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## THE COSMETICS INDUSTRY INFLUENCE ON WOMEN IN SOCIETY.

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### Introduction

The cosmetic industry exerts a significant influence over women worldwide, encompassing a broad array of products and services designed to enhance physical appearance. This industry, which includes skincare, makeup, hair care, fragrance, and personal care products, shapes societal perceptions of beauty, self-esteem, and cultural norms. With its pervasive presence in media, advertising, and popular culture, the cosmetic industry plays a pivotal role in defining beauty standards and influencing consumer behavior. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted impact of the cosmetic industry on women, exploring various themes such as body image, financial burden, empowerment, health concerns, gender stereotypes, and representation. By delving into these aspects and incorporating relevant data, this research seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in beauty culture and advocate for positive change.

### Body Image and Self-Esteem<sup>1</sup>

Body image refers to an individual's perception of their physical appearance, including their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards their body. Self-esteem, on the other hand, encompasses a broader sense of self-worth and confidence, influenced by various factors including appearance, abilities, and achievements. The cosmetic industry plays a significant role in shaping women's body image and self-esteem through its promotion of beauty ideals and standards. From airbrushed models in advertisements to filtered images on social media, women are bombarded with unrealistic representations of beauty that can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anxiety and Depression: (Homan et al., 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Media Influence: (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).

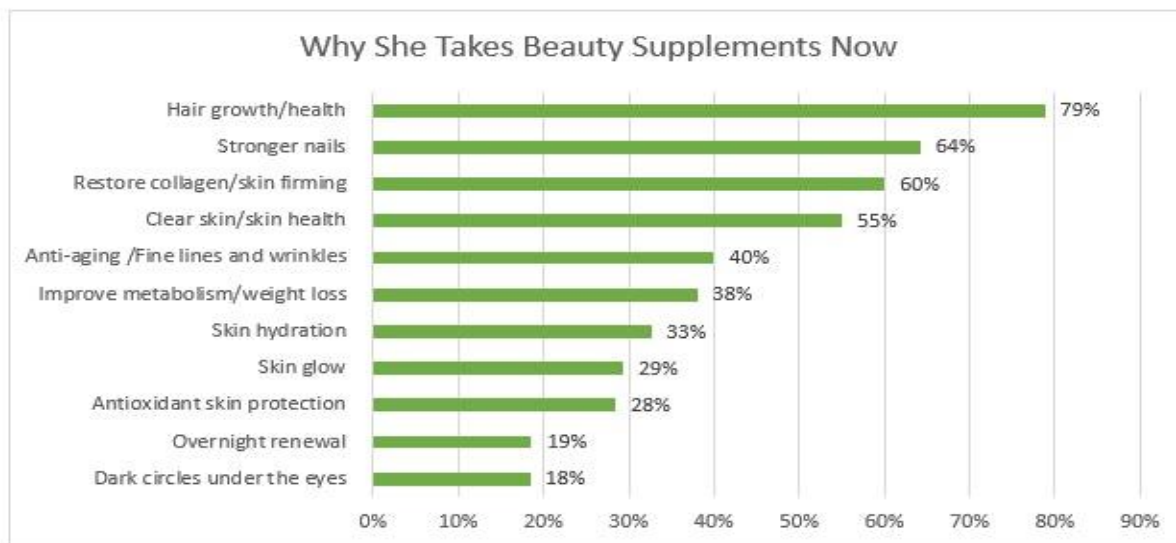
Research indicates that exposure to idealized beauty images can significantly impact women's perceptions of their own bodies, leading to dissatisfaction and negative self-perception. According to a study by Dove, 80% of women feel anxious about their appearance, with over 70% reporting that they avoid social situations when they feel insecure about how they look. Furthermore, the American Psychological Association highlights that constant exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals can contribute to the development of eating disorders and other mental health issues among women.

