

DREAM<sup>®</sup>  
Driving Racial Equity in Aesthetic Medicine

# Forces of Beauty<sup>®</sup>

A LENS INTO INCLUSIVITY IN AESTHETICS



skinbetter  
SCIENCE<sup>®</sup>

Allergan  
Aesthetics

“  
One of us  
*cannot*  
represent  
all of us.”

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# Overview

Industry leaders Allergan Aesthetics and skin**better** science® have joined forces to create DREAM: Driving Racial Equity in Aesthetic Medicine®. Together, they've set out to advance racial and ethnic diversity, inclusion, equity, and sensitivity in the fields of dermatology and plastic surgery.

The Forces of Beauty® report is intended to revisit a critical issue—the perpetuation of narrowly defined beauty standards. These Eurocentric beauty ideals have long marginalized women of color, rendering them invisible at times. The purpose of this report is to understand the extent to which these notions of beauty continue to impact women across races and ethnicities, in order to generate lasting change within the aesthetics industry.

The Forces of Beauty® report is the result of qualitative and quantitative research on beauty standards and representation, conducted with:

**~4,000 women aged 21-65**  
across numerous ethnicities and geographic locations

People who identify as  
**female and nonbinary**

Variable body mass index (BMI) to ensure  
**women of different body types were part of the conversation**

African American/ Black

~1,000 responses

Hispanic/ Latinx

~1,000 responses

White/ Caucasian

~1,000 responses

Asian American/ Pacific Islander

~500 responses

Multiracial/ Middle Eastern/ Unspecified

~500 responses



To supplement survey findings, the DREAM Initiative® engaged **21 focus groups across Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago**. The intent was to gather a nuanced yet robust reflection of women of different backgrounds' relationship with beauty. Some of those findings and insights include:

## STATISTICS<sup>1</sup>

**1 in 4**

Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial women believe that society's beauty standards are racist.

**Only 31%**

of women agree that beauty standards are achievable.

**38%**

of Black women feel more beautiful than how they believe society perceives them to be.

**96%**

of women said feeling beautiful impacts how they feel about themselves, ranging from Low to Completely.

## INSIGHTS<sup>1</sup>

- Women of all races strongly believe that “one of us cannot represent all of us.”
- Black women feel aesthetic treatments are not for them because doctors lack training with Black skin.
- Asian and American beauty standards drastically differ. And Asian-American women face the duality of wanting to fit both.
- Black and Hispanic women don't want their beauty to just be “accepted.” They want it as celebrated as Eurocentric standards.
- The change most women want in the beauty industry is to see “real women” reflected in beauty advertising.

Based on a survey (n=3,587) in July 2021. Healthcare professionals and individuals pictured throughout the report were not included in the survey.

# We're not asking for change. We're making it.

Representation matters—both in front of and behind the camera. That is why, throughout this report, you'll see stunning images of real people, captured by female photographers and directors of color.

The photography on the Forces of Beauty® project is intentional. We put our research findings into practice by collaborating with our models to showcase what each of them perceives as beautiful about themselves. Now, women across the U.S. will see themselves reflected in aesthetics like never before.



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## LASTLY, WE'D LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK OUR DREAM INITIATIVE® AMBASSADORS:

Dr. Kelly Bolden, MD - Plastic Surgery

Dr. DiAnne Davis, MD - Dermatology

Simone Hopes, PA-C

Dr. Melissa Levin, MD - Dermatology

Dr. Rukmini (Vinaya) Rednam, MD - Plastic Surgery

Dr. Caroline Robinson, MD - Dermatology

Each aesthetic healthcare professional provided invaluable insight and guidance, and this project would not be possible without their support.

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# Foreword

There's this meme floating around the internet that sizes up my relationship with beauty. It's a screenshot of a tweet blasted out by an influencer, and it reads, "Ok, but when did you realize you weren't ugly and that you were just a POC around too many YT people?" Every time I read it feels like I'm being hugged through a phone. It's such a small missive but so powerful in its ability to make you feel seen and less traumatized. It's a subtle reminder that it wasn't you all along... And what's even more telling is that almost any person of color who grew up in white enclaves has an answer.

For me, it was moving to New York when I was 22. I'd been called an "adorable baby" and a "pretty little girl," but beauty seemed to evade me as a teen. I was a late bloomer in every sense of the word, awkward and restless in my new body. Moreover, I was living between two worlds—one Black and one white—each of which possessed their own beauty standards. I met the requirements of neither. I didn't have the right shape, texture of hair, inimitable features of the teen princesses and "the beautiful ones" that lived on my television, within the pages of my favorite fashion magazines, or in the hallways of my predominantly white school. My beauty—if it ever emerged—would not be affirmed. I simply didn't measure up.

It wasn't until I moved into more diverse environments and saw more diverse representations of beauty that I could recognize my own. It was here in this swelling metropolis that I was centered for the first time; that I was not an afterthought or a sidekick to my white girlfriends who were consistently positioned as the paradigm. I was the main protagonist: desirable, aspirational, beautiful. It was here that I learned that I had been fed lies for years, convincing me that my hair texture wasn't loose enough, my thighs were too thick,

or my breasts were too small. Who cared that my nose didn't turn up? The pillowy nature of my lips was a gift. I ran around New York with my curly 'fro in the wind, eschewing a bra and my thighs brushing up against one another, and for the first time, I really loved the skin I was in. This coming into a self-knowing also mirrored a larger evolution in culture, which provided more space for Black and brown women like me.

Through the onset of online media, I clocked a sudden uptick in seeing faces that resembled mine on magazine covers, billboards, and magazine stands. It was long overdue: the aesthetics industry knew the contributions women of color, especially Black women, had made in real time but had failed to include us in the conversation or promote our beauty as aspirational. Still, the aesthetics industry has quite a long way to go in repairing the fractured relationship between women of color. For far too long, and far too often, industry gatekeepers have failed to listen to female consumers of color, challenge age-old definitions of beauty, and do more than performative advocacy.

It's this disregard that drew me to the project: there was an opportunity to directly report on and challenge the aesthetics industry's racially exclusionary history by centering the voices it has consistently impacted. Weaving these surveyees' narratives in with history, research, and front-line experience, this report aims to actively empower the underserved, enlighten those charged with their care, and hopefully change how we all come to see ourselves.



—Marjon Carlos  
Report Editor



# Introduction

The Forces of Beauty® report explores the unique dynamic between racial/ethnic diversity and beauty for women within the U.S.

Through this report, we aim to provide a broad understanding of what inclusive and representative beauty looks like today.

Women of color, especially Black women, have historically always had to be innovative and enterprising in the aesthetics industry. Intentionally written out of the European canon of beauty, we were never seen as or considered viable beauty consumers. Neither fair-skinned, blonde, nor blue-eyed, we were excluded from the market; absent from billboards, campaigns, and beauty counters. Instead, we created our own brands and products to address our unique concerns and tell stories that weren't represented in most store aisles. We became entrepreneurs and visionaries, devising new trends, inventions, and potions that would move the entire industry forward—all without recognition or equal access to the funding, resources, or mentorship critical to building a viable beauty business.

Only recently has the aesthetics industry addressed these inequities within its fold. In the aftermath of 2020's racial reckoning, the aesthetics industry, like so many other fields, was finally forced to contend with systemic racism's impact on its own entities and examine how their silence on its ubiquity has reinforced those glaring injustices. From the boardroom to their social feeds, brands began to reevaluate and examine the disparity of women of color represented across their organizations.

