



Women's Body Objectification Under Capitalist Ideas of Beauty in Japanese Society Portrayed in The Novel Breasts and Eggs by Mieko Kawakami

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Info Artikel

Submitted: 11st June 2025

Revised: 12th July 2025

Accepted: 14th November 2025

Publish: 30th November 2025

Keywords: beauty concept; capitalistic ideas; Japanese society

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.24843/JH.2025.v29.i04.p08>

Abstract

Capitalistic ideas of beauty in Japanese society are found in how beauty is perceived as social demand and necessity. This study attempts to reveal how the perception of women's body and beauty in Breasts and Eggs is heavily influenced by the patriarchal and capitalistic ideals. We argue that capitalistic ideas shape the objectification of women's bodies by using Naomi Wolf's concept on the Beauty Myth and Alison Jaggar's theory of capitalist feminism. It finds the female characters embody capitalist beauty standards set by the society through cosmetic surgery, media influences and societal judgment. The female character's insecurity due to the capitalistic standards of beauty encourage her to follow beauty procedures such as breast augmentation. It reflects that beauty is transformed into commercialism and commodity. These beauty myths and beliefs lead into the psychological effects as shown further by the character's thoughts on puberty that is tied to social expectation.

INTRODUCTION

As the age of media grows, women's bodies become the objects of commercialism through consumption and modification to be accepted into the idealized standards of beauty. The idea of women's beauty may be various across the globe, depending on cultural, social and economic systems, yet, mostly their worth and values are materialized into their physical appearance (Labong, 2022). The simplification of women's worth based on physical attractiveness leads to the commodification of women's bodies. It refers to the notion of the process that women must endure where they are treated as products for their bodies are consumed, altered, changed and transformed to follow the beauty standards. This commodification has been spreading globally through media, advertisement and consumption culture (Paramita & Lestari, 2023), creating and emphasizing the standards of beauty that are hard to fulfil for most women who desire to achieve it (Oki, 2025). Yet, only few women who are usually models and celebrities who can afford the expensive beauty treatments while they are also paid to promote the products (Velasco, 2019).

Focusing on profit, production and consumption, capitalism values women from their economic worth which mostly stemming from their attractive appearances. This system is strengthened and sustained in the beauty industries in which they are always reminded to be likeable and marketable. As already becoming massive globally, the beauty and cosmetic surgery industries in Japan gain huge profits from women's anxieties and dissatisfaction on physical concerns such as body types and shapes, aging, and attractiveness. As the economic system that calculate gain from profit, production and consumption, capitalism has helped shaping and sustaining gender stereotypes and playing with women's perspectives on bodies and appearances. Capitalism creates false beliefs and myths on the idealized and standardizes images of femininity through beauty. Capitalism industry is actively building and sustaining this beauty myths through advertisement, entertainment and corporate messages (Wan, 2025) as if it were "from women for women". This idealization is intended to generate demands and needs for products and services promising women to meet the beauty standards that are almost impossible to attain by most women. Thus, the female body can be considered as both the target as well as the subject of the economic exploitation. These industries play around the women's insecurities to generate incomes and revenues by repeatedly telling women that they are never enough as they are; refinement and modification should always be taken into consideration and action. Meanwhile, at the same time, these same industries also overuse the female body as the tool, object and display to gain profits in the form of marketing and campaigns. Meanwhile, the high level of body objectification reduced the level of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Tahreem, Alam & Khan, 2025), especially when the objectification is addressed by the partner (Kranz, 2025).

As if not satisfied with just making women feel like they are beautiful, these industries also encourage and urge the women to alter and change their bodies to create the need of cosmetic surgery. They are convinced yet pressured to take redundant plastic procedures such as breast augmentation, skin whitening, anti-aging treatment, until facial and body member reconstruction to be considered as meeting with the set ideals of beauty. Ironically, these practices are often prompted and campaigned as the acts of empowerment or self-care, yet they are just statements to play with women's consciousness and think of themselves as feeling empowered. Capitalism creates camouflage and illusion of control as choice, of consumption as empowerment, and of normal body as flaws and defects. These illusions are circulated and maintained for the sake of profits and gain of the industries, costing women of gender inequality, psychological distress and the objectification of women's bodies across cultures (Wan, 2025).

