SELLING BEAUTY: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SKINCARE AND COSMETIC ADVERTISING

by

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Though there are several legal regulations related to advertising, unethical behavior by advertisers remains a common occurrence. This is especially relevant within the beauty industry, where advertisements exaggerate product benefits and mislead consumers. Further, the beauty industry plays a pivotal role in defining beauty standards for women and provides women with a significant amount of information that they use to evaluate their own beauty. This thesis focuses on three key topics to determine the impact of unethical advertising. First, it examines common ethical issues that arise in the advertising industry as a whole. Next, it looks at beauty advertising specifically, evaluating ethical issues specific to this industry. Finally, based on original survey data and other relevant literature, it makes suggestions for companies to create more ethical advertising and for viewers to consume ads in a healthier way.

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Introduction

Project Description

Beauty advertising, defined in this project as skin care and cosmetic advertising focused on the face, typically promotes a standard that is unachievable by consumers. It is easy for ad watchers to view these standards as something they ought to work towards achieving, rather than recognizing their impossibility. Beyond individual consumers, these advertisements also impact beauty standards for women at large. As such, it is important to study the ethical considerations of beauty advertising, particularly in relation to how this advertising affects the self-esteem of those who consume the ads.

There have been many instances where beauty advertisements were banned on the basis of being misleading to a reasonable consumer. In 2012, a L'Oréal advertisement featuring actress Rachel Weisz was banned in the UK, as the image used had been digitally altered and exaggerated the capabilities of the anti-wrinkle cream being advertised (*BBC News* 2012). The previous year, in the US, a CoverGirl mascara ad faced backlash as it claimed the product could double the volume of the user's eyelashes. However, in fine print, the ad disclosed that the model's eyelashes had been digitally altered. The ad was banned by the National Advertising Division because of its use of misleading and manipulative imagery (Rand 2011). These situations provide only a couple of examples of a frequently occurring issue.

Companies often embellish ads with overstated claims of the products and accompany these claims with manipulated images in an attempt to convince consumers to buy the product. In extreme situations, when these ads are ruled as misleading, the law must intervene, establishing a legal precedent for how far ads can exaggerate their products. However, the law is not the only

indicator of unsound behavior from advertisers. When the law is insufficient, ethical standards become the criteria for evaluating advertisements.

In this project, I am going to examine the ethical implications of beauty advertising. I will first investigate common ethical concerns faced by the advertising industry in general. Next, I will examine ethical concerns that are specific to advertising within the beauty industry. Using a combination of this information and original data collected through a survey, I will then suggest characteristics that ethical beauty advertisements should have. Upon completing this analysis, I will use my findings to develop recommendations for beauty companies to follow as they produce advertisements, as well as for ad viewers to use to consume beauty advertisements in a healthy way.

Research Questions

- What are common ethical concerns associated with the advertising industry?
- What are common ethical concerns associated with beauty advertising specifically?
- What should ethical beauty advertising look like?

Overview of Advertising

"Society drives people crazy with lust and calls it advertising." – John Lahr

From insurance to soda, streaming services to clothing, everything can be advertised. Every day, people are exposed to thousands of advertisements, and companies pour billions into these advertisements. The advertising industry's sheer size and omnipresence has given it immense power and influence in the lives of individuals. With this influence, however, comes an abundance of considerations regarding how these ads impact consumers.

Size of the Advertising Industry

In 2021, advertisers in the United States spent approximately 279.5 billion dollars. In 2022, this figure increased to 332.2 billion and is projected to continue to increase in the following years (Navarro 2023a). In 2022, Amazon was the most advertised brand in the US, with expenditures of 6.1 billion dollars. Walmart, GEICO, Target, and Verizon also ranked among the top five companies for advertising spending (Faria 2023). Revenues from advertising remain high, as well, and are projected to continue rising. In 2022, advertising revenues for media owners in the US amounted to 343.5 billion dollars (Navarro 2023b).

Given the immense spending on and revenue from advertising in the US, one must wonder the extent to which increased spending on advertising increases revenues. According to James Schroer in the Harvard Business Review, "advertising spending can determine advances and retreats in the market share – but only when a big spending difference among competitors has been maintained for a long time" (Schroer 1990). According to Schroer, this length of time is approximately 18 months, with correlations between advertisement spending and revenues becoming consistent after 3 years.

On the viewer's end of the advertising industry, it is estimated that most Americans see between 4,000 and 10,000 ads per day. Viewers undergo a sort of "screening process" when presented with advertisements where they subconsciously select what to pay attention to and what to ignore (Simpson 2017). In other words, just because a viewer is exposed to an ad does not mean they will inherently pay attention to it or encode its information. As a result, advertisers must approach advertising strategically so that they can ensure viewers will engage with their ads, and their immense spending will be worthwhile.

Common Techniques Used by the Advertising Industry

Advertisers use many tactics to help viewers encode their ads. Many of these tactics go beyond visual imagery, such as what the ad directly depicts, and auditory cues, such as dialogue or music within the ad. One tactic frequently used is color psychology. Certain colors are associated with certain emotions and ideas. This can be observed through the design of a company's logo. For example, red conveys excitement and boldness. Target and its red logo align with these values, as customers can always be excited about the selection of products and deals they can find inside the store. Green conveys peacefulness and health, which is consistent with Whole Foods' brand image. Blue signifies trust, dependability, and strength, so it is understandably used for many technology companies' logos, such as Dell and HP (Ciotti 2020). Similarly, the colors used in advertising can convey messages about the brand and its products.

Brands may also use color as a facet of their brand identity. For example, Tiffany and Co.'s robin's-egg blue has become so synonymous with the brand that the color is named "Tiffany Blue." In fact, the color has been trademarked by Tiffany and Co. in 1998 ("Tiffany Blue" 2020). The iconic Tiffany blue box and bag become as much a part of the consumer experience as the jewelry itself. The color is easily identifiable to consumers, signifying the

luxury of the brand and its products, and is therefore frequently used by the company in its advertisements.

Figure 1: A Tiffany & Co. fragrance advertisement.

In the advertisement shown in Figure 1, hardly any text accompanies the images. Though the brand name is printed on both the back of the woman and the bottle of perfume, they are very small relative to the size of the advertisement. Here, the advertisers primarily rely on viewers' recognition of the Tiffany Blue color, which will immediately signify the brand conveyed in the advertisement.

The woman shown in the advertisement also has four small star tattoos on her back, one of which is colored the same Tiffany Blue color as shown on the left. This use of color is also extremely significant. A tattoo is a permanent mark, meaning this woman is literally branded with Tiffany Blue. This illustrates how she represents the brand not only in its advertisement, but

also every day of her life. Consequently, although the advertisement does not say anything about the product itself, its affiliation with the brand through the use of color is enough to prompt consumers to seek more information.

Another strategy frequently used by brands is product placement, which is the deliberate placement of certain brands and products within movies or TV shows. This offers a more subtle form of advertising and allows for brands to associate themselves with the image of the media in which they are featured. Product placement provides benefits for both parties involved, as the characterization of a product and the character using that product happens in tandem: characters become defined by the product's brand image, and the brand becomes defined by the media's associations. In fact, product placement is estimated to be a $23 billion industry, and this number has been steadily increasing in recent years (Haigney 2022).

One example of product placement can be seen in the CW show "Riverdale." Throughout the show, the characters are shown using Covergirl makeup products. References to the various products, such as shades of lipstick, are included in the dialogue. The show also not-so-subtly includes shots of a character holding a Covergirl makeup product, then focuses the camera on the

makeup product to make sure the viewer does not miss the Covergirl brand. An example of this shot is shown below.

Figure 2: Covergirl product placement in "Riverdale."

By featuring Covergirl products in "Riverdale," viewers will be prompted to use Covergirl products as they attempt to emulate the characters they see on screen. Focusing on the product and blurring the character behind it ensures that viewers know exactly what product the character is using. Though product placement often involves more subtle usage of the products, "Riverdale" provides a more obvious situation where viewers cannot help but see the characters using Covergirl products.

Advertisers also often utilize celebrities within their ads. Using a celebrity in an advertisement allows companies to liken their brand and products with the celebrity's image. Regardless of whether the celebrity uses the product, they now become associated with it, meaning consumers equate a positive image of the celebrity with a positive image of the brand or product. This allows companies to build credibility and gain support for their product. One example of celebrity advertising is "Riverdale" actress Lili Reinhart's Covergirl campaign. In

addition to using the brand for on-screen product placement, they produced a campaign that features the main actress from the show.

Figure 3: Lili Reinhart in a Covergirl advertisement.

In the figure shown above, Lili Reinhart poses for a Covergirl advertisement. Though there is nothing that specifically says Reinhart is wearing the foundation being shown, her image in the advertisement suggests that she does. Further, it suggests to viewers that if they were to buy the foundation shown in the advertisement, they would be able to emulate Lili Reinhart's makeup routine and possibly even look like her. This feeling of aspiration towards celebrities is what allows celebrity product endorsements to be so successful.

Ethical Considerations of the Advertising Industry

"If you are not paying for it, you're not the customer; you are the product being sold." – Andrew Lewis

According to the Federal Trade Commission, "claims in advertisements must be truthful, cannot be deceptive or unfair, and must be evidence-based" ("Advertising and Marketing" 2023). These legal guidelines attempt to regulate messages shared by advertisements, as advertisers often embellish and exaggerate their claims. When this exaggeration is deemed misleading, the law must intervene. This is not a rarity in advertising. Recently, a 2022 Shell ad was banned for misleading its viewers with clean energy claims (Masud 2023). In the UK, a Lufthansa ad was banned for representing a "misleading impression of [the company's] environmental impact" (Sweney 2023). In fact, in 2018 Google banned 2.3 billion misleading ads to protect its users ("Google Says It Banned 2.3 Billion Misleading Ads in 2018" 2019). Despite so many banned advertisements, the banned ads represent only a fraction of all advertisements.

Further, ads that are not legally banned are not inherently truthful. Legal precedents for misleading ads are only one set of indicators for unsound behavior and cannot cover every circumstance. Where the law falls short, ethics comes into consideration. Just because something is legal does not mean it is ethical. Ethics provide much more fluid guidelines than the law, however, and considering ethical issues within advertising requires careful and thoughtful analysis.

Advertising Sells More Than Just Products

In her article "The Bribed Soul," Leslie Savan explores the ethics of advertising by explaining how advertising has permeated consumers' lives to point that humans now live "the sponsored life."

> The sponsored life is born when commercial culture sells our own experiences back to us. It grows as those experiences are then reconstituted inside us, mixing the most intimate processes of individual thought with commercial values, rhythms, and expectations. It has often been said by television's critics that TV doesn't deliver products to viewers but that the viewers themselves are the *real* product, one that TV delivers to its advertisers (Savan 2007).

Savan argues that as humans consume advertisements, their personal thoughts and ideals become inextricably linked with the messages they are receiving through advertising. As a result, humans cannot disentangle their own ideas from what they are being told to believe through advertising. When this process occurs, Savan asserts that the consumers become the product of this exchange. In other words, advertisers become buyers, and they are buying consumers' attention towards their brand.

Savan goes on to explain that when consumers buy products, they "buy the world that presents them," and, "whether [consumers] actually buy a particular product is less important than that [they] buy the world that makes the products seem desirable" (Savan 2007). In this statement, Savan explains how consumers purchase the ideas of products and the perceived needs they will fulfill more so than the products themselves. This highlights the tendency of advertising to create needs for consumers which must be fulfilled through consumption.

The idea that advertising sells ideas rather than products is further supported by William Shaw in "The Debate Over Advertising." Shaw explains that "by connecting products with important emotions and feelings, advertisements can also satisfy our deeper needs and wants" (Shaw 2008). Highlighting this idea further, Shaw writes:

> Advertising provides little usable information to consumers. Advertisements almost always conceal relevant negative facts about their products, and they are frequently based on subtle appeals to psychological needs, which the products they peddle are unlikely to satisfy (Shaw 2008).

Shaw discusses how ads make subtle appeals to psychological needs, often without the knowledge of the consumer. The subconscious effect of such advertising is ethically

questionable, as it may alter consumers' thoughts and perceptions without them realizing what is happening. Shaw explains further that products shown in advertisements are often unlikely to satisfy these created needs, highlighting another common ethical issue in which advertising constantly leaves consumers wanting more.

Shaw also explains how advertisements do not often provide its viewers with tangible, useful information about a product. Moreover, ads rarely discuss negative factors associated with the use of their products. This withholding of information brings to light an ethical concern related to advertising. Though it is part of the job of an advertiser to convey their product in a positive light in order to prompt consumption, consumers should, in an ideal world, have access to all relevant information before making purchasing decisions. The exclusion of this information from advertising leads to consumers making misinformed decisions.

Consumers Do Not Have All Information Necessary to Make a Purchase

In "The Ethics of Consumer Production," Manuel Velasquez expands upon Shaw's argument that consumers do not have all of the information necessary to make a purchase by explaining how the act of consumption can be viewed as a contract between the consumer and the business. Velasquez describes the process of entering into a contract, explaining how,

> Traditional moralists have argued that the act of entering into a contract is subject to several secondary moral constraints:
> 1. Both of the parties to the contract must have full knowledge of the nature of the agreement they are entering.
> 2. Neither party to a contract must intentionally misrepresent the facts of the contractual situation to the other party.
> 3. Neither party to a contract must be forced to enter the contract under duress or undue influence (Velasquez 2004)

In the scope of advertising, point 2 is especially significant. Misrepresentation happens frequently in advertising in an attempt to make a product seem more desirable. According to

Velasquez, if this happens, a consumer cannot ethically enter the contract, or in other words, cannot ethically consume the product.

