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Relationship between Stereotypical Beauty Standards and Secondary Social Status of Women

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Abstract: *There is no doubt about the fact that women throughout the world are discriminated against and hold a secondary status in every sphere of life. They are stereotyped when it comes to their roles in family/social life. There are even stereotypical beauty standards in every culture to dictate, how a woman should look like. Women are expected to attain those unattainable beauty standards in order to be considered acceptable to the society. This stereotyping plays a central role in shaping women's behaviors in everyday life and determining their status in the society, which is secondary to the men folk. The purpose of this study is to study the variables (the stereotypical beauty standards about women and their (women's) secondary social status) to discover the relationship between the two. Also this study aims to evaluate the impact of the stereotyping on the lives of women so that some guidelines could be developed to avoid the negative impacts of stereotypical beauty standards on women. Furthermore, it could be helpful for the policy-making process to assist the states to achieve the sustainable development goals 2030. Since it is not possible to attain these goals without including the 51% of the world's population, i-e women, into the process of policy making at the state level..*

Key Words: Stereotypical Beauty Standards, Secondary Social Status, Gender Discrimination

Introduction

Women make more than half of the total population of the world and, around the world, they are being discriminated against just because of their gender. In spite of the efforts by the governments, INGOs and civil societies, gender equality still seems to be a dream. Women are being discriminated against almost in every field of life. Their rights are denied and responsibilities are doubled.

"From news, show business, politics or modeling everything contains a tinge of controversy when it comes to women" (Huda & Ali, 2015). The nature of discrimination is different in different parts of the world, however there is one common burden, women across the globe are bearing,

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irrespective of their society, country or religion and that burden is to "look beautiful". They are expected to fit into the boxes of stereotypical beauty that is constructed by the society.

This may seem something very simple, superficial and harmless but in fact things are not that simple. Women and girls around the globe try their best to look as they are expected to look by the social set-ups they are living in, but if somehow they fail to do so, the consequences they have to bear are beyond the comprehension of a common man. It is very important to see whether the stereotypical beauty standards have any relationship with the secondary social status of women? Or these phenomena are not linked with each other?

The researcher believed that a lens of a researcher brings so much more to the table than the discussions of other communities. Though this topic has been researched about so many times but importance and sensitivities of this topic are still there to be explored. This phenomena is influencing more than half of the population of the world and anthropological community has a huge responsibility in this regard to uncover the different facets of this phenomena. This paper employs narrative analysis technique to find how deeply rooted is the phenomenon.

The research aimed at some of the stereotypical beauty standards in different societies that women strive to achieve, and also tried to explore the cost that women pay for just BEING WOMEN? What are the beauty standards for women and how are those standards hard to meet? Why these stereotypical beauty standards are harmful and how are they actually damaging our women folk? And finally, what measure could be taken to save our women from this nuisance?

Literature Review

There is no doubt about the fact that in order to investigative a particular issue/topic, it is very important for the researcher to thoroughly go through the previous researches so that the up-coming research study could be made unique in its type and unintended duplication could be avoided. The role of previous researches is also important in understanding the facets of the issue that has been discussed and explored.

There are many ways through which Stereotypical Beauty Standards are inculcated in the society and are damaging women. Greenfield, S. (2018) believed that every society has its own beauty standards nd preferences but advertisements have taken it to the next level, where the beauty standards propagated by them became unattainable. "Beauty is only skin-deep, but the perceived absence of beauty may lead to damaging social bias. Compared to men, women may suffer more from social anxiety, prejudice, and inequality based on their appearance" (Kim & Lee, 2018).

Some of the studies done in South Asia found dominant trends of fair skin obsession among the women. This obsession is driving women/girls crazy to lighten their complexion even at the cost of their health. A research study have found that people who possess darker skin, are given less opportunities than those who have lighter skin tone (Osuri, 2008). Similar results have been found durian a research study by (Banks, 2015), he said that women with the lighter skin are thought to be more desirable and beautiful than those who have darker skin.

It was found interesting and informative. But at the same time a research-gap was also found that was there to be explored and investigated. It was found that there was no substantial research material on, how the stereotypical beauty standards effect women and are they, in anyway, the reason of women's subordination in the society? These two variables are thought to be far apart and seem to have no effect on each other but, researcher believe that interesting facts can be found If a research is conducted to find out whether the stereotypical beauty standards prevent women from achieving financial independence the way men achieve and enjoy the same. Since women are kept financially dependent and are treated just as commodities and objects, they remain secondary to men in the society. Financial dependence prevents them from achieving freedom for themselves to take major decisions of their lives, hence women end up being financially dependent, indecisive and unable to climb the ladder of success in life, and

remain like a commodity in the society that has to meet the socially acceptable standards of beauty in order to be appreciable and even acceptable in the society.

