

FROM FLESH TO FILTERS: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF DIGITAL BEAUTY STANDARDS IN PIXEL FLESH BY ALLEN ATLANTA

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Abstract

*The process looks critically at the digital beauty myth by reading Ellen Atlanta's Pixel Flesh with the help of feminist and intersectional theories. It looks at the history of colonialism, having a patriarchal system and capitalism influences unrealistic standards of beauty there are many racist standards that especially target women of color. It explains how these beauty Ideals are both cultural and political and have an influence on race. Gender, class, and identity play a big role in society. A textual analysis that uses qualitative methods is what I apply. look into how each chapter of Pixel Flesh portrays widespread oppression through the use of media, certain filters, cosmetic surgery, and the demands set on people by the internet. All of the passages in the text were examined. focused on how digital beauty shapes peoples' views of themselves, mentally people's health and their social position. The study looks at such topics as aesthetic labor. There are messages about misogyny, the sale of body images, and cruelty on the Internet. It is the case that Keep in mind, modern control plays on women's insecurities so they never feel comfortable with themselves. beauty as it is judged by European beauty standards. Even girls as young as ten have difficulties in their journey in this industry. these pressures. Black and brown features are made invisible in Western movies, or they are highlighted in unfair or stereotypical ways. Characters and events here are usually idealized. The ending strongly believes that we must oppose these limiting standards of beauty. by showing a wide range of women from all backgrounds in a way that is accepting and freeing. It points out that empowerment is achieved by removing those systems that take advantage of individuals profit and power taken from women through use of their bodies. **Keywords:** Digital beauty myth, intersectionality, Pixel Flesh, Ellen Atlanta, feminist theory are the main topics. people's looks, power from colonization, politics of the body, patriarchy, and industry's influence on culture.*

1.Introduction

For a long time, society has been interested in female beauty as more than just looks on the face, including their skin, body shape, and hair. Nevertheless, people tend to forget about the core beauty of someone's personality just to pay attention to their physical features. Ellen's Atlanta book, Pixel Flesh, gives a strong argument against narrow beauty standards by applying both and intersectional feminism. The artist reveals that what is natural and diverse, especially in beauty, goes against the digital image that social media trends and algorithms promote. Given all this, we have to think carefully about how digital beauty shapes our sense of identity, how we are seen by others, and our mental health, mainly because of the colonial and patriarchal traditions affecting today's society.

Using Instagram and TikTok, social platforms, has changed the way we view beauty these days. For example, these apps change how people look, making the influencers' skin even, their faces

well balanced, and their bodies thin. Social media researchers say that influencers typically edit their photos, which causes people who see these images to grow more unhappy with the way they look normally (Fardouly et al., 2020). A few go so far as to get plastic surgery because their filtered photos make them look different (AAFPS, 2022). Such an obsession over beauty is so well-known that it has even led to a term such as “Instagram face” (Hess, 2018). Such standards lower people’s self-esteem and give beauty industries more chances to earn money from their worries.

There is a big difference between natural beauty and digital beauty because one is real while the other aims for a fake perfection. Being natural means respecting diversity and the way someone is not the same, but digital beauty usually was based on narrow, European standards. Intersectional theory points out that race, gender, class, and oppression determine which people are part of these ideals and which are left out. Because of the pressure to fit digital beauty trends, women from some groups can have problems with either their self-image or mental health (Ramphul & Mejias, 2018). Influencers and artificial intelligence encourage edited looks, which usually disregard the beauty found in black and non-white bodies. This text highlights how beauty trends in the digital world objectify women and make their appearance things you can buy. Using the approach of intersectional feminism, this research reveals how beauty ideals are affected by racism, sexism, classism, and power from colonialism. The need is for resistance through natural beauty and more people being represented. With her work, Atlanta encourages women and particularly women of color to stop feeling ashamed about their appearance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Because of online media, unrealistic and Western-based beauty standards have grown stronger and still uphold gender and race inequality. Social media sites including Instagram and TikTok influence women, mainly those who are women of color, by presenting edited photos of themselves. Consequently, people encounter mental health changes and start seeing themselves only as sexual objects, which lowers their self-esteem. Ellen Atlanta’s *Digital Beauty Myth: A Decolonial Feminist Critique of Beauty Standards in Pixel Flesh* tries to find out how beauty standards set by digital spaces bring about exclusion and oppression. This paper aims to study the emotional and social results of digital beauty standards and show that intersectional feminist theory provides a way to challenge and oppose them.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To explore the feminist perspective on beauty standards in Pixel Flesh.
- To analyze how social media influences and promotes digital beauty norms.
- To examine the impact of digital beauty myths on identity, mental health, and self-perception—particularly for women of color.

1.3 Research Questions

- How does Pixel Flesh critique digital beauty standards through an intersectional lens?
- How does intersectional feminism challenge digital beauty norms shaped by race, class, and gender?
- What are the psychological and sociological effects of digital beauty standards on marginalized women?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research adds to feminist literary criticism by using digital research tools along with an intersectional feminist point of view. It is well known from feminist studies that beauty standards hurt women, but this study investigates how they adversely affect women of color even more. It also looks at how social media shares these concepts and helps platforms to stick to narrow standards. This study finds that digital beauty is linked to effects of the colonial past

and oppression of women. It helps bring about content online that is diverse, inclusive, and stronger than before. It also points out the importance of looking at how beauty myths are related to class, racism, problems of violence against women, and losing cultural traditions, by asking for more research on this topic.

1.5 Delimitation of Study

This study is delimited to a feminist critique of digital beauty standards as represented in *Pixel Flesh* by Allen Atlanta. It specifically focuses on the ways in which the text critiques the construction, internalization, and consequences of toxic beauty ideals perpetuated through digital and social media. The analysis is confined to the content, themes, and rhetorical strategies used in *Pixel Flesh*, with particular attention to how these elements reflect and resist patriarchal beauty norms. The study does not include a comparative analysis with other texts or media portrayals, nor does it investigate the psychological or sociological impact of beauty standards on diverse populations beyond the scope of what is depicted in the selected text.

2. Literature Review

In the article “Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism” (by Noble in 2018), a detailed discussion of digital platforms is offered, showing that they promote specific beauty standards and exclude many other appearances. She points out that search engines help to form and support these beauty ideals by including them in their algorithms (p. 33), which means beauty standards seen on Google or other search sites are not natural but purposed by the algorithms. According to Noble, by following this standard, “what is considered beautiful online relies on data that gives an upper hand to whiteness and thinner bodies” (p. 67), which ends up sidelining the unique and diverse beauty seen all over the world. According to proponents of feminist theory, part of its danger is that technology makes biased results look natural and undisputable. The impact goes far because beauty is seen as something to trade, allowing algorithms to deem who really deserves to be noticed, thus contributing to oppression. The research points out that digital techniques tend to build on current inequalities and add extra challenges for those who don’t fit into society’s ideal picture. She reveals through her studies that the use of technology has a major effect on how we view beauty on the internet. The book “The Beauty Myth” by Naomi Wolf points out that men’s institutions purposely use images of beauty to maintain control over women by stating that “the beauty myth is not about women, but about men’s power” (p. 12). She points out that such standards, described as usual ways of thinking, are really created by society to oppress and, as she puts it, beauty is like the gold standard and gets influenced by politics (p. 58). Since beauty standards are now shifting online, Wolf’s comment becomes even more evident, since what’s considered attractive in women also portrays the types of actions expected of them. Shu 93) also looks at 93 from a new algorithmic view. Approaching her topic from a feminist standpoint, Naidoo highlights why dieting divides women and stops them from forming strong groups, saying that it is the “most powerful political drug for women.” By studying wolf’s case, one can see that beauty rules, applied on- or offline, act as tools to discipline women and make them feel they are free or empowered.

