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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Pink tasks: Feminists and their preferences for premium beauty products

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Abstract

Consumers of different genders often have different consumption habits, especially pertaining to routine, daily practices. Anecdotal evidence, as well as scholarly research, suggests that feminists may experience conflicting pressures surrounding consumption associated with a feminine identity—such as applying make-up, shaving one's legs, keeping fingernails manicured, and styling one's hair. We investigate how consumption experiences surrounding beauty work differ for feminists and nonfeminists. Employing a variety of methods—including online experiments (Studies 1 and 4), secondary data (Study 2), and a behavioral study (Study 3)—we demonstrate that feminists report higher preferences for premium beauty products than nonfeminists. Feminists' preferences stem from associating beauty work with feelings of empowerment or, more specifically, self-determination. We discuss implications for our work and conclude with a call for additional research examining how consumers experience consumption dictated by social standards and expectations rather than individual choice.

KEYWORDS

beauty products, beauty work, empowerment, feminists, gender, premium products, self-determination

First author (a woman):	"Good morning. How are you?"
Second author (a man):	"Fine, I guess. I just woke up and have to teach in 15 minutes. So, I rushed in."
First author (a woman):	"You just woke up? I have been up for 2 hours getting ready to teach this morning."
Second author (a man):	"Woah. I just rolled out of bed and put on pants and a shirt."
Third author (a man):	"Yeah, all I did was wake up and put on a shirt."
First author (a woman):	"That's bull---t."

1 | INTRODUCTION

As illustrated above, some daily activities (such as getting ready for work in the morning) are dictated by standards that differ across gender identities. Indeed, the first author's profane reaction reflects an obvious reminder that she is on the more burdensome end of this disparity. Further, her reaction is fueled by a strong feminist identity. Being a feminist, she finds it ridiculous that she should feel the need to spend hours getting ready in the morning while her male colleagues spend only a small fraction of that time. Yet, she continues to perform these time-consuming and costly behaviors—applying her make-up, shaving her legs, styling her hair, maintaining manicured

fingers and pedicured toes—that are not expected of the men with whom she works.

The first author is not alone in experiencing conflict between her feminist identity and the beauty work of her daily life. Scholarly research suggests that feminists invest just as much time and resources into meeting feminine beauty standards as their non-feminist counterparts (Siegel & Calogero, 2019) but report feeling guilt around their beauty work (Rubin et al., 2004). To address this conflict, feminists may emphasize personal choice (Kelly, 2014) concerning their beauty work. Where these tasks may have once been "political weapon[s] against women's advancement" (Wolf, 1991, p. 10), now they may reflect time, energy, and resources that are self-focused and empowering. Feminists get to determine if, when, and how beauty work plays a role in their everyday lives.

In this research, we examine how women, particularly feminists, respond to cultural standards of beauty. Using a behavioral study, a secondary data set, and two experiments, we find that feminists demonstrate increased preferences for premium beauty products when compared to nonbeauty products (Studies 1 and 2), and when they perceive the make-up industry as perpetuating make-up consumption (Study 3). Finally, we demonstrate that feelings of self-determination related to beauty work mediate the interaction of feminist identity and beauty standards on preferences for premium beauty products (Study 4). We also find that that age plays a role in the focal relationship (Study 4).

We contribute to the literature in three significant ways. First, we add to the limited understanding of how beauty standards impact consumption. Women's beauty practices have been explored by academics studying beauty work (Kwan & Trautner, 2009), appearance management (Aune & Aune, 1994), the prescriptive beauty norm (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020), and body management/work (Gimlin, 2007). Scholars have explored the meaning women associate with these practices (Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008) and the internal benefits they can provide (McCabe et al., 2017). However, research linking these observations to actual consumption is lacking. We engage in a focused investigation of women's experiences of beauty standards and how these impact consumption of beauty products.

Second, we examine these consumption behaviors within women who vary in their degree of feminist identity. Applications of feminist theory exist in the consumer behavior literature (Bristor & Fischer, 1993) and other gender-based identities have been the focus of specific investigation in recent years, such as women who participate in roller derby (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015) and divorced women (Thompson et al., 2018). However, the feminist identity has not been given significant attention. We believe our focus on this identity is timely given the evolving view of feminism between generations and because more women are identifying as feminists today than ever before (Watson, 2020). Our work investigates how an overlooked identity held by millions of women influences their routine consumption practices.

Third, we present evidence of an effect that, from the outside, may appear contrary to feminist values and behaviors—namely, that feminists (in contrast to nonfeminists) report *increased* preferences of premium beauty products. Historically, feminist scholars have opposed beauty standards, conceptualizing them as binds placed on women (Wolf, 1991). However, based on recent research involving feminists, often using samples of young women (e.g., Erchull & Liss, 2013; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994), we surmise that the emphasis on personal choice that characterizes modern feminism has resulted in a new perspective on beauty work. Specifically, our work suggests that generational differences in feminist identity have shifted this perspective. As a result, we observe that yesterday's feminists may have viewed cultural beauty standards as thrust upon nonconsenting women, while today's feminists view adherence to these standards as volitional and empowering. We are the first, to our knowledge, to observe and investigate this phenomenon in a consumption domain.

Before reviewing the relevant literature, we highlight our deliberate terminology choices. We intentionally use the word "gender" as opposed to "sex." While "sex" refers to a biological category (male, female), gender refers to one's identification with socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. This choice allows us to assess consumers according to the gender with which they identify. Additionally, we contrast feminists and non-feminists to simplify our discussion. We would like to point out, however, that in all but one of our studies (Study 2), we assess feminist identity *strength* on a continuum, rather than a dichotomy. Finally, we acknowledge that not all feminists identify as women, but elect to concentrate on women in this research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Feminist identity

As an ideology, feminism reflects "the basic idea that change to the status quo is necessary to address gender equality" (Yeung et al., 2014, p. 475). It has long been a part of feminist thought that conforming to cultural standards of beauty reinforces the patriarchal structure and places "society's ornamental burden" squarely on women (Chapkis, 1986, p. 129). As an identity, feminists are characterized by (a) awareness of the sexist nature of the gender system and (b) endorsing the need for collective action to address these inequalities (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994). Historically, a feminist identity has been associated with identifying as a heterosexual woman, espousing a liberal political orientation centered on a need for reform, as well as certain behavioral characteristics (such as aggressiveness and independence; Berryman-Fink & Verderber, 1985).

