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Idealized Female Beauty as Represented in Alessia Cara's Song *Scars to Your Beautiful*

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Abstrak

Kecantikan feminin yang ideal adalah seperangkat standar kecantikan yang dibangun di atas gagasan bahwa daya tarik fisik adalah salah satu aset wanita yang paling penting dan sesuatu yang harus diperjuangkan dan dipertahankan oleh semua wanita. Scars to Your Beautiful adalah lagu yang ditulis dan dinyanyikan oleh Alessia Cara. Lagu ini bercerita tentang seorang gadis yang ingin menjadi cantik seperti gadis sampul. Dia ingin semua orang terpikat dengan kecantikannya. Namun, dalam proses memenuhi standar kecantikan itu, dia melupakan apa yang berharga di dalam dirinya. Dia rela menderita rasa sakit dan kelaparan untuk menjadikan dirinya secantik yang standar kecantikan inginkan. Lalu, bagaimana kecantikan perempuan yang diidealkan dan dampak negatifnya direpresentasikan dalam Scars to Your Beautiful karya Alessia Cara? Melalui metode kualitatif, artikel ini menjelaskan bagaimana standar kecantikan berdampak negatif pada gadis dalam lagu Alessia Cara. Didukung oleh teori dari Savannah Greenfield, kecantikan wanita yang diidealkan dan dampak negatifnya tercermin ketika gadis dalam lagu ini mendambakan dirinya seperti gadis sampul. Kesimpulannya, gadis itu melakukan segalanya untuk menjadi cantik namun dia akhirnya tersiksa dalam usahanya untuk memenuhi standar kecantikan yang dipenuhi oleh gadis-gadis sampul.

Kata kunci: Alessia Cara, Kecantikan Feminin yang Diidealkan, Standar Kecantikan, *Scars to Your Beautiful*

Abstract

Ideal feminine beauty is a set of beauty standards built on idea that physical attractiveness is one of a woman's most important assets and something that all women should strive for and defend. Scars to Your Beautiful is a song written and sung by Alessia Cara. This song is about a girl who wants to be beautiful like cover girls. She wants to get people's attention attracted by her beauty. However, in process of meeting that standard of beauty, she forgot what was precious within her. She is willing to suffer pain and hunger to make herself as beautiful as beauty standards demand her to be. Then, how are idealized female beauty and its negative impacts be represented in Alessia Cara's Scars to Your Beautiful? Through qualitative method, this article explains how beauty standards give a negative impact to the girl in Alessia Cara's song. Supported by theory of Savannah Greenfield, idealized female beauty and its negative impact are reflected when the girl in this song yearns for herself to be like cover girls. In conclusion, the girl did everything to be beautiful yet she ended up tormented in her efforts to meet the beauty standards that cover girls meet.

Keywords: Alessia Cara, Beauty Standard, Idealized Feminine Beauty, Scars to Your Beautiful

INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a term that has a variety of definitions and is very subjective in its further continuation. Beauty may initially be seen as the physical, such as shape and form, but it also could equally be about its function and effects on people, and the environment one has inspired (Rosida & Saputri, 2019). It can be argued that beauty is not only an aesthetic value, but it is also a social capital that is supported by the global beauty industry. Advertising and the beauty industry have a huge impact on women and their self-image. Though face and body image concerns are not a mental health condition in themselves, those have a negative impact on women's mental health being associated with body dysmorphic disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, depression, eating disorders, psychological distress, low self-esteem, self-harm, suicidal feelings (Danylova, 2020).

It is not a strange phenomenon where women are always associated and limited by certain beauty standards. Wherever and whenever women exist, their appearances are highlighted at the first sight. It should be stressed that appearance has always been a topic of special attention in human culture. Appearance standards could take very severe forms and could relate to the face, figure, clothes, smell, and be detailed and differentiated to a greater or lesser degree. Teenagers and young people always experience their non-conformity with the defined appearance requirements particularly pain-fully, even though their own demands may be rather peculiar. Perceptions about ideal appearances may be specific not only to different age groups but also to different social strata, subcultures and different historical periods (Kholmogorova et al., 2017).

According to a recent survey of 3,300 girls and women across 10 countries, 90 percent of women aged 15 to 64 worldwide want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance, with body weight ranking the highest (Calogero et al., 2007). A standard that requires women to be slim in order to be perceived as attractive, for example, has caused body dysmorphia and pushed women to seek cosmetic surgery, undergo extreme dieting, excessively use beauty filters on social media, or not feel confident when not wearing makeup (Rizky, 2022). This is what motivated this study to be carried out with the aim of showing everyone how big the effect of beauty

standards on the quality of life of humans, especially women.