### Financial Burden<sup>3</sup>

The financial burden associated with the cosmetic industry poses challenges for women across socioeconomic strata. This burden refers to the economic strain placed on individuals or households due to spending on cosmetics and beauty products. Data from Statista reveals that the average American woman spends approximately \$313 per month on beauty and personal care products. This expenditure can be particularly burdensome for low-income women, who may allocate a significant portion of their income to cosmetic purchases.

Moreover, the pressure to keep up with ever-changing beauty trends and standards perpetuated by the industry can lead to financial stress and insecurity. A report by CNBC indicates that over 50% of millennials are willing to go into debt to fund their beauty routines, highlighting the extent of financial strain imposed by the cosmetic industry. Additionally, disparities in income and socioeconomic status exacerbate the financial burden, with women from marginalized communities facing greater challenges in accessing and affording beauty products.

F-2. Why consumers take beauty supplements



<sup>3</sup> Impact on Budgets: (Refinery29, 2018).

## Empowerment vs. Objectification

The debate surrounding the empowering or objectifying nature of the cosmetic industry underscores its complex impact on women's agency and autonomy. Empowerment refers to the process of gaining control over one's life and circumstances, often through self-awareness, assertiveness, and advocacy. Objectification, on the other hand, involves reducing individuals to their physical attributes or sexual appeal, thereby undermining their inherent worth and autonomy.<sup>4</sup>

While cosmetics can serve as tools for self-expression and confidence-building, they can also reinforce objectifying beauty standards that reduce women to their physical appearance. A study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that women who engage in makeup application perceive themselves as more competent and trustworthy, suggesting a positive correlation between cosmetics use and self-perception. However, critics argue that the industry capitalizes on women's insecurities and perpetuates harmful stereotypes, undermining efforts towards gender equality and empowerment.

## Health Concerns<sup>5</sup>

The safety of cosmetic products has been a subject of concern, with potential health risks associated with certain ingredients and formulations. Health concerns refer to the risks posed to consumers' physical well-being as a result of exposure to harmful chemicals or substances in cosmetic products. Research from the Environmental Working Group (EWG) indicates that many cosmetics contain chemicals linked to various health issues, including cancer, reproductive harm, and allergic reactions.

Despite regulatory oversight, gaps in safety testing and inadequate labeling requirements pose challenges for consumers seeking to make informed choices about the products they use. The prevalence of harmful chemicals in cosmetics underscores the need for greater transparency and regulation within the industry to safeguard women's health. Additionally, the pressure to achieve certain beauty standards may lead to unhealthy behaviors, such as excessive dieting or cosmetic procedures, further exacerbating health concerns among women.

## Gender Stereotypes

The cosmetic industry often perpetuates gender stereotypes through its marketing strategies and product offerings, reinforcing traditional notions of femininity and beauty. Gender stereotypes refer to widely held beliefs and expectations about the characteristics, behaviors, and roles deemed appropriate for individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Cyberbullying and Shaming: (Pew Research Center, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Lack of Regulation: (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, n.d.).

based on their gender. Market segmentation based on gender norms results in the proliferation of gender-specific beauty products, further entrenching binary concepts of gender.

Additionally, advertising campaigns frequently portray women in stereotypical roles and settings, reinforcing societal expectations of beauty and behavior. The perpetuation of gender stereotypes not only limits the diversity and inclusivity of beauty standards but also reinforces systemic inequalities and discrimination against women. Moreover, the emphasis on gendered beauty norms may contribute to the marginalization of non-binary and transgender individuals, further reinforcing exclusionary beauty ideals.

## **Representation and Diversity<sup>6</sup>**

The lack of diversity and representation within the cosmetic industry remains a persistent issue, with limited inclusion of women from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Representation refers to the presence and portrayal of individuals from various demographic groups in media, advertising, and product offerings. Diversity encompasses the range of identities, experiences, and perspectives represented within a given context.