Despite the usefulness of this comparison, Velasquez goes on to explain the critiques of contract theory. First, contract theory makes unrealistic assumptions about the relationship of consumers and businesses. Velasquez explains how "the theory unrealistically assumes that manufacturers make direct agreements with consumers" (Velasquez 2004). In other words, the theory fails to capture that manufacturers and consumers often interact indirectly.

Further, Velasquez points out that information-sharing in a contract is a "two-edged sword."

> If a consumer can freely agree to buy a product *with* certain qualities, the consumer can also freely agree to buy a product *without* those qualities. That is, freedom of contract allows a manufacturer to be released from his or her contractual obligation by explicitly *disclaiming* that the product is reliable, serviceable, safe, and so on (Velasquez 2004).

This argument illuminates a significant loophole in the contractual theory of consumption. Disclaimers about products can be easily overlooked or missed by consumers, though they essentially allow manufacturers to relinquish their contractual responsibilities. If a consumer purchases a product but fails to acknowledge disclaimers made, they remain responsible for their purchase and cannot hold the manufacturer liable.

The third idea of contract theory that Velasquez critiques is that buyers and sellers enter a contract as equals. In reality, buyers and sellers do not have equal amounts of available information about their products, and they do not have equal skillsets when it comes to evaluating product features.

> Sellers and buyers do not exhibit the equality these doctrines assume. A consumer who must purchase hundreds of different kinds of commodities cannot hope to be as knowledgeable as a manufacturer who specializes in producing a single product (Velasquez 2004).

Manufacturers dedicate their careers to perfecting and fine tuning their product, meaning they unavoidably become experts. Manufacturers need to only focus on one product, while consumers must sort through a plethora of options and try to discern the best possible choice to make. This reveals that the two parties are not on equal footing when they enter a contract. These critiques highlight how frameworks for understanding advertising and consumerism can be helpful, but can also miss critical ethical considerations.

Advertising Inherently Involves Exaggeration

Theodore Levitt offers a different and more sympathetic ethical perspective on advertising in his piece, "The Morality (?) of Advertising." Levitt equates advertising to an art form, citing poetry as the primary comparison.

> Commerce, it can be said without apology, takes essentially the same liberties
> with reality and literality as the artist, except that commerce calls its creations
> advertising, or industrial design, or packaging. As with art, the purpose is to
> influence the audience by creating illusions, symbols, and implications that
> promise more than pure functionality (Levitt 1970).

Levitt argues that exaggeration is not just a consequence of advertising, but a part of its innate purpose. Consumers seek these types of alluring images. They do not just want products; they want the feelings and ideas with which they are associated.

Levitt cites a quote from Charles Revson, founder of the cosmetic company Revlon. Revson said that "'In the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope'" (Levitt 1970). To build on this, Levitt argues that women do not just want the cosmetics themselves, but they also want "the seductive charm promised by the alluring symbols with which these chemicals have been surrounded" (Levitt 1970). This further supports Levitt's idea that consumers do not just seek to buy products. Instead, they hope to buy the lifestyle that owning the product suggests.

Further, Levitt explains that a primary function of art—and advertising—is to reduce the

harshness of reality.

> It is the purpose of all art to alter nature's surface reality, to reshape, to embellish, and to augment what nature has so crudely fashioned, and then to present it to the same applauding humanity that so eagerly buys Revson's exotically advertised cosmetics (Levitt 1970).

Levitt suggests that reality is harsh, and the job of advertising is to reduce the cruelties of life.

Levitt also implies a certain degree of ignorance of consumers of advertising by describing them

as "applauding humanity." Such language suggests that humans blindly and passively absorb

advertising as an objective reality rather than an exaggerated one.

Levitt further discusses this idea that humans do not engage with the true realities of our

world, even beyond the scope of art and advertising.

> Everywhere man rejects nature's uneven blessings. He molds and repackages to his own civilizing specifications an otherwise crude, drab, and generally oppressive reality. He does it so that life may be made for the moment more tolerable than God evidently designed it to be. As T.S. Eliot once remarked, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" (Levitt 1970).

Levitt paints the exaggeration of advertising in a more positive light, explaining that it helps

humans tolerate the world around them. In fact, Levitt explains that humans actively seek

something other than reality in multiple facets of their lives. Humans rely on this type of escape

to be able to withstand the atrocities they are faced with every day. Therefore, it stands to reason

that when advertising exaggerates its claims, it is doing a favor for its viewers, as it allows them

to see the world the way they want to see it, rather than the way it truly is.

Despite the many similarities between art and advertising, Levitt highlights an important

distinction. Creators of advertising and creators of art differ primarily in their motivations.

> The business executive seems to share with the minister, the painter, and the poet the doctrine that the ends justify the means. The difference is that the businessman is justifying the very commercial ends that his critics oppose. While his critics

justify the embellishments of art and literature for what these do for man's spirit, the businessman justifies the embellishment of industrial design and advertising for what they do for a man's purse (Levitt 1970).

Levitt suggests that advertisers have more "commercial" motivations for their craft, meaning that they are primarily motivated by stimulating consumer spending on their product and therefore making profits. On the other hand, an artist is more concerned for the wellbeing of the viewer, as they seek to improve upon individuals' "spirits." Therefore, although both art and advertising offer a similar type of exaggeration, they do so with starkly different intentions: artists seek to better the lives of their viewers, while advertisers seek to empty their wallets.

Levitt also explains how consumers make decisions when purchasing products.

We do not choose to buy a particular product; we choose to buy the functional expectations that we attach to it, and we buy these expectations as "tools" to help us solve a problem of life. Under normal circumstances, furthermore, we must judge a product's "nonmechanical" utilities before we actually buy it. It is rare that we choose an object after we have experienced it; nearly always we must make the choice before the fact. We choose on the basis of promises, not experiences (Levitt 1970).

Levitt argues that consumers do not buy products themselves, but rather what they perceive as the function and purpose of the product. Consumers use the expectations they have about products as a means to make purchasing decisions. Further, consumers are often faced with the need to judge and make decisions about a product before they have actually used it. Therefore, their decisions are made entirely based on what advertisers promise about their products.

This presents a prevalent ethical concern with advertising. If consumers must make decisions solely based on claims made by advertising, and advertising inherently involves some sort of embellishment and exaggeration, then consumers are not making fully informed decisions. Rather, consumers are making decisions based on an idealized version of reality. Therefore, products become known by their promises and symbolic meanings rather than their

actual functions. This becomes problematic if the products do not live up to their promises and if consumers do not achieve what they hoped to achieve by consuming such products.

In "Advertising and Behavior Control," Robert Arrington builds on the discussion of how advertisers exaggerate products and evaluates whether this creates desires within consumers. Arrington begins by discussing puffery, a technique commonly used by advertisers where products are exaggerated to increase the likelihood of making a sale.

> By associating a product, for which we may have little or no direct need or desire, with symbols reflecting the fulfillment of these other, often subterranean interests, the advertisement can quickly generate large numbers of consumers eager to purchase the product advertised (Arrington 1982).

Arrington explains a common technique used by advertisers, where they sell much more than the product itself. Advertisers also seek to sell the lifestyles, identities, and ideas associated with the products. In doing so, they can offer consumers much more than the product itself. Further, like Levitt, Arrington argues that consumers want these added benefits of consumption. Associations help differentiate products from one another and help shape consumers' identities, which Arrington explains as a potential benefit of advertising.

To further highlight how this type of exaggeration can be viewed as beneficial, Arrington explains some of the potential consequences of removing such claims from advertisements. Arrington says that, without associated ideas and exaggerations,

> [w]e would be left with literal descriptions of empirical characteristics of products and their functions. Cosmetics would be presented as facial and bodily lotions and powders which produce certain odor and color changes; they would no longer sell hope and adventure. In addition to the fact that these products would not sell as well, they would not […] please us as much either. For it is hope and adventure we want when we buy them (Arrington 1982).

Although exaggeration is advertising's most common technique, Arrington explains how consumers favor this sort of advertising. This is in line with Theodore Levitt's view on advertising, where he equates it to an art form. Regardless of whether consumers truly do desire

this exaggerated form of advertisement, the ethical concern that the information shown is not realistic remains prevalent.

Advertising Creates the Needs it Fulfills

Before making purchases with limited information, one must wonder where consumers develop the need for these products in the first place. In "The Dependence Effect," John Kenneth Galbraith brings up another essential ethical issue related to advertising, which is that production fulfills the very needs it creates.

> The even more direct link between production and wants is provided by the institutions of modern advertising and salesmanship. These cannot be reconciled with the notion of independently determined desires, for their central function is to create desires – to bring into being wants that previously did not exist (Galbraith 2007).

Galbraith argues that advertising is the mechanism that is used to create consumer desires. As a result, consumers feel the need to purchase products that they would not otherwise purchase had they not seen the advertisement. In other words, companies create ads for their products, these ads make consumers feel as if they need a product they did not previously need, which prompts the consumer to purchase the product from the company. In this system, the advertiser continually benefits while consumers are exploited for their desire to purchase goods.

Given that advertising creates demand for its products, Galbraith explains what this means for the nature of such demand.

> The fact that wants can be synthesized by advertising, catalysed by salesmanship, and shaped by the discreet manipulations of the persuaders shows that they are not very urgent. A man who is hungry need never be told of his need for food. If he is inspired by his appetite, he is immune to the influence of [advertising]. The latter [is] effective only with those who are so far removed from physical want that they do not already know what they want. In this state alone men are open to persuasion (Galbraith 2007).

Galbraith argues that these wants created by advertising cannot be considered innate needs, because if they were innate needs, the consumers would not need to view an ad to act on them. In the context of the beauty industry, if there were an innate need for an eye cream, for example, advertising for an eye cream would not be necessary. However, because such advertising exists, the needs for beauty products are not inherent and are instead created by the advertisements themselves, according to Galbraith.

Culture and Advertisements Dictate Human Desires

Friedrich von Hayek defends advertising by challenging Galbraith's argument in "The Non Sequitur of the 'Dependence Effect.'" Von Hayek explains that Galbraith misses a key part of how wants are created, namely that culture helps teach us what humans ought to desire and own.

> Most needs which make us act are needs for things which only civilization teaches us to exist at all, and these things are wanted by use because they produce feelings or emotions which we would not know if it were not for our cultural inheritance (von Hayek 2007).

Von Hayek argues that culture produces both our desire for goods and our emotional response upon consuming these goods. Along these lines, culture determines one's perception of and images associated with certain products, which are crucial in one's consumption of a product and response to doing so.

Von Hayek also explains that, though producers can aim to create certain wants within consumers, their success "will depend not only on what [the producer] does, but also on what the others do and on a great many other influences operating upon the consumer" (von Hayek 2007). In other words, advertising is not the sole force driving consumption. Consumers face influences from culture and their peers in addition to advertising.

Against Galbraith's argument, von Hayek also argues that producers do not actually know what consumers want and that consumers still determine their own choices.

> Though the range of choice open to the consumers is the joint result of, among other things, the efforts of all producers who vie with each other in making their respective products appear more attractive than those of their competitors, every particular consumer still has the choice between all those different offers (von Hayek 2007).

Von Hayek argues that consumers still make conscious choices to choose products based on all the options available to them, even after viewing advertisements for a specific product. Therefore, consumers are still acting based on their decisions and not solely based on advertising messages.

Summary of Ethical Advertising Concerns

Through review of works by Savan, Shaw, Velasquez, Levitt, Arrington, Galbraith, and von Hayek, it is clear that ethical issues in advertising are extremely complex and interconnected. A brief summary of the primary concerns highlighted by these writers are as follows.

Advertising Sells More Than Just Products: Humans cannot distinguish their own thoughts from the messages they consume through advertising. Consumers purchase the ideas of products and the ideas that they represent more than the products themselves. In fact, advertising sells these ideas more than tangible products.

Consumers Do Not Have All Information Necessary to Make a Purchase: When viewing a purchase as a contract, not all requirements are met because consumers and companies do not enter the transaction with equal amounts of information.

Advertising Inherently Involves Exaggeration: Consumers do not just want products, they want the possibilities and ideals that they offer. Advertising can be interpreted as an art form, meaning one of its functions is to reduce the harshness of everyday realities.

Advertising Creates the Needs it Fulfills: Consumers only desire to buy products because these desires have been manufactured by advertising. In this process, the consumers themselves become the product.

Culture and Advertisements Dictate Human Desires: Culture produces both the desire to consume goods and the emotional response to consumption. Culture combines with the influences of advertising to ultimately guide purchasing decisions.

Though these ethical concerns are related to advertising in general, they remain relevant within beauty advertising, as well. Therefore, these issues will be used in subsequent analysis to suggest improvements beauty companies should make when advertising their products.

Ethical Issues in Beauty Advertising

"I could try every lipstick in every shade / But I'd always feel the same / 'Cause pretty isn't

pretty enough anyway." - Olivia Rodrigo, "Pretty Isn't Pretty"

Although the aforementioned ethical concerns related to advertising are also applicable to

beauty advertising, there are many additional ethical issues specific to the beauty industry. Like

advertising in general, beauty advertising is also subject to the legal regulations enforced by The

Federal Trade Commission. The FTC identifies three principles to which advertisements must

adhere, dictating that "Under the law, claims in advertisements must be truthful, cannot be

deceptive or unfair, and must be evidence-based" ("Advertising and Marketing Basics" 2024).

These guidelines are especially relevant in beauty advertisements because these ads involve

claims about product capabilities and results more than advertisements in other industries. The

FTC further defines what each of these principles entails.

