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More than Skin Deep: An Analysis of Black Women's Experiences with Race, Skin
Tone, and Cosmetics

By
Anne Y. Van

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
In
Ethnic and Multi-Cultural Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

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More than Skin Deep: An Analysis of Black Women's Experiences with Race, Skin Tone, and Cosmetics

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee:

Dr. Laura Harrison

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Abstract

An abstract for the thesis of Anne Y. Van for the Master of Science in Ethnic Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota

Title: More than Skin Deep: An Analysis of Black Women's Experiences with Race, Skin Tone, and Cosmetics

In June 2016, the cosmetic company, *ColourPop*, released a new line of contour-intended sculpting sticks with insensitive names, such as “Yikes,” “Typo,” and “Dume,” for their three darkest shades. *ColourPop*'s lack of regard to their African American consumers serves as a reminder that the cosmetic industry often fails to include and fully embrace Black women. It is important to explore the relationship between the cosmetic industry and Black women because reoccurring negative experiences may be indicative of systemic oppression – illustrating that Black women's personal experiences reach a political sphere. Furthermore, the parallels between history and contemporary experiences provide proof of Black women's theorization within U.S. beauty culture. I will discuss the historical background of Black women and skin tone. Then, I will delve into an analysis of Black women's contemporary experiences with cosmetics and hegemonic beauty ideals from this research study. They discussed the challenges of finding appropriate cosmetics for their skin tone and childhood experiences of learning dominant beauty ideals. Despite the inadequate inclusion of Black women in the cosmetic industry, Black women remain resilient and have created a space within a racist cosmetic industry.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In June 2016, an established cosmetic company, *ColourPop*, released a new line of contour-intended sculpting sticks. While many makeup enthusiasts celebrated the new release, some Black women criticized the names of the three darkest shades: “Yikes,” “Typo,” and “Dume.”¹ When compared to the names of the lighter shades, Yikes and Typo prompted shame and discomfort among those with darker skin tones. “Dume,” a present-day slang term, is defined by Urban Dictionary as “a very stupid-like human creature, who is also retarded.”² *ColourPop* released a statement of apology, but the damage remained. *ColourPop*’s lack of regard for their consumers of color serves as a reminder that the cosmetic industry often fails to include and represent Black women.

In my previous research, I analyzed the globally-recognized cosmetic company, *L’Oréal*, and their products – specifically the luxurious foundation line of *Lancôme* and the mass-market foundation line of *Maybelline* – to examine how these companies perpetuate classism, racism, sexism, and colorism through the main relationship of shade availability, costs, and societal pressure. Using an intersectional framework, I determined a relationship between the availability of appropriate foundation shades for Black women and costs. The higher-end foundation line of *Lancôme* featured a wider range of foundation than the mass-market foundation line of *Maybelline*. Black women often must buy multiple, affordable products to mix or a higher-end product to achieve an appropriate shade of foundation. The intersection of cost and shade availability demonstrates that Black women’s “personal” difficulties with finding foundation are

“political” consequences of the systemic exclusion of Black women from the beauty industry.

It is important to explore the relationship between the cosmetic industry and Black women because reoccurring negative experiences may be indicative of systemic oppression within U.S. beauty culture – illustrating that Black women’s personal experiences are also part of the political sphere. Historian Kathy Lee Peiss asserts that beauty culture “should be understood not only as a type of commerce but as a system of meaning that helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience.”³ Peiss’ framework of beauty culture allows for analysis that highlights the agency of women through the key word of “navigate.” Despite the systemic challenges of oppression within U.S. beauty culture, the endurance of women of color – particularly Black women – within U.S. beauty culture may indicate how Black women negotiate at a personal and collective level to create a space for themselves.

It is common for many Black women to report difficulties of finding an appropriate shade of foundation, but little academic research explores these experiences. When selecting this topic, I examined contemporary research, but there was enough research that addressed the nuances of Black women’s experiences. It seemed that most of the research scratched the surface of Black women’s experiences with cosmetics and beauty. There also does not seem to be any research that centers Black women’s exercise of agency or addresses skin tone and colorism outside of skin bleaching, such as with cosmetics. Furthermore, research on Black women oftentimes does not address how the hierarchical systems of colorism and racism interact and interlock. Additionally, I did not find research from an Ethnic Studies or Gender and Women’s Studies discipline; these

two disciplines are more likely to delve into the qualitative aspects of lived experiences than mainstream social science disciplines of sociology and/or psychology. Aside from researching Black women's difficulty of finding foundation, I also wanted to consider how Black women may experience colorism and how they navigate the Euro-centricity of United States beauty culture.

Drawing from an Ethnic Studies and Gender and Women's Studies background, I formulated my research objectives with the two disciplines' strengths in mind: 1) How does the history of Black women's experiences in the United States demonstrate intersections of skin tone, race, gender, and class? 2) How have Black women negotiated within a Eurocentric beauty industry? and 3) How do Black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty relate to racial identity? The interdisciplinary approach of these two areas is necessary to address the lack of literature on the intersections of race, gender, and skin tone within the cosmetic industry. This research provides groundwork for future intersectional work that centers the experience of marginalized individuals concerning hegemonic beauty ideals and their exercise of agency.

In chapter two, the literature review explores the history of Black women in the United States starting from the enslavement of African women. The exploitation of African women through slavery in the United States serves as a basis to analyze how white men exploited and commodified Black women's bodies and skin tone. It is necessary to analyze how power works within institutions, such as the beauty industry, to effectively create a hierarchy where a Eurocentric definition of beauty holds the most power and resources. I specifically examine existing literature on how the beauty industry established white skin as physically and morally superior to Black skin. Additionally, I

analyze contemporary research on Black women's experience to identify any gaps in literature and how my research can build on it. I also analyze the discourse on agency and cosmetics as a practice of self-discipline. To conclude the section, I detail my theoretical frameworks, reflexivity as a researcher, sampling methods, and research methods. I mainly employ Black feminist standpoint theory, an intersectional framework, and the social conflict theory. As a researcher who is a racial outsider to the community that I study, I discuss my reflexivity and epistemic authority.

In chapter three, I discuss my methodology. I delve into my sampling methods of recruitment, purposive and snowball sampling. I discuss my method of prioritizing potential participants based on eligibility of the focus group interview. My research methods involve semi-structured focus group interviews with questions about experiences with cosmetics and beauty ideals. To conclude the chapter, I provide details of my assumptions for this research study.

In chapter four, I provide the results of this research study. First, I provide background information of the participants as a collective group. Due to having similar patterns of discussion amongst all of my focus group interviews, I organized the results into significant themes: difficulty finding appropriate foundation shades, distrust of makeup counter associates, perceived beauty ideals versus personal preferences, childhood experiences with skin tone and beauty preferences, and additional beauty concerns. Additionally, I provide an analysis and discussion with the results under each theme.

In chapter five, I provide a discussion on how my research compares to previous literature. Moving forward, I delve into the next steps of this research to further examine

the intersections of skin tone, class, race, and gender in the cosmetic and beauty industry. Then, I highlight Black-owned companies' current efforts to address the lack of inclusion in the cosmetic industry.

Working from an Ethnic Studies and Gender and Women's Studies background, I hope to illuminate the intersections of race, gender, and skin tone in Black women's experiences. The significance of this research includes addressing the lack of academic research concerning Black women and the cosmetics industry. When it comes to marginalized populations, academic research has traditionally analyzed Black women's experiences within systemic oppressions as monolithic. By centering Black women in a discussion about their experiences, I hope to find not only similar patterns, but also unique challenges of each individual. It is necessary to examine Black women's participation due to makeup emerging as a significant contribution to current popular culture. Previous historical documentation has failed to highlight the theorization and agency of Black women. By researching Black women's contemporary experiences, I hope to contribute to the growing literature of Black feminism.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cosmetic and beauty companies have frequently been criticized by the Black community for their lack of sensitivity and inclusion of makeup that is appropriate for multiple skin tones. Many consumers attempt to defend the cosmetic and beauty companies in times of controversy, but their rebuttals frequently fail to acknowledge the historical context of Black women's oppression. Additionally, the representatives of these "guilty" companies often do not recognize the need for staff of color nor how such employment could prevent these controversies. I believe the *ColourPop* incident may not simply reflect human error, but is rather a consequence of the long oppressive history of the cosmetic and beauty industry.

