

CONSUMED

This “revolutionary beauty product” alleviates extensive beauty rituals every morning. Best of all, my product allows for women to perform their cosmetic needs in three times the speed! That extra hour each day of personal grooming can now go towards new daily rituals including educating others, radical involvement in the feminist movement and meaningful self empowerment.

Giving the illusion of freedom when splayed open, the apparatus quickly reminds women of the realities of being trapped in a patriarchal capitalist system as the armature imprisons the customer and applies “cosmetic empowerment.”

Feminist rhetoric has been co-opted by body shaming industries. Through PR campaigns and advertising, women young and old are being told that they are in need of constant improvement. Words like “empowerment” and “confidence” are sprinkled frivolously throughout ads and articles in fashion magazines, as if buying these products will allow women to fill the void *created* by these media influences. Corporations exploit and capitalize on buzzwords of liberation, utilizing these seemingly positive phrases to alienate women. Therefore, there is an obvious need for skepticism about consumer-based solutions to social issues. These messages promoting consumption urge women to foster narcissistic behaviors, rather than challenge gender hierarchies.

Mia

Beauty Rituals:

An American woman spends an average of 49 minutes a day on beauty rituals, from selecting clothes to hairstyling to makeup application (Johnson). Almost an hour of each day is lost to personal grooming, time that could be used for learning or striving or simply sleeping. While I can't recall a specific instance that I was told that needed to take care of myself in a certain way in order to be considered beautiful, there are many materialistic things I do to myself each day to *feel* beautiful; I dye my hair, paint my nails, curl my eyelashes, whiten my teeth, draw dark lines across my eyelids and pluck my eyebrows, just to name a few.

With an extra hour to each day, I could read a book, volunteer at an animal shelter, study more or even learn a language. As an activist and young women's educator, this is not the first time I have existentially wondered why I blindly follow these materialistic habits to define my identity. I

I talk a lot about the psychological war against women that comes from "the media", an idealized sense of beauty and capitalism. As a feminist I am told to question the things that influence me. Why do I still perform these daily rituals, and what is influencing me to feel uncomfortable in my own skin?



**8 NIGHT TIME BEAUTY RITUALS
TO WAKE UP PRETTY**

mass media. Advertisements and magazine articles are telling me exactly what it looks like to be beautiful as a woman today, but more importantly they are telling me how I can *purchase* that beauty. I am told that these products will make me not only look attractive, but they will also make me feel better about myself. The purchasing power given to women like me by exploiting our vulnerabilities allows for corporations to sell beauty to us as empowerment, instead of achieving authentic liberation within ourselves.

Why Women Buy Beauty:

Western women began fighting for their rights again in a more holistic, mainstream feminist movement in between the right to vote in the 1900's and the Equal Pay Act of the 1970's. The movement's flame was sparked once again for women to fight for their rights to healthcare and fair wages. Almost three decades later, we see this fire still burning strong as women continue to fight for reproductive, educational, professional and societal freedoms.

There is, however, a very clear link between the gaps in women's liberation and women's beauty. While women made up only about one-third of the workforce in 1969, women today make up almost half of all workers in the United States (Long). Women are also stepping up to lead the country; a record number of women ran for public office in 2012, and a record-high percentage of women are serving in Congress (Millard). Why is it, however, that after this rise in perceived societal liberation comes exponential growth of woman with eating disorders (Johnston), the insane expansion of the plastic surgery industry (Butler) and obscene objectification in advertising within that same time period?

With women's gained confidence in their place in western society comes a relative hatred towards the physical self, poisoning the progress women have made. Naomi Wolf, feminist scholar and author of multiple highly acclaimed book feminist theory, writes: "It is no accident that so many potentially powerful women feel this way. We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement:

the beauty myth.” Women’s vulnerabilities are used against them while as the beauty industry thrives off of their insecurities. The beauty myth is not only a tool for making money, but it is also a tool to keep women subordinate within the patriarchy.

While women have more money and power, statistics show that they are more likely expending those freedoms as consumers instead of contributors (Rook). It is important to note that the lifestyle promoted through the traditionally patriarchal capitalist system thrives in promoting an image of womanhood that is physically harming woman’s bodies. Therefore, it would make sense that this rise in destructive advertising goes hand-in-hand with the gain of women’s societal rights: as the patriarchal system is damaged in one place, it is mended in another.

Will Women Ever Be Good Enough?:

In reality, as women perform these cosmetic practices, they are left with promise of attaining an unrealistic goal of womanhood. For profit reasons, the beauty industry has kept aesthetic standards out of reach to human capacity in order to have consumers continually purchase products to reach this “goal”.