So this research finds a close connection between the women's secondary social status and stereotypical beauty standards for them. This research also explains the origin of these beauty standards and why is there a surge in it with every passing day and up to what extent they are damaging to women around us.

Moreover, in this paper researchers have also tried to find out, up to what extent Pakistani women are being affected from this phenomenon? Although this phenomena is severely damaging women around the world but this article particularly focuses on the women living in Pakistan.

Methodology

This paper aims to identify how stereotypical beauty standards are affecting women's lives in all the cultures of the world. Researcher had selected some literature including stories for kids and some literary papers to trace the impacts of beauty standards on women. The reason behind selecting kids literature for review was, to identify the basic reason behind the formation of such belief system at a young age. Furthermore, such literature also gives us a way to understand the ideas about womanhood, beauty, feminity and gender that have been transferred from generation to generation.

Since this research is qualitative so "Inductive Research Approach" has been used to conduct the study. Three standard steps of the said approach have been followed for the paper. These steps are as follows

1- Observation (Already existing literature and researches are used to study the variables, that are stereotypical beauty standards for women and their(women's) secondary status; Narrative analysis)
2- Observing a Pattern (A consistent pattern has been observed between the two variables under study)

3- Developing a theory (finally, a theory about the relationship between these two variables has been established/presented)

The paper discovers a direct and strong relationship between the stereotypical beauty standards and the secondary social status of women. This study finds that there is a direct relationship between the stereotypical beauty standards about women and their secondary social status around the world. When women are expected/compelled to look in a certain way to be considered desirable and even acceptable to the society, it has disastrous effects on their health (Physical and psychological). And when these stereotypical believes are translated at the organizational levels and women are dealt with as objects while keeping their potential and abilities aside, they prove to be a big hurdle for women in their career development. This results in systematic exploitation of women and further leads to financial dependence of women to the male member of the family. When women are not financially secure and independent, their rights are denied. They are exploited and objectified which finally results into their secondary social status. As it is obvious that "Beggars cannot be choosers" so they are considered secondary to men in all the walks of life.

Results and Discussion

The "pressure to look beautiful" is an ugly reality that has severe effects on women. This phenomenon has been destroying our women since ages. Though beauty standards for women vary from culture to culture but almost in all the cultures around the globe, these standards are impossible to achieve. Now, due to the information technology and other technological advancements have changed the world all together. Internet has made the world a global village, where media is always there to float the latest trends in seconds. Especially social media has changed the game altogether.

The list of the articles that were selected for the sake of systematic literature review and thematic analysis are mentioned in the table;

Table 1

Article	Author
When Beauty is the Beast: The Effects of Beauty Propaganda on Female Consumers.	Greenfield, S. (2018).
The Effects of Skin Tone and Self-esteem in South Asian Women: Internalized Racial Oppression as a Mediating Variable	Bhayani-Larsen, K. (2020).
The objectification of women in mass media: Female self-image in misogynist culture.	Berberick, S. N. (2010).
Exploring the relationship between frequency of Instagram use, exposure to idealized images, and psychological well-being in women.	Sherlock, M., & Wagstaff, D. L. (2019).
Fair skin in South Asia: an obsession?	Shankar, P. R., & Subish, P. (2016).

Media and Beauty Standardization

Berberick, S. N. (2010) said that media has objectified women since long. They have also defined the standards of beauty for women folks and made them reduced to just objects. He also said that both women and society have been negatively influenced due to this phenomenon.

Now an actress sitting in the first world country like America, can upload a picture making millions of women see that in seconds and setting higher goals of beauty for themselves, that are unattainable for a women sitting in third world country. But here the question is; why women want to look beautiful? What are the factors that force them to strive to look in a certain way? What makes them dissatisfied with the way they look or who they are? Numerous studies have been conducted to find the causes of this phenomenon. Researchers have found that the people who are beautiful or attractive as per the beauty standards of the culture they are living in, have several advantages over those who are not (so called) beautiful. So physical appearance definitely seems to be playing an important role in everyday lives of people.

Benefits of Meeting Beauty Standards

Several researches indicate the advantages of being attractive or beautiful, as per the set standards of the society. Many studies have been conducted to find out the affects of meeting the beauty standards, all of these studies have come to the save conclusion that women who are beautiful have several advantages over the rest. Women who are beautiful enjoy unfair beneficial treatment from the society says (Dakanalis, Carrà, Calogero, Fida, Clerici, Zanetti & Riva, 2015). Another study conducted by (McKinley, 2017) have found that the beauty standards for the women folks largely depend on the culture, one lives in. They largely vary from culture to culture.