METHOD

By using qualitative method, the materials needed such as journals and articles are took from online scripts. Those materials are used to clarify the connection between Alessia Cara's *Scars to Your Beautiful* and the idealized female beauty by Savannah Greenfield. The data analysis encompasses accumulating and sorting sources, reading those sources conscientiously, comparing with other subjects, quoting into paper, and putting it in the reference list. The data studied are the lyrics of Alessia Cara's *Scars to Your Beautiful* and Greenfield's theory. In other words, Alessia Cara's song is the object whereas Greenfield's argument is a tool to analyze. Then, the following analysis will bring a discussion about how this song implies idealized female beauty and its effect on women's lives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Postures of Women in Scars to Your Beautiful

Scars to Your Beautiful is a song by Alessia Cara as the third single from her debut album *Know-It-All*. Cara first performed the song at TEDxTeen 2015, and later released it as part of her album. On July 26, 2016, the song was serviced to Top 40 radio. In an interview with *Idolator*, Cara explained the meaning behind the track;

"Basically, that song is about body image. It's directed at women, but I think men can relate to it as well. It's just a song about these things that certain women go through on a daily basis in order to feel loved or in order to love themselves. I think that's such a thing that goes on in today's world. These weird things are instilled in us. You know? That tell us that we're not good enough or that there's only one kind of beauty. This song basically is contradicting that idea." (GeniusMedia, 2022)

Before discussing about idealized female beauty and everything related to this idea in Alessia's song, here are the lyrics of Alessia's song entitled "*Scars to Your Beautiful*":

[Verse 1]

She just wants to be beautiful

She goes unnoticed, she knows no limits
 She craves attention, she praises an image
 She prays to be sculpted by the sculptor
 Oh, she don't see the light that's shinin'
 Deeper than the eyes can find it
 Maybe we have made her blind
 So she tries to cover up her pain
 And cut her woes away
 'Cause covergirls don't cry
 After their face is made

[Chorus]

And there's a hope that's waiting for you in the
 dark
 You should know you're beautiful just the way
 you are
 And you don't have to change a thing, the world
 could change its heart
 No Scars to Your Beautiful, we're stars and
 we're beautiful
 Oh, oh, oh
 Oh-oh, oh, oh
 And you don't have to change a thing
 The world could change its heart
 No Scars to Your Beautiful, we're stars and
 we're beautiful

[Verse 2]

She has dreams to be an envy, so she's
 Starving, you know, covergirls eat nothing
 She says, "Beauty is pain and there's beauty in
 everything, what's a little bit of hunger?"
 "I can go a little while longer," she fades away
 She don't see her perfect, she don't understand
 she's worth it
 Or that beauty goes deeper than the surface, oh,
 oh
 So to all the girls that's hurting, let me be your
 mirror
 Help you see a little bit clearer the light that
 shines within

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

No better you than the you that you are
 No better you than the you that you are
 No better life than the life we're livin'
 No better life than the life we're livin'
 No better time for your shine, you're a star
 No better time for your shine, you're a star
 Oh, you're beautiful, oh, you're beautiful

[Chorus] (GeniusMedia, 2022)

The lyrics of the song both explicitly and implicitly indicate beauty standards or idealized beauty and its impact to human life especially women. The ideas are shown in the following;

She just wants to be beautiful

She goes unnoticed, she knows no limits
 She craves attention, she praises an image
 She prays to be sculpted by the sculptor

The song is started with she. It means that the song is focused to women; especially those who feel unconfident and unsatisfied with their bodies. Even though this song focuses on women, it also can be directed to men as well. It is stated by Alessia in her interview with Idolator; "... It's directed at women, but I think men can relate to it as well..."

This stanza tells us about the girl in Alessia's song that does not feel confident with herself. She feels that she is unnoticed because she is not beautiful. Then, she decides to try to be beautiful by doing anything needed to meet that idealized beauty that she finds in some images (GeniusMedia, 2022). She also prays to be sculpted by the sculptor (it could be referred to God), which means she hopes that she can be shaped as beautiful as possible.

