

MANE Chair in Diversity & Inclusion in Beauty

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The Future of Body and Beauty: Evolving Attitudes of Women Towards Ozempic in Germany and U.S. Amongst Different Generations

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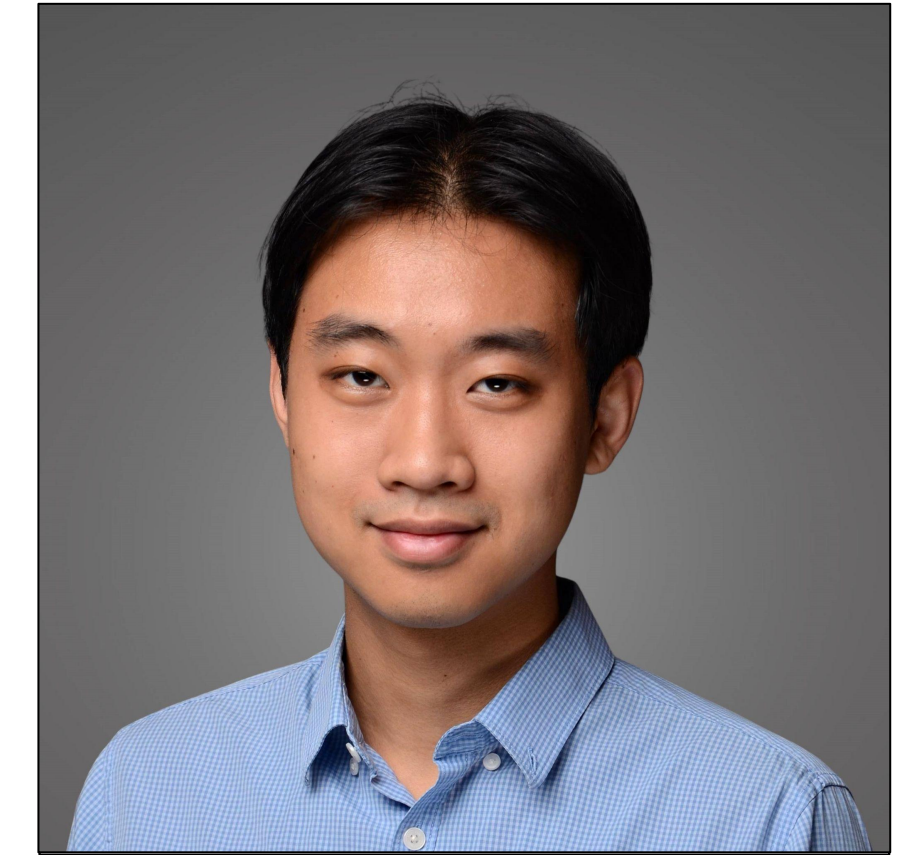
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AGENDA

Introduction

Background and Historical Context

Research Questions

Theoretical Framework

Methodology

Findings

Implications for the Beauty Industry

Conclusion

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study seeks to examine the **societal and cultural implications** of the increasing availability of **weight loss medications in the U.S. and Germany**. It aims to explore how these medications could shape perceptions of **beauty, body image, and status** in the coming years.

Our working hypothesis is that increased access to pharmaceutical weight management **will cause a shift** in the aspiration to be skinny. The lack of exclusivity surrounding the beauty aesthetic will make it **less desirable** and **change the body beauty standard** in a new way.



BACKGROUND

What is Ozempic?

An injection that decreases blood sugar and heart risks for diabetes.

Who manufactures it?

Novo Nordisk created Ozempic in 2012 and it was officially approved by the FDA in 2017. Competitors such as Eli Lilly also produce similar products including Mounjaro.

How does it work?

It mimics a hormone called GLP-1 which stimulates insulin production and suppresses the production of glucagon (known to raise blood sugar). The hormone sends signals to the brain to trigger a feeling of fullness.

What is the cost?

- Must be prescribed by a licensed clinician
- Priced at \$936 per pen (4 doses) In the U.S.
- Priced at €90 (around \$100) per pen in Germany

What are the side effects?