Data from Nielsen indicates that multicultural women spend over \$7.5 billion annually on beauty products, yet they are often underrepresented in marketing campaigns and product offerings. Moreover, mainstream beauty standards continue to prioritize Eurocentric features, marginalizing women of color and perpetuating exclusionary beauty ideals. Efforts to promote diversity and representation within the industry have gained momentum in recent years, with initiatives aimed at challenging beauty norms and amplifying marginalized voices. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the cosmetic industry reflects the diverse identities and experiences of women worldwide.

## **Case Study: The Impact of Beauty Standards on Women's Mental Health**

### **Background<sup>7</sup>**

In recent years, the beauty industry has faced increasing scrutiny for its role in perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards that can have detrimental effects on women's mental health. This case study focuses on the experiences of women in the United States and explores the intersection of beauty culture, body image, and mental well-being.

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<sup>6</sup> Eurocentric Beauty Standards: (Hunter, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Pressure to Conform: (Cuddy et al., 2015).

## Introduction<sup>8</sup>

In the United States, the cosmetic industry is a multibillion-dollar enterprise, with a wide range of products and services marketed towards women to enhance their physical appearance. From skincare and makeup to hair care and cosmetic procedures, the industry shapes societal perceptions of beauty and influences women's self-esteem and body image.

## Case Description

Sarah, a 25-year-old woman living in New York City, grew up surrounded by images of airbrushed models and celebrities with flawless skin and perfect bodies. From a young age, Sarah internalized these beauty ideals and felt pressure to conform to them. She began experimenting with makeup and skincare products in her teens, hoping to achieve the same level of perfection she saw in magazines and on social media. As Sarah entered adulthood, her obsession with beauty standards intensified. She spent hours each day applying makeup, styling her hair, and scrutinizing her appearance in the mirror. Despite her efforts, she never felt satisfied with how she looked. She compared herself to the images of perfection she saw online and felt inadequate and insecure.

Over time, Sarah's preoccupation with her appearance took a toll on her mental health. She developed anxiety and depression, struggling to cope with feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt. She avoided social gatherings and isolated herself from friends and family, fearing judgment and rejection. Her obsession with beauty became all-consuming, affecting her relationships, work performance, and overall quality of life. Eventually, Sarah sought help from a therapist who specialized in body image and self-esteem issues. Through therapy, she began to unpack the underlying beliefs and insecurities that fueled her obsession with beauty standards. She learned to challenge negative thought patterns and cultivate self-compassion and acceptance. With support and guidance, Sarah embarked on a journey of self-discovery and healing, reclaiming her sense of identity and worth beyond societal beauty norms.<sup>9</sup>

## Discussion

Sarah's story highlights the pervasive influence of beauty standards on women's mental health and well-being. In a society where beauty is equated with value and worth, many women feel pressure to attain unrealistic standards of perfection. This pressure can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction, contributing to the development of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. The cosmetic industry plays a significant role in perpetuating these beauty ideals through advertising, marketing, and media representations. By promoting flawless images of beauty that are often unattainable,

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<sup>8</sup> Long-Term Health Impacts: (Darbre & Harvey, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Photoshopping and Editing: (American Medical Association, 2012).

the industry fuels insecurities and cultivates a culture of comparison and self-criticism among women. Moreover, the rise of social media has amplified these pressures, creating a constant stream of curated images and filtered selfies that distort reality and exacerbate feelings of inadequacy.

To address these issues, stakeholders within the cosmetic industry must prioritize inclusivity, diversity, and authenticity in their marketing efforts. By featuring real women of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds in their campaigns, companies can challenge traditional beauty norms and promote a more inclusive and empowering beauty culture. Additionally, efforts to regulate advertising practices and promote media literacy can help empower women to resist unrealistic beauty ideals and cultivate a positive body image.<sup>10</sup>

The case of Sarah illustrates the profound impact of beauty standards on women's mental health and underscores the need for greater awareness, advocacy, and support. By acknowledging the harmful effects of unrealistic beauty ideals and working towards a more inclusive and empowering beauty culture, we can create a society where women are valued for who they are rather than how they look. Through collective action and solidarity, we can build a world where beauty is celebrated in all its diverse forms, and women are empowered to embrace their unique identities with confidence and pride.