The lines also give an overview of the phenomena in which appearance is everything. If any individual could not meet the standard, he or she may feel depressed and want to do anything to meet the standards set by the society, even though it could hurt themselves (Chen et al., 2020). Slimness-oriented body dissatisfaction also play huge roles as the risk factors for developing eating disorder and even depression, as well as decreased well-being, such as lower life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-compassion, optimism, secure attachment, and proactive coping (Chen et al., 2020; Rosida & Saputri, 2019).

Oh, she don't see the light that's shinin'
 Deeper than the eyes can find it
 Maybe we have made her blind
 So she tries to cover up her pain
 And cut her woes away
 'Cause covergirls don't cry
 After their face is made

"She don't see the light that shining" means that she could not see the good things within her such as kindness, good attitude, good way of thinking, and so on from inner beauty. "Deeper than the eyes can find it" means that vision is limited only to outer appearance. People

could not really see what lays inside person's mind and heart. Therefore, any judgment only focuses on what is seen visually such as face, body shape, and appearance (Chen et al., 2020; Gelsinger, 2021). This is what happened to the girl in this song.

"Maybe we have made her blind" is a hyperbole of society who always give her an image of unrealistic standards of beauty have made her blind and could not see all the goodness that she already has. As the result, the girl in this song tried so hard to meet this standard of beauty. Then, "she tries to cover up her pain and cut her woes away" during that struggle because she sees that models are happier when they made up their appearances (GeniusMedia, 2022). It means that those models or cover girls have done the process of meeting the beauty standard and now they can be beautiful, appreciated, and happy.

And there's a hope that's waiting for you in the
dark
You should know you're beautiful just the way
you are
And you don't have to change a thing, the world
could change its heart
No Scars to Your Beautiful, we're stars and
we're beautiful

"There's a hope that's waiting for you in the dark" is a metaphor in which even in someone's worst day, there is beauty waiting for him or her but in a different format (Thomas, 2017). People have to realize and believe that they are beautiful just the way they are. This is because "the world could change its heart" is imagery of exaggeration saying that the world can change your feelings inside you, by judging or complementing you (Thomas, 2017).

The stanza is ended with lyric "No Scars to Your Beautiful, we're stars and we're beautiful". Scars here symbolize the shortcomings that people have and any flaw people have will never erode such beauty. In other words, beauty is not only about appearance, but also about authenticity.

She has dreams to be an envy, so she's
Starving, you know, covergirls eat nothing
She says, "Beauty is pain and there's beauty in
everything, what's a little bit of hunger?"

"I can go a little while longer," she fades away

In the first four lines of the second verse, it is told that the girl really wants to be more beautiful. She was motivated after seeing the cover girl's ideal body and beauty. In an effort to

get a good body, she is willing to not eat and starve. She seemed to have lost her mind in order to be beautiful as a cover girl. Here, the mass media is very influential in terms of beauty standards. Because, most of them only want to show artists or people who have beautiful looks and charming bodies and indirectly they have created beauty standards that can harm people, especially women (Gelsinger, 2021).

She don't see her perfect, she don't understand
she's worth it
Or that beauty goes deeper than the surface, oh,
oh
So to all the girls that's hurting, let me be your
mirror
Help you see a little bit clearer the light that
shines within

Here the songwriter says that the girl forgot that there is something valuable in her. She forgot that beauty is not only what is visible to the eye, but also what is embedded in the soul (GeniusMedia, 2022). After that, the songwriter make herself a reflection for girls who are feeling worthless or feel they are not beautiful enough and help them to be confident and proud for every good thing within themselves.

No better you than the you that you are
No better life than the life we're livin'
No better time for your shine, you're a star
Oh, you're beautiful, oh, you're beautiful

In the bridge of the song, the songwriter declared once again to the girl that who she is now is the best version of herself and the life that she is living right now is the best chapter of her own life. Moreover, there is no better time to her to be the best of herself than this present time. So, the song tells not to waste to hurt own only to meet the unrealistic standard of beauty made by mass media.

Chronicles of Meanings behind Idealized Female Beauty

The ideal for feminine beauty is a concept that has been socially created by depicting that physical attractiveness encompasses the most vital qualities for a woman and that all women must do anything possible to acquire and maintain this attractiveness (Chen et al., 2020; Greenfield, 2018). The principles of feminine beauty are based on the heteronormative ideas and largely discriminate against women of all sexual orientations. These ideas further incorporate the shape of a woman's

body which usually varies by cultures (Greenfield, 2018). The demands to comply with these ideals and the specific description of ideal beauty can lead to radical psychological consequences (Gelsinger, 2021; Greenfield, 2018).