To gain a thorough understanding of how the social construct of beauty evolved and altered in relation to Black women, this literature review will analyze how Eurocentric beauty ideals impacted Black women and their bodies. By this, I will highlight how racist power dynamics contributed to the establishment of a skin tone hierarchy and allowed for the exploitation of Black women's bodies. Additionally, I will also examine Black women's negotiation within the U. S. beauty culture. Furthermore, the historical background will explore the ways Black women exercised their agency and resisted Eurocentric beauty ideals within the confines of an anti-Black industry.

My analysis of Black women's marginalization will begin with the intimate relationship of class, race, skin tone, and gender during the Colonial and Revolutionary Era, ca. 1607-1788. Next, my analysis will detail how white women's influence in the beauty industry impacted portrayals of Black women and dark skin tone in the Early

Republic and Antebellum Era, ca. 1788-1860. During the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era, ca. 1890-1970, the Black community began re-establishing itself after the abolishment of slavery. This era also marked the beginning of Black-owned beauty businesses, in which Black beauty shops served as safe spaces for Black women from the backlash of Civil Rights protests.

The next body of this literature review will delve into contemporary research on Black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty. The literature will consist of cosmetology research on Black women's perception of skin defects, social science studies on how Black women view themselves and others, and more specific explorations of women's experiences with foundation products. I will also identify how this research study will contribute to the existing literature on Black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty.

The last body of this literature review will discuss concepts of embodiment and agency. First, I will examine Foucault's theory of docile bodies and Bartky's interpretation related to cosmetics and beauty. I will also highlight how Foucault and Bartky's theoretical frameworks disregard intersections of oppression and exclude Black women's experiences. I will delve into Black women's theorization of embodiment and agency. By doing this, I hope to illustrate how discourses on the body and cosmetics often exclude Black women's voices. To conclude the section, I will detail my theoretical frameworks.

The Histories of Black Women's Marginalization in the United States

A historical background of Black women in the United States serves as a foundation to understand the intimate relationship of class, race, skin tone, and gender in

the cosmetic industry. While race and skin tone have an extremely intimate relationship, I will differentiate the two terms to demonstrate the complexities of social constructs and skin pigmentation throughout my research. Sociologists Omni and Winant define race as “a variable which is shaped by broader societal forces,” and contend that the meanings of race “have varied tremendously over time and between different societies.”⁴ Historically, people have attached social meaning to “differences in skin color and other obvious physical characteristics” to define racial categories.⁵ However, racial categories establish stark skin color classifications (simply Black or white) and rarely incorporate the complex hierarchal system of skin tone, or colorism. According to sociologist Margaret L. Hunter, colorism refers to the systemic “privileging of lighter-skinned people because of their phenotypic proximity to whiteness.”⁶ During slavery, the exploitation of enslaved African women by white slave masters contributed to the racial formation of Blackness and the development of colorism.

The Colonial and Revolutionary Era, ca. 1607-1788

The study of slavery and systemic oppression often centers enslaved African men’s narratives and disregard the specific experiences of enslaved African women. The experiences of enslaved African women offer a starting point to analyze the intersections of race, gender, and skin tone. The institutionalization of race and gender discrimination can be directly linked to legislation intended to oppress enslaved African women and privilege white men. In 1662, the colony of Virginia enacted the *partus sequitur ventrem* law, stating “all children borne in this country shall be bond or free according to the condition of the mother.”⁷ Under English law, white men were financially obligated to

support any mixed-race children. However, the enactment of the *partus sequitur ventrem* law allowed white men to absolve legal responsibilities. The law simultaneously privileged white men and created a financial burden for enslaved African women to raise children who were likely conceived through rape.⁸

Similar to the *partus sequitur ventrem* law, “the Rule of Hypodescent” or the “one-drop rule” also meant that racially mixed children—or anyone with “one drop” of “black blood”—inherited their mothers’ status of enslavement.⁹ In 1705, Virginia legalized hypodescent by passing a law based on a “one-eighth blood-fraction rule; You belong on the Black side of the color line if you had one or more great-grandparents who had belonged on the Black side of the color line.”¹⁰ Although some states codified similar legislation, some also created harsh legislation to prevent inter-marriage; for example, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Delaware, and Pennsylvania outlawed interracial marriage in the early 1700s.¹¹ Indeed, the strict enforcement of these laws established a standard of purity for the white race. The institutionalized oppression of persons of full or mixed African ethnic background resulted in the simultaneous creation of more “enslaveable” people, a color gradient of skin tones, a larger population of light-skinned African Americans, and skin color stratification.¹² The establishment of systemic oppression based upon skin tone proximity to whiteness initiated a race-gender-skin tone compound of oppression and influenced early social constructions of beauty.¹³ The institutionalization of racism, colorism, and misogyny effectively conceived a hierarchy of power and respect. This hierarchy positioned white men at the top, white women second, Black men next, and Black women at the bottom; other ethnic groups were also slotted within the hierarchy.

The beginnings of the social construction of Black beauty can be traced back to the commodification of racially mixed women. “Fancy maid” auctions are an example of this commodification, and the systemic exploitation of Black women. The “fancy trade” involved the selling of “mulatto” women for sex and companionship. The “fancy trade” may be strongly associated with New Orleans, Louisiana, but American historian Walter Johnson asserts that the “fancy trade” occurred not only in that area, but also all over the South.¹⁴ Isaac Franklin, a well-known slave trader in the United States domestic slave trade, participated in this trade as both a businessman and a consumer. History professor Edward E. Baptist states, “Franklin and his colleagues passionately wanted ‘mulatto’ women, and Black people generally: as bodies to rape and bodies to sell.”¹⁵ White buyers often described “fancy maids” as “pretty,” “handsome,” “beautiful,” and with “good figure.”¹⁶ Johnson further argues that the term “fancy” goes beyond the initial definition of an adjective to describe girls of good manners and appearance, but also describes the fantasizing and eroticizing –“fancying”—of mulatto women.¹⁷ Johnson describes how the slave trader market adapted the term into a noun to signify “a slaveholder’s desire made material in the shape of a woman” through the example of slave dealer Philip Thomas description of a young, mulatto girl, “13 years old, Bright Color, nearly a fancy for \$1135.”¹⁸ The price of “fancy maids” was as high as \$1100 in the 1830’s – a value of \$27, 264.16 in 2016.¹⁹ These positive visual descriptors, premium prices, and high demand for mulatto “fancy maids” imply that light-skinned Black women and girls were considered more attractive than dark-skinned Black women and girls as early as the Colonial period.²⁰

Before delving further into the historical connotations of beauty and cosmetics, it is important to first discuss whiteness as a beauty ideal. The concept of whiteness not only became racialized, but it also became gendered.²¹ Sociologist Margaret L. Hunter provides the historical context of how the social construction of race influenced notions of beauty. The abstract concepts of whiteness and blackness became tangible due to the association of physical traits with skin color. White skin and European features represented civility, virtue, and beauty. Whereas, dark skin and African features were often represented as barbaric, heathen, and ugly.²² As demonstrated in the “fancy maid” trade, white men perceived lighter-skinned Black women as more beautiful due to the proximity of the woman’s skin tone to whiteness. Perhaps influenced by the desire to be considered beautiful by white men, white women in antebellum America reinforced the racial binary through the compliance of hegemonic beauty ideals dominated by white supremacy. White supremacy continues to influence hegemonic beauty ideals today; this research study addresses the endurance of anti-Black discourse and how contemporary experiences parallel the historical exclusion of Black women within US beauty culture. In addition to the racial binary, this research will also consider how the intersection of skin tone and race impacts Black women’s experiences.

The Early Republic and Antebellum Era, ca. 1788-1860

In “The Art and Practice of Looking White,” Mary Cathryn Cain analyzes the beauty practices of white women in antebellum America, which extended from approximately 1781 to 1865. Cain argues that white beauty practices can be best understood as a reaction to white women’s anxiety. Due to the changing definitions of

household labor and gender roles, women who adhered to traditional gender roles felt that they may be losing their productive power as homemakers. To contribute to the virtues of the slave republic, white women utilized beauty as a vehicle to moral superiority.²³ Fair, delicate skin historically indicated economically privileged classes, but white women in the antebellum era characterized the skin preference as an advantaged racial status.²⁴

By equating whiteness to civilization, white women developed an aspect of white racial supremacy in the beauty realm. *The Book of Health and Beauty*, published in 1837, heralded a fair complexion as the “brilliant offspring of civilization and luxury,” which “does not appear in all its attributes and all its charm in the wild state, or under the influence of laborious professions.”²⁵ Other various literary works from antebellum America also demonstrate how authors equated white beauty to virtues of morality and purity. For example, Wilson Flag equated whiteness as the absence of sin in his 1834 compilation of poems, *Analysis of Female Beauty*; he demonstrates this position in the following lines, “You cannot think beneath a brow so fair, / One sinful thought was ever harbored there.”²⁶ To further support whiteness as the absence of sin, Cain analyzes the sexualization of Black women’s bodies in advertisements and art prints. The bodies of young Black girls were also sexualized through suggestive placing of clothing and physical expressions of the body.²⁷ The media’s portrayal of Blackness in these advertisements contributed to a false equivalency of Blackness and a lack of innocence regardless of the person’s age.