The FTC asserts that an advertisement is deceptive if "it contains a statement - or omits

information - that is likely to mislead consumers acting reasonably under the circumstances; and

is 'material' - that is, important to a consumer's decision to buy or use the product" ("Advertising

FAQ's: A Guide for Small Business" 2001). The FTC utilizes the principle of "reasonableness"

to establish its legal standards, highlighting that an advertisement is illegally deceptive if it is

misleading to a reasonable consumer. The FTC explains that a reasonable consumer is the typical

person who would be looking at the advertisement. This definition, however, leaves room for

interpretation. In terms of unfairness, the FTC determines that advertising is unfair if "it causes

or is likely to cause substantial consumer injury which a consumer could not reasonably avoid;

and it is not outweighed by the benefit to consumers" ("Advertising FAQ's: A Guide for Small

Business" 2001). In other words, if an advertisement causes more harm than good, it is unfair

and therefore illegal. On top of unfairness and deceptiveness, the FTC asserts that an advertisement must be truthful and evidence based. This means that the advertisement does not contain claims that are overtly false, or that are not supported by a sufficient level of proof.

For beauty and fashion advertising specifically, there are two key points that fall under the umbrella of truthfulness in advertising.

1. Product Claims: Fashion advertisements must accurately represent the features, qualities, and benefits of the products they promote. Claims about product performance, materials, and benefits must be substantiated with evidence.
2. Disclosure of Retouching: Some countries, like France, have enacted laws requiring advertisers to disclose when images have been retouched or digitally altered. This transparency allows consumers to differentiate between natural beauty and digitally enhanced representations (Mehta 2023).

Product claims are commonly seen in beauty advertising. The FTC dictates that such claims must be appropriately backed up by evidence. Retouching and digital manipulation is also quite common, but legal regulations regarding these practices are still evolving. France has established rules requiring that retouching be disclosed, but the US has no such laws. Whether or not retouching is used, including how much of it is used, remains at the discretion of individual companies within the US.

Because of their ambiguous guidelines regarding retouching, I plan to focus my project on beauty advertising specifically in the US. Further, I will focus specifically on women, as they are the typical target of beauty advertisements and are more prone to experiencing the societal impact of beauty advertisements.

Beauty Advertisements Promote Unhealthy Gendered Stereotypes

In his article, "Towards A New Paradigm in the Ethics of Women's Advertising," John Alan Cohan outlines several ethical concerns related to women's advertising. Cohan looks at

women's advertising in general, the category under which beauty advertising falls. Cohan highlights the significance of women's roles as consumers, explaining that in the United States, women are responsible for around 70% of retail sales (Cohan 2001). Cohan then explains three primary concerns related to women's advertising, given their sizeable influence on companies' revenue.

The first issue Cohan identifies is the use of unhealthy gender stereotypes.

> Many ads present sex stereotypes to do with weakness roles of women – showing women as submissive, and suggesting that women are constantly in need of alteration or improvement, or are to feel ashamed of themselves, and dissatisfied in life (Cohan 2001).

Cohan goes on to explain that because these advertisements emit the message that men desire women who are weak and submissive, this in turn causes women to believe this of themselves. The women who hold these beliefs become the most at risk for being vulnerable to the effects of advertising. Advertising leaves women feeling as though they always need to fix something about themselves, and the advertisements that use sex stereotypes suggest that women need to improve themselves to please men. This is especially prominent in the beauty industry.

Beauty Advertisements Promote Unattainable Images of Beauty

The unattainability of advertisements is what Cohan identifies as the second ethical issue of women's advertising. Cohan explains that "women's advertising *redefines* attractiveness from something natural to an unattainable ideal" (Cohan 2001). Images are constantly edited and retouched to a level of perfection that a real woman could not achieve. So, "by inviting women to compare their *unimproved* reality with such perfection, advertising erodes self-esteem, then offers to sell it back – for a price" (Cohan 2001). This holds severe ethical implications, as the success of advertising is dependent upon the disintegration of women's self-esteem. Beauty advertisements create unattainable standards that women feel they must meet, then create and

sell the very products that offer to fulfil these standards. By doing so, a perpetual cycle is created, where women never feel satisfied with themselves and continue purchasing products to attempt to reach satisfaction.

Beauty Advertisements Objectify Women

The third and final issue Cohan highlights related to women's advertising is the objectification of women in such ads.

> Ads of this kind suggest that women's features are things separate and more important than a woman's true self. Female models are often depicted in the fragmentation technique, showing only body parts, endorsing the idea that bodies and presumably the "people" inside of them, are fragmented, that there is no unified or coherent "self" (Cohan 2001).

Within the beauty industry, this issue is especially significant, because it holds true both for how women are viewed by others and how women come to view themselves. From this type of fragmentation, it follows that women become known by and identify themselves by their body parts rather than themselves as a whole. Women become defined by a particular insecurity, and this exists at the forefront of their personal identity. This causes them to lose their sense of self and become lost in a fight towards an unattainable ideal.

Beauty Advertisements Prompt Self-Comparison and Self-Dissatisfaction

In her article, "Social Comparison and the Idealized Images of Advertising," Marsha Richins conducts a study to test the hypothesis that idealized images in advertising promote comparison, and as a result create self-doubt and dissatisfaction in the viewer (Richins 1991). Richins explains the basis of this hypothesis, which is widely agreed upon by many writers:

> The uniformly thin and beautiful models in cosmetics ads have created such unhappiness among young women about their bodies and faces that their confidence is undermined, causing them to indulge in unhealthy eating practices

that may lead to eating disorders or to turn to invasive procedures like plastic surgery (Richins 1991).

Richins' research investigates one of the primary ethical dilemmas associated with beauty advertising, which is that it inherently creates a certain level of dissatisfaction to convince consumers to purchase the product being advertised. Oftentimes, it also sparks deeper dissatisfaction in viewers, which has larger consequences, such as an increased likelihood of developing an eating disorder or seeking plastic surgery.

To further explain her hypothesis, Richins also brings up social comparison theory, which is credited to Leon Festinger in 1954. Richins writes:

> Social comparison theory is directly applicable to the notion that consumers compare themselves with persons portrayed in ads. Festinger proposed that humans have a drive to evaluate themselves and that they evaluate themselves by comparison with others when nonsocial means are unavailable (Richins 1991).

Because of humans' innate drive for self-evaluation, when presented with images of unreasonably attractive people, as advertising does, humans are forced to turn to comparison. As Richins explains, "the larger the discrepancy between the standard and perceived performance, the larger the dissatisfaction" (Richins 1991). In other words, if a viewer sees themselves as differing greatly from the images they see in an advertisement, they will be more dissatisfied with themselves.

Richins chooses to look specifically at female college students, explaining that attractiveness is especially important to this group.

> Models in ads targeted at college-age women are often uncommonly attractive. If female college students compare themselves with such models, they will in most cases perceive a negative discrepancy between their own attractiveness and that of the models. Since appearance is likely to be an important dimension of the self for these individuals, this discrepancy is hypothesized to lead to dissatisfaction (Richins 1991).

Richins asserts that female college students are prone to being shown unrealistic images in advertising. This means this group is also more likely to perceive a larger difference between themselves and these images. Because appearance is especially important to this group, Richins guesses that the immenseness of their perceived differences will lead to self-dissatisfaction. Richins goes on to explain one dimension of her overarching hypothesis, which is that being exposed to advertising will cause women to feel dissatisfied with their physical appearances. She also explains that, if this hypothesis holds true, either the standard to which women are compared has been raised, or their perceived level of performance towards that standard has been lowered.

Richins explores each of these possibilities. First, with regards to comparison standards, she writes that being exposed to advertisements might alter one's baseline standard for attractiveness, albeit temporarily. Richins explains that this effect is also dependent on how viewers categorize what they are seeing.

> If consumers consider professional models to be a separate category when consciously or unconsciously judging physical attractiveness, there might be no shift in standards after viewing ads with highly attractive models. If, however, professional models are considered when consumers judge the attractiveness of all people, then viewing ads with attractive models might at least temporarily shift the [adaption level] and affect how more ordinary persons are judged (Richins 1991).

Essentially, if viewers include models in their standard for how they judge ordinary people, being shown images of such models will in turn impact how they view ordinary people. If this is not the case, their exposure to these images will likely have little effect on how they perceive ordinary people.

To determine which scenario most accurately represents the average person's method of thinking, Richins cites two studies, both of which suggest that models are not perceived as a separate category when judging attractiveness. The first study involved two groups of men rating a woman of average attractiveness after viewing two different television programs. The study

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found that men who were watching "Charlie's Angels" rated the woman lower than males watching a different program. In a follow up experiment, men that were shown an image of actress Farrah Fawcett before a woman of average attractiveness rated the woman lower than men who were only shown the woman's image. The second study found that "nude females of average attractiveness were rated lower after male and female subject had viewed *Playboy* and *Penthouse* nudes than after subjects had viewed abstract art" (Richins 1991). Both of these studies suggest that people use models within their group of reference for judging attractiveness.

Richins' second possibility for why advertising lowers women's satisfaction with themselves is that these images alter their perception of themselves. Richins discusses the idea of self-concept, which includes

> [o]ne's beliefs about the level of one's physical attractiveness, probably developed by examining oneself and comparing one's appearance with others and by learning the reactions of others to one's appearance. Even children see ads with very attractive models, and this information is perhaps incorporated in forming a self-perception of attractiveness. By late adolescence, however, the sight of extremely attractive models is "old news" and unlikely to provide new information that might influence self-perception (Richins 1991).

Self-concept develops over time, likely beginning in early childhood. Self-concept is developed initially through some means of comparison, meaning humans' perceptions of themselves are based on how they perceive themselves relative to others, including unrealistically attractive models. Richins argues that although this generally stabilizes in late adolescence, and models are not used as a baseline for self-perception, there are still some fluctuations in feelings about the self. So, although viewing an image of an attractive model may not drastically alter one's self-perception, it is likely to still have an impact.

Richins conducts four studies to explore her various hypotheses. Her first study consists of two different focus groups aimed at determining whether women in college compare themselves to the images they see in advertisements, and if they do, determine how these

advertisements influence their feelings about themselves. Richins' selected comments from the

focus group are shown below.

General comparison	"God! I wish I looked like that." (written comment about a cosmetics ad before discussion began) "There's certain [ads] that I look at and say, 'Wow! I'd sure like to look like that.' " "In high school, you want to think that you could look like that if you try. Then in college, you realize, 'Oh, forget it!' "
Ads generating specific body comparisons	"When I see ads, I always look at the chest. I like it when she has no chest. Because, you know, I don't either." "I have wide hips. I always look at the hips. I guess I'm just jealous." "When I look at a model I look at the arms, because my arms are awful."
Negative self-feelings from viewing ads	"You look at these ads and you feel inadequate, like you can't measure up." "It's frustrating when you start to realize you should look that way—I mean—I can't." "I used to go through these magazines every day and look at [models in the ads] and wish I looked like them. I used to go running every day, and I really thought maybe I could look like them. I remember, I even picked one model in particular and cut out ads with her in them. I was pretty obsessed. And I finally realized this wasn't realistic. But I sometimes still look and think, 'Well, maybe.' " "Sometimes [ads with models] can make you feel a little depressed." "They make me feel self-critical." (participant viewing models in swimsuit ads)

Figure 4: Selected focus group comments from Richins' first experiment.

The first section of comments, relating to general comparisons made by participants,

illustrate that women react to advertisements with a sort of envy. The participants say that they

wish to look like the models shown in the advertisement in a general sense, rather than relating to

a specific body part or aspect. The second category, however, gets more specific, and illustrates

that women tend to focus on the body parts of models that they feel insecure about, or that they

are searching for validation of. Women are happy when they see a model that has features

similar to their own. For example, one respondent explains that she likes advertisements that

feature models with smaller chests because she, too, has a smaller chest. On the other hand, other

women express jealousy or self-criticism upon seeing a model with a feature they wish they had.

The third category highlights how focus group participants experience negative feelings

about themselves after seeing models in advertisements. The women express feelings of

inadequacy, frustration, depression, and self-criticism. One participant explains that she would

run every day after seeing images of models in magazines, saying that she grew obsessed with a

certain model. Further, she realizes this is an unrealistic standard to hold herself to, but she still

finds herself thinking that she might be able to emulate how models look.

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Though this experiment was conducted in 1991, and it is focused on issues related to body image rather than strictly skin care and cosmetic advertisements, it draws attention to issues that remain relevant. This experiment illustrates how advertisements are seen as standards women ought to achieve, and therefore use as a benchmark against which they measure themselves. This is still the case today.

In this experiment, the moderator also attempted to elicit positive aspects of viewing advertisements. Richins writes:

> Some women expressed optimism and motivation, particularly if some characteristics of the model are consistent with the viewer's own self-perception or if the look is considered attainable (e.g., by dieting). This was more true of ads showing the full body than the facial ads, perhaps because bone structure and facial features are not readily alterable (Richins 1991).

Richins explains that the effects of advertisements are not inherently negative; they can be used as a source of inspiration and motivation, as well. However, viewers are more inclined to view ads as inspiring when they are fashion related. Images shown in skincare and cosmetic advertising, that only feature the model's face, are seen as less attainable because facial features are not viewed as something that can be changed. With full body images, viewers believe that they may be able to achieve such standards by lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise.