Researchers' early understanding of feminism focused on how the revelation of recognizing inequalities within the gender system evolves into a feminist identity and active commitment to addressing those inequalities (Downing & Roush, 1985). Yet, this model has been challenged over the years as the meaning of the "feminist" label shifted and the feminist movement has made progress. Liss and Erchull (2010) revisited the model 25 years after it was originally published to investigate whether it applied to a new generation of

women. Based on their findings, these authors proposed that "It may be more common for women to start in a stage where they feel as though they have infinite opportunities but are unaware of continued gender discrimination" (p. 94). They went on to argue that the Downing and Roush (1985) model reflects different potential *dimensions* of a feminist identity, rather than stages of development.

As evidenced above, feminism changes as the gender system itself changes. Research from the 1990s demonstrates that espousing a feminist identity was associated with the agreement with feminist issues (Cowan et al., 1992) and positive views of the feminist movement (Cowan et al., 1992; Williams & Wittig, 1997). Years later, Liss and Erchull (2010) found that gender collectivity, having personally experienced sexism, and decreased support of the gender system were all associated with holding a feminist identity. Conceptualizations of what it means to label oneself a feminist continue to shift as support for feminist ideals grows and disassociates from feminist self-labeling. In other words, women may espouse attitudes consistent with feminist ideals while simultaneously reject the label (Burn et al., 2000; Williams & Wittig, 1997). These changes in the conceptualization of the feminist identity likely correspond to differences in generational views of feminism. In other words, individuals' perspectives of feminism likely differ across generations.

Indeed, research acknowledges that older and younger women may view feminism differently. For instance, Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) observed that positive attitudes toward feminism had different correlates depending on a woman's age. For young adults (aged 18–26), positive attitudes toward feminism were predicted by identifying as a woman. However, for these participants' older relatives (aged 50–87), positive attitudes toward feminism were associated with low levels of religious endorsement. One thing that women young (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018) and old (Clarke & Griffin, 2008) experience is cultural standards that demand routine beauty work, which is our next focus of discussion.

2.2 | Internalized standards of beauty

Through a combination of forces—including evolution and its implications for optimal mate selection (Trivers, 1972), sociohistorical trends associating women with the private sphere (Martin, 2001), and marketing designed to perpetuate and reinforce expectations related to femininity (Wolf, 1991)—beauty standards have come to be placed on women. Yet, the relationships between internalized beauty standards, the beauty work they demand, and downstream consequences may be different for feminists and nonfeminists (e.g., Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). Feminists themselves seem to be conflicted about their feelings of beauty standards and resulting beauty work—reporting feelings of guilt and confusion while grappling with the conflict between their feminist values and their beauty practices (Erchull & Liss, 2013; Rubin et al., 2004; White, 2018). Notably, however, feminists do not invest less than nonfeminists in their beauty work (Siegel & Calogero, 2019).

A key tenet of today's feminist thought may help reconcile this conflict. This tenet is the belief that an individual gets to define her feminist identity for herself and, as such, determines which of her daily activities constitute activism (Erchull & Liss, 2013; Liss & Erchull, 2010; McRobbie, 2004). Kelly (2015) observes that those who self-labeled ("public feminists") were more likely to report that feminism influences their everyday behaviors, while those who espoused feminist values but did not self-label ("postfeminists") were more likely to emphasize an individualistic, "I do what I want" mentality. This individualistic mentality highlights a focus on choice which, we propose, feminists extend to their beauty work.

This is consistent with research demonstrating different ways beauty work can be positioned in the minds of those performing it. Stuart and Donaghue (2011) observe that women who engage in beauty work associate it with competition with other women, find it comforting and enjoyable, and report that it has significant implications for their self-esteem. Smith et al. (2021) demonstrate that framing beauty work as an act of self-expression, rather than self-enhancement, is more palatable to consumers. The notion of choice is critical.

Feminists may once have seen beauty work as oppressive. However, if it can be framed as a chosen activity, beauty work could become a pleasurable, even empowering, practice. Indeed, one defining factor of whether a task feels empowering is self-determination, which "reflects autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes (Spreitzer, 1995, p. 1443)." We suggest that the previously described conflict between feminist values and beauty practices and, by extension, the products associated with them, may be reconciled when feminists view their beauty practices as empowering.

2.3 | Preferences for premium products

The luxury and hedonic consumption literatures provide insight into how consumers may purchase products associated with consumption practices they find empowering. Generally, product valuations reflect consumers' motivations (e.g., Rucker & Galinsky, 2008), interest (Grewal et al., 2019), and ability to choose different options. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for products they associate with positive emotions (Rauschendorfer et al., 2022). In the context of luxury goods, intrinsic motivations predict pleasureful feelings associated with a purchase (Truong & McColl, 2011). Luxury goods can be purchased as self-gifts (Dubois & Laurent, 1996). In the context of hedonic consumption, deriving positive emotions during a consumption experience increases the willingness to pay for that experience (Sukhu & Bilgihan, 2021) or service (Izogo et al., 2021). Consumers who feel that their self-determined needs—including the need for personal autonomy—are fulfilled exhibit more, rather than less, willingness to pay a premium (Gilal et al., 2018). Taken together, these observations suggest that feminists who have come to associate their beauty work practices with empowerment and self-determination will demonstrate an increased preference for premium beauty products compared to nonfeminists.

2.4 | Hypotheses

We predict that feminist identity and beauty standards will interact to produce different preferences for premium beauty products. Specifically, we predict that, while both feminists and nonfeminists will regularly purchase and use beauty products, there will be significant differences in their preferences regarding these products. We propose that nonfeminists' passive adherence to beauty standards will be unlikely to result in strong preferences for premium products. However, beauty work may take on a deliberate, intentional meaning for feminists. We predict that, for feminists, strong (versus weak) beauty standards will be associated with increased preferences for premium beauty products. This is because feminists may be particularly motivated to frame their adherence to beauty standards as self-determined. In turn, associating beauty work with self-determination will result in strong preferences for premium products. A visual representation of our conceptual model is presented in Figure 1. Our theorizing leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Beauty standards and feminist identity will interact to predict preferences for premium beauty products such that the consumers with the strongest preferences for premium beauty products will be those with strong feminist identities when beauty standards are salient.

H2: The interactive relationship of beauty standards and feminist identity will be mediated by feelings of self-determination, such that those with strong feminist identities and salient beauty standards will associate their beauty work with self-determination, which will, in turn, predict increased preferences for premium beauty products.

2.5 | Data summary

In what follows, we provide support for our hypotheses using a variety of methodologies. In Studies 1, 2, and 3, we use an experiment, secondary data, and a lab study to test the interaction of beauty standards and feminist identity on preferences for premium beauty products (H1). In Study 4, we measure self-determination associated with make-up to test its mediating role in the focal relationship (H2).