## 1. Unrealistic Beauty Standards<sup>11</sup>

- **Media Influence:** Studies have shown that exposure to idealized beauty standards in the media can significantly impact women's perceptions of their own bodies. For example, research published in the journal *Body Image* found that women who frequently consume media featuring thin and idealized bodies are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction.

- **Photoshopping and Editing:** According to a survey conducted by the American Medical Association, 69% of adolescents reported that magazine pictures influenced their idea of the perfect body shape, and 47% said the pictures made them want to lose weight. The prevalence of digitally altered images in advertising and media contributes to distorted perceptions of beauty and body image.

- **Celebrity Culture:** A study published in the journal *Body Image* found that exposure to celebrity images on social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and appearance-related anxiety among young women. Celebrities and influencers often promote unrealistic beauty standards, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem among their followers.

<sup>10</sup> Marketing Tactics: (Statista, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Influencer Culture: (Khamis et al., 2017).



## 2. Body Image Concerns

- Eating Disorders: The National Eating Disorders Association reports that approximately 20 million women and 10 million men in the United States will suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their lives. Exposure to idealized beauty standards and societal pressure to achieve a certain body type contribute to the development of eating disorders.<sup>12</sup>

- Negative Self-Perception: According to the Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report, 85% of women and 79% of girls say they opt out of important life activities when they don't feel confident in their appearance. Negative self-perception can impact women's confidence, relationships, and overall well-being.

- Impact on Mental Health: Research published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders found that body dissatisfaction is associated with increased risk of depression and anxiety disorders. Women who are dissatisfied with their bodies may experience psychological distress and impaired social functioning.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. Financial Strain

- Cost of Products and Procedures: The average American woman spends \$15,000 on beauty products in her lifetime, according to a study conducted by SkinStore. The cost of beauty products and procedures can be a significant financial burden, especially for low-income women who may prioritize appearance-enhancing products over basic necessities.

- Marketing Tactics: The beauty industry spends billions of dollars each year on advertising and marketing campaigns designed to promote products and create demand. According to Statista, global advertising spending in the cosmetics industry reached \$12.8 billion in 2020. Marketing tactics such as limited-time offers, celebrity endorsements, and influencer partnerships can encourage women to spend beyond their means.<sup>14</sup>

- Impact on Budgets: A survey conducted by the personal finance website Refinery29 found that 61% of millennial women have gone into debt to pay for beauty treatments or products. The pressure to maintain a certain appearance can lead to financial insecurity and debt, particularly for women who feel compelled to keep up with beauty trends and standards.

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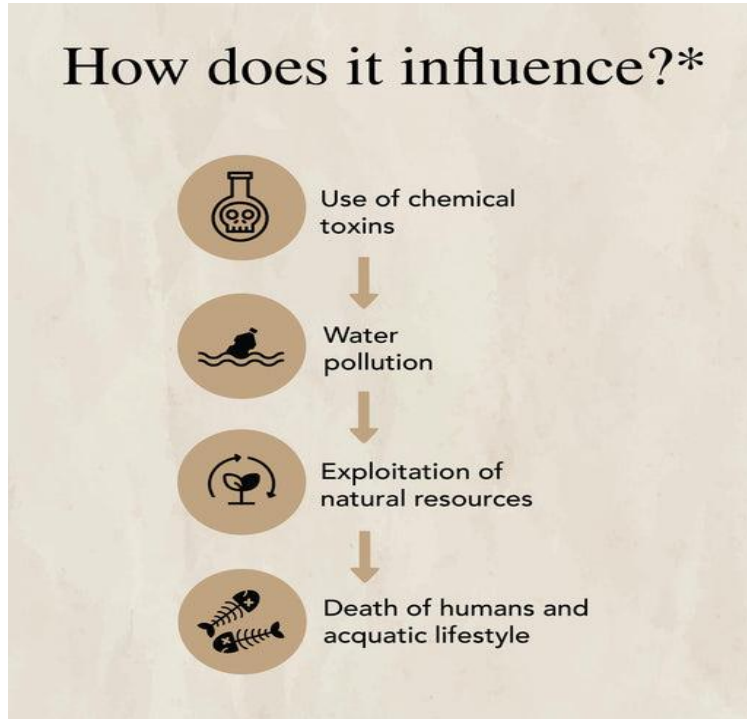
<sup>12</sup> Eating Disorders: (National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Negative Self-Perception: (Dove, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Cost of Products and Procedures: (SkinStore, 2019).