To reference the first section of this investigation, studies have indeed indicated that such ideals have been related to depression, eating disorders, reduced self-esteem, and several more. Girls are subjected to images of this ideal at very young ages and such constant exposure extends through adulthood (Greenfield, 2018; Verrastro et al., 2020). The study was based on sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of society in individual development, and further specifies that negative effects are caused by the unattainable beauty portrayed by advertisements. The current standards of beauty are dangerously unattainable, especially in terms of thinness, because the gap between realistic expectations and the ideal continues to grow larger (Gelsinger, 2021; Greenfield, 2018).

In the Classical period of Greece, there were virtually no sculptures depicting women who were not deities. This is likely because during this period, it was the woman's role to stay home and maintain the house, while also taking care of any children she had. That is why the art of the Classical period did not have much representation of women in sculpture outside of religious circumstances (Jess, 2021). The statues of the goddesses have square shoulders and hips, which resemble that of a Greek athlete. Because many of these statues have masculine proportions, it often looks like they were modelled from ephebes and then breasts added later (Jess, 2021).

The history of art above is dissimilar to recent condition of beauty in which all aspects are shown explicitly. It is not meant for artistic matters, but for mass media consumption in which profit-oriented capitalism works behind it (Verrastro et al., 2020). The main idea to make such standard is to sell more beauty products in the market. When women have succeeded to reach such beauty, another aspect to be updated will always come to surface. There are abundant modern solutions to any kind of beauty problems (Gelsinger, 2021; Verrastro et al., 2020). Almost all products are meant for appearances, as that is the main dictated standard of recent beauty. When women could not reach such standards, indeed any stress may come forward. It is not due to natural differences of beauty, but due to

problems that could not be solved by modern matters (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020).

Self-esteem is a key factor influencing body image among women of all races and ethnicities. Many factors, including race, ethnicity, cultural background, media consumption, and individual psychology have been linked to the diverse body image perceptions among women (Paschal, 2012; Yang et al., 2020). Several studies have indicated how the media has played a large role in an idealized conception of female standards of beauty. Historically, most of the theory derived from body image research has supported the claim that White women more often are afflicted by problems associated with poor body image than women of other ethnicities (Paschal, 2012; Verrastro et al., 2020). A woman's body image is greatly influenced by her own interpretation of her culture's beauty standards, her perception of how closely her own body matches those standards, and her belief about how important a woman's body is in matching those standards to other members of her cultural group (Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Paschal, 2012).

Somehow, beauty standards are not always about being thin, white, or tall. It is relative and there are no certain standard of beauty standard. The main idea behind that standard is whether women truly believe in it or not. If they believe it, such obedience will follow, and any progress must be obtained (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Yet, if any progress to reach such beauty is hindered, she is left alone by not following the standard. In this case, being left behind indeed will affect self-esteem of women itself. Sometimes, they will blame themselves for their failure to reach such standards (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020; Verrastro et al., 2020). However, they are not wrong and must not be blamed since they are human beings that should not be dictated by mere total definitions of appearances. If women face low self-esteem in embracing such beauty standard, she will always feel such anxiety that could be piled into further neurotic pathological condition in the future (Engeln-Maddox, 2006).

Triggers for the Uprising of Idealized Beauty and Its Impacts

The influence of the mass media typically convey unrealistic images of female beauty (Arendt et al., 2016; Engeln-Maddox, 2006). For example, over the years, the portrayal of the female body has become thinner, while in reality,

the body mass index of women in Western societies has actually increased (Arendt et al., 2016; Blaivas et al., 2002). Importantly, previous research has shown that exposure to the media's idealized standard of female beauty can increase body dissatisfaction (Arendt et al., 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020).

In recent era of information and technology, social media contains various kinds of photo posts of women and men. Being photogenic is not enough in that media as people must be pretty or handsome (Engeln-Maddox, 2006). It is undeniable that most of the comments containing praises are obtained by pictures of women who are slim, fair skinned, having beautiful eyes, and well dressed. Such photos are also the ones that catch people's attention and interest the most (Blaivas et al., 2002; Engeln-Maddox, 2006). Vice versa, various mockeries are often found in photos that do not meet their criteria of being "beautiful".

