. This ideal also discourages other various behaviors such as the expression of emotions, or the need to seek help from others. Connell seeks to explain why so many men and women willingly participate in their own oppression (Connell, 1). Men accepted the ideals of hegemonic masculinity so as to enjoy the material, physical, and

by some as beneficial to men. This constitutes the most socially valued form of masculinity.

Women are often forced to follow beauty standards that are created by men and their need and control for power. I see this play out whenever I go out with friends, or high school and middle school dress codes that objectify thirteen-year-olds. Women standing up to men and taking back control is how we are going to fight the oppression that the beauty myth has created. Men can fight the oppression of hegemonic masculinity by expressing their emotions and femininity. One way to change a person's life is to not buy into the stereotypes of the beauty myth and hegemonic masculinity.