

## The Fetishization of Youth and Beauty: A Contextual Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Women and Gay Men

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Kriz, Alexander Charles
Citation	Kriz, Alexander Charles. "The Fetishization of Youth and Beauty: A Contextual Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Women and Gay Men". BA Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2023.
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2024-12-07 12:29:11
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/40">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/40</a>



## **John Cabot University**

Department of Humanistic Studies

Bachelor of Arts in Humanistic Studies  
Minor in Philosophy

### **The Fetishization of Youth and Beauty: A Contextual Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Women and Gay Men**

Alexander Charles Kriz

First Reader  
Annete Bryson

Second Reader  
Brunella Antomarini

Spring 2023

## **Abstract**

We have stories of witches with an unquenchable thirst for youth. We are fascinated by television shows about a child coming of age and overcoming hardship. We are lured into fitness routines that promise to make us look younger. We shut away older adults into homes and refuse to acknowledge that we will all end up there someday. We are raised with myths of searching for the fountain of youth and drowning in a pond because of the beauty of our reflection. We are obsessed with youth. We are obsessed with beauty.

Youth and beauty have a chokehold on everything we hold dear. With every turn we make in the modern day, we are confronted with images of what is considered beautiful and persistently cajoled into thinking that remaining youthful is the only way to obtain this beauty. The connection between the two permeates the depths of our culture. I will use this thesis to highlight the moral implications of these connections to show that humanity has not only created an everlasting relationship between the two but has escalated them to a problematic fetishization of both youth and beauty.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this undergraduate thesis to all who may think that it is too late to return to your education. It is never too late to learn from the world's most brilliant minds.

## Acknowledgements

Words cannot describe how thankful I am for being guided and taught by the professors at John Cabot University. The Humanistic studies program has shaped me into a multi-faceted, well-rounded, and confident academic ready to take on the world. In particular, I owe many thanks to the philosophy professors, who helped open my mind to subjects I never dared to tackle before.

I want to thank Professor Annette Bryson for her continued support, endless positivity, and brilliant mind. Through her feedback, lessons, and friendship, I reached new heights in my education that I will forever be grateful for.

I want to thank Professor Brunella Antomarini for introducing me to the raw power of philosophy and inspiring the subject of this thesis. She turned my whole world upside down while studying the philosophy of art and beauty, and I will never look at the world the same way again.

I want to thank Professor Tom Bailey for his ability to guide me in the proper direction when discussing philosophical matters and the confidence he has given me in expressing my opinion and being firm in my stance.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Roots .....	7
Juvenescence .....	7
Introduction .....	7
Anthropos .....	9
The Origins of Juvenescence .....	11
The Enlightenment .....	12
Neoteny.....	14
Conclusion .....	17
3. The Systems .....	18
The Economics of the Beauty Industry .....	18
Introduction .....	18
The Consumer’s Power .....	19
The Consumer’s Targetability .....	22
The Consumer’s Goals .....	25
Conclusion .....	26
Hetero-Patriarchy .....	28
Introduction .....	28
Mythical Norms and an Absence of Desire .....	29
Help! I'm a Gay Man Trapped in a Woman's Body .....	31
Conclusion .....	33

4. The Problems .....	35
No Duty to Resist .....	35
Introduction .....	35
False Consciousness .....	35
False Consciousness and Gay Men .....	37
Gay Categorization.....	39
Conclusion .....	41
The Beauty Myth.....	42
Introduction .....	42
The Myth of Beauty, Youth, and Patriarchy .....	43
Flower Power, Sex, and the 1960s.....	45
HIV / AIDS.....	47
Conclusion .....	49
5. Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research .....	51
Bibliography .....	52

# 1. Introduction

Anthropologists have studied many different forms of rituals and magic in cultures all around the globe. Certain behaviors may have even been labeled as “interesting” or “unique” in the greater context of the world, but no such behaviors compare to those of the Nacirema. Professor Linton was the first person to bring attention to the ornate, distinctive, and intense norms of the tribe. While more has been discovered about their rituals, there remains a profound question of where and why their culture has developed in the present ways.

The Nacirema are a North American group between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui, Tarahumara of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Their origin remains unknown, although it is assumed they came from the East. They have developed a unique and powerful economic system, but the fascinating part of their culture comes from the hours spent performing rituals. Every day, every night, and sometimes multiple hours during the day are spent practicing habits centered on the human body with a desire to make themselves healthier and more beautiful. They are inclined to believe that the natural body is ugly and that beauty lies underneath its perceptible imperfections. They do everything they can to reverse, avoid, and hide their body’s natural tendencies toward certain aesthetic qualities (Miner, 1956).

Every household of the Nacirema has a specific room dedicated to performing such rituals. It is the room where every family member spends multiple hours a day, either performing body rituals or practicing an almost religious obsession in satiating their desire to modify their appearance. They often do this in complete solitude, taking turns and teaching children to do the rituals themselves in isolation (Miner, 1956).



The rituals use many potions and powders thought to be magical, and their quantity can be high for each person. Each vial has a particular purpose, magical effect, or appearance-altering quality, and each is applied in a specific order. Sometimes the potions cause intense burning or pain for the individual, but they are counteracted with even more brews. The men have been seen to use blades on their faces daily, causing bleeding and extreme discomfort. The women have been seen using the same blades on almost every part of their bodies. They also are known to place their heads, and sometimes their entire bodies, into massive ovens that they believe cook away the ugliness that is naturally within. The mouth is fascinating, as they have multiple rituals centered around it and feel it directly correlates to their beauty and well-being. They have contraptions that cause incredible amounts of pain that forcefully manipulate each tooth and the entirety of the jaw into precise positions that they believe are perceived as beautiful by others (Miner, 1956).

Their perception of beauty is also seen in the body's presence or absence of fat. If a person is considered skinny, they have gorging rituals that make them fat. If a person is overweight, they have temples dedicated to starvation so that they might lose weight. Similar temples are erected where people of the tribe go to achieve intensive, life-threatening rituals that aim to modify the body in any drastic way possible. These rituals include many incisions made with knives all over the body, particularly the face and stomach (Miner, 1956).

Now that we have a reasonably intimate familiarity with the culture of the tribe, I encourage my readers to read the tribe's name, "Nacirema," backward. If done, one might find themselves looking at all the rituals listed above in a different light. All of these beauty rituals are done by the American people and people of other Western cultures (as well as worldwide). The magic potions are simply the creams we apply daily, the blades that cause bleeding are

razors for hair removal, the ovens are hair and tanning salons, the mouth contraptions are braces and other dental devices, and the temples with life-threatening rituals are hospitals and cosmetic surgeries.

These rituals are centered around doing everything possible to make the body more beautiful to avoid what it naturally looks like. This is how I view American society and what has inspired me to write this thesis. I look at Americans and, more broadly, Western culture and wonder how it has evolved this way. It is centered around certain ideals rooted in how we perceive ourselves as beautiful, and we do everything we can to achieve those standards, no matter how far out of reach they may be. Upon reflecting on these beauty standards and our efforts to achieve them, I realized that not only does our society have a deep relationship with beauty, but that youth seems to be intimately connected with it. I have looked throughout history and concluded that society has a far too deep fascination with youth and beauty and that we have elevated this relationship to fetishization in the modern day.

The term fetishization is a relatively strong one. I have chosen it with diligence and argue that it accurately displays the intensity of the obsession and its uncomfortable implications within society. We not only profoundly value the possession of youth and beauty, but we give them a value and social credit comparable to a level of fetishization, or the object of a sexual fetish. The objects of sexual fetishes are often seen as irreplaceable, the ultimate object of desire, and a requirement for satiation. I argue that Western society has learned to treat youth and beauty precisely with this attitude. It is worth noting that the relationship is not merely sexual; it has implications for many facets of society, which will be explored in this thesis.

I have divided this paper into three sections: “The Roots”, “The Systems”, and “The Problems.” In the first section, “The Roots,” I will discuss the possible reasons why Western

culture has such an intense fascination with youth and beauty. This is an essential first step in exploring this topic because the foundations of this fetishization are based on fascinating concepts.

The primary source I will use for this section is Robert Pogue Harrison's book, *Juvenescence*. He examines how youth and the desire for eternal youth have become overemphasized in modern Western culture. He contends that we have repeatedly indulged in this obsession with eternal youth, which has caused us to undervalue age and ignore wisdom and the experience that comes with it. My addition to the conversation is extending his arguments to show that society has developed an inclination toward youth *and* beauty and how they have evolved together. Throughout the book, he examines many thoughts, themes, and subject areas, but four threads run through it all. These include Juvenescence, Anthropos, the Enlightenment, and Neoteny. These sections discuss the birth of juvenescence, our obsession with youth and beauty, and the cultural and biological factors contributing to their continued growth. By the end of this section, we will have a clearer understanding of where this obsession came from, so we might better understand its importance and relevance today.

The following section, "The Systems," is divided into two subsections. The first is called "The Economics of the Beauty Industry" and discusses the impact of economics and capitalism within our fetishization of youth and beauty. My main argument for this section is that the continued deepening of this fetishization is thanks to the various aspects of the sociology and psychology of economics. In a capitalist-based system, we tend to learn that the things we buy reflect who we are and the morals we uphold, and in the realm of youth and beauty, this becomes an exacerbated problem. In my introductory example on the tribe of the Nacirema, or Americans, the people used many different potions and remedies for combatting the body's natural signs of

aging and degradation. This holds very true in the reality of American culture and some of the broader scope of Western civilization. I discuss the various aspects of the relationship between consumer and market and draw conclusions and implications for the supposed intensity of our fetishization of youth and beauty based on this relationship. I also compare the lived experiences of women and gay men regarding youth and beauty. The dynamic between marginalized groups in a society designed around patriarchal tendencies is fascinating, and I begin to explore the depths of this dynamic by the end of the section.