- Common: nausea, diarrhea, constipation, fatigue, dizziness, abdominal pain, etc.
- Serious: hypoglycemia, gallstones, pancreatitis, kidney damage. etc.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THIN BODY IDEALS

During the Industrial Revolution, multiple factors emerged which impact the societal engagement with beauty today

- People gain mass access to beauty products and interventions
- “Thinness” becomes the desired standard for body weight due to the rise of sedentary lifestyles
- Companies influence and define beauty ideals in order to profit
- Mass media homogenizes beauty globally

The Diet Industry gained mass popularity in the 1900's

- Women embrace fad diets and medical interventions to lose weight
- Media, advertising, and marketing drives fixation with weight loss
- Scientific research is invested into solutions for weight loss

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our Questions

- How might beauty standards change if weight loss medications become widely affordable and accessible?
- What impact could this have on the role of body weight as a symbol of social and economic status?
- Could the broader availability of these treatments promote inclusivity, or will it reinforce narrow and exclusionary ideals?



How we measured these in interviews...

- Imagine that **there is a pill in the market that can help you lose weight, given that it is of no cost to you...** would you be willing to take it? What hesitations do you have?
- How much **money would you be willing to spend** to conform to this beauty standard?
- What is the **dominant beauty standard** of the culture, community, or society that you live in?
- How much do you feel influenced by **social media, family, or friends** when it comes to body image and health standards? Can you give examples of how this influence shapes your views on using medical interventions like weight-loss drugs?
- How do you feel about using **medical treatments primarily for aesthetic purposes** rather than health reasons? Do you believe this approach will impact future health and beauty standards?
- How much do you care about **conforming to the beauty standards** of your culture or community?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- This exploration seeks to provide valuable insights into the **evolving relationship between body image and societal expectations**, addressing a complex and timely issue in a rapidly changing world.
 - By analyzing these dynamics, this study aims to contribute to the broader conversation about how **medical technologies intersect with cultural values**, helping to **inform public understanding and future policy decisions**.
- Exploring the intersection of **medical advancements, cultural trends, and globalization** in shaping societal norms.
 - Globalization has increasingly **homogenized beauty ideals**, however, cultural differences across the United States and Germany may influence societal attitudes differently.
 - Critical **ethical and social questions** with advancements in weight loss medications offer tools that may democratize access to certain body aesthetics.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

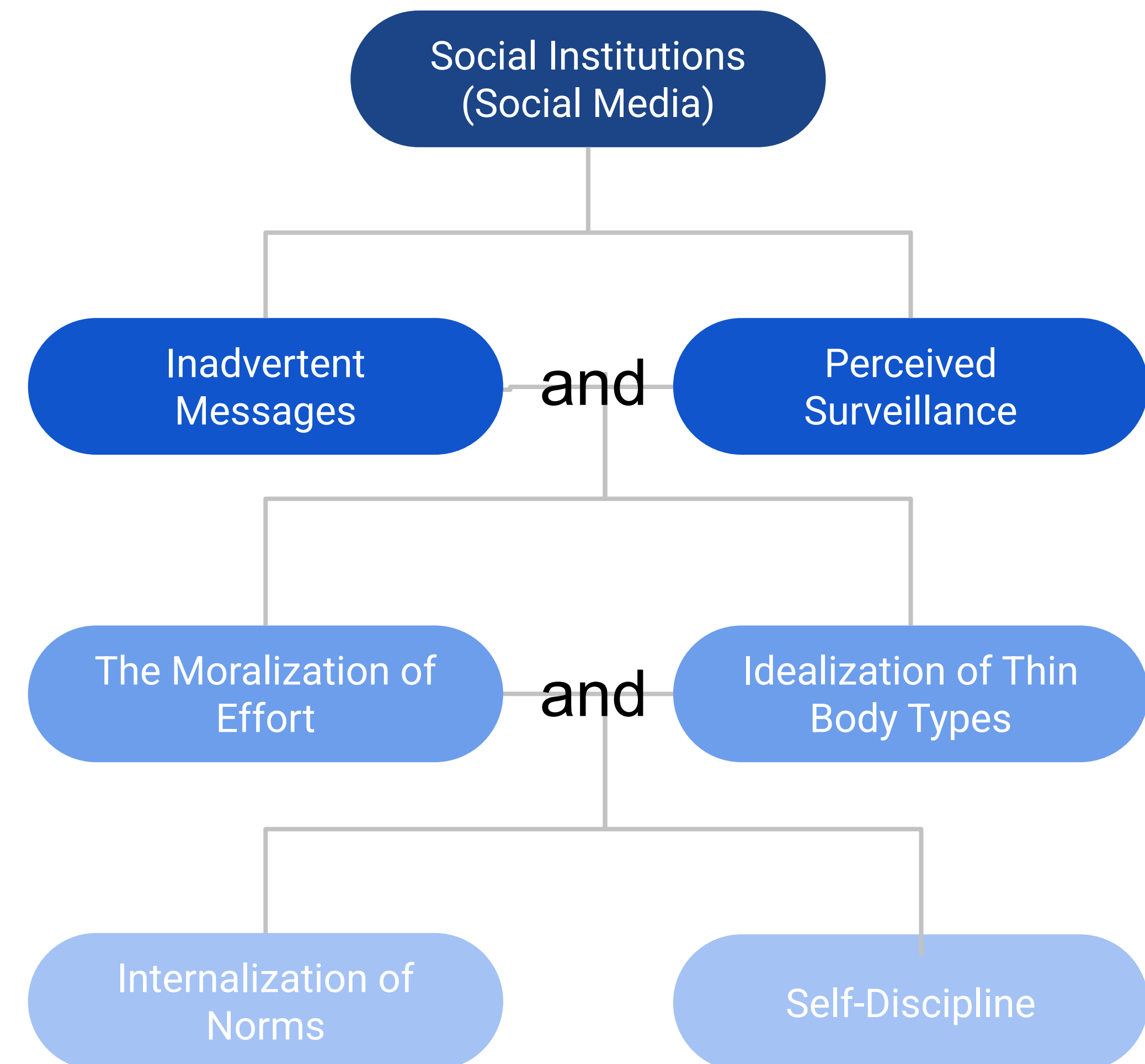
Frameworks to Conceptualize the Internalization and Idealization of Thin Body Types