3 | STUDY 1

In Study 1, we test H1 by investigating how the interaction of beauty standards and feminist identity impacts the number of premium beauty products participants choose for a hypothetical subscription box. We prime beauty standards by exposing participants to a list of common beauty work, or nonbeauty work, tasks. This primes the constellation of beauty work tasks prescribed to women, even if the individual participant does not do all of the activities, in much the same way that Jost and Kay (2005) see effects of a gender stereotype prime even for participants who do not endorse the stereotype. We compare choices of beauty products and nonbeauty products labeled as "premium" and "discount." This comparison is useful because it considers common products that consumers may feel expected to use but that vary in their association with beauty work.

3.1 | Method and procedure

We recruited 239 women (M_{age} = 43.1, SD = 16.96) from Prolific Academic, paid them a small monetary gift, and randomly assigned them to a 2 (beauty standards prime: beauty vs. nonbeauty) × continuous (feminist identity) between-subjects experiment. To prime beauty standards, we presented participants with a list of 17 beauty practices (beauty prime condition, e.g., body hair removal, contouring make-up techniques) or 17 nonbeauty practices (nonbeauty prime condition, e.g., use mouthwash, shower/bathe; see Supporting Information for complete lists). We instructed participants to check a box beside each practice that they completed regularly. We controlled for the number of tasks that participants indicated they regularly performed in the checklist manipulation ("task quantity") as we anticipated it would be predictive of the number of products chosen in the subsequent task.

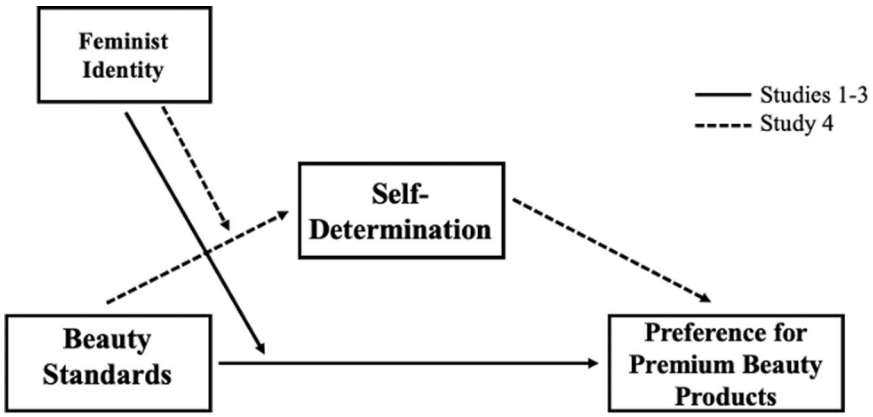

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

After the prime, we asked participants to select products for a hypothetical "personal care" subscription box. We presented them a list of 16 products: 8 beauty products (e.g., "Green Tea and Aloe Shaving Cream" and "Pallet of 4 Cruelty-Free Eye Shadow—Neutral Colors") and eight nonbeauty products (e.g., "Alcohol and Fluoride-Free Peppermint Mouthwash" and "Green Tea and Aloe Body Wash"). Importantly, within each of these two categories, we described four products as "premium" and four as "discount." We instructed participants to select as many products as they would like (ranging from 0 to 16) and used the number of premium beauty products participants chose (ranging from 0 to 4) as the dependent variable. See Supporting Information for a list of all products.

After the choice task, we measured feminist identity using four items adapted from Doosje et al. (1995): "I identify with feminists," "I have strong ties with feminists," "Feminists are an important part of my self-image," and "Being a feminist is important to me" (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*) and a single item adapted from Burn and colleagues (2000), "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" with anchors 1 = *I do NOT identify as a feminist*, 7 = *I very strongly identify as a feminist* ($\alpha = 0.96$). Finally, we asked participants to report demographic information and debriefed them.

3.2 | Results

We ran an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression[1] to test the interaction of beauty standards prime condition and feminist identity on the number of premium beauty products chosen, controlling for task quantity. Specifically, we regressed the number of premium beauty products chosen on (i) the task quantity covariate, (ii) feminist identity, (iii) a dummy coded variable to indicate the condition (*beauty* = 1, *nonbeauty* = 0), and (iv) the interaction term of condition × feminist identity.[2] We found a significant effect of task quantity ($b = 0.15$, SE = 0.02, $F(1, 234) = 38.48$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.14$). More importantly, we found support for our predicted interaction ($b = 0.25$, SE = 0.10, $F(1, 234) = 6.32$, $p = 0.013$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.03$). No other predictors were significant (p's > 0.095). Our focal interaction was not predictive of the number of premium nonbeauty products ($p = 0.917$), or the total number of nonbeauty products ($p = 0.765$) chosen.

To further examine the interaction, we regressed the number of premium beauty products chosen on feminist identity within the two conditions separately. In the non-beauty prime condition, feminist identity was not a significant predictor of the number of premium beauty products chosen ($b = -0.07$, SE = 0.08, $F(1, 114) = 0.86$, $p = 0.355$). However, in the beauty prime condition, feminist identity was a significant positive predictor of the number of premium beauty products chosen ($b = 0.16$, SE = 0.06, $F(1, 119) = 6.48$, $p = 0.012$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.05$). Finally, we conducted a floodlight analysis, generating a Johnson–Neyman region, which suggests that, for feminist identities at or above 4.42, beauty prime condition was positively related to the number of premium beauty products chosen (see Figure 2).

3.3 | Study 1 discussion

In Study 1, we observed our predicted pattern of beauty standards interacting with feminist identity to determine consumers' preference for premium beauty products. Specifically, strong feminists primed with beauty standards chose the largest number of premium beauty products, which provides initial support for H1. The dependent variable in Study 1 was a hypothetical choice task. To increase the external validity of our findings, in the next two studies, we used more consequential measures of product preferences than those used in Study 1.

4 | STUDY 2

In Study 2, we use data gleaned from the posts of social media influencers to provide additional support for H1. Influencers are professional marketers who earn money promoting products to their target market of followers (Hutchinson, 2019). Influencers can affect their followers' consumption through the products they promote, which is informed by their knowledge of their followers' purchase preferences (de Veirman et al., 2017). Given that successful influencers must have a deep understanding of their followers' interests, we expected to find evidence of our focal interaction in the products these influencers promote. We use the prices of the products promoted by the influencers as a proxy measure for the product preferences within their followers. As in Study 1, we compare beauty and nonbeauty products. We anticipate that feminist influencers promote more expensive beauty products (compared to nonbeauty products) than nonfeminist influencers.