The second subsection is entitled “Hetero-Patriarchy.” Much of what I have to say in the first section on economics is rooted in blame towards patriarchal systems that have taken over our society. In the end, I argued that patriarchy was a cause of the deepening of the fetishization, and this section will further explore this concept. I delve further into the experiences of women and gay men using articles by Sheppard et al. and Finnigan et al. Each provides a different perspective on the patriarchal hold that reigns over our society. By the end of this section, we will better understand the systems in place that sustain the existence of our fetishization of youth and beauty.

In the next main section, “The Problems,” I explore further the real problems within certain facets of society because of this fetishization. This includes an article by Heather Widdows that maintains that individuals have no “duty to resist” the harmful norms within society. I argue against her, claiming that if certain marginalized groups are included in her conversation, such as gay men, the situation changes, and the validity of her central argument changes. Ultimately, I suggest that actively resisting norms in the realm of gay men’s experiences with youth and beauty would help lead to their eventual disruption and that the same may hold for women.

Next, I discuss one of the most pivotal books in feminist history, *The Beauty Myth*, by Naomi Wolf. At the same time, the book touches upon the most important aspects of where, how, and why society has developed an obsession with beauty, I will discuss the ones I found most relevant to youth and beauty. This includes further discussing patriarchy, the period of the 1960s, and the HIV / AIDS epidemic. When considering women and gay men together in their marginalized experiences within society, each section has something important to say. By the end of this section, we will have a complete view of the impacts of society's fetishization of youth and beauty on the lived experiences of some women and gay men.

I will then end the thesis with a brief conclusion. I will suggest further research implications and what can be done in our society and culture to combat the ramifications.

## 2. The Roots

### Juvenescence

#### Introduction

Firstly we must gain some greater context as to the roots of our fascinations with youth and beauty. Analyzing the physical elements contributing to our obsession with looking youthful is essential. If we consider enhanced diets, health benefits, reduced exposure to the elements, and monumental advancements in technology and information, it is no wonder that our bodies are changing. However, these advances do not apply only to aesthetics; we have also found ourselves younger in looks, behavior, mentality, lifestyles, and desires. Still, I wish to explore the depths of these other immaterial reasons, including the possible biological and cultural reasons that the obsession has become so prevalent. I will show that in doing so, we can establish a foundation of reasoning for why our society has intensified our fascination with youth and beauty to a level of fetishization.

Robert Harrison's book, *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age* explores how contemporary Western culture has placed too much emphasis on youth and the pursuit of perpetual youthfulness. He argues that we have continuously embraced this fascination with perpetual youthfulness, which has led to a devaluation of aging and a neglect of wisdom and the experience that comes with it. Throughout the book, he explores many different concepts, themes, and areas of study, but he weaves four ideas that tie everything back together. He

ultimately suggests that by embracing aging and mortality, we can find more profound meaning and fulfillment in life.

The first of these concepts can be picked out by the term “juvenescence.” Harrison defines this as the cultural obsession with youthfulness that he sees as a defining feature of our age. He argues that it has infiltrated all aspects of modern life, including everything from media and advertising to politics and education. The second concept is agelessness. Juvenescence is not just about being biologically young or aesthetically juvenile; it is about the desire to be immortal or ageless. You can see this idea reflected in many cultural phenomena like the rise in popularity of cosmetic procedures (which will be discussed later in this thesis) and the idolization of celebrities who sustain their youthful and good looks as they continue to age. The third is narcissism, or an obsession or preoccupation with oneself. Harrison maintains that our desire for agelessness and mortality is driven by a constant fear of death that leads to a refusal to acknowledge our human limits. The final concept is technophilia or a fascination with technology. He argues that juvenescence is also caused, or at least closely tied to, technology. To express our desire for agelessness, we partake in anti-aging treatments and social media platforms that allow us to perfectly curate a specific representation of ourselves that we want others to see.

These four concepts give us a foundation for discovering how Juvenescence molds contemporary culture and society to its liking. The physical and aesthetic characteristics captured by this concept are enlightening. Still, these four concepts highlighted throughout Harrison’s book can deepen our understanding of it to ultimately conclude that there are also profoundly engrained psychological and cultural forces at work here. If we wish to dissect the issues of

youth and beauty, we must come to this understanding so that we might understand ourselves and our place in the world just a little bit better.

The book consists of four parts, each containing a different reason, cause, or explanation for our continued progress into juvenescent creatures. In this section of the thesis, I will address what I have found to be the most relevant and exciting concepts as they pertain to a foundation of understanding in the cultural obsessiveness over youth and beauty. I will connect Harrison's points and extend his reasoning to include youth (which the book focuses specifically on) and beauty. I will also draw connections to other, more specific facets, such as the experiences of those who identify as women and gay men, later in the thesis.

### **Anthropos**

The first section of Harrison's book is entitled "Anthropos." It gives a detailed description of the cultural and philosophical roots of juvenescence. The point of this section is essentially to suggest a simple reversal of our prime directive. We tend to think of age, one of the main components of our persona, as a function of time, but instead, time has become a function of age. When we apply time to something, particularly an organism, it is usually because it has some aging process where death or decay slowly takes hold over the object in question. Thus, we examine and categorize the thing by its' direct relationship to time in how it appears to be aging. When we apply this concept to how we view beauty, its importance is evident. I argue that we have become accustomed to valuing our beauty based on how much death and decay have obsessively taken over our bodies and how well that is exhibited in our aesthetic features. The value we give to beauty is directly proportionate to the value we give to age, and we measure each in tandem. Therefore we have learned to value the signs of youth as beautiful and the signs of aging as the opposite of beauty.



Harrison calls humans “heterochronic” in that we can possess many ages: biological, historical, institutional, and psychological. Biological age refers to the physical state of our body, including aspects like health, genetics, and lifestyle. This term encompasses the idea that age can influence a person’s perception of their youthfulness or aging. Historical age refers to the historical period that a person was born into. Every period contains different political and cultural contexts, so that a historical age can morph someone’s social identity and how strongly they identify with the rest of the people in their generation and people within other generations. Institutional age implies an age-related factor to what portion of life you are considered to be in based on your rate of development. This means that we divide ourselves into groups like childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and older people. This age can reflect how we act within society and how we perceive ourselves. Finally, psychological age refers to a person’s age in terms of mental maturity. For example, if two people have the same biological age, they might exhibit varying psychological ages, such as one being less mentally or emotionally mature than the other. Each one of these different exemplifications of how we view ourselves heterochronically has implications for how we react to the concept of beauty. While I argue that biological age is the one most focused on in terms of beauty, the other three also play essential roles. In this thesis, however, the focus will primarily be biological age. Therefore when I refer to “youth” in a biological sense instead of a figurative one, I will be referring to those in adolescence and young adulthood.

Harrison also points out that our associations with age do not accurately reflect what our bodies are experiencing. For example, if our heart is old, our kidneys might not be so. He highlights that different parts of the body contain varying experiences with time, and yet we clump them all together in one pre-defined “age” determined by the number of years we have

been alive. In other words, the body is also heterochronic, even if we do not perceive it as such. Where, then, does our obsession with youthfulness come from? Is it precisely because our nature is heterochronic we seek to alter how we experience time? Our connections with both youth and beauty, then, seem to come from the fact that we are heterochronic. If we can perceive something such as time in so many ways, then maybe we have an innate desire to control it just from our sheer misunderstanding. Due to our perspective on aging, we tend to view time as linear and unchangeable. We may seek to change the unchangeable simply because we have no power to change it in the first place. When we combine this physical and mentally perceived “age” with the splendors of adolescence and innocence, we begin to form a connection with it that glues together the literal and metaphorical concepts into one fine-tuned obsession.

### **The Origins of Juvenescence**

The origins of juvenescence can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology, and its prevalence is astounding. There are many stories in which youth is treated as a reward, goal, or unattainable future within these ancient stories. The myth of Tithonus, for instance, is mentioned by many scholars, including Harrison. The myth follows that Tithonus was a mortal prince whom Eos, the goddess of dawn, loved. Eos begged Zeus to grant Tithonus immortality so they could be together forever. Zeus granted this wish, but Eos forgot to ask for eternal youth and immortality. Tithonus then continued to age, becoming feeble, while Eos remained forever young and beautiful. Eventually, he became so old and decrepit that he could not take care of himself, and Eos shut him away to live out the rest of his days.

The myth suggests that eternal life without eternal youth is a curse rather than a blessing and that mortality and aging are essential parts of the human condition. However, the fact that the myth exists proves that there might be a basic desire for immortality and youthfulness within

Western culture that is carried through time. It can be seen as the foundation for the cult-like aspects of juvenescence that we embrace today. Harrison uses the term “cult-like,” which is an interesting word choice. It implies not only that people take it seriously as they would a religion or cult but that it cannot be obtained by everyone, which may ultimately lead many people to desire it.

Many ancient myths and religions paint the human condition as a sort of exile from a primordial state of innocence and bliss. This state is often associated with vitality and youth; the desire to return to it has continued throughout history. Harrison points out the moments these connections began and explains why they persisted for many years. I argue, with the same basis that he draws these connections, that it is merely an aspect of humanity that cannot be avoided. When we associate this desire for youthful vitality with that of being beautiful, cultural problems begin to arise. This thesis will explore a few of those problems as they are seen today.

### **The Enlightenment**

Another crucial point in history when our fascination with juvenescence was both deepened and clearly seen was the period of the Enlightenment. Thinkers of the time sought to free humanity from the confines of tradition and history, a process connected deeply to the desire for eternal youth. Philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau praised childhood as a time of innocence and freedom. Still, this idealization of youth paved the way to making the modern cult-like associations we have today. In his book *Émile; or, On Education*, Rousseau stated, “We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education” (Rousseau, 1762). This would imply that aging is related to a sense of wisdom but also that we are inherently weak and need guidance through education

when we are young. Rousseau would not have been the first to suggest that children are innocent and require education. However, this view of childhood as a time of pure innocence, freedom, and growth influenced the Romantic movement, and we can still see its presence in society today. I argue that its presence may be part of why we have learned to place youth as a defining factor in what and who is perceived as beautiful. The essence of childhood is certainly different than the concept of youth when it is combined with beauty, however the point I wish to highlight is that the roots of the extent of this fetishization with youth and beauty must have been exacerbated at some point in recent history to lead us to where we are today. It is possible that this period, with thinkers like Rousseau and other philosophers, placed a certain emphasis on individualism that contributed to a growing fascination with youth and the desire to prolong it indefinitely.