The Sociocultural Model

- Body image is informed by internalized societal beauty standards
- Three biggest factors in internalization are parents, friends and media
- Media being the most prevalent

Foucault's Disciplinary Power

- Modern societies are regulated through social normalizations
 - People self-regulate based on internalized norms shaped by factors such as inadvertent messages and perceived surveillance
- Ex. Social Media



METHODOLOGY

Interview Overview

Description

- We conducted 24 interviews studying German and US perceptions of Ozempic and other Semaglutide products, along with larger perceptions of beauty and health.

Goal

- Compare these two countries and gain an understanding of how attitudes vary about body and beauty. Questions were open-ended and meant to gather context

Participants

Method

- Each interview was ~40-minute interview on virtual meeting spaces with recorded audio and video, (transcripts are available in the appendix)

Participants

- U.S. & Germany
 - 12 women from each country
 - 6 women 20-39 years-old
 - 6 women 40-60 years-old

Questionnaire

Diversity in Beauty Questionnaire

- Demographic Questions:
1. How old are you?
 2. Where do you live? City, suburb, rural?
- Perceptions of Health:
3. What do you think is healthy? How would you define healthy?
 4. Are you happy with your health and body image?
Please rate on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high).
 5. What influences your views on health? Would you say that media, science, celebrity culture, or other forms of cultural learning influence your perceptions of health significantly?
 6. What changes have you noticed in societal attitudes towards health and body image over time?
 7. How do you perceive yourself on a scale of 1-10?
1 being underweight, 5 being healthy, 10 being overweight
 8. Are you willing to take a shortcut to achieving your ideal body image?
 9. How do you think beauty standards affect health within your country?
 10. To what extent do you believe weight-related health issues are a necessary challenge to address in your community?
 11. In your lifetime, how has the standard of health shifted in terms of what you believe is the ultimate goal of your health habits?
 12. How much money would you be willing to spend in a year to be "healthy", whatever that means to you?
- Perceptions of Beauty Standards
13. What is the dominant beauty standard of the culture, community, or society that you live in?
 14. Why do you believe that this beauty standard has become prevalent?
 15. How much do you care about conforming to the beauty standards of your culture or community?
 16. How much do you feel influenced by social media, family, or friends when it comes to body image and health standards? Can you give examples of how this influence shapes your views on using medical interventions like weight-loss drugs?
 17. In what ways do you feel that your generation's attitudes towards health and beauty differ from those of other generations? Do you see these attitudes changing in the future?
 18. How much money would you be willing to spend to conform to this beauty standard?
- Introduction to drug:
19. Would you consider undergoing procedures to maintain a youthful appearance?
Please rate on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high).
 20. How do you feel about using medical treatments primarily for aesthetic purposes rather than health reasons? Do you believe this approach will impact future health and beauty standards?
 21. Imagine that there is a pill in the market that can help you lose weight, given that it is of no cost to you... would you be willing to take it? What hesitations do you have?