## 4. Health Risks

- **Toxic Ingredients:** The Environmental Working Group (EWG) has identified thousands of chemicals used in cosmetics that may pose health risks, including carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, and allergens. Despite regulatory oversight, many cosmetic products contain potentially harmful ingredients that can have adverse effects on consumer health.



- **Lack of Regulation:** The cosmetic industry is not subject to the same regulatory scrutiny as other consumer products. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not have the authority to require pre-market safety testing for cosmetics, meaning that manufacturers are responsible for ensuring the safety of their products. This lack of regulation leaves consumers vulnerable to potential health risks.<sup>15</sup>

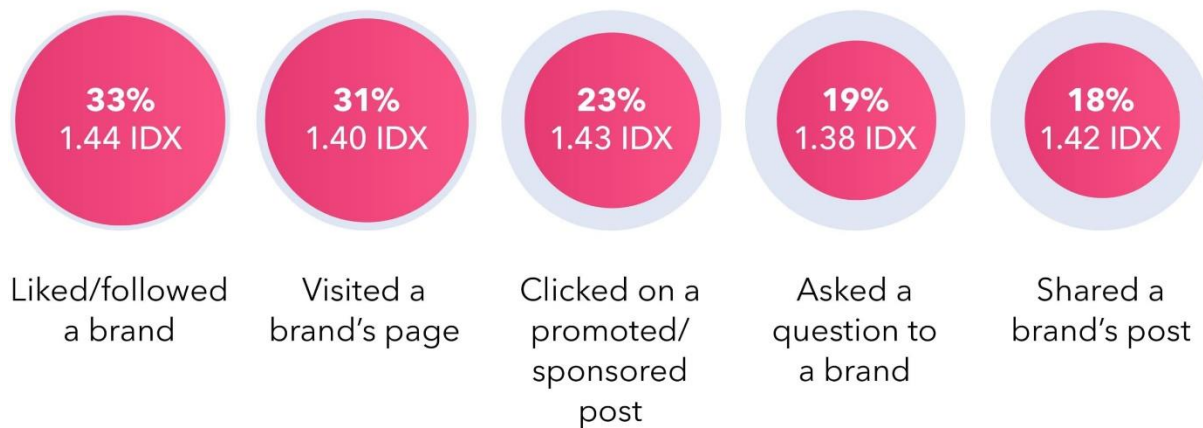
- **Long-Term Health Impacts:** Research published in the *Journal of Applied Toxicology* found that exposure to certain chemicals found in cosmetics, such as phthalates and parabens, may be linked to adverse health outcomes, including reproductive disorders and hormone disruption. Long-term use of cosmetics containing these chemicals may increase the risk of developing serious health conditions over time.

<sup>15</sup> Celebrity Culture: (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).