It is universal, however, that those who are deemed attractive in any society are rewarded for that status; having conventional beauty gives an individual an edge relative to those lacking it (McKinley, 2017) also have come to the very same conclusion, that people who are beautiful according to the beauty standards of the society do have an edge over those who are not so beautiful. Grogan (2016) have found that beauty is such a powerful phenomenon that people who look beautiful are thought to be intelligent and intellectually sound, they are more persuasive than those who are not beautiful. Moreover, beautiful people can easily dominate their fellows.

So it is obvious that there are many benefits attached to one's good looks. And there is a silent agreement between the society and its individuals that people who meet the beauty standards set by the society deserve a higher place in the society as compared to those who are less beautiful or do not meet the stereotypical beauty standards. So people strive to meet the stereotypical beauty standards set by the society in order to be considered desirable and even acceptable.

Beauty Standards in Pakistani Society

Almost every woman on earth wants to look

beautiful, however in every culture beauty is perceived in different ways. But when we speak specifically about the beauty standards in the context of Pakistan the situation is quite complicated. Women have access to the media and they are aware about the latest fashions and trends but at the same time there is bombardment of misleading information and beauty images on the media. Women want to attain the very same beauty with very limited resources, eventually they end up damaging themselves physically and psychologically. Many girls and women are found fasting to attain a certain weight or using formula creams to change their complexion for a lighter one. Such things are damaging them a lot. But women still use these substandard products as the available resources that they can spend on their appearance are very limited. Average women do not have the same resources as a model/actress in TVC has. But with the very limited resources every woman wants to looks as beautiful as the models in media, so they use substandard products and end up damaging themselves physically as well as mentally.

Influence of Technology

Recently there is a surge in the internet use in the country due to which advertisers have made their way to a large number of audiences, including young girls and women, who are unaware about the fabrication of the images presented in the advertisements. Consequently, they compare themselves to the images shown in the advertisements and end up being anxious about their own reality. This not only affects their image of self but also affects their everyday life.

Multinational companies, that are making huge money, form their beauty products; want women and girls to perceive the beauty in a certain way. For example, in Pakistan, fairer complexion is considered to be more beautiful than the tan. People call it a post-colonial phenomena. If we see this in the historical perspective, one can easily see the reason behind this perception. Britain ruled the subcontinent for a long period of time and since they were the rulers and thought to be superiors to the natives so people perceived whiter complexion as a mandatory beauty standard.

So, multinational companies, being aware of the phenomenon, found a good market in the region to sell their fairness products and they started exploiting the people for their false perception of beauty. Multinational companies spend millions and millions of Dollars to reinforce these beauty standards and to make people believe that white color is essential to look beautiful and attractive. So people buy their product to attain fairer complexion.

Obsession of Thinness

Similarly, thinness is another beauty standard that is very common in Pakistan, just the way it is very common in the rest of the world. Women strive to attain thin bodies on the expense of their physical and mental health. Girls at a very young age go on fasting to attain a certain body weight. Due to which they end up with severe physical and mental health issues. Malnutrition is one of the most common issues, girls are facing today. Malnutrition further leads to the eating disorders like Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and even hormonal issues in young girls. Such problems are not just damaging for women but are also, life threatening. Some of the major psychological problems that women face due to the obsession of being thin are anxiety, under-confidence, depression and lower self-esteem. The current standards of beauty are dangerously unattainable, especially in terms of thinness, because the gap between reality and the ideal; continues to grow larger.

Numerous studies have proved that women in patriarchal societies live on a disadvantageous side. They are thought to be inferior to men, no matter how hard they work to play their role in everyday life. And there is no doubt that this secondary status of women is reinforced by the media, be it advertisements, dramas, films or any other genre, women are objectified everywhere. This phenomenon is affecting women in almost every sphere of life.

Beauty Standards and Professionalism

The stereotypical beauty standards for women impact them even when it comes to their professional life and that is the point when women are influenced, THE MOST. Due to the stereotypical beauty standards, women have to strive to get themselves fit into certain boxes, and

if they fail to do so, they consider themselves incompetent or insufficient. In the professional life, when a woman wants to put up her for a job, there is a long list of professions where women are considered suitable to appoint, on the basis of their looks. And also there are many jobs that are considered to be WOMEN-ONLY(women specific) jobs, just because the organizations look for someone who is more attractive than able.