 22. Have you heard about a new drug for people to lose weight? Would you use it? Why or why not?
 23. Do you know women in your generation who you believe would be willing to take a drug for weight loss?
 24. Do you believe it's okay for people to take this medicine solely for weight loss and body image purposes even if it is prescribed by a doctor?
 25. Have you heard of semaglutide? If so, what are your thoughts on it?
 26. What do you think other people might think about you if you were taking this drug?
- Aftermath of the Medicine:
27. Once the drug helps you achieve your body image goal, what would you do next?
Would you continue taking it? Would you take the chance to maintain your diet? Or do you think you would revert back to old eating habits?

FINDINGS: GERMANY

Perspectives on Health and Beauty Standards Among German Women Aged 20-39

- **Health Definition:** Physical fitness, mental well-being, and absence of illness are top priorities.
 - *“Being healthy means feeling strong mentally and physically”* (Q3, DE IDB #10).
- **Beauty Ideal:** Slim, athletic, and well-groomed, driven by media and social media.
 - *“Slim and athletic, but not excessively muscular”* (Q13, DE IDB #8).
- **Social Media Impact:** A major influence on health perceptions, balanced by scientific evidence.
 - *“Social media has a big influence, but I also try to focus on scientific findings”* (Q5, DE IDB #10).
- **Openness to Medication:** Participants were cautiously open to safe, effective weight-loss medications but worried about side effects and societal judgment.
 - *“People might think I’m too lazy to lose weight the ‘right’ way”* (Q26, DE IDB #7).

Perspectives on Health and Beauty Standards Among German Women Aged 40-60

- **Health Definition:** Focus on pain-free living, mental/physical agility, and longevity.
 - *“Health means being pain-free, physically fit, and doing what’s necessary to maintain this”* (Q3, DE IDB #1).
- **Beauty Ideal:** Slim, sporty, and youthful; media reinforces societal expectations.
 - *“Slim and athletic, but not excessively muscular”* (Q13, DE IDB #1).
- **Social Media Impact:** Health decisions primarily influenced by verified research over social media.
 - *“Social media doesn’t influence me much, but I look at what works scientifically”* (Q16, DE IDB #4).
- **Openness to Medication:** Participants aged 40-60 were open to safe, non-invasive weight-loss medications, prioritizing health and natural results, but raised concerns about dependency and sustainability.
 - *“If there was a miracle pill, I’d try it—if it didn’t harm my health”* (Q8, DE IDB #1).

FINDINGS: USA

Perspectives on Health and Beauty Standards Among German Women Aged 20-39

- **Health Definition:** Wholistic balance of physical, mental, and emotion well-being; strong focus on long-term sustainable routines
 - *“Health is putting attention towards how you feel about your body and mind - as opposed to how it looks”* (Q3, USA IDB #10).
- **Beauty Ideal:** Athletic, muscular physique that is influenced heavily by social media
 - *“There is a shift from the ‘anorexia trend’ in the 90s to a more athletic body type”* (Q6, USA IDB #10).
- **Social Media Impact:** Plays a major role in shaping beauty perceptions, offering a diverse range of body types but still contributing to unrealistic beauty expectations
 - *“Watching people on work out on social media influences me, but I do not always have time”* (Q5, USA IDB #12).
- **Openness to Medication:** Participants were open if proven risk-free, with concerns about side effects and societal judgement
 - *“I had some not so great side effects from it and now I am super weary of it”* (Q25, USA IDB #7).