Black Beauty; A History of the Black Women's Body in America, Dawson (2015) traces how beauty standards have historically policed Black women's bodies, noting that "the Black female form has been simultaneously hyper-visible and erased in America's visual culture" (p. 34). She exposes how natural beauty traditions among Black women—like embracing dark skin, textured hair, and fuller figures were systematically devalued, arguing that "whiteness became the unmarked standard, while Blackness required constant explanation and alteration" (p. 89). In the context of digital beauty, Dawson’s analysis reveals how these hierarchies persist, as

"algorithms and filters often replicate colonial aesthetics, smoothing out ethnic features and lightening skin tones" (p. 122).

Through a feminist theory lens, she frames beauty as a battleground, asserting that "when Being able to take back their bodies, black women shake up many generations of abuse and exploitation (p. 156). He demonstrates that no matter if they happen in media, on screens, or as part of enslavement, beauty traditions still stand for control—until creative reinterpretations happen. Social media tends to boost and sustain restrictive views on beauty, arguing that "digital spaces now serve as modern mirrors, making even the unrealistic beauty ideals from society appear bigger," as quoted on page 5 by the authors. According to the authors, there is little space for natural beauty since social media and its tools mostly aim to promote the same appearance, favoring people who are young, thin, and have Eurocentric faces (p. 12). According to Snyder & Kahn, this phenomenon becomes more important in feminist theory since it describes how, in order to be seen, some users perform a strong sense of femininity on the Internet. Still, the study points out that people from marginalized groups now take advantage of social media to reject the norms others set for them and define beauty in a way that feels right to them (p. 24). As a result, they show that digital beauty is an area where both oppression and opportunities to resist are found.

According to hooks, *The Will to Change* (2004), feminists argue that under patriarchy, the way people feel about their body is shaped to regard it as defective or not beautiful enough. According to her, these standards in fashion help maintain power over people, and most importantly, they separate people from their true selves. Nowadays, this trend is more powerful because of the rise of digital beauty platforms. Using feminist theory, hooks teaches that we should recognize the natural beauty in all people and not punish ourselves for not fitting "expectations." When analyzing masculinity, hooks states on page 136 that love cannot thrive under domination, only an illusion. This is demonstrated clearly in beauty culture, where digital platforms pretend to promote empowerment but truly lead to domination with their filtered images.

In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks (1992) explains that under white supremacy, people often think of black women as outside the norms of femininity. She recommends doing away with these beauty ideals since she believes that "when black women choose to see things differently, their insistence can be revolutionary" (p. 115) - central for realizing the resistance towards beauty standards set by digital media. In her theory, hooks opposes the idea that Black women's bodies are undervalued and points out that "recovering our beauty is a protest against the oppressive pictures used against us" (p. 89). Her research points out that having the same idea of beauty upholds the power held by a certain group. Today, algorithm-based platforms allow the same pressure to continue in the world of beauty. The theory developed by hooks is valuable for looking at pre-digital media since it allows for understanding how modern digital platforms both follow existing beauty hierarchies and make it possible to challenge them with new forms of representation.

Using the example of Black women, Collins (2000) details how following norms of beauty suppresses people, arguing that the stereotypes of the mammy, jezebel, and welfare queen are used to back up racial and gender injustice. According to her, these stereotypes show that Black women's features are not viewed as beautiful, causing people to see Eurocentric traits as standard, while everything else is seen as different or unusual (p. 115). According to Collins, a feminist perspective shows that resistance exists because Black women can defy the main beauty myths and embrace their individual traits. This shows how algorithms help enforce the same biases found in history through how they present people online, according to Collins who writes, "power operates by picking both who appears and how, including how they see

themselves,” (pp. 203). Her research forms an essential basis to look at beauty standards as a combination of racial, gender, and digital rules—and learn how to argue against them.

In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir explains that patriarchy rules over gender standards by affecting female beauty ideals and argues that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, p. 267). The thesis points out that ideas about ‘natural’ beauty come from culture, as it interprets the body to be a situation, which allows it to grasp and interact with the world, contradicting those approaches to beauty that place value on our genes. According to Beauvoir, being “feminine” means women must appear weak, futile, and passive, and this is even more obvious on digital platforms with the help of beauty filters. Before the digital age, she noted that a woman’s self-worth is still measured against men and predicted that today’s beauty sites also emphasize this. Beauvoir’s texts offer an important approach to showing how standards of beauty turn women into objects, not individuals.

According to Wolf, men in power use standards of beauty as a barrier for women to progress, and she states in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 1990, that “the beauty myth is aimed at preserving male power and has nothing to do with women” (p. 12). She explains that these beauty standards are not really about beauty, but have been built to control women’s minds and increase their uncertainty. Now that technology plays a big role, Wolf’s statement is especially important, because whatever looks beautiful is chosen to help those in power. Critics from a feminist theory background note that Naomi Wolf’s words ring true during our current time, with diet culture secretly restricting women’s freedom using new beauty trends. It is important to look at Wolf’s findings to grasp the true reasons behind beauty norms, as they control, not enhance, our lives.

As McRobbie explains in *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), post-feminist culture encourages young women to follow patriarchal beauty rules by making them ‘pleasingly feminine’ and keeping an eye on their image all the time (p. 61). She points out that the pressure to look perfectly natural has turned into a duty for everyone, and adds that “we see the female body treated as something women must always upgrade as a way to express themselves” (p. 89) - the feeling is intensified online in beauty areas with the help of filters and apps that edit photos. Looking at the situation from a feminist angle, McRobbie points out that this means more freedom for women is nothing more than the ability to choose between different but oppressive standards of beauty. Using the term “faux empowerment,” Wolf discusses the way social media supports just one type of beauty, while pretending to encourage diversity. McRobbie’s argument reveals the way neoliberal feminism convinces us to agree with its ideas about beauty, which are based on rising tech.

Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, by Bordo (1993) discusses how patriarchy leads to the oppressive creation of beauty standards and suggests the female body is a place where the society’s values are made clear. She points out that these so-called beauty standards actually make some people appear proper while others seem deviant and bad. Circular beauty has turned into a bigger movement thanks to digital beauty tools. Bordo, using a feminist perspective, discloses how society uses ideas of skinny people to set the proper standards for those things as well as expressing willpower. She explains that any form of social control can be seen in how people’s bodies are subject to standards of beauty, both in the past and nowadays on the internet. Bordo reveals how similar the old beauty myths are to the new ones in digital culture, and that both try to control women’s bodies based on the views of those in power.

According to MeToo and the Politics of Social Change (Mendes et al., 2019), digital spaces help women speak out against strict beauty expectations created by men, pointing out that “Women are now showing their opposition on social media platforms to the male gaze that has

traditionally decided what defines female beauty” (p. 47). By studying these online movements, they claim that natural beauty is taken back from male control, as those movements have made people rethink how women’s bodies are used commercially and in the media. The authors point out, through feminist eyes, that digital beauty norms are being resisted and “hashtag activism gives rise to online platforms that acknowledge and value different body types that don’t fit into the commercial idea of beauty” (p. 112). They also explain that, even when these algorithms support feminist ideas, they still gain from women’s challenges with their bodies. Through an understanding of social media, we learn that it often promotes or rejects current beauty beliefs, and helps people challenge against body control.