A history of lionizing Eurocentric beauty had excluded these underserved groups as consumers, pioneers, decision-makers, and muses. So much so that even when brands were attempting to foster diversity, they idealized and promoted racially ambiguous women with a proximity to whiteness to represent an entire racial community. The variety of skin tones, shapes, and sizes that made up this group were often underrepresented or altogether invisible. As one surveyee commented, **“one of us is not the face of all of us.”**<sup>1</sup>

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**“To create lasting change, the field of aesthetics must continue to hold itself accountable.”**

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Only meaningful structural change around diversity and inclusion could remedy this oversight. Virtue signaling was no longer enough.

In response, mainstream beauty brands established incubators; held business workshops to support entrepreneurs from underserved communities; and utilized their communication channels to spotlight those companies and their founders. These steps proved productive in addressing inequities for women of color in the aesthetics industry as acts of intervention.

But there is still so much more to do. To create lasting change, the field of aesthetics must continue to hold itself accountable. Calls for diversity cannot be trend-based and cursory. Through radical transparency, companies and key thought leaders must acknowledge blind spots and remain consistent in their work to repair those gaps. Even more, the industry must prioritize and listen to those voices that have been missing from the conversation for far too long.

The DREAM Initiative® works to shift the marginalized to the center by revealing how narrow, outdated definitions of beauty have impacted women's relationships with their bodies, communities, and themselves. By expanding the idea of what beauty looks like, therein is the opportunity to invite everyone, widen the market and create products that actually help to benefit those in need.

CHAPTER ONE

# Defining Beauty

How Eurocentric beauty  
ideals have excluded and  
erased women of color



“

Eurocentric beauty  
standards *are racist.*

I've always heard society  
describe beauty as being thin  
and of a lighter complexion.  
Nothing that equates to who  
I am as a person. I always  
encourage young people to  
celebrate the things that make  
them uniquely themselves.”

—Taneal W.

## Throughout Western history and up to the present day, beauty remains an aspiration.

No matter the era, no matter the place you call home, it is practically predetermined to pursue this elusive physical ideal. Beauty was an essential character trait for the ancient Greeks, on par with integrity and bravery. As an homage, parents even erected statues of Aphrodite and Apollo in their bedrooms in hopes of conceiving beautiful children, believing it would ensure their offspring lived a prosperous life.<sup>2</sup> While today's generation defers instead to celebrities as the go-to model for beauty, not much has changed: aesthetics continue to play a significant role in how one is treated and assesses their self-worth—especially for women. It's no wonder that **96% of those surveyed within this survey believe that feeling beautiful impacts how they feel about themselves, ranging from Low to Completely.**<sup>1</sup>

**96%** of those surveyed within this study believe that feeling beautiful impacts how they feel about themselves, ranging from Low to Completely.<sup>1</sup>



Despite beauty being an ever-moving goal post, with trends coming and going, women have always been expected to fit within beauty's standards. While we recognize beauty comes in countless shapes, shades, and forms, these standards have overwhelmingly been racially exclusionary and Eurocentric in nature. The benchmarks of female beauty have been understood as light skin, straight hair, thin, able-bodied, large eyes, and a small nose.<sup>3</sup> This leads back to ancient Greek culture, which espoused that beauty was quantifiable and determined by supposed perfect physical proportions. So much so that they developed physiognomy, a science which measured the face using three tiers of angularity, with the ideal face being two-thirds as wide as it was high.<sup>4</sup>

Later, Eurocentric beauty ideals would be used as a tool of colonialism during the Age of Exploration.<sup>5</sup> European countries that invaded and exploited large swaths of Asia and Africa during the 15th century used physical differences to create a contrast between “colonizer” and “other.” Intolerant of diversity, these distinctions bolstered European supremacy, undermined cultural and individual characteristics, and erased other definitions of beauty.

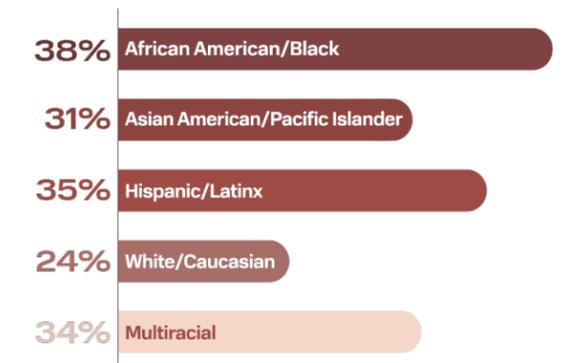
Now, centuries later, we are living the fallout of imposing this pressure to conform to the Eurocentric ideal. **Nearly 31% of women feel more beautiful than they believe society perceives them to be,** meaning only a third of women still manage to consider themselves beautiful despite cultural rhetoric that tells them otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

## Nearly 31% of women

feel more beautiful than they believe society perceives them to be.<sup>1</sup>

**This is especially true for Black women (38%) versus Caucasian women (24%).<sup>1</sup>** All the more remarkable when one considers that arguably, of all racial groups, Black women are considered as least fitting the ideal female archetype. **It's only natural that women today may begin measuring their beauty outside of Eurocentric standards: 75% of women surveyed believe beauty is a feeling and 69% believe beauty is fluid.<sup>1</sup>**

“I feel *more beautiful* than how I believe society perceives me.”<sup>1</sup>



75% of women surveyed believe beauty is a feeling and 69% believe beauty is fluid.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the influence of exclusionary Eurocentric beauty standards is nearly inescapable. Its hold on Western culture is reified via industries, policies, and rituals,<sup>6</sup> while an endless stream of media underscores them all.

That lack of representation for women of color, then, has forced them to create their own spaces in which to affirm and celebrate themselves. Those spaces often start in the home, where girls witness and absorb beauty practices, innovation, and rituals they'll eventually emulate (and pass on themselves). Whether watching their mothers press their hair before work or listening to conversations among women at the beauty salon, Black women and often other women of color's relationship to aesthetics was significantly influenced by their formative environment. Indeed, **51% of Black women say their idea of beauty originates from family members, compared to 43% of non-Black women.**<sup>1\*</sup>

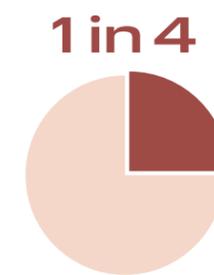
## 51% of Black women

say their idea of beauty originates from family members, compared to 43% of non-Black women.<sup>1\*</sup>

In that same breath, though, the home is also a space where Eurocentric beauty ideals are reinforced for many. The Forces of Beauty<sup>®</sup> survey found that **Asian and Latina women, especially, feel pressure from family and friends to conform to a more European look.**<sup>1</sup> Despite wanting to celebrate their natural phenotypes, they are often taught

that physical assimilation can enable social mobility, provide cultural currency, effect protection, and enable acceptance in Western society. In these attempts to attain proximity to whiteness, many women adjust their features by using any number of means, from undergoing plastic surgery to bleaching their skin to applying colored contacts. There is even a prevailing, shared belief within Asian, Latinx, and Black communities that one should marry someone with lighter skin to ensure a better station in life.