Since Japan's cultural history stems from Confucian tradition that centres on harmony and balance, it creates ambiguity when it comes to the standardized ideals of beauty where society plays a crucial role in shaping the objectification of women's bodies. Japanese culture has long seen women as the embodiments of purity, selflessness, domestication, gentleness and motherhood. These traditional notions have been fused with capitalist ideas and are now considered as containing patriarchal ideology. The phenomenon of commodification has been investigated in several popular Japanese literary works such as Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Women*. The story has a similar critique on the current study in which the protagonist attempts to thrive in the harsh world of a convenience store, a symbol of Japanese representation on societal expectations. In this novel, Keiko's rejection of marriage and motherhood made people around her uneasy. Her decision to stay with her part-time job is considered as a social failure. It explores how women's traditional roles are still enclosed within the societal

consciousness. Murata exposes how Japan's modern capitalist society continues to reinforce archaic gender norms, often under the guise of individual responsibility or self-improvement (Khalliyeva & Petrosyan, 2024). Through the characters, the author reveals the psychological and emotional costs of existing in a society where personal worth is measured against culturally sanctioned roles.

The body control and conformity is also discussed in Orbaugh's (1996) essay *The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction*. Women's bodies are subjects to commodification where societal expectations put femininity into consumable forms. Orbaugh shows how Japanese women's writing often represent the female body as the compliant commodity constructed by cultural norms and economic forces, highlighting how the body is performed and disciplined, where women are forced to succumb into the ideals of beauty, purity, and maternal embodiment. Another Japanese literary work *Gifted* (2022) by Suzumi Suzuki also depicted the struggle of a young woman navigating Tokyo's red-light district. She exposes how her body becomes a transactional commodity shaped by consumerist and patriarchal pressures (Suzuki, 2022). The controlled exercise of sexual choice turns slowly into a submission to an industry-drive force and economic necessity. No room for identity and grief over her mother's death, she was only seen as the adult-video actress and hostess. Her body was no longer her self-expression as it was exploited under capitalist system that values performance, desire, and financial return.

In the novel *Breasts and Eggs*, Mieko Kawakami depicts this cultural tension through Makiko and Natsuko who are in the dilemmatic position between conforming to traditional femininity and attaining their bodies' autonomy (Khodaria, 2024). Makiko's desire for breast augmentation and Natsuko's conflicting idea of motherhood are the complexity of individual's preferences and social expectations, of which the later perceive women as either sexualized objects or maternal figures. These roles are not always the products of culture for there are capitalist industries who gain economic benefits from commercializing beauty, fertility and domestic perfection as marketable goals (Fitri & Wahyuni, 2024). Women's bodies become fighting arenas where femininity is always at war for being constantly constructed, commodified and consumed. Makiko's obsession with breast augmentation does not come from personal health or comfort. She believes that larger breasts will make her more desirable that can lead her to acceptance and success. Thus, it depicts how women's bodies are influenced by consumerist demands. Modifying one's body as the equalization of self-improvement is more about submission than self-improvement, for it revolves around female insecurity instead of pride or comfort. Therefore, cosmetic surgery is not an act of liberation, but a transaction to trade in social value that commodifies femininity (Smith, 2023). Capitalism commodifies women's bodies to the extent that it also strengthens gender stereotypes by setting narrow and specific ideals of femininity circulating around physical appearances, domestic roles and responsibilities, and reproductive capacities. In the novel *Breasts and Eggs*, Kawakami displays characters who succumb into these ideals and feel the need to change their bodies to fit them.

Various themes have been explored by previous studies in Kawakami's work such as compulsory conformity, asexuality, and traditional gender roles critique. Preethi & Bhuvana (2024) embarked on how Kawakami narrates the struggles of her female characters against social expectations through body image and motherhood. The story delves into the life of three main characters, they are Natsuko, Makiko dan Midoriko as the representation of different problems that women encounter in contemporary Japan. As the narrator who is aspired to be a writer, Natsuko is struggling with her identity in

which she deems herself as asexual yet desiring to have children. Her older sister, Makiko fights against the pressures of femininity and social norms. Preethi & Bhuvana (2024) argue that Kawakami critiques the objectification of women's bodies and the rigid beauty standards pressed by society. The character's journey shows the emotions that arise along with these ideals and explore the complexities of femininity in more depth. Meanwhile, Munawar & Chaudhary (2022) analyze alienation and the search for authenticity under capitalism in *Breasts and Eggs*. However, this study has not fully discussed how capitalist structures contribute to the objectification of women's bodies in Japanese society.