In this book, Nakamura (2014) shows that the internet does not tackle race, but instead, technology is used to represent race differently. 34). She reveals that computer tools usually give an impression of European looks as their default, labeling ethnic characteristics as choices in settings. Explains how technology carries elements of racial inequality. Nakamura looks at digital beauty platforms with a feminist lens and points out that social media allows people to appreciate different races, still leaving whiteness as the standard. Her argument for “digital blackface” (p. 145) clearly explains how online views of beauty let cultural appropriation happen, unfortunately while sideline real women of color by keeping colonial standards of beauty active on the web. Nakamura’s texts are vital to comprehending how being affected by race and gender can be aggravated in online markets, as their claims of freedom frequently hide existing oppression.

In *The Lack*, Tate (2015) points out that black women are highly seen and ignored at the same time in society’s beauty standards. In her writings, she underlines that natural beauty in the Black community is devalued by European ideas, as she says that “textured hair, fuller lips, and dark skin tones are usually written off as problems or exoticized as strange, but they are rarely accepted as everyday features” (p. 87). From a feminist theory point of view, Tate highlights that in digital beauty spaces, filters and editing tools basically bring about the same physical changes that colonialism accomplished in earlier times. She also points out ways in which Black women resist, by showing that with social media, “Black women are able to challenge the algorithms and set their own standards of physical beauty” (p. 156). The framework introduced by Tate shows that digital spaces are built upon older styles of controlling bodies, yet they also make room for more creative art.

Williams (2020) explores how various beauty standards you see online are now merely digital packages of data that can be valued and changed by companies (p. 47). The author explains that filters and editing applications in digital spaces transform the concept of beautiful, pointing out that their versions differ a lot from reality (p. 52). Through a feminist standpoint, Williams shows that digital standards of beauty help control women, since platforms encourage this behavior and make money from it. She especially makes a point that the idea of having an online identity gives the false impression that strict ideas about beauty are expanding, while they are actually getting narrower (p. 60), showing how supposedly diverse standards of beauty actually reinforce homogenized ideals. Williams’ work provides crucial insights into how beauty has become both product and prison in the digital economy, where liberation rhetoric often obscures new forms of gendered oppression.

From *Margin to Central*, hooks (1984) examines how popular ideas of beauty support patriarchy and racism by saying that these standards are created to exclude people from minority groups. She says that the standards of beauty society sets are not true in nature but are actually created to support white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As seen through a radical feminist theory, hooks finds that being excluded from these beauty ideals results in some women being taught to view their own natural features as things that need to be fixed (p. 89).

While writing before the age of technology, hooks argued that adopting your own sense of self instead of following the externally imposed fashion and beauty standards is the start of freedom. Now, this message highlights how modern digital standards shape our lives and provide guidelines for someone trying to escape their grip.

According to Collins (2000) in *Black Feminist Thought*, beauty rules are used to control and oppress both race and gender by pointing out that “the image of mammy, jezebel, or the welfare queen decides which parts of Black women’s bodies are deemed appropriate or not” (p. 72). According to Grant, most ideas about beauty favor people with “Eurocentric features” and consider “Black hair, skin tones, and body shapes” as deviations (p. 115). In the light of intersectional feminist theory, Collins notes that, when Black women refuse to accept standard beauty ideas and appreciate their own appearances, they expressly forge their identity. This theory makes it possible to examine present-day digital beauty standards, as it points out that power keeps controlling what we see in media and what we think about ourselves. Collins teaches us that beauty standards form multiple systems of control that are present from early colonial life until today and points us to ways we could challenge and change such standards.

In their study of social media's psychological impacts, Fardouly et al. (2015) demonstrate how digital beauty standards negatively affect women's self-perception, finding that “exposure to Facebook images leads to increased body dissatisfaction compared to traditional media” (p. 39). Their research reveals how social media distorts notions of natural beauty, show Mahoney that “women consistently underestimate how much digital manipulation occurs in online images they view as realistic” (p. 41).

Views from an empirical feminist theory reveal that using social media leads to feeling worse about oneself and worrying about appearance. The study indicates that young women who invest a lot of time on Facebook tend to accept the idea that thinness is desirable (p. 44). Although their main interest is the mind, their studies clearly explain that digital beauty cultures strongly affect body control, embracing standards that have little to do with most women’s beauty. Tufekci (2015) argues that, apart from Facebook and Google, algorithmic harms frequently force people to meet cruel social beauty standards, and these systems seem objective but enforce harmful biases. It turns out that not only does AI not represent images of nature, but it also seems to copy historic biases toward not including natural beauty. 310). On the feminist theory side, Tufekci explains that platforms willingly present similar feminine ideals because this encourages more people to interact with the content. She explains in her warning that, since algorithms reinforce original biases, it’s no surprise algorithms for beauty remain unchanged and continue to uphold the same standards, reaffirming traditional standards. Tufekci has shown that the infrastructure of technology helps shape and restrict the ways one’s body is shown online.

This book by Budgeon (2015) discusses the role of capitalism in shaping beauty as a chance to profit and claims that the beauty industry succeeds by convincing women they must change their natural looks. 45). Her study points out that the concept of natural beauty has gradually disappeared, since making beauty products and advice about them often leads to further discipline for women (p. 78). Using a feminist perspective, Budgeon examines how social media turned into new ways for people to sell products addressing women’s insecurities. She points out that online culture helps spread one kind of beauty standard, which silences different cultural traditions (p. 145). Budgeon reveals the way beauty has transitioned from a personal idea to a commodity, as attempts to establish freedom usually hide detailed systems used for regulating bodies and making profit.

In Duffy (2017), social media influences women to present themselves as ideal females online, since they are not paid for this type of online promotion (p. 63). She points out that influencers’

natural look is in fact achieved because they edit their profiles a lot and watch themselves all the time. From a feminist perspective, Duffy notes that these platforms use the posts of women, yet require them to cover the expenses linked to looking beautiful (p. 132). She points out how people in digital spaces face unfair pressure because of these impossible beauty standards that overlap the boundaries between personal and work life (p. 155). With Duffy's insights, one can see how social media makes women think they have to meet beauty standards as if it were necessary for their careers, disguising the fact that this is patriarchally driven

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Method:

The research is qualitative because it looks into difficult subjects, emotions, and structures represented in *Pixel Flesh* by Ellen Atlanta. Instead of using numbers, qualitative research helps to discover the hidden meanings in the text, mainly about digital beauty standards. It is a great method to look at how these standards are made, supported, or questioned through images and texts.

3.2 Research Design:

The author adopts an intersectional research approach that is connected to decolonial feminist criticism in general. In this way, we are able to view the role played by different oppressions like racism, sexism, and legacies from colonialism in shaping what is considered beautiful online. With this design, the research questions highlight both the 'beautiful' things and the reasons behind people valuing some traits instead of others—it also investigates the results of these valuations on various groups.