This thinking among communities of color perpetuates colorism—the prejudice and discrimination against those with darker skin tones, typically among people of the same racial and ethnic group—is an enduring legacy of both colonialism and slavery. As history reveals, enslavers routinely offered preferential treatment to enslaved people with lighter skin and forced enslaved people with darker skin to perform harder, more manual labor in the fields.<sup>7</sup> This device worked to stratify and further divide enslaved people along color lines. Centuries later, communities of color have internalized this racism and continue upholding white beauty standards that denigrate their natural features. It's unsurprising then that **nearly a quarter of women surveyed in The Forces of Beauty<sup>®</sup> research found that stigmas around beauty are interconnected with race, culture, and religion.**<sup>1</sup>



Nearly 1 in 4 women surveyed in The Forces of Beauty<sup>®</sup> research found that stigmas around beauty are interconnected with *race, culture, and religion.*<sup>1</sup>

\*In this report, family members include mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, siblings, and cousins.

Considering this telling response, it's imperative that aesthetic healthcare professionals (HCPs) become more adept in understanding and responding to historical and cultural contexts such as this—and that we have more HCPs of all races and backgrounds.



Stigmas around skin color, for example, often find their way into exam rooms. HCPs must be able to decipher whether patients of color feel a heightened sense of pressure into treatment due to stereotypes or are doing so freely, and adjust their approach as needed to better understand their patients' motivations. The critical front-line position of HCPs allows them an opportunity to pull in members of historically underserved communities and help these individuals achieve goals, not fulfill projected standards of beauty.

The combination of exclusionary media and inherited aesthetics trauma,<sup>8</sup> the term used to describe the inherited distressing experiences related to one's appearance, reinforce why women of color have learned to define beauty on their own terms. **At 31%, Black women, especially, view the Eurocentric standard of beauty as something that does not include or apply to their own, and would never try to achieve it.<sup>1</sup>**

Instead, Black women have cultivated their own, culled independent industries outside the mainstream, and continued to explore and experiment with their looks freely, refusing to acknowledge the public's scrutiny. While it's a beautiful demonstration of self-determination, aesthetic HCPs across the board are still responsible for questioning and unlearning previous teachings that have historically excluded patients of color.

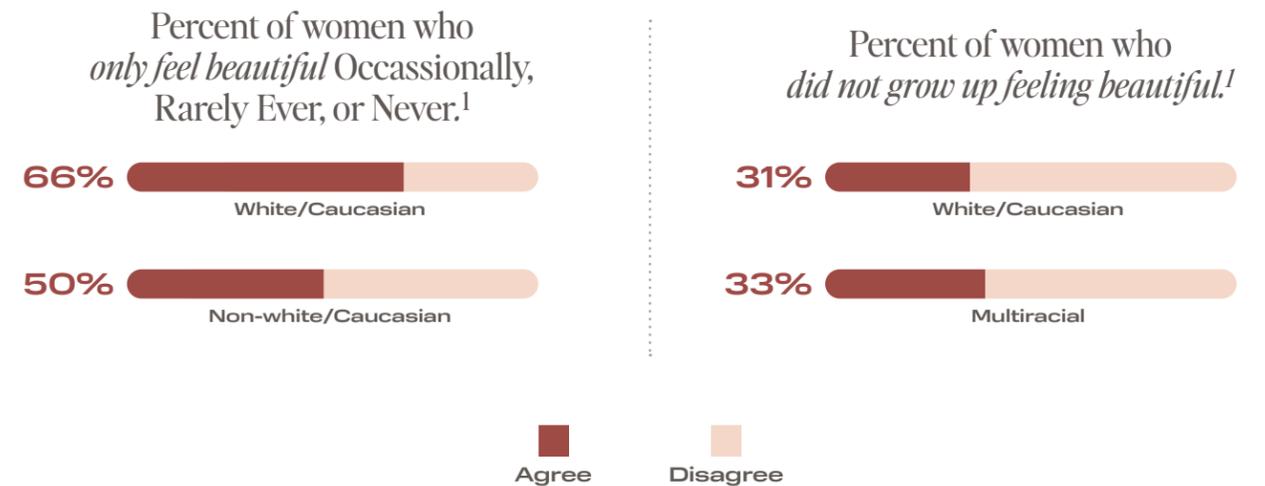
As many of our DREAM Initiative® Ambassadors explained, medical professionals must understand the unique needs of deeply melanated skin and realize that not all skin colors are alike.<sup>29-30</sup> Dr. Rednam reminded us that Black and white skin are different in more than color alone: "There are differences in the oil production,<sup>29</sup> collagen, and sun effects<sup>30</sup> that must be considered to provide the

best care for our patients." While Dr. Davis explained that Black skin also ages differently than white skin and may respond differently to procedures. "...There may be completely different aesthetic treatments one may recommend for Black skin to achieve the aesthetic outcome the patient desires."<sup>32</sup>

Because so few medical curricula address these differences, aesthetic HCPs must be proactive in seeking out education. "Currently, a lot of training for Black skin is a side thought rather than being given equal importance to white skin. With a message like that from the training years, it's no surprise that many providers later give it the same amount of importance," Dr. Rednam continues. This training is worth it and communicates to all patients they are welcome.

The aesthetics industry and Western culture cater to and privilege white women, yet even they don't feel like they stack up to Eurocentric beauty standards. **Of those surveyed in our report, 66% of Caucasian women only felt beautiful Occasionally, Rarely Ever, or Never (compared to 50% of non-Caucasian women.) In fact, 33% of Multiracial and 31% of Caucasian women did not grow up feeling beautiful (compared to 21% of other races).<sup>1</sup>**

Of those surveyed in our report:



These unreasonable expectations placed on women's bodies and appearance from their formative years to adulthood make no one feel seen and beg the question:

*Who are these beauty standards even for?*

Based on a survey (n=3,587) in July 2021.

CHAPTER TWO

# History *of* Beauty Standards

A historical breakdown of the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on women of color



“

We've gotten lost in the shuffle over the years, and our stories have been *pounded down*.

Seeing people that look like me represented in the beauty world is everything.”

—Mariah H.

As Chapter One explored, Eurocentric beauty standards have deliberately excluded non-white races since their inception.

By evaluating attractiveness based against one's lightness of skin tone, hair texture, and physical proportions, societal beauty norms have overwhelmingly prioritized white bodies. As the Forces of Beauty® report discovered, **1 in 4 Black, Latina, and Multiracial women recognize society's standards of beauty as racist.**<sup>1</sup>

1 in 4

Black, Latina, and Multiracial women recognize society's standards of beauty as racist.<sup>1</sup>



For the beauty and aesthetics industry to bridge that gap and challenge discrimination, it's necessary to unpack the ugly history behind the propagation of Eurocentric beauty ideals. A potent example of how Black women's beauty was often highly policed and penalized is the Tignon Laws of antebellum New Orleans.<sup>9</sup> Enacted by the colonial governor of Louisiana in the 18th century, the Tignon Laws demanded that free women of color cover their hair in public. Their intricate and eye-catching hairstyles, which were often decorated with jewelry and feathers,<sup>10</sup> were said to attract the attention of white men, which posed a threat to the social order.