White women in antebellum America adopted beauty practices that were centered around morality. In terms of fashion, white women dressed in darker colors to enhance the visual display of white skin; additionally, fashion shifted to be more modest and less

decorative to draw more attention to a woman's face.²⁸ White women rejected the cosmetic use of powders and paint to make up one's face because they felt internal morality would translate into physical beauty – this became known as “moral cosmetics.”²⁹ In 1837, the *Book of Health and Beauty* announced that the quality of skin could not be disguised under cosmetic paint. Self-proclaimed beauty experts, typically white men and women of either religious or class privilege, influenced the beauty culture to characterize women who used artificial whiteners such as cosmetic paint and powders as frail, impure, sexually corrupt, deceitful, and vain; they further determined any whiteness obtained from the use of artificial whiteners as illegitimate.³⁰ These white beauty experts increased the value of whiteness through condemning the women more likely to use cosmetic paints or artificial whiteners: lower-class white women (tan from working outside) and Black women. By establishing strict standards, these white beauty experts reserved “authentic” whiteness for the most privileged in terms of both class and race. While “artificial” skin lightening was discouraged, the natural means of skin whitening, such as applying lemon juice to the skin, were considered “genuine.”³¹ However, the usage of cosmetic paints was disparaged due to the perceived similarity to body-painting of “uncivilized, savage” people. White women could deter women of color from using cosmetics to “pass” as white by equating cosmetic use with prostitution and racializing cosmetic paints as “uncivilized.”³²

The Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era, ca. 1890-1970

The beauty practices of white women in antebellum American influenced the beauty culture in African American communities. Women's, Gender, and Sexuality

Studies professor Treva B. Lindsey delves into the beauty practices of Black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in her article, “Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture.” She specifically discusses the period, ranging from the 1890’s to the 1930’s, when a “New Negro” identity emerged.³³ The abolishment of slavery marked the beginning of this new identity. The emergence of a new elite class of African Americans characterized this time and influenced social practices of the urban upper south. While Lindsey does not delve into fashion or cosmetic powder/paint practices, she discusses the beauty practice of skin bleaching. Similar to the white women in antebellum America who embraced racialized beauty standards to distance themselves from perceptions of slavery, Black women invested in these practices to “shed” associations with slavery.³⁴

Some Black elite circles did not view darker skin as attractive or modern because of its relation with being “uncivilized.” Like antebellum white women, Black women used skin bleaching products inconspicuously because they wanted a more “natural” look. However, Black women faced shame for using skin bleaching products as some people viewed it as an anti-Black practice of emulating whites.³⁵ While most Black women consumed these beauty products, some Black women “rejected the idealization of white beauty norms by criticizing the predominance of advertisements for skin lightening products and processes.”³⁶ Despite the attempts of some Black individuals to vilify beauty practices as “white emulation,” a majority of Black women still participated in the beauty culture and trends of the time due to the following influences: the desire to become a modern African-American woman, the multitude of skin bleaching and

lightening advertisements, and the overwhelming “color struck” or “partial to [lighter skin] color” attitudes within Black communities.³⁷

Consequently, the commercial skincare industry capitalized on the devaluing of dark skin, which upheld white standards of beauty. Although both white women and women of color used products to lighten and/or bleach their skin, very few companies advertised to the African American community. In *Beauty Imagined*, international business professor Geoffrey Jones discusses how the attempts by early products to “include” women of color relied heavily on ethnic stereotypes and promoted the association between ‘civilized’ and ‘whiteness.’³⁸ Jones delves specifically into the Pears’ Soap product and how its advertisements between the 1890’s and 1920’s frequently proclaimed the ability to simultaneously whiten and “civilize” people of color. To further support his point, Jones details an 1899 advertisement entitled “The White Man’s Burden” that features the American Admiral George Dewey using Pears’ Soap in the Philippines; the advertisement claimed the soap to be “a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances.”³⁹

Aside from white-owned skin bleachers and lighteners, most products did not suit women of color due to the lack of availability of fitting colors. For example, the only available colors of powder included talcum white or pinkish “flesh” (the skin color more closely associated with white people) until Anthony Overton entered the market with his face powder made by Black people for Black women, High-Brown Face Powder.⁴⁰ Overton founded his baking powder manufacturing company, Overton-Hygienic Company, in 1898. He quickly discovered that women “used more face powder than baking powder” and, within a few years of opening his manufacturing company, created

his High-Brown Face Powder “to harmonize with the color and skin texture of the women of our race.”⁴¹

American historian Kathy Peiss discusses in her book, *Hope in a Jar*, how Black women pioneered much of the Black beauty culture around the time of Overton-Hygienic’s entrance. However, many Black beauty culturists, like Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone, tended to focus on hair regimens. The commercial Black skincare industry began with the emergence of black patent medicine makers, druggists, barbers, and peddlers in the cosmetics trade.⁴² Like white pharmacists, Black pharmacists delved into manufacturing skin creams for local patrons. After experiencing success and rapid development, Black pharmacists expanded distribution of skin creams to regional and national levels.⁴³ Although Walker and Malone focused largely on haircare, Walker featured a witch hazel jelly skincare product “for the hands of ‘those who work in the open and who put their hands in hot water.’”⁴⁴ Some Black-owned firms, like Overton-Hygienic and Kashmir Chemical Company, marketed skin bleaching products despite the anti-white emulation rhetoric.⁴⁵ Walker had strong convictions against selling skin bleachers, but her company released a popular skin bleaching product called “Tan-Off” immediately after her death in 1919.⁴⁶ Despite the large number of Black entrepreneurs entering the beauty business, major non-Black beauty companies still dominated the beauty industry because Black manufacturing companies could not compete with mass-market tactics used by white businessmen, who “gave drug and chain stores special deals, offered lower prices, and effectively undercut African-American firms.”⁴⁷

Black-owned skin bleach products may have contained milder forms of bleaching agents than their white-owned competitors, but the production and advertisement of such

products still supported a white ideal of beauty.⁴⁸ Furthermore, these products also reiterate the gendered oppression of skin color because Black men entrepreneurs developed these products for Black women's consumption. Although Walker's company sold Tan-Off, a Black man and the general manager of Walker's company, F. B. Ransom, released the product against her initial anti-bleach convictions after her death.⁴⁹ Despite the strong impact of systemic oppressions against Black women, Black women were not powerless victims. Black women ought to be recognized as agents of change and for their adaptability to succeed in a disadvantageous and exploitative society. I will discuss how Black women utilized their agency to gain economic independence because my research will focus on Black women as individuals capable of change, not compliant victims of unfortunate circumstances.

Despite white-owned beauty companies having historically capitalized on the insecurities of Black women, many Black women entrepreneurs revolutionized the beauty industry. Two of the most prominent Black beauty entrepreneurs include Annie Turnbo Malone and Madam C.J. Walker.⁵⁰ Malone founded the Black haircare industry in the United States with her hair treatments, but Walker seems to be more commonly known to most people due to Walker's overwhelming success. To avoid further criticism from high-ranking Black men and Black club women, Walker and Malone promoted their hair and beauty regimens as hair cultivation instead of hair straightening.⁵¹ Walker highlighted "the maintenance of a healthy, well-groomed body as key to the cultivation of personal and race pride, and as an antidote to the negative images of Black women."⁵² Walker, Malone, and other Black beauty culturists underscored the relationship between personal appearance and race progress by suggesting that attention to physical

appearance and beauty can challenging stereotypes. With proper care and attention to hygiene, many Black Americans undermined the racist equation between black skin and “dirtiness.”⁵³

However, Leah Tonnette Gaines argues that Walker did not revolutionize the beauty industry because she also capitalized on Black women’s insecurities and promoted products that supported the white beauty standard. Gaines explicitly states, “Walker received many criticisms for promoting a White beauty, however, she did not create the market or demand, she merely supplied the already existent consumer demand.”⁵⁴ She further supports her position by highlighting how Walker’s cleansing cream claimed to “work while you sleep” and advertisements of the product promoted four various ways “to cleanse a Black woman of her seemingly dirty Black skin.”⁵⁵ However, Gaines did not contextualize the time of Walker’s product. Walker passed away May 25, 1919 and the cleansing cream appeared in August 1919.⁵⁶ This timeline suggests and possibly reaffirms the likelihood of Walker’s general manager, F. B. Ransom, being the person responsible for “Walker’s promotion” of white beauty ideals. Additionally, the release of Tan-Off after her death strengthens the likelihood.