The main topic of this research is body objectification under capitalist structure. The previous study has provided the exploration on beauty myths have offered a thorough examination of the different kinds of beauty myths that women encounter, however, there is a lack of research exploring objectification as a form of capitalism. Thus, this research illustrates how Japanese society reflects social and cultural pressure on women. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to extend Wolf (1992) theory and research on beauty myths in the context of feminism framework and Jaggar (1983) theory in Feminist Politics and Human Nature used to analyse how capitalism commodifies women's bodies. By focusing on Makiko's obsession with breast augmentation and how she adopts society's beauty ideals, this research will reveal how patriarchal and economic systems take advantage of women by criticizing the paradox of expecting them to maintain a "perfect appearance" while still carrying out conventional tasks.

METHOD AND THEORY

This research employs qualitative data as a methodological approach intended to understand human behaviour, experiences, and social phenomena through non-numerical data. It focuses on exploring the meanings, perspectives, and contexts of individuals or groups, often using methods such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary data of this research are collected from the novel combined with secondary sources that are relevant to the research objectives. Wolf's theory of feminism and Jaggar's theory of capitalist feminism are used to analyze the primary data from the 339-page novel *Breasts and Eggs*. The novel was first published in Japanese as *Natsu Monogatari* in 2019 which was then translated into English by Sam Bett and David Boyd in 2020. The secondary data are supporting theoretical frameworks and related studies collected from books, articles, or journals relevant to this current study. After the data collection, the primary data are categorized to answer each research question. The objectification of women in *Breast and Eggs* based on their appearance and bodies is examined using Wolf's theory of beauty myth, which is then linked to Jaggar's theory of capitalist feminism.

The objectification of women refers to the social and psychological processes that transform women into inanimate objects. Women are valued more for their sexual function or external appearance than for their humanity, intelligence, and uniqueness. Women's objectification is against the idea of feminist philosophy where it emphasizes how women continue to be dehumanized in society, the media, and interpersonal relationships. The dehumanization results in negative consequences such as marginalization, sexualization, and the perpetuation of gender inequality. Objectification theory explains how women internalize this external gaze, leading to mental health problems, body shame, and self-objectification. This line of thought seems consistent with the culturally accepted sexual objectification of the female body,

which prioritizes physical attractiveness over functionality (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Capitalism puts women's bodies as commodity for transaction and marketings. It always reminds women to consider beauty treatments like unnecessary surrogacy, fast fashion, and beauty treatment, which all are offered for the sake of financial gain (Eisenstein, 1979). Capitalism systems create women's labour, reproductive potentiality, and physical appearance merely for the purpose of marketing materials, economic values and patriarchal control. The beauty and surgery industries create unrealistic expectations that push women to alter their bodies through cosmetic procedures, surgeries, and restrictive diets, making self-perception a profitable business (Wolf, 1991).

This research is grounded in two key feminism theories, the first one is Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* and the second one is Alison Jaggar's capitalism feminism. These theories offer a framework for comprehending the ways in which capitalism systems and cultural beauty standards support the objectification of women's bodies. Wolf (1991) argues in *The Beauty Myth* that beauty standards are socially constructed to control women rather than being natural or equality, contrary to most women believe that being and feeling beauty is an obligation and a necessity. Wolf also highlights patriarchal institutions that employ a means of maintaining women's attention on appearances rather than their pursuit of equality, autonomy, or power. These unachievable and unreasonable beauty standards put people under continual strain, which can result in low self-esteem, insecurity, and mental health conditions including depression. Most women who do not think that they are beautiful will always feel like lacking something, meaningless and powerless.