To stifle that, Black women were forced to wear tignons (handkerchiefs) to both reinforce their slave status and criminalize their beauty.<sup>11</sup> As historian Virginia M. Gould argued in the 1997 anthology, *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in Early South*, such laws worked "to return the free women of color, visibly and symbolically, to the subordinate and inferior status associated with slavery." They rebelled by choosing color and elaborate textiles as a way to signal autonomy and resistance.<sup>12</sup>

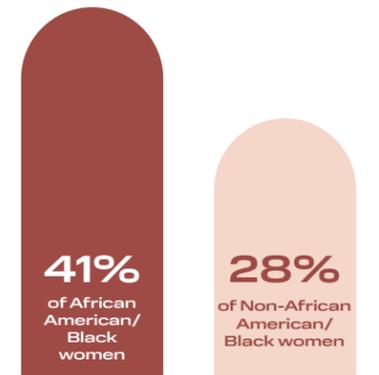
**While humiliating, even Tignon Laws could not squelch Black women's preternatural style and flair.**

The West's systemic disavowal of cultural and physical diversity hardly stops there. At the turn of the twentieth century, indigenous communities throughout America were subject to a forced assimilation campaign by the federal government.<sup>13</sup> "Kill the Indian," as it was termed, systemically demolished indigenous culture through material and physical erasure.

**"My tribe and my people have been here before any settlers came to this land.**

**We are still following traditions, even if other people aren't seeing them."**

—Mariah H.



*"Being beautiful is what I expect of myself."*<sup>1</sup>

Already confined to reservations, nearly 100,000 Native children—often considered the "stolen generation"<sup>14</sup>—were separated from their families and enrolled in boarding schools across the country. From the late 1800s through the 1920s, they were subjected to compulsory indoctrination of American customs, forbidden to speak their languages, practice their religion, and use their original names. They were given different monikers, and their long hair was unceremoniously chopped, an act that held considerable physical and symbolic meaning. In indigenous communities, hair was (and continues to be) a source of pride, and a tether to one's cultural identity.<sup>15</sup> Chopping it, then, was a massive betrayal of their roots and a way for the government to sever those ties.

“A good reason to seek aesthetic treatment is *because you want to.* Not that you feel pressured by society’s views of beauty.”

—Simone Hopes, MHS, PA-C

## Only 11% of all women,

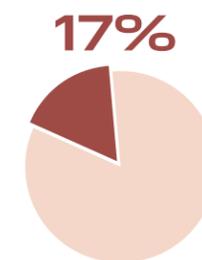
**agree society makes them feel beautiful, but 30% of women believe society pressures them to look a certain way.<sup>1</sup>**

Physical transformations as a form of cultural assimilation were also common practice for many immigrant groups migrating to America. In the 1940s, for example, Korean brides arriving from the war with their newfound husbands elected to undergo double eyelid surgery before relocating to the U.S., given World War II propaganda vilified Asian features. In particular, eyes without an eyelid crease (more commonly known as “slanted” eyes) had come to symbolize untrustworthiness. Going under the knife to create a second eye fold was a tangible way of appearing whiter and more socially adaptable as they eased into the culture. It also rendered Korean brides less racially threatening and reinforced a “passive, compliant nature,” all while they faced pressure to raise their children with so-called American customs.<sup>16</sup> While many of today’s Asian patients receive the procedure for purely aesthetic reasons, these historical factors are worth exploring in how they have informed the Asian-American beauty narrative.

Despite every effort to discount them, though, women of color persist. Racial discrimination, in and outside the beauty space, has not stopped

these groups of women from combatting this exclusion by embracing their natural beauty, creating their own standards, and developing industries that specifically cater to their needs—especially in recent years.

In providing a wide swath of shades and product ranges, innovators like Rihanna, Pat McGrath, and NikkieTutorials, have democratized who can feel included in the conversation around aesthetics, and who profits from it. Because, to be sure, it’s women of color, especially Black women, who overwhelmingly push the aesthetics industry’s billion-dollar needle while barely receiving any credit for it. You need only open any social platform to see and feel the impact that rich traditions originating from women of color have on global audiences.



Percent of women, including Caucasian women, who feel *their racial beauty is accepted by society.<sup>1</sup>*

Social platforms also allow consumers to source products or beauty tips not offered by companies and influencers who primarily service white women. However, as women of color continue to define and embrace their beauty standards, a separate, urgent matter has moved to the forefront: cultural appropriation.

CHAPTER THREE

# Appropriation

A look at how evolving beauty standards continue to erase women of color from the narrative once the mainstream accepts and co-opts trends



“  
I see cultural  
appropriation *now*  
*more than ever.*”

Black women don't get  
acknowledged for beauty like  
other races and cultures do. I  
feel like we're robbed.”

—Kiyah W.

For our reporting purposes, cultural appropriation is defined as adopting aesthetics from marginalized cultures without acknowledging the people from whom they originate.<sup>17</sup>



AMONG OTHER BEHAVIORS,  
THIS TAKES THE FORM OF:

1

Wearing “ethnic” hairstyles that were once shunned

2

Imitating a manner of dress

3

Modifying one’s physical appearance to acquire features that were previously derided and then legitimized by white adoption

It’s a curious, infuriating phenomenon, especially considering the dominant, white culture’s historical condemnation Black women’s bodies and styles that originate in the Black community. Curvier physiques, larger lips, darker skin tones, long acrylic nails, braided, elaborate hairstyles: these were all degraded until they were co-opted by white or white-passing celebrities. As one member of our focus group of Black women commented, **“Black women ‘push the culture’ in terms of which features are beautiful,” but “until dominant culture says it’s attractive or desirable, it’s not.”**<sup>1</sup> As the phrase goes, “ghetto until fashionable” Black women set trends that are discounted by the mainstream until they catch up.

## “Black women ‘push the culture’

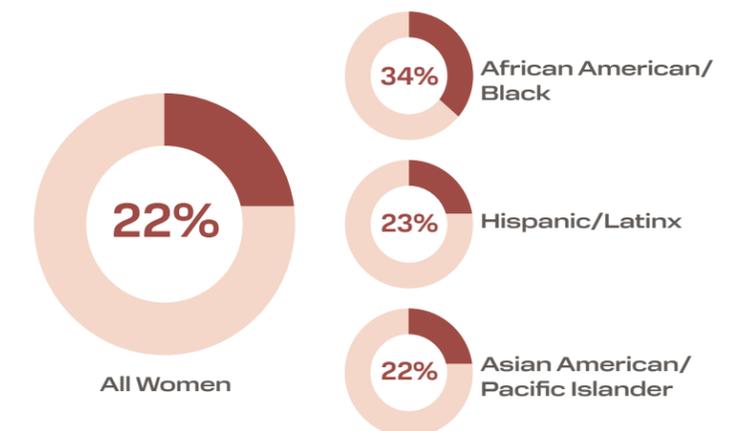
**in terms of which features are beautiful,” but “until dominant culture says it’s attractive or desirable, it’s not.”**<sup>1</sup>

Take the growing popularity of the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL), a surgical procedure that suctions the fat out of the abdomen or lower back and deposits it into a patient’s buttocks. **The procedure mimics a shape common to Black women that stars now flock to, despite celebrity culture rejecting it for years.**

The BBL craze of the last decade is a teachable moment for HCPs about the importance of knowing trend origins, as it provides them a deeper understanding of what drives patients into their offices. They must stay informed about what exactly is driving this trend and how beauty can be appropriated. While HCPs are not in a position to judge, they should use their vantage point to inform patients, and provide them the best care and knowledge in order to make the best decisions about their bodies. And moreover, it gives them the ability to better spot cultural appropriation, and understand if and how they might be fueling it.

