# CHAPTER IV

# CONCLUSION

Discourse about beauty has taken place since Aristotle's era, and one of it centers around the notion that beauty is a socially constructed concept. At any given time or place, society has an expectation about how particular groups of individuals should look. This came to be known as the beauty standard, which varied around the world. However, as time goes by, beauty standards become more pervasive. Beauty standards are known to affect women's income source, as women who are more conventionally attractive are more likely to get hired. Beauty standards have also been linked to body dissatisfaction and even restricted women's freedom, because instead of pursuing personal development, women are expected to straighten their hair, wear makeup, maintain their body weight, remove their body hair, and so on. Women have also mentioned that they withdraw from life-engaging and life-sustaining activities such as exercising and giving an opinion because they feel bad about their appearances, thus lowering women's quality of life.

Because of the negative effects of beauty standards, radical feminists have deemed beauty standards as oppressive, especially Korean beauty standards that expect women to be thin, be youthful, have smooth skin, and undergo cosmetic surgeries to obtain double-lidded eyes, a defined nose, and a well-sculpted chin. Furthermore, these beauty standards are deemed oppressive because they fit into the concept of oppression, which specified four conditions for something to be

considered as oppression. Those four conditions are the harm condition, group condition, coercive condition, and privilege condition. As for the harm condition, beauty standards dictate women's relationships with their bodies, determining what women can and cannot do. The group condition is fulfilled because the patriarchal society as a group enacts beauty standards on women through social practices and norms. The privilege condition is fulfilled because men are the privileged group in the case of beauty standards as they are not held to the same standards as women, making them systematically better off from the start. Lastly, beauty standards also fulfill the coercive condition where women collectively possess diminished choice when it comes to their beauty. Individually, Korean women may not be explicitly forced to do beauty practices, but the coercion comes in the form of pressure from society. Hence, designating beauty standards as oppressive is justified.

To resist oppressive beauty standards, women have led various social movements throughout the years, including the infamous protest against the 1961 Miss America pageant. However, Escape the Corset movement in South Korea is the latest social movement and the only one to do it in the middle of the conservative Korean society and amidst the K-Beauty craze. Therefore, this research specifically attempts to answer the research question: *How is the development of Escape the Corset movement affected by oppressive beauty standards?* Escape the Corset or 'tal-corset' in Korean can be considered a social movement because it is a network of interactions engaged in the fight against beauty standards on the basis of a shared identity as women who bear structural disadvantages because of beauty standards. To answer the research question, the author employs the concept of social

movement, the concept of beauty standards, the stages of social movement concept, the concept of oppression, and radical feminism perspective.

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, it has been concluded that the research question has been answered. According to the stages of social movement concept, the first stage of social movement development is the emergence phase, where there is widespread discontent about a certain social condition, but a collective action was not yet present. In this phase, oppressive beauty standards served as the social condition which prompted South Korean women to take a step against imposed femininity. South Korean women felt that beauty standards are akin to the corset, a piece of clothing that restricts women's movements in lieu of having a better figure. Thus, after collectively identifying that their discontent stems from oppressive beauty standards, they encourage fellow women to take off the corset in the coalescence phase and Escape the Corset movement was born.

On the process of the development of Escape the Corset movement, South Korean women encountered some challenges. Women are in constant threat of harassment from men online, that women resorted to women-only online forums. Many of them also chose to be anonymous online to prevent unwanted attention and harassment. They also faced hesitation from fellow women, because some thought that beauty practices are women's personal choice and thus cannot be oppressive. Other women also thought that the call to "take off the corset" is too extreme, but these women understood the purpose of Escape the Corset movement after attending rallies which were also attended by Escape the Corset supporters. This showed that oppressive beauty standards may have led to the development of

Escape the Corset movement, but the process towards the development of the movement was not an easy one.

From the analysis in the previous chapter, the author concluded that Escape the Corset movement did not undergo the bureaucratization phase which is the third phase of the development of a social movement. It did not form a social movement organization which is important to achieve a higher level of organization and devise strategies. While oppressive beauty standards were able to bring women together during the emergence and coalescence phase, the lack of bureaucratization contributed to the decline and failure of the movement because Escape the Corset movement has no leader and no strategic plan. Although Escape the Corset movement is not a successful movement by the time this research came to a conclusion, it has reached its goal partially, which is liberating women from forced femininity. Hence, it can be concluded that oppressive beauty standards triggered the development of Escape the Corset social movement by causing collective discontent, but only discontent is not enough to sustain a social movement. From this result, future social movements should learn that bureaucratization in the form of forming a social movement organization is important to ensure that a movement has a long-term goal and can still perform its day-to-day function when there are no highly enthusiastic volunteers.

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