

FASHION FAIR IN A FENTY WORLD

INTERSECTIONALITY, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF
BLACK-OWNED BRANDS IN THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY
THROUGH CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that through an examination of the variable market successes of Fashion Fair Cosmetics and Fenty Beauty, racial and gender intersectionality continues to negatively impact the experience of black beauty consumers in the US today. Through influential black feminists, including media theorist bell hooks, and critical race and gender theorists Kimberlee Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins, this paper will discuss how black women historically and presently have been marginalized in relation to the needs and interests of white women. Drawing on the notable anthropologist Soyini Madison's *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2022), I utilize a critical ethnography to analyze how one's racial and gendered background can affect the relationship between beauty brands and consumers and how this impacts the experience of black and brown women as beauty consumers. This paper will also engage with the rise of historic and contemporary social justice activism and current Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs in the wake of Black Lives Matter Movement and the impact that this has had not only on industries but on the experience of black and brown cosmetics consumers. In addition, this paper will note how a speedy and superficial increase in DEI programs across service industries and cosmetics has led to a shallow understanding of the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in all spaces. Lastly, I will deploy an autoethnographic approach to discuss how social media has strongly impacted and influenced the industry Fashion Fair is relaunching in. The autoethnography will discuss the social media strategies that drive a successful makeup brand in the contemporary beauty industry and, importantly, how contemporary consumers of color experience the beauty industry. This paper will close by speculating on the manner in which the legacy

brand Fashion Fair, might in the current practice of Fenty, sharpen its appeal and engage the kind of social media strategies that will successfully reintroduce the brand to a new generation—and thereby more successfully resume its mission to deliver care to long-alienated beauty consumers in the US.

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INTRODUCTION

Through an exploration of the historic erasure of black women in the feminist movement and broader US society in the post-Civil Rights era, this paper will examine what I argue has been the parallel erasure and alienation of black beauty consumers in the makeup industry to this day. I will argue that due to a lack of an understanding of intersectionality, even in the contemporary moment of corporate response to social activism, that black women continue to be misunderstood and marginalized by even the most progressive corporate campaigns. Through engaging an autoethnographic approach, this chapter will explore how Fashion Fair once effectively engaged black consumers historically, how Fenty has taken up that challenge in the face of continued marginalization, and show Fashion Fair might better reposition itself to do the same in the future.

Both broadly ethnographic and autoethnographic methods have been brought to bear on this research. The ethnography effectively examines Fashion Fair's past; it will demonstrate the impact it has had on the black and brown community and how that impact varies for clients of a younger age with a different background. The autoethnography will focus on Fashion Fair's future of relaunching in an industry highly motivated by social media and the prospect of connecting with a new audience to become a sustainable makeup brand. Fashion Fair moved from department stores like Macy's and Nordstroms to Sephora, a retailer of high-end, trendy beauty brands with a different clientele. Regardless of how well-crafted the products are, Fashion Fair must evolve its prior business model to compete with the brands that are dominating in sales and media content across the industry today. Auto-ethnographically, I will explore the significance

of a competitive social media presence through my current experience as a beauty advisor working in Sephora stores. Based on an analysis of Fashion Fair Cosmetics and Fenty Beauty, this thesis argues that racial and gender intersectionality continues to negatively impact the experience of black beauty consumers. Through engaging the work of media studies scholar, bell hooks, and intersectional scholars Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw, I will demonstrate how black women have been marginalized in the beauty spaces that white women have historically dominated.

The methods section of this paper will discuss the moments that guided my study, my positionality, the validity of my ethnography, and the decision to utilize ethnography. I will employ Dr. Soyini Madison's (2020), *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance* to reflect on and theorize my ethnographic approaches. An ethnography described by Madison is the following, "Ethnography is generally defined by its aim to engage, interpret, and record the social meanings, values, structures, and embodiments within a particular domain, setting, or field of human interaction." (Madison, 2020, p. 3) According to Madison, a critical ethnography focuses on how cultural backgrounds impact the connection between consumer and brand. Not only will I engage autoethnography to explore the nuances, meanings, and legacies that Fashion Fair has delivered in past, but I will also discuss my own received wisdom, as a consumer and beauty advisor, on the influence that social media platforms like Tik Tok and Instagram currently wield and how they have reshaped the contemporary beauty industry. Lastly, this chapter will engage and interpret moments of human interaction that represent social meanings, values, and structures that defined the early Fashion Fair period and speculate

on how this might be articulated in the present so as to recenter black and brown users within the future of US and global beauty scopes.

Madison argues that, “What is distinctive about critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain.” (Madison, 2020, p.4) I employ critical ethnography within this discussion because both Fenty and Fashion Fair were previously and presently operating in a white-dominated global setting that provides essential cultural resources beyond their consumer value. While the vignettes I recall happened after I consciously decided to perform an ethnography, I believe these moments are still valid. I continue to experience moments in my everyday life similar to the moments discussed in this study. I think they’re especially useful when analyzing Fashion Fairs’ past and future and how they fit in the contemporary makeup industry. These social interactions hold weight in the discussion of cultural studies and the impact of Fashion Fair on society, but more importantly, the importance of more black-owned brands in white dominating spaces.

Chapter One: *The Legacy*, will uncover the history and impact of Fashion Fair cosmetics. Based on recalled interactions and conversations with my mother, Ruth Barrett, I will uncover the connection Fashion Fair built with black and brown women in the United States and globally in the early post-Civil Rights movement. This chapter will discuss Fashion Fair’s cultural impact, the obstacles black-owned businesses have faced, and, importantly, the factors that played a role in Fashion Fair’s decline. I will argue that Fashion Fair was able to fulfill a need in the makeup industry that, until the early 1970s, was virtually untouched. I will argue that despite the marginalization of black women in cosmetics, Fashion Fair changed how the cosmetic industry approached black beauty

products and how black women looked at their own beauty. Through bell hooks and the select black feminist thinkers of the Combahee River Collective, this paper will discuss how marginalized black women have been erased from both social movements as well as the beauty spaces that were supposed to benefit them.

The Legacy will look closely at Fashion Fair founder Eunice Johnson as well as her Ebony, and Jet lifestyle publications. It will also explore how Eunice's traveling Ebony Fashion Fairs played a key role in the early successes of Fashion Fair cosmetics. This chapter will discuss the post-civil rights era in which Fashion Fair was born and how Fashion Fair was able to respond in a racially charged moment when Black women most needed it. I will explore how, through the Johnson Publishing Company's creation of popular black-focused magazines, Eunice Johnson was able to create a platform for black fashion creatives, and identify and take advantage of an open market in the beauty industry for women who looked like her. While some millennials were introduced to Fashion Fair through their grandmothers, mothers, and aunts, most have no idea what Fashion Fair is or was today. In this chapter, I shed light not only on Fashion Fair's early impact and legacy but why, given broader shifts in the cosmetics industry, there has arisen a disconnect between the brand and today's emerging generations.

Chapter two: *What is Black Beauty?* will cover the experience of black and brown clients in the beauty industry today. This chapter will also examine how the recently arrived Fenty Beauty has struck what is considered to be the contemporary standard of both racial and gendered diversity in its marketing, and as such, widely trending makeup brand. I will argue that in a short period, Fenty Beauty has become the epitome of a contemporary diverse, inclusive makeup brand that knows how to utilize social media to

its advantage. Fenty Beauty is a brand that has been able to form strong relationships with consumers quickly through pop artist Rihanna's global celebrity and its channeling of such fame through a cutting-edge utilization of social media marketing. While most may assume Fenty Beauty's popularity is solely based on Rihanna's fame, Fenty has been able to produce highly versatile, award-winning, and craftily marketed products that can be used in an abundance of ways and across a wider range of skin tones; ultimately aiding in creating a self-sustaining, extremely popular beauty brand. (Diner, 2018)

Most notably, Fenty has focused on creating complexion shades for black and brown clients more than most brands carried by major retail distributors. Much like Fashion Fair in its heyday, Fenty Beauty emerged during a monumental and challenging time in history. Launched during the height of the Black Lives Matter Movement and a conservative Trump administration that embraced ethnonationalism, xenophobia, and antiblackness, Fenty has taken a political stance since its inception. During this period, many companies were put in a position where they felt forced to make a statement or engage policies that supported Black Lives Matter and other progressive social movements or risk appearing insensitive to the swell of activism that supported the movement for black lives (Murphy, 2021). Launched in 2017 with no less than 40 foundation shades, Fenty Beauty demonstrated a recognition of the broad range of complexions prevalent across populations both in the US and across the globe. Although it was not abnormal for a brand to work their collection up to 40 shades, it was monumental to launch a brand at 40 shades with a focus on colors that were made for black and brown clients (Little, 2020). As a result of the confidence in new social media technology and social activism, Fenty Beauty rapidly rose to the forefront of the beauty

scene to become the face of diversity and inclusion in the makeup industry. Fenty displayed its commitment to creating products with a diverse color range and undertones through their products. They demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusivity through advertisements by including models who identify with different genders, backgrounds, and religions to represent Fenty Beauty (Fetto, 2020). Fenty has also been able to stay on top of trends and remain relevant on newer social media apps like TikTok resulting in them remaining a brand with highly sought-after products. Fenty Beauty is arguably the global standard for an on-trend, diverse and inclusive makeup brand.

Additionally, Fenty Beauty has had a political impact through the ability to decenter whiteness within the makeup industry through a commitment to creating makeup products that are truly created with black and brown women in mind. From creating complexion products with diverse undertones and having an evenly diverse color range to flipping their assortment from darkest to lightest, Fenty has forced brands to follow their lead. Their impact alone has caused other popular makeup brands to push themselves to create more shades with more undertones and to think about how they can welcome a more diverse clientele.

Chapter three: *Sephora x Fashion Fair* covers several topics that directly impact the 2020 interaction of Fashion Fair. First, the rise in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives among corporations in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Secondly, this chapter will explore and critically analyze HBO and VOX films produced documentary immediately following the Fashion Fair relaunch. I argue that the strengths and weaknesses of this piece speak to challenges that the brand must face if it is to successfully reaffirm its legacy. Lastly, this chapter will present an ethnographic vignette

in which I interact with a co-worker whom I rename Alex's, a woman whose resistance to Fashion Fair's black focus begs an analysis of the harmful consequences of a shallow corporate applications and understandings of DEI initiatives prevalent in the new era of corporate social justice.

Fashion Fair went from Macy's and Nordstroms as their retail distribution to Sephora Inc, an entirely different retailer with a different clientele. Sephora, as a retail distributor, is known to be a brand builder. Sephora's merchandising and marketing departments invest massively in brands to help curate their assortment, social media, marketing, and advertising to attract Sephora's clientele. Along with Sephora's investment in bringing Fashion Fair to stores, Sephora and Vox partnered to present a documentary on Fashion Fair's relaunch, which premiered on HBO MAX. *The Beauty of Blackness* is a documentary that follows the journey of Fashion Fair's CEO Desiree Rodgers and Cheryl Mayberry McKissack through buying Fashion Fair, obstacles throughout the relaunch, and the importance and the impact Fashion Fair cosmetics and the traveling fashion shows had on the black community and more specifically black women (Moore & Johnson, 2022).

This paper will explore the history of marginalization and sidelining of black women's needs and self-representations in its sustained focus on Eurocentric needs and interests. Through intersectional feminists bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberlee Crenshaw, we are able to understand the history of black women's highly particular and critical engagement with largely white feminism. Through ethnographic vignettes in which I feature interactions with my mother, Ruth Barrett an early Fashion Fair consumer as well as Alex, a co-worker critical of Fashion Fair, this chapter will

discuss the manner in which black-owned brands celebrate black beauty and the ways in which this might be problematically read by those outside of the black community.

Lastly, through my autoethnography and positionality as a beauty advisor, this chapter will uncover the unique industry Fashion Fair is relaunching in and the factors that will likely determine a successful comeback

METHODOLOGY

Ethnography

According to notable critical ethnographer and author Soyini Madison, an ethnography is defined by, “Its aim to engage, interpret, and record social meanings, values, structures, and embodiments within a particular domain, setting, or field of human interaction.” (Madison, 2005, p. 3). This section will explain why I selected critical ethnography as my research method. I will also engage the vignettes you will read later in this piece and discuss the manner in which intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, Collins 2022) affects the makeup industry and shapes the experience of consumers from an array of racial, ethnic, and gendered backgrounds. Through the utilization of Madison’s insights on ethnography, I will demonstrate how reactions to Fashion Fair cosmetics vary based on racial background, cultural background, and skin tone and how these can play a role in the relaunch of a black-centered legacy brand. Lastly, I will demonstrate how social media has affected and impacted the cosmetic industry through autoethnography.