While anti-aging products can be seen throughout history, starting from the ancient Egyptians, the Enlightenment provided advancements in science and medicine which may have exacerbated the continued rise of an attachment to youthfulness. In her article, “Anti-Aging Medicine: The History: Life Extension and History: The Continual Search for the Fountain of Youth,” Carole Haber discusses the historical search for longevity and youthfulness. She states that in the 1800s, the cell was widely believed to be immortal. People thought the development of the cell within the body caused degradation and death, and one of the first to advocate for this position was Elie Metchnikoff. Haber states that Metchnikoff contended that phagocytes poisoned the body and led to the decline. In response, he advocated a diet rich in lactic acid, thinking it would lead to the detoxification of the substances within the body that led to decay (Haber, 2004). Similarly, Charles A. Stephens, in his book *Natural Salvation* published in 1903, argued that someday cells would develop to resist aging. “Immortal life will be achieved by the

aid of applied science; it is what the whole scheme of evolution moves forward to” (Stephens, 1992).

The Enlightenment was a time of growing belief that individuals could take control of their lives and that science could help them overcome the limitations of the physical body. Reversing the signs of aging and ultimately prolonging youth for as long as possible were ideals that fit perfectly into their beliefs. It was a time of rekindling ideas throughout history but with the added aspect of the robust advancement in science and medicine. Individualism, reason, and science all played their part in advancing the societal norms surrounding youth and beauty, and I argue that they have been carried together since then.

### **Neoteny**

Neoteny is the subject of much of Harrison’s argument. It is a word comprised of two Greek roots. Neos means new or young, and teinein means stretching or retaining (Harrison, 18). In evolutionary biology, this term refers to the sustainment of fetal or juvenile features in fully grown organisms, in addition to the retardation of the rate of development, which makes it possible and even expected to keep juvenile characteristics into the later stages of one’s life. Harrison states this is a critical concept in human evolution and the development of complex social and cognitive abilities like language and reasoning. He agrees with the claim that we are a neotenic species, and our juvenile traits have played a crucial role in our success as a species. An example of this can be seen in our retention of a large head and brain size. This has led to an increase in our development of social structures, communication skills, and general intelligence (Platek, 2007). Evidence of this is seen further in our retention of emotional traits generally associated with childhood, like curiosity and playfulness.

Examples include smooth skin, a symmetrical face, and a toned body. These traits are seen as desirable and thus beautiful because they are associated with youthfulness, vitality, and fertility. These simple and essential evolutionary cues play into mate selection, which may explain why they have developed the way they have (Dimitrov et al., 2023; Jones et al., 1995). Although this is true, our cultural obsession with youthfulness has led to a fascination with specific juvenile characteristics associated with physical attractiveness. These features are referenced not only in the realm of biology and psychology but also in social life and other works. Deborah Rhode, in her book *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law*, states that “although conventional wisdom holds that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, in fact most beholders agree about the appeal of certain characteristics. . . facial symmetry, unblemished skin, and an hour-glass figure have been widely viewed as evidence of health and fertility” (p. 24).

Harrison suggests that the cultural obsession with youth is reflected in many areas of human cultures, such as art, literature, and popular culture. I argue that beauty is carried along with it. Youth and beauty are often idealized within these realms while simultaneously portraying aging negatively. It is this combination of neoteny and culture that, he suggests, is the reason the idealization of youth and beauty is so often reinforced, and the desire for eternal youthfulness is always sought. These obsessions can lead to a devaluation of maturity and the wisdom that comes with age. When youthfulness is tied in with beauty and continuously sought after within a culture, it is implied that anything that is not youthful must also not be beautiful. This then leads to neglecting the diversity and complexity of the human experience. So, not only does this cultural fascination harbor current ramifications, but it also predicts a certain fostering of the rejection of the vast experiences that come with being a human.

The difference between sex organs determines much of our social and psychological lives. In this way, it follows that “anatomy is destiny.” In other words, sex seems to influence the fundamentals of life strongly, but like how there is more to destiny than anatomy, there is also more to anatomy than destiny. Harrison points out that we have aged as a species, both males and females. When we view ourselves as purely human, neither is more human than the other. If anything, there seems to be a difference between the ability of women to retain more neotenic characteristics than males in recent years, in purely an aesthetic sense.

Although we share the same destiny, Harrison is undoubtedly correct that the differences between men and women are still massive. The biological aging process vastly differs between the two, and even our life cycles vary. Harrison maintains that the larger philosophical question is whether these differences bring us closer together or farther apart. As I will do for the rest of this thesis, I argue that although society will try to find a reason to separate people into groups further, specific experiences will bring humanity back together. The primary example of this I will address will be the foundation of the second part of this thesis, which is to do with the lived experiences of women and gay men. What happens when the experiences of one group are like the experiences of another when the two are supposedly separated? The answer that I surmise is that they are both treated poorly because of these experiences and because of who they are. These experiences will be elaborated on; however, I want to highlight that many see an obsession with youth and beauty as the answer to being oppressed for these lived experiences. We rely on these societal norms to enhance our self-worth perception while fighting against them. Perhaps, then, our problem lies within the imaginary standards we set for ourselves and those naturally set within us. Is this merely a fight against biology? Or is it the epicenter of a much larger discussion between biology, psychology, and sociology?

## **Conclusion**

When we think about Western culture's popular myth of the fountain of youth, it is generally understood that we are not chasing a desire to become children again; instead, we wish to divulge in our innate human desire to live forever. Although perhaps this is how the fountain would accomplish such an impossible feat. Maybe it would reverse our biological clock back to a child, and we would be forced to grow up again and rely on the fountain once again when we reach old age. Regardless of how a fictional world would satisfy our craving for immortality, it is this natural fascination we have to achieve it that is meant when I say the term "youth." We have cultural ties to specific age groups, and they remain painfully evident in pop culture. We have coming-of-age stories of a child conquering the troubles of the world, age-reversing tropes where people are temporarily placed into the shoes of someone of different age, actors playing characters many years younger than their biological age, purported myths about witches making elixirs of immortality at the expense of sacrificing the lives of children, the frequent trope of an older and successful man falling in love with an aesthetically beautiful young adult woman, and so many more. Youth means something different in these situations, yet youth is still their underlying theme. The same applies to this thesis. While youth may imply a sense of adolescence, what it means in the contexts discussed throughout this paper is the desire to obtain something that is only inevitably lost.



### **3. The Systems**

#### **The Economics of the Beauty Industry**

##### **Introduction**

Now that the roots of our understanding of the fetishization of youth and beauty have been established, we can discuss the systems in which they both operate and influence.

The beauty industry is a massive economic beast that dominates much of the world's market. It had an estimated global value of \$532 billion in 2019 (Statista, 2021), with a specific and rising yearly increase. This increase is debated among different sources, but all agree that the industry constantly rises. One study from McKinset & Company states that the beauty industry grew at a compound annual growth rate of 4.8% between 2014 and 2019, outpacing even the global economy's growth rate (McKinset & Company, 2020). This has tremendous implications for how deeply society values beauty. As we can see in most beauty industry advertisements, a connection is also drawn to youth. For example, the products that claim to be anti-wrinkle (wrinkles being a direct cause of aging, therefore an effect that promotes a way to achieve youthfulness that is lost) were valued at \$9.1 billion in 2021, with a projected rise to \$12.8 billion by 2027 (Future Market Insights, 2022). Most marketing techniques that lure people into contributing to this economic monster relate to anti-aging and reverse-aging claims. Analyzing these facts and the implications that arise from them in the context of this thesis requires attention to multiple different ideas within the realm of the economics of the beauty industry. First, I will investigate anti-aging and reverse-aging marketing techniques and how this translates

into norms associated with both beauty and youth. Second, I will draw attention to the targets of these advertisements and how they are lured into continuous contributions to the industry. Third, I will draw conclusions that relate to how the increase in the economic contribution to the beauty industry parallels an increase in society's obsession with beauty and youth as well.

### **The Consumer's Power**

First, I will address anti-aging and reverse-aging marketing strategies. Anti-aging is a widely used term for many products purported through the beauty industry. The exciting part of its application to the market is that the products are self-applicable. In other words, they require people to use the product themselves, promoting a sense of satiation in the consumer that they are doing what is necessary to achieve the marketed effects. The power to control what we use or consume gives us a psychological edge, making us more likely to continue using or consuming. Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier studied the psychological effects of empowerment strategies on consumers' product demand. They found that large companies use a widely used strategy that integrates their customers' choices, explicitly creating a sense of control within the consumer. They draw a psychological connection between this empowerment of the consumer and the distribution and sale of goods, stating that customers who are empowered in selecting certain products over others to be displayed and sold are more likely to buy said products. While these may be interesting in industries such as home care and retail, the implications change drastically when this psychological difference is applied to the beauty industry.

In the beauty and cosmetics industry, there is a connection between what consumers choose to be produced, the products sold, and how this highlights the ramifications of certain societal norms. For example, when much of common Western thought is focused on beauty and an obsession with the innocence of youth, the beauty and cosmetics industry can provide a

physical way for people to apply these ideals. When someone is confronted with an advertisement implying that they are too old and not beautiful according to specific societal standards, they will most likely take it if there is an instant way to placate this anxiety.

Alan Petersen completed a study on how aging anxieties are capitalized upon and how this led to creating a market focused on anti-aging treatment. He states that over the last two decades, the market has expanded drastically to include promises of preventing, delaying, reversing, or masking the effects of aging. He used economics and sociology combined with science and technology studies to show the underlying implications of the anti-aging market. In the end, he argues that the evidence he presented and his connections show that the anxieties surrounding aging reinforce the commodification of aging and ageism. He states that the future implications of such a market and the effect it may have on Western society (in sustaining and exacerbating certain harmful ideals related to aging and ageism) could be damaging, considering that most of the promises made in this realm of advertising are so far implemented without tested and proved lasting effects. In other words, this industry's impact on society gives people the power to align themselves with certain beauty ideals. However, when the products are not proven to be long-lasting, it could create an endless chase for consumers to achieve the desired results, increasing the economic power of the industry and the power of the norms in society.