These goals are portrayed through NAIR Commercials, Photoshopped models and underneath the plastic packaging of products that don’t really make eyelashes grow longer or skin any tighter. The ad above is just one example of using body shame as a bandwagon advertising technique. In campaign the viewers notes that without this product they should feel bad about their bodies, as shown with the girls who look self conscious juxtaposed to the girl who looks confident offering up her shiny razor. Not only are these materialistic practices harmful to our psyche, but they’re harmful to our physical bodies as well.



this
bad

The beauty industry continues to propagate ideas of misogyny and further institutionalizes gender inequality by placing an emphasis on the typical appearance of what a woman should look like. This largely replicates inaccessible aesthetic standards that can force women to step outside

their genetic boundaries, which make the idea of achieving these standards through breast augmentations, liposuctions, and facelifts seem rational. A multinational survey found that only 2% of women describe themselves as beautiful (Etcoff), meaning that, even through this multibillion-dollar industry, women still come out feeling less than beautiful. What better way of keeping women in her place?



Women fill the emptiness left by these broadcasted insecurities to buy things that they don’t need, grasping to reach the unattainable ambition of being beautiful today. Take the Ad above for Inspired Silver, which normalizes the practice of going under the knife while also objectifying the model. Ads like these perpetuate harmful cultural practices from implants to labiaplasty to laser hair removal as the only way a woman can feel good in her own skin. Who cares if they’re not real—as long as the industry is making a profit?

Seeing Beauty Rituals as Empowerment:

Not only does this promote a materialized sense of beauty to women, it also implies these harmful beauty rituals as a sense of empowerment: things to fill the void created by these advertisements and media influences in the first place. Women are continually told that they aren't good enough, and therefore they can feel good enough by buying or purchasing something to experience a certain "empowerment" by that purchase. In reality, what they are experiencing is catering to a greater system working against them. Internalizing the idea that harming ourselves will make us beautiful bleeds into other parts of a woman's life creating unhealthy relationships to the body.

Women are so internally and emotionally oppressed when it comes to their self-image that they are willing to believe that confidence can really come in a can. The disconnect between personal transformation in terms of women's beauty ideology and transformative social change is lacking, though the media by telling them otherwise. The only way for women to attain authentic empowerment is to disconnect feminine beauty ideologies from the ideology of feminist social action.

Through PR campaigns and advertising, women young and old are being told that they are in need of constant improvement. Buzz words are sprinkled frivolously throughout ads and articles in fashion magazines (like "empowered" or "self-determination" or "independence") as if buying these products will allow them to feel free. Using this seemingly progressive rhetoric begins to only sell ideas of empowerment, instead of suggesting any type of real social change itself. Understanding that corporate interests of promoting buying as a meaningful source of deliverance is not only morally wrong but it is institutionally holding woman back.

Understanding Authentic Empowerment:

These practices are being introduced to women in traditionally feminine and complicated ways, like Harley Medical's surgical campaign of "Inspiring Confidence", tells us to reproduce, rather than challenge gender hierarchies. Traditional feminist practices that call for a mandate for radical and economic equality and refusal to settle for second-class citizenship now deviates into a refusal to settle for less than smooth skin.

The emphasis of feminine beauty and the body as a site of individual meaning allows for corporate domination to begin normalizing their power of standard cultural images. Consumer spending has tripled since 1990 (Davis) and as the makeup industry has doubled since 2003 from \$30 billion to \$65 billion (Averett), women have to wonder how liberating these practices have become?



While it may be nice to hear the buzzwords of liberation, the power of corporations to exploit and capitalize on biological boundaries to alienate woman shows the need to be skeptical of consumer-based tactics towards social change. Woman are promised a false sense of choice in the beauty industry as an array of products promise to be able to shave, highlight and soften their troubles away. As a young woman, I am constantly consuming this information fed to me by pop up ads, billboards and magazines, with or without my approval. Living complacently under this system is institutionally and mentally holding me back.

After fully understanding its repercussion, I still stand before you with pallid foundation plastered across my face and my nails painted an artificial black. I am that still that girl who feels worse about herself without my freshened face of pasty makeup slathered across it. I am still that girl who feels the need to apologize for looking “ugly” when I really am looking like myself. But I am still that girl who calls herself a feminist. Complacently understanding these institutionalized practices as wrong is one thing, and acting upon these injustices to create social change is another. Recognize why women feel the need feel beautiful at all: beauty rituals are called “rituals” because they are instilled in us. The danger behind these practices is what lies behind the prescribed behavior, not the danger of the appearance itself. Use that knowledge to question the rituals that go unnoticed, both by society and by ourselves.

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