According to Dr. Madison, a central approach of an ethnographer is to spend time in the field, participate in daily life, and the researcher is a participant observer. The moments I will discuss in this paper are all within settings I am foundationally a part of. The experiences that I will share are rooted in my positionality. Kezar (2014) explains positionality as, “[the acknowledgment] that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity including social class” (Kezar, 2014) Therefore based on this notion that people have multiple identities that affect the way they process and make sense of situations and meanings there are three aspects of my identity that affect my position within this study. First, my position as the

daughter of an African immigrant who grew up in a predominantly white area. Second, my position as someone who worked in Sephora stores interacting with clients daily, witnessing the different shopping experiences between black beauty consumers and white beauty consumers. Lastly, my position as someone who was present in Fashion Fair brand calls and has growing expertise within the corporate beauty industry.

There are several reasons why it was necessary to employ a critical ethnography. Madison argues, “What is distinctive about critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain.” (Madison, 2005, p.4) I employ critical ethnography within this discussion because Fenty and Fashion Fair presently operate in a white-dominated global setting. Fashion Fair and Fenty Beauty both push back on the norms still present in the makeup industry in centering on whiteness. While the vignettes I recall happened after I consciously decided to perform an ethnography, I continue to experience moments such as those I will describe in my everyday current experience as a beauty professional. I argue these moments remain very valid and likely reflective of encounters between customers and beauty professionals of all races across US makeup spaces today, I additionally imagine my research as informed by a kind of retrospective ethnography. The moments I discuss continue to occur in my everyday life and are instrumental when analyzing Fashion Fairs’ past, present, and future. These social interactions also hold weight in the discussion of cultural studies and the impact of Fashion Fair Cosmetics on society.

A critical ethnography places emphasis on injustices within a lived domain. The moments included within this ethnography are still true to this day and can be replicated

through conversations with the parties incorporated. These moments have powerful feelings, ideas, and connections to which parties within different groups can relate. As explained by Madison, critical ethnography disrupts the status quo and focuses on identifying underlying relationships of power and control. (Madison, 2005). Fashion Fair is a brand susceptible to backlash for not creating complexion products that all women can use. Fashion Fair's relaunch in 2020 disrupted the status quo of foundation and complexion color range in the makeup industry by focusing solely on black and brown women. Fashion Fair can push back on these norms through a counter-hegemonic mission to empower marginalized consumers in an overly saturated industry that unfailingly invests more in white complexion products. Fashion Fair decided to stay true to the original brand while simultaneously attempting to dismantle the beauty industry's hegemonic power, which continuously ensures white women are catered to first.

My ethnography is based on oral history performance and observation analysis. Although, there has been criticism on the reliance of these two performances alone, the combination of these approaches shows the layers of intersectionality and implications present, "Observations and analysis often accompany the oral history interview to signify its embedded implications, as well as the complexities of its surface meanings" (Madison, 2005, p. 11) To address the concern about validity, the moments included within this ethnography, must consist of moments that can be shared by similar groups of people or moments that continue to happen and are similar. The moments I include within this study represent the connection and impact Fashion Fair had and still has on a range of generations. I decided to include these moments in this study after the moments occurred. While the events occurred before I decided to commit to this study, these moments

remain exemplary of ongoing conversations, and remain true to feelings of the individuals involved.

Positionality:

As a black woman working in the cosmetic field for more than five years, I remain dissatisfied with the continued lack of products that my friends and family are able to access. As part of my ethnographic approach, I pay special attention to the manner in which social media-driven marketing campaigns have impacted how brands communicate, how consumers interact with brands, and how emerging brands generate and sustain customer loyalty. Rather than as a full-blown content analysis, I incorporate my comparative observations of Fashion Fair and Fenty Beauty's social media strategies as part of my ethnographic experience. As a graduate student in Media Studies and budding scholar, I am especially interested in how all the above elements speak, not only to the erasures and alienation that black and brown women have long been dealt by mainstream American beauty standards, but how a new generation of entrepreneurs have attempted to continue to recenter and deliver care to black and brown women. Lastly, as a black woman who continues to work in predominantly white spaces my position is based on my own experiences in the makeup industry and my own observations of white beauty consumers' experiences in comparison of the experiences of black and brown beauty consumers.

Approach:

In conjunction with the above, I retrospectively center my interactions with three subjects in three central vignettes, each of which offers insight into the dynamics of the relaunch of Fashion Fair. Firstly, I center my own experiences with my mother, Ruth

Barrett, an English-born, West African immigrant to the US, and a faithful Fashion Fair products client. Here I also explore my own experiences as a daughter who has recently discovered not only the Fashion Fair brand but her mother's long-time love affair with its affirming products. Secondly, I explore my interactions with a Sephora manager whom I shall refer to as Alex—an individual who strongly disagrees with Fashion Fair's retained focus on a black demographic, an idea she ironically believes runs counter to current corporate notions of diversity and inclusion. Alex's pushback on Fashion Fair offers insight into the mainstream and historical attitudes toward black women's beauty and issues plaguing contemporary corporate DEI policy in a new era of social justice and its corporate appropriation. Finally, I center my autoethnographic experience as a Media and cultural studies graduate student and current merchandising professional at Sephora, a major cosmetics brand, who now engages in corporate responses to recent BLM-era social activism and is seemingly committed to relaunching Fashion Fair as one of its brands.

Autoethnography:

Madison pulls from Reed-Danahay (1997) in her discussion about autoethnography and reflexive ethnography to describe what an autoethnography is, "Autoethnography is most often referred to as the ethnography of one's own social, ethnic, or cultural group" (Reed-Danahay, 1997 cited in Madison, 2000, p.18). Autoethnography uses our own experiences to confront ourselves and others with social, political, and cultural research. (Abrams et al., 2015, p. 1) Through my autoethnography, I will engage with my experiences as a beauty advisor in Sephora stores, witnessing the change in the industry due to the growing influence of social media. My experience in Sephora stores

and Sephora corporate has provided me with a lot of insight about trends within the beauty industry, client shopping experiences, and as a black woman working in the cosmetic field, the lack of products that my friends or family would be able to use. Social media has impacted how brands communicate, how consumers interact with brands, brand loyalty, and shared industry knowledge. In addition to cultural experiences, I have witnessed how social media has strongly impacted the entirety of the cosmetic industry. I have obtained the ability to speak about the impact Fashion Fair has had on cosmetics from my experience within stores, the corporate beauty industry, and as a black beauty consumer with a Bachelor's in Communications and a current Media Studies and Production Master's Student.

By employing Dr. Soyini Madison's Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance, I have established my validity and position through a critical ethnography analyzing the impact of social media in the makeup industry and how intersectionality affects one's connection to Fashion Fair. Through vignettes from my mother, Ruth, and Alex, I will display how intersectionality can affect one's view of inclusivity and consumers' connection to makeup brands. Additionally, Fashion Fair is determined to stay dedicated to its original brand, which results in the decentralization of whiteness in the cosmetic industry. Regardless of Fashion Fair's mission, a strong social media strategy and presence are necessary to maintain a successful brand in the contemporary makeup industry. Although there have been massive strides in product selection for black beauty, consumers lack in product options for clients of a deeper complexion, nonetheless. Through my ethnography, I will show how shallow understandings of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion can lead to racial neutrality.

A BEAUTY ADVISOR'S AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Newer social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have strongly impacted who has a voice to influence on a large scale. Influencers have become essential to brands, consumers, and social media platforms,

Influencers can be described as 'semi-professional' 'microcelebrities' who gain followings on various social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. Often sponsored by brands to promote their products, influencers offer a range of message reliability regarding their carefully crafted lifestyles, personalities, and interests. (Lee, 2022)

The rise in social media has allowed growing platforms to discuss and communicate about different industries, beauty being a big one. There is a steady rise in social media networks that either focus on beauty, have users who utilize that platform for beauty topics or enjoy seeing beauty in their feeds. TikTok is a popular app that has a large beauty community, “[TikTok} has become an incredibly useful platform for the beauty community: from generating hype around beauty trends...TikTok is buzzing with hyper-consumable content for skincare, hair care and make-up addicts everywhere.” (Karin, 2021) Newness TV and Flip are two newer social media apps focusing on beauty. Newness TV is a beauty-centered live streaming platform with abundant beauty live streamers. (NEWNESS, 2021) Flip is a social media e-commerce app that combines TikTok's quick videos and a beauty shopping tool. The growth in interest in the beauty industry is on an upward trend, and social media apps support it. This growth has opened up the relationship between influencer and brand and between brand and consumer.

As an employee who has worked in Sephora stores from 2018-2022, I have seen celebrity brand ambassadors drive cosmetic sales. Indeed, as an employee in the beauty industry, I connect with my clients through my own long time love of cosmetics and

makeup. A sensitive and responsive beauty adviser connects with their clients by sharing her own personal stories, challenges with products and through such sharing develops lasting relationships with her clients. When working with clients, I have found trendy makeup and their celebrity ambassadors heavily impact interactions with clients.

Celebrity inspired trends impact the ever-shifting makeup aesthetics clients are willing to try, the products they desire, and the brands they seek out. Influencers have reached A-list status through the groundbreaking success of celebrities like Kim Kardashian, which leads to an influential voice with a lasting impact on cosmetic spaces across the globe. Through my own extensive experience in delivering makeup services for clients and in selling beauty products, I have witnessed how the presence of influencers on social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram and most notably Tik Tok, drive product sales season after season and inspire the imagination of those who come to my counter. The Chinese owned social media app, TikTok rapidly rose in popularity to surpass the reach of even its closest rival in Instagram in the US, between Spring 2019 and Fall 2021, during the extended quarantine period of the global COVID-19 Pandemic.

Largely adopted by the 18-25 demographic TikTok's audience is a new generation who has yet to be introduced to Fashion Fair cosmetics, "in the demographics of some of the most-followed stars of TikTok, most of whom are under the age of 20. It is reported that 41 percent of TikTok users are aged 16–24." (Omnicores, 2020) as cited in (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070) TikTok is an undeniably impactful platform that Fashion Fair can explore and utilize as a way of breaking barriers to a new generation. Despite the overnight virality and youthful age demographic of most Tik Tok influencers, these newly arrived celebrities display a significant hold over their audiences and as such have quickly grown

to wield novel influence in the cosmetics industry. While the resurgent Fashion Fair brand currently maintains Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts, the brand is noticeably absent on Tik Tok, an environment which if ignored will likely shape its public profile as at best antiquated and out of touch.

Glow Recipe is a skincare brand carried by Sephora. Glow Recipe was launched in 2014. After reaching \$60 million in sales during the 2020 pandemic, it was projected to hit \$100 million in sales in 2021. The brand attributes a lot of their growth to Tik Tok. According to Hayes, (2020) “TikTok is a social media video-based phone application which enables creative and engaging videos to be shared on social media platforms worldwide.” (Hayes et al., 2020, p. 3858) Glow Recipes cofounder Sarah Lee insists that, “As a beauty brand, once you go viral on TikTok, it immediately converts to sales like never before” (Karin, 2021). In 2020, two emerging popular beauty TikTokers, Glamzilla and Mikayla Nogueira, posted organic non-sponsored Tik Tok videos, Glamzilla’s post reached 1.9 million views, and Mikayla Nogueira’s skyrocketed to 16 million views. (Karin, 2021) Quickly recognizing Tik Tok’s viral propensities, Glow Recipe capitalized on this growth through collaboration and positive promotion with these emerging influencers. Reflecting on the brand’s success, Glow Recipe’s co-founder Christine Chang revealed, “We reposted customers’ videos, created our own tutorial with Glamzilla’s tips and shared how the products work individually and together” (Karin, 2021). Nogueira also partnered with Glow Recipe to create a Mikayla-curated Glow recipe gift set. According to brand founders Lee and Chang, the relationship between consumer and brand is fostered through our growing social media world. I contend that beauty brands cannot compete in today’s rapidly evolving market without a solid social

media presence or a social media strategy that offers interactive and compelling content across multiple platforms. It is by now abundantly clear to the most savvy brands that each social media platform communicates uniquely with its users, and that ambitious brands must craft their marketing messages to meet the kinds of idiosyncratic demands and particularized habits users uniquely employ on each platform. According to popular clothing retailer Madwell's CMO, Yarborough, "one of the key aspects of the Glow Recipe's marketing strategy is to tailor campaigns to fit the platform they are premiering on... The goal is to stay true to the platform while staying true to the brand" (Parisi, 2022).