As one surveyee observed, all too often, when **“people take parts of [Black] culture and use it for their own, it’s their own now. It’s not [Black] culture [anymore].”**<sup>1</sup>

Percent of women who agree there are stigmas around beauty within *race, culture, and/or religion!*



Cultural appropriation  
can manifest in  
adopting another  
culture's beauty  
symbols *without*  
understanding their  
*origins.*

The origins of “trendy” beauty, such as baby hair or long acrylic nails, should be properly recognized as originating with Black women. What’s more, culture at large often cherry-picks the parts of Black style it finds alluring while ignoring the difficult experiences that shaped it. These styles are often created by Black women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose social capital and status are consistently undermined due to their race, gender, and class. When non-Black women adopt a trend without understanding or acknowledging its roots, they help uphold the structure that keeps those women in such conditions.

## Only 31% of women

agree that beauty is achievable.<sup>1</sup>

That sense of entitlement and ownership has gone so far as to inspire another means of appropriation: Blackfishing.<sup>18</sup> The neologism, developed by Wanna Thompson, was created to define the sudden uptick of white celebrities and online influencers who alter their appearance to reflect traits often ascribed to Black people, or to appear Black passing. Whether they’re tanning their skin, enlarging their lips, or wearing hairstyles pioneered by Black women, these women strive to appear racially ambiguous. What’s more, many of

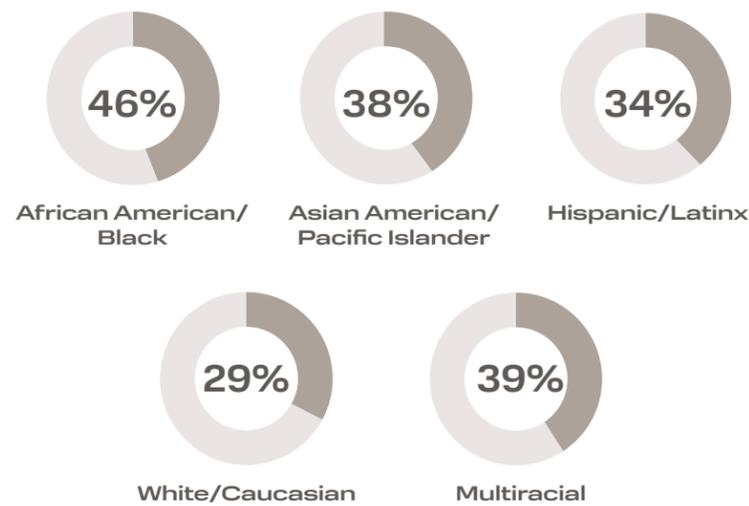
these women profit off this masquerade, which directly impacts Black women’s already lower earning potential.<sup>19</sup>

It’s not just Black women being written out of their beauty narratives. The “fox eye” or “designer eye” trend of late is a perfect example of how once demonized beauty standards become desirable when on the “right” body. It’s an eye shape commonly attributed to Asian features—and, as discussed in Chapter Two, it is a trait that has historically been vilified.<sup>20</sup> Today, white celebrities and beauty content creators imitate that same slanted, upturned look through fillers, surgery,<sup>21</sup> or deft makeup tricks.<sup>22</sup> The feature is now en vogue—just not on Asian women, necessarily.

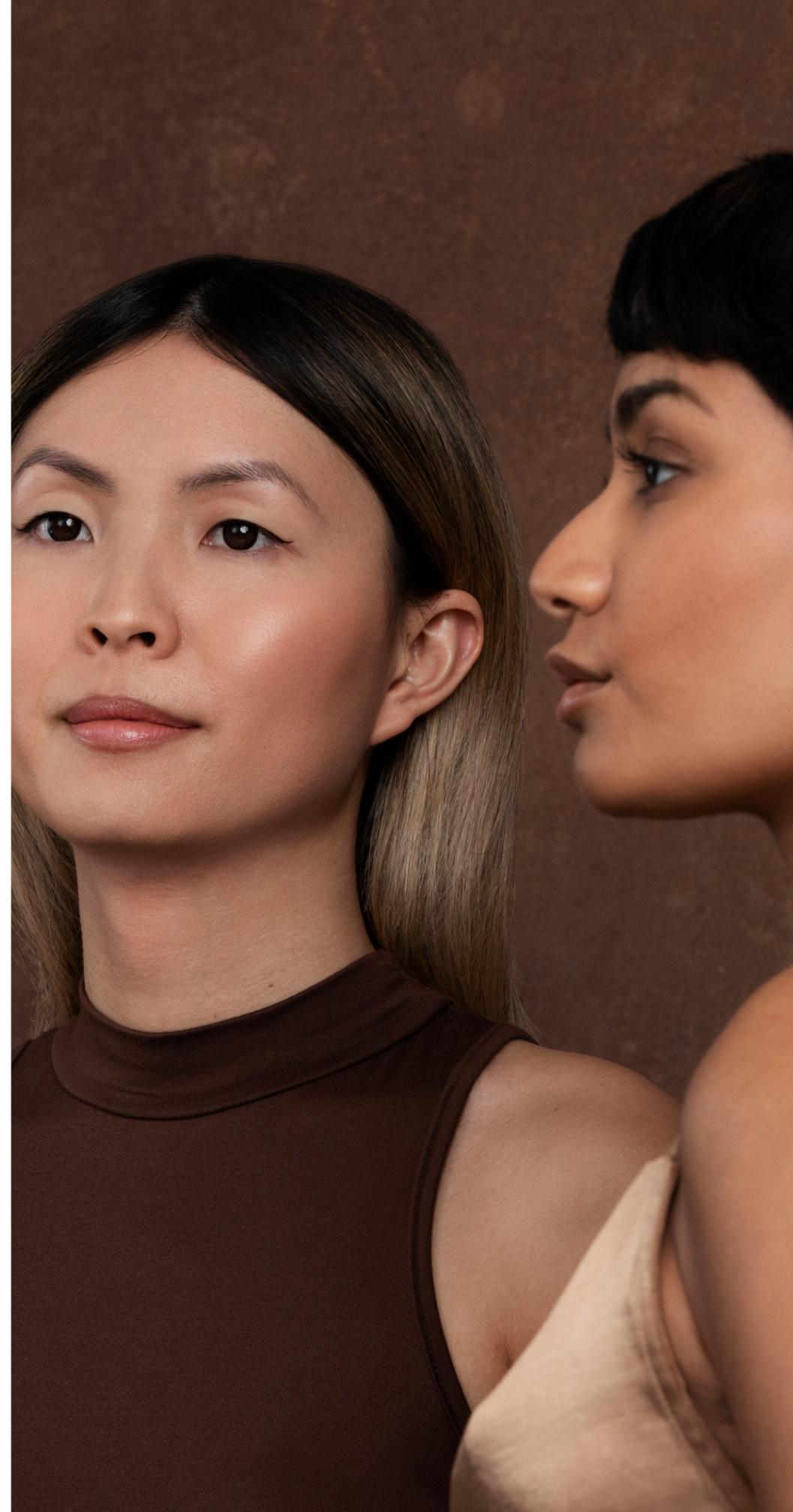
Cultural appropriation can also manifest in adopting another culture’s beauty symbols without understanding their origins. Look no further than the recent TikTok frenzy over “slugging.”<sup>23</sup> While white social media users believed they’d stumbled upon the “newfound” skin benefits of petroleum jelly application, which involves massaging oil into their scalp, hair, and/or face, this beauty secret was hardly news to many in the Black community, as several Black commentators noted publicly. A staple in Black homes, Vaseline is both a product and a tradition passed down by mothers and grandmothers who’ve used it as a multitasking balm for generations. East Asian communities have also been “hair slugging” for centuries. In fact, mainstream beauty editors had previously frowned upon the remedy, warning it clogged pores. Their touting of its benefits now is, again, an example of cultural theft peddled as cultural literacy.<sup>24</sup>