The analysis of capitalism and feminism by Jaggar (1983) in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* supports Wolf's theories by emphasizing how capitalism turns women's bodies into commodities to be used and profited from. The patriarchal system that deeply rooted this commodification places a higher value on women's bodies according to their reproductive potential or appearances beauty than on their uniqueness or humanity. Industries like advertisement, fashion and entertainment sells their goods and services by diminishing women's bodies. For instance, advertisement frequently sexualize women's bodies to draw in customers, and women are frequently chosen for roles in the entertainment business based more on beauty than skills (Jaggar, 1983). By combining these two theories, this current study can offer a thorough framework for examining how the female body is objectified in patriarchal and capitalist societies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Breasts and Eggs narrates the story of womanhood in the modern-day Japan where female is no longer autonomous of their own body due to the objectification of the capitalist ideas of beauty. Although the story revolves around the three women that are related in blood, the focus of the current study was Makiko, the sister of Natsuko who becomes the narrator. Natsuko, along with her sister Makiko, and Makiko's daughter Midoriko, encounters problems caused by the social expectation surrounding their bodies, independence, and financial security. By focusing on Makiko's struggles as a middle-aged hostess at a Japanese club, Kawakami explores how capitalism converts women's bodies into products. Makiko's strong desire for breast augmentation surgery serves as a central metaphor for systemic objectification. Her decision to pursue breast surgery is not merely personal choices but a calculated survival strategy in a capitalist society that treats women's bodies as objects and products. The choice turns into a

strong demand that she no longer treats her body as her own. The novel does not romanticize her choices since it reveals the harsh reality that in a capitalist society, women often must change themselves just to survive. This research paper has two sub-chapters of discussion, they are 1) Form of Women's Body Objectification and 2) Capitalist Structure in Japanese Society.

Form of Women's Body Objectification

Having immensely been discussed among feminist discourse, women objectification is a process by which a woman is reduced to her body, or special body parts and treated as object or visual or physical consumption (Bartky, 1990). This problem shapes how women experience themselves in relation to societal beauty expectations. According to (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), objectification occurs when the female body is fragmented and treated as a passive object for the male gaze. Within patriarchal and capitalist systems, such objectification is normalized and commercialized also often manifesting in beauty standards that compel women to conform, consume, and compete. Wolf (1991) further emphasizes how these objectifying ideals are socially constructed to maintain control over women. She argues that these standards function as ideological tools that pressure women to equate their self-worth with their physical appearance. This internalized pressure is often overlooked in everyday life, yet it profoundly influences women's self-image and personal narratives. In the novel *Breasts and Eggs* by Mieko Kawakami, this systemic objectification can be seen in Makiko's monolog:

"People like pretty things. When you're pretty, everybody wants to look at you, they want to touch you. I wanted that for myself. Prettiness means value. But some people never experience that personally." (Breasts and Eggs, 2020, p.40)

Wolf claims that beauty is an idealization resulting from social construction utilized as a political agenda against women's unique personalities and appearance. If women do not fit within the beauty standards, they are not accepted by the surrounding society. In this quote, Makiko equates "prettiness" with "value," showing how deeply ingrained these beauty standards are in her physical appearance. This mirrors Wolf's argument that beauty myths pressure women to view their worth primarily through their appearance, thereby controlling their time, attention, and confidence. The line "Prettiness means value" directly reflects Wolf's idea that the beauty myth defines women's social value in terms of appearance rather than competence, intellect, or integrity. Makiko's yearning to be looked at and touched reveals an internalization of the male gaze, another point Wolf critiques, where women seek validation through how they are perceived physically. Thus, the quote above exemplifies how women internalize the beauty myth, allowing patriarchal and capitalist systems to shift focus from female empowerment to female self-surveillance. Another thing to consider is that to be beautiful requires a lot of value or material. Maintaining and caring for women's beauty requires a lot of money. Thus, it can be interpreted that a woman's beauty is very expensive.

This internalization of objectifying beauty standards becomes even more evident in Makiko's insecurities about her nipple. Based on her general belief that "prettiness means value," her personal struggles with specific body parts further illustrate how deeply these ideals have shaped her self-perception. This occurs when Makiko and her sister Natsuko visit a sauna together:

"They're dark," she said. "I know. They're dark and they're big. No need to say it. I know they're not pretty." (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 41)

Naomi Wolf argues that modern beauty standards are socially constructed tools of oppression, designed to control women by instilling dissatisfaction with their bodies. In this quote, "they" refer to Makiko's nipples of which she regarded their shapes, forms and colour are undesirable. Makiko's internalized body shame reflects the effects of these unrealistic standards: The repetition of "they're dark" and "they're big" conveys Makiko's anxiety and internalization of narrow beauty norms, especially those that associate beauty with whiteness, smallness, and symmetry, qualities typically celebrated by commercial media and beauty industries. Her assertion, "I know they're not pretty," highlights the psychological damage caused by these standards, echoing Wolf's claim that women often adopt these oppressive ideals as part of their own self-image, leading to chronic insecurity and diminished self-worth. Makiko's self-critique is not based on medical, personal, or functional reasons, but on appearance, which demonstrates how society trains women to assess themselves.