He also addresses the different associations drawn between several types of aging and the meaning that this may have. In Western society, a typical attitude is that older people burden the state and the family. The narratives around successful, positive, and healthy aging have gained significant momentum in recent years. They carry a morality tied to the responsibility for being healthy and address the social anxiety of growing older and becoming this perceived "burden." In this way, we could assume that the attitude towards aging is being confronted; however, it is

founded in attempts to ultimately reverse the effects of aging rather than accept that it happens regardless of whatever attempts are tried. He mentions that these responsibilities are bound to look different across varying groups due to the societal norms and expectations that each one may experience. "However, this ethics of responsibility is likely to play out differently among different groups and genders, with women being more subject to cultural expectations about maintaining their youthfulness as they age and engage in aesthetic [anti-aging treatments] and practices" (Petersen, 3) Here he directly addresses that women are more susceptible to these cultural expectations. He also mentions the term, "ethics of responsibility" which is an interesting way to phrase these cultural expectations. He means that each group affected by these expectations may feel a responsibility to keep them aloft. Older people, for example, may think that it is their responsibility to attempt to reverse the apparent signs of their aging, and women may feel that they have an innate obligation to appear as young as possible.

What I find most interesting about these ideals is that we are drawn to participate in their continued existence willingly. Our anxieties surrounding youth and beauty are evident and run deeply within society. As I mentioned, if the effects of these products are not yet proven to be long-lasting or 100% effective, then why do we feel the responsibility to placate these anxieties related to aging? The reason for this, I argue, is the combination of a capitalistic mindset and a deeply engrained obsession with youth and beauty that creates a cycle where each sustains the other's existence. When society is founded upon capitalism, people may develop an attachment to the feeling that what they buy can directly placate the anxieties they are taught to feel.

Capitalism tends to teach us that the things we buy now reflect our physical and moral selves.

An example of this is the purchasing of anti-aging beauty products whose companies support charitable causes worldwide. Aveda, a famous vegan skin-care line, promises to donate a

portion of profits to environmental and social organizations such as WaterAid, which provides access to safe water and sanitation in developing countries (Aveda.com). Clinique, another famous skin-care line, has partnered with various organizations to support research on breast cancer and other health issues (Clinique.com). Many companies employ this strategy of making consumers believe they are donating to noble causes by purchasing their products, thus attaching an even stronger sense of morality to the purchase and use of anti-aging products. The cycle starts with the anxieties associated with aging, continues with companies promoting anti-aging products, ends with attaching morality to buying those products, and begins again with people's desire to continue to do what is necessary to placate the aging anxieties.

### **The Consumer's Targetability**

I have just shown that the strategy of anti-aging marketing has a powerful effect on our psyche and that we may be just as much a part of the never-ending cycle as the companies who use those marketing strategies. Now I will bring attention to the target audience of these strategies and the degree to which they are exploited. Marketing strategies require a specific audience to be successful. If they were aimlessly shown to different groups, then it would be rare for someone feels the intrinsic need to believe in what the marketing strategy is claiming. For example, a 21-year-old is less likely to desire to buy an anti-aging cream and, therefore, less likely to believe that it has the desired effects. The marketing, then, would be aimed at the older population because they are more likely to want to reverse the effects of aging. So, to accomplish this, companies latch onto existing stereotypes, popular fads, and moral incongruencies within society to reach their target audience more effectively. Existing stereotypes include many norms concerning how exactly a "beautiful" woman should look. These can consist of wearing the right makeup to enhance certain features and hide others, as well as a certain age being explicitly

idolized, such as 20-30. Popular fads include performing a certain amount of aesthetic rituals in the morning and night to ensure that a person is engaging in all the things they "should" to retain or obtain beauty. Moral incongruencies include double standards sustained to capitalize on self-esteem and a negative perception of self-worth, such as attaching immorality to fatness and morality to achieving thinness.

Large companies could not simply say, "Here is my product. Use it." They must use enticing language that preys on insecurities and cultural obscurities that convinces a person they must engage with them. This is mainly accomplished by targeting those who identify as women and specific subgroups that stem from them. For example, Rosso performed a textual analysis of beauty and body-related advertisements targeting middle-aged women. The article was published in 2017 and used magazines from 2013 as their reference for coming to their conclusions. While this was ten years ago from the date of drafting this thesis, the information is still pertinent to advertising techniques. I would even argue that they have become more targeted with developments in social psychology and the methods used for luring consumers to a company's products. The findings in Rosso's article suggest that advertisement strategies implement pseudoscience, hegemonic beauty, body ideals, and general heteronormativity to create a fantasy, idealized version of the middle-aged woman. The cycle of capitalism and beauty ideals is seen again, as companies rely on valorizing the standards to continue to profit from their existence.

Combining what I have stated regarding the treatment and cultural perception of older people in Western society and the standards surrounding youth and beauty, Rosso analyzes the different tactics used (and possibly still are). "Not surprisingly, more and more women are relying on medical and artificial ways to avoid being marked as old, which is ultimately the same as being marked as unworthy" (Rosso, 186). Analyzing the literature used in their study, what is

found is a combination of intersectionality, feminist body studies theory, aging studies, and mainstream media representations of beauty ideals. The study goes on to connect the problems associated with these norms. For example, highlighting that aging has come to mean that one becomes less visible in the eyes of society and that aging ungracefully (that is, not doing the things to combat the direct signs of aging) is a direct reflection of a woman's health and the amount of control that she has over her life. Control is an idea that is coveted deeply in the progress of feminism, as much of women's control has been taken away by the sustainment of the hold that the patriarchy has on society.

While women are the main targets of the beauty industry, men have also been targeted, particularly gay men and others within the LGBT+ community. In the past, advertisements that targeted the community usually displayed an exceedingly small and stereotypical view of gay men as fashion-conscious, fit, and focused on their appearance. Advertisers often portray this ideal as the only means of achieving desirability and attractiveness. They would sell products using images of young, beautiful, and toned men. These products included everything from clothing to grooming products and even fast food (Aley and Thomas, 2021).

While the situation has improved over the years, and the gendered and sexually oriented stereotypes have begun to dissolve, there are still many instances where advertisers continue to prey on these ideals of youth and beauty and how they are applied to the lives of women and gay men. The reinforcement of these stereotypes, and the continued targeting of specific audiences in specific marketing environments, may make it difficult for gay men (and others in the LGBT+ community) to feel accepted or valued if they do not fit into the overly prescribed image of what a gay man should look like. This parallels many of the problems I have stated that relate to women expressly, and the fact that this community is affected just as much shows the true

strength of our societal fascination with youth and beauty. If they were not coveted so heavily, and if they did not infect so many of our day-to-day lives, then perhaps we would not fall victim to such marketing strategies, and maybe some of the products and strategies would not even exist.

### **The Consumer's Goals**

So far, I have shown the problems associated with anti-aging and reverse-aging marketing strategies. Now I will explore how the increase in the economic contribution to the beauty industry parallels an increase in society's obsession with youth and beauty. In a capitalistic society, the concepts and ideas I have introduced in this section combine to create a perfect storm of false ideals and negative aspects of how we live our lives. When we are led to believe that old age is terrible and that youth is good, and that we can buy things to satiate our cravings for homogeneity within a particular cultural subgroup (such as women or gay men), we may seek to continue our participation in the capitalistic system because of the possibility that the empty promises that are made to us will someday come true.

When specific groups of people are accurately targeted to feel certain ways about their appearance in a capitalistic society, there will inevitably be an increase in the economic contribution to the industry. This can be seen in the statistics mentioned earlier in this paper about the steady rise in the global contribution to the beauty industry. The interesting part of this realization is that this directly parallels the strength that society gives these norms and how seriously society takes them. For example, women take their beauty seriously, either by choice or unconscious participation in the false consciousness taught in a patriarchal society. This can be seen in the increased purchasing of anti-aging and reverse-aging products on the market. The same can be said for gay men and those within the LGBT+ community, as they are targeted



similarly. If these groups of people did not take the norms as seriously as I am claiming, then we would not see an increase in the industry.

Another group that deserves mention in this conversation is heterosexual men and their participation in and contribution to the problems associated with these norms in a capitalistic society. Byrne and Milestone analyzed the use of male grooming products and the implications this might mean towards the acceptance, sustainment, or rejection of certain beauty norms. They found that age was crucial in men's willingness to engage in these norms and that men are uncomfortable discussing their grooming practices with others. They reference a study done by Hakim in 2016 that also supports the notion that there is a certain pressure for men to improve their bodies continually. Still, their silence and privacy about the matter differ drastically from those of women and gay men (although the sexuality of the men in both studies was not clarified, so there may be a blend of orientations that contributed to the results).

## **Conclusion**

In our patriarchal society, certain ideals have been established under the guidance of heterosexual men. I argue that the importance we give youth and beauty also has a solid foundation in these views. However, when these ideals are flipped and focused on straight men, we can see a difference in how they react, thanks to the study by Byrne and Milestone. This difference in responses indirectly highlights how the norms are enforced in the first place. If the norms were treated equally amongst the population, then straight men would feel just as obligated to achieve youth and beauty as women and gay men do. However, they were shown to be apprehensive in admitting their usage of products that promise the satiation of these norms. I argue that this apprehension exists because of the norms surrounding “manliness” that dictate that it is more manly to not worry so much about your appearance and that to do so is an

inherently feminine act. If apprehension is shown under these circumstances, perhaps that would be the best way to break down the foundations of these norms within the patriarchy. If we have the means to show how the patriarchy, set up under the guidance of heterosexual men, negatively affects norms that apply to everybody, not just women and other groups. Perhaps progress can be made in changing how Western society approaches these problems. In other words, if we dramatize the adverse effects of focusing the beauty norms back on straight men, change may be achieved in a seemingly unchangeable and oppressive system.