3.3 Research Tools:

The study depends on textual analysis as the key tool employed in the research. Focussing on the words, images, symbols, and the overall layout, I examined the novel to discover how the writer builds and unbuilds the concept of beauty. It helps us think critically about what the text shares about gender, self, and how these are shown in the digital world. Two types of data will be gathered in this study: the main data will come from Ellen's story, *Pixel Flesh*, which we will study to find main themes about digital beauty and identity.

3.4 Data Collection:

The supporting information of this project contains scholarly works and critical essays focused on intersectionality, decolonial feminism, and the way media portrays these ideas. Topics in the area will be supported by the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (on intersectionality), bell hooks, and Frantz Fanon (on the topics of feminism, media, colonial psychology, and identity).

3.5 Theoretical Framework:

Intersectional Theory serves as the main framework for this research since it shows how race, gender, class, and colonial history interact and cause differences in levels of privilege and discrimination. This theory is especially helpful when analyzing beauty standards because these standards are not fair; they are affected by different groups of power. The diagram below displays what defines Intersectional Theory in the digital age and how it tends to narrowly focus on those who fit Eurocentric norms. *Pixel Flesh* points out the damage done by colonialism and patriarchy to people's self-image and presence on the internet.

4. Data Analysis:

Pixel Flesh by Ellen Atlanta studies digital beauty standards using the idea of intersectionality. The author conducts this study using a qualitative method to examine the link between beauty and different factors such as race, gender, class, and identity. Using the idea of intersectionality, I discovered that when racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and ableism are combined, it is women of color, queer people, and women from lower classes who are mostly affected. We can see in the text that digital beauty culture encourages individuals to feel that

beauty is a duty and a way to be controlled. The analysis done chapter by chapter will highlight the presence of every aspect and show how it affects the characters, their experiences with identity, social issues, and violence against women caused by social media.

“Each progress women make in fighting for their freedom is followed by even greater efforts to control them physically” (Atlanta, 2023, p.46).

While women have accomplished many things, they are placed under pressure in other situations, mainly because of beauty expectations. New methods of controlling women’s looks and behavior keep being developed in our society. When they are women of color, poor, or do not fit the usual “perfect” stereotypes, it becomes an even greater challenge for them to get this kind of control. In spite of winning rights, women are not truly free since they are still judged and regulated differently.

“Women often notice that when they try to fit the mold, they make themselves feel increased stress. The further you go from those expectations, the more shamed you will feel” (Atlanta, B2023, p.56)

These lines explain why following social norms becomes important for women. It points out that women tend to be trapped in a negative cycle. If people attempt to follow society’s definition of beauty, they put lots of pressure on themselves to appear flawless all the time. If people decide not to follow the accepted rules of beauty, they are usually made fun of and looked upon negatively. It proves that judging women can’t be traced back only to their beauty standards; being judged is a common experience regardless of her appearances. Having these standards around beauty makes many women distressed and confined. These situations create a lot of stress and can change how women see themselves and what they believe about themselves. This quote shows that society uses the idea of beauty to keep women trying to meet others’ needs instead of their own.

This section of the text points out that whereas people in general may see control over women’s bodies, the control is more steady towards women of color, fat women, and queer women. It explains that experiences of discrimination and censorship can be different for people because of how race, body size, and sexuality affect each other. This demonstrates that beauty standards and rules in society force people to fit their body image to certain expectations and punish those who differ, helping continue systems that keep people out.

Since women feel pressured by society’s idea of beauty, they begin to monitor and judge their features without help. Instead of only being controlled by outsiders, women start to control themselves by following the expectations they feel. The fact that women tend to watch themselves closely proves how much these norms have become part of them, so challenging the rules is harder and oppression is maintained.

“We believe that women can influence their image now using digital tools, but this is really not true”.(Atlanta; 2023, p. 50)

Actually, they are still being guided by unseen standards of beauty set by society. Though it may seem that we make the best choices, it isn’t always true. They do not feel entirely at ease, as they have to match certain beauty standards to be liked. Digital culture in beauty teaches women to watch over their own appearance and also observe and advise other ladies on how they should look. It has caused women to feel that they should make sure they and others keep to particular standards of beauty. Women now not only need to worry about social expectations, but also compare themselves and others. The pressure comes not only from the world outside; we feel it every day on social media with the focus on certain looks, new fashion trends, and likes. Thus, women become a key part of the system that controls them, which increases unrealistic expectations and makes them always monitor and judge themselves.

Posting sexualized pictures of themselves on social networks is not related to being truly in charge of their sexual selves and only serves to strengthen gender-based discrimination. It discusses how women online are treated like objects, with their bodies and judgment still determined by men's values and ideas. Such actions do not help liberate women, and could keep beauty standards alive. According to intersectional theory, it uncovers gender, identity, and oppression—referring to how digital expression is affected by wider inequalities that affect those who are marginalized.

"The wage gap between white sex workers and sex workers of colour persists online, mirroring the inequalities present in the offline world" (Atlanta, 2023, p.78)

This statement highlights the ongoing racial and economic inequality in digital spaces, especially in online sex work. It shows that sex workers of color (These are non-white individuals (e.g., Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous) involved in sex work. Their experiences are often shaped by both racial and gender discrimination), continue to earn less than *white sex workers (These are white individuals involved in sex work. They may still face stigma but are less likely to experience racial discrimination).

This proves that the digital world mirrors the same discrimination found offline. Despite being a modern platform, the internet still reflects deep-rooted systems of racism and class bias, reinforcing how intersectional issues like race, class, and gender shape people's access to fair treatment and income *From the age of twelve, I was sexualised* *(Atlanta, 2023, p.69)* This line highlights how young girls are often objectified and sexualized from a very early age, which reflects deep-rooted gender-based oppression. It shows how society imposes harmful and premature adult expectations on children, robbing them of their innocence. This early sexualization is part of a broader system where power and control over women's bodies begin long before adulthood, contributing to ongoing cycles of trauma and inequality.

"We are traumatised by men and then punished by a patriarchal society for our response" (Atlanta, 2023, p.70)

These lines reveal a harsh reality where women experience trauma caused by men, but instead of receiving support, they face judgment and punishment from a male-dominated society. This reflects how patriarchal systems blame victims for their reactions, reinforcing inequality and maintaining control over women by discouraging them from speaking out or seeking justice.

"Disabled women are stripped of all sexuality." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 67)

This sentence points out that disabled women are frequently denied recognition of their sexuality. Society tends to view them as asexual, ignoring their sexual identity and needs. This misconception leads to their exclusion and further marginalization, as their complete humanity, including their sexuality, is not acknowledged or valued.

"If you're Black it can be harder to fight for the higher prices that you deserve." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 78)

This line points to the economic inequalities faced by Black individuals, especially in markets where payment or pricing is influenced by social biases.

It suggests that systemic racism affects the ability of Black people to negotiate or receive fair financial compensation compared to others. This inequality is not limited to one area but reflects a wider pattern of racial discrimination that impacts opportunities, income, and value assigned to Black bodies and labor. The statement reveals how race intersects with economic injustice, showing that even in settings where earnings depend on personal effort or talent, racial prejudice still limits equitable outcomes. This ongoing disparity reinforces existing social hierarchies and contributes to the continued marginalization of Black communities.

