

## **NAOMI WOLF'S 'THE BEAUTY MYTH': AN EYE-OPENER FOR MODERN WOMEN**

**Ms.G.Kalaivani**

Assistant Professor of English  
Sourashtra College, Pasumalai



The primary assertion of *The Beauty Myth* is that as the modern day women get imparted with a good deal of social power and societal distinction, they feel extreme pressure to hold on to unrealistic social standards. In the light of acute commercial influences via the mass media, the pressure to maintain a good physique and to care for the external appearance has grown deep on women. The outcome of this pressure is unhealthy behaviors and an exaggerated emphasis on appearance in both sexes. Such preoccupation stalls to a greater extent the ability of women to be effective and acceptable in the society.

*The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf has turned into a classic, making her a public figure of repute. It got republished in the year 2000. Let us see how Naomi finds a myth behind the beauty of every woman. Fashion is an ever evolving trend and is a cycle that promotes changes and changes alone. The very concept of 'Beauty' change from time to time. These changes mirror the societal views of the period. Standards of Beauty of the past do not apply to the present, and this vicious cycle keeps rolling, changing along with it the perspectives of the society.

In the past, skin color had been the primary discerning factor for beauty. The trend idolized women with fair skin and discriminated women with dark complexion. In 1900s, fair skin color and slim waist are the features that represented ideal body shape. This notion increased the number of plastic surgeries undertaken by women. But the notion has severely altered in the recent years. It is an indication that society time and again alters the socially constructed ideals and imposes them on women. The society leaves no space for the women but pressurizes them to adopt the prevailing trends and tendencies. The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolfs comes as a solace to the women, who fall an easy prey to the inevitable societal impositions. The book is centered on Wolf's ambitions for the future of the young girls of today. She, in her work, proposes the required guidelines for the women to combat patriarchal oppression. They aim at helping the women in the creation of a unique self-image and self-esteem. Wolf finds the fashion and beauty industries as exploitative of women. She also claims that it is difficult to avoid the beauty myth as it extends into all areas of human activity.

The Beauty Myth by Naomi is a bestselling classic that redefines the relationship between beauty and women. In today's world, women have more power, legal recognition, and professional success than ever before. Today women speak up problems, act and make changes. Alongside this noticeable progress of the women's movement, the obsession with physical perfection however traps the modern woman. It proves to be an inevitable kind of social control, which proves just as limiting as the traditional images of homemaker and wife. The beauty myth places them into an endless war with the society's impossible definition of "the flawless beauty."

## National Seminar on TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM: LITERATURE, THEORY AND PRACTICE

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf tries to bring out changes in the mindset of every woman. Second-wave feminist, Germaine Greer claims *The Beauty Myth* to be *the most important feminist publication since The Female Eunuch*. Similarly, Gloria Steinem opines that *The Beauty Myth* is a smart, angry, insightful book and a clarion call to freedom. She suggests that every woman reads it.

British novelist Fay Weldon commented that the book is an *essential reading for the women of the modern era*. Similarly, Betty Friedan remarked in *Allure* magazine that *'The Beauty Myth' creates a controversy that could be a hopeful sign of a new wave of feminist consciousness*.

There exists a general inclination to compare your wrinkles with those of other women on the subway or to spend your whole monthly earning at a beauty salon. These impulses are rooted in culture and patriarchy. Wolf suggests a few ways for us, the readers, to take action against the Beauty Myth.

We (the women) are not the problem here. It is our responsibility that we identify ways to celebrate female culture without mixing it up in the repressive demands of patriarchy. We need to work out a way to make ourselves, and all women, feel beautiful.

We need to stop, as Wolf says, debating on the symptoms more passionately than the disease. The issue here is not if women prefer wearing makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, undertake surgery or renounce it, adorn our bodies and faces with works of art, sport elaborate designs of ornaments or ignore adornment altogether. *The real problem lies in our choice*. We need to stop imposing the concept of beauty on all women. Our judgment on beauty must necessarily surpass external appearance. There can be no reasonable exception to this rule.

It is mandatory that we, the women of today, evolve a strong sense of identity that has very little to do with physical appearance. We need to stand up against evaluation of women based on what they look like, wear, or weigh. We need to propagate to the wider world the destructive powers of the Beauty Myth. The Internet is the most powerful medium to achieve this. We need to resist the concept "age youthfully," rather we need to embrace the attractive notion '40 is the new 20'. We need to evolve a culture, wherein we look directly at one another, and explore alternative notions of beauty.

We need to muster the power required to speak out against any superimposed images of the Beauty Myth. We must concentrate on developing and attending to our sexuality, rather than deriving it from these false images. It is time that we joined hands with other feminists to fight these conceptual battles. The prime evil of the Beauty Myth is that it pits us against each other and makes us afraid of aging.

The older one becomes, the less scary aging gets. The younger you are, the more you contribute. We need to see beyond the role models, forced on us by the media and look for real ones that can help us launch a conceptual battle against patriarchal values.

History makes it evident that women, regarded as paragons of attractiveness, are derided and taken less seriously as they age. They're also frightened of growing older or plumper. We, the women, need to stop seeing each other as competition.

Wolf argues that beauty is the last and the best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. Somehow we've been flogged the idea that to be beautiful we have to look a certain way: thin, youthful, smooth-skinned, small-nosed, silky-haired, etc.

Wolf uses the phrase cultural conspiracy; it's hard to imagine who the conspirators might be. Women who feel old and ugly get forced to buy things they do not need. For instance, an anti-aging cream, a blouse very little different from those they already have.

Wolf condemns the fashion and beauty industries of exploiting women. Wolf writes that women must choose to do whatever we want with our faces and bodies without being punished by misleading

ideology, economic pressure, and even legal judgments regarding women's appearance to undermine us psychologically and politically.

Wolf remains convinced that women were under assault by the "beauty myth" in five areas: work, religion, sex, violence, and hunger. Ultimately, Wolf advocates the relaxation of normative standards of beauty. There lies nothing in the external beauty. Beauty is always a myth behind every woman.

### References

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