For example, a job of "receptionist" is often considered to be a woman's job. Since it requires fewer skills but looks. So a beautiful (As per beauty standards set by the society) girl is preferred over an average girl who is better able.

Similarly, nursing is also considered to be a women's job as it require the person to be caring and helpful. Apart from these, there are several other jobs that are women-specific. Personal assistant is also an example of such jobs. This is not it, even the jobs where there is no human interaction in-person and all the conversation is over a phone call, organizations prefer to hire females for them. Call center representative is an example of such jobs. Where organizations prefer women candidates since they believe that customer are better handled when they have a female to interact with.

On the contrary, women are not preferred when it comes to hiring for highly-skilled jobs. For instance, most of the directors, heads of departments, managers and CEOs are men. These jobs are not just highly skilled but are also highly paid, and women are rarely found in such jobs because stereotypical social status is a big hurdle in achieving such jobs.

Subordination of Women

This seems to be something very simple but it is not as simple as it seems to be. This results into women's subjugation, objectification and their secondary social status in the society. But the question is, how such a simple phenomenon, like stereotypical beauty standards for women folks of the society results into women's subordination, objectification and their secondary social status in the society. Here is the answer

There is a close nexus among stereotypical beauty standards and women's subordination/secondary social status in the

society. When women are not given jobs on the basis of their intellect rather their appearance is valued more, it results into a perception that the only quality women should strive to achieve is the beauty (as per social standards). All other capabilities that women have are secondary and even not valuable. When such a perception prevails in the society, women try their best to achieve those beauty standards that are considered desirable by the society, even when they are dangerously unattainable. Moreover, women who have strong intellect are unable to find their ways in the professional world and end up working in low-paid jobs such as receptionist, nursing, day care attendant or personal secretaries. So in spite of working for hours and hours, they are paid less than what they deserve and consequently they end up being financially dependent on their male family members, be it father, brother, husband or son. It is a proven fact that the financial independence and freedom is very important for an individual to be independent, but in the scenario explained above, it remains impossible for women to be self-sufficient or independent.

This results into a vicious cycle. When women are not financially independent and cannot make living for themselves they do not have the power to take the important decisions of their lives, such as what do they want to study, what skills do they want to learn and what they want to do on the professional front. Some more important decisions they cannot make, are the decision of getting married or choosing their own life partners. Due to this we see many cases of child-marriage and forced-marriage. These are some of the important decisions on which the entire lives of women depend on. But in order to be able to make these decisions, a woman has to be self-aware and independent (especially financially) so that she could make these decisions for herself, freely and without any fear.

When a woman is financially independent, there are fewer chances that she will be exploited because when she can provide everything for herself, she is less controlled by others and can do whatever is in her interest. But this is possible only when, girls are raised with totally different belief system. When they are taught to accept love themselves the way they are, and no to

follow the beauty or fashion trends blindly, rather focus on themselves to learn and explore their individuality. It is very important for us to make the girls of coming generations believe that their intellect is much more important than their appearance. And they absolutely, do not need to look like that fashion models, they see in TV, rather they are beautiful the way they are. Their individuality is important, as it strengthens the diversity, which is the essence of the society. No two individuals are supposed to be the same.

Conclusion

It is evident that stereotypical beauty standards set by the society are badly influencing women and are bringing them at their worst. Stereotypical beauty standards are affecting women in all spheres of life. Be it domestic sphere or public sphere, these are damaging women socially, financially, psychologically and even physically. The negative impact of the beauty standards, set by society, on women is very obvious and the situation in Pakistan is very similar and even worse than the rest of the world.

Recommendations

Things could be changed with some efforts at government level. Moreover, Non-governmental organizations and civil society can also play a very important role to make the things better. Media can play a central role in making such a change in the perspectives of the society. We need to make women/girls believe that stereotypical beauty standards of the society do not define them at all. They are so much more than their appearance and they need to be intellectually sound so that they could leave their mark on the world. Girls must believe that they are much more than their bodies. They are individuals and their individuality brings diversity to this world and that is the real beauty they should carry and maintain. This belief system will make girls/women more satisfied and happier, the way they are and they will focus on improving the quality of their lives and to achieve their dreams and goals such as, achieving financial independence that will eventually help them to get rid of all the negative attitudes towards them. Society will start looking at women/girls as important assets and vital parts of the social setup rather than just objects. In future, researchers should research about the ways to reduce the phenomena in the social settings and also the multinational companies involved in the business of beauty must be researched about, so that the systematic exploitation of women could be ended.

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