"You can punish her for anything. You can make her humanity monstrous" (Atlanta, 2023, p.67)

This statement highlights the harsh reality of how women, especially those who challenge social norms or assert their independence, are subjected to unfair criticism and punishment in society. It reflects a system where women's actions—regardless of their intent—are often judged harshly, and their behavior is criminalized or condemned simply because they do not fit into predefined roles. The phrase “make her humanity monstrous” suggests that society distorts or exaggerates women's qualities, portraying them as threatening, dangerous, or less than human. This dehumanization serves as a tool to justify control and oppression, making it easier for patriarchal structures to marginalize women and deny them equal rights or dignity. In essence, this line underscores the ways in which women's individuality and humanity are undermined to maintain existing power imbalances.

“It hurts that white women can take on these features that we have been tormented for in order to advance themselves or benefit in some way” (Atlanta, 2023, p.100)

This statement reflects the emotional and cultural pain experienced by women of colour when their natural features—once stigmatized—are now celebrated only when adopted by white women. It highlights the ongoing issue of cultural appropriation, where traits linked to marginalized groups are exploited by dominant groups for profit or status, without acknowledging the original struggles tied to those features. This dynamic reinforces racial inequality and deepens feelings of exclusion and injustice.

“We don't actually have any power over Blackness; it doesn't feel like it belongs to us” (Atlanta, 2023, p.100)

This line expresses a deep sense of alienation experienced by Black individuals, especially women, when their cultural identity—“Blackness”—is controlled, reshaped, or commodified by others. It points out that although they live their identity, they don't feel ownership of it because society often celebrates it only when adopted by others, particularly white individuals. This reflects how systemic racism and cultural appropriation strip marginalized communities of agency and connection to their own culture.

“Brands will still pay more for a white woman co-opting the features of women of colour” (Atlanta, 2023, p.102)

This statement points out the racial injustice in how beauty is commercialized. It shows that companies are more willing to financially support white women who imitate the physical traits of women of color, instead of appreciating or compensating the original communities these features come from. This reflects deep-rooted discrimination and cultural appropriation, where white women profit from looks that Black and Brown women are often shamed or penalized for. The line exposes how racial bias continues to shape beauty standards and economic opportunities.

“Black women's bodies still seem to belong to everyone but themselves” (Atlanta, 2023, p.103)

This line highlights the ongoing issue of how Black women's bodies are objectified, controlled, and commodified by society. It suggests that their physical appearance is often used, judged, or exploited by others—whether in media, fashion, or digital spaces—without respecting their agency or ownership over their own identity. This reflects a legacy of colonialism and systemic racism, where Black women have historically been denied autonomy and are still fighting to reclaim their bodies and narratives in a world that continues to marginalize them.

“The ghosts of colonisation still haunt our digital realm” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 91)

This line shows that even though times have changed, the unfairness and control from the colonial past still affect the internet today. Old problems like racism and power unfairness are still present online. So, the digital world isn't free from these past issues and continues to impact people, especially those from minority groups.

“Racism is over; whilst a racial hierarchy remains largely intact” Atlanta, 2023, p. 102)

This sentence means that even though some people say racism has ended, the reality is different. The system that ranks people based on their race still exists and continues to affect society. So, while open racism might seem less visible, the unfair treatment and advantages linked to race are still very much present.

“The fight to reclaim Sarah’s body is over but the fight for the reclamation of the bodies of women of colour all over the world” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 106)

This sentence shows that while Sarah, a specific woman, has managed to take back control over her body and how it is seen or treated, many other women of color around the world still have to fight for the same basic right. It means the problem is bigger than just one person—it is a widespread struggle.

Women of color often face unfair treatment, discrimination, and lack of respect regarding their bodies. So, the fight to be free from this control, to be respected, and to have ownership over their own bodies is still continuing for many women everywhere.

“Beauty is both required and stigmatised, but to dismiss its importance is a way of reinforcing stereotypes and systems that keep white men in power” (Atlanta, 2023, p.111)

This sentence shows how beauty is complicated because society both demands it and judges it harshly, especially for women. From an intersectional point of view, this connects to how different social identities—like race, gender, and class—interact to shape people’s experiences with beauty. For example, white women often benefit from beauty standards that favor their features, while women of color face more pressure and criticism because the ideal is based on whiteness. Also, the idea that beauty is important helps keep unfair systems in place, like racism and sexism, which mostly give power to white men. By ignoring how beauty is linked to these systems, we allow those in power to keep controlling who is valued and who is pushed down. So, beauty isn’t just about looks; it’s tied to bigger issues of inequality and control in society.

“That beauty is a path to freedom, a negotiation of power, extends beyond conversations of race and into the intricacies of wealth, class and status” (Atlanta, 2023, p.112)

This statement shows that beauty is not just about looks but is deeply connected to power and freedom. Through the lens of intersectional theory, it means that access to beauty can influence a person’s social position and control over their life. However, this access is complicated by multiple factors like race, wealth, social class, and status. For example, a wealthy person might use beauty to gain influence or opportunities, while a person from a marginalized background may face barriers even in this area. So, beauty becomes a way people negotiate their place in society, but this negotiation is unequal because different identities and economic realities shape how much power someone can gain through appearance.

“Now more than ever, beauty can be bought, cultivated, curated and attained with an investment of time, money and energy” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 112)

This line highlights how, in today’s world, achieving beauty often requires a lot of resources—like time, money, and effort. From an intersectional perspective, this shows how social inequalities affect who can access beauty standards.

People with more money and free time can afford treatments, products, or lifestyles that help them look a certain way, while those with fewer resources struggle to keep up. This creates a system where beauty becomes a privilege tied to class and economic status, making it harder for marginalized groups, such as poor women or women of color, to meet these standards. So, beauty isn’t just natural; it’s shaped by social and economic factors that not everyone can control.

“What we are doing is defined as aesthetic labour – work for which you are compensated, directly or indirectly, for your body’s appearance” (Atlanta, 2023, p.114)

This line means that taking care of or improving our looks is considered a kind of work called "aesthetic labour." According to intersectional theory, this idea shows how society values appearance, especially for women, as a way to earn rewards or benefits—whether money, attention, or social acceptance.

This “work” can be paid or unpaid, but it still requires effort, time, and resources. It also highlights how different factors like gender, class, and race affect who is expected to do this kind of labour and who actually gains from it. In short, our appearance becomes a form of work shaped by social inequalities.

This line means that following society’s beauty standards needs certain advantages, like money and resources, which not everyone has. According to intersectional theory, this creates a cycle where privileged people those with more wealth and access can maintain or increase their social status by meeting these standards. Meanwhile, those who lack economic power face disadvantages and are often judged or excluded because they can’t afford to “keep up.” This shows how beauty standards are tied to social inequality, reinforcing differences based on class, race, and gender.

“In our individualistic, capitalist and patriarchal culture, the beauty standard is acting as a tool to keep those with less privilege at the bottom of the social hierarchy.” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 125)”

This sentence explains that in a society focused on individual success, money, and male dominance, beauty standards are used to maintain social inequality. From an intersectional perspective, these standards don’t just reflect personal choices but serve as a system that pushes people with fewer privileges like those with less wealth, lower social class, or marginalized identities into lower social positions. Essentially, beauty norms become a way to control and limit the opportunities of disadvantaged groups, keeping the powerful in charge.

"Beauty may have promised us power but we know now more than ever that misogyny always prevails" (Atlanta, 2023, p.130)

This line reveals a harsh truth about the relationship between beauty and power within a sexist society. While beauty might seem like a way for women to gain influence or agency, the reality is that deep-rooted misogyny prejudice and discrimination against women continues to dominate and limit their true empowerment. Even when women try to use beauty as a form of strength or freedom, the existing patriarchal system often undermines or controls them, showing that societal sexism remains a powerful force that is difficult to overcome.