To further support Walker’s stance of racial uplift, Walker consistently refuted claims that her products were “anti-white” because they altered Black women’s hair further from their natural texture. Her hair products smoothed and stretched Black women’s hair, but she never claimed they straightened hair. Walker stated in a newspaper article, “Right here, let me correct the erroneous impression held by some that I claim to straighten the hair. I want the great masses of my people to take a greater pride in their personal appearance and to give their hair proper attention.”⁵⁷ Walker’s statement

exemplifies the politics of respectability as an essential component of racial uplift.

Although some may argue that the politics of respectability are inherently anti-Black and groom individuals to be compliant to white standards, many Black women, especially Walker, in the early twentieth-century believed beauty and haircare promoted pride in their identity. In her book, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*, historian Tiffany M. Gill provides additional context of Walker's early life. Walker's initial intentions to dive into the beauty industry included finding a solution that would alleviate "scalp ailments most common to black women of her generation: dandruff (known then as seborrhea) and psoriasis (known then as tetter)."⁵⁸ Walker suffered from these same scalp ailments, but the severity also caused her hair to fall out. After receiving hair treatment services from Malone, Walker became a sales agent for Malone in 1903. However, Walker eventually distanced herself from Malone to focus on her own hair preparations.⁵⁹

Many of the elite Black class criticized Walker and her products, but they also failed to acknowledge her intentions and early products of alleviating the scalp ailments and hair loss that plagued many Black women. Additionally, Gill asserts that Black women utilized the Black beauty enterprise as "a platform through which black women could escape the economic limitations imposed by racism and its enduring legacies and, in turn, build enduring institutions that challenged not only the social discourse of their respective communities but also the larger political arena."⁶⁰ As previously discussed, the Black beauty industry allowed Black women to become economically independent.

In *Pageants, Parlors, & Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*, history professor Blain Roberts offers more insight into Black beauty

culture during the Jim Crow era, ca. 1890-1965. While Roberts' book affirms some of Lindsey's points that Black beauty culture encouraged discriminatory beauty standards, Roberts also contributes to Peiss and Gill's argument of how Black beauty culture simultaneously liberated Black women. Black women empowered and liberated themselves from both their white employers and Black husbands by working in the Black beauty industry. Working-class Black women could become beauticians without going into debt.⁶¹ Black beauticians managed important free spaces in black communities because they could work without the watchful supervision of white employers. In these free spaces, Black beauticians assisted other Black women in creating a Black femininity that softened "the harsher edges of Jim Crow."⁶²

These Black beauticians primarily focused their discourse of racial uplift and respectability on hair because well-groomed hair was already associated with a certain degree of respectability and cleanliness.⁶³ Similar to experiences with skin bleaching, Black women were criticized for pursuing methods of hair smoothing and straightening because of the "supposed desire" to appear whiter. Although many criticisms from high-ranking Black men and Black club women positioned Black beauty culture as restrictive and anti-Black, it allowed some working-class Black women to become financially independent and afforded others the luxury of relaxation and pampering through beauty practices.⁶⁴ These critics continued to deny the agency of Black women in the beauty industry despite the mass movement of Black women gaining economic independence. Booker T. Washington relentlessly tried to undermine Black beauty culturists and the movement of respectability by describing beauty practices as a vehicle to idealize whiteness. Washington further demeaned the work of Black beauty culturists by refusing

to “distinguish between black hair culturists who argued they wanted to cultivate black women’s beauty and those who made harmful product designed to make them look whiter.”⁶⁵ Washington’s disapproval of Black beauty culturists perhaps resulted from his position as a man; like many others, Washington saw modern beauty practices as immoral and may have struggled to accept female-owned manufacturing companies due to pre-conceived notions of gender roles.⁶⁶

Like Washington, some prominent Black club women viewed beauty practices as attempts to look whiter. However, Roberts positions the criticisms of Black church and club women as a possible reaction to “their class-based positions of authority challenged by working-class beauty culturists advancing an economic form of racial uplift from below.”⁶⁷ At the time, Black club women played significant roles in collective action efforts. For example, a prominent Black club leader, Ida B. Wells, investigated lynching patterns and exposed that the increase of lynching directly responded to the Black communities’ rise of economic and political gains.⁶⁸ Additionally, many Black club women provided community services for vulnerable individuals, such as donating food baskets to the needy during holidays or establishing a group home for Black girls without mothers.⁶⁹

However, some middle-class Black club women “conceived lifting the race as an obligation and duty that could be performed by middle-class women who, by virtue of their moral upbringing, could teach lower-class Black women to be more like them.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, these Black club women’s classism can be illustrated in how they felt that “Black womanhood should no longer be judge by the non- or counter productivity of the ‘lowly,’ ‘illiterate,’ and even ‘vicious’ women of the race to whom they were inextricably

bound. It would be necessary to ‘go down’ among the masses, instill within them good moral values, and return them to the mainstream of the race.”⁷¹ Although some Black club women felt that all Black women had responsibility of racial uplift, their class position heavily influenced their ideas of morality and cosmetics. Again, middle-class Black women distanced themselves from Jim Crow imagery by presenting a more “respectable” appearance through hair grooming and proper hygienic care.⁷² These women wanted to be recognized as respectable women and no longer associated with the harshness of slavery.⁷³ However, it seems that more working-class women were scrutinized for their participation in U. S. beauty culture than middle-class Black women.

Nannie Helen Burroughs, a member of the Woman’s Convention and the National Association of Color Women, stated in 1904, “[i]f Negro women would use half the time they spend on trying to get white, to get better, the race would move forward apace.”⁷⁴ Cornelia Brown, a Tuskegee graduate and founder of Mt. Meigs School in Alabama, demonstrated the connection of morality, beauty, and whiteness in the following statement: “[i]t is foolish to try [to] make hair straight when God saw fit to make it kinky.”⁷⁵ As the statements illustrated, Black women faced similar criticism as antebellum era white women using beauty products: “rejected their natural beauty,” “forfeited their feminine virtues,” and indicated a lack of morality.⁷⁶ Additionally, cosmetic companies contributed to the discourse of natural beauty by positioning beauty as a responsibility of women and advertising beauty products in coded ways. Many advertisements connected light skin tones with social status and marketed light skin tones as fashionable. Although these advertisements may have been mostly covert in their advertising, this coding of European traits with positive adjectives, such as beautiful and

fair, impacted many Black women. Black women received conflicting messages: praise for having more Eurocentric beauty features obtained through “anti-Black” beauty practices, but disapproval for practicing those very same beauty practices.⁷⁷

By 1928, the strong opposition to Black beauty culturists faded “once it became clear that the regimens of Walker, Malone, and other beauty culturists worked—that they did not cause irreparable physical damage in the pursuit of a caricatured whiteness.”⁷⁸ However, the dissolution of opposition did not seem to reduce the role of colorism within Black communities. Due to the large amount of literature detailing the controversy surrounding hair, I will isolate and examine the effects of the skin tone hierarchy. The lived experiences of Black women demonstrate the reinforcement of colorism and adherence to “color-struck” attitudes within Black communities.