Many ask, "What is the actual harm in trying a new beauty regimen or product from another culture?" Trying out a beauty trend may seem innocuous enough, but this kind of tone-deaf erasure is what discredits women of color. Baby hair and dramatic long nails, to name two currently popular styles, aren't credited to Black and brown women because they're not viewed as cultural artifacts worth crediting. Full appreciation of another culture involves understanding: educating oneself on the history of the style, the role it plays in another culture, and what it works to convey. Mining communities of color for culture while not inviting them into the conversation around beauty is exploitative and hollow. **It's why 46% of Black women surveyed here are more likely to want "respect without exploitation."**<sup>1</sup>

Women who want respect *without exploitation.*<sup>1</sup>

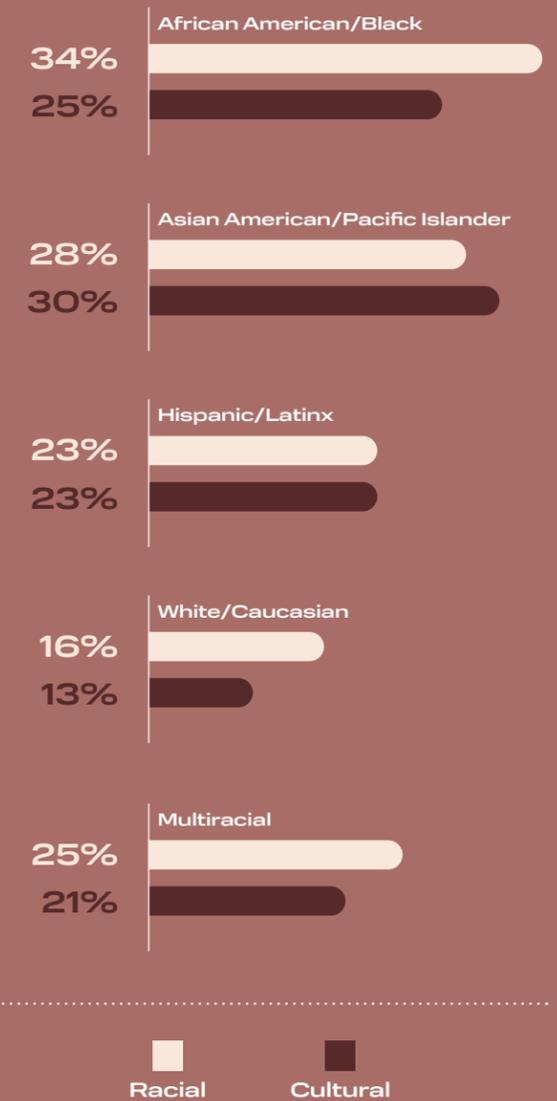


Simply put, women of color, who inspire so much of beauty culture today, seek proper accreditation for their cultural contributions, and to preserve the integrity of their traditions. In fact, our survey discovered that women of color are more interested in learning about our cultural roots than becoming more rooted in the mainstream.



Specifically, **Black women surveyed were more likely than other racialized groups of women who want society to know more about their racial and cultural backgrounds as related to beauty (25% vs 14% non-black women).**<sup>1</sup>

Women who wish society better understood how their *race or culture relate to beauty.*<sup>1</sup>



CHAPTER FOUR

# Empowering Uniqueness

The need to represent the full spectrum of beauty and address women's desires to be authentically seen



“

The more diverse stories we have from women of color, the better we can showcase this spectrum.

**Inclusivity has a lasting impact.”**

—Ansa W.

Despite the aesthetics industry’s work to close racial inequity gaps and broaden representation, **many women of color feel that there is no understanding of the cultural diversity that makes up each race, and there exists a lack of “subgroup” representation in the aesthetics industry.**

“One of us cannot represent all of us,” is a direct quote from one of our survey participants, and a sentiment echoed by women of all races in our report. In not showcasing subgroups within races and ethnicities, the industry inadvertently sets boundaries for how representation should appear. And that fails women across all races and ages.



In not showcasing subgroups within races and ethnicities, the industry inadvertently sets boundaries for how representation should appear. *And that fails women across all races and ages.*

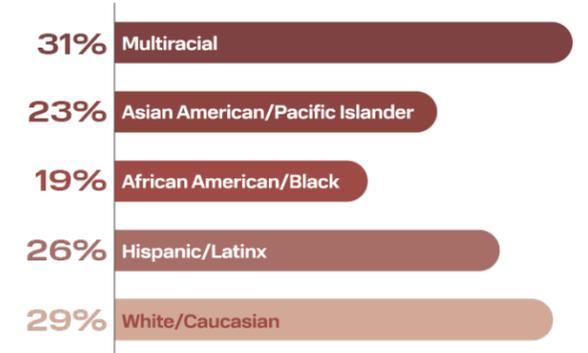
Case in point: the spectrum of Asian ethnicities. While Far East Asians are often put forth as the standard of Asian representation, Southeast Asians, South Asians, Middle Eastern Asians, etc, are vastly underrepresented. The women we surveyed revealed that they want to see “more varieties of Asian women,” including body types and skin tones.<sup>1</sup>

**Dually, the aesthetics industry must recognize that for Latinas, “race is different from culture.”<sup>1</sup>** There are Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Indigenous communities within the Latinx world that identify with their ancestors’ African and indigenous roots, as well as the customs and language of their native countries. Media’s typical depiction of Latinas as Euro-appearing women fails to account for the vast skin tones, body types, and hair textures possessed by women in the Latinx diaspora.

## The aesthetics industry must recognize that for Latinas, “race is different from culture.”<sup>1</sup>

And across communities of color, the proverbial ambassador is far too often cast as racially ambiguous (ie, still possessed of white appearance save for slight variations in skin color, facial features, etc). It’s a go-to tactic of beauty companies, which often cast Multiracial women in advertisements as a way to check inclusion off the list, as it were. While many Multiracial women identify as Black, a singular representation of one racial group diminishes the shapes, sizes, and colors that exist within it. As expressed in a group discussion among Black women for this report, “Black beauty isn’t defined by one entity—there are so many variations of color, shape, size, and hair texture.” In fact, **31% of Multiracial women and 29% of Caucasian women said unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards set by the media drove their beauty insecurities (compared to 22% of other races).**<sup>1</sup> The furthering of invisibility and whitewashing makes feeling beautiful nearly unattainable for all.

Women who feel insecure about their beauty because of *unrealistic and unattainable standards.*<sup>1</sup>

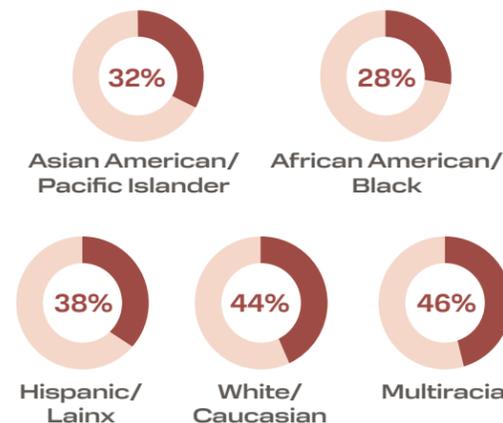


Pandering to women of color with one-off photoshoots and mere hints at change is not enough. Consistent and long-lasting efforts toward correcting the current paradigm are how brands can celebrate the beauty of women of color.