The novel also explores the objectification of women's bodies after childbirth, as Makiko describes the transformation of her breast: "And don't even get me started on how big they are. Even the doctor said 'I'm not sure your baby will be able to fit her mouth around these.' No joke. And this is an expert. Do you know how many thousands of boobs this guy's seen? Then there's the fact that they're flat as pancakes. Or the plastic baggies they put goldfish in at festivals. Know how they're only half full? Like that. They're deflated. Everyone's different after childbirth. Some people go back the way they were, some people never even change. But me, I ended up like this." (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 42)

Makiko's comparison of her breasts to "pancakes" and "plastic baggies" in which they refer to the flat surfaces reflects a detachment from her own body for she claimed that her body would not be acknowledged as desirable by men. This describes how Wolf argues that beauty standards are political tools used to control women, and that the pressures to conform intensify at transitional moments in life, especially aging and motherhood. In this quote, Makiko expresses deep bodily alienation and shame after childbirth, highlighting several of Wolf's core ideas: Her description of her breasts as "pancakes" and "plastic baggies" reflects a dissociation from her own body, which no longer aligns with media-driven standards of youthfulness and firmness. According to Wolf, such comparisons stem from internalized objectification: women begin to view their bodies from the outside, as if assessing their market value. The implication that something is "wrong" because her body changed after childbirth reflects a cultural refusal to normalize female biological processes, which Wolf claims is central to the beauty myth. Furthermore, rather than viewing postpartum bodies as natural, the capitalist beauty myth pathologizes and markets against them (e.g., through "mommy makeovers" or anti-aging products).

Capitalist Ideal in Japanese Society on Beauty

According to Jaggar (1983) in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, women's bodies in capitalist patriarchy are not just personal, they are imprinted with ideological meanings that uphold structural power structures. Femininity and beauty are culturally produced ideals that are maintained by market forces, and capitalism exploits and reshapes feminine embodiment into instruments of profit-making. A woman's physical

self becomes a location of commercialization, self-surveillance, and estrangement under such a society. This ideological pattern is illustrated in Mieko Kawakami's *Breast and Eggs* through the character Makiko and her obsession with breast augmentation. The detailed and commercialized language surrounding cosmetic surgery reflects how women's self-perception is conditioned by capitalist ideals.

"I can't tell you how many brochures she had. All shapes and sizes. She must have had well over thirty. Most of them had white girls with blonde hair on the front, wearing almost nothing, to give you an idea of what breasts looked like, and were embellished with pink ribbons or nice floral designs" (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 26)

Makiko collects more than thirty brochures from different clinics, many of the clinics display Western and white skinned women with minimal clothing and pink embellishment. The racialized and sexualized imagery shows a capitalist ideal, aligning with Jaggar's view that capitalism appropriates and commodifies women's appearance for economic circulation (1983). Jaggar emphasizes how capitalism reduces women's bodies to objects of consumption, embedding market logic into personal and intimate decisions. These quotes clearly show how the commodification of the female body is reinforced through advertising aesthetics and racialized imagery. The brochures' use of scantily clad white women as visual templates for breast augmentation reflects how women's bodies are marketed like consumer products, where the "ideal" is white, young, slim, and sexualized. The pink ribbons and floral designs represent a deliberate feminine branding strategy, transforming surgical procedures into commodified lifestyle choices, beautified, and commercialized to make body modification feel like shopping. According to Jaggar, this process alienates women from their own bodies. Makiko, bombarded by thirty brochures, is not engaging in autonomy, she is navigating a marketplace that frames dissatisfaction as normal and surgery as salvation.