## **Hetero-Patriarchy**

### **Introduction**

Now that the economics of the beauty industry and how it affects our fetishization of youth and beauty have been discussed, we can move on to the second system, which takes hold over most of Western culture.

While this thesis focuses primarily on how youth and beauty have become exacerbated in our society to the point of fetishization and how that fetishization affects women and gay men specifically, my readers will find an excess of blame being pointed at "Patriarchy." Oxford Reference defines patriarchy as "a community of related families under the authority of a male head called a patriarch; applied more generally to any form social organization in which men have predominant power" (Oxford University Press). Patriarchal hold over American culture and society is vast, robust, cross-cultural, and trans-historical. Some examples of norms that have a basis in patriarchal tendencies include men not being allowed to show emotion, women who show "too much" feeling labeled as uncontrollable, women being perceived as objects, unequal pay in the workplace, and so many more.

The presence, hold, and history of patriarchal influences can be seen in many facets of American culture. Patriarchy places men in positions of dominance and authority, frequently at the expense of women and other underrepresented groups. The underrepresentation of women in positions of authority and influence, the gender pay gap, and the widespread impact of gender norms that reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations are just a few examples of how patriarchy presents itself in American society. In addition, racism, classism, and ableism all interact with patriarchy to generate a web of interconnected injustices that disproportionately

influence marginalized groups. In his article entitled “The Legacy of Patriarchy,” Robert Bahlieda maintains that American culture has developed with strong patriarchal influences and that patriarchy has been interwoven into today’s world even though there is no formal presence of one. A formal presence of patriarchy would look like a totalitarian regime led by angry and vengeful people. Still, American culture has adopted a much less obvious relationship with it that allows it to creep through the years with a firm grasp on society. “These definitions maintain that patriarchal attitudes, values, and beliefs shape our cultural, social, political, and economic decision-making, interpersonal relationships, leadership models, religious beliefs, and educational practices” (Bahlieda, 16). I agree with Bahlieda’s claims about how far it reaches over society. It is not merely a conspiracy in which marginalized groups attempt to place blame; it is a full-fledged invasion of American culture that has proven and will prove, to be incredibly difficult to rid ourselves of. As mentioned above, these influences even pass into attitudes such as men and women needing to act a certain way. The gendered norms based on patriarchal tendencies are fascinating and worthy of more exploration, which this section of my thesis will attempt to do.

### **Mythical Norms and an Absence of Desire**

What I find fascinating about what I do here is that I draw upon the lived experiences of women and gay men in how they have been affected by society's obsession with youth and beauty. However, it is essential to be clear that I am not suggesting that these experiences are universally identical. Indeed, a significant variance exists in how people respond to societal norms. I cannot say a universal, "this group of people responds in this specific way," because it would be false. To highlight this fact, I will use an article entitled "Discourses of Friendship Between Heterosexual Women and Gay Men: Mythical Norms and an Absence of Desire"

written by Shepperd, Coyle, and Hegarty to address these varying differences. After reading the conclusion of this thesis, my readers may be inclined to think that the lived experiences and struggles of women and gay men are incredibly similar and that they both suffer equally under patriarchal control over our society. However, this section is meant to dissuade my readers from reaching that misguided conclusion.

Firstly, I will address points made by Sheppard et al. that explain the heterosexual-patriarchal ways our society is founded. They state that norms, as we view them, are not explicitly apparent at any given point and that sometimes they are not labeled as such until the ideas are exposed. For example, much of our society is based on an implicit model of heterosexuality (Shepperd, 207). This is a norm that most of the community does not realize because it is hidden in plain sight. It dominates American culture and "interprets itself as society" (Warner, xxi). It just seems natural or normal to most people. This means that our society is structured in a way that excludes anything outside of heterosexuality. An excellent example of this in the real world is seen in the hypothetical situation of a gay couple and a heterosexual couple booking a room at a hotel. The heterosexual couple would most likely be offered one bed, whereas the gay couple would have to explicitly ask for one bed because it is more "unexpected" for two men to share one. This can be seen in many parts of society and varies from city to city, state to state, and even country to country. The idea to take away is that the heterosexual couple might not even think about how one small interaction like that could drastically differ for a gay couple. Therefore, certain groups of people and their lived day-to-day experiences are hidden from normative society. In the hypothetical situation, it might be that the heterosexual woman identifies as incredibly liberal and gay-friendly. Still, this identification does not make her

impervious to the normative constructs our society frequently upholds in favor of heterosexuality. The evidence from the article implies a conclusion like this.

Secondly, Shepperd et al. addresses the vast differences that can occur between gay men and heterosexual women. The similarities between the experiences of the two are highlighted throughout this thesis. However, these similarities are not congruent across all of society. Gay men cannot be assumed to have any investment in feminist politics, and all women cannot be considered gay liberationists (or even feminists, for that matter). In fact, Jeffrey (2003) highlights that some feminists argue that gay men can be complicit in the oppression of women and that they are ultimately more invested in men than women. In other words, they exhibit a hierarchical attitude toward men, placing them above women due to their sexual interest, and they may or may not be aware of this attitude. I argue that these occurrences can be understood as extensions of the patriarchal hold over our society. Two groups, seen as separate in society, are influenced by something out of their realization or control. Patriarchy does precisely that, manipulating decisions and outcomes that work forever in its favor. While Sheppard et al.'s article points out the differences between women and gay men, I argue that some of these differences can still be seen as manipulations by patriarchal strategies. I will elaborate further on these differences below.

### **Help! I'm a Gay Man Trapped in a Woman's Body**

An excellent example of these manipulations can be seen in the article "Help! I'm a Gay Man Trapped in a Woman's Body" (Finnigan and Hine, 2003). The report, coming from a period slightly out of the norms of what would be produced in a contemporary (2023), more "accepting" society, criticizes women's time with gay men. It suggests that it causes women to become more

like gay men instead of heterosexual women and that this is a problem for society. The following excerpt is a list of symptoms that the reader can check herself for in the case that she has been manipulated and changed too much by a gay man.

Hearing Judy Garland sing *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* never ceases to make you burst into song, if not tears ... You can re-enact the dance routines (and do it with pride in public) to every Bananarama song from the 80s ... You flirt outrageously with every gay man you meet. However, when it comes to straight men your bitchy one-liners are more fag hag than sex siren ... Friends comment on your resemblance to Leader of the Fag Hags, Karen, from *Will & Grace* ... You kid yourself that your penchant for feather boas, crimson lips and an over-abundance of sequins is endearingly flamboyant and eccentric. But that straight guy you're eyeing up is probably assuming you're an ageing stripper. Or, worse still, a drag queen. (Finnigan and Hine, 2003: 132).

The mere existence of this article brings up interesting points regarding hetero-patriarchal control over society. On a surface level, it tells women how to act and that if they operate outside of certain norms, it is unacceptable, a common theme in patriarchal control tactics. On a deeper level, it is taking the relationship that is formed between women and gay men and demonizing it due to the existence of a relationship between men and women that is not heterosexual. In other words, their relationships are unsexual and unromantic. Therefore, they directly challenge a social norm established by hetero-patriarchy that dictates that women's and men's relationships must be romantic and sexual. Not only this, but the article also implies that a certain amount of time spent with gay men is allowed and that anything more than that will directly and negatively influence the woman's personality. It implies that the only relationship that must be focused on is

the relationship that the heterosexual woman has with the heterosexual man and that anything outside of that is socially and morally impermissible.

Shepperd et al. analyzed seven discourses between heterosexual women and gay men and came to an interesting conclusion. Their results dictated that both women and gay men draw upon normative discourses rooted in heterosexism (and thus, I argue, hetero-patriarchy). The women were shown to exclude gay men from normative masculinity. In contrast, gay men used discourses that delivered their attachment to masculinity or their strong connection to being labeled as a "gay man." The gay men also were shown to draw upon sexist language that went unnoticed and passively labeled as permissible to those involved. This showed that gay men operated under the same hetero-patriarchal funneling that they were considered excluded from.

I argue that this relationship that the two separate groups have with each other is merely a reflection of certain powers that hetero-patriarchy has over society in general. Again, after reading certain sections of this thesis, it is possible that I wish to show how the lived experiences of women and gay men are incredibly similar, and it is within these similarities that their oppression is shared. However, the results from this article show that this is not always true. The gay men knowingly used sexist language and verbally oppressed the women. However, it was seen as acceptable due to their status as a gay man. The women were seen as separate from their heterosexual-male counterparts and treated the gay men as spokespersons of all men. Each group identified the other as notably different and spoke to each other as such instead of, as might be implied by certain parts of this thesis suggest, as inexorably similar.

## **Conclusion**

How this article defines and uses patriarchy and how I use it in this thesis may imply that any societal problem could blame patriarchy for its existence. In other words, it could be



interpreted as a weak cause of any situation, especially in society's obsession with youth and beauty. The purpose of my argument is not to place direct blame upon patriarchy for these problems but to instead suggest the indirect correlations between the different facets of issues. The all-encompassing idea that there is a fundamental problem with society's obsession with youth and beauty is the persuasive goal, and shifting blame indirectly and directly to patriarchy is merely one of the ways that I wish to do this.

## **4. The Problems**

### **No Duty to Resist**

#### **Introduction**

Above I discussed how certain systems are in place that enhance the perpetuity of our fetishization of youth and beauty. Now we can move on to the last section discussing the societal problems that are directly affected by the roots and the systems.

Heather Widdows writes about the power of an individual to resist beauty norms and defends the view that it is a mistake to think that each person has a “duty to resist” dominant beauty norms. In mainstream society, people seem to be separated into groups of those embracing beauty norms and those who do not. Proponents of anti-beauty norms and those that try to resist the temptations of appearing as what our society would consider “beautiful” might say that we have a duty to resist said norms. Widdows argues against this idea and states that there is nothing harmful in valuing appearance and even goes as far as to say that there is also nothing wrong in the continued use of body modification practices. What she proposes is that we have no “duty to resist” and, indeed, that it is in promoting this duty that is “ineffective, counterproductive, and unethical” (Widdows, 2).