The recollections of two Black beauticians in the 1890s demonstrate the “color-struck” attitudes toward women with darker skin tones. Mamie Fields, a Charleston beautician, had darker skin than her sister. Fields’ sister attended the Avery Normal Institute (the local school for Charleston’s Black elite and middle class) because she had light skin. Fields attended a different school because the Avery Normal Institute’s reputation involved discrimination against dark-skinned children. However, Fields’ brother, who also had dark skin, attended Avery and seemed to have an active social life.⁷⁹ According to Fields, “... if you were a little black girl from the same very nice family, that was something else. It kept you from being invited to parties.”⁸⁰

Additionally, these “color-struck” attitudes influenced the dating and marriage prospects of Black women. Julie Lucas, a Durham beautician, recalled how lighter skinned women

had the option of choosing from the best suitors, but darker skinned women had to choose from a less desirable pool of suitors.⁸¹

Despite the challenges of color-struck attitudes and internalized oppression, Black beauty shops allowed activism and grassroots efforts to flourish for Black women during the Civil Rights era. Historian Gill provides accounts of civil rights freedom fighter Anne Moody and scholar Deborah Willis to exemplify how “beauty salons, particularly those in the Jim Crow South, functioned as asylums for black women ravaged by the effects of segregation and served as incubators of black women’s leadership and platforms from which to agitate for social and political change.”⁸² Racial slurs and food were hurled at Moody at a Woolworth lunch counter sit-in demonstration in 1964. Afterwards, she sought refuge in a Black beauty salon. She describes the comforting effect of the regard from other customers and having her hair washed and styled by the Black hairdresser in her memoir. Willis recalled similar memories of Black women venting to the hairdressers in her mother’s beauty salon.⁸³

It is not coincidental that Black beauty salons served as safe spaces. Gill asserts, “Black beauty culturists in this period were keenly aware of the economic autonomy their profession afforded them, the unique institutional space they controlled, and the access they had to black women within their communities. They were instrumental in developing the political infrastructure for African American women’s involvement in the civil rights movement, which was for the most part under black female control and under the radar, hidden from whites unsympathetic to the cause of racial justice.”⁸⁴ Gill provides insight in the pivotal role of beauty activism in professional organizations during the Civil Rights era; significant professional beauty organizations include the

National Beauty Culturists' League (NBCL), United Beauty School Owners and Teacher's Association (UBSOTA), and the Mississippi Independent Beautician Association (MIBA).⁸⁵

The grassroots activism ranged from centering civil rights at their conferences and conventions, writing letters to the President of the United States, encouraging clients to discuss the political climate, supporting Democratic candidates, and building relationships with prominent civil rights leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr.⁸⁶

Additionally, many of the members of the organizations were already politically active prior to being approached by civil rights leaders. For example, the founder of UBSOTA, Marjorie Stewart Joyner, expressed the following goals at their national convention in 1958, "We aim to make every shop owner and every beautician a missionary to mobilize all the Negro women they come in contact with to make voting next to God and cleanliness."⁸⁷ Gill's discussion illustrates how Black women rebounded from oppression and exclusion to form safe, self-empowerment spaces. My research will address how Black women may strengthen their identity and critically analyze the political climate due to the beauty industry's continued lack of substantive inclusion.

Contemporary Research on Skin Tone and Colorism

As briefly discussed in the introduction, Black women's negative experiences with cosmetics and beauty products indicate systemic oppression. However, the historical expansion of beauty and cosmetics demonstrates the *ColourPop* incident as a continuation of the historical oppression of Black women. The last several decades have witnessed significant research on how skin tone and colorism impact the experiences of

women of color, particularly darker-skinned women. In *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, sociologist Margaret L. Hunter suggests that “light skin works as a form of social capital for women... light skin tone is interpreted as beauty, and beauty operates as social capital for women.”⁸⁸ Women can convert the social capital of beauty into other forms: economic, educational, and romantic. Hunter’s analysis of skin color stratification in the lives of Black women affirmed her hypothesis of light-skinned women were more likely to have higher educational attainment, higher personal incomes, and high-status husbands than darker-skinned women.⁸⁹ Hunter further demonstrates the intimate relationship of skin tone and beauty as a form of social capital by detailing the phenomena of the “beauty queue.” The beauty queue references how women are positioned in a social hierarchy due to skin tone.⁹⁰ In 1998, sociologist Maxine Leeds Craig conducted qualitative interviews with African American and Mexican American women of various skin tones. “A significant number of interviewees” felt “light-skinned women were more attractive” and had more opportunities in terms of potential romantic partners.⁹¹ One specific darker-skinned participant, Pearl Marsh, shared a story of how she and her friends felt most potential partners gravitated towards light-skinned women and only proceeded to view dark-skinned women as potential partners when it did not work out with the light-skinned women.⁹²

Hunter also describes “the quest for white beauty” as significant because “white or light skin is a form of ‘racial capital’ gaining its status from existing racial hierarchies.”⁹³ She defines racial capital as “a resource drawn from the body that can be related to skin tone, facial features, body shapes, etc.”⁹⁴ Hunter positions the concept of racial capital more distinctly as a form of social capital than a part of a racial identity

because of the way individuals may utilize phenotypic features as a vehicle to gain social status.⁹⁵ For example, a light-skinned African American woman may use her privilege of a lighter skin tone to reach a higher status than darker-skinned women on the social ladder, as opposed to centering her skin tone as part of her racial identity. The concept of white/light-skinned beauty illustrates the intersections of racism, colorism, and misogyny because Black women “need” to be mixed-race and have light skin to be considered beautiful under Eurocentric beauty ideals, and Black women face far more criticism for not meeting the white beauty standard than do Black men.⁹⁶

The privilege and oppression resulting from skin tone can also be demonstrated in psychological studies and their examination of internalized perceptions of skin tone. Social psychologists S. I. Coard, A. M. Breland, and P. Raskin analyzed the relevancy of skin tone to the development of racial identity and self-esteem. In 2001, their study interviewed 113 African American women/college students and did not find statistical significance of Black women’s perceived skin tone, their preferred skin tone, and self-esteem. However, Coard et al. found a difference in the perceived preference of skin tone. Black women’s self-perceived skin tone and their preferred skin tone matched closely, but they perceived that men and their family members preferred significantly lighter skin tone.⁹⁷ The results suggest Black women may be receiving positive messages about light skin from family members and men to indicate an ideal preference. Coard et al. also discovered that all the participants in the sample preferred a medium skin tone, regardless of the participant’s own skin tone. The researchers highlighted the significance of this finding because “it contradicts the wealth of literature that has found African Americans exhibiting preference for either a lighter or darker skin tone.”⁹⁸ Although Coard et al.’s

finding may signify a generational shift from the “color-struck” attitudes, the result of Black women’s perceived ideal skin tone preferences of family members and men may suggest the gendered reinforcement of colorism. By this, Black women receive more messages about beauty and skin tone preferences than Black men during their childhood. Furthermore, the participants’ personal preference of a medium skin tone may indicate the desire to be “dark enough, but not too dark,” but more research remains necessary to determine Black women’s feelings of skin tone, to which my research will address.

In 2014, clinical psychologist Speshal T. Walker’s doctoral dissertation examined the relationship between Black women’s skin tone and self-perceptions of attractiveness. Her research indicated a positive correlation between skin lightness and higher self-attractiveness ratings.⁹⁹ Additionally, Walker’s research indicated that darker-skinned participants in her sample placed more importance on body features than lighter-skinned participants. Walker suggests that her findings may potentially indicate that the darker-skinned women felt less attractive and more self-conscious of their bodies, but she also includes that there was little skin color dissatisfaction among participants.¹⁰⁰ Although Coard et al. and Walker provide significant findings, their research methods prevented exploration of participants’ lived experiences and nuances that can only be examined from qualitative research. My research involves a semi-structured focus group interview to collect details of lived experiences and how Black women may be able to not only relate to each other’s experience, but also possibly contribute to the consciousness-raising of other participants.

Sociologist Brittany Slatton employed qualitative research methods and examined the statements of white men to determine how they defined black female beauty in 2012.