After showing the brochure, she had obtained, Makiko showed Natsuko the most expensive breast augmentation option. This option involved a procedure to insert silicone gel implants in the breasts, available in various sizes and prices:

"....Every clinic says something a little different, which makes it hard to choose, but this is the big one, the top of the line. Silicone gel, 100%. They call the next one gummy bear implants. Anyway, this one's a little bit more rigid than the gel type, so it's more resistant to leakage, but even if it ruptures, it's perfectly safe. It just looks a little hard. Some people think it looks unnatural. Then there's saline. The best part about saline is that they don't fill the bags until they're inside, so they can make smaller cuts. But most people get silicone gel. It's the future. So, yeah, I've given it a lot of thought, and I want to go with silicone. This place is only 1,500,000 yen for both breasts. With general anesthetic, it's just another 10,000." (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 27).

The passage above is an example of how capitalist systems commodify the female body, turning deeply personal decisions, like cosmetic surgery, into consumerist, product-driven experiences. As Jaggar (1983) critiques how capitalist structures commodify women's bodies, turning them into centres of market activity, profit, and alienation. This passage perfectly illustrates that idea that the entire monologue is shaped like a sales pitch, showing how Makiko has internalized the capitalist logic:

evaluating body parts like merchandise, comparing features, and making decisions based on pricing, safety, and appearance. The pricing, “1,500,000 yen” plus “another 10,000 for anesthetic”, reduces the female body to a cost-benefit analysis, reflecting how capitalism turns bodies into transactions. The line “Most people get silicone gel. It’s the future” shows how social pressure is merged with capitalist ideology, making the pursuit of these procedures seem like modern progress, when in fact it often deepens inequality and objectification. In Jaggar’s terms, this is a clear case of bodily commodification: women’s physical selves become consumable, upgradable items in a market-driven society.

The power of capitalist industry is dramatized through manipulative pricing strategies and deceptive advertising. This can be seen when Natsuko protested her sister’s decision to take breast augmentation option by fat injections. Surgery clinics often lure the customer with promotional costs while withholding important information about surgical risks and professional credibility, a practice that mirrors exploitative labor and consumer manipulation in a broader capitalist system. Such strategies reflect what Jaggar would term as the institutionalization of alienation, where women’s agency is systematically undermined by corporate interests posing as personal choice.

“.... The brochure says 450,000 yen, right? But when you actually show up at the clinic, there’s no way that’s all you’re paying for. Their whole strategy is to get you in the door. Once you’re there, things add up. Plus, if you go with the promo prices they list in the brochures, you can’t even choose your own surgeon. Chances are good they’ll hand you off to some twenty-two-year-old with no experience. There’s a lot to keep in mind . . . It’s a real long process we’re talking about here, a real journey.” (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 28)

Jaggar’s theory explains how capitalism converts women’s bodies into sites of economic manipulation. In this passage, the breast augmentation experience is treated not as a medical or personal journey, but as a consumer trap. The line “Their whole strategy is to get you in the door” reflects classic capitalist bait-and-switch marketing tactics, showing how clinics exploit women’s insecurities with misleading promo prices, then inflate costs once the customer is emotionally invested. Makiko’s knowledge of how prices increase, and surgeon choices are restricted shows how the beauty industry operates like a profit-driven enterprise, not a care-based one. This aligns with Jaggar’s view that capitalist systems undermine female agency by masking exploitation as freedom of choice. Referring to surgery as a “real journey” exposes how capitalism sells transformation as a meaningful experience while commodifying every step of it, from surgeon choice to implant type to anaesthesia.

When Natsuko reminisces about her own adolescence, particularly the physical changes she experienced during puberty. This memory is triggered by her interactions with her sister, Makiko, who is considering breast augmentation, and her niece, Midoriko, who is grappling with the onset of puberty. Natsuko recalls the sudden and painful development of her breasts, highlighting the discomfort and surprise that accompanied this transformation. She also reflects on the societal expectations of female beauty she internalized as a child, influenced by media portrayals of women. Despite these expectations, she acknowledges that her body did not conform to these ideals:

“I remember what it felt like when my breasts started getting bigger. How out of nowhere I had grown these things. It was incredible how much they hurt back then if anything bumped into them. As a kid, whenever I saw the naked women in the magazines that the kids in the neighborhood got their hands on, or saw grownup woman expose her body on TV, I guess on some level I thought that someday all those parts of me would fill out, too, and I would have a body just like them.” (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 39)