When comparing Fashion Fair's limited social media presence to the now gold standard Fenty Beauty's social media output, glaring differences are immediately apparent to even the passing consumer. My own observation is that Fenty's social media presence is spread across multiple platforms, each of which is thoroughly exploited, noticeably connecting Fenty Beauty consumers across multiple social media fields and interfaces. In this area among others, Fenty Beauty has set the standard in the makeup industry. I argue that Fenty's multiplatform social media engagement is as groundbreaking as its broad-based complexion range. Launching at its very inception with a 40-tone shade range, previously unheard of for an opening launch of a brand, Fenty's wide product line goes hand in hand with its multi platform social media strategy (Ambrose et al., 2020, p. 37). Clearly Fenty Beauty has identified that by investing in already existing consumer activity and a self-driven and social media savvy target audience, a brand can create a sense of community among its would-be clients that translates into online support, sales, and organic promotion. As beauty researchers

Ambrose (et al) confirm, “support for Fenty Beauty often goes above and beyond average online devotion for a makeup company.” (Ambrose et al., 2020, p. 49)

For the budding media studies scholar such as myself, Fenty’s marketing and product strategy recall media theorist’s Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism, “the medium is the message.” According to McLuhan (1964):

This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of our- selves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.
(McLuhan, 2003, p. 1)

Simply put, the mode in which you communicate with consumers or your audience is, at very least and often more important than the message itself. By deploying multi-platform social media campaigns and multi-tone shade ranges as Fenty Beauty does, it constructs itself in the imaginations of its consumers as not only current and competitive, but indeed bleeding edge. Fashion’s Fair’s lack of social media reach, given its likely smaller marketing budgets, even with Sephora sponsorship is an obstacle in its journey to gain traction with a younger demographic even as it attempts to rekindle its affair with the older generation.

The medium is the message that can be applied to their choice of brand ambassador. From my observations, Instagram comments on Fenty and Fashion Fair’s Instagram pages. Fashion Fair received anywhere from 1 to 10 comments on a single post. The post, which included a famous Youtuber Monica Style, received 23 comments. One of the first comments I noticed was, “I love Monica Style.” The message’s medium supports the idea that the way a message is sent matters more than the actual message. Utilizing Monica resulted in more engagement because although it was the same

message, the medium being Monica affected the message and how consumers responded. As a consumer, I can identify the effect my favorite influencers have on me. When scrolling through TikTok, Instagram, and even meandering on YouTube, I tend to pause and invest time in learning about products my favorite influencers are testing out or loving. Influencers can cross over into movies, music, and modeling, opening the door to a limitless level of fame.

Influencers are a vital and evolving core aspect of social media-driven brand campaigns, products, and brand launches within beauty spaces. Through a discussion about the cultural meaning of celebrity endorsement, Canadian Anthropologist McCracken argues, “Even the most heavily stereotyped celebrity represents not a single meaning, but an interconnected set of meanings.” (McCracken, 1986, p. 313) The interconnected meanings representing influencers are significant when discussing Fashion Fair’s reach. While influencers have followers, those followers are following them not only because they promote beauty products. These influencers represent a personality they identify with, come from a background they recognize, and discuss topics of interest. The mix of these factors gives value and meaning to influencers. McCracken continues by discussing meaning transfer. In this discussion, McCracken states, “Celebrity endorsement is a special instance of a more general process of meaning transfer. According to this model, there is a conventional path for the movement of cultural meaning in consumer societies. Meaning begins as something resident in the culturally constituted world” (McCracken 1986, p. 72-73). McCracken is arguing that when partnerships like brand ambassadors occur the meaning associated with the entity of the celebrity is then associated with the brand. (McCracken, 1986) The instruments that

would be able to facilitate this transfer of meaning between Fashion Fair and millennials and younger would-be social media influencers who have strong relationships built with Generation X.

Fashion Fair chose Kiki Layne as their global ambassador in 2021. Kiki Layne is an American actress known for her work in *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2018), *The Old Guard* (2020), and *Coming 2 America* (2021). The purpose of a brand ambassador is to be the face of the brand and use their established relationships and public profile to promote and market the brand that they are the face of. According to Extol, a marketing company with a focus in influencer driven content, “A global brand ambassador is typically someone who eats, lives, and breathes your brand. Someone who appeals, connects, and engages with customers that enjoy sharing purchase history and reviewing products and services.” (*Global Brand Ambassador*, 2022) A crucial aspect of being a global brand ambassador is having an already large fan base to which they connect to the brand. A big obstacle that Fashion Fair has to overcome is creating a relationship with the generation who does not know the history of Fashion Fair. That relationship could be established through influencers on Instagram and TikTok. When you look at Fashion Fair’s Instagram compared to Fenty, you see different themes on both pages. While we see clients present on both Fenty and Fashion Fair’s Instagram pages, consumer-made content is used differently. Fenty uses organic unedited content made by those who love the brand. These products are also used by all types of consumers. There is content from makeup artists, beauty influencers, and everyday beauty consumers who love the brand. Looking at Fenty’s Instagram page, consumer content and Fenty beauty produced content flow with each other. There is no disconnect; it seems like Fenty’s page is made to

promote consumer-created content. They have acquired and maintained a seamless way of promoting their products while creating a sense of camaraderie and empowerment for those who do not fit in with mainstream beauty ideals.

When we go to Fashion Fair's Instagram page, we see a different utilization of consumer-created content. Unlike Fenty, it is clear what posts are created by Fashion Fair. When looking at the page as a whole, it is effortless to distinguish posts Fashion Fair made compared to entirely organic content. Fashion Fair-created content includes the same green color as Fashion Fair's packaging. As explained in *The Virus of Marketing*, Rayport (1996), rule one explains the advantages of achieving covert brand campaigns. Hiding a brand message under the guise of another activity impacts the influence of a product over consumers. Instead of reposting the creator's content, unedited Fashion Fair is placing creator content in Fashion Fair-created posts with Fashion Fair language used to showcase what the creator is showing. Even though it is organic creator content, it comes across like an ad because Fashion Fair added its twist. Fashion Fair also posts many word-heavy posts that highlight Fashion Fair products, unlike what we see on Fenty's page, which is more visually focused. Many posts display a picture of someone wearing Fashion Fair but are then placed in templates with Fashion Fair marketing, which is not what consumers respond to in 2022.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEGACY

Reflecting with Ruth

My first encounter with Fashion Fair cosmetics occurred through a merchandising internship with Sephora Corporate in the summer of 2021. After working at Sephora stores between 2018 and 2021, I landed a remote internship with Sephora corporate headquarters in San Francisco, CA. During this period, I worked with a portfolio of five makeup brands, Fashion Fair perhaps being the least known among my regular customers. Through multiple relaunch design meetings, I slowly started to learn of the historical impacts of Fashion Fair cosmetics. It was only after a conversation with my own mother, Ruth Barrett, that my eyes were opened to the brand I had been working with. After attending my first brand meeting, I innocently mentioned the brand to my mother. While tidying my bathroom in my apartment, I faceted my mom. Upon her answering I stated, “Do you know what Fashion Fair is?” Instantly, my mother’s eyes blew up, at which point she yelled emphatically, “YES! Of course! That’s all we wore!” Recognizing my mother’s excitement, I quickly explained that Fashion Fair was in the process of being relaunched at Sephora. Upon hearing this news, Ruth Barrett immediately gasped, “Oh my God! I need to tell Aunt Naomi! Oh my God! Nicola, that is all we bought; that is all we wore because [back then] they [mainstream cosmetics companies] did not make products for black people; that [Fashion Fair] was the only thing for us.” Clearly, no other brand delivered what Fashion Fair had for my mother’s generation. Calming my mother down, I demanded that she wait for a public, corporate announcement to be made about Fashion Fair’s relaunch before she told anyone.

Agreeable but still visibly elated, my mother explained how excited my Aunt would be. Fashion Fair's relaunch would mean that once again both my mother and her sister could once again purchase their favorite lipstick—a custom that they and so many of their generation sorely missed since the disappearance of Fashion Fair from cosmetics counters in the mid-2000s. Reminiscently, Ruth explained that Fashion Fair was the only relatable brand that she could actually buy when, in the 1980s, while living in West African countries like Nigeria and Ghana, and even here in the United States once she had arrived. This comment struck me as odd. I was surprised that after having been born in England, raised in multiple West African countries, and relocated to the US for college, where she settled raising a family, my mother would be familiar with Fashion Fair—a brand I'd barely heard of before learning of its proposed relaunch through Sephora. Interestingly, whenever my mother discusses everyday life in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Ghana, and any number of additional West African countries she's spent time in, it is always with a sense of wistful and yet critical nostalgia. "Hot weather in Sierra Leone doesn't feel like this type of heat." "Police in Nigeria are so corrupt." "We don't have these types of issues in Africa." Whenever Ruth reminisces over her previous home spaces, these places feel distant to me, as though there are no parallels between life in the US and Africa for her. And yet, in Ruth's reaction, I could tell that my news stirred memories, nostalgia, and a feeling of acceptance of the beauty she possessed. At this moment, it dawned on me that perhaps Fashion Fair was among those few memorable tokens that linked life across those distant spaces for my mother. As the singular brand that once met her aesthetic and, dare I say, metaphysical needs, Fashion Fair had clearly remained deeply etched in her psyche. Fashion Fair filled multiple needs for my mother

and other black and brown women outside of the physical need and use of a cosmetic product. In this charged moment, I felt as though some kind of family jewel was being passed down to me—a gem of self-care perhaps, one that symbolized just how black and brown women, relegated to the margins of Western beauty aesthetics, nonetheless experienced their own unique beauty and sense of self.

Looking even further back, my first unconscious encounters with Fashion Fair occurred when I routinely searched through my mother’s makeup bag as an impressionable young girl. Growing up, I was infatuated with my mom’s makeup. I would quickly search her makeup bag and go straight for the blue liquid eyeliner, overly used pink compact foundation, and her NARS Blush. My mother loved bold eyeliner, loud lipsticks, and colorful blush; she did not care if they clashed, either. Observing her apply her makeup felt like a ritual that signified beauty, feminism, and a grounded self-presentation to the world. Sometime after our first conversation about her connection to Fashion Fair, I Facetimed her after something dawned on me, “Wait!” I said, confused, “...the light pink compact you used to have... was that Fashion Fair?” I asked. “Yes!” she beamed with a sense of pride, enchanted that I had only just awakened to that moment of clarity. Fashion Fair has been both present and absent in my life without my knowledge. That interaction convinced me that the same is true for many black and brown millennials and Generation X women. Although we were not direct consumers when Fashion Fair was at its peak, we remain connected to its unique hues, tones, textures, and smells through our moms, grandmothers, aunts, and cousins who clearly were once avid Fashion Fair fashionistas.

This chapter will explore the manner in which American black women have been historically left out of the U.S. beauty industry and erased from American beauty paradigms. It will also explore Fashion Fair's historical response to the above, one of recognizing and supporting black women, and black creatives and redefining and reasserting black beauty. In this chapter, I draw on media studies scholar bell hooks and intersectional scholar Patricia Hill Collins among others, to discuss the alienation of black women in this historical moment and how Fashion Fair, foreshadowing aspects of the 3rd wave U.S. feminism and an intersectional politics, first arrived to deliver trust and care to those otherwise ignored by Eurocentric beauty industries.