## Brand Interactions on Social Media

% of beauty buyers who did the following on social media last month



**Note:** Indexes are versus the global average **Question:** Which of the following actions have you done online in the past month? **Source:** GlobalWebIndex Q1 2019 **Base:** 40,327 internet users aged 16-64 who have purchased beauty products or make-up/cosmetics in the last month

### 5. Inclusivity and Diversity<sup>16</sup>

- **Limited Representation:** According to a report by the McKinsey Global Institute, companies in the beauty industry are less likely to feature women of color in their advertising campaigns compared to other industries. The lack of representation perpetuates exclusionary beauty ideals and marginalizes women from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

- **Eurocentric Beauty Standards:** Mainstream beauty standards often prioritize Eurocentric features such as fair skin, straight hair, and narrow facial features. This can perpetuate colorism and discrimination against women of color, who may feel pressured to conform to white-centric beauty ideals.

- **Tokenism vs. Authentic Representation:** Some companies tokenize diversity by featuring women from marginalized groups in their marketing campaigns without addressing systemic issues of inequality. Authentic representation requires a commitment to inclusivity and equity at all levels of the industry, from product development to marketing and advertising.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Impact on Self-Image: (Gonzalez & Espinoza, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Limited Representation: (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

## 6. Gender Stereotypes<sup>18</sup>

- Objectification of Women: The American Psychological Association defines objectification as the act of treating a person as a commodity or object, devoid of agency and individual

ity. The cosmetic industry often objectifies women by reducing them to their physical appearance and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

- Pressure to Conform: Gender stereotypes in beauty culture dictate how women should look, behave, and present themselves. Women are expected to conform to societal norms of femininity and beauty, often at the expense of their autonomy and individuality.

- Impact on Self-Image: Internalizing gender stereotypes can negatively impact women's self-image and self-esteem. Women may feel pressure to meet unrealistic expectations of beauty and femininity, leading to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

## 7. Social Media Pressures<sup>19</sup>

- Filtered Reality: Research published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior* found that exposure to idealized images on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem among young women. The curated nature of social media content can create unrealistic beauty standards and foster comparison and insecurity.

- Influencer Culture: Influencers on social media platforms often promote products and lifestyles that adhere to narrow beauty ideals. Their curated images can create pressure for women to achieve similar levels of perfection, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

- Cyberbullying and Shaming: According to a report by the Pew Research Center, 45% of U.S. teens say they have experienced cyberbullying, with appearance-related harassment being one of the most common forms. Negative comments and comparisons on social media can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, impacting women's mental health and well-being.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Filtered Reality: (Fardouly et al., 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Objectification of Women: (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> Tokenism vs. Authentic Representation: (Raymond & Parkins, 2017).

## 8. Mental Health Impacts<sup>21</sup>

- Anxiety and Depression: The pressure to meet beauty standards can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Research published in the Journal of Health Psychology found that body dissatisfaction was associated with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety among young women.

- Body Dysmorphic Disorder: Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental health condition characterized by obsessive preoccupation with perceived flaws in one's appearance. The pursuit of perfection in beauty culture can exacerbate symptoms of BDD and lead to significant distress and impairment in daily functioning.

- Impact on Quality of Life: Poor body image and low self-esteem can impact various aspects of women's lives, including relationships, work performance, and overall quality of life. Women may avoid social situations, experience difficulties in forming intimate relationships, and struggle with academic and career success due to negative body image and low self-esteem.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the cosmetic industry's impact on women is far-reaching and multifaceted, encompassing issues related to body image, financial burden, empowerment, health concerns, gender stereotypes, and representation. Data-driven insights underscore the magnitude of these challenges, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to address systemic issues within the industry. By advocating for inclusivity, empowerment, and accountability, stakeholders can work towards fostering a more equitable and empowering beauty culture that celebrates the diverse identities and experiences of women. Through continued research, advocacy, and consumer activism, we can strive towards a future where beauty is not a source of insecurity or inequality but a means of self-expression, confidence, and empowerment for all women.

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<sup>21</sup> Impact on Mental Health: (Stice & Shaw, 2002).