4.1 | Data

We used published lists of popular influencers from 2019 from an Internet search of "top beauty influencers in 2019" and, separately, "top *feminist* beauty influencers in 2019" (see Supporting Information for more details). After accounting for influencers who were included on multiple lists, we identified 55 nonfeminist influencers and 69 feminist influencers. Of these, 25 (17 feminists) did not have any posts with products tagged during the data period, two profiles (both feminists) were set to private, which did not allow us to see their posts, and five (four feminists) were not cataloged because their posts were not written in English. This left us with a final sample of 92 influencers (46 feminists and 46 nonfeminists). Using these influencers' Instagram pages, we cataloged a month's (November

[1]Because our dependent variable has only five levels, we also ran the analysis using an ordered logit regression. Our results do not change in direction or significance using this model.

[2]In Studies 1 through 3, we contrast-coded all manipulated predictors and mean-centered all continuous ones. For ease of interpretation, we present raw scores in accompanying figures.

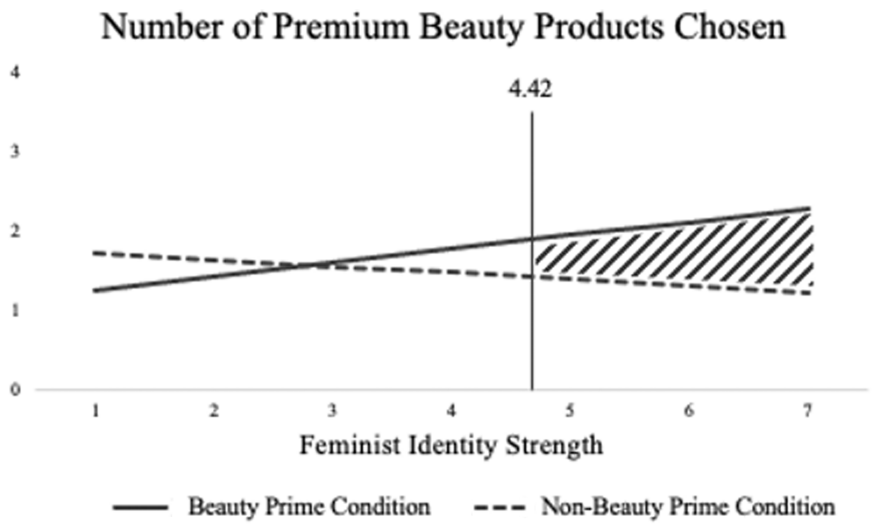

FIGURE 2 Interaction of beauty prime and feminist identity on premium beauty products chosen.

2019, months before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the United States) worth of tagged products. After assembling a list of the products, we recorded the price for each product and grouped them into categories that represented beauty versus nonbeauty products.

The average number of followers for the nonfeminist influencers (M = 8,377,365, SD = 27,715,747) was not significantly different from the average number of followers for the feminist influencers (M = 3,401,481, SD = 14,100,348; p = 0.281). Likewise, the average number of posts during the study period from the nonfeminist influencers (M = 9.89, SD = 8.61) was not significantly different from the average number of posts from the feminist influencers (M = 7.76, SD = 12.47; p = 0.343). However, the nonfeminist influencers tagged significantly more products during the study period (M = 40.83, SD = 50.81) than the feminist influencers (M = 14.96, SD = 30.57; F (1, 90) = 8.75, p = 0.004, η^2_{partial} = 0.09). For each of the cataloged posts, we recorded if the post was designated as an advertisement or sponsored post (e.g., the inclusion of "#ad" or "#sp" in the caption, the post being listed as sponsored in the description, or if it included a coupon code), if the brand that was tagged belonged to the influencer, whether the price was located on Amazon as opposed to another source (we believed this factor could influence the price of the product), and the number of followers for each influencer. Thus, we estimated the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Promoted product price} = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \textit{feministidentity} \\ & (-1 = \textit{nonfeminist}, 1 = \textit{feminist}) \\ & + \beta_2 \textit{Product}\,(-1 = \textit{nonbeauty}, 1 = \textit{beauty}) + \beta_3 \textit{Feminist} \\ & \times \textit{Product} \\ & + \beta_4 \textit{Promoted product labeled an advertisement} \\ & (0 = \textit{not labeled ad}, 1 = \textit{labeled ad}) \\ & + \beta_5 \textit{Number of followers of influencer} + \beta_6 \textit{Price origin} \\ & (0 = \textit{another retailer}, 1 = \textit{Amazon}) \\ & + \beta 7 \textit{Promoted product is influencer} \\ & \textit{'s brand}\,(0 = \textit{not influencer} \\ & \textit{'s brand}, 1 = \textit{influencer's brand}) + \varepsilon \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

4.2 | Analysis and results

We used an OLS regression to estimate the results of the model because the dependent variable (promoted product price) was continuous. We standardized the variables in the model to remove extremely small coefficients and used robust standard errors (Huber–White sandwich estimators) to correct for any heteroscedasticity in the residuals in every model reported. The variance inflation factor in the model was well below the threshold of 10 recommended by Neter et al. (1990), suggesting that multicollinearity was not an issue. However, out of an abundance of caution, we report the analyses in three steps, covariates only (Model 1), followed by main effects (Model 2), and the full hypothesized model (Model 3). We suggest that Model 3 is superior due to a higher adjusted R^2 and log-likelihood as well as a lower Akaike information criterion and Bayesian information criterion.

We observed a significant interaction between product and feminist identity (β = 0.16, p < 0.010; see Figure 3). Specifically, feminist influencers promoted significantly more expensive beauty products than nonfeminist influencers [t (1,878) = 11.97, p < 0.001], but feminist influencers and nonfeminist influencers promoted similarly priced nonbeauty products [t (1,878) = −0.28, p = 0.99].

To provide additional support for this observation, we conducted two robustness tests. First, we estimated the model when we removed product price outliers (>3 standard deviations, products above $946) to account for very expensive products that may have had an oversized impact on valuations (Model 4). Second, to account for the fact that influencers who identified as feminists was nonrandom, we applied a propensity score matching (PSM) approach. Specifically, we implemented a static-one-to-one matching without replacement to pair feminist influencers with nonfeminist influencers under a caliper of 0.2. We calculated the propensity scores using a probit regression model where the dependent variable was the indicator of

feminist identity (*nonfeminist influencer* = −1, *feminist influencer* = 1) and the covariates were the observed variables in the model. Thus, using this restricted sample, we tested the model with observations of product recommendations that were most similar to one another in the nonfeminist and feminist samples. In other words, this method attempted to create two groups that were similar except in their treatment (feminist vs. nonfeminist) to mimic the random assignment of an experiment (Model 5; see Table 1).

FIGURE 3 Interaction of product type and feminist identity on promoted product price.

4.3 | Study 2 discussion

The results of Study 2 provide additional support of H1. Specifically, we observed that feminist influencers promoted higher-priced beauty products than their nonfeminist counterparts. In the following study, we examine preferences for premium beauty products in the collections of make-up products consumers already owned.