Feminism & Intersectionality

bell hooks discusses what feminism is and the intersectionality present within feminism in, *Feminism is for Everybody*. In the chapter, Race and Gender, hooks discusses the intersectionality of black women and the new obstacles that come along at the cross point between political female obstacles and political and cultural minority struggles. First, hooks discusses how black women were historically erased from the American feminist movement, "They entered the movement erasing and denying difference, not playing race alongside gender, but eliminating race from the picture" (hooks, 2000, pg.56). hooks argues that the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, in its foregrounding of gender and its obscuring of race allowed white women to take center stage within the movement. White women at this time claimed to champion the issues of all women while remaining willfully ignorant of issues that affected the next largest demographic of women in the US—African American women. Second-wave white feminists for all of their notable public agitation claimed to support causes and issues

affecting all women while they were in reality exclusively focused on the issues that impacted white women. Further and even more problematically, as hooks argued, when convenient white women rather aligned themselves with white men under white supremacy. (hooks, 2000, pg. 56)

In the late '70s and '80s, a younger generation of black women and women of color pushed back on white female racism. During second-wave feminism, black and brown women were in a better position to criticize the racism at the center of the first-wave feminist movement. According to hooks:

Individual white women who had attempted to organize the movement around the banner of common oppression evoking the notion that women constituted a sexual class/caste were reluctant to acknowledge differences among women, differences that overshadowed all the common experiences females share. Race was the most obvious difference (hooks, 2000, pg. 57).

White women struggled to recognize that while they were dealing with oppression and gender-fueled discrimination, black women had to combat the same issues affecting all women while also battling the racism that doubly oppressed them. White women were unable to understand the interlocking set of oppression black women experience and how that differed from exclusive sexist oppression. All forms of oppression are interrelated and connected to each other through an interlocking system of oppression (hooks, 2014). White women at this time were oblivious to the overlapping gendered and racial marginalization black women faced. It is during this period of push back in the 1980s that a gathering of emerging and established women-of-color writers known as the Combahee River Collective, “pioneered what would eventually become known as ‘intersectionality’ ...the idea that multiple identities can be constantly and simultaneously present within one person's body” (Harcourt, 2022, p.301). Arguing these identities, in the case of black

women, were doubly disadvantageous (Crenshaw, 1989). White women positioned themselves at the forefront of gender activism which allowed them to wield power as the normative subjects in turn becoming the apple of the eye of US cosmetic industries.

The cosmetic industry's attempt at being inclusive was giving a sample size of products for black and brown women while providing an entire array for white women and because they provided something for those of a deeper complexion in an attempt to dissolve themselves of any accusations of discrimination. The term "identity politics," was coined by the Combahee River Collective, "'identity politics,' introduced the expression 'interlocking' systems of oppression and developed a paradigm for how to think and act at the intersection of anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-capitalism, and anti-hetero patriarchy." (Harcourt, 2022, p. 298). Identity politics supports second-wave feminism and the notion that all people within marginalized groups possess an interlocking system of oppression. Those who are binded through more oppression have to learn entirely different ways of accessing the same or as close to similar privileges as white people. Eunice and John Johnson had hopes and dreams to take a public and political stance through publications, charity, and multiple modes of business to support those who lived within this intersection.

1973 Fashion Fair

It is essential to discuss the period in which the Fashion Fair was launched. Jim Crow laws ended in 1965, and Fashion Fair cosmetics launched in 1973; although Jim Crow laws ended, there were still systematic racist policies impacting black and brown communities. When Fashion Fair launched, we were in the post-civil rights movement era. After the civil rights movement, many African Americans were impoverished,

under-educated, and lacking opportunities. This period did spark the creation of an African American middle class, but the African American community did not feel invested in by industries and corporations on a larger scale. This period sparked a rise in black-owned businesses that were catering to black communities and, this time, bred Fashion Fair and Jet and Ebony magazine. The cosmetic industry did not acknowledge intersectionality. The makeup industry included black women only in the context of wanting to obtain Eurocentric features. Professor Tiffany Gill explains in *The Beauty of Blackness* the rise in before and after pictures in cosmetic ads after the end of the Jim Crow Era ended. These before and after pictures would show skin tone transitioning from darker to lighter to promote cosmetics.

Makeup brands historically positioned white women as their focus and black and brown women around that focus; before black women were a part of that focus, cosmetics erased the presence and needs of black women in the beauty realm. Fashion Fair was able to come at a time when Black women needed it. Fashion Fair emerged from a systematically oppressive and racist time in American history, launching soon after Jim Crow Laws ended. Although Fashion Fair had obstacles in their path, they decided to etch out a new market by utilizing their other businesses, Jet and EBONY magazine, as advertising sources. The success of Johnson Publishing led Eunice Johnson to create a platform for black fashion creatives, the traveling Fashion Fairs. The success of the traveling Fashion Fairs led Eunice to notice an open market in the beauty industry for women who looked like her. In this section, we will focus on how Eunice brought this brand to life and the factors that made it successful. Fashion Fair has branded its relaunch

based on this story, and understanding its history and legacy is necessary to understand how monumental its relaunch was.

In the 1940s, John and Eunice Johnson created Ebony magazine. (Moore & Johnson, 2022) They wanted a magazine modeled after LIFE magazine to create a place where African Americans could read about things happening within their community, a place where they could see people who looked like them on the covers and within the stories (Moore & Johnson, 2022). Ebony and Jet magazine created a connection and sense of pride between African Americans during a racially divided time. The language within these publications was rooted in empowerment and uplifting the black community. Historically, black women were excluded from luxury consumption in terms of beauty and Fashion (Moore & Johnson, 2022). By the 1960s and 1950s, Johnson publishing company was flourishing, which gave Eunice access to European Fashion shows and a world of couture and luxury that most black women were not invited in. Eunice had entered into a world of luxury fashion that other black and brown women were not welcomed into or represented within (Moore & Johnson, 2022). Fashion Fair did not start with cosmetics, though it started with the traveling Ebony Fashion Fair show.

The Ebony Fashion Fair was created in 1958 by Johnson Publishing, closely managed by Eunice Johnson. The Ebony Fashion Fair traveled nationwide to 30 cities per year throughout its 51-year run. (#TeamEbony, 2019) Eunice Johnson wanted to create a platform to spotlight black models and fashion designers. Eunice utilized the Ebony Fashion Fair to promote EBONY and Jet magazine. They used proceeds from the Fashion show to invest in the black community, “Every ticket purchased came with a free subscription to EBONY or JET...Over the lifetime of the production, more than \$60

million was raised from the show for Black nonprofit organizations, scholarships, schools, and hospitals.” (#TeamEbony, 2019) Throughout her connections, Eunice Johnson had access to couture fashion spaces; within these spaces, she noticed that no one else looked like her in the audience or on the runway. Eunice decided to launch her own traveling Fashion Fair, which gave black and brown women a sense of pride and confidence. Backstage during the Ebony Fashion show, Eunice noticed how many models had to mix makeup products to create their perfect foundation shade. From that observation, she realized that if this is the case for these models, this must be the case for the majority of black women in society. From this revelation, Eunice felt the need to create Fashion Fair Cosmetics. In 1973, Eunice Johnson launched the brand Fashion Fair Cosmetics. (Zumbach, 2021)

Eunice utilized every resource to promote Fashion Fair cosmetics. Through Jet and Ebony magazine, Eunice introduced Fashion Fair cosmetics to Black women throughout the country. Eunice Johnson was able to utilize Johnson Publications to market and advertise Fashion Fair to black and brown women who were familiar with Ebony and JET magazine. Jet and Ebony magazines are black-owned magazines focused on African Americans' lives. Jet and Ebony magazine had great success, “Johnson Publishing Company, Inc. (JPC)...now in its seventh decade, produces the most widely read publications about African Americans. EBONY, a monthly magazine, and JET, a weekly magazine, have a combined readership of nearly 18 million people.” (ABC 7, 2011) They were able to utilize their resources to support the launch of the Fashion Fair and bring it to the homes of African American families throughout the nation through Johnson Publications subscriptions.

Trust is an important aspect of having success in business, “Trust has long been a cornerstone of business relations and persuasive communication.” (Gerard Ball et al., 2016, p. 216) Fashion Fair cosmetics was able to build off of the trust that Johnson Publishing built with the black community. Fashion Fair cosmetics always promoted the makeup used in Jet magazine, Ebony magazine and advertised on the cover photos. Fashion Fair cosmetics were promoted at Fashion Fair shows, having a moment on stage when Fashion Fair is identified as the makeup used by all the Fashion Fair models and an area where the audience could buy Fashion Fair products. Eunice Johnson created a strong relationship with her audience because she was able to see the way intersectionality and identity politics doubly bound the access black women had to luxury consumption. Eunice’s goal through her cosmetic line, Fashion shows, and magazine publications were to open the doors for Fashion and Beauty that was Afrocentric. That relationship was fostered through Jet and Ebony magazine, and Fashion Fair shows, and it was ultimately utilized during the launch of Fashion Fair Cosmetics. Those who bought a magazine, a Fashion Fair lipstick, or went to a Fashion Fair show all felt apart from the Fashion Fair family. The Fashion Fair family consisted of Fashion Fair models, Fashion Fair counter girls, Fashion Fair makeup artists, and anyone who supported the Fashion Fair brand.

J. Carlyle Wormley, Barbara Heinzerling, and Virginia Gunn explore the impact Black-Owned businesses have had on the civil rights movement and the effects of Ebony Fashion Fair and Ebony magazine on Black consumers. They utilized interviews from early Fashion Fair models, members of the organization, members of organizations that sponsored events, and Ebony Fashion Fair audience participants. During their data

collection, they identified five themes connected to Ebony Fashion Fair. The first connection is that “Ebony provided positive images to encourage and inspire the black race and they showed it is possible for Blacks to reach their full potential.” (Wormley et al., n.d., pg. 149) Black women did not need to be light skinned to be accepted as a model or designer; all black women felt beautiful through Fashion Fair. The use of darker models conveyed that Fashion Fair viewed all black women as beautiful. The second theme is, “Ebony Fashion Fair increased opportunities for Black models, designers, photographers, and entertainers.” (Wormley et al., n.d., pg. 149) Ebony magazine influenced the display and advertisement of Black people. The third noticeable theme is Ebony Fashion Fair’s impact on Black charities and organizations. Theme four is that Ebony magazine provided opportunities for Blacks beyond fashion. The last theme identified is Ebony Fashion Fair and Fashion Fair’s impact on white consumer culture. Fashion Fair showed white consumers that brands that value diversity and inclusion could benefit and be equally profitable. Fashion Fair cosmetics, Ebony magazine, Jet magazine, and Fashion Fair shows showed the world what can happen when you invest in creating products for the black community.

Obstacles for Black-Owned Businesses

In addition to the racially fueled obstacles they had to overcome, Fashion Fair also had to combat the hurdles that all businesses have to endure. It is not easy for small businesses to survive, let alone black-owned businesses.

There are 30.2 million small businesses in the U.S. But only a fraction of them survive. Twenty percent of small businesses fail by the first year, 30% by the second, 50% by the fifth...Eight out of 10 Black-owned businesses fail within the first 18 months. (Green, 2021)

Looking beyond the numbers: The Struggles of Black Businesses to Survive: A Qualitative Approach looks at Black business owners' experiences in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their study identified growth in African American businesses from 1982 to 1987, jumping from 308,099 black businesses to 424,004 black-owned businesses. By 1997 there were more than 800,000 Black-owned businesses in the United States. (Boston & Ross, 1996; Rice, 1993; as cited in Bonds, 2007) This growth in black-owned businesses can be attributed to a few changes. Minority-owned businesses could access government contracts they could not access otherwise because of government programs. These programs also required white contractors to have minority business subcontracting goals which provided black companies more access to the industry they otherwise would not have received. (Bonds, 2007) The emerging black businesses they saw a rise in were firms involved in construction, finances, building, manufacturing, business, and professional services. The black-owned companies facing the most hardships had low-profit rates, operated on a smaller scale, and were located in low-income African American neighborhoods. These businesses consisted of mom-and-pop stores and personal services like barbershops, beauty salons, taverns, and auto repairs. (Bonds, 2007)

There were multiple obstacles identified that black-owned businesses have to deal with. These obstacles included access to mainstream markets, racial discrimination, and being more likely to be turned down for loans than white business owners. Competition from larger white-owned corporations also plays a role. Larger corporations noticed the growing opportunity to target the black community and Black neighborhoods; their resources and capital made it hard for smaller black-owned businesses to compete.