#### **False Consciousness**

Widdows hypothesizes that the idea that individuals have a duty to resist likely arises from false consciousness arguments. These are arguments in which a subordinated class of people are falsely instructed on their respective class within society and are deluded about their

position in general. She uses the example of second-wave feminism to explain this. The second-wave feminists realized that women's attempts to appear as beautiful to their respective paternalistic society only reinforced the strength that the paternalistic ties had over them in the first place. Second-wave feminists' response to demanding appearance standards was that they should refuse to participate. Widdows uses this period as an example of the breaking of false consciousness. She then compares it to the ideals of beauty that women still have today, which I will explain later.

The second-wave feminists assumed that upon realizing that appealing to these standards led them to be subordinated, women would choose not to engage with the ideals in the first place. The second-wave feminists used consciousness to dispel norms that favored the patriarchy in hopes that once consciousness is raised, the subordinated will be aware of the delusion they were acting under. An example of false consciousness is seen in the image of the happy housewife that was purported by the media and the public during the second wave of feminism. Once second-wave feminists helped people recognize that this image was nothing but the patriarchy speaking and putting them in place, the idea was then that women could refuse to participate.

Firstly, there is a need to show that when Widdows speaks about beauty throughout her arguments, the connection to youth that is brought along with it changes the perspective. In a way, it was as though Widdows was making excellent points related to beauty norms but needed to see that youth was tied in with these ideas. When this falsely deluded position is that a person is beautiful because they are young, it validates the false consciousness they are experiencing. They may not be aware of the false consciousness and its power over them, but the fact that they remain attached to it for reasons they are unaware of shows that perhaps there is a connection to

something intangible or un-beautiful. If a person is seen as beautiful because they are young, then it is not them complying with any standard of beauty being put forth by society; it is them being told that because they are one thing, they must be another (young, and therefore beautiful). One of these things is rooted in something perceptible and changeable; however, the other is biologically uncontrollable. If the thing that they are supposed to resist is something that they cannot change, then perhaps this is why our attachment to such ideals has persisted and escalated. If it were a matter of simply refusing to wear make-up and appeal to aesthetic beauty standards, then maybe our connection with them would have been reversed by now. Instead, one of the main reasons a person is considered beautiful is related to their youthfulness which is something a person cannot simply refuse to stop being.

If a person is both young and beautiful, they can do nothing about their youthfulness and how that is tied in with their beauty. However, they can change how they evaluate others' beauty and slowly help to change the foundations on which our perceptions of beauty are laid. In other words, I agree with Widdows' claim that a person has no individual duty to resist. Instead, the problem is situated deeply with our societal foundations in what is considered beautiful.

### **False Consciousness and Gay Men**

A good deal has been written about women's false consciousness concerning demanding beauty standards. I argue that the same can be said for gay men. Benson, referenced in Widdow's article, uses the college-aged girl as an example of someone suffering from false consciousness. The college-aged girl in the example leads a fulfilling and busy life at school but is constantly worried that she does not have the right look and spends countless hours trying to modify her body to meet societal standards. I see this as consequential of her being led to believe her

appearance is controllable and accurately reflects who she is as a person and her value within society.

Similarly, gay men experience a need to appeal to beauty standards. Like women, gay men may have expectations to meet societal standards unagreeably placed upon them, and, like women, they often desire to do so. I propose that there are interesting differences, however. One difference lies in where this desire forms. A woman does not necessarily have to fight for her identity. Instead, it is thrust upon her in a similarly non-consensual way. It is often the gay case, however, that a gay man must willingly show himself to society in a unique way that is already expected of him. In our patriarchally designed community, heterosexuality is expected to be the norm, and the sexualities that lie outside of that are alienated. The gay man is thus expected to be straight and then must come out as something that lies outside these expectations. He then might be forced to defend his identity and uphold it in ways that he might disagree with but places participation and recognition in the community as a higher priority than pride in refusing such ideals. In this way, he “chooses” to undergo the pressures surrounding societal standards and therefore feels a different need to uphold them in situations like the college-aged person trying to be beautiful. The college-aged girl could realize that her agreement to participate in the beauty standards and refusing to see herself as handsome without them hurts both her and women, although the gay man may approach this differently. The girl would no doubt have other women with whom she could rely, as she is part of a community (of those that identify as women) and, considering the standard anti-patriarchal norms accepted today, would have further support in her refusal to participate in such models. However, the gay man has a much smaller community that is often harder to find, especially when not conforming to beauty standards that affect how you are presented in society. For example, the common stereotype is that gay men take “better

care” of themselves. When you see a well-groomed, well-dressed man with elements of youthfulness sprinkled in, such as glowing skin, slightly too-small clothes, and a high and youthful voice, you may assume that he is a gay man, as he desires to present himself as such. If these things are not present, it is much harder to find those of the same persuasion in a heterosexually expectant society.

Widdows would disagree with this notion in further support of her argument that no individual has a duty to resist. However, if she included gay men in the conversation, she might consider things differently. I argue that, depending on the group in question, there may be a benefit to actively resisting such ideals. Widdows defends that false consciousness is not grounds for individual resistance because “telling individuals that they are wrong about the pleasure they experience, that they are deluded or duped, is to take a particular kind of high argumentative ground that is not justifiable in this instance” (Widdows, 8). I can see this argument working for women, but I believe things can change when considering gay men. Consequently, it might be possible that a group, such as gay men, would benefit from a duty to resist, and it may also be possible to extend this rationale to women.

### **Gay Categorization**

I have stated above that Widdows’ argument on no duty to resist may change if she considered a specific group, such as gay men, and I will now expand on why this might be. I will bring my own experience as a gay man into this section, and I believe my experiences and those of my peers, friends, and lovers are relevant. While these perspectives may not apply to the entire population, they are viewpoints and facts that I have experienced first-hand for the 14 years I have been out as a gay man.

It is not clear that women are grouped into categories as clearly as gay men are. We are funneled into certain stereotypes and shown that our identification with one group is rewarded with acceptance and uninhibited sexual attraction. For example, the popular gay dating app Grindr. The app is mainly used for casual sex encounters, and since its creation in 2009, it has remained the most popular app for gay men, regardless of whether they are looking only for sex. It has its users identify with one or more “tribes.” The tribes filter out the people we are not attracted to so that we might be more successful in finding someone close to us whom we can have immediate sex with. These tribes are separated by both physical features that are controllable and those that are not. The groups include bear, clean-cut, daddy, discreet, geek, jock, leather, otter, Poz, rugged, trans, and twink. While this thesis does not explain each category, it could prove interesting to my reader to explore what each of these means in the gay community. Most groups are based on physical features, such as a bear who is generally a larger and hairy man, compared to a jock who frequents a gym and has aesthetically pleasing muscles. However, two of these groups, which are the most popular, include implications towards things outside of one’s controllable appearance. Twinks are generally petite, hairless, skinny, and young. Daddies are usually bigger, slightly hairy, and older in age. The sexual attraction experienced between the two groups is strong and incredibly common. If you can comply with one of these groups, you are much more likely to receive a match from someone looking specifically for someone within their desired group.

I argue that individual resistance could prove to be useful in this situation. Individually resisting the societal pressures to alter your appearance so you can fit into one or more groups could prove to sway public opinion that the ideals do not have as strong a hold over us as they might seem. Consequently, people would realize that things out of our control (such as our age)

are not important either. If there is no individual duty to resist, then there can be no resistance by most of the group in question. For example, resisting the urge to place ourselves into one of the tribes and instead look for people we might not expect to be immediately attracted to could prove a healthy first step in moving away from these societal pressures. Widdows argues that an obligation to the duty to resist may lead to alienation or isolation. While this might still be true for gay men, it holds a different possibility of success. When considering women, it seems that alienation or isolation might occur, but I argue that a public reaction to something like that is impossible to predict. It would be possible, then, for gay men to use their community's obsession with categorizing in their favor. If gay men are so quick and willing to subject themselves to these idealized tribes, then any resistance would be highlighted to start a new movement away from them, thus leading to social acceptance for those outside of these parameters. In other words, I argue that gay men could use the established system in our favor instead of thinking that we have no power to change things or no duty to resist.

### **Conclusion**

Widdows did an excellent job defending her reasons for denying that an individual has a duty to resist beauty norms and ideals. However, I showed how her arguments do not hold when extending these reasons to another marginalized group. I argue that it would be worthwhile to consider these situations and their implications for how society may react to changing beauty ideals. I also showed how her explanation of the beauty standards in question ignored the aspect of youthfulness tied with it. Women and gay men both have similar experiences in dealing with these beauty norms, except it is possible that the solutions for each can vary. Perhaps, then, gay men could be used as a study group in actively resisting such norms and ideals and can be used as a means of inspiration for other marginalized groups in a patriarchally designed society.



# The Beauty Myth

## Introduction

The Beauty Myth is a book by Naomi Wolf that explores the pressures placed on women to conform to specific, narrow standards of physical beauty. It was published in 1990 and has easily become a feminist classic and essential work in women's studies. In the book, Wolf argues that the myth of beauty is a tool centered on social control that distracts women from actual issues. She argues that this myth creates an unrealistic and unattainable ideal of beauty that is used to keep women in states of perpetual self-doubt, self-objectification, and anxiety. This keeps women stagnant in their progression toward total equality in the eyes of society while simultaneously perpetuating consumerism on a massive scale. I will use this section to defend her ideas surrounding the effects of youth and beauty on women and extend them to include the experiences of gay men, thus showing the ramifications seen in society's perpetuity of the norms. I will touch on present times and travel back in time to the late 1900s to surmise where these ideals came from and why they have been exacerbated.