This distinction between the achievability of full body versus facial images highlights how beauty and cosmetic advertisements may offer less benefits than fashion advertisements. Given that viewers compare themselves to the images they see in advertising, if they do not believe the images to be achievable, they will feel discouraged and self-critical rather than inspired and motivated. This means that beauty and cosmetic advertisements may be more detrimental to viewers than other fashion advertisements.

Richins' second experiment examined the extent to which female college students compare themselves with images shown in advertisements, in addition to whether the frequency

of such comparisons impacted self-perception and dissatisfaction with self-image. In this stage of

the study, Richins found that the frequency of comparisons was negatively correlated with

satisfaction with self-image. However, she points out:

> The negative correlation between amount of comparison and reported satisfaction
> with one's physical appearance might be interpreted as suggesting that
> comparisons lead to dissatisfaction. Equally plausible, however, is the explanation
> that dissatisfied persons more frequently compare themselves with advertising
> images. Or, dissatisfied young women may simply be more likely to notice (and
> thus report) their comparisons than more satisfied women (Richins 1991).

Richins points out a pertinent hardship with determining causality between comparison and self-

image satisfaction, which is that the direction of impact is difficult to discern. While it is

reasonable to assume that frequent exposure to beauty advertising prompts comparison, therefore

leading to dissatisfaction, this is not the only possible explanation. As Richins points out, women

who are already more dissatisfied with themselves could be more likely to seek out images in

advertising and compare themselves to these images. They may also be more aware of these

feelings and therefore more likely to report them.

Regardless of the presence or direction of causation, the study found that comparison

with advertising images is correlated with a lower level of satisfaction with oneself. This reveals

that people do consider advertising to be a sort of standard for appearances. Measuring

themselves against these standards creates a sense of insufficiency. Further, women who are

dissatisfied with themselves might actually seek out advertisements as a way to ruminate on their

self-consciousness and affirm their beliefs that they are inadequate compared to the model. This

only reinforces negative feelings, merely perpetuating a cycle of dissatisfaction.

After having established that women do compare themselves to the images shown in

advertisements, Richins' third experiment sought to measure the effect of these comparisons.

Students were shown beauty advertisements either with or without a model, then asked them to

rate their own sense of physical attractiveness. Subjects were told that the experiment was determining how people respond to and evaluate print advertisements. Richins found that those who were shown images of attractive models subsequently rated images of models of average attractiveness lower than those not shown images of attractive models. Furthermore, students did not rate themselves lower after being exposed to images of attractive models. One theory Richins has for this is that after viewing images of models rated as averagely attractive, participants' standards were brought back to reasonable levels. Therefore, Richins tested whether the order of the experiment affects the results in her final study.

The fourth and final study exposed participants to three types of advertisements: those without models, those with models' faces only, and those with full body images of models. Similar to the previous experiment, subjects were also instructed to conduct self-ratings of their attractiveness either before or after they were shown the advertisements. The study found that those who were exposed to images of attractive models were subsequently less satisfied with their own appearance compared to those who saw advertisements without models. Richins also found that order did not affect these ratings. Students who rated themselves before viewing photos of models of average attractiveness did not rate themselves differently than students who did so afterwards.

Richins concludes that "satisfaction was lower among subjects exposed to idealized advertising images" and that "a change in comparison standards was probably responsible for the lower satisfaction" (Richins 1991). In other words, those who view images of highly attractive models begin to see themselves as less attractive, likely because their standards are raised upon viewing these images of attractive models. Richins also discusses how this is somewhat problematic for marketers:

> The marketing concept espouses creation of customer satisfaction as the central
> goal of marketing. Study findings demonstrate that marketing activities can, in
> some contexts, do the opposite. Although one may argue that temporary
> dissatisfaction is beneficial if it stimulates consumers to buy products that
> improve their appearance (or solve other problems) and thus eventually enhances
> satisfaction, it is difficult to argue that such is the case here (Richins 1991).

Richins explains the primary dilemma related to beauty marketing, which is that consumers must feel worse about themselves so that they can buy the advertised products and feel better about themselves. So, although the goal of marketing is to make consumers feel better about themselves, the opposite must occur before this goal can be achieved.

Summary of Ethical Beauty Advertising Concerns

In their articles, Cohan and Richins describe the most pressing ethical concerns related to beauty advertising. A brief summary of these issues are as follows.

Beauty Advertisements Promote Unhealthy Gendered Stereotypes: Beauty advertisements depict women as submissive and in need of approval from men. Beauty advertisements also cause women to feel as if there is always something they must improve about themselves.

Beauty Advertisements Promote Unattainable Images of Beauty: Beauty advertisements are indicative of beauty standards for women at large. However, the images in beauty advertisements are often digitally manipulated, creating unattainable ideals that women feel they need to achieve.

Beauty Advertisements Objectify Women: Beauty advertisements reduce women to an accumulation of individual parts, rather than a complete individual. This leads women to do the same to themselves and become defined by a particular insecurity, losing their sense of self in the process.

Beauty Advertisements Prompt Self-Comparison and Self-Dissatisfaction: Women compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertisements which leads to feelings of

inadequacy and frustration. Viewing images of models who embody unrealistic beauty ideals raises comparison standards, making viewers feel even more dissatisfied themselves.

Although Richins conducted her experiments in 1991, the conclusions highlight many issues that remain relevant. In fact, with the increased use of technology, advertising is likely more persistent today than in the past. Therefore, I chose to create and conduct a survey that will evaluate whether, and in what ways, Richins' conclusions are still applicable to college-aged women. Survey data, combined with ethical issues in both advertising in general and beauty advertising, will help inform my suggestions for ethical creation and consumption beauty advertising.

Methodology

In addition to a review of current literature, I created and distributed a Qualtrics survey to measure how female college students at the University of Oregon view and respond to beauty advertising. The survey was shared with three different sororities on campus. Demographic information of participants was not collected but can be reasonably assumed to represent the demographics at the University of Oregon as a whole. The survey asked only for female respondents, which represent about 55% of undergraduates at the University of Oregon. About 61% of students at the University, including both graduates and undergraduates, are White, about 7% are Asian, 3% are African-American, 15% are Hispanic, and the remaining 14% belong to other ethnic minorities ("Facts at a Glance | Office of the Registrar," n.d.).

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate their opinions within three overarching categories. These categories are whether and to what degree beauty advertisements impact them, in what ways beauty advertisements impact them personally and impact women at large, and how beauty advertisements *should* impact them personally and impact other women. There were 13 total statements to measure these opinions. Questions corresponding to each category were evenly dispersed throughout the survey to minimize participants' answers to one question affecting another. Additionally, there were three general questions that asked about time spent on participants' beauty routine each day, the frequency at which participants leave their house without makeup, and the frequency at which participants buy products shown in beauty advertisements. Qualtrics recorded 98 survey responses, but of these only 68 were complete and were used in the subsequent analysis.

In order to minimize confusion, survey respondents were given definitions to adopt for the terms "beauty," "advertisement," and "self-esteem." They were told to think of beauty as

"skincare, cosmetics/makeup, or other products and processes that specifically target the face."
For advertisements, they were told to think of "TV commercials, magazines, paid social media
content, product placement, billboards, or other paid content that occurs outside of a store/point
of sale." Finally, for self-esteem, they were told to think of a "long-term state of being, more
stable than a short-term feeling or mood."

Hypotheses

When creating the questions for the survey, several hypotheses came to light regarding
what survey respondents would answer. The questions in the survey were written to test these
hypotheses but aimed at limiting leading respondents to generate unbiased results. One overall
hypothesis defined each of the three categories of questions, and this was accompanied by
several sub-hypotheses that more specifically related to each question.

Beauty Advertisements Impact Viewers

The first section of questions was aimed at measuring whether and to what degree beauty
advertisements have an impact on survey respondents personally and women in general. Overall,
I hypothesized that survey respondents would say that beauty advertisements do have some sort
of impact on viewers. More specifically, I predicted that the survey results would reveal that
college-aged women compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertising and that
beauty advertisements impact women's self-esteem. Further, I believed the results would show
that women believe they are personally less susceptible to the impacts of beauty advertising
compared to other women. In other words, they would believe that other women are more greatly
impacted by beauty advertising than they are personally. Finally, I predicted that survey
respondents would agree that beauty advertisements influence beauty standards for women.

Beauty Advertisements Negatively Impact Viewers

The second section within the survey measured how beauty advertisements affect viewers, including both the survey respondents themselves and their perception of the effects on women at large. Overall, I predicted that survey respondents would say that beauty advertisements negatively affect viewers. More specifically, I believed survey respondents would agree that women typically have a negative emotional response to beauty advertising and that, on average, beauty advertisements are harmful towards women's self-esteem. I also predicted that respondents would agree that beauty advertisements promote both unrealistic and unhealthy standards of beauty for viewers. Finally, I hypothesized that survey participants would believe that beauty ads are misleading.

Beauty Advertising Viewers Prefer Positive, Realistic Advertisements

The final section of the survey sought to measure what respondents believe beauty advertising should look like and how it should impact viewers. In a general sense, I hypothesized that respondents would demonstrate a desire for positive and realistic advertisements. I believed the results would show that beauty ad viewers would rather see ads that make them feel confident as opposed to self-critical. Further, I believed viewers would want to see realistic results and product claims rather than exaggerated and more aspirational information.

Results

Survey respondents were first asked a few general questions about their beauty and consumption habits to get a feel for their involvement in the beauty industry. Of the 68 survey respondents, 68% spend 0-30 minutes on their beauty routine per day, while the remaining 32% spend greater than 30 minutes. This reveals that the majority of respondents spend relatively little time on their beauty routine per day. Interestingly, however, only 49% of respondents say that they often leave their house without makeup on, and 37% say that they rarely leave their house without makeup on. When asked how often participants buy products they have seen in a beauty advertisement, no one answered always, but 49% said often. Another 41% said rarely, while the remaining 10% said never.

This reveals that the survey audience generally spends little time on their beauty routines but typically participates in a beauty routine each day as evidenced by the fact that they usually wear makeup when they leave their house. Additionally, the survey audience is somewhat prone to buying beauty products they have seen in advertisements. In order to learn more about how survey respondents feel about beauty advertising, they were asked questions that fall within three separate categories: whether and to what degree beauty advertisements affect the respondent personally and women in general, in what ways these effects occur, and what these effects should look like.

Determining Whether Beauty Advertisements Affect Respondents & Women

The first question respondents were asked is whether they compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertisements. The results are summarized in the graph below.
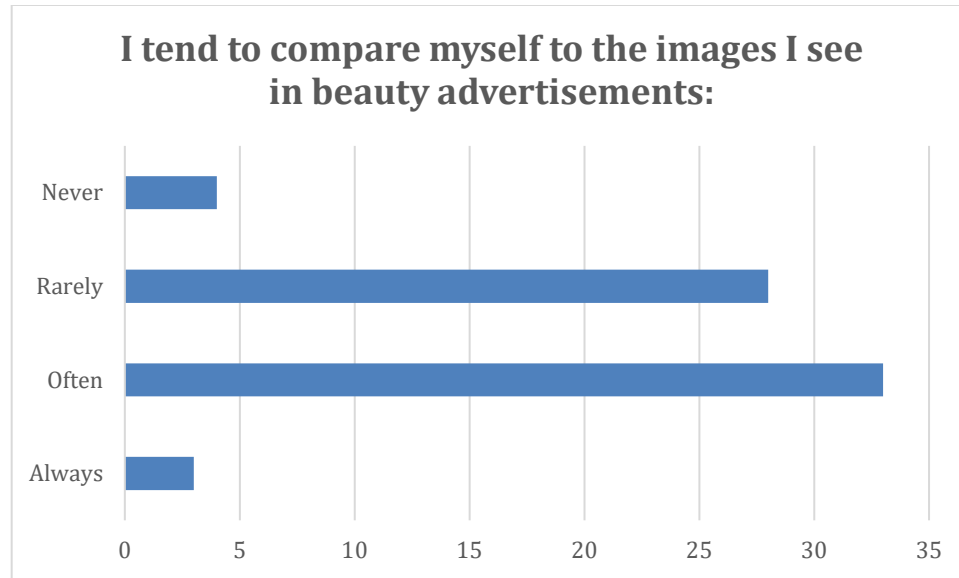
Figure 5: Frequency at which survey respondents compare themselves to images in beauty advertising.

49% of respondents answered that they often compare themselves, while 41% said they did so rarely. This means that most respondents fall more towards the middle, which was expected. It is also not surprising that more respondents said they often compare themselves to the images shown in advertising, as this aligns with previous research on the topic. What is surprising, however, is that a very similar number of respondents answered "rarely," while very few respondents answered "never." Even though participants that answered "rarely" do not often compare themselves to the images in advertisements, there are still instances in which they do. Therefore, the data strongly supports the hypothesis that college-aged women compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertisements.