The downplaying of Black features in casting also underscores how proximity to whiteness translates to more opportunities. Several multiracial celebrities<sup>25</sup> have been vocal about this gap, observing how their lighter skin and biracial features have helped their careers considerably, as they generally read more palatable to white audiences.<sup>26</sup> We must challenge not only that trope, but also the power structure that upholds it—or else the cycle of exclusion continues unabated.

**38% of women surveyed agreed: the biggest change they want to see in the beauty industry is “real women in beauty and advertising.”<sup>1</sup>** White and Multiracial women demand more “real women” to be cast in advertisements, while Black, Asian, and Latina women look for better body diversity and racial representation. **But more than authentic representation and acceptance, 40% of Asian, Black, and Latina women want their racial beauty to be celebrated.<sup>1</sup>**

38% of women, surveyed agreed: the biggest change they want to see in the beauty industry is “real women in beauty and advertising.”<sup>1</sup>



Based on a survey (n=3,587) in July 2021.

By listening and collaborating with members of marginalized communities, beauty brands have the opportunity to produce more intentional products that address underserved groups’ concerns and to build brand loyalty. A growing majority of “belief-driven buyers” are looking for substance over style; they will choose, switch, or boycott brands based on their stance on societal and political issues.<sup>27</sup> Consumers are also looking at the demographics of a brand’s workforce. External change is one thing, but are there women of color in tangible roles of power? And if not, how are companies taking accountability for this deficit and ensuring the success of the employees of color on staff?

## 40% of Asian, Black, and Latina women

want their racial beauty to be celebrated.<sup>1</sup>

Pandering to women of color with one-off photoshoots and mere hints at change is not enough. Consistent and long-lasting efforts toward correcting the current paradigm are how brands can celebrate the beauty of women of color. Those efforts can look like a whole host of actionables. **As one of the DREAM Initiative® Ambassadors proposed in their Forces of Beauty® questionnaire, including “more clinicians of color, more ads including people of color, more products focused on skin of color, and more clinical trials and outcomes research involving patients of color” is the only path forward should we truly want to achieve permanent, authentic racial equity.**

# Summary

## Meet Women of Color Where They Stand

Overwhelmingly, women in our survey agree that beauty is a feeling; it is fluid and influenced by personal preferences.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the media continues to emphasize a Eurocentric standard of beauty, and only praises Black and brown features once they're seen on Caucasian women. This makes it difficult to create a landscape where all forms of beauty can be embraced.

It's important to note, again, that women of color will consistently take matters into their own hands to feel represented. Using social media as connective tools, they have been able to self-author their own media and broaden representation in real time. Almost instinctively, women today utilize social media to become leaders in the beauty space. The various channels have created an entire ecosystem in which women of color come closer to finding the best tutorial and product with the touch of a search button.

These content creators also record podcasts, produce photo shoots that center their beauty, and cast themselves as the main character in television and film productions. As such, Hollywood has seen an explosion of diverse storytelling. Media can no longer deny the talent and stories of these innovative, overlooked visionaries.

While Black and brown women rewrite the scripts, HCPs also need to recognize the role they play. HCPs can productively intervene and reshape conversations about beauty. But first, they need to better educate themselves on the unique needs of melanated skin. As DREAM Initiative® Ambassador Dr. Bolden offered, it's vital that aesthetic professionals **“take the time to study skin of color as it relates to pigmentation, scarring, and elasticity.”** For example, Black skin can often react differently to lasers than fairer skin, and alternative treatments must be considered.<sup>28,31,33</sup> Moreover, HCPs must listen: **“Before making assumptions about why they are here, ask your patient what their concerns and goals are,”** says DREAM Initiative® Ambassador Dr. Rednam. Far too often unwarranted beliefs are written onto melanated skin and go unheard or misunderstood.

Our perspectives of beauty largely come from what we see in media, and the aesthetics industry can course correct. We can create representative media, authored by women of color to ensure authenticity. Additionally, we can make resources and information more equitable and accessible to patients across the board. Diversity and inclusion are hardly a marketing tactic, but a commitment that touches every facet of a business from ad campaigns, packaging, to organizational inclusion. Integrating a large swath of inclusivity indicators helps make consumers of color feel welcome, assured, and genuinely valued. Like DREAM Initiative® Ambassador Dr. Rednam argued, it reassures them that the beauty space is for them. **“From a business aspect, if we really want to represent beauty then we need to take a look at the fact that the world is made of so many groups of people who do not look Western and should not be made to feel as if they should to feel beautiful.”**

The aesthetics industry must remember that we were never meant to set the beauty norms; instead, we are responsible for making everyone feel like the best version of themselves.

Based on a survey (n=3,587) in July 2021.

# Taking Action

Forces of Beauty® was conducted to spark conversation and inspire change. Use these questions as a guide to reflect on your own experiences, perceptions, and personal actions. Where applicable, develop an action plan to promote greater diversity and inclusion.

## AESTHETIC HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS (HCPS)

- Think back on how you formed your own notions of beauty: How did they emerge? Have they shifted over time or remained the same?
- How might a Eurocentric standard of beauty inform your approach to aesthetic medicine?
- How did your medical training educate you about melanated skin? How did it prepare you for considering race and culture when addressing patients' concerns? Were you taught to consider race or cultural identity when addressing a patient's concerns?
- Have you sought out training or research to better educate yourself on the specific needs of patients of color? If so, what was that experience like?
- How might your blind spots limit your ability to effectively treat a diverse clientele? What steps can you take to recognize those limitations and remedy them?
- Were you taught to consider race or cultural identity when addressing a patient's concerns?
- How have you changed or shifted your practice to accommodate a more diverse clientele?
- What signifiers do you display or share so that racial groups know they can be well-served by you? For instance, have you ever considered including in your bio and website language that speaks to your experience and skills in treating a diverse clientele?
- What else do you think can be done to better connect with and advise a more diverse clientele?

## AESTHETICS PATIENTS

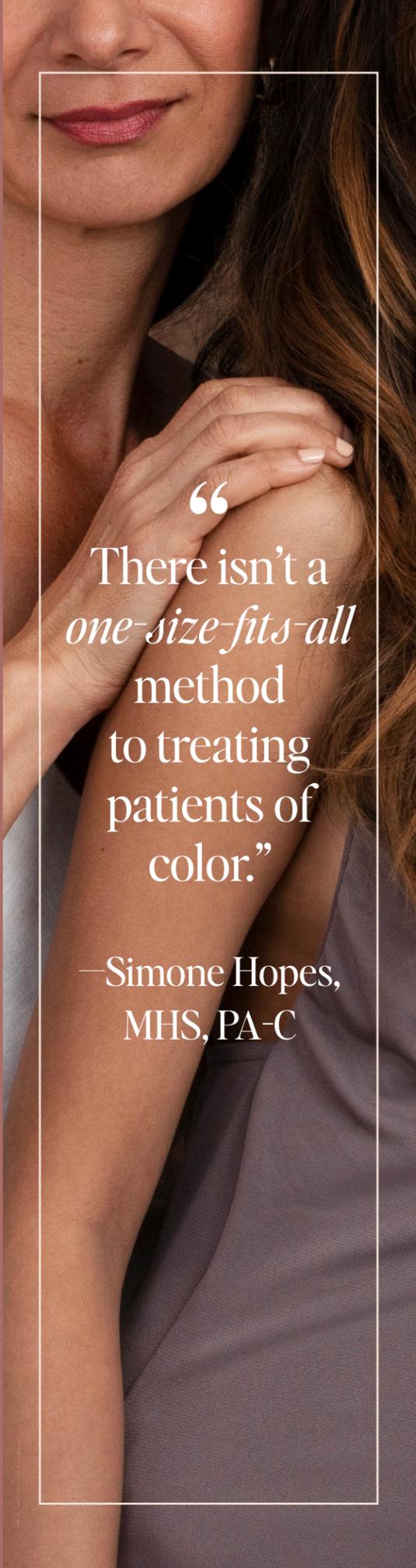
- How has your racial or cultural identity influenced the way you think about beauty?
- How has your definition of beauty changed over your lifetime?
- What myths around beauty did you outgrow and rewrite for yourself?
- Are there reasons that keep you or previously have kept you from seeking out care or an opinion?
- How does your own racial identity influence the HCPS you seek for your care?