5 | STUDY 3

In Study 3, we sought to observe additional support for H1. Study 3 differs from the previous studies in two meaningful ways. First, we measure participants' perceived strength of beauty standards as they apply to the marketplace. Specifically, we measure the degree to which consumers have internalized beauty standards related to make-up as they are perpetuated and reinforced by the make-up industry. By measuring the construct in this way, we examine the perceived role marketing has played in societal beauty standards applied to women. As such, this allows us to enhance the marketing implications of our work. Second, we investigate the products consumers already own, instead of hypothetical choices or promoted products. We seek to determine whether the make-up products owned by participants reflect the interaction between their perceived beauty standards and their feminist identities.

TABLE 1 Estimated results (Study 2).

Table 1—estimated results	Model 1 Covariates	Model 2 Main effects	Model 3 Full model	Model 4 >3 SD outliers removed	Model 5 Analysis
Constant	−0.021	0.121	0.168*	−0.042	0.300**
Main effects					
Beauty product		−0.011	−0.026	−0.004	0.021
Feminist identity		0.193***	0.082	0.070**	0.102
Interaction					
Product × feminist			0.160*	0.117***	0.170*
Covariates					
Labeled ad	−0.110**	−0.082*	−0.115**	−0.016	−0.083
Number of followers	0.167	0.179	0.173*	0.027	0.479*
Price on Amazon	−0.316***	−0.296***	−0.278***	−0.142***	−0.369***
Influencers brand	0.604***	0.406***	0.397***	0.408***	0.056
N	1884	1884	1884	1843	395
Adjusted R^2	0.101	0.121	0.129	0.302	0.162
LL	−2571	−2548	−2539	−892	−657
AIC	5151	5110	5094	1800	1330
BIC	5179	5148	5138	1844	1362

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

5.1 | Method and procedure

We recruited 57 women (M_{age} = 24.83, SD = 10.80) including students, faculty, and staff from a large Northwestern university to participate in the study for $5. In a survey before the laboratory session, we asked participants to complete a single-item measure of feminist identity adapted from prior research (Burn et al., 2000): "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" with anchors 1 = *I do NOT identify as a feminist* and 7 = *I very strongly identify as a feminist*.

Next, participants brought their make-up bags containing the products they used on an average day into the lab. We designated three spaces on the table in front of the participant to sort their products: premium products ("These are products that you wanted to be the best. You wanted something high quality and not second best"), nonpremium products ("These are products that you thought would be good enough. You didn't want a perfect product, you just wanted something that would be sufficient"), and miscellaneous products (e.g., products they may have gotten as a gift; see Supporting Information for the full text accompanying these spaces). A research assistant instructed participants to sort their make-up products using the three categories.

After participants finished sorting, the research assistant recorded the number of products placed in each category. As a comprehension check, the survey instructed participants to report the valuations they placed on the products in the premium and nonpremium categories separately using the following item: "The amount of money I spent on these products is … 1 = *Not very much*, 7 = *A lot*." Then, the survey asked participants to report how much they view the cosmetics industry as perpetuating societal beauty standards (called *perceived beauty standards* below) using the following three items: "I feel that my consumption behavior is beholden to this industry," "I feel coerced into purchasing products from this industry," and "This industry has me tied down as a consumer" (α = 0.82). This measure serves as the independent variable in this study and represents participant's perceptions of how the make-up industry reinforces beauty standards. Finally, the research assistant debriefed and paid participants.

5.2 | Analysis and results

5.2.1 | Products per category

The total number of products participants brought to the lab ranged from 2 to 49 with an average of 12.50 (SD = 10.60) products. Importantly, the results of the comprehension check suggested that the subjective monetary value of products placed in the premium category (M = 4.59, SD = 1.39) was higher than the scale midpoint of 4.0 [t (53) = 3.12, p = 0.003]. The amount of value placed in products categorized as nonpremium (M = 2.67, SD = 1.35) was significantly lower than the scale midpoint [t (54) = −7.30, p < 0.001]. The average number of products classified in the miscellaneous category was 3.25 (SD = 5.54) with a range of zero to 29 products.

5.2.2 | Number of high-value products

We ran an OLS regression to test the interaction of perceived beauty standards and feminist identity on the number of premium make-up products owned. Specifically, we regressed the number of premium make-up products on (i) perceived beauty standards, (ii) feminist identity, (iii) and the interaction term of perceived beauty standards × feminist identity. This analysis revealed a marginally significant effect of the interaction term (b = 0.36, SE = 0.20, F (1, 52) = 3.17, p = 0.081; $\eta^2_{partial}$ = 0.06). No other predictors were significant (p's > 0.140). Importantly, this interaction was not a significant predictor of the number of nonpremium products a participant owned (p = 0.604).

A floodlight analysis produced a Johnson–Neyman point of 5.74, which suggested that, for participants reporting feminist identities at or above 5.74, perceived beauty standards was positively related to the number of premium make-up products they already owned (see Figure 4).

5.3 | Study 3 discussion

Study 3 demonstrates further evidence in support of H1. Specifically, when they felt the make-up industry fuels beauty standards, feminists owned more high-value make-up products than nonfeminists. Thus, our first three studies provide evidence supporting our prediction that feminists display stronger preferences for premium beauty products than nonfeminists. In our final study, we test H2, which proposes that this effect occurs through feelings of self-determination that feminists attach to beauty work.

6 | STUDY 4

In Study 4, we sought to test H2, which suggests that self-determination mediates the relationship between beauty standards and feminist identity on preferences for premium beauty products. We focus again on make-up within this study and explore how consumers evaluate a bundle of make-up products that is described as either "discount" or "luxury." We test how these evaluations are influenced by the consumers' feminist identity and self-determination regarding make-up practices.

6.1 | Method and procedures

We recruited 264 women from Prolific Academic and paid them a small monetary gift for their participation. Seventeen participants who began the study reported that they did not own or use a single make-up product and were screened out of the study. This left us with a sample of 247 women (M_{age} = 40.08, SD = 14.02).