“Not only did our bodies fragment, ruptures appeared between bodies, divorcing us from each other.(Atlanta, 2023, p. 134)

This line highlights how women's experiences of their bodies are not unified but fragmented, causing divisions among them. Intersectional theory helps us see that these fractures are influenced by overlapping factors like race, class, and gender identity, which affect how different women relate to each other and to society. The "ruptures" suggest that societal pressures create separation, making it harder for women from diverse backgrounds to connect and support one another. This division weakens collective strength and reflects how systems of power exploit differences to maintain control and inequality.

“Women are split, as men are not, into a body and a face each judged by somewhat different standards.”(Atlanta, 2023, p. 133)

This line points out that women’s bodies and faces are often seen and judged separately, unlike men, who usually face a more unified standard. From an intersectional perspective, this means women experience multiple layers of scrutiny based on their appearance, influenced by gender, race, class, and other social factors. For example, beauty standards for women of different races or classes can vary greatly, intensifying the pressure to meet diverse and sometimes conflicting

ideals. This split judgment reinforces inequalities by holding women to unrealistic and fragmented standards that affect their self-worth and social treatment differently than men.

"We worked on ourselves instead of working on the culture." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 137)

This line highlights how women have often focused on changing their own appearance rather than challenging the deeper cultural and social systems that create unfair beauty standards. From an intersectional theory viewpoint, it shows how societal pressures make women feel responsible for fixing themselves, ignoring how factors like gender, race, and class shape these expectations. Instead of addressing the root causes—such as patriarchy, racism, and capitalism—that enforce these ideals, the burden is placed on individual women to conform, which keeps oppressive systems intact.

Eventually, we became so detached from our own bodies that I think we lost the ability to see." (Atlanta, 2023, p.138)

This line suggests that over time, women have become disconnected from truly understanding and accepting their own bodies. From an intersectional perspective, this detachment is influenced by overlapping social pressures related to race, class, gender, and other identities. Society's narrow beauty standards often exclude or marginalize many women, causing them to feel invisible or unworthy. This alienation makes it hard for women to fully recognize and appreciate their own bodies, as they are constantly judged by external ideals that don't reflect their diverse realities. Ultimately, this loss of connection harms women's self-awareness and sense of identity.

"The pursuit of beauty was both freedom and enslavement." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 143)

This line highlights the paradox of beauty in women's lives. On one hand, pursuing beauty can feel like empowerment or personal expression — a way to gain confidence or access opportunities. On the other hand, it can trap women in strict societal expectations, forcing them to constantly strive for unattainable ideals.

From an intersectional lens, this contradiction becomes more complex. For marginalized women — such as women of color, trans women, or women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds — the beauty standard is even more exclusive and oppressive. While beauty might offer limited access to power, it also reinforces systems of racism, classism, and patriarchy, turning beauty into a form of control rather than true liberation.

"Cosmetic surgery becomes not only a means by which to comply with modern beauty standards but also an active agent in determining the standard." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 140)

This line shows that cosmetic surgery is not just a way to follow beauty rules — it also creates and sets new beauty rules. When many people start getting the same types of surgery (like nose jobs, lip fillers, or body shaping), those features slowly become the "new normal" or "ideal" in society. In other words, what people choose to do with their bodies actually shapes what is considered beautiful. From the lens of intersectional theory, this issue is more than just about beauty. It's about how race, gender, class, and identity play a role in who can afford to meet beauty standards and who suffers from them. For example: White, rich women often have better access to surgeries and are praised for enhancing their looks.

Women of colour, poor women, or disabled women may face more pressure to look a certain way but don't have the same access to money, safety, or social approval to get those surgeries. This creates a power imbalance — where only certain groups benefit and others are left out or judged for not looking "perfect." So, cosmetic surgery seems like a personal choice, but in reality, it supports a system where only a few types of beauty are valued. It also puts pressure on more and more women to change themselves just to be accepted. What seems like freedom actually becomes a new form of control and inequality, especially for already oppressed groups.

"Now, we live in an augmented reality, creating the most heightened beauty, where we can publish our filtered selves to the world." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 162)

This line shows how technology and social media let people change and improve their appearance digitally before showing it to others. It talks about a world where beauty is not natural but enhanced or edited to look perfect. For example, people who already face discrimination may feel even more pressure to change their looks to fit these impossible beauty standards online. This digital "augmented reality" can deepen inequalities by favoring those who can afford better tools or who already fit the dominant beauty ideals, while others might feel left out or invisible.

"In addition to the male gaze, we are now filtering our existence through a digital gaze – curating ourselves for a world that only exists online." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 163)

This line explains that besides being judged by traditional societal standards—mostly shaped by men's expectations, known as the "male gaze"—people today also face pressure from the "digital gaze." This digital gaze refers to how we carefully shape and edit our online appearances on social media and other digital platforms. We create idealized versions of ourselves to present to an online audience that might not be real or fully know us. This constant editing and curation can make people feel they must always look perfect and live up to unrealistic beauty standards.

From an intersectional theory perspective, this pressure affects different groups in diverse ways. Women, especially those from marginalized communities such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, or those from lower economic classes, might feel even greater stress. They have to meet beauty ideals that often favor white, wealthy, and able-bodied features. This digital pressure not only continues traditional gender-based control but also adds new layers connected to race, class, and identity. It shows how technology and social media can deepen existing inequalities by reinforcing narrow and exclusive standards of beauty and worth.

"Filters and unrealistic expectations of beauty are seen by everyone now – children see it, men expect women to look that way, women are expecting every other woman to look that way." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 163)

This line highlights how digital filters and impossible beauty standards are now everywhere and visible to all ages. Even children are exposed to these altered, perfect images, which shapes their ideas of what beauty should be. Men often expect women to look like these filtered versions, creating pressure on women to meet those unrealistic looks. Meanwhile, women themselves also start judging each other based on these impossible standards, leading to competition and self-criticism among women.

Using an intersectional lens, we can see that these pressures don't affect everyone equally. Women from different racial, economic, or social backgrounds may experience this beauty expectation in various ways. *For example*, women of color might struggle against standards that favor lighter skin or Eurocentric features, while women with fewer resources might find it harder to access beauty products or treatments. This creates a cycle where digital culture reinforces harmful stereotypes and widens existing inequalities, making it even harder for marginalized women to feel accepted or valued.

"Filters and editing apps reflect and compound biases that already exist within our society and reward those who already closely resemble the ideal." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 178)

This line shows how digital tools like filters and photo editing apps don't just change how people look, but also make existing unfair ideas about beauty worse. These apps often make people look slimmer, lighter-skinned, or more like the popular beauty standards. Because of this, people who already look more like these "ideal" standards get more approval and attention, while others who don't fit these ideas are pushed aside. This increases inequality by

favoring certain looks, which is unfair and can harm people's self-esteem. It reflects how society's bias about race, body size, and other features continue even online, making it harder for everyone to feel accepted.

"'Snapchat dysmorphia' to describe the phenomenon of patients wanting to bring a digitally augmented version of themselves to life." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 176)

This line talks about a new problem called "Snapchat dysmorphia," where people become so used to seeing their digitally edited and filtered images that they want to look exactly like those perfect versions in real life. This shows how social media and technology can change how people see themselves and create unrealistic beauty goals. It also highlights the pressure on individuals, especially women, to change their natural appearance to match these fake digital images, which can lead to emotional struggles and risky cosmetic procedures.