The next statement that sought to evaluate whether beauty advertisements personally affect the respondents asked about whether their self-esteem is tied to the images shown in beauty advertisements. The results are summarized in the figure below.
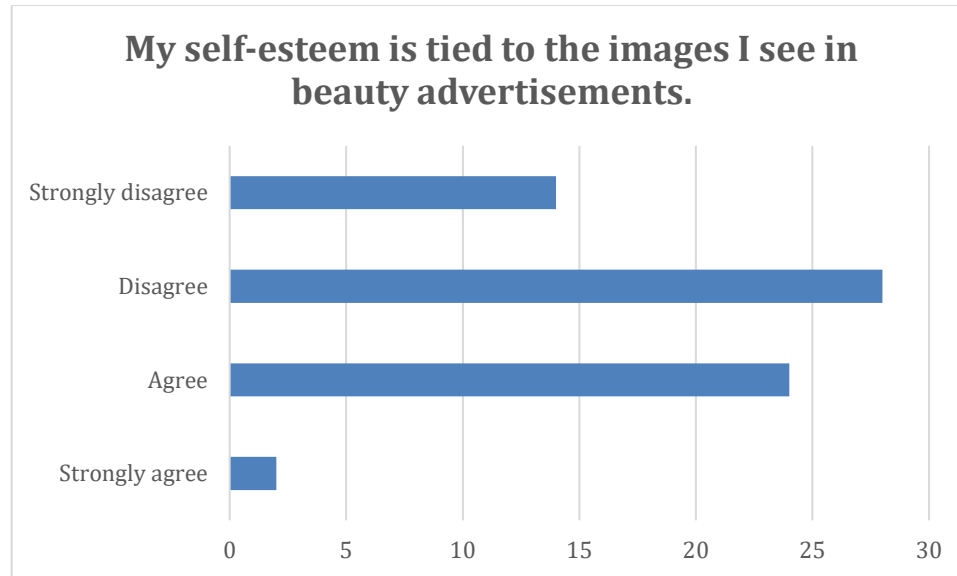
Figure 6: Responses to whether or not participants' self-esteem is tied to images shown in beauty advertisements.

Interestingly, a majority of respondents disagreed, whether strongly or not, with the statement. Yet, 35% of respondents indicated that they agree with the statement and do believe their self-esteem is tied to the images they see in beauty advertisements. The fact that most respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement supports the first part of the hypothesis, that women believe they are personally immune to the effects of beauty advertising. Of course, respondents' self-esteem may be affected by beauty advertising subconsciously, making them unaware that it is happening. This would cause more people to disagree with the statement when it may actually be true for them. Even without this assumption, a significant portion of respondents feel their self-esteem is tied to the images they see in beauty advertising.

The final question in this category asked about the impact of beauty advertisements on women at large. The results are summarized below.
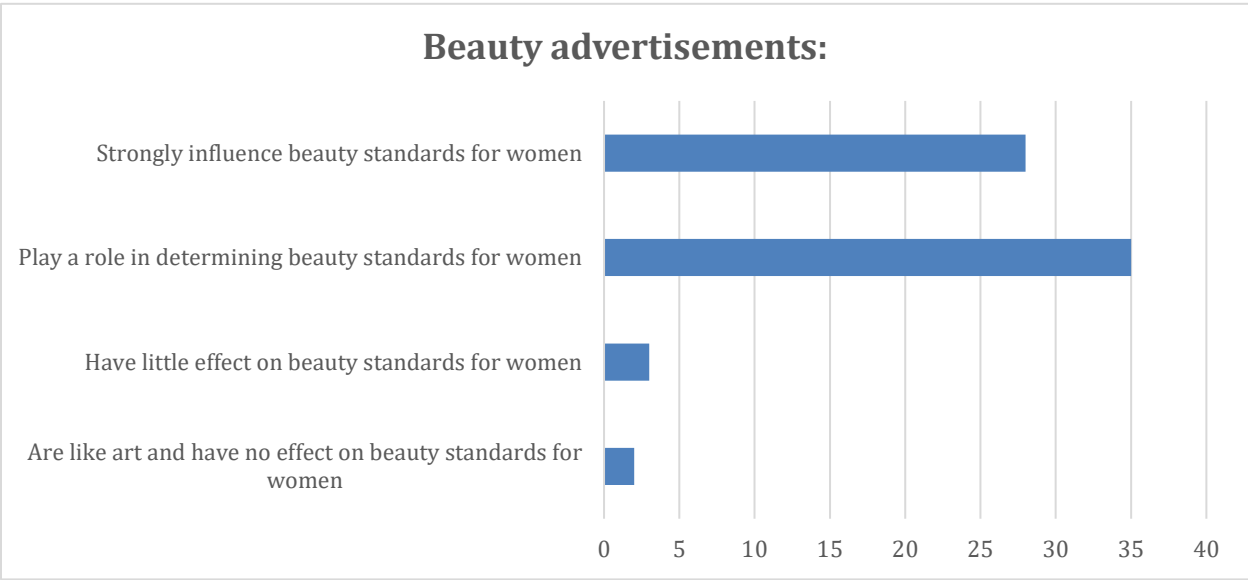
Figure 7: Respondents' opinions regarding whether beauty advertisements impact beauty standards for women.

An overwhelming majority said that beauty ads influence beauty standards for women in some way. 41% said that they strongly influence women's beauty standards, while 51% said they play a role in determining beauty standards for women. Only three respondents said that beauty advertisements have little effect, and only two said they are like art and have no effect on beauty standards for women. This goes against Levitt's argument that advertisements are a form of art and are viewed by consumers as such. Instead, it supports the hypothesis that beauty advertisements do have an impact on determining beauty standards for women.

Additionally, because this question focuses on the impact of beauty advertisements on women at large, rather than the respondents personally, it supports the second half of the hypothesis that participants would say they are less affected by beauty advertisements than other women. On average, participants answered that they do not feel their self-esteem is tied to the images shown in beauty advertisements, but at the same time said that they impact beauty

standards for women. Therefore, participants believe they personally are more immune to the effects of beauty advertising than women in general.

Based on these three questions, the survey data points to the conclusion that beauty advertisements do impact the respondents personally and women at large. The average respondent said that they compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertising, and although ads might not directly affect their own self-esteem, they certainly play a role in determining beauty standards for women at large. Therefore, it can be deduced that the survey population believes that beauty advertisements do have an impact on themselves personally and women in general.

How Beauty Advertisements Affect Self-Esteem

After establishing that beauty advertisements do in fact impact women, several questions were asked to analyze in what ways this occurs. The first three questions aimed to understand how participants feel personally affected by beauty advertisements, specifically with regards to their impact on self-esteem. Participants were first asked about their general response to advertising. They were given the answer options of "inspired," "curious," "somewhat frustrated," and "self-critical." Inspired and curious have a more positive connotation, while somewhat frustrated and self-critical offer a more negative view. The results are summarized in the figure below.
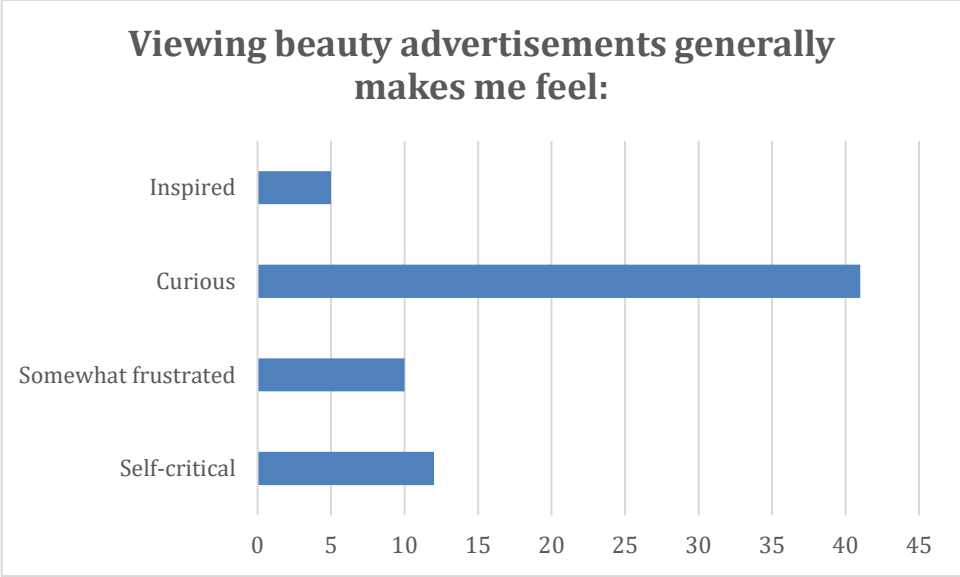
Figure 8: Respondents' emotional responses to viewing beauty advertising.

A sizeable majority, 60% of respondents, said that viewing beauty advertisements makes them feel curious. The next most common answers were self-critical and somewhat frustrated. Very few respondents said that viewing beauty advertisements left them feeling inspired. This is a surprising result, as it contradicts the hypothesis that women would have more of a negative emotional response towards beauty advertising. Curiosity is a positive emotion. While this might not surprise beauty marketers, as this is the emotional response most likely to produce sales, it is surprising that respondents would have a positive feeling toward an activity they see impacting beauty standards for women.

Survey respondents were also asked how buying a beauty product they have seen in an advertisement tends to make them feel. These results are shown in the figure below.
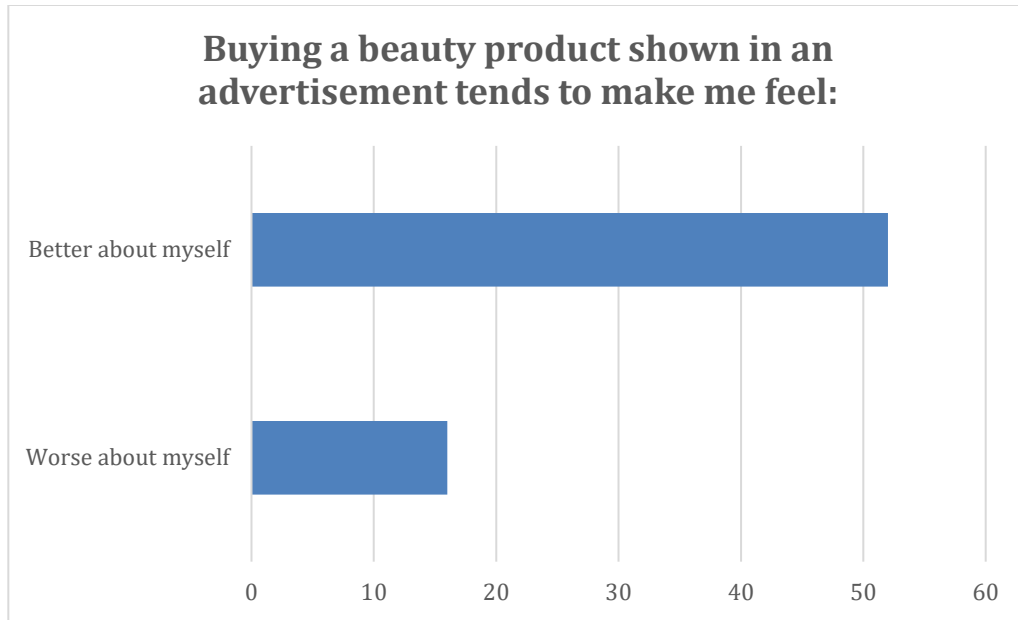
Figure 9: Emotional responses to beauty advertisements.

One crucial ethical issue related to beauty advertising is that it creates feelings of discomfort within viewers that can only be alleviated by their purchase of the product. This is supported by the fact that 76% of respondents said that buying a beauty product they have seen in an advertisement makes them feel better about themselves, and only 24% said doing so makes them feel worse about themselves. This is interesting, but not surprising, as it supports the idea that beauty advertisements create the desire for the very products they are advertising.

Participants were also directly asked about the overarching hypothesis, that, on balance, beauty advertisements are harmful towards women's self-esteem. The results are summarized in the figure below.

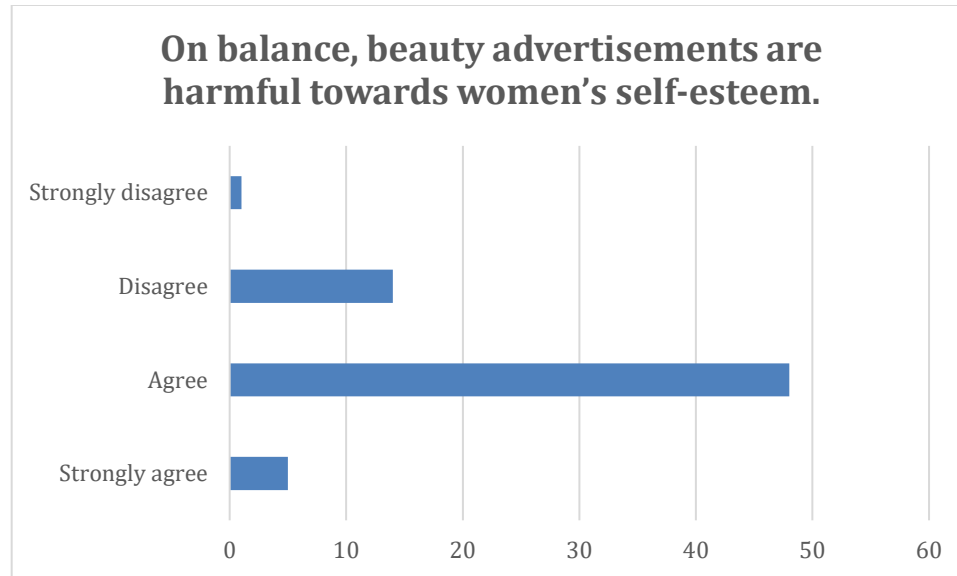On balance, beauty advertisements are harmful towards women's self-esteem.

Figure 10: Respondents' varying degrees of agreement with whether beauty advertisements are harmful towards women's self-esteem.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents agreed with the statement. 71% selected agree, while 21% selected disagree. On the extreme ends of the scale, only five respondents selected strongly agree while only one respondent selected strongly disagree. The fact that only one respondent strongly disagrees with the statement, and that the majority agrees, seems to confirm the hypothesis that on average, advertisements are harmful towards women's self-esteem. Further, these responses highlight that respondents believe other women's self-esteem is tied to beauty advertising more than their own. Women feel personally immune to the impact of beauty advertising, which may be due to a lack of self-awareness about their own susceptibility. One could also argue that this personal immunity may stem from the idea that women mistakenly think others are more susceptible to the impact of beauty advertising than they really are. However, given the size and success of the beauty advertising industry, this is unlikely.