To begin, we showed participants a picture of a bundle of 25 make-up products along with a list of the products it contained. We told half of the participants that the bundle contained "discount"

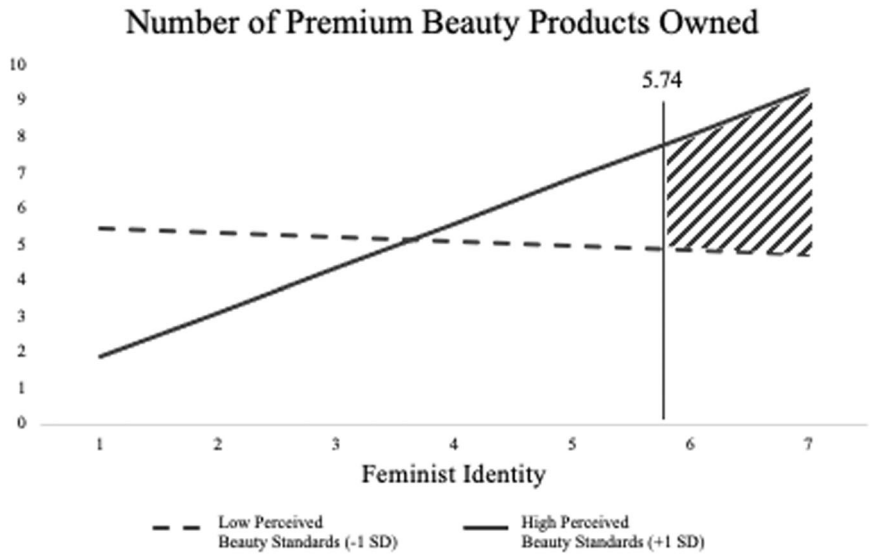

FIGURE 4 Interaction of perceived beauty standards and feminist identity on premium beauty products owned.

make-up (Discount condition), while we told the other half that the bundle contained "luxury" make-up (Premium condition). After viewing the picture, we asked participants to evaluate the bundle using the following four items: "This (discount/luxury) make-up bundle is desirable to me," "This (discount/luxury) make-up bundle is something I would enjoy owning," "I would like to have this (discount/luxury) make-up bundle," and "This (discount/luxury) make-up bundle is something I would like to have" ($\alpha = 0.99$).

Next, we asked participants to report the degree of self-determination they associate with make-up, using the following items adapted from Spreitzer (1995): "I have significant choice in determining how and when I do make-up tasks," "I can decide on my own how and when to go about doing make-up tasks," and "I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how and when I do make-up tasks" ($\alpha = 0.87$). Finally, we asked participants to report the strength of their feminist identities using the five items from Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.98$) and demographic information.

6.2 | Results

We ran an OLS regression to test the interaction of condition and feminist identity on make-up bundle evaluations and self-determination. Specifically, we regressed the evaluation/self-determination score on (i) condition (1 = *Premium*, 0 = *Discount*), (ii) feminist identity, and (iii) the interaction term of condition × feminist identity. We observed that none of the three predictors were significantly related to product evaluations (all *p*'s > 0.232) or self-determination (all *p*'s > 0.508).

6.2.1 | Moderating role of age

Previous work suggests that feminism has changed over time (Malinowska, 2020). Indeed, as we have reported, young feminists may be particularly concerned with individual choice and empowerment (Erchull & Liss, 2013; Kelly, 2015). Thus, we ran follow-up analyses to better understand the unexpected null results reported above. In the spirit of Bem's (2003) call for data exploration, we included participants' age as an additional moderating variable in regression analyses predicting self-determination.

We regressed self-determination on (i) condition (1 = *Premium*, 0 = *Discount*), (ii) feminist identity, (iii) age, (iv) condition × feminist, (v) condition × age, (vi) feminist × age, and (vii) condition × feminist × age. In this model, we observed four significant predictors: condition [$b = -1.75$, SE = 0.78, F (1, 239) = 5.00, $p = 0.026$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.02$], the condition × feminist interaction term [$b = 1.75$, SE = 0.16, F (1, 239) = 4.64, $p = 0.032$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.02$], the condition × age interaction term [$b = 0.04$, SE = 0.02, F (1, 239) = 5.88, $p = 0.016$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.02$], and the condition × feminist × age interaction term [$b = -0.01$, SE = 0.00, F (1, 239) = 4.46, $p = 0.036$; $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.02$]. None of the other predictors were significant (all *p*'s > 0.185) (see Figure 5).

An exploration of the conditional effects provides a deeper understanding of this interaction. At low ages, feminism was not a significant predictor of self-determination in the discount condition ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.669$), but it was a significant predictor in the premium condition ($b = 0.11$, $p = 0.027$). However, in this sample, at high ages, feminism was not a significant predictor of self-determination in the discount ($b = 0.08$, $p = 0.136$) or the premium ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.732$) conditions.

6.2.2 | Mediation

Given that we observed our predicted relationships when including age as an additional moderator, we proceeded to test our proposed mediation model. Specifically, using Model 13 of the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro, we tested for the interactive effe of condition, feminism, and age on self-determination and subsequent product valuation. This analysis revealed a significant index of mediated moderation: −0.003, SE = 0.002, 94.5% confidence interval [−0.0079, −0.0001] (see Figure 6). Specifically, for younger consumers with