Perspectives on Health and Beauty Standards Among German Women Aged 40-60

- **Health Definition:** Feeling physically well and functional through natural practices
 - *“Health can be eating non-processed foods and using clean products”* (Q4, DE USA #3).
- **Beauty Ideal:** Emphasis on fitness and an athletic physique, but the desire to be slim and youthful remains prevalent
 - *“Now, you are required to exercise to look good”* (Q6, USA IDB #1).
- **Social Media Impact:** Beauty decisions primarily influenced by personal recommendations from friends and family over trends
 - *“I am more prone to be influenced by a skincare suggestion over medicine or drugs”* (Q16, USA IDB #5).
- **Openness to Medication:** Some open to trying for health reasons and others prefer natural methods due to side effect concerns
 - *“If this medication was prescribed by a doctor, there would be a good reason for it”* (Q23, USA IDB #6).

DISCUSSION: GERMANY AND USA

Health Definition

- **Both:** Younger generations view health holistically, emphasizing physical, mental and emotional well-being striving for a long-term changes
- **Both:** Older generations prioritize health in terms of functionality and longevity, focusing on maintaining mobility and managing pain
- **DE:** Lean towards clean eatings, traditional health practices, and natural remedies
- **US:** Influenced by family traditions and tend to emphasize functional health

Beauty Ideals

- **Both:** Emphasized a toned, athletic body over extreme thinness, though youthful appearance remains a dominant ideal
- **DE:** Older generations have a pragmatic view, adopting medical and cosmetic interventions as tools for sustaining health and confidence
- **US:** Older generations have a divided view, some willing to embrace interventions and others prefer traditional/natural beauty practices

Social Media Impact

- **Both:** Younger generations recognize a dual role of social media: reinforcing beauty ideals and promoting diverse representations
- **Both:** Younger generations are critical of media-promoted beauty standards and prefer a holistic and sustainable approach
- **DE:** Older generations are less influenced and tend to follow evidence-based health practices and scientific advancements
- **US:** Older generations focus more on personal relationships and trusted sources like family and friends over social media

Openness to Medication

- **Both:** Older generations express concerns about side effects and ethical implications of using medicine purely for aesthetics
- **DE:** Younger generations express cautious interest and will only try drugs if they are deemed safe and effective
- **US:** Younger generations largely reject weight-loss medications and will prioritize exercise and dieting
- **DE:** Older generations are more accepting of weight-loss medications
- **US:** Older generations are divided on their openness to medications

IMPLICATIONS TO THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY

Recognizing Slimness as an Aspiration

- The beauty industry can market slimness positively, emphasizing health and confidence without reinforcing harmful or exclusionary standards.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Balanced Aspirations Highlight the journey to confidence and health. Frame slimness as part of a holistic lifestyle, connecting with broader goals like vitality, fitness, and self-care.
2. Modernizing Slimness Present slimness alongside strength, athleticism, and body diversity, making ideals more inclusive and relatable.
3. Ethical Framing of Products Position weight-loss tools like Ozempic as enhancers of health and well-being, focusing on transparency and avoiding stigma around diverse body types.
4. Authentic Media Representation Use aspirational yet achievable imagery. Include diverse body shapes to resonate across demographics and counter exclusionary beauty standards.
5. Responsibility in Marketing Acknowledge cultural aspirations for slimness while portraying it as one of many expressions of beauty, inspiring consumers thoughtfully and inclusively.

KEY TAKEAWAYS/CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways

Generational Divides

- **Attitudes:** The younger generations in both the U.S. and Germany preferred holistic and sustainable health approaches. The older generations in both countries, specifically Germany, were more likely to consider a weight-loss medication.
- **Media Influence:** The media both perpetuated conventional beauty standards, although with more inclusivity than before. The older generations were less likely to be influenced by social media, favoring trusted and familiar choices.

Significance

Reshaping Societal Norms

- Advancements in medical technology have the potential to challenge preconceived notions about health and beauty. Weight-loss drugs are not associated with the traditional emphasis of personal effort and discipline placed on thin body types.

Industry Impacts

- The media and societal norms play a huge role in shaping body image. There is the opportunity to influence traditional beauty standards in marketing techniques through the use of inclusivity and promoting holistic takes on health.

Q&A