Women are conditioned from a young age to associate their worth with physical beauty, which is defined and controlled by media, consumerism, and patriarchal ideals (Jaggar, 1983). Natsuko’s memory clearly reflects this statement. Her exposure to “naked women in the magazines” and “grownup woman expose her body on TV” reveals how media operates as an early agent of social conditioning, shaping expectations for what a “real” or “desirable” woman should look like. The belief that her body would “fill out” like those in the magazines illustrates how beauty myths implant future-oriented expectations in young girls, creating a standard of bodily development that is not natural or universal but constructed and idealized. When Natsuko reflects that her body did not conform to these ideals, it reinforces Jaggar’s idea that failing to meet these standards causes feelings of inadequacy, even when one’s body is entirely healthy and normal.

Natsuko was affected in the same way. She also spoke about the moment she realized that her body would not conform to the hyper-feminine, sexualized image presented in media, particularly in girly magazines:

“...My monolithic expectation of what a woman’s body was supposed to look like had no bearing on what actually happened to my body. The two things were wholly unrelated. I never became the woman I imagined. And what was I expecting? The kind of body that you see in girly magazines. A body that fit the mold of what people describe as “sexy”. A body that provokes sexual fantasy. A source of desire. I guess I could say that I expected my body would have some sort of value. I thought all women grew up to have that kind of body, but that’s not how things played out.” (Breast and Eggs, 2020, p. 39-40)

Capitalist feminism reveals how capitalism benefits from creating dissatisfaction with women’s bodies, encouraging them to pursue value through appearance-based consumption (Jaggar, 1983). Natsuko’s statement that she “expected [her] body would have some sort of value” shows how the capitalist market teaches women that their worth is physical and transactional. Her disappointment reflects the capitalist promise that beauty equals power, love, and success, a promise that is rarely fulfilled but keeps women engaged in the cycle of consumption (e.g., beauty products, cosmetic surgery, dieting). The commodification of female sexuality is also evident in her reference to “a body that provokes sexual fantasy”, a body constructed not for herself, but to be consumed by others. This reflects Jaggar’s notion that women’s bodies are treated as objects for the male gaze and capitalist profit.

CONCLUSION

In *Breasts and Eggs*, Mieko Kawakami offers a powerful critique of the relationship between capitalism and the objectification of women's bodies in modern Japanese culture. This research has demonstrated how capitalist structures commodify female

bodies by embedding market logic into women's self-perception, bodily autonomy, and reproductive choices. Based on Alison Jaggar's theory of capitalist feminism and Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, the research shows that under capitalism, women's physical appearance is no longer merely a personal characteristic but rather a business asset that is shaped, assessed, and marketed by the beauty industries. The psychological and social burden that women who internalize beauty ideals and navigate a society where their bodies are seen as goods rather than lived experiences bear is encapsulated in Kawakami's portrayal of Makiko as the center character, alongside with other supporting characters Midoriko and Natsuko.

Makiko's obsession on breast augmentation portrays as an example of how capitalist society takes advantage of women's insecurities and turns cosmetic surgery into a desirable commodity. Her engagement with advertising images, special pricing, and glossy brochures is indicative of the widespread consumerism that uses external beauty and profitability to define feminine. The analysis of her internal dialogue and interactions with others reveals that cosmetic enhancements are not freely chosen acts of empowerment, but rather strategic responses to a system that devalues women unless they conform to narrow standards of physical perfection. Similarly, Natsuko's thoughts on puberty reveal how deeply media and consumer society shape girls' expectations that their value is correlated with their physical attractiveness. As women attempt to live up to idealized standards that are out of reach for the majority, these expectations create emotional labor and lifelong discontent.

Furthermore, the analysis of marketing tactics employed by beauty clinics, such as misleading promotions, branded packaging, and racially charged imagery, shows how capitalist systems commodify not just the female body but also the transformational process itself. All things considered, *Breasts and Eggs* offers an engaging perspective for analyzing how women's bodies are objectified by capitalism. The emotional, social, and intellectual repercussions of being in a culture that capitalizes on women's vulnerability are revealed by Mieko Kawakami.

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