"You get addicted to the likes and you start competing not just with other girls but with yourself." (Atlanta, 2023, p.191)

This line shows how social media creates a cycle where young girls constantly seek approval through likes and online attention. Over time, this turns into a kind of addiction—they feel pressured to get more likes, look better, and outdo not only others but even their past selves. This leads to harmful comparisons, low self-esteem, and endless self-surveillance.

Through intersectional theory, we can see how this issue is shaped by gender, age, race, and class. For example, white, slim, wealthy girls might receive more likes and positive attention, while girls of color or from lower-income backgrounds may struggle for the same validation. This digital competition reinforces unfair beauty ideals that favor certain bodies and backgrounds.

Girls from marginalized groups may feel invisible or pressured to change themselves more drastically, further deepening emotional and social harm.

The line highlights how social media doesn't just reflect beauty standards it intensifies them, making young women feel like they're never enough, no matter what they do.

"Within days, Instagram promoted accounts with names like 'Sweet Skinny', 'Prettily Skinny', and 'Wanna Be Skinny' to a thirteen-year-old girl." (Atlanta, 2023, p.194)

This line exposes how dangerous beauty content is quickly pushed onto very young girls through social media algorithms. Even without searching for it, a 13-year-old girl is shown pages that glorify extreme thinness, sending the message that being skinny equals being beautiful, lovable, or successful.

From an intersectional perspective, this problem isn't just about gender or age—it also connects with race, class, and digital access. The "ideal" thin body promoted on these pages is usually white, rich-looking, and styled in a way that matches Western beauty ideals. Girls who do not match this image—Black, brown, disabled, or poor—may feel even more excluded, ashamed, or pressured to change themselves. The line shows how digital beauty culture reinforces harmful hierarchies, making young girls vulnerable to both internalized oppression and external judgment based on their body type, race, and class. It is a form of systemic digital violence masked as trendiness or inspiration.

"Now, narratives around food restriction are masked under terms like 'clean eating', which turns diet culture into a form of self-care and social". (Atlanta, 2023, p. 209)

This line highlights how today's society has cleverly changed how we talk about dieting. Instead of openly saying someone is restricting food to lose weight, it's now framed as "clean eating"—something that sounds healthy and respectable. But underneath this idea is the same old pressure to stay thin and fit into certain beauty standards.

From an intersectional perspective, this issue becomes even more serious.

Women from wealthy or white backgrounds are often praised for following such diets, while women of color or from poorer classes may be judged or excluded for not being part of this trend. This shows how race, class, and gender combine to make beauty and health harder to reach for some groups.

What looks like a personal health choice is actually part of a system that keeps the same groups in power and others feeling left out or ashamed. So, "clean eating" is not just about food—it's about who gets accepted and who gets pushed aside in society.

"We must eradicate any evidence of humanity left on our faces and bodies." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 216)

This line shows how today's beauty standards—especially on social media—pressure women to remove all natural signs of being human, like wrinkles, skin texture, stretch marks, or body hair. These natural traits are now seen as flaws, and people feel they must erase them to appear flawless or acceptable online. The digital world encourages people, especially women, to present a polished, filtered version of themselves that looks artificial but is praised as beautiful. Through the intersectional lens, this pressure is worse for women who already face discrimination—like women of color, trans women, disabled women, or those from lower classes. These women are often judged more harshly and feel forced to meet unrealistic beauty goals shaped by white, rich, slim beauty ideals. As a result, their identities are pushed aside, and they feel they must change who they are just to be accepted. The line reveals how digital beauty culture makes women erase their true selves to survive in an image-obsessed society.

"This pressure is feeding into young women at a much, much younger age. Yes, I'm seeing the twenty-year-olds, but what's happening is actually ten-year-olds who told me about their skincare routines, their baby faces starting at eight, nine, ten years old." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 218)

This line highlights how beauty standards are now targeting girls at a very young age. Instead of enjoying childhood, girls as young as eight or nine are starting to worry about how they look. They begin skincare routines not for health, but to match a fake, adult-like beauty seen online. This shows that the pressure to be "perfect" no longer waits until adulthood—it starts in childhood, shaping girls' views about themselves far too early.

From an intersectional perspective, this pressure is not experienced equally.

Girls from marginalized communities—due to race, class, or body type—often feel an even stronger need to "fix" themselves to be accepted. These beauty ideals come mostly from white, rich, slim, and digitally filtered images, making others feel excluded. As a result, young girls grow up believing they must constantly change or improve themselves to be valued, which damages their self-esteem and identity development.

"Faces have dynamic lines – our skin is designed to crease, fold and move in line with our expressions. Our faces are meant to be malleable, soft and supple, to have light and shadow. It is totally normal for your face to have lines when it moves, and to have those lines settle as you age." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 220)

This line explains that it is completely natural for human faces to show lines and movement. Wrinkles, folds, and shadows are part of being alive and expressive. Smiling, frowning, or showing emotion causes our faces to move—and that movement leaves marks as we grow older. These lines are signs of life and experience, not flaws.

However, digital beauty culture teaches us to hide or erase these features through filters, makeup, or even surgery. People begin to fear normal aging signs, as if they are ugly or shameful. From an intersectional lens, this pressure is even heavier on women, especially older women, who are judged more harshly than men for aging. Beauty standards push an unrealistic image of forever-youthful, smooth, flawless skin—usually based on Eurocentric features—which alienates women of different races, classes, and body types.

This unrealistic view contributes to body anxiety, lowers self-worth, and encourages unhealthy habits to stay “beautiful” by society’s narrow definitions.

“Women had told me about their bodies becoming public property during pregnancy, with family, friends and strangers touching their stomachs, or commenting on how high they were carrying.” (Atlanta, 2023, p.239)

This line highlights how society often treats pregnant women’s bodies as if they no longer belong to the women themselves. Once a woman becomes pregnant, many people—whether family, friends, or even strangers—feel they have the right to touch her belly or make comments about her appearance.

This behavior invades a woman’s personal space and takes away her bodily autonomy.

Through the lens of intersectional theory, this issue reflects how gender oppression operates subtly and socially. A woman’s body, especially during pregnancy, becomes a site for public discussion and control. While pregnancy is a deeply personal and emotional experience, society reduces it to a public event. This also shows how patriarchal norms blur the line between care and control, often under the pretense of curiosity or concern.

Additionally, for women of color, working-class women, or those from marginalized groups, this public access to their bodies may come with additional layers of racial or class-based judgment. Intersectionality helps us understand how different identities can compound this experience, making some women more vulnerable to this type of objectification and lack of respect.

“Social media made her experience of motherhood more difficult: these women were just snapping back, having these great bodies and getting back in their clothes, and I just couldn’t do it.” (Atlanta, 2023, p.251)

This line highlights the unrealistic expectations new mothers face online.

Social media often shows a filtered version of reality where women appear to recover their pre-pregnancy bodies instantly, setting false standards for others. For many mothers, this makes their own experience feel like a failure, even though their bodies are healing normally.

From an intersectional lens, this pressure is not felt equally. Wealthier, white, or socially privileged women may have access to trainers, expensive diets, or cosmetic procedures that help them “snap back” quickly. Women from marginalized groups—especially those with limited financial resources—are judged more harshly when they don’t meet these ideals.