(Bonds, 2007) Bonds also identifies the struggle of breaking through existing business relationships Whites have with other Whites, “African American businesses are cracking the old boy’s network” (Bonds, 2007, pg. 595). The existing relationships white business owners have with one another are long-standing relationships. When you incorporate a history of racism and discrimination, it makes it extremely hard for black business owners to be successful when they cannot form working relationships with other business owners or individuals in financial or government positions because of the lack of diversity within these spaces.

Fashion Fair Decline

As iconic as Fashion Fair was, there was a slightly expected downfall of this historic brand. Three themes are present in the collapse of the Johnson Publishing company and Fashion Fair: poor management, lack of evolution, and inability to keep up with demand. Fashion Fair went out of business when Johnson Publishing Company filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Johnson Publishing company announced in April of 2019 that it would be filing for bankruptcy and selling its remaining assets, which consist of “a comprehensive archive of photos from some of black America’s most pivotal 20th Century moments, and a beloved cosmetics line that, toward the end, accounted for more than 40 percent of JPC’s [Johnson Publishing Company’s] bottom line.” (Bates, 2019) In the 90s, the makeup industry started to see more makeup brands like MAC and Bobbi Brown hit the market with shades that black women could utilize. The shade range was not quite as diverse as Fashion Fair, but there was competition, and black women had more choices than they did in the 70s. Fashion Fair cosmetics also experienced issues with distribution. When Fashion Fair revamped its packaging, they struggled with

distribution, therefore, could not stay in stock in the stores they were housed. Due to empty spaces in stores, clients were forced to find other products. Additionally, some stores could not afford to hold the space for them because of the lack of inventory. Since Fashion Fair products struggled to maintain stock levels, when clients found Fashion Fair products, they would buy in bulk, drawing stock down more. (Givhan, 2015). When the print industry started to decline with the rise of digital media, the Johnson Publishing Company, or JPC, took a hit. When online advertisements grew, they took money away from magazine advertisements, which JPC heavily relied on (Bates, 2019). Subscriptions slowly started to fall, and when John H. Johnson, founder, and CEO of JPC, died, his daughter Linda Johnson Rice took over the company, but was sadly unprepared and unequipped to handle the market shifts. With rapid changes in the industry occurring, loss of advertising dollars to online media, downsizing, and merging, they could not adapt to the new industry. In 2016, Rice sold Ebony, Ebony.com, and Jet.com. In 2019 Fashion Fair went out of business.

Fashion Fair cosmetics recognized black beauty. Black women have a history of being forgotten, pushed to the side, and ignored. Through bell hooks and Combahee River Collective, we have discussed how marginalized black women have been erased from movements and spaces that are supposed to benefit them. Similar to first-wave feminism, they were pushed to the side to focus on the needs of white women first. Fashion Fair being one of the first brands who celebrate the intersectionality of black women, has created a historical connection between Fashion Fair and black beauty consumers. Although Fashion Fair was unable to adjust to market shifts, my mother's

vignette displays the long-lasting impression the brand has had on the construction of black beauty and the importance of black representation in the cosmetic industry

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS BLACK BEAUTY?

Alex's Annoyed Vignette

After concluding a 10-week remote internship at Sephora's corporate headquarters in the summer of 2021, I transferred back to my hometown Exton, Pennsylvania, Sephora store. I was thrilled and inspired to share the amazing things I learned about new product launches, how brands operate, and new brands coming to Sephora stores. One of those brands was Fashion Fair. During my internship, I learned how impactful this brand remained for generations of African American women, particularly between the early 70s and the early millennium. I was thrilled to share this news with my team and share the history and importance of this brand. While presenting the history of Fashion Fair Cosmetics during an informal training session with both superiors and coworkers, Alex, a recently arrived manager, walked into my presentation midway. After I passionately described the importance of Fashion Fair to the black community and identified the segment of Sephora's client base that it would target, I explained that the brand traditionally did not supply complexion makeup products for white clients, focused as it was on delivering products to communities whose deeper skin tones were historically ignored by mainstream cosmetic brands. Despite my detailed explanation, Alex bitterly stated that she disagreed with the Fashion Fair partnership with Sephora, arguing that it was essentially exclusive to white clients.

When I asked Alex specifically what she disagreed with; she responded in annoyance that she did not believe that Sephora's launching of a brand that created products solely for clients of color was reflective of Sephora's current stand on Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion—a policy only recently put in place by Sephora in 2018. Alex further explained that multiple high-end bronzers were not made light enough or were too orange for her skin tone. According to Alex, her struggles in finding high-end bronzers that work for her skin tone, “. . . . was the same thing,” as black beauty clients struggled to find complexion shades that matched them; a comment that to me seemed ignorant of histories of black exclusion in the mainstream beauty industry. When I explained that many of the clients who walked through our doors were limited to Fenty Beauty, a more recently launched brand that instead centered browner skin tones and how problematic that was, Alex was seemingly bewildered; lost as to why African American women would feel excluded when they already had a current brand that catered to them. Clearly, Alex seemed comfortable with sidelining brown skin tones to the singular Fenty Beauty, the only competitive brand capable or willing to care for black women. In her mind, “diversity and inclusion” was served by relegating darker skin-toned customers to a singular brand.

The moment lingered in my mind: I have well over 20 brands in my makeup collection, and it is safe to assume that most of my coworkers have the same or more. I can confidently say from helping clients buy makeup that most clients who shop at our stores have a mix of brands within their everyday makeup. Why would a client of a deeper complexion not want the same thing? Most clients I work with look forward to seeing products from other brands and comparing and contrasting products to decide on a perfect brand and perfect product for them. Why would anyone assume that a client of a deeper complexion is okay with being forced to utilize one brand because that is the only brand that works for them? Furthermore, why would one assume that one brand would be

able to cater to all the needs of every black and brown client walking through Sephora's doors? Alex assumed that because one brand contributed to the market for black and brown clients, this was an acceptable way of creating an inclusive space. Alex's comments clearly demonstrated a shallow and problematic understanding of inclusion and highlighted for me the manner in which contemporary corporate DEI policies have quickly become and remain the superficial marketing tokens of corporations' attempts at making good on the newly emergent paradigms of social justice and responsibility emergent in the wake of the Movement for Black Lives and other social activism.

What is Black Beauty?

This chapter will cover the evolution of how black and brown people have been treated within the makeup industry and the influence Fenty Beauty has recently come to wield in the beauty industry, other brands, and beauty retailers. It will explore the experience of black women in the contemporary beauty industry as well as my decision to choose Fenty Beauty and its recent successes in recalibrating cosmetic skin tone palettes as the contemporary brand to which the legacy brand Fashion Fair should respond. Lastly, through engaging black feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, among others, this chapter will unpack problematic representation and erasures of black women across mainstream American beauty scopes, illuminate issues that affect black women within the beauty space and explore how Fenty Beauty has begun to decenter whiteness and recalibrate the beauty spectrum. An exploration of Fenty's recent successes as a way to speculate on the direction that Fashion Fair might take so as to reposition itself in the contemporary moment and to continue its legacy of care for black and brown communities.

In *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins, she argues, “Black women’s empowerment lies both in criticizing the existing social order and in creating spaces where we each can develop our authentic selves.” (Collins, 2022, p. 356) Fashion Fair started the work of creating spaces where black women could be their authentic selves first through the EBONY Fashion Fair shows. Eunice recognized the need to have a place where black creatives could be seen and appreciated for the features that were being excluded from the fashion and cosmetic industry. The work of creating spaces for black women continued through the launch of Fashion Fair cosmetics. Fashion Fair cosmetics created a space where, for the first time, black women of all skin tones were positioned through magazines like EBONY and Jet as the standard and face of beauty. This work continued in the contemporary beauty industry through Fenty Beauty. Fenty has been able to criticize the norms of the beauty industry by pushing the standards encompassing shade range and product development to have black women at the forefront. Fashion Fair and Fenty Beauty carry importance to the black community and the cosmetic industry because they have successfully been able to criticize a white-centered beauty industry through their products, creating a space where black women felt welcomed and empowered.

The Fenty Effect

I would argue that in a short period, Fenty Beauty has become the epitome of a contemporary, diverse, and inclusive makeup brand that knows how to utilize social media to promote products, partner with influencers, and support marginalized groups. Fenty displayed its commitment to creating diverse products meant for all consumers from its first launch. They demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusivity

through advertisements by including models who identify with different genders, backgrounds, and religions to represent Fenty Beauty (Fetto, 2020). Fenty Beauty has also been able to stay on top of trends and remain relevant on newer social media apps like TikTok resulting in them remaining a brand with highly sought-after products. Additionally, Fenty Beauty has had a political impact. They have been able to decenter whiteness within the makeup industry through a commitment to creating makeup products with black and brown women in mind. Fenty Beauty's impact and success emphasize the importance of creating products for marginalized groups and engaging with consumers through recently emergent social media strategies that align with trending marketing strategies and contemporary social justice movements and outlooks.

The makeup industry has changed significantly in the last 20 years. The factors that affect consumer choices continuously evolve from shifts in brand popularity to the evolution of ingredient preferences. Product selection for foundations, lipsticks, and other essential beauty products is continually growing. Regarding the color range, cosmetic companies have historically prioritized creating colors that will sufficiently match white clients while deciding not to invest in developing complexion shades that would serve a wide range of black and brown clients. After the launch of Fenty cosmetics, makeup brands were held to a higher standard regarding complexion shades. Fenty Beauty launched with a starting point of 40 shades and later expanded to 50, which was uncommon at the time of launch in 2017, "The (now legendary) opening gambit was a 40-strong foundation range (since expanded to 50) that included shades for *everyone* and a marketing campaign that was as diverse as they come" (Fetto, 2020). I chose Fenty

Beauty as the brand to compare Fashion Fair to because Fenty is the gold standard for a diverse brand that utilizes social media to create community.

When Fenty Beauty launched with a starting range of 40 complexion shades, it sent a message to the beauty community that it would produce products meant for black and brown clients, “The messaging – essentially that “if you don’t fit an age-old Eurocentric ideal of beauty, you are not welcome” – was the white elephant in the room of a tone-deaf business. Fenty Beauty didn’t just address this, it blew the conversation wide open.”(Fetto, 2020) Fenty Beauty continued Fashion Fair’s work by focusing on the lack of complexion products for black and brown clients within the makeup industry. Fenty Beauty and Fashion Fair Cosmetics were both born out of times of oppression as well. Fenty was launched in 2017 at the beginning of the Trump administration. Fashion Fair launched a few years after the Jim Crow era ended. Fenty has also become a staple brand within the black community. From creating products with a wide range of undertones that work for many skin tones. Fenty Beauty has made a huge cultural impact on the beauty industry because of their focus on black and brown faces.

Intellectual Activism

Patricia Hill Collins is credited for the term intellectual activism. Collins explains intellectual activism as “the myriad ways that people place the power of their ideas in service to social justice.” (Collins, 2022, p.358) Collins expands on intellectual activism within *Black Women and Wellness* by stating,

Black women’s intellectual activism within Black communities has been and remains inherently unruly, creatively fusing art and politics to engage issues of importance to Black women. Visual arts, fiction, music, poetry, dance, and other forms of Black creative expression provide important interpretive spaces for Black women’s self-definition (Collins, 2022, p.358)

Collins is arguing the way black women use intellectual activism is through the use of artistic expression to make political stands. When you look at what Fenty Beauty has been able to do, there is intellectual activism present. When Rihanna launched her brand through a 40-shade range foundation, she was sending a supportive message about diversity within the beauty industry. She was saying, “Black is beautiful” during the height of Black Lives Matter. Through that launch, Rihanna moved the spotlight on the lack of shade ranges in an impactful way where the spotlight for every brand was on their shade range. Fenty Beauty utilized the art of makeup to make a social stand to raise awareness of a lack of products that cater to women of a deeper complexion.