In the book, **Wolf** also explores how this myth affects women's physical and mental health, arguing that the social pressure to conform to a specific ideal of beauty can lead to many health issues like eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression. The negatives do not end there, as she also suggests that it leads to excessive use of cosmetics and plastic surgery, both of which are two of the most lucrative and growing businesses in the world. Outside of physical and mental health, she also examines how women's relationships and social and political standing are affected. She sees the pressure to conform to an ideal of beauty as having the ability to create a certain jealousy among women, which leads to a lack of support in their community. The myth

can also be used as a tool of destruction and oppression in a political sense, as it can force women to be marginalized and silence them in political situations and other spheres of public life.

In response to the myth of beauty, Wolf calls to action any women that believe in their cause to resist and challenge the legitimacy and existence of the myth. She encourages women to reject unrealistic parameters and redefine beauty on their terms. She also encourages women to support each other and to work together to create a more just and fair society. It is a groundbreaking piece of work that sheds light on the pervasive and damaging impact of the beauty myth on women's lives. Wolf successfully exposes how patriarchal power structures work to control and limit women. The book has profoundly influenced feminist discourse and will continue to be a pivotal piece of literature.

### **The Myth of Beauty, Youth, and Patriarchy**

The idea of beauty both objectively and universally exists through the desire to embody it by women and the desire to own it by men. The reasons it exists are biological, evolutionary, and sexual; their beauty must be due to their fertile ability, and strong men battle for beautiful women. Wolf states that every piece of this is a lie, and we exchange beauty as a social currency determined by politics.

Wolf goes on to describe that anthropology has refuted the idea that females require beauty to mate, suggesting instead that they are the sexually free ones who enjoy multiple sexual partners. This makes it evident that men's patriarchal control over women is one of the root causes of this beauty myth. They have bent reality to work in their favor in their possession and control over women, and beauty also connects to youth. She claims that youth is tied to beauty because of its relevance to virginity and because virgins represent "experiential and sexual

ignorance” (Wolf, 14). The term “sexual ignorance” itself has far-reaching implications. The Union of International Associations Encyclopedia addresses the problem of inadequate sexual education, saying that it can lead to reinforcing existing taboos and leads to sex by trial and error (UIA). Sexual ignorance, then, could be considered why men desire sexual relations with virgins.

One question I am interested in exploring is this: why do gay men tend to experience the same false consciousness related to beauty that women do? Mitchell Wood examined body image disturbance among gay men from various sociocultural perspectives. After reviewing the empirical literature, they concluded that gay males experience greater body dissatisfaction than other groups due to “their higher levels of gender nonconformity” (Wood, p. 43). In this way, the false consciousness associated with beauty standards experienced by gay men may be more intense than the same exhibited by women. However, I argue that the matter of intensity is not in question; the important part is that the lived experiences of both women and gay men may be similar enough that they have deeply ingrained ideals associated with beauty that affect their perception of self. Wood found that, when discussing beauty ideals and body dissatisfaction with gay men, “They therefore typically regard their problem as personal in nature, a belief that is prone to reinforcement by significant others, popular culture. . . whereas feminists have fought passionately against the male gaze, many gay men are still fighting passionately for it, striving to extend its reach, wishing to partake of its power” (Wood, p. 45). This opens an analysis of the fascinating relationship between gay men and the psychological influences and effects of the patriarchy. The fact is that the beauty ideals experienced by, and socially expected of, gay men and women are similar, and therefore their reaction to them may also be identical. The interesting part, however, is where these ideals came from and why they are put so high on the social pedestal.

It is possible that these ideals rooted in beauty and youth attract men, or at least that is what patriarchal control over the topic leads people to think. So, it is possible that once a gay man is out (publicly revealed that he is not heterosexual) and comfortable with acting in a way that no longer rejects the natural tendencies of his sexual attraction, he may look to fill that empty feeling of freedom with parameters that relate to something that he knows will attract men; youth and beauty. As I mentioned, the beauty ideals between gay men and women are similar in how they affect both groups (with Wood arguing that those experienced by gay men are worse), so it makes sense that a gay man would base his expectations of beauty around those that he was taught when he identified as heterosexual.

While Wolf claims that the beauty myth is merely a social construct, the fact that it is founded upon biological reasons relating to youth gives it a false validity that otherwise would not be as perfectly legitimate. This combination of an attachment to a social norm based on biology (youth) and one entirely socially constructed (beauty) gives a strong foundation for its persistence and existence in society. I now wish to explore the basis of this foundation, where precisely these social expectations have come from, and how they relate to gay men and women specifically. What results is a fascinating relationship between history, sociology, and philosophy.

### **Flower Power, Sex, and the 1960s**

Sex and sexuality follow fashion, and fashion falls in the shadow of politics. For many years, the congruencies between the way sex, style, and politics follow each other can be easily found. Wolf uses many examples of ads from around the time of publishing her book (1991), and while some of them would be grossly out of place at the time of the publishing of this thesis, 30 years later, things have not changed that much in general. “In an ad for Obsession perfume, a

well-muscled man drapes the naked, lifeless body of a woman over his shoulder . . . A woman sits up and begs, her wrists clasped together with a leather leash that is also tied to her dog. . . Two men tackle one woman and pull another by the hair” (Wolf, 133). These ads seem very violent, and the imagery is very straightforward, but the ads today are of the same heir of sexual repression except with the added aspect of subtlety. While today there is a sense of justice for these things not to be purported by the media, it all ties back to the politics and economics of fashion. There are no longer ads with a woman sitting up and begging with her wrists bound. Still, instead, she is shown on an expensive boat on a beautiful coastline draped over a man’s arm, hinting that the man is wealthy and successful, and their arrangement works only because she is beautiful and youthful looking.

Wolf also addresses the 1960s Flower Power era, where love was the reason behind everything during a sexual revolution. During this period, men expressed a new sense of femininity, reveling in their feelings of sensuality and frivolity. Some grew their hair long and became attached to certain beauty ideals centered on making their bodies more beautiful, but all of this, Wolf highlights, was because women were not thinking of their freedom. “Though they appropriated girls’ pleasures, it was still a boys’ party” (Wolf, 133). Perhaps this explains why gay men have fallen into stereotypes and forced norms surrounding beauty that are like women. While straight men were becoming more sexually free and embracing beauty standards once thrust upon women, it is possible that gay men were still in hiding and repressed and ignored in a remarkably analogous way that women were. Suddenly there was a disconnect between what was considered masculine and normal, and the social laws surrounding this became blurred, but possibly not for the better. As Wolf states, it was this sexual and aesthetic revolution that was at

the expense of women still not being free. I propose that this was simultaneously the case with gay men.

Wolf states that the feel of the 1970s was slightly different from the 1960s because of the major institutions in place and how they related to continuing sexual implications and norms for women. As women were being placed into positions of power in the workplace, the things they found desirable started becoming a threat to these institutions. If women were acting sexually free and cheerful without a sense of shame or dread of the consequences, it would break down these institutions since women changed the way they were displayed publicly, not privately. Then a norm began that women had to learn how to have sex like men, relating to this “equality” being tested in the workforce and social life. It was implied that passionate and tender sex was boring and not titillating. This led to the use of the female body as a source of identity for women to use as a sort of armor in embracing their sexuality. In other words, they would strive towards these certain ideals rooted in beauty and youth that would give them a reason to be sexual in the first place. Staying within this period of the 1970s, I will now explore the emergence of an epidemic that involved the sexual lives of gay men.

## **HIV / AIDS**

Wolf then briefly addresses the AIDS epidemic and states how it intensified an environment that purported the idea that only extraordinary beauty could merit the risk of having sex in the first place. I think this is a fascinating theory, and I argue that this moment was a massive turning point in the similarities experienced by women and gay men and how they relate to both youth and beauty.

The epidemic is thought to have started in the early 1980s. In 1981 the first cases of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) were reported, although it is believed to have

been circulating amongst the population for several years before that. As the disease spread, it became clear that it could be transmitted through sexual contact, needle sharing for intravenous drug users, and transmission from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding (Greene, 2007). The emergence of the disease had a massive impact on public health and social attitudes toward people in the LGBT+ community and those living with HIV. It affected both women and gay men, regardless of which group is thought to have suffered more. The political atmosphere surrounding it became increasingly hostile because of a sense of immorality that came along with the disease, as can still be seen in stigmas against it today. In other words, those most at risk of getting it were considered innately immoral. It was implied that gay men were more susceptible to the disease because by 1995, one in nine gay men had AIDS, one in fifteen had died because of it, and 10% of the 1,600,000 men between the ages of 25-44 who identified as gay had died (Rosenfeld, 2018). During these times, there was much misinformation and a lack of medical knowledge and acceptance of how to prevent the disease.

Let us return now to how this epidemic relates to youth and beauty. It is possible that the intersectionality between beauty standards, gender, and sexuality created specific vulnerabilities for certain individuals. Societal expectations around women's sexual behavior can also lead to stigmas against HIV-positive women, exacerbating the disease's impact on women in general. This connection also extends a bit broader in societal norms and gender and sexuality. Women who conform to conventional beauty standards were more easily objectified (as we see today). They were valued more for their physical appearance than their abilities, intelligence, or other admirable qualities. This adds to the culture of objectification and exploitation, where women are expected to conform to narrow and unrealistic standards about youth and beauty. This may have led to an increased vulnerability for HIV transmission as women may have felt pressured to

engage in more risky sexual behaviors to appease these standards and expectations. Mays et al. conducted a study based on this very idea. The article analyzes the disproportionate impact of HIV on marginalized communities, including women and LGBT+ individuals. They successfully highlight how societal norms around gender and sexuality can contribute to increased vulnerabilities for HIV transmission. For example, they specifically say that traditional gender roles tend to place women in subservient positions in sexual relationships where they have less power and control in dictating how sexual encounters play out.

### **Conclusion**

The similarities between the experiences of women and gay men and the epidemic are vast. It is argued by many that gay men suffered the most from the disease, and the statistics on how many gay men died from the disease prove that. In the gay community, the emphasis on youth and beauty can create particular vulnerabilities for individuals in terms of transmitting the disease. It can also lead to stigmas and discrimination for those living with it, just as it did (and perhaps still does) for women. Gay men who fit into conventional beauty standards may be more likely to attract partners at higher risk for contracting and transmitting the disease. The difference between them and women is the increased chance of interacting with someone with the disease due to the gay community being much smaller than the heterosexual one.