This quote shows how digital beauty culture, capitalism, and patriarchy combine to make motherhood harder instead of supporting women during a vulnerable and powerful time.

“Under a patriarchal, capitalist society, women’s bodies will never be regarded with the value, autonomy or respect they deserve” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 249)

This line strongly criticizes how society treats women’s bodies. In systems where patriarchy (male dominance) and capitalism (profit-driven culture) are in control, women’s bodies are often not valued for who they are, but for how they look or what they can offer to others. Women’s choices about their own bodies are frequently ignored or judged, and their worth is often linked to appearance rather than identity or personhood.

Through the intersectional theory lens, this issue becomes even more serious for women of color, poor women, trans women, or disabled women — who are marginalized by both gender and other social systems. These overlapping inequalities mean their bodies are even less likely to be respected or given autonomy.

In summary, the line shows that as long as societal systems continue to be built on male power and profit, true respect and freedom for women’s bodies will remain out of reach.

“Violence against women in all manifestations is a violation of our human rights, freedoms and autonomy.” (Atlanta, 2023, p. 256)

This line shows that all forms of violence against women—whether it's physical, emotional, sexual, or digital—break their basic rights as human beings. It stops them from living freely, making their own choices, and feeling safe in the world. When seen through intersectional theory, it also means that not all women experience this violence the same way. A poor woman, a woman of color, a disabled woman, or a transgender woman might face worse treatment and be ignored more by society and legal systems. This line reminds us that protecting women's rights must include understanding how race, class, and other factors make their experiences of violence different.

"To experience violence is to experience womanhood. To E experience violence online is to exist as a woman with an internet connection." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 273)

This line shows how violence is deeply linked to the female experience—many women face some form of abuse just because they are women. With the rise of the internet, online spaces have also become places where women face attacks, such as harassment, threats, and bullying. From an intersectional point of view, this violence is not the same for everyone. Women of color, trans women, disabled women, and those from poor backgrounds often face harsher and more targeted abuse. The line explains that being a woman online automatically makes you a target, especially if you belong to multiple marginalized groups. It also shows how digital spaces mirror real-world inequalities, reinforcing the idea that patriarchal and racist power structures exist everywhere—even online.

"Even in our response to cyberviolence we are expected to adopt a submissive position... Women who post about their abuse are subjected to yet more abuse." * (Atlanta, 2023, p. 277)

This line explains that when women face online abuse (cyberviolence), they are often expected to stay silent, stay calm, or not fight back. Society pressures them to be "quiet victims". If a woman speaks out or shares her painful experience on social media, instead of getting support, she is often attacked again—this time for speaking up. From an intersectional perspective, this shows how gender, race, and power interact. For example, a Black or Muslim woman speaking out might face more hatred than a white woman, because multiple forms of discrimination are at play (sexism + racism + religious bias, etc.).

These highlights how patriarchal and oppressive systems not only allow abuse to happen but also punish women for defending themselves, keeping them in a powerless position.

"Our entire notion of a 'perfect' victim is inherently intertwined with our beauty standard – of beauty's affiliation with virtues such as purity and truth." (Atlanta, 2023, p. 282)

This line explains that society often expects victims, especially women, to look a certain way—usually beautiful and "pure." This idea of a "perfect victim" is linked to these beauty standards. If a woman doesn't meet these expectations, people might not believe her or may blame her more.

Using intersectional theory, we understand that women who don't fit these narrow beauty ideals—like women of color, disabled women, or those with different body types—face extra challenges. They are less likely to be seen as "perfect victims," which means their experiences with violence might be ignored or doubted. This shows how different forms of discrimination—like racism, sexism, and ableism—work together to affect women's lives. In short, beauty standards don't just affect how women look but also influence how their suffering is treated by others.

4.1 Discussion:

This research critically examined the digital beauty culture through Pixel Flesh by Ellen Atlanta, using an intersectional feminist lens. The analysis revealed that beauty in the digital world is no longer just about appearance—it has become a powerful social tool shaped by systems of race, gender, class, and colonial legacy. These beauty standards are not neutral or

harmless; they serve as mechanisms to maintain the dominance of privileged groups, particularly white, wealthy men, while pushing marginalized women further to the margins. Across the chapters, a key finding was how women's bodies have been commodified and policed online. Beauty has turned into a form of labour—called aesthetic labour—where women are constantly expected to invest their time, money, and energy to meet unrealistic standards. Filters, editing apps, and cosmetic surgeries reflect how beauty can be manufactured and sold.

Yet, this process does not empower all women equally. Only those with social and economic privilege benefit, while women of color, fat women, disabled women, and working-class women are excluded or exploited.

The data also exposed digital mimicry and erasure to gain fame and money, while Black women are still punished for these same traits. This highlights the ongoing racism and appropriation deeply rooted in digital beauty norms. The beauty ideal remains Eurocentric, slim, youthful, and unattainably perfect—further marginalizing anyone who deviates from it.

Moreover, the research revealed the damaging psychological impact of these beauty standards, especially on young girls. They begin to measure their worth through likes, filters, and online validation, leading to identity loss, body dysmorphia, and mental health struggles. The internet has become a space where misogyny is normalized, and where simply existing as a woman can invite harassment and abuse.

In summary, the discussion shows that digital beauty is not a symbol of freedom—but a reflection of power structures that control and divide women. The beauty myth continues to evolve, but it still carries the weight of historical oppression. This study calls for a deeper awareness of how digital platforms influence self-worth, identity, and equality—especially for those whose voices have long been silenced.

5. Conclusion

This research explored the powerful and complex relationship between beauty, power, and oppression in the digital age by analyzing *Pixel Flesh* by Ellen Atlanta.

Throughout the text, it became clear that beauty in the digital world is not just about looking good—it is deeply political. The research highlighted how digital beauty is a standard created by colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist systems, where slimness, whiteness, youth, and flawlessness are presented as the ideal. These ideals are promoted through filters, algorithms, editing apps, and social media platforms, which reward those who match this "perfect" image while excluding and punishing those who do not.

A key point raised in this research is that women of colour, especially Black women, are often exploited in this system. Their natural features are copied and commercialized by white influencers, yet they themselves face discrimination for the same traits. The digital space continues to erase Blackness, disable voices of marginalized women, and promote Eurocentric beauty standards, making it difficult for diverse bodies and faces to be seen, heard, or valued equally.

This study also showed how beauty has become a form of labour. This is especially harmful in a society where beauty is linked to self-worth, success, and survival. Additionally, the commodification of beauty has made women feel disconnected from their own bodies. In trying to meet ever-changing online standards, many women lose touch with their real selves, their cultural roots, and even their health. Cosmetic surgery, for instance, is not just a personal choice—it reflects wider cultural pressures and social expectations shaped by male-dominated beauty industries. The research also uncovered how violence against women has been digitized. From online harassment to image-based abuse, women face a constant threat on the internet. Even when they speak up, they are blamed, judged, or ignored. The idea of the "perfect victim"

is still tied to beauty—women who don't fit this image are less likely to be believed or supported.

Finally, this research shows that the digital beauty myth is not just about looks—it's about who has power, who is seen, and who is silenced. The myth is deeply rooted in systems of racism, patriarchy, classism, and ableism, and it continues to affect real lives in real ways.

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