The statements demonstrated that white men view the stereotypes of Black women as the opposite of ideal notions of beauty. Some statements indicated that participants believed the attractiveness of Black women could be increased if the Black women's features were more similar to white women.¹⁰¹ Many participants believed, in a matter-of-fact or common sense approach, that white women are more attractive than Black women due to the following justifications: "that straight hair is better than 'kinky' hair, that light or white skin is preferable to dark, that aquiline features are preferable to full, flat, or wide features, and that black butts and body shapes are disproportionate."¹⁰² These statements from the white male participants suggests that the whiteness contributes to hegemonic beauty ideals. Slatton's study illuminated the racialized attraction of white men, but previously mentioned studies also indicate that white women, Black men, and Black women have a similar understanding of the skin tone hierarchy. Although Slatton's research provides insight into how Black women may be perceived by others, this research addresses a gap in literature concerning how Black women view themselves and their reality. This research study centers Black women and directly prompts them with questions regarding cosmetics, beauty ideals, and experiences. By focusing on Black women, their experiences offer a discussion on how they exercise agency and negotiate Eurocentric beauty ideals within a systematically racist beauty culture

Despite the mainstream integration and celebration of Black bodies (more specifically, the curvaceous body shapes), skin tone has yet to be heralded in the same fashion. In *Colourism and the Politics of Beauty*, sociologist Aisha Phoenix discusses the contemporary views of skin tone by examining 2014 Twitter trends of "light skin versus dark skin" posts. In her own experience, Phoenix witnessed many statements of abuse

and derogatory comments of dark skin.¹⁰³ She also read statements praising the beauty of light skin, such as “light skin is the right skin.”¹⁰⁴ However, Phoenix links the hegemonic ideals of skin tone to the cultural production of these ideals. She further demonstrates contemporary colorism in discussions of how popular magazines lighten non-white celebrities' skin in photographs. Although these magazines deny claims of lightening skin via digital means, Phoenix highlights that the method—digital alteration or intentional lighting in photo shoots to create the perception of lighter skin—does not matter because “the results and the implicit message they convey are the same: women of colour, whatever their skin shade, are not light enough for mainstream media because they are not white.”¹⁰⁵ Ample literature examines the impact of media, but many fail to detail the lived experiences of Black women. Phoenix analyzed the media content as a sociological feminist scholar, but I wish to learn how the information and/or messages from media impact everyday Black women. I will review the relationship between the beauty industry and Black women to further determine the need for academic exploration and provide insight into possible circumstances to ask about during data collection, also serving as a basis for my own research

Research conducted by cosmetic scientists Caisey, Grangeat, Lemasson, Talabot, and Voirin explore women's self-perceived facial defects and their relationship to cosmetics. First, Caisey et al. highlighted how the evolution of foundation from theatrical makeup to routinized cosmetic product contributed to the lack of regard by cosmetic companies for specific ethnic differences among consumers.¹⁰⁶ Their research study strategically employed methods to analyze different ethnic groups of women to determine similarities and differences in perspectives of cosmetics. In their research study, they

observed that white women commonly mentioned acne, blackheads, and wrinkles as their own skin defects to the researchers. Black women similarly expressed concerns of those skin defects, but they additionally included visible texture irregularities (dark marks, scars, skin blemishes) and unevenness of skin color.¹⁰⁷

While Black and white women both report concerns about acne or wrinkles, foundation serves a disciplinary role as a cosmetic solution to disguise skin “defects,” that are associated with Black women’s skin. The skin concerns of white women can be mostly addressed by skincare regimes of topical ointments and creams, but Black women’s concerns of visible texture irregularities and unevenness of skin color directly contributes to high demand for full-coverage foundations. However, Black women also declared their dissatisfaction with their usual foundation product because “appropriate foundation shades are not available in store.¹⁰⁸” To address this issue, they described their solution of mixing several different products. There does not seem to be any other cosmetology research studies that explore this issue, but more Black women are voicing these issues today through social media outlets, such as Twitter and Instagram. My research will attempt to address this gap in literature through the exploration of Black women’s relationship to cosmetics, their perspectives of beauty ideals, and how both may impact them psychologically and emotionally.

In a recent thesis, Jaleesa Reed conducted a qualitative study to examine the relationship between millennial Black women and MAC cosmetics. Through semi-structured interviews, Reed concluded that her participants valued self-image management and presentation to reinforce an acceptable image for themselves, had an emotional relationship with MAC due to the store environment and customer service, and

felt empowered when MAC employees provided professional expertise and makeup technique education.¹⁰⁹ However, Reed's study focused only on MAC cosmetics, a high-end makeup brand. It lacks a well-rounded analysis of Black women because it did not include that some Black women may only be able to afford drugstore brands. Without acknowledgement of Black women's experiences with drugstore makeup, Reeds study cannot fully represent Black women from all social classes.

According to LaPorchia Davis' thesis, "African American Women's Use of Cosmetics Products in Relation to Their Attitudes and Self-Identity," her participants reported difficulties in finding appropriate shades for Black women in cheaper cosmetic lines. Rather than resorting to mixing products, Davis' participants indicated a preference to buy a higher-end foundation, like MAC, than struggle finding cheaper alternatives that may not be an exact match or good for one's skin. All of Davis' participants used social media to learn how to apply makeup or certain cosmetic presentations. Davis concluded all her participants enjoy using cosmetics to present an idealized appearance.¹¹⁰ However, Davis did not seem to include any biracial/multiracial Black women. The construction of beauty and self-perception may be influenced by having a biracial/multiracial background. Additionally, Davis delves into first memories/experiences with cosmetics, but she does not address early memories of how participants first understood the concept of beauty in relation to their skin tone. My research will address participants' conceptualization of beauty and include biracial/multiracial Black women to garner a better representation of the relationship between Black women and the cosmetic/beauty industry.

The previously discussed material provides extensive insight into the experiences of Black women, but more literature is needed to provide a wider intersectional approach. The next step includes simultaneously delving further into Black women's relationship to the cosmetics/beauty industry and emphasizing an intersectional analysis that includes skin tone, race, gender, and class. More specifically, I will expand on the current limited literature by including more exploration into the cosmetics industry's reinforcement of colorism and how Black women navigate Eurocentric beauty ideals. The expansion of literature will lead to better representation of Black women and provide more direction for future research endeavors.

Black Women's Embodiment and Agency

The theoretical contributions of both Michel Foucault and Sandra Bartky, particularly regarding docile bodies and self-discipline, are important for understanding cosmetic use and beauty. However, their works fail to consider the intersections of race, skin tone, and gender in Black women's experiences. Feminist scholarship on beauty seems to apply Foucault and Bartky's concepts to all women, despite the reality that many marginalized groups of women do not have the same experiences. This section asserts that Foucault and Bartky's concepts cannot be applied to Black women's experiences with cosmetics without some revision, because Black women's participation in U.S. beauty culture is an act of resistance of Eurocentric beauty ideals.

Michel Foucault's works are often highly regarded and applied to many analyses, especially of U.S. beauty culture. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses how coercion and discipline creates a "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" through "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its

elements, its gestures, its behaviour.”¹¹¹ For example, Foucault uses a metaphor of a soldier and how commands and expectations mold their embodiment into the perfect soldier.¹¹² Furthermore, Foucault asserts that “this might be called the instrumental coding of the body. It consists of a breakdown of the total gesture into two parallel series: that of the parts of the body to be used and that of the parts of the object manipulated.”¹¹³ In terms of beauty practices, there is a rigorous routine of body movements to achieve the perfect application of cosmetics. For example, perfect application of eyeliner involves lightly closing one’s eyes, one hand holding the eyelid taught, the other hand gripping the eyeliner utensil, but the person must be aware of spatial location of their body at all times because the smallest deviance of gesture can result in poor task execution. This routine of body movements creates a docile body by establishing a behavior to meet societal expectations of beauty. Furthermore, the practice of docile bodies diminishes the time and energy of the person from resisting other forms of social injustice.

Building off Foucault’s work, Sandra Lee Bartky’s theory of self-disciplined beauty illustrates how beauty practices continue to adhere to misogynistic standards of self-discipline. In “Foucault, Femininity, and The Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” Bartky frames femininity as an achievement accomplished through disciplinary practices of gesture and appearance.¹¹⁴ Bartky attributes the phenomena of self-disciplined beauty as part of the production of what Michele Foucault terms “docile bodies,” or the embodiment of discipline and societal demands. Bartky states, “The production of ‘docile bodies’ requires that an uninterrupted coercion be directed to the very processes of bodily activity, not just their result; this ‘micro-physics of power’ fragments and partitions the body’s time, its space, and its movements.”¹¹⁵ By this, society enforces beauty standards

and practices then advertises the “newest cosmetic and beauty trends” to influence people to self-discipline.¹¹⁶ Because a “woman’s body is an ornamented surface,” the production of a body deemed “suitable” by society involves a certain amount of discipline.¹¹⁷ The disciplinary practices of femininity include hair removal, body manipulation through diet and exercise, and skincare regimes, such as the application of cosmetics. She argues that the act of making up one’s face is not one of self-expression because women are limited to a select few cosmetic presentations. Furthermore, the act of making up one’s face contributes to the discourse that implies women’s faces ought to be covered up or disguised because they are inherently defective.¹¹⁸

While women may take pleasure in experimenting with makeup, social situations and expectations dictate the appropriateness of cosmetic presentations. For example, Halloween make-up or brightly colored cosmetic presentations would not be appropriate for a formal gathering. Currently, the popular culture narrative produced by popular women’s magazines, celebrities, and cosmetic companies declare that women have reclaimed make-up as a form of self-expression and empowerment; women have also highlighted the inclusion of men in mainstream representation of cosmetic companies as evidence. However, the make-up culture still complies to misogynistic standards of beauty and femininity. The trending, “Instagram-worthy” makeup looks exemplify how little make-up presentation has changed. While the colors may have changed, making-up one’s face largely still follows a precedent: foundation, eyeshadow, eyeliner, mascara, blush, and lipstick; for example, one may be able to use eyeshadow on their lips, but it will still adhere to a pre-conceived blueprint of pigment application on the face.