## BRANDS AND ORGANIZATIONS

- Prior to 2020, had you ever examined your brand's organizational diversity? What were your results? What, if any, blind spots did you uncover when it came to race?
- Does your senior leadership consist of a racially diverse group? If not, what efforts can be taken to work toward a steady increase in racial representation?
- How do you work to attract and retain talent of color?
- Does your business have identity-based affinity groups, and do you include those groups for strategy development?
- Do you have an internal racial equity plan? If so, is it adequately resourced?
- How do you ensure that racially diverse consumers see themselves in your brand?
- Does your brand voice speak to/attract racially diverse communities?
- How does your brand support or invest in budding entrepreneurs of color?

## MEDIA

- What challenges/barriers do you face in being more inclusive?
- Consider your process for recruiting talent: How might your blind spots negatively impact casting decisions?
- Do the decision makers across the organization adequately represent the diversity within your consumer base?
- Have you created an equitable and diverse crew behind the scenes that reflects the spectrum of beauty you present outwardly?
- Have you secured resources or internal support to push more diverse packages through?
- How do your creative deliverables challenge outdated stereotypes that no longer apply?



“There isn't a *one-size-fits-all* method to treating patients of color.”

—Simone Hopes,  
MHS, PA-C

# Appendix

## A FURTHER LOOK AT METHODOLOGY

Black and Latina women, as well as nonbinary people, are driving beauty sales across categories. In addition, a lack of representation of people of color in clinical trials has been documented. Therefore, it was important to ensure their voices were highly accounted for within the Forces of Beauty® report.

The survey was a 30-minute online questionnaire developed by the DREAM initiative®, with input from public relations; marketing; and a Medical, Legal, and Regulatory Committee. Once finalized, the questionnaire was distributed through our marketing research department.

Focus groups with women and nonbinary people of different ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds were held as a way to further understand beliefs, motivations, and behaviors as they relate to beauty.

## OUR GOALS

- Evaluate the current perception of beauty across races and ethnicities
- Access how people learn about beauty
- Determine what contributes to a person's standard of beauty

## ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANT BREAKDOWN

Gender	Age	BMI	LGBTQIA+ Inclusion
Female: 4,416 Nonbinary: 24	21-29: 781 30-39: 1,031 40-49: 955 50-59: 791 60-75: 882	Underweight: 234 Normal: 1,601 Overweight: 1,091 Obese: 1,514	LGBTQIA+: 468 Non-LGBTQIA+: 3,945 Not Listed: 27



Focus groups with women and nonbinary people of different *ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds* were held as a way to further understand *beliefs, motivations, and behaviors* as they relate to one's personal beauty.

## STATISTICS AND PULL QUOTES

### The Perception of Beauty

- Women agree that beauty is a feeling (75%), beauty is fluid (69%), and beauty is influenced by personal preferences (62%)
- Women feel most beautiful when they “do the things they love” (56%)
- Only half (52%) of women agree that “anyone can be beautiful”
- Only 31% of women agree that beauty is achievable
- 96% of women said feeling beautiful impacts how they feel about themselves, ranging Low to Completely
- 64% of women said feeling beautiful has a strong impact on or completely impacts how they feel about themselves
- 41% of Black women say “being beautiful is what they expect of themselves”—far more than their non-Black counterparts (average of 28%)
- 4 in 10 (41%) women agree that feeling beautiful is connected to their self-worth

### How Beauty Is Defined

- 51% of Black women’s ideas of beauty originate from a family member, compared to 43% of non-Black women\*
- Black women’s ideas of beauty were far less likely to have originated with “society’s standards” (18% vs 31% non-Black women)
- Only 11% of women agree society makes them feel beautiful, but 30% of women believe society pressures them to look a certain way
- 31% of women feel more beautiful than they believe society perceives them to be—this is especially true for Black women (38%) compared to Caucasian women (24%)
- 20% of Black women believe their race is “deemed less beautiful than other races by society” is why they do not feel beautiful

### Societal Beauty Standards By Race

- Nearly a quarter (22%) of women believe there are stigmas around beauty related to their race, culture, and/or religion—this is especially true among Black women (34%), followed by Hispanic women (23%) and Asian women (22%)
- 1 in 4 Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial women believe that society’s standards of beauty are racist
- Only 17% of all women, including Caucasian women, feel like their racial beauty is accepted by society
- Black women were more likely than other racial women to want society to know more about their racial and cultural background related to beauty (25% vs 14% non-Black women)
- Black women are more likely to want “respect without exploitation” (46%)
- The top way women embrace their idea of beauty is by embracing their natural beauty (50%)
- But Black (56%) and Hispanic (50%) women are split down the middle; half say they accept their natural beauty, while 25% of Black woman and 47% of Hispanic/Latina women say they embrace their beauty by wearing makeup
- The change women most want in the beauty industry is “real women in beauty and advertising” (38%)
- 34% of Black women agree that “racial representation” is important within the beauty industry, which is the highest for all groups. Caucasians are the lowest (16%)
- 32% of women say that while they prefer natural beauty, society desires altered beauty

### Impact of Beauty Standards

- Only 20% of women do not have concerns around their beauty. For most women, weight (38%) and body shape (27%) are physical features they are most insecure about related to their beauty
- 22% of Caucasian women say they feel insecure about their beauty because they do not believe they are beautiful (compared to 14% average of non-Caucasian women)
- 33% of Multiracial and 31% of Caucasian women did not grow up feeling beautiful (compared to 21% of other races)
- 31% of Multiracial and 29% of Caucasian women said unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards set by the media drove their beauty insecurities (compared to 23% of other races)
- Asian and Black women are more likely than other races to say that they do not have any beauty concerns (24% and 25%, respectively), insecurities (13% and 18%), or flaws (Black women—20%)
- 14% of Black women agree their flaws are what make them beautiful

### Responses on Representation

- “There’s different shades of us”
- “It’s not one size fits all”—multiple focus groups
- “Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes”
- “One of us is not the face of all of us”
- Asian women mentioned wanting to see “representation of more varieties of Asian women,” which includes variations in both body type and skin tone—Asian focus groups
- The change women most want in the beauty industry is “real women in beauty and advertising” (38%)
- 20% of Black women have beauty insecurities because they believe society has “deemed beautiful than other races”
- “Race is different from culture”—Hispanic focus groups

Based on a survey (n=3,587) in July 2021.

\*In this report, family members include mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, siblings, and cousins.

“  
There’s  
*different*  
*shades*  
of us.”

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