

The Double Standards in Beauty Standards

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Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, someone said a long time ago. According to this proverb, beauty is subjective; what looks beautiful to one might not appeal to another. Yet, when it comes to beauty in terms of physical appearance, is it really subjective? Aren't we consciously or subconsciously influenced by certain standards when we think about beauty on the outside?

These beauty standards are not set according to a certain individual's personal taste. They reflect trends visible in mainstream media, slowly setting an ideal of what a man or a woman should look like, or at least *try* to look like. Thus, expectations are created, based on which we judge whether someone is beautiful or not.

However, some of these expectations – superficial as they are – are not universal. In some cases, what is perfectly fine for men is unacceptable for women with no good reason, and vice versa. Let's look at some of these standards.

Body and Facial Hair

All human bodies grow hair, unless you have alopecia universalis (Google it). The most coveted body hair is the one that grows on our heads, but as for the rest of the body, beauty standards diverge drastically between the two sexes.

For men, body hair is a symbol of manliness, especially in some areas like the torso and the face. Although in some settings a clean shaven face is preferred, men don't have to worry much about the hair on their bodies, as long as it grows on the desired stretch of skin.

For women, it's a completely different story. Movies, TV shows and glossy fashion magazines give one the illusion that women are born without a single hair follicle, except those responsible for hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. Even the models in hair removal cream commercials don't have any body hair! These commercials always make me wonder what so-called imperfections they want to remove from their already smooth, flawless skin.

A cursory glance at one's arms and legs is enough to debunk the myth that women don't have body hair. Yet, many women go through great lengths to regulate or eradicate the growth of body hair, spending a significant amount of time and money to wax, shave or laser the undesirable hair away. Hair is allowed to grow in certain places like the eyebrows, but that too is carefully monitored by regular threading, lest the two arches become too unruly or even worse, join in the middle to form a unibrow.

This is not to say that I'm condemning women who get rid of their body and facial hair. After all, it depends on personal preference. However, we need to question the stigma surrounding something as natural as body hair. In certain medical conditions like PCOS and severe hirsutism, a woman might have excessive body hair. But, hair in itself doesn't threaten one's health. Therefore, there's no reason to be afraid of hair on female bodies.

Makeup and Skincare

It's not far from the truth to say that most people like to look presentable. Even if not always, we like to look nice and try to leave a good impression on others. In addition, since skin is an important organ of our



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bodies, we take various measures to tend to it. We groom ourselves to various degrees, but it is also safe to say that women tend to put more effort into their preening than men do.

A discussion on the grooming patterns of women is incomplete without the mention of makeup. A dash of colours on one's face can do wonders to enhance their facial features, and therefore rule the world outside. Makeup can boost self-confidence because its sole purpose is to make you look good, within limits of course. For these reasons, makeup is an indispensable part of our daily routine. So is skincare. We bathe ourselves with creams, face masks and other substances I can't name so that our skin remains its best self.

All this is good and counts as important self-care, but would I be wrong in saying that in our society, a woman's physical appearance overshadows her other qualities? And, as a result of which, women are pressured into devoting a little too much attention to their outer beauty than is sometimes necessary?

In a Vox video titled "Is Beauty Culture

Hurting Us?" several women are shown going through their elaborate skincare and makeup routines while they share their insecurities about their appearances. It shows how even the most inconsequential comment, such as pointing out a wrinkle, can trigger anxiety in women, sometimes leading them to invest in expensive procedures just to hide these insecurities, like getting eyelash extensions.

The video also mentions how less is expected of men to make themselves presentable. As long as a man maintains his hygiene and wears clean clothes, he's good to go. However, we would be wrong to assume that the insecurities so many women share about their faces completely bypass men. They too have skin, thus they too have blemishes, scars and pimples. Yet, according to some unwritten rule of conventional masculinity, men are discouraged from paying too much attention to their outer appearance, since it's a so-called womanly thing. Therefore, they are often excluded from self-care practices. Most skincare products are marketed towards women instead of all genders. Most men don't

even know that there are makeup lines that cater especially to men, with products like concealers, contour and foundation.

Thus, there is a very noticeable imbalance between how men and women are supposed to groom themselves according to beauty standards. Women are expected to rely too much on their outer beauty to determine their self-worth, and men are expected to do the opposite – not care about their outer beauty at all. In order to get rid of these stigmas, we need to talk less about women's physical appearances because that's just a tiny fraction of their personalities, and we should normalise men boosting their self-confidence by taking care of their faces and skins.

Most importantly, we should do away with these mostly nonsensical ideals, because it is more important to cultivate our inner beauty to build a better society that doesn't judge people based on beauty standards.

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