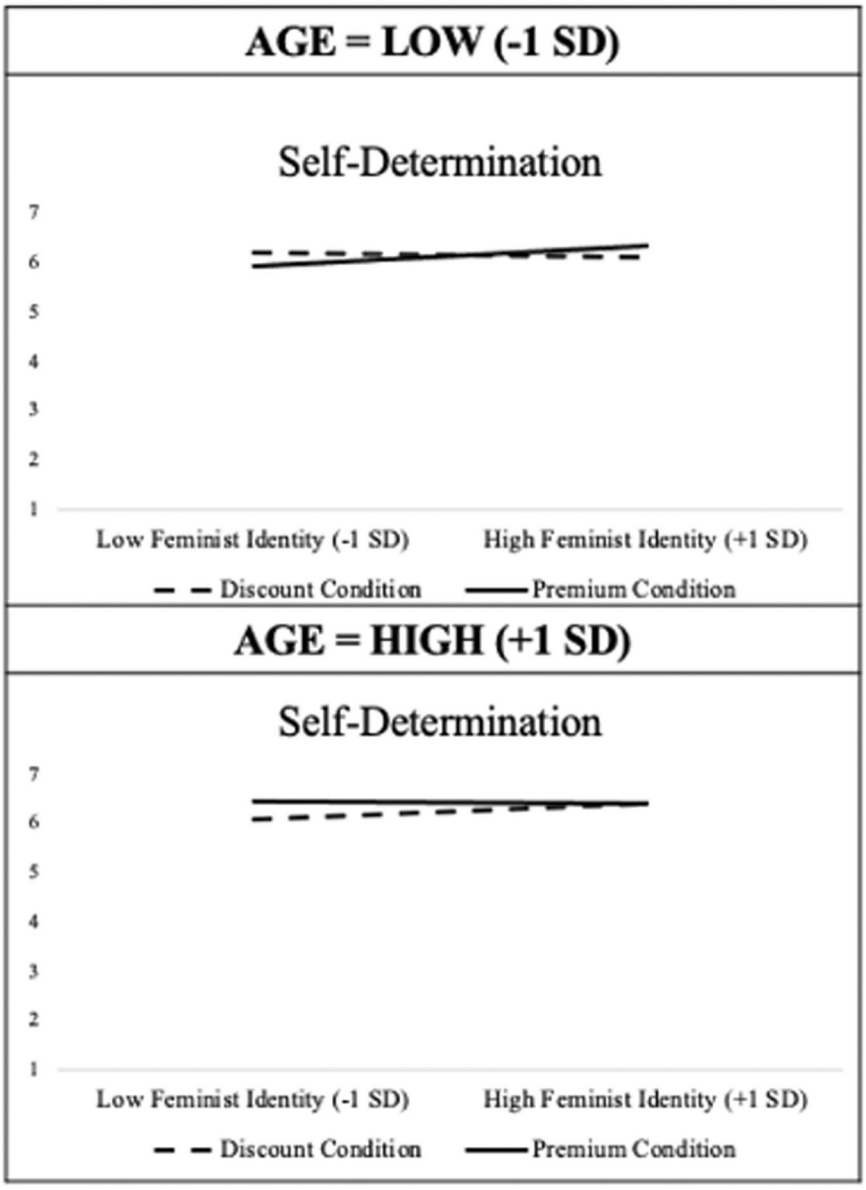

FIGURE 5 Interaction of condition, age, and feminist identity on self-determination.

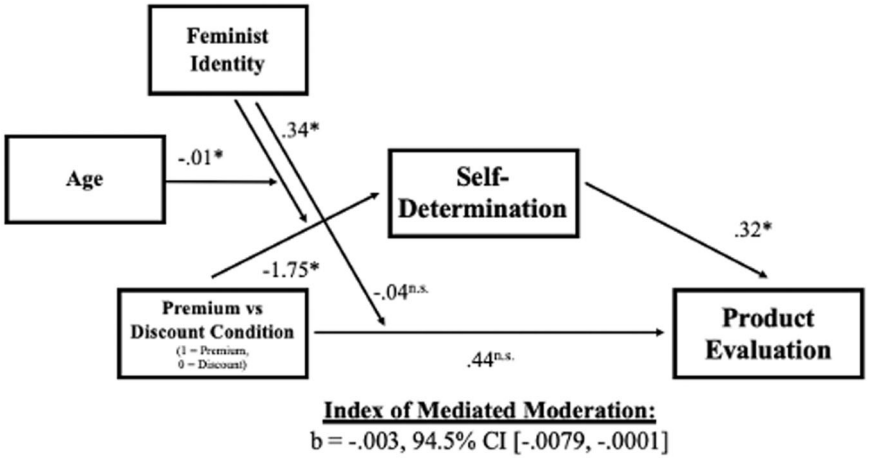

FIGURE 6 Mediation model.

strong feminist identities, self-determination was higher in the condition where they saw the premium, rather than the discount, make-up bundle. As self-determination increased, preferences for the make-up bundle increased.

6.3 | Discussion

The results of Study 4 lent partial support for our proposed mechanism and for H2. Specifically, make-up-related self-determination mediated the relationship between the interaction of feminist identity, age, and premium level of the product bundle and evaluations of the bundle itself. This observation may shed light on the effects we observed within the influencers from Study 2, as social media is used more by younger, rather than older, consumers (Pew Research Center, 2021).

7 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Recent anecdotal evidence and scholarly research suggest that feminism emphasizes personal choice and that this emphasis has bled into feminists' beauty work (e.g., White, 2018). In the current research, we investigate how beauty product consumption differs for feminists and nonfeminists. Employing a variety of methods—including online experiments (Studies 1 and 4), secondary data (Study 2), and a behavioral study (Study 3)—we demonstrate that feminists report stronger preferences for premium beauty products than nonfeminists. We provide evidence that feminists find these practices empowering—specifically, they associate them with feelings of self-determination—as a mechanism for the main effect. See Figure 7 for an overview of our theorizing.

7.1 | Contributions and future directions

This research offers several contributions to the literature. First, we investigate how beauty standards impact the consumption of premium beauty products. We demonstrate that, when beauty standards are salient (Study 1), feminists chose more premium beauty products for a hypothetical subscription box than nonfeminists. We also show that women differ in the degree to which they perceive beauty standards as being perpetuated by the marketplace, and that feminists who endorse this belief strongly own more premium products than those—feminists and nonfeminists alike—who do not endorse it as strongly (Study 3). This finding suggests that