How Beauty Advertisements Affect Women

Next, respondents were asked about the effect of beauty advertisements on women more generally. Four different questions sought to evaluate these effects. The first asked about the achievability of the standards promoted by beauty advertising. The results are displayed in the figure below.
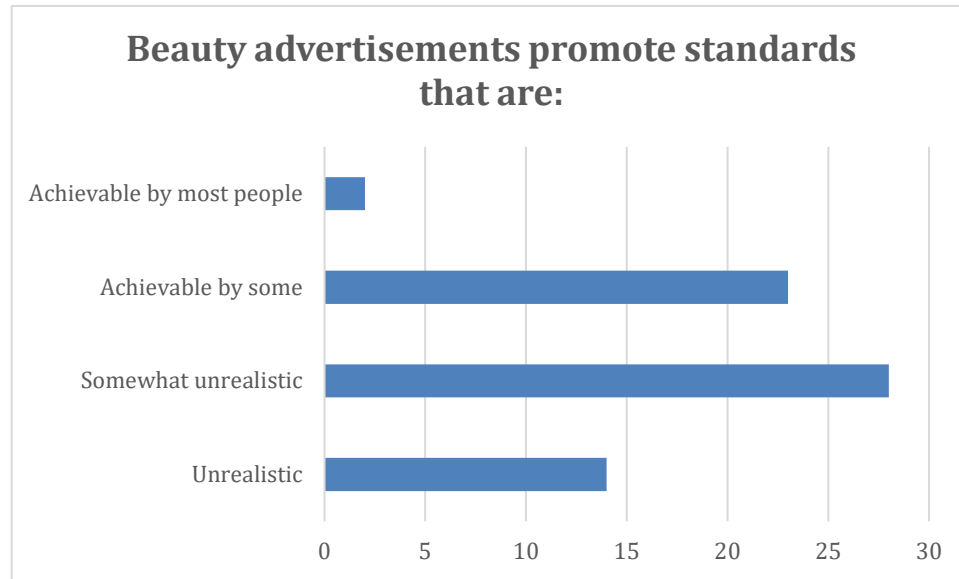

Figure 11: Opinions surrounding the achievability of standards promoted by beauty advertisements.

Only two respondents, or 3%, said that beauty ads promote standards that are achievable by most people. 34% said that they believe these standards are achievable by some. The largest percentage at 42%, however, said beauty advertisements promote standards that are somewhat unrealistic. Another 21% said that the standards promoted by beauty advertisements are unrealistic. This supports the hypothesis that beauty advertisements promote unrealistic standards for its viewers, as only two respondents believed that the standards were achievable by most people, while the remaining respondents believed that either some or all people were excluded from the feasibility of the standards promoted.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the statement that beauty advertisements promote healthy standards of beauty. This is similar to evaluating whether the standards are realistic but is more focused on the quality of the standards rather than on whether they can be achieved by viewers. The responses to this statement are shown below.
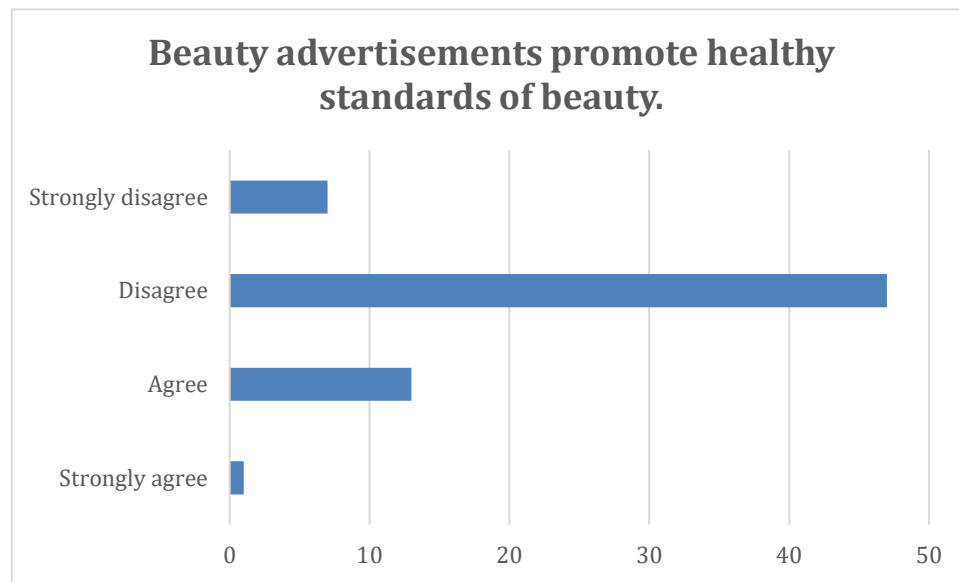
Figure 12: Evaluations of the quality of standards of beauty promoted by advertisements.

Unsurprisingly, the majority, 69% of respondents, disagreed with the idea that beauty advertisements promote healthy standards of beauty. Only 19% agreed with this statement. However, what is surprising is the lack of respondents who strongly disagree. This suggests that participants can think of a few instances in which they have seen beauty advertisements that do in fact promote healthy standards of beauty but more often see unhealthy standards being displayed. Regardless, these responses support the hypothesis that beauty advertisements promote unhealthy standards of beauty.

The next question focused on whether women are misled by beauty advertising. This is a common ethical concern related to both beauty advertising and advertising in general. Many ads

tend to be misleading and exaggerated in order to drive sales for the product being shown. The responses to this statement are summarized in the figure below.
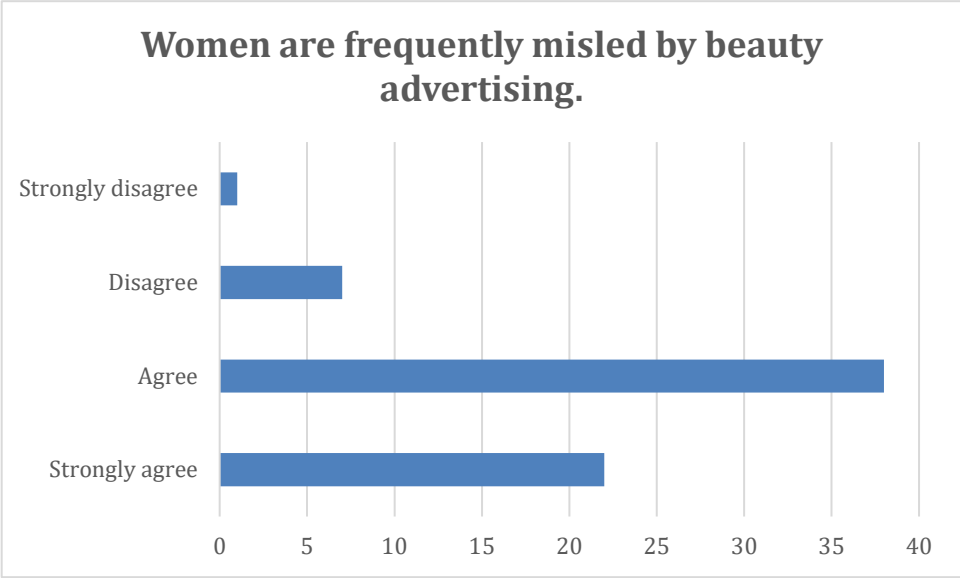
Figure 13: Respondents' opinions surrounding whether women are misled by beauty advertising.

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents agreed, either strongly or not, with the idea that women are frequently misled by beauty advertising. 56% of respondents agreed, while 32% strongly agreed. In contrast, only 10% disagreed. This supports the hypothesis and the consensus within current literature that beauty advertisements are misleading to women. This also confirms the second part of the hypothesis that participants themselves believe they are more immune to the effects of beauty advertising than they believe other women are.

The final question in this category asked whether women know that buying a beauty product they have seen in an advertisement will not make them look like the model. The responses to this statement are shown in the figure below.

Women know that buying an advertised beauty product will not make them look like the model.

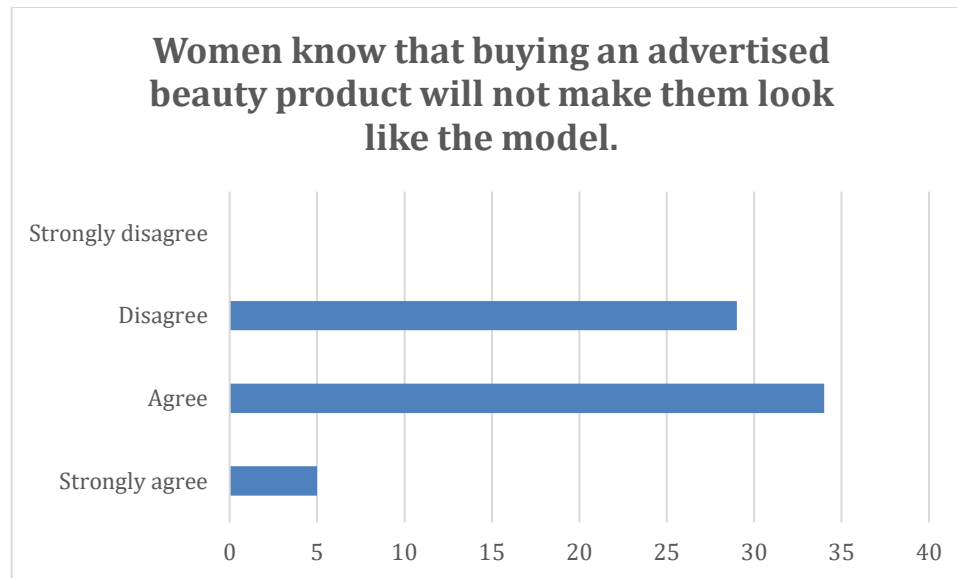Figure 14: Survey respondents' opinions on whether women believe buying a beauty product seen in an advertisement will make them look like the model.

Surprisingly, a similar number of respondents agreed and disagreed with this statement. 50% said that they agreed, while 43% said that they disagreed. Further, about 7% of respondents indicated that they strongly agree with the statement, while no respondents strongly disagreed. This indicates that more respondents believe women know that they will not look like the model when buying a beauty product they have seen in the advertisement.

This is likely because, although women view ads as something aspirational, they are still somewhat realistic about what can and cannot be accomplished through the use of beauty products. In other words, women may buy a product they have seen in an advertisement with the hope that it may improve their appearance, but not to the extent that they will look like the model in the ad. Many respondents believe that beauty advertisements promote unrealistic standards for women, according to an earlier survey question. Therefore, it makes sense that the majority of respondents say that women in general are aware of this effect, as well, and can distinguish between realistic and unrealistic images in beauty ads. Despite this, a significant portion of

respondents think that women believe buying a beauty product they have seen in advertisement will make them look like the model.

Based on the responses to these four statements surrounding how beauty advertisements affect women, it is clear that the average respondent believes these effects to be negative. Most respondents agree that beauty advertisements promote both unhealthy and unrealistic standards of beauty. Additionally, most respondents agree that beauty advertisements are misleading. While many respondents stop short of believing women think beauty products will make them look like the model, it can be concluded that beauty advertisements are largely negative for women.

How Beauty Advertisements Should Impact Viewers

The final few questions aimed to gauge survey respondents' opinions surrounding what type of impact beauty advertisements *should* have on viewers. The first question asked about how beauty advertisements should make respondents feel. The results are summarized in the figure below.
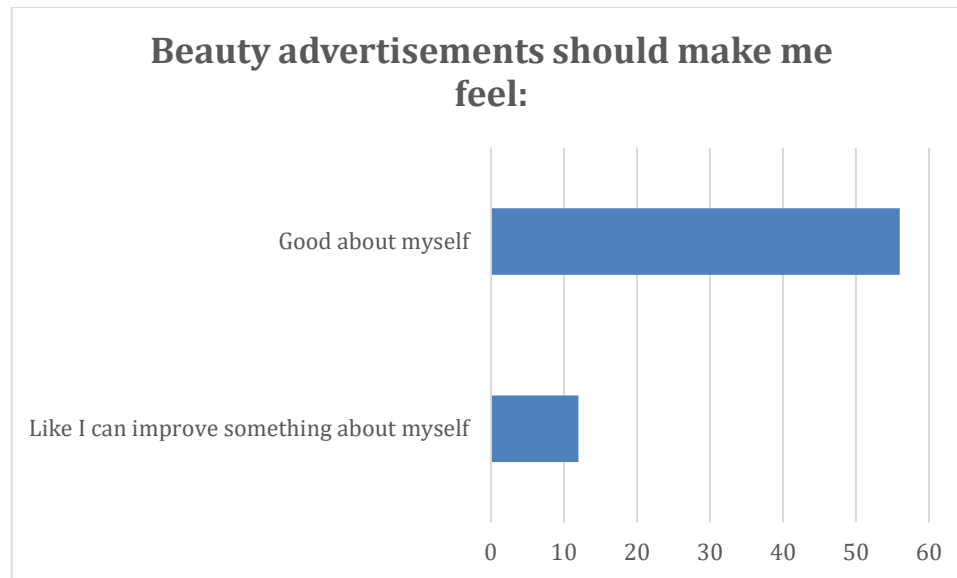
Figure 15: Survey respondents' opinions regarding how beauty advertisements should make them feel.