Black Is Beautiful Movement

During the late 1960s, the rise in the ‘Black is Beautiful’ slogan occurred to recognize the success of the Civil Right Movement (Baird, 2021). It was a way of rejecting Eurocentric white norms and promoting black Afrocentric norms. ‘Black is Beautiful’ was a way to celebrate dark black skin, coarse hair and Afros and a way to push back on all of the Eurocentric norms that were dominating the beauty industry. In Baird’s *Making Black More Beautiful’: Black Women and the Cosmetics Industry in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, she discusses how the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement changed attitudes about beauty standards in the black community. Baird also includes an experience Activist Assata Shakur shared about her observations of how Black women have tried to adhere to white beauty norms, “[T]here was one girl in our school whose mother made her wear a clothespin on her nose to make it thin. There were quite a few girls who tried to bleach their skin white with bleaching cream” (Baird, 2021, p. 558) Eurocentric norms that historically have been imposed on black people has been

extremely impactful on what our society views as beautiful or ugly and because of systematic racism like the Jim Crow Laws white people have always been in the positions of power to dictate societies image of beauty.

The beauty industry historically has invested more in products and shade ranges that support non-black women. Tiffany Gill, Professor, and Historian at Rutgers University, touches on the historical American view of beauty in *The Beauty of Blackness*, a documentary following Fashion Fair's relaunch. Gill explains that beauty is power, but because of American History and slavery, beauty has always been connected to whiteness. (Moore & Johnson, 2022) Gill states, "The closer you can get to whiteness the more beautiful you become." (Moore & Johnson, 2022) In her discussion, she touches on how the beginning of the cosmetic industry is responding to the standard of beauty that is connected to being white. The first companies that attempted to beautify black women were white. The products those companies pushed were rooted in colorism. These products pushed the idea that the lighter you are, the more beautiful instead of embracing deeper complexions. (Moore & Johnson, 2022) Within the documentary, Gill references a story about actress Cicely Tyson. Gill explains that actress Cicely Tyson would say she hated seeing pictures of herself on the red carpet or on camera because she felt like she looked gray. The experiences you will read below did not only affect everyday consumers; these issues all black and brown women at all levels have to endure because our beauty industry has historically been rooted in whiteness.

The Experience of Black Beauty Consumers

Black Representation in the Beauty Industry by David Baboolall, Tiffany Burns, Kristi Weaver, and Ammanuel Zegeye discusses the challenges of equality from the

perspective of black beauty brand owners and black beauty consumers. *Black representation in the beauty industry* includes McKinsey's Institute for Black Economic Mobility research. As trivial as the beauty industry is, how the beauty industry and society talk about beauty affect how women and men see themselves, "beauty products are a fundamental part of how others view them and how they see themselves. With taglines [like] 'because you're worth it' and 'making life more beautiful,' the beauty industry promises to enhance not only people's appearances but also their lives." (Baboolall et al., 2022) How the beauty industry discusses beauty and images they associate as beautiful can affect self-esteem and perception of what beauty is for consumers nationwide. I decided to utilize this report because it touches on experiences that most black and brown women experience and experiences I have personally experienced in the beauty industry. The experiences that are described are some that I have experienced as a consumer but have also had the unfortunate chance to witness as someone who works within the beauty industry.

When we look at the shopping experience for black beauty consumers, we cannot ignore the differences between a black consumer and a white consumer. First, let us look at beauty marketing. Historically, beauty campaigns have focused on including white women, lighter-skinned women, and women with Eurocentric beauty features. Rarely do you see a darker-skinned black woman with coarse hair as the face for a beauty campaign (Baboolall et al., 2022). When the participants of the focus group were asked how they felt about advertisements, they explained that they had positive feelings toward those advertisements, although they identified that they were not represented. When asked about black brands' marketing, the responses were as follows, "I feel it's inclusive and

represents me” or “It makes me think how beautiful Black people are.” (Baboolall et al., 2022) Beauty advertisements are not only advertising products, but they are also advertising the image of what beauty is, which has an impact on the benchmark for beauty within society.

The second aspect of the shopping experience that affects black consumers is the lack of accessibility to stores and the lack of available products. Many black neighborhoods are consumer deserts meaning they have insufficient access to goods and services meaning black consumers have a higher chance of having to travel further to access retail outlets and higher quality products than white consumers (Baboolall et al., 2022) For black consumers who do have regular access to beauty stores and retail spaces, that does not ensure that they have access to products that will work for them, “There aren’t enough brands on the shelves suitable for melanated skin or Afro-textured hair. Seventy-three percent of our survey respondents reported that Black beauty products were often out of stock when they went to buy them.” (Baboolall et al., 2022). Similar to some struggles Fashion Fair experienced before they went out of business, many women feel as though their favorite products from their go-to black-owned beauty brands are frequently out of stock. When asked about product accessibility, the survey respondent’s response was as follows, “Forty-seven percent of our survey respondents said they typically buy beauty products at a mass-market retailer or a grocery store, yet only 13 percent said it’s easy to find beauty products that meet their needs there.” (Baboolall et al., 2022). Although some retailers are making an effort to house more black-owned beauty brands, that does not mean they are accessible to a majority of the black community.

The last aspect of the shopping experience that affects black women more than non-black is the poor sales experience. Black consumers historically have had negative sales experiences within beauty spaces in particular. Many of those experiences are rooted in a lack of knowledge among salespeople. Salespeople have to be trained to know how to speak to black-owned beauty brands, and they must be trained to know how to match women of a deeper complexion, “Black customers are 5.7 times more likely than White customers to be dissatisfied with product specialization in color cosmetics.” (Baboolall et al., 2022) One negative experience can have a huge impact on a consumer's decision to become a frequent buyer, “Even after buying a beauty product, there’s no guarantee that Black consumers’ will repeat their purchase, usually because the products didn’t work as consumers hoped they would.” (Baboolall et al., 2022)

Findings like the ones we discussed above are not exclusive to only black beauty consumers. Black Beauty business owners struggle to find resources that non-black beauty businesses can access. When discussing diversity in ownership, Fashion Fair Co-Owner, Cheryl Mayberry McKissack states, “Black women have been such great consumers of cosmetics and skincare. Unfortunately, they really didn’t have a seat at the table...From an ownership standpoint, it wasn't really inclusive at all” (Moore & Johnson, 2022) Part of the issue within looking at the lack of diversity in the makeup industry is the lack of black and brown ownership. Resources like investments and venture capital are more easily attainable for non-black beauty business owners, “Black brands in the beauty industry raise a median of \$13 million in venture capital, substantially less than the \$20 million that non-Black brands raise. Yet, the median revenue of those Black brands is 89 times higher than what non-Black beauty brands

return over the same period.” (Baboolall et al., 2022) Although findings support black beauty consumers who want to buy from black-owned beauty businesses because they know their products will work for them, the obstacles black-owned beauty brands have to work around stifles access for the black community to purchase products. Access to funding and capital is an aspect of starting a business that black business owners struggle with more than non-black business owners. Black Beauty Brands and The Challenges Founders Face discuss findings within the Mckinsey report and the challenges black beauty brand owners have to overcome.

Intersectionality is very present within the cosmetic industry in multiple respects. When we talk about black beauty, there are multiple aspects of intersectionality that represent black beauty. The contemporary makeup industry is represented by more than just white and black straight women in 2022. The LGBTQA+ community has a great impact on the beauty industry, community and history. Although members of the LGBTQA+ community have not consistently been in the forefront of advertisements and beauty marketing they have always been beauty consumers. When Fashion Fair launched in 1973, the cosmetic industry did not recognize the intersectionality of black women, let alone the intersectionality of gender, sexuality and race. While we have discussed the marginalization of black women, we cannot erase of black and brown members of the LGBTQA+ community as well. In addition, with the intersectionality of race and gender the intersectionality of gender, race and sexuality is impacted by interlocking systems of oppression (hooks, 2016). While black women must experience an interlocking of oppression that is rooted in racism and sexism, black and brown members of the LGBTQA+ community must experience an interlocking of oppression that is rooted in

racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and much more. Fenty Beauty is a brand who has marketed themselves as the brand for marginalized groups and while that strongly includes black women, they have also been strong allies and supporters of the LGBTQA+ community as well pushing them to the forefront of marketing and product campaigns. Although the 2020 iteration of Fashion Fair has not included gender diversity as much as Fenty Beauty, they do depict a more diverse community than the 1973 iteration of Fashion Fair. In the contemporary beauty landscape all aspects of diversity are expected to be represented in public campaigns and it is essential in the sustainability of beauty brands.

Kimberle Crenshaw, discusses the problematic tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989). In her discussion, Crenshaw states, “This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened, and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination.” (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140) The erosion of black women in the beauty industry is not exclusive to straight black women, and through Crenshaw’s argument, the black members of the LGBTQA+ community are the most marginalized group. Members of the LGBTQA+ community were also not historically represented within brands and campaigns in the cosmetic industry. Now in 2022, we see members of the LGBTQA+ community with major brand campaigns, brand owners, and major makeup artists impacting trends. The intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality is also extremely important and a level of inclusivity that should be at the forefront in all beauty brands. The beauty industry has been centralized in straight whiteness for most of its history. In Crenshaw’s (1989)

discussion on the intersectionality of race and gender she identifies the harmfulness in focusing on the most privileged group,

Focus on [the] privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon. (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140)

Black beauty consumers who walk in beauty spaces have had wildly different experiences from white women. The experiences we discussed above are rooted in a lack of black representation within the beauty industry. While Fashion Fair is an extremely unique brand that caters to a specific market with beautifully curated products, other products can easily outshine Fashion Fair based on their social media presence. While sustainability is a concern for Fashion Fair, competing against highly popular and loved artistry makeup brands will also be a huge obstacle as well. Fashion Fair has a great opportunity to connect with younger black and brown women through popular black and brown influencers to send the message that you do not have to “Make it work” and you do not have to go through rounds of finding the perfect match because Fashion Fair is the brand created for you. Although there has been progress in how black and brown women are treated within beauty spaces, darker complexions are still not prioritized in product creation, shade ranges, or undertone selection. Fashion Fair has the opportunity to continue what the previous iteration of Fashion Fair was working to, and the job that Fenty has since picked up is decentralization whiteness in the beauty industry.

In this chapter, we have discussed the evolution of how black and brown people have been treated within the makeup industry and the impact Fenty Beauty has had on the beauty community. Through Patricia Hill Collins, we discussed how Fenty, and Fashion Fair have been able to enable intellectual activism to push the standards in the makeup

industry. Using *Black representation in the beauty industry*, we have been able to exemplify the marginalized experience black and brown women have endured. Lastly, we have discussed the intersectionality that is present in the cosmetic industry, which presents more marginalized groups that should be represented in all brands. In the next chapter, we will discuss and analyze the decision to launch Fashion Fair at Sephora, and the documentary focused on Fashion Fair's relaunch, *The Beauty of Blackness*.

CHAPTER THREE

SEPHORA X FASHION FAIR

Sephora

In 2020, Fashion Fair went from Macy's and Nordstrom as their retail distribution to Sephora, which is an entirely different retailer with a higher end clientele who has a strong interest in luxury beauty. Sephora, as a retail distributor, is known to be a brand builder. Sephora's merchandising department invests massively in brands and helps them curate their assortments, and engage in social media, marketing, and advertising to support a better introduction to Sephora's clientele. Originally founded in France in 1970, and later branching to Soho, New York City, Sephora is a French company and LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton subsidiary specializing in luxury beauty (Loeb 2013). Today Sephora operates in 35 countries throughout the globe, with a total of 2,700 stores, and another 500 stores to be established through its latest partnership with Kohls. (Sephora, n.d.), Sephora's open-sell environment distinguished the chain from its competitors at its launch (Business for Reference, 2018). Sephora removed the counter makeup style layout utilized at most department stores at the time. This store model removed the counter that separated the person selling makeup from the client, leading to more genuine consultation and a great in-store experience. Sephora encouraged clients to touch, feel and apply makeup in-store, which changed how clients looked at the makeup shopping experience. Sephora is now known for its innovative, forward-thinking, trendy brands According to Sephora "Sephora continues to curate innovative brands including a robust Clean beauty assortment and exclusive brands like Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez and Fenty Beauty by Rihanna brought to market first by Sephora." (Sephora, n.d.) While

Sephora as a retailer initially prided itself as committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the beauty industry, the upsurge of social activism in the wake of the George Floyd killing further forced the hand of its public relations. When the Black Lives Matter movement rose to prominence, Sephora, like other corporations, were forced to take a critical look at the degree to which they supported the black community and to make necessary changes.

Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter Movement, which was created by three black women, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, rose to prominence in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a self-appointed Sanford, Florida neighborhood watch member, or more appropriate, vigilante, who murdered the 17-year-old unarmed black teen Trayvon Martin (Mir & Zanoni, 2021). Trayvon Martin's murder sparked the notably decentralized, grass roots, physical, social media-based and eventually global movement for black lives. According to authors, Mir and Zanoni (2021), "protests [were] held in dozens of countries, highlighting the interconnected global histories of slavery and colonialism, underscoring the continued marginalization and exploitation of Black bodies across the world." (pg.4) After the similarly needless and brutal killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2022, as many as 26 million people throughout the United States stood together in protest against police brutality, and systemic racism in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. (Harlow, 2022) The month after the murder of George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatters was shared more than 400 thousand times on Twitter. (Kivvit, 2020). The Black Lives Matter

Movement was and remains invested in highlighting racism, discrimination and inequality experienced by black people (Roberts, 2018).

While the Black Lives Matter movement has received criticism from some, most notably from Trump administration secretary of housing and development, Ben Carson who argued that the movement was vested in advancing a Marxist agenda, BLM has enjoyed the broad base support of varied institutions and communities across the US.. Clearly perplexed at the movement's popular appeal Carson, ironically claiming Martin Luther King was quoted as arguing, "What did [Dr. King] stand for[but] a color-blind society." Advancing a problematically thin reading of King's vision, Carson continued, "[Rev. King] said 'I dream of a time when people will be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. We are putting everything in context of color, of skin, of external characteristics.'" (Halon, 2020). Here, the ultra-conservative Carson argued for the kind of post-racial colorblindness that social justice activists rail against and which individuals such as my co-worker Alex, similarly put off by Fashion Fair black-positive politics, appear to be reassured by.

The under-examined criticisms of its detractors aside, the Black Lives Matter Movement has had a significant impact on US society, an influence which demanded the immediate alliance of all Americans, including its white populations. Indeed, BLM politics demanded that those that would consider themselves allies should speak up and join the fight. The video evidence that uniquely marked George Floyd's killing and which re-energized the still-fledgling movement demanded that all empathetic groups, including corporations respond, not only with rhetoric but actionable, trackable policies and programs that would address the systemic inequalities that made the unprovoked killings

of Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many other not only possible, but unprosecutable.

15% Black-Owned Business Pledge

The undeniable moral weight of the Black Lives Matter movement put pressure on all public and private institutions, including corporations to reconsider their historic lack of support of the black community and their largely exclusive hiring and exploitative practices. Activist groups demanded that particularly those brands and corporations that had enjoyed historic patronage from black communities make rigorous internal changes in their marketing, advertising, hiring and sales practices and most importantly in their community investment. In response to these inarguably morally justifiable demands, brands started making those changes, many agreeing to a recently emergent and compelling 15% black-owned pledge—an online campaign started by social justice activist, Aurora James—one designed to push retailers to commit to support black-owned businesses more permanently (McEvoy, 2020).

Strategically targeting industries as an important site for social justice, in May 2020, Aurora James posted a call to action aimed at all of the world's biggest retail brands. Publicly calling-out retailers like Nordstroms, Ulta, Walmart, Whole Foods and Sephora among others James announced, "I am asking you to commit to buying 15% of your products from Black owned businesses" (Regensdorf, 2020). Recognizing these companies as dependent in significant part on the black dollar to stay in business and aware of these companies' dismissal of issues that afflicted black life, it was Aurora James' intention to rightfully shame corporations into response (Connelly, 2020). Largely successful in her mission, since her public launch of the pledge, over 28 brands and

retailers have taken on the challenge, driving reinvestments of upwards of \$10B toward black-owned brands (*The Fifteen Percent Pledge*, 2022). Sephora's response to the pledge was notable, Upon launching Sephora's campaign of black business engagement Chief Merchandising Officer, Artemis Patrick was quoted as saying, "Ultimately, this commitment is about more than the prestige products on our shelves,...It starts with a long-term plan in diversifying our supply chain and building a system that creates a better platform for Black-owned brands to grow, while ensuring Black voices help shape our industry. We recognize we can do better "(Maheshwari, 2020). The loss of innocent black life at the hands of police forces notwithstanding, The Black Lives Matter movement, largely initiated and driven by the courageous efforts of black women activists, ultimately drove an agenda that corporations were forced to respond to.

The 15% pledge focused on the lack of diversity and inclusion present within products and corporations that were publicly sending diverse messages. In efforts to combat the lack of diversity within merchandise and the workplace, corporations, including Sephora, felt a 15% pledge would be the first step toward creating a more inclusive space for employees and consumers. In the summer of 2020, some two months after the launch of Aurora James' public challenge, Sephora became the first major retailer to take the 15 Percent Pledge, committing 15% of its assortment to prestige Black-owned companies, According to CMO, Artemis Patrick, "By the end of 2021, we'll more than double our assortment overall, including achieving the 15% benchmark in prestige haircare." (*About Us*, n.d.) Prior to the 15 percent pledge, Sephora carried nine black-owned brands out of its 290 brand array—roughly 3% of its product range. As of November 2022, Sephora carries 21 black-owned products out of 322 brand portfolios,

notably reaching its targeted 15% black brand quota and multiplying its engagement with black brands.

DEI Initiatives

When the video of George Floyd's death went viral on social media, protests occurred nationwide. The country, later the globe, was visually up in arms about the pattern of police brutality towards black and brown men and women in the US. According to New York Times journalist, Derrick Taylor, "In cities across the United States, tens of thousands of people have swarmed the streets to express their outrage and sorrow during the day. That has descended into nights of unrest, with reports of shootings, looting and vandalism in some cities." (Taylor, 2021). While corporate and other institutional DEI initiatives have existed since the early post-Civil Rights era, according to Forbes contributor, Geri Stengel, "Before COVID-19 and [the] Black Lives Matter, DEI initiatives were plentiful but ineffective" (2020) In response to BLM-era agitation however, corporations were forced to recognize their superficial training around workplace bias, and to admit that their shallow DEI initiatives had never been effective. Stengel argues, "The conversation pivots here to what we can do to ensure that our workplace is inclusive, fair, and equitable to our current employees...[and] how our policies need to change to ensure that that is [in fact] happening" (2020. px). In a (2020) interview with Forbes magazine, Canary CEO and co-founder Mandy Price admitted, "Rage turned to action and Black Lives Matter protest rallies erupted around the world. Pushed by employees and fear of losing customers, companies pledged to play a prominent role in combating racism....We are at a watershed moment...Going back to old normative patterns [isn't] going to work." (Stengel, 2020). Not only did companies

realize that they were not doing enough to diversify their workplace and supply chains, but that this would be undeniably publicly apparent during this racially tense time in history as well. Companies had to decide between being labeled as complicit with systemic racism and as such a tarnishing of its public image and likely loss of customers or in investing in substantial DEI programs aimed at driving diversity and equity in their workspaces and product lines. It is in this historic context of the opening up of supply chain opportunities to black businesses that new Fashion Fair owners, Desiree Rogers and Chery MsKissak have found an eager distributor for a reinvigorated and important black-owned and black-focused Fashion Fair. Whether or not Sephora and other corporations' commitments to the 15% pledge are largely reactionary, superficially, financially motivated and ultimately unsustainable remain to be seen. Whatever is to be made of Sephora's novel sponsorship of Fashion Fair, the ultimate fate of this crucially important legacy brand, the mission of which has been to uplift black women, may very well rest upon it.

Capturing the Beauty of Blackness

Seemingly as part of Sephora's investment in Fashion Fair, in 2021 Sephora and Vox Films partnered to produce an HBO Max premiered documentary on the relaunch of the legacy brand. The Kiana Moore and Tiffany Johnson directed feature-length film, *The Beauty of Blackness*, is a documentary that follows the struggles of Fashion Fair's CEOs Desiree Rodgers and Cheryl Mayberry McKissack in buying and relaunching Fashion Fair and the impact of the early Fashion Fair cosmetics and the Ebony traveling fashion shows had on the black community and more specifically black women (Moore & Johnson, 2022). The documentary explores how Fashion Fair emerged as a symbol of

beauty, power, and respect within the black community. In the piece, Rutgers University professor Tiffany Gill explains that because white-owned companies were among the first to try to beautify black women that regardless of these brands' intentions, black beauty was nonetheless constructed in relation to and, at best, as secondary to white beauty (Gill 2022, Moore & Johnson, 2022). While white-owned companies of the mid-twentieth century did endeavor to target black women, they did this through promoting what were essentially mild skin-bleaching products marketed as 'skin-toners' that set up whiteness and lighter skin tones as desirable standards to which darker skinned women should faithfully and dutifully aspire. White-owned brands like Lucky Brown and the Lucky Brown Skin Lightener would advertise before and after images in magazine and television ads that highlight darker-skinned women's improved attractiveness and social access in after images that portrayed them with magically lightened skin tones.

During the documentary's exploration of the later demise of Fashion Fair, current Co-Owner and CEO Desiree Rodgers admit, "The demise of Fashion fair [was] complicated." The film highlights multiple reasons for Fashion Fair's millennial business failures, including the change in the media landscape, the strain on the firm's capital, the brand's failure to keep up with demand, and its later assumptions of client loyalty during significant market shifts. Fashion Fair's current global makeup ambassador, notable make-up artist Sam Fine, explains that Fashion Fair went out of business because they took their clients' once well-earned allegiances for granted, this while being unable to keep up with ever-increasing demand for their products. In some ways, Fashion Fair was arguably a victim of its own earlier successes in its own niche market. By the early 2000s and in a crucial moment of market shift and increasing competition, Fashion Fair failed to

develop and launch new product lines. In addition, already existing product supplies have become more difficult for customers to access. Here new Fashion CEO Desiree Rodgers explains that the brand's demise was based on a rapid shift in media industries from print to digital. Rodgers also argues that the unsustainable expenses of the continued print publication of the Johnson Publishing Company's founding businesses in *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines—the initial marketing launch vehicles for Fashion Fair— eventually put a strain on the broader firm's capital. According to documentary commentator Tiffany Gill, the Johnson Publishing Company was woefully unprepared to adjust to such seismic market shifts.

Upon their 2019 purchase of the Fashion Fair, brand new co-owners, Cheryl Mayberry McKissack and Desiree Rodgers decided that Sephora, as a retail and distribution platform, made the most sense for Fashion Fair's contemporary relaunch. Acknowledged as operating at the forefront of the global beauty industry since 1998, Sephora is historically known as a brand-building retailer/distributor which delivers crucial consumer information and market insight that positively impacts the trajectories of the brands it carries (Moore & Johnson, 2022). In the late 2010s, the popularity of malls began to dip, and department stores such as Nordstroms and Macy's, as well as the brands they carried, Fashion Fair included, took a significant hit. Instead of going to the nearest mall to grab makeup at Macy's, most consumers in the mid-2000s transitioned to online shopping or stand-alone counter less stores like Ulta or Sephora, which were unattached to mall complexes. While Ulta has positioned itself as the affordable beginner-friendly store of inexpensive cosmetics manufacturers, the newly resurgent and ambitious Fashion Fair would rather align itself with Sephora, presumably given its

prominence as the number one luxury beauty retailer. Fashion Fair's gamble on Sephora amid its commitment to DEI with a 15% black-owned businesses pledge as its exclusive relaunch base is a gutsy move, the sustained results of which are yet to be seen.

While *The Beauty of Blackness* remains a beautifully produced and engaging retelling of the Fashion Fair story, several questions lingered for an industry operative, cosmetics consumer, and daughter of a Fashion Fair fashionista such as myself. How could Fashion Fair effectively reintroduce itself to an ever-evolving social-media-driven market and connect with a new generation of clients who had never heard of it? How could Fashion Fair reposition itself with a new generation of consumers whose politics have shifted to include far more diverse gender-fluid politics and respond to new waves of black feminism that are increasingly more gender inclusive? How can Fashion Fair fare in a moment dominated by Fenty Beauty, an emergent brand driven by the global celebrity status of its founder and media mogul, Rihanna, and the savvy social media strategies it has now mastered? How can Fashion Fair redevelop the trust and care that it once delivered to a more diversely gendered consumer base? How would Fashion Fair now fare in a Fenty World?