The above phenomenon has unconsciously been the reason for the creation of ideal beauty standards. In this case, being ideal does not come from noble idea itself. It is dictated by popular opinion today (Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020). Moreover, mass media also shows the ways to be beautiful and implicitly gives standpoints on being in good and bad beauties. This is also how the way modernity works; things must be able to be defined, measured, and predicted. Those three aspects then also invade matters of beauty. It happens especially when there is a certain standard define what beauty is, the indicators of being beautiful, and how to achieve that charming status (Blaivas et al., 2002; Prnjak et al., 2020). That is also the main cause that makes the girl in the song try to make herself as pretty as the beauty standards want her to be. She wants to be noticed and liked by people. She wants their attentions and recognitions, that is why she think it is a must to follow the standards of beauty at all cost. Besides wanting to get attention, the girl in the song really wants people to envy her beauty. She wanted to be the person every girl wished (GeniusMedia, 2022). This is because she also feels jealous of the bodies of the girls that displayed on magazine covers, advertisements, social media, and so on.

All over the world, magazine, advertising, marketing, and fashion industries repeatedly emphasize the standards of ideal beauty. By creating and enforcing the belief that beauty can be achieved when a woman matches the ideal concept portrayed by the media, these

advertisements are developing and nurturing a strong need in female consumers to obtain this beauty. It is because there are many advantages to being attractive in society, it is natural and logical that women would want to fill this need (Greenfield, 2018; Verrastro et al., 2020). However, any of those is touching matter of illusion rather than embracing idea of truth. People are urged to be always perfect while no one is actually perfect, though.

Ideal beauty is presented in advertisements in order to be perceived as flawless and faultless (Greenfield, 2018; Prnjak et al., 2020). Advertisements portray a thin ideal of beauty, often featuring perfect proportions, light skin, and soft hair. As a result, society is influenced by such images because people have begun to normalize them and, thus, have the desire to emulate the women portrayed in the advertisements (Chen et al., 2020; Greenfield, 2018). Once it is normalized, people will not even notice if that standard is similar or different from their own culture. What is important is following the trends.

Unhealthy dieting, excessive weight and shape concerns, and body dissatisfaction were identified as important risk factors associated with an increased probability of the onset, greater severity, and longer duration of health problems (Arendt et al., 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020). Some of the problems are caused by following trends of beauty and fashion industries. Especially girls and young women report substantial levels of body dissatisfaction (Arendt et al., 2016; Verrastro et al., 2020). This finding has raised serious concerns as body dissatisfaction is associated with negative self-perception, depressed mood, and disordered eating (Arendt et al., 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020).

What was conveyed in the previous paragraph is what the girl in the song experienced. She felt that her body still did not meet the standard of a beautiful body. As a result, she was willing to go on a strict diet. It is said in the song that she is willing to starve in order to get a body like the girl he sees on the cover (GeniusMedia, 2022). She even said that everything that is beautiful is painful. However, she is also willing to suffer pain in order to get a beautiful body. This of course gives a real picture of the negative impact caused by beauty standard. This can make its devotees willing to do anything to fulfill it even if it endangers themselves.

One of the most dangerous eating disorder that may be caused by following the beauty standard is anorexia nervosa. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV-TR), anorexia nervosa is classified as an eating disorder caused by psychological factors where there is a desire to have a slim body shape but is very obsessed and never satisfied with that body shape (Azzahara & Dhanny, 2021). Anorexia can cause sufferers to lack many nutrients that result in damage to the body's organs and the most fatal is death. This is what the lyrics "*she fades away*" might mean.

Besides describing how big the negative impact of complying with beauty standards is, this song also invites women to be aware of the authenticity of beauty in themselves. In the bridge of the song, the singer said indirectly to the listeners that they are beautiful as they are and it is better for them to live with everything that is in them right now because that is the best (GeniusMedia, 2022). They have to cherish and proud of it despite merely following unending trends of beauty.

CONCLUSION

The song *Scars to Your Beautiful* takes the theme of standardized beauty or idealized beauty that a girl dreams. Beauty standards are commonly based on a slender body, white skin, big eyes, and so on. However, in reality, beauty standards do not have a global benchmark; it depends on the region and culture. The girl's perspective depicted through the lyrics makes people understand more about the feelings and situations of those who really want to meet the criteria of beauty standards in general. Interestingly, besides depicting the girl's perspective, this song then invites people not to be influenced by beauty standards and to start loving ourselves as we are. It is since following the idealized beauty will only lead people to dangerous things that will damage ourselves. As the last words, the standard of beauty is nothing but a stigma echoed by look worshippers and praise beggar. Beauty standards can vary by region and culture. On the top of that, people can also make it for themselves in order to appreciate own selves better either.

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