An overwhelming majority, 82% of respondents, said that beauty advertisements should make them feel good about themselves. Much fewer respondents said that beauty ads should make them feel like they can improve something about themselves. This supports the hypothesis that beauty ad viewers want advertisements that make them feel confident rather than those that make them feel more self-critical.

These responses are not surprising but do provide an interesting conundrum for beauty marketers. Because beauty advertisements often necessitate making viewers feel worse about themselves to motivate them to buy the product being shown, there is a question of whether beauty advertisements that make viewers feel content with themselves will be able to generate sales. Regardless, survey respondents believe that beauty advertising should be encouraging and affirming for women rather than suggestive of what they could improve about themselves.

The next question asked about what survey respondents believe beauty advertisements should show in terms of product results. The results of this question are shown in the figure below.

I would rather be inspired by an idealized beauty advertisement than shown realistic results.
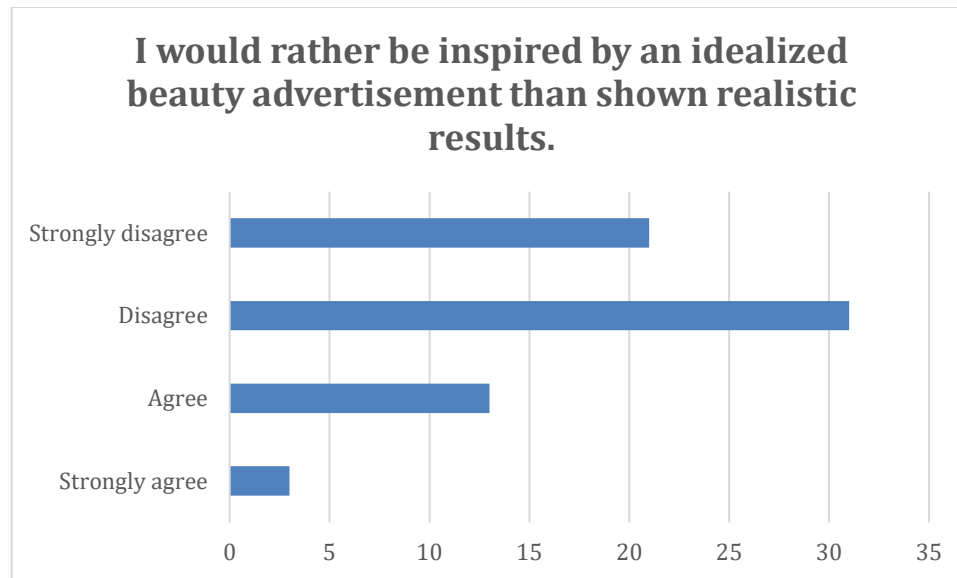
Figure 16: Survey respondents' opinions surrounding how realistic beauty advertisements should be.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of survey respondents disagree, either strongly or not, with the idea that beauty advertisements should show idealized results rather than realistic results. 46% disagree with this statement, and 31% strongly disagree. This supports the hypothesis that beauty advertisement viewers want to see the realistic results and product claims. Realistic advertising would also help limit the number of viewers that are misled by false claims and digital alterations. However, the efficacy of such ads would necessitate further investigation.

The final question focused on the effect advertisements should have on women in general. The results are summarized in the figure below.
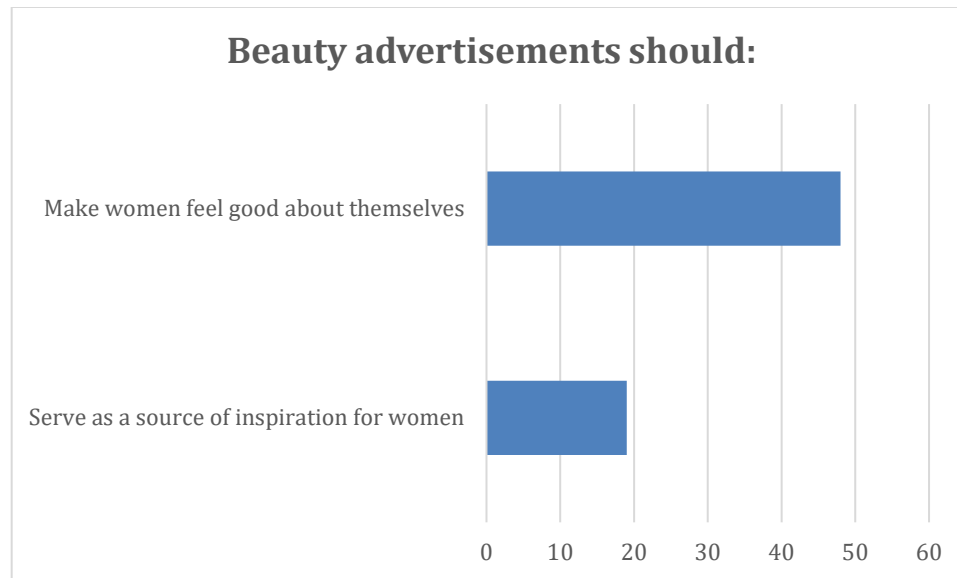
Beauty advertisements should:

Figure 17: Survey respondents' opinions regarding how beauty advertisements should make women feel.

As with the first question in this category, the majority of respondents said that beauty advertisements should make women feel good about themselves rather than serving as a source of inspiration. However, this was the response from 72% of respondents, as opposed to the 82% that believed beauty advertisements should make them feel good about themselves. This means, relative to the first question, a slightly higher percentage of respondents felt that beauty advertisements should serve as a source of inspiration.

These differing percentages are likely due to the connotations of "making an improvement" versus "a source of inspiration." Beauty advertisements as a source of inspiration has a much more positive connotation than a beauty advertisement that points out what a woman ought to improve about herself. For an ad to point to what the viewer needs to improve, it inherently must highlight some type of flaw. In contrast, inspiration is merely providing a picture of what could be achieved by women. This is an important distinction, as it reveals that women prefer advertising that leaves them with an aspirational ideal rather than a critical view of themselves. More than either of these, however, women want advertisements that empower them

to feel confident. Further, women may want advertisements that allow them to feel good about both themselves as they are and their potential to continue improving. This is a much more positive feeling than one that fixates on viewers' flaws.

When examining the three statements used to measure what beauty advertising should elicit, the average respondent believes beauty advertising should be encouraging and uplifting towards its viewers rather than highlighting what they should improve about themselves. Further, respondents would rather be shown realistic results from a product than being inspired by exaggerated images. Generally, the survey responses as a whole indicate that women are impacted by beauty advertising, and that this effect is largely negative. Additionally, college-aged women believe beauty advertising should be both realistic about the products it advertises and uplifting towards its viewers. These opinions and preferences lead to several suggestions for how beauty marketers can change their advertising to make it more ethical.

Suggestions for Ethical Beauty Advertising

By examining current literature that discusses what ethical advertising, and combining this with survey results, several suggestions for ethical beauty advertising come to light. In his article, "Towards a New Paradigm in the Ethics of Women's Advertising," John Alan Cohan discusses how we can move away from our current unethical system of advertising. Though it may seem that exaggeration and the creation of unattainable standards may be the most natural way to stimulate product consumption, Cohan says that,

> There is no reason why advertising can't both emphasize the desirability of high material standards, while reminding us that material gain is merely a means to an end, not an end in itself, and that there are higher purposes and ends in life (Cohan 2001).

Cohan highlights that advertising can still be effective without promoting the idea that consumption should be one's entire life purpose. In other words, people can consume products, but be known and defined by more than the products they consume. Further, Cohan argues that women's advertising specifically can have positive impacts on its viewers by promoting ideas that enhance women's self-esteem. This is also consistent with survey respondents' advertising preferences. The survey revealed that viewers would rather see advertisements that are uplifting, encouraging, and make them feel good about themselves. Cohan argues that this can be done by advertisers to generate a more positive response.

Producing advertising that moves away from focusing on appearances and unattainable beauty ideals is essential in the realm of beauty advertising. However, Cohan argues that shifting towards this type of advertising from current practices requires a paradigm shift, which happens when

> [s]ocial and psychological factors, politics, personal influence, historical chances, and other ephemeral factors converge. […] Such a shift would offer women a more human, approachable, intimate interpretation of beauty – more to do with inner beauty than an idealized, unattainable standard (Cohan 2001).

A paradigm shift in advertising would not happen overnight. It is a very extensive process, as it involves changing the opinions of both advertising executives and viewers. As such, Cohan suggests several ways to help aid this shift.

First, Cohan suggests that advertisers should hire advisors who are familiar with common ethical concerns surrounding advertising. Next, agencies should think deeper about their definition of how they define popular culture in their advertisements, and the inherent meaning behind such images. Upon doing so, agencies can transform any negative images to those that are positive and uplifting towards women. Finally, Cohan suggests that media should review all advertising and reject advertisements they consider to be unethical. To conduct this evaluation, Cohan suggests using the question, "Is the content of this piece consistent with promotion of human dignity?" (Cohan 2001).

Cohan also suggests several recommendations for different types of advertisements. First:

> In print advertising for fashion, cosmetics, perfume, etc., creative teams should hire models who are of diverse ages, of imperfect weight and size. Models should look healthy, vibrant, and should be depicted as being connected to other models in the scene rather than alienated or fragmented (Cohan 2001).

By being mindful of utilizing a diverse set of models, advertising can move away from promoting unattainable ideals, and rather promote the idea that women exist in all sorts of shapes, sizes, ages, and races, and that this is not just normal, but something worth celebrating. Further, advertising can promote connectivity among women, rather than insinuating rivalry and competition. These messages will positively impact women, providing them with encouragement rather than negativity.

This is consistent with survey participants' preference for realistic advertising. Rather than seeing a model who might serve as inspiration for what type of ideal they ought to achieve, respondents prefer images that are realistic to them. This can be done by being more inclusive with models used in advertising, as viewers will be able to see someone who looks like themselves in advertising rather than someone who embodies an unrealistic and unattainable standard.

Another suggestion Cohan makes concerns using sex appeal in advertising. Cohan argues that advertising should be more inclusive with how it uses sex appeal, then goes on to describe an ideal use of sex appeal in an ad.

> An advertisement for some fashion accessory or cosmetic might show a middle-aged, over-weight model, immaculately groomed (wearing the advertised cosmetic or accessory) in a packed elevator; the picture can show that a handsome man next to her is making a pass, obviously being charmed by her, and he is ignoring a knockout gorgeous woman on the other side, who has a perfect figure but lacks the immaculate grooming that goes with the product being advertised (Cohan 2001).

Cohan argues that advertisements do not need to give up utilizing sexual appeal, but should give up the idea that only thin, young, conventionally attractive women can be seen as attractive. The use of models who do not fit this particular description is an important step to achieving this, which Cohan outlines in this description.

Though Cohan's vivid description of a new type of advertisement moves away from current advertising practices, it is still imperfect. The advertisement described insinuates that women ought to seek male validation, and that gaining attention from a man is the mark of a useful product. In other words, it still suggests that women should buy a certain product to be noticed by a man. I would argue that in an ideal world, where advertising promotes confidence within women and emphasizes one's inner beauty, women should purchase products for themselves and only for themselves. However, its focus on promoting healthy hygiene habits as

an ideal, rather than a certain type of look, aligns it with survey respondents' desires for

encouraging and uplifting advertisements that offer realistic, attainable standards. Everyone can

and should aim to be the healthiest they can be, but what this looks like is different for everyone.

It is important for advertisements to accurately capture and represent this idea.

Another idea that Cohan suggests is that advertisements should embrace the use of

ordinary imagery in order to appeal to ordinary people. Cohan provides another example of what

this might look like.

> Fashion or cosmetics advertising can show models – again, models who have a
> broad range of appearances, a healthy and natural look, and older in appearance –
> who are attending to routine matters of daily living (such as caring for children,
> cooking, or hailing a taxi), while clothed in the most beautiful fashions,
> cosmetics, and accessories. […] These types of scenes might show the desirability
> of wearing fashionable products, cosmetics or eyewear in the context of an
> overworked female surgeon, for instance, or a female bus driver (Cohan 2001).

This type of advertising can allow women with seemingly ordinary lives to find a sense of

identity and encouragement within the ad. This will help assure them that the product can be

used by people like them, who look like them and have a similar job and daily life as they do. An

advertisement of this sort would promote consumption not with the goal of achieving an

unattainable ideal, but rather to find a sense of belonging and to affirm one's identity. Further,

showing women in high-power careers using fashion and beauty products can produce the

message that women can care about their appearance and still succeed professionally.

Oftentimes, these are thought to be mutually exclusive, though this is not the reality.

Cohan's suggestions for ethical advertising are helpful for illustrating the ways in which

companies can incorporate consumer desire for realistic, inclusive advertising. Though they are

not perfect, they provide an excellent starting point for ethical advertising. Cohan's suggestion to

models with diverse appearances and even ordinary lives satisfies the desire of survey

respondents to see advertisements that encourage them to be proud of the way they look. Cohan

also suggests that some of the preexisting techniques of the advertising industry, such as utilizing sex appeal, do not necessarily need to be abolished altogether, but can be modified to be more inclusive and realistic. This is also consistent with what survey respondents said they would like to see in beauty advertising.

Though the majority of beauty companies are still producing advertisements that are not inclusive and realistic, there are some companies that have begun utilizing ethical advertising. Dove's Real Beauty campaign is one example of this. The campaign is seen as a pioneer of ethical and inclusive beauty advertising. The Real Beauty campaign portrays women of multiple sizes, ages, and races to increase representation and encourage all types of women to feel beautiful. An image from the campaign is show below.

