

Beauty at Any Cost
Action Guide

Major Findings

Every woman in the United States participates in a daily beauty pageant, whether she likes it or not. Engulfed by a popular culture saturated with images of idealized, air-brushed and unattainable female physical beauty, women and girls cannot escape feeling judged on the basis of their physical appearance. As a result, many women feel chronically insecure, overweight and inadequate, as these beauty images apply to an ever-shrinking pool of women. Moreover, the diet, cosmetic and fashion industries are often too willing to exploit these narrow beauty standards so women and girls will become cradle-to-grave consumers of beauty products, cosmetic surgery and diet programs.

The issue is not new, but the extent to which it is invading the lives of younger girls and women of color, and the lengths to which women will go to achieve an unattainable look, is an increasing problem. From new levels of spending on cosmetic alteration to health risks and to a “mean girls” culture, the lifelong burden of an unattainable beauty and body image is taking a terrible toll in all areas of women’s lives, from their economic well-being to health to interpersonal relationships.

Key Messages:

- Americans’ unhealthy obsession with idealized, artificial and airbrushed female beauty affects every woman and girl.
- Americans need to change their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors related to female beauty at the individual, community and policy levels.
- The YWCA will lead this fight and raise awareness, ignite a national conversation, motivate women to reclaim their beauty, and mobilize Americans to achieve these changes.

Action Steps:

1. Generate Additional Media Coverage
2. Ignite a Community Conversation
3. Advocate for Change

YWCA Action Steps

1. Generate Additional Media Coverage

- E-mail the report and press release to your local media contacts and urge them to cover the story.
- Issue a press release endorsing the report and make yourself available for local print/broadcast interviews to discuss it. Include any local statistics that illustrate how the problem affects women and girls in your community, i.e., increasing rates of cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders, and depression.
- Meet with your local newspaper's editorial board to ask if they will write about the issue and the report. Do some legwork first and line up some local experts who can speak directly about the issue and how it's affecting local women and girls.
- Submit an opinion column about the report to your local newspaper. Encourage continued online dialogue and conversation at your Web site about the report's key findings.
- Join with other community leaders -- women's organizations, girls' groups, mental health and health care professionals, faith community leaders, and parent organizations – to discuss the report. Hold a joint press conference to endorse the report together and announce your community plan of action.

2. Ignite a Community Conversation

- Sponsor age-specific discussion groups to talk about issues raised by the report and what can be done about them.
- Sponsor small-group events in which girls and young women are encouraged to explore their feelings, attitudes and behaviors related to female beauty through first person narration, art, dance, and/or theatre projects.
- Organize a monthly mother-daughter book club using the book list provided in the *YWCA Discussion Guide*.
- Post the report on your Web site and encourage online discussion, blogging and comments about the issues it raised.

3. Advocate for Change

- E-mail the report to you state and federal policy makers asking them to become familiar with the issues raised in the report.

Advocate for Change – continued

- Incorporate policy issues raised in the report into your on-going conversations and visits with policy makers.
- Invite policy makers to speak at and participate in YWCA community forums and events related to celebrating wholesome and healthy female beauty.
- Join with other like-minded organizations to sponsor a community summit to develop a long-term strategy to change knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to female beauty.