Furthermore, corporations in the beauty industry appropriate women's movements by advertising a false sense of empowerment and self-expression through the perfect application of winged eyeliner; the beauty industry maintains capitalism and allows for the exploitation of women and children's labor across the world – that does not seem very feminist. Women ought to take pride in themselves, but it remains problematic to believe make-up as a form of self-expression somehow dismantles patriarchal institutions. In addition, Bartky positions the “art” of makeup as essentially being the art of disguise, which presupposes that an unpainted face of a woman is defective.¹¹⁹ Thus, makeup application can be framed as a means of survival by covering up perceived defects to avoid unwanted attention. The concept of makeup application as a means of survival fosters a discussion of how cosmetics may have contributed to the assimilation of Black women into a white-dominated society.

However, Bartky's discussion of cosmetics and self-disciplined beauty lacks a discussion of agency and racialized concepts of beauty. To center Black women's experiences and voices, I will also discuss Black feminist perspectives on embodiment and agency. In *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*, sociologist Maxine Leeds Craig highlights how conversations about beauty and misogyny often ignore/disregard how racism and colorism in U. S. beauty culture factor into the experiences of Black women. Craig states, “Several studies have analyzed the ways in which beauty ideals serve to reinforce male supremacy... but do not explain how Eurocentric standards placed black women and white women in very different situations vis-à-vis beauty as an ideal.”¹²⁰ Craig provided this statement in context of 1968 when the National Association of Colored People staged a Miss Black America pageant to

protest how Miss America beauty pageants traditionally excluded Black women.¹²¹ Craig also highlights how white women were objectified in institutions, such as national beauty contests and media advertising, but “Black women were either excluded from them or included in images that reinforced Eurocentric beauty ideals.”¹²²

Furthermore, Craig asserts, “In response to the exclusion of Black women from dominant representations of beauty, African American women’s beauty became part of the symbolic repertoire with which champions of the race sought to assert racial pride.”¹²³ By this, Craig argues that Black women’s participation in U. S. beauty culture is more of a source of resistance than adherence to misogynistic standards of beauty. Additionally, Craig’s statement parallels how Black women, like Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone, felt that establishing a hair regimen for Black hair contributed to racial uplift and pride. As previously discussed, Walker and Malone received criticism for “emulating whiteness” and adhering to Eurocentric beauty standards, but Walker and Malone created a space for other Black women to become economically independent and theorize within communities of Black women. Although there may be some criticism of Black women’s contemporary embrace of U. S. beauty culture, Black women’s resistance of exclusion in U. S. beauty culture involves claiming their spaces.

In *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance*, women’s studies professor Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant argues that the racialized femininity of Black women involves an emphasis on strength and silencing their experiences of struggles and oppression. In her research, Beauboeuf-Lafontant examines the emotional and physical distress on Black women’s bodies by adhering to the “strong Black woman” narrative.¹²⁴ While Foucault and Bartky’s research on docile

bodies emphasize hegemonic notions of femininity and beauty, Beauboeuf-Lafontant discussion of embodiment deconstructs the “controlling image” of strong Black womanhood. She illustrates how the notion of strong Black womanhood “guide[s] behavior toward and from these persons, constrain[s] what is seen and believed about them, and when internalized, profoundly influence[s] the self-perceptions of the marginalized” according to Patricia Hill Collins theory of power dynamics.¹²⁵ The controlling image of a strong Black woman discourages Black women from showing their vulnerabilities and relegates those vulnerabilities as more essential to white women’s performance of femininity.

Additionally, Beauboeuf-Lafontant asserts that “beauty enlists such women and their bodies in the doing rather than ‘undoing’ of a particular formulation of gender... the beauty myth is not about women [or beauty] at all. It is about men’s institutions and [the protection of their] institutional power.”¹²⁶ Considering how white women reinforced notions of beauty to reserve a social ladder for themselves, beauty can also be positioned as a tool to protect white institutional power. The position that makeup as a form of self-disciplining bodies cannot be fully applied to Black women. In a society where institutions continuously equate Black women to masculine qualities and animals, Black women’s claim to beauty subverts hegemonic notions of femininity and Eurocentric beauty ideals. For example, Black athletes, like Serena Williams and Gabby Douglas, have their bodies frequently compared to traditionally masculine bodies; Michelle Obama and other Black women have received insults where they are equated to apes and monkeys. Similar to how Black women distanced themselves from slavery through beauty practices in the past, contemporary Black women distance themselves from these

controlling images of strong Black womanhood and deep-rooted stereotypes by participating in U. S. beauty culture. This relates to the research study's objectives of exploring how contemporary Black women negotiate Eurocentric beauty ideals and theorize within the confines of a racist industry. I hope this research will highlight the need to analyze Black women's experiences with an intersectional lens and illustrate how general research of women cannot represent Black women.

Theoretical Frameworks

This section delves into the theoretical frameworks that guide my research and exploration of Black women's relationship with the cosmetic and beauty industry in the United States. I employ three theoretical frameworks: Black feminism standpoint theory, intersectionality, and the conflict theory. It is important to establish that the Black feminist standpoint theory centers the experiences of Black women because they have been historically excluded from structures of power and white feminism. Black feminist standpoint highlights Black women's individual experience and commonalities amongst those experiences. Additionally, an intersectional framework provides a lens to analyze how skin tone and race intersect in the lived experiences of the participants. For the previous reasons, I also employed conflict theory from a sociological perspective to further demonstrate that Black women's experiences with the cosmetic and beauty industry operates at a political level and results from systemic racial oppression within the United States.

In "Defining Black Feminist Thought," Patricia Hill Collins argues that Black feminism "consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which

clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it.”¹²⁷ Collins pinpoints the problem with Black feminist thought relates to how certain ambiguous definitions lead people to believe that the primary criteria of being a Black feminist is simply being a Black woman. Collins argues that the biological determinant of being a Black woman does not automatically result in theoretical contributions to Black feminism; she also states that her definition does not exclude other groups that play a critical role in the epistemological production of Black feminism.¹²⁸ As an Asian American woman, I acknowledge that I do not have the epistemic privilege of using my analysis to interpret the impact of the cosmetic and beauty industry in Black women’s experiences. However, I demonstrate the core theme of Black feminism by centering Black women’s experiences and drawing connections between their contemporary experiences to their history of systemic racial and gender oppression. I also delve into Black women’s legacy of struggle and resistance. The legacy of struggle refers to the historical intersections of white supremacy and patriarchy that informed the oppression of Black women.¹²⁹ Although I am not a Black woman, I hope to contribute to this debate by exploring Black women’s experiences in the realm of beauty and cosmetics. Additionally, I hope to highlight ways that Black women negotiate beauty ideals through the emphasis of their empowerment and agency.