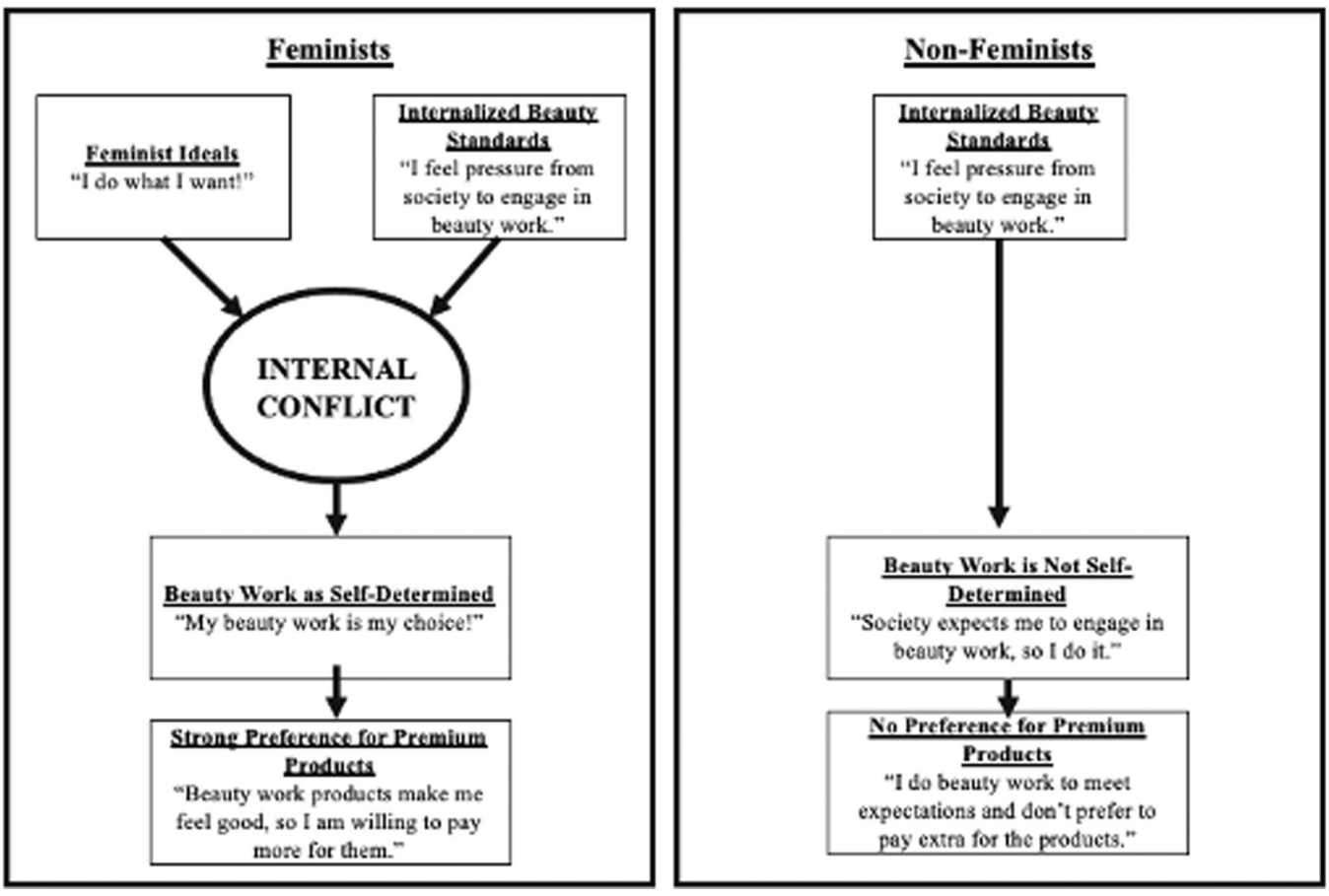

FIGURE 7 Logic of the observed effects.

beliefs about the nature of the industry as a whole impact consumption within that industry, which we discuss below.

Second, by focusing on feminists, our work sheds light on a population of consumers that are often overlooked by marketing scholars. By providing a rich understanding of a group—which one nationwide survey suggests continues to grow (Watson, 2020)—we provide valuable theoretical insight into how this particular identity interacts with social norms that do not seem to align with it. In other words, feminist women's coopting of beauty work through self-determination helps reconcile seemingly contradictory forces.

Third, in drawing attention to this overlooked but growing and theoretically interesting population of consumers, we also found there are differences within this group as a function of age. Our observations concerning consumer age in Study 4 uncovered interesting differences between younger and older feminist women. Moschis (2012) has argued that older consumers have been overlooked in the consumer behavior literature. We hope our findings can serve as a potentially fruitful area of additional inquiry.

Finally, our work elevates the routine, often daily, consumption practices of women to a place of deliberate study and attention. While such consumption may be some of the most common and predictable of a woman's life, researchers have not directed much attention to understanding these consumption experiences. We find that some women, namely feminists, find significant autonomy in these consumption practices. Future research could examine the different manners in which such practices play meaningful roles in the lives of the women who engage in them. For instance, perhaps feminist women see purchasing premium beauty products as a means to elevate an industry that is fueled by, and largely associated with, women.[3] If this is the case, do feminists display preferences of premium products in other women-dominated industries that are not associated with beauty, such as those related to nursing children or menstruation? Pinna's (2020) work demonstrating that women are more likely than men to purchase "ethical products" suggests that this may be the case.

7.2 | Implications

Our work offers several implications both for society and for marketers. By shedding light on consumers who have largely been overlooked by consumer researchers, our work offers implications for the positioning of the beauty industry and gendered products. Feminist scholars have accused the beauty industry of being a tool of the patriarchy used against women (Wolf, 1991). We demonstrate that women vary in the belief that their beauty-related consumption is perpetuated by the marketplace (Study 3). Importantly, we find that this belief has downstream consumption consequences. Firms, then, should consider the perceptions consumers have of the nature of their industry as a whole and not just their brand and product offerings. While coercive messaging—such as Veet's "Don't Risk Dudeness" campaign[4] for shaving products—may be a tactic, less coercive approaches may be more palatable to women and produce less reactance (Åkestam et al., 2017). Indeed, recent campaigns using a softer approach, such as Dove's Real Beauty (Griffin, 2021) and Always' "#LikeAGirl" (Burton, 2023), have been well received. Research has demonstrated that beauty brands can utilize technology, including framing artificial intelligence as a friend, to improve outcomes, including body image and self-esteem concern, for Gen Z women (Ameen et al., 2022).

Our work also has implications for the positioning of beauty products for different segments of the market. Specifically, our findings suggest that associating premium beauty products with empowerment and self-determination may make them especially appealing to feminists. Marketers might consider including in their offerings nonpremium options that are positioned for women who want to "check the box" and move on. It seems that products touted as easy to use and efficient may be particularly appealing to this segment of nonfeminist women. Additionally, brands may benefit from understanding the age of their consumers, as our results have demonstrated that younger and older feminist consumers view premium make-up products—and their association with feminism—differently.

While our focus was on feminist consumers, our work does shed some light on nonfeminist women as well. Specifically, we report evidence to suggest that nonfeminists still engage in beauty work but demonstrate weaker preferences for premium products and associate these practices with less self-determination than feminists. This suggests that there are women in the marketplace who are engaging in some of the most routine consumption of their lives in a passive manner. This seems important for marketers of beauty products to understand. Might these professionals benefit for encouraging their more passive consumers to interrogate their daily beauty work practices more deeply? Billie, a personal care brand focused primarily on razors, was lauded by women (Robin, 2019) for their razor advertisements featuring consumers with varying levels of body hair and the messaging: "Red, White, and *You Do You*. [Italics added for emphasis]." Billie's encouraging women to decide for themselves if, when, and how they approach their body hair, in contrast to more coercive messaging like those described above, could inspire more thoughtful and empowered consumption.

Finally, we chose to focus on what might be considered "mundane" consumption. We hope our work demonstrates that consumers can find meaning in their routine consumption. Indeed, we suggest that feminists may even view their daily make-up routines as empowering. We encourage other researchers to similarly attend to such instances of consumption and how they impact consumers' daily lives and well-being. It seems likely that there are other instances of mundane consumption that consumers perceived to be dictated by social standards. For instance, might marketers help new parents feel

[3]We would like to thank one of our anonymous reviewers for this thought.

[4]Saul (2014).

empowered by the purchases they make in preparation for a baby? Might they help college students feel empowered by the textbooks they are told to purchase? Might they empower those who buy potentially embarrassing products to address conditions that are deemed socially unacceptable, such as dandruff shampoo, sprays to prevent athlete's foot, or Gas-X? We hope this research inspires others to identify possible binds consumers find themselves in and the ways consumers have developed to adjust, remove, or reframe them.

8 | CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is our hope that this work has demonstrated that women's routine practices are not just mundane, but theoretically interesting consumer experiences that represent a complex interplay between history, identity, social norms, and consumption. We believe society will benefit from a clear understanding of this interplay, and we hope that this research will be a springboard for future exploration in this and other similar consumption domains.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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