While *The Beauty of Blackness* captured the history, passion, and importance of Fashion Fair, it failed to question how the new Fashion Fair would ensure that young adults in 2022 and beyond would come to feel the same passion and love for the brand as their ancestors had. Or how, given the expanding ideas of gender and womanhood today, it would appeal to more recently arrived consumers of diverse gender backgrounds. The Sephora-produced film, featured no interviews nor discussions on how Fashion Fair would engage the undeniable presence, reach, and precarity of today's social media

environment or the perhaps equally charged but more politically diverse social and environmental justice activism of the current moment. The film also does not explain why for example, current Fashion Fair owners chose the talented and yet lesser-known actress, KiKi Layne as their leading global ambassador when other more deeply-complected black women celebrities with larger public profiles would likely better connect with younger demographics. While the film responds to questions about who Fashion Fair was and why it is important and rightly celebrates the brand's presumable, courageous, and needed comeback, it fails to answer many of the crucial questions that will directly impact the 2020 relaunch and the future of Fashion Fair.

Although diversity is a hot topic on everyone's mind, this does not mean that it always will be. Fashion Fair has been relaunched on the heels of yet another racially tense time in US history and at a time when all eyes are on brands like Fashion Fair and Fenty Beauty that dare to recenter black and brown clients. Although Fashion Fair and Sephora have done a lot of work to rebrand and relaunch, its future as a sustainable brand depends on its reemergence as a staple for the coming generations. I argue that it is not sufficient that Fashion Fair only makes a case as to why it is a historically significant and still relevant brand, but it must create a relationship with a consumer base that is by now already loyal to Fenty Beauty, a brand that has arguably already checked all of the above boxes.

Fashion Fair's Relaunch

Fashion Fair's decision to choose Sephora as the exclusive distributor accentuates the importance social media will play in Fashion Fair becoming a sustainable brand capable of competing against the abundance of viral brands Sephora already houses

within its assortment. Indeed, Fashion Fair had little choice but to move away from their relationships with department stores if they were to be competitive in today's market, according to Allure columnist, Forbes:

Fashion Fair was a staple at department stores for generations, but this new iteration of the brand is taking into consideration the nature of makeup shopping in this day and age... There's also the fact that department store makeup counters don't have the cache they did in the past. These days, people are flocking to retailers like Sephora... Entering this particular space, the hope is, will help the brand become more accessible to modern makeup wearers who are shopping in stores and online. (Forbes, 2021)

Fashion Fair had limited options for where they wanted to relaunch in hopes of reinventing and renewing the relationship between Fashion Fair and a new market of clients. Fashion Fair has considerable differences that set it apart from other brands in Sephora's assortment. Beyond its legacy to black consumers, Fashion Fair remains more invested in a niche market than any other brands carried by Sephora. Fashion Fair's sole focus on shade ranges that prioritize black and brown clients ensures a steady supply in new complexion colors, a supply Sephora clients have not traditionally had access to. Indeed, even a glance at Sephora's product range in the pre-BLM moment of the early first decades of the millennium demonstrates that ethnic and skin tone diversity was not a priority for the retailer. In the wake of the BLM movement, however, companies quickly recognized that being unresponsive to the current wave of social activism would be quickly read as, at best, complacent in a racially tense time and, at worst, complicit with the systemic inequality that activists groups are actively fighting against.

The beauty industry was especially vulnerable to the increase in popularity of the BLM movement because cosmetics and the beauty aesthetics they seek to enhance speak directly to conceptions of race as understood in the US and its global client space. If

Sephora did not make an effort to support the 15 percent pledge and, in so, demonstrating solidarity with those agitating against the police brutality occurring at that moment, the company's public profile would have been damaged, the effect of which would have driven clients to competitors like Ulta. Intensely responsive to shifts in public sentiment, Sephora quickly took up the 15% pledge. This begs the question as to whether Sephora's decision to carry Fashion Fair and commit to the 15 percent pledge was financial or moral. I would argue that it was both. Sephora would not have remained at the forefront of the beauty industry and would have likely suffered a significant loss in client base, and sales had it not adapted and responded to immediate societal changes. Indeed, when in 2020, Sephora was publicly challenged on its previous lack of product and hence consumer diversity; they were able to send a message through their commitment to DEI initiatives that they could do better. Whether or not Sephora's quick pivot during this moment is reflective of a genuine and sustained commitment to an underserved population through its support for Fashion Fair remains to be seen.

Discussion

The makeup industry has had a hyper-focus on white women and their needs for decades hence why a brand launching in 2022 focusing on the needs of black and brown women can come across as non-inclusive. While diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the top of my mind, more is needed to ensure equality for all consumers. Many consumers still cannot recognize the stronger focus on the needs of white women in the industry while black beauty is falling by the waist. Most brands have mastered complexion for white women, although we continuously see products for brown and black women come

through a collection expansion after they can see how consumers reacted to products, usually aiming for a positive reaction to white women.

The lower-level manager, Alex, continued to make comments within my workplace that showed a lack of awareness about the lack of inclusion present in the beauty industry. These comments were also slightly mirrored by another coworker who questioned the goal Fashion Fair is aiming at, which shows that although I disagreed with the comments made by my lead, they are comments that might be shared by others who may share a similar background, upbringing, or social awareness. The comments she made raised questions that others may share and will come with a brand deciding to launch products targeting a color range in 2022 that does not include white people. My lead, Alex, is a 25-year-old white woman from Niagara Falls, New York. She came to the Philadelphia area during her first year at college to study architecture at Drexel University. Although she did not graduate, she has furthered her career through a job at Sephora and was recently promoted to Assistant Manager of a Sephora store. Alex's response to Fashion Fair came from the centralization of whiteness.

Alex's vignette touches on the changes that were occurring within Sephora and its stance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. From 2019 - 2020 Sephora was revamping and rebranding to center diversity and inclusion within their manifesto, "In 2019, Sephora announced a new tagline and manifesto, "We Belong to Something Beautiful,"... In 2020 Sephora launched our Diversity and Inclusion Heart Journey to support our vision of becoming the Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Champion in the retail industry." (*About Us*, n.d.) When Alex shared her thoughts on Fashion Fair's relaunch, she explained that she did not think Sephora launching a brand that only created products for clients of color

was not reflective of Sephora's stand on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Sephora has been tied to some negative experiences in-store by black and brown clients. They have had scandals that highlighted the lack of training Sephora employees to receive on biases, racial discrimination, and client perception. Sephora shifted much of its education to focus on color-matching black and brown clients, awareness about racial biases, and loss prevention training.

Alex never had to pay attention to how the market caters to black and brown women, which is why she referred to Fenty Beauty as an option for black and brown clients. While Fenty Beauty did a great job creating a diverse color range with undertones that worked well for clients of color, Fenty cannot be the one-stop shop for women of color. With Fenty on the market, there are still complexion gaps that Fashion Fair has been able to fill because they have invested more than any other brand in creating products that will work best for women of a deeper complexion. Alex was able to utilize a highly superficial understanding of DEI. Upon hearing that Fashion Fair was not making complexion colors suitable for her, she deemed it not inclusive. Alex was incapable of recognizing the difference in experience between black women and white women in the makeup industry and how being a black woman affects the individual experience of consumers within the beauty space. She could not critically look at how she could shop from gondola to gondola with the ability to find her shade within the majority of our Sephora stores, while black beauty consumers do not possess the same privilege.

Sephora is a retailer leading in innovation, beauty trends, and integrating technology into the cosmetic shopping experience. Sephora has been able to stay on top of market shifts and at the forefront of luxury beauty. The Black Lives Matter movement,

which resulted in the 15% pledge, had a massive impact on corporations. A wide spectrum of companies from different industries had to analyze how they supported the black community and marginalized communities in general. The rise in the Black Lives Matter Movement resulted in increased Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives within the workplace. Sephora was forced to take an assertive stance in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and the importance of inclusion and diversity in all spaces. Although extremely important, this sudden and quick rise in DEI initiatives can result in a shallow understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion, similar to what we witnessed from Alex. Through bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and first and second-wave feminism is important in recognizing how one's background causes different experiences in different spaces. In addition, those who deal with multiple aspects of oppression are restricted more than those who deal with at most one level of oppression. The rise in BLM affected the criteria when looking for new brands to introduce into Sephora's assortment.

CONCLUSION

This thesis argued the parallel erasure and alienation of black female consumers in the makeup industry continues to negatively impact the experience of black beauty consumers in the US due to the interlocking set of oppression consisting of racial and gender intersectionality. Guided by Dr. Soyini Madison's Critical Ethnography (2022), I have demonstrated how reactions to Fashion Fair cosmetics vary based on racial background, cultural background, and skin tone and how these can play a role in the relaunch of a black-centered legacy brand through Ruth and Alex's vignette. We have been able to explore the manner in which black women have been historically left out of the beauty industry and erased from American beauty paradigms. We dove into bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins in a discussion about feminism and intersectionality. Within that discussion, we are able to establish the history of erasure of black women within the feminist movement and the pattern identified within white women resorting to unifying with white men under white supremacy when needed. There are clear patterns of a lack of support from white women for black women in political settings and that continued lack of support is demonstrated within the beauty industry as well. White men and women predominantly own the makeup industry, and regardless of the products they create for black and brown women, there is a prioritization of products and colors that work best on white beauty consumers. Through this lack of support, Fashion Fair emerged, a cosmetic brand that prioritized black beauty through a wonderful celebration. Through engagement with my mother, Ruth Barrett, we are able to see how deep of a connection Fashion Fair built with black women and the importance black-owned brands play in the representation of beauty. Through Jet and EBONY magazine, they were able

to create a representation of black beauty that was absent otherwise. Through these emergent outfits, trust and care was delivered to those otherwise ignored by Eurocentric beauty industries. Additionally, my retrospective autoethnographic engagement with my mother, Ruth Barrett, shed light on the presence Fashion Fair has had in the lives of black and brown women such as herself across global spaces.

Through this discussion about the experience of black beauty consumers, I have been able to explore Fenty's recent successes as a way to speculate on the direction that Fashion Fair might take to reposition itself in the contemporary makeup industry. Through the utilization of Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins, I identify intellectual activism as the method black women use to critique the social order. The intellectual activism that black women engage in is channeled through means of creative and artistic expression exemplified by Fashion Fair Fashion's early shows and its makeup brand. By their very presence, Fenty Beauty and Fashion Fair have criticized the white-dominated spaces they continue to operate by exposing the lack of investment by mainstream beauty brands in black beauty. Finally, drawing on market research by David Baboolall, Tiffany Burns, Kristi Weaver, and Ammanuel Zegeye (2022), I offered insight into the poor consumer experiences and lack of access to beauty products that black and brown consumers in the US have suffered from. The difference in experience between black and white beauty consumers is rooted in a lack of interest, a purposeful erasure of the black experience, and denial of black beauty in the mainstream beauty industry. This chapter effectively unpacked problematic representations and erasures of black women across mainstream American beauty spaces, illuminating issues that affect black women

within the beauty spaces. It examines how Fenty Beauty has, in the current moment, initiated the decentering of whiteness and the future recalibration of the beauty spectrum.

By critically analyzing the Black Lives Matter Movement's impact on all corporations, particularly beauty, I am able to draw on connections from the rise in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives and Fashion Fair's relaunch at Sephora in 2020. The BLM movement experienced its height of popularity in 2020 in the depth of the COVID-19 Pandemic. When everyone was locked indoors or protesting, social activism rose to the forefront, aggressively impacting society's expectations of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Corporations were forced to publicly support black lives and the black community during a racially tense time. Within *Sephora x Fashion Fair*, we *identified* the consequences of the quick rise of DEI initiatives.

Through Ruth and Alex's vignettes which are focused on the presence of black owned brands in the beauty space I am able to critically analyze the impact of diverse brands within Sephora's assortment. Alex's vignette displayed the superficial understanding that results from the rise in DEI initiatives that do not explicitly engage with white privilege and an authentic narration of the experiences of black and brown clients. The quick rise in DEI initiatives can lead to an incorrect understanding of what an accurate depiction of diversity, equity, and inclusion looks like, which can lead to racial neutrality. Within this rise in DEI initiatives, corporations rushed to establish sensitivity training, educational conversations, and interactive modules that glossed over the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and in merchandise without truly engaging, which resulted in a strong ignorance from Alex who regarded her stance against the Fashion Fair launch from a place of being inclusive.

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