The part of this that I find fascinating is that it is possible that the epidemic either worsened people's attachment to youth and beauty or exacerbated it. The fact that youth and beauty were treasured societal norms before the epidemic is incontestable. However, it is possible that the epidemic directly challenged these ideals since it was many young and conventionally attractive women and gay men who contracted and/or died from the disease. It is also possible that the ideals were worsened, at least in the eyes of gay men. After the disease



appeared, older gay men had their partners and friends dying, suffering, or already dead from the disease. They were left alone, and their social lives, which they had worked hard to obtain, were left empty. Rosenfeld analyzed the effects of the epidemic on the social and personal lives of the men at the time, “older gay men who had lost friends and/or partners during the AIDS epidemic described cities becoming virtual ghost-towns” (Rosenfeld, 2018). The communities that were once bustling with people became empty, concluding that the gay community suffered socially and personally from the epidemic. I argue that it is possible that these older men suddenly had a feeling of reveling in the lost years of their partners and friends, and a new appreciation of the innocence and virginity of youth may have started to evolve. As Wolf mentioned, youth is often tied in with virginity, innocence, and general sexual inexperience, so this may be when gay men started to develop a further appreciation for those that currently had no chance of contracting the disease due to their lack of sexual freedom or experience.

Similarly, they could have valued the youth’s position because it also meant that the older men had less chance of contracting the disease with them than they did with people of their age group. The same could be said for women during this time as well, considering that only the sexual women and those that considered themselves sexually satisfied and free were the ones who had the chance of getting the disease. It follows, then, that when added information about the disease and its prevention and treatment started to emerge, there remained a sense of coveting the youthful and beautiful still seen today. In other words, there may have been a reason that youth and beauty were coveted in the times of an ugly and destructive disease. However, now that that disease is preventable and treatable, a societal inclination still lingers towards fetishizing youth and beauty.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

The intersectionality between subjects while studying for a Humanistic Studies degree is vast, so I have chosen a thesis project with large amounts of intersectionality. There is the subject of our deeply rooted fascination with youth and beauty in general and the implications it holds over people in their everyday lives, as exemplified in the cultural thought experiment of the Nacirema. This warrants study, mainly why we have developed this way and why it seems we will continue to grow similarly. There is also the subject of how this obsession with youth and beauty affects marginalized people in patriarchal systems, and the consequences are not easily overcome. Feminist theory has much to say on this subject, as does Queer theory and LGBTQ+ studies. Queer theory is a scope that I believe would be ultimately satisfying and yield powerful results. The intersectionality between these two marginalized groups, as they experience the cultural effects of these obsessions, could be fascinating to future scholars. I have argued that the oppressions of a patriarchal system run deep within Western culture and that there may be things we can do to slow the process of these obsessions becoming worse.

These things have become far too typical in Western culture. It makes perfect sense to hold the innocence of adolescence above the guilt-ridden lives of adulthood. It also makes sense that we find symmetry, proportion, and harmony beautiful and that these qualities can be found within the aesthetic nature of other human beings. The problem, I have argued, arises when these two are considered together. As we continue to make advancements in medicine and technology, there is no better time to be wary of how high we hold specific values over others. It may be time to embrace an older world with beauty in wisdom rather than accept a young world with beauty in vanity and naivety.

## Bibliography

- “Anti-Wrinkle Products Market.” Www.futuremarketinsights.com, FMI - Future Market Insights, July 2022, [www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/anti-wrinkle-products-market](http://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/anti-wrinkle-products-market).
- “Aveda - Sustainable Future.” Aveda, [www.aveda.com/sustainablefuture](http://www.aveda.com/sustainablefuture).
- “Beauty Sustainability.” Clinique, [www.clinique.com/sustainability](http://www.clinique.com/sustainability).
- Bahlheda, Robert. “Chapter 1: The Legacy of Patriarchy.” *Counterpoints*, vol. 488, 2015, pp. 15–67, [www.jstor.org/stable/45136330?seq=2](http://www.jstor.org/stable/45136330?seq=2). Accessed 25 Apr. 2023.
- “Inadequate Sex Education | The Encyclopedia of World Problems.” Uia.org, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD PROBLEMS & HUMAN POTENTIAL, 2016, [encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/inadequate-sex-education](http://encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/inadequate-sex-education). Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.
- “Patriarchy.” Oxford Reference, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100310604;jsessionid=5EBDCDA68F33B10FE26DE3498965AF31#:~:text=Literally%2C%20a%20community%20of%20related,patriarchal%20adj.%20%5B>.
- Aley, Melinda, and Brandon Thomas. “An Examination of Differences in Product Types and Gender Stereotypes Depicted in Advertisements Targeting Masculine, Feminine, and LGBTQ Audiences.” *Communication Research Reports*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2021, pp. 132–141., <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2021.1899908>.

- Byrne, Angela, and Katie Milestone. "He Wouldn't Be Seen Using It...! Men's Use of Male Grooming Products as a Form of Invisible Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 23, no. 1, 27 Feb. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405211066314>.
- Charles Asbury Stephens. *Natural Salvation: The Message of Science, Outlining the First Principles of Immortal Life on the Earth*. The Laboratory, 1903.
- Del Rosso, Teri. "There's a Cream for That: A Textual Analysis of Beauty and Body-Related Advertisements Aimed at Middle-Aged Women." *Journal of Women & Aging*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2016, pp. 185–197., <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2015.1125698>.
- Dimitrov, Dimitre, et al. "Beauty Perception: A Historical and Contemporary Review." *Clinics in Dermatology*, 4 Mar. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clindermatol.2023.02.006>.
- Editors, The. "Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy." *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 1, Feb. 1991, pp. 56–57, <https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.1991.308>.
- Fuchs, Christoph, et al. "The Psychological Effects of Empowerment Strategies on Consumers' Product Demand." *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 74, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 65–79., <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.1.65>.
- Gamson, Joshua, and Michael Warner. "Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory." *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 6, 1994, p. 905., <https://doi.org/10.2307/2076123>.
- Gerstell, Emily, et al. "How Covid-19 Is Changing the World of Beauty - McKinsey & Company." *McKinsey & Company*, May 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Consumer%20Packaged%20G>

oods/Our%20Insights/How%20COVID%2019%20is%20changing%20the%20world%20of%20beauty/How-COVID-19-is-changing-the-world-of-beauty-vF.pdf.

Greene, Warner C. "A History of AIDS: Looking back to See Ahead." *European Journal of Immunology*, vol. 37, no. S1, Nov. 2007, pp. S94–102, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eji.200737441>.

Haber, Carole. "Anti-Aging Medicine: The HistoryLife Extension and History: The Continual Search for the Fountain of Youth." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series A*, vol. 59, no. 6, June 2004, pp. B515–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerona/59.6.B515>.

Harrison, Robert Pogue. *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age*. The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Jeffreys, Sheila. *Unpacking Queer Politics : A Lesbian Feminist Perspective*. Cambridge ; Malden, Ma, Polity Press In Association With Blackwell Pub, 2003.

Jones, Doug, et al. "Sexual Selection, Physical Attractiveness, and Facial Neoteny: Cross-Cultural Evidence and Implications." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 36, no. 5, Dec. 1995, pp. 723–748. Jstor.org, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2744016.pdf?casa\\_token=ot0r4fGV-SUAAAAA:b3bCLiHxDR7Y0RcX0PveMafpNeFuBrE6r\\_4oIGqRcCM6ijuktMeI\\_q1InpvyiOD7C8\\_-UUfRpdN85VujmQ-QNM0ROgx6l2XnEYVU5zbQgseJK2SLTQ](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2744016.pdf?casa_token=ot0r4fGV-SUAAAAA:b3bCLiHxDR7Y0RcX0PveMafpNeFuBrE6r_4oIGqRcCM6ijuktMeI_q1InpvyiOD7C8_-UUfRpdN85VujmQ-QNM0ROgx6l2XnEYVU5zbQgseJK2SLTQ). Accessed 2 Apr. 2023.

Kant, Immanuel, and Andrews Reath. *Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason*. Edited by Mary J. Gregor, 1997, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511809576>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

- Mays, Vickie M., et al. "HIV Prevention Research: Are We Meeting the Needs of African American Men Who Have Sex with Men?" *Journal of Black Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 1, Feb. 2004, pp. 78–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798403260265>.
- Miner, Horace. "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 58, no. 3, June 1956, pp. 503–7, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1956.58.3.02a00080>.
- O'Neill, Onora. "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics." *Contemporary Moral Problems*, West Publishing Co, 1985.
- Petersen, Alan. "Capitalising on Ageing Anxieties: Promissory Discourse and the Creation of an 'Anti-Ageing Treatment' Market." *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2018, pp. 191–202., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318766165>.
- Petruzzi, Dominique. "Beauty Market Value by Category Worldwide." Statista, 1 Mar. 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/550657/beauty-market-value-growth-worldwide-by-country/#:~:text=Global%20beauty%20and%20personal%20care%20market%20value%20by%20category%202013%20to%202026&text=This%20statistic%20illustrates%20beauty%20and,billion%20U.S.%20dollars%20in%202021>.
- Platek, Steven M. *Evolutionary Cognitive Neuroscience*. Mit Press, 2007.
- Rhode, Deborah L. *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile; Or, on Education*. 1762.
- Widdows, Heather. "II—No Duty to Resist: Why Individual Resistance Is an Ineffective Response to Dominant Beauty Ideals." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 122, no. 1, Jan. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/arisoc/aoab014>. Accessed 20 Jan. 2022.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*. Vintage Classics, 2015.

Wood, Mitchell J. "The Gay Male Gaze." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, vol. 17, no. 2, Aug. 2004, pp. 43–62, [https://doi.org/10.1300/j041v17n02\\_](https://doi.org/10.1300/j041v17n02_)