Figure 18: Dove's Real Beauty Campaign.

The campaign was largely received positively by the public and is successful because it simultaneously works to transform beauty standards while also promoting the company and building its brand image. As Jennifer Millard explains,

The company has publicly committed to broadening beauty definitions and, in doing so, stands out from its competition. Brilliantly, the company uses the same semiotic resources as do women to make this change happen; advertisements are thus personal and communal indicators of beauty (Millard 2009).

Millard discusses how Dove's campaign is revolutionary because it uses traditional indicators of beauty to portray a new image of beauty standards. This allows the advertisements to be easily understood by the public, and simultaneously feel personal enough to be effective. Due to the nature of the campaign, Dove is also able to stand out from their competitors, as they are known as a company promoting more realistic standards of beauty.

As for the use of semiotic resources mentioned by Millard, she explains that,

Semiotic resources are actions, materials, and artifacts that we use to communicate and that can have actual and potential meanings embedded in the use or practice of that artifact, not existing intrinsically within it. […] In other words, semiotic resources are the fundamental units of meaning that people practically use to communicate with others (Millard 2009).

In the context of the beauty industry, semiotic resources include elements that are manipulated to convey an idea about beauty, such as skin and hair. Manipulation of such elements can communicate certain messages about beauty, which are dictated and understood through culture. Dove aims to alter these "beauty scripts" women feel obligated to follow, encouraging women to embrace their natural features.

Through the use of a diverse range of models and promotion of embracing natural beauty, rather than trying to fit into a certain mold, Dove's Real Beauty Campaign is exemplary of survey respondents' desires for encouraging and realistic advertisements. Survey respondents indicated that they want to see advertising that makes them feel good about themselves, rather than pointing out what they should fix about themselves. The campaign does exactly this by using models that do not have the traditional look. Further, their use of multiple models

encourages viewers to realize that not looking like someone else is normal and should be celebrated.

Despite the positive perception of Dove's campaign, some people oppose the campaign, as well. One reason is that it is still created by a corporation with the aim of selling more products. One of Millard's interviewees, Kate, describes these mixed intentions:

> I'm just a little hesitant and I kind of take it with a grain of salt because it's a big corporation and they're trying to sell you a product. So how much are they trying to satisfy this women's dissatisfaction with their body by feeding you something else? […] How much can we really trust them? What is their motivation? Is it to make us feel good or to sell us something?

Evidently, some consumers of Dove's advertising feel that the intentions behind the campaign are not genuine. They cannot decipher whether Dove wants to help women feel better about themselves, or whether they hope to sell more product. Though the two are not mutually exclusive, the possibility of Dove's motives being related to company success rather than goodwill clouds the efficacy of the campaign.

People are also skeptical because Dove's parent company, Unilever, does not have a brand image that is consistent with Dove's. Unilever produces Slimfast, which is a diet supplement, and also owns Axe cologne, which is known for its sexy, and quite controversial, advertisements (Millard 2009). Many Axe advertisements, including the one shown below, use sexual images of women to convey the appeal of the product. The advertisements suggest that men who use Axe will be able to attract women. This conveys women as an object to be won, which directly contradicts Dove's campaign. As a result, some viewers are hesitant to take Dove's campaign at face value, due to the company's seemingly ambiguous motives.

Figure 19: An Axe Body Spray Advertisement.

There are many things that Dove does well that beauty advertisers can learn from. At the same time, the campaign can help caution beauty advertisers against certain tactics, as well. Advertisers should take from Dove the use of inclusive models, which allows for all types of women to feel seen and represented in advertising. However, when creating these ads, advertisers must think carefully about their brand image and motives.

The message conveyed in their advertisements should align with their brand identity, otherwise they risk their credibility as a brand. Additionally, if they are attempting to sell products, it should be made clear that women do not need to buy these products to change something about themselves to become more beautiful. Rather, they should encourage women to buy products to feel good about themselves and to merely enhance their current level of beauty. In other words, consumption should be based on bolstering self-esteem, rather than making

women feel inferior, then trying to remedy this by purchasing beauty products. Though this is a tactic that may limit the number of sales a company can make, it is essential for beauty organizations to recognize their influence on women's self-esteem and on societal beauty standards. They must realize that their advertisements have implications that go much farther beyond selling a product – they are responsible for shaping how women perceive themselves relative to the rest of the world. This is an immense responsibility that beauty companies need to use to have a positive impact, rather than compromising women's self-perception to increase sales.

Inclusive and transparent advertising practices also seem to be part of a larger trend in the industry. In fact, consumers tend to now reject beauty advertisements that seem overtly fake because of what Sophie Russel, senior planner at the creative agency Brave, terms "perfection fatigue." Perfection fatigue happens when "consumers are so accustomed to seeing the conventionally 'fake' and perfectly polished beauty ads that the primary response is simply indifference" (Kemp 2018). In other words, advertising has become so saturated with images of perfection that consumers do not respond to such images anymore. Additionally, consumers expect that advertising practices should change alongside societal beauty standards. When advertisements feature only young, thin, white models, this is not reflective of modern beauty ideals.

In conducting her research, Russel developed a list of "new rules" for beauty advertising.

- Lay off the extreme airbrushing and embrace imperfection
- Be transparent about your brand benefits, vacuous claims can be damaging
- Diversity is appreciated, but is fast becoming a hygiene factor
- To connect emotionally tap into the macro trends of individuality and body positivity

- Don't stop at advertising: embrace realness and transparency in your brand values (Kemp 2018).

Russel urges beauty advertisers to embrace authenticity and inclusion in their advertising practices. The last point is especially important, as a brand cannot promote images of authenticity if they do not practice such values within their organization. This was one of the downfalls of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign: viewers did not believe in it because of the company's questionable background. Brands that embrace these values not just in their advertising, but in their brand identity, are much more successful in their advertising efforts.

Russel's checklist also perfectly encompasses what college-aged women are saying about beauty advertising. According to the survey, beauty ad viewers realize that ads are promoting unrealistic and unhealthy standards through the use of digital manipulation and a lack of diversity in their models. Further, Russel urges beauty advertisers to be realistic, which is another area where survey respondents are looking for improvements. Viewers would rather see less drastic results if they are realistic, as this will allow them to make a more informed purchase decision.

When looking for brands that exemplify these ideal advertising practices, one that comes to light is Glossier. Glossier is a skincare and cosmetic brand, founded in 2014, and was originally a beauty website that focused on real beauty information. The company began by selling only four products but made up for its lack of variety with a strong brand image that highlighted simplicity and authenticity. This image was created through product packaging and company taglines such as "Skincare first, makeup second, smile always" and "You look good" (Fischer 2023).

Glossier's advertising uses its customers as models, emphasizing its commitment to portraying real beauty. Their Instagram page is never saturated with just their products; instead,

it contains people, skyscapes, and pets. When they do show their products, they do so in an aesthetically pleasing way. The Instagram page has less to do with selling products than it does with selling the company's brand image. Their advertising campaigns adhere to similar tactics, highlighting real people rather than the products themselves, as shown below. These tactics are extremely effective, as they allowed Glossier to grow into a billion-dollar business within a decade of its creation (Fischer 2023).

Figure 20: Feeling like Glossier advertising campaign.

Glossier's inclusive imagery and emphasis on highlighting, rather than hiding, natural features make it stand out as a leader in ethical beauty advertising. Further, Glossier's advertising messages are ingrained in their brand image and brand personality, which signals to consumers that these messages are genuinely something the company believes in and not just a ploy to increase sales. Glossier recognizes the importance of the messages in their advertisements and encouraging women to embrace their natural beauty rather than feeling like they need to change something about themselves. Evidently, they are also succeeding financially while spreading

these messages, which highlights that it is possible for beauty companies to advertise ethically while still succeeding as a business.

Based on a review of the current ethical issues prevailing in both advertising in general and beauty advertising specifically, an analysis of survey results, and an evaluation of current ethical beauty practices, several suggestions for ethical beauty advertising can be made. Though it is difficult and costly for a beauty company to alter their marketing strategies, it is essential for beauty companies to recognize the importance of doing so, as their advertisements greatly impact women's beauty standards and self-esteem.

Beauty Advertisements Should Be Realistic and Informative

Current advertising practices bring to light the ethical concerns that advertising sells more than just products and that it inherently involves exaggeration. Consumers are sold the idea of, and feelings associated with, products more than the products themselves. Though Levitt argues that consumers want to be sold these exaggerated images, survey respondents indicated that they prefer realistic advertising. Further, respondents disagreed with Levitt's central argument that advertisements are viewed by consumers as a form of art. Therefore, advertisements should be realistic. If an advertisement includes suggestions about the feelings associated with a product, these suggestions must be based in truthfulness.

Another current ethical issue related to advertising is that consumers do not receive all information necessary to make a purchase from ads. Because ads often provide little tangible, useful information, consumers are required to rely more on the ideas and feelings provided by advertisers. This means that they often make purchases with incomplete or inaccurate information. To combat this, advertisements should contain complete and correct information

related to the product. This includes both statistics related to the product's efficacy and how it looks on the model.

Beauty Advertisements Should Not Imply Needs

One prominent ethical concern related to advertising is that it creates the very needs it fulfills. In other words, consumers desire to buy products only because they have seen an advertisement for it. Though the primary function of advertising is to stimulate consumer purchasing, an advertisement should not imply that a consumer *needs* to buy a certain product. As Galbraith says, someone who is hungry does not need to be told of their need for food. Essentially, products that are shown in advertisements cannot be innately necessary, otherwise they would not need to be advertised. However, this is not always clear to viewers. In the context of beauty advertising, seeing an advertisement for an anti-wrinkle cream will make viewers feel like they need to use an anti-wrinkle cream, for example. Therefore, advertisements should use language that conveys that buying the product shown can help fulfil a desire, rather than implying the product is an innate need.

Beauty Advertisements Should Create a Cultural Ideal of Self-Acceptance

Another ethical issue of advertising is that ads, combined with culture, produce the desire to consume goods and the emotional responses associated with consumption. Advertisements aggregate to influence culture, and culture influences what is shown in advertisements, creating a self-perpetuating cycle. Advertisers must recognize the influence their ads have on culture and use this influence positively, shifting to promoting the cultural ideal of self-acceptance. This will allow ad viewers to work towards accepting themselves as they are, rather than chasing an unattainable ideal.

Beauty Advertisements Should Empower Women

Many beauty advertisements are centered around the idea that success for a woman is measured by approval from a man. Rather than portraying women in this light, beauty advertisements should empower women. This may include helping them feel confident the way they are or inspiring them to improve something for themselves only. Beauty advertisements should include imagery of women in high-power careers to highlight that women can both aspire to succeed successfully and feel confident in their appearance.

Beauty Advertisements Should Showcase Attainable and Realistic Images

Because women compare themselves to the images shown in beauty advertisements, it is essential that beauty companies ensure these images are attainable and realistic. Beauty advertisements should feature models that look like ordinary people. This will allow for viewers to see advertisements without feeling inadequate, and like they must work towards an impossible ideal. This will help reduce feelings of self-dissatisfaction in viewers, allowing them to feel confident the way they are, or that they can easily achieve an ideal version of themselves.

Beauty Advertisements Should Promote a Holistic View of Women

Beauty advertisements tend to reduce women to an accumulation of individual parts, rather than emphasizing a more holistic and complete perspective. This causes women to fixate on certain insecurities by which they begin to feel defined. Rather than highlighting certain body parts or beauty concerns that women should address, advertisements should help reinforce that women are complete individuals and are defined by so much more than how they look.

Guidelines for Consuming Beauty Advertisements Healthily

Though it is easy to look at beauty advertisements and point out all they can do improve their advertising, it is perhaps unrealistic to believe beauty companies will make these changes voluntarily. Developing and creating advertisements requires substantial time, money, and effort, and changing a company's brand image requires even more. Therefore, a more immediate solution lies in the way beauty advertising is consumed by viewers. Below are a few methods beauty ad viewers might use to consume beauty advertisements in a healthier way.

Don't take claims made by ads at face value. Knowing that beauty advertisements often make exaggerated claims about the product, do your own research on the product before buying it. Take what is said in the advertisement as only one source of information and consult as many other sources as you can. Whether this is reading product reviews, testing the product in-store, or asking a trusted friend if they have used the product, do not gather all your purchasing information solely from the advertisement.

Know that you do not need to look like a model in an advertisement to be beautiful. Beauty advertisements make consumers feel like they need to achieve a certain standard to be considered beautiful, and that this can be done through purchasing the product. However, this is not true. Everybody looks different, and this is something to celebrate, not detest. Rather than feeling like you need to achieve an impossible standard shown in a beauty advertisement, remember that the beauty of someone else does not diminish your own.

Support companies whose values mirror your own. The way you spend your money is up to you, so spend it on companies that are making a positive impact on beauty standards for women. You are entitled to elect not to support companies that promote unhealthy messages about beauty, and to feel good about doing so.

Be aware of your own susceptibility. We tend to believe others are more susceptible to the impacts of beauty advertising than we are personally. However, everyone else is saying this too. Given the success of beauty advertising, it is clear that we are all vulnerable to its impacts. Therefore, do not discount your own sensitivity to beauty ads. You may be impacted in ways you do not realize, and you should do what you can to recognize and acknowledge this. Ultimately, however, you should remember that you are merely a victim to a larger system that is at play. Until the majority of beauty companies begin to shift to more ethical advertising practices, you cannot be expected to completely ignore the impacts of beauty ads. These impacts are real and substantial, and it is the responsibility of beauty advertisers to address them.

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