In 1991, American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality as a methodology to examine “multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.”¹³⁰ Crenshaw highlights how lived experiences of oppression cannot be isolated as the result of one identity, but that one’s

marginalized identities interact and interconnect. An intersectional framework to examine Black women's lived experiences with race, skin tone, and cosmetics is necessary; by employing an intersectional framework, I can critically analyze how my participants' lived experiences may demonstrate a systemic issue of how Black women are treated within the beauty industry. Furthermore, my research addresses more than just the typically studied identities of Black and woman in research studies regarding colorism and race. I also examined the following identities and how they impact my participants' experiences: nationality, socioeconomic status, bi/multiracial status, and students of color at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

In sociology, the conflict theory perspective highlights competition between social groups. The exploitation of subordinate groups allows for the dominant group to access more resources. I position beauty as a form of social capital in the literature review.¹³¹ Although it is important to center Black women's experiences of navigating the cosmetic industry, the conflict perspective provides a structural context to frame how women competed for social capital within the constructs of beauty and race. By employing the conflict perspective, obstacles can be positioned as consequences of white supremacy dominating the cosmetic industry to reinforce hegemonic beauty ideals. In today's context, social problems are frequently discussed in a manner that does not emphasize power relations. The current hierarchal preference of lighter skin did not simply happen overnight. Light-skin preference is a product of continuous reinforcement from white supremacy and patriarchy. The intersections of race, gender, skin tone, and class have primarily influenced the reality of oppression in Black women's experiences. I hope this research will highlight Black women's negotiation of racist and sexist standards

in the cosmetic industry. However, the term negotiation may have negative connotations in that it relates more to survival. I hope to redefine negotiation in my research to propose that Black do not only survive the beauty realm, but also thrive and redefine beauty in their own terms. By simultaneously employing a Black feminism standpoint and conflict theory, I aim to demonstrate the ways in which personal lived experiences of Black women reach a political sphere due to the structural inequalities in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study includes exploring Black women's experiences with the cosmetic industry and how they navigate Eurocentric beauty ideals. In this chapter, I will discuss my two-step procedure for data collection, sampling methods, and assumptions.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved a two-step process. The first step is a pre-test using Qualtrics software. The pre-test includes ten questions used to collect demographic information, personal experiences with cosmetics, and frequency of cosmetic use. The demographic portion contains questions focused on racial/ethnic identity, nationality, and age. The next portion includes questions about the participant's experiences with cosmetics. The prompts used straight forward questions to ask the participants if they use foundation and/or concealer. Participants who indicate yes will be prompted with a question if they have encountered any problems finding a product that best fits their skin tone. The next section includes one question inquiring about how often the participant wears or uses makeup. The pre-test concluded with a prompt for participants to submit their email address if they agreed to be contacted about participating further.

The pre-test's primary role was to recruit appropriate participants for the focus group interview. For example, a Black woman who does not use cosmetics at all would not be able to contribute to this study. By implementing a pre-test measure as the first step, I was able to determine appropriate participants based on identity, age, and frequency of cosmetic use. Although it is possible for participants with limited to no

cosmetic use to have relevant experience, Black women with regular cosmetic use were prioritized. Black women with cosmetic use will be more likely provide in-depth opinions about today's flourishing cosmetic industry climate. Furthermore, Black women that indicated their nationality as American were also prioritized. Although Black women may have similar experiences across the world, Black women in the United States may be more likely to have similar exposure to U. S. societal expectations or cultural scripts that value whiteness over blackness.

The second step of the data collection involved a semi-structured focus group interview of 5-6 participants. The semi-structured focus group interview included prompts to facilitate an organic discussion between participants. It featured two sections of questions. The first section of questions asked about participants' opinions and experiences with cosmetics. The second section of questions asked about how they negotiated Eurocentric beauty ideals in their childhood and recent experiences.

Sampling

The sampling methods included volunteer, snowball, and purposive sampling. I posted advertisements around campus bulletin boards with my contact information; people interested in participating emailed me. I also contacted professors from Minnesota State University, Mankato to forward an email containing a link to the pre-test to their students. Due to the study's specific call for Black women, it is possible students contacted peers outside the classroom about the study. After participants provided information through the pre-test, I employed purposive sampling, a method of selecting a sample "to be representative of the population."¹³² I prioritized frequent cosmetic use and

nationalities in selection of participants for the semi-structured focus group interview, but did not fully exclude participants based on level of eligibility. I determined the level of eligibility based on identity, age, and frequency of cosmetic use. Afterwards, I heavily employed snowball sampling, a tactic to recruit research subjects through the “identification of an initial subject.”¹³³ In brief, I faced obstacles in scheduling focus group interviews. However, I provide more details about limitations of this research in the next chapter.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data by coding the focus group interviews. I looked for significant themes for each focus group interview. Although I will mainly discuss significant themes expressed by the majority of participants, I also looked for uncommon themes to contextualize them. For example, most of the participants grew up in Minnesota, but I will highlight the difference and similarities to participants that did not grow up in Minnesota. I hope to prevent my research from essentializing Black women by denoting the diversity of Black women’s experiences.

Assumptions

I will discuss some assumptions of this study. The research study relied on the assumption that participants responded with honest and true answers. Both the pre-test and focus group interview prompted participants to provide responses based on their own life and personal experiences. The research study also depended on the assumption that participants have an awareness of their social location in United States society by

identifying their membership of a marginalized group. With this assumption, participants will be able to demonstrate their lived experiences as a means of navigating discrimination influenced by the beauty industry. I limited the participant pool to United States citizens to focus on the assumption that these participants would be exposed to the same general cultural scripts that idealize European beauty standards. Additionally, the emphasis of American nationality would help ensure the assumption that participants use U. S. cosmetic brands. I assumed that participants with familiarity of cosmetics would have a relationship with at least a few mainstream cosmetic brands. I also restricted the age range of the participant pool to between 18-25 years old based on the assumption that younger women would have exposure of the current cosmetic trend of full make-up application compared to older women.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collection process of this research study was conducted over a period of three months, March 2017 through May 2017. Thirty-three students took the pre-test, but only fifteen participants were selected to participate in the focus group interviews due to time conflicts and lack of eligibility. I conducted the focus group interviews in two locations: the campus library and the student union. Focus Group A had only three participants and seemed to be the most reserved in their discussion. Focus Group B had six participants; they engaged in an enthusiastic discussion and often analyzed how certain aspects of the beauty industry felt like “tools of oppression.” Focus Group C also had six participants; most of the participants actively connected with each other and often referenced their experiences of growing up in a small town in rural Minnesota.

In addition to my lack of epistemic privilege, there are several other possible limitations of this research study. Many students expressed interest in participating, but many of them could not meet at the same time for a focus group interview. Due to the challenge of accommodating multiple schedules and lack of follow-up from pre-test participants, I removed some participants from my potential sample pool for the focus group interviews. Additionally, I relied heavily on snowball sampling to reach my goal of fifteen participants. I asked some participants to have their friends take the pre-test then schedule a time that worked for their group of friends and I accommodated my schedule to them. Although this method allowed me to meet my goal, my data does not represent all Black women in Minnesota State University, Mankato. Friend groups as participants also presents the limitation that they are more likely to already have similar experiences

and connect with each other well because of it. Additionally, the geographic location limited my research to only have a glimpse of Midwestern experiences of Black women; the participants often referenced the challenges of living and going to school in a predominantly-white area/institution.

All of the participants were students at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Spring 2017 semester. Mankato is a city in southern Minnesota with an approximate population of 42,000 people. According to the United States 2010 census, white residents comprised 89.9% of the city's population and Black residents comprised 4% of the city's population. However, Mankato's demographics do not translate over into Minnesota State University, Mankato's student demographics. Enrollment statistics from the 2016-2017 academic year indicate that white students comprised 74.6% of the population, but Black or African American students made up 4.8% of the total student body.¹³⁴

As a predominantly white institution, Black students have faced obstacles and challenges at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In "Black Women, White Campus: Students Living Through Invisibility," Khalilah Annette Shabazz analyzed Black women's experiences with attending a predominantly white institution in the midwestern state of Indiana. The participants in her study highlighted the challenge of not only navigating a PWI, but also having to fight stereotypes about Black women.¹³⁵ Furthermore, participants felt that their identities as Black women rendered them almost invisible on campus.¹³⁶ Most of my research study's participants also reflected on those experiences of challenging stereotypes and feeling invisible. The navigation of a PWI contributes to the challenges of Black women's negotiations with Eurocentric beauty ideals. For example, participants may feel overwhelmed due to not only the campus

disregarding their population, but also the overarching message from cosmetic companies that they do not care about Black women either. The presence of both Eurocentric cultures in a small, Midwestern town may provide a different response than other regions in the United States.

All three of the focus groups in this research study exemplified how Black women's personal experiences with cosmetics and beauty intersect at the site of race, gender, and skin tone. This pattern of common experiences indicates that Black women's personal experiences result from systemic oppression within U. S. beauty culture. The focus group style fosters a discussion where the participants share and exchange their experiences and thoughts. Due to having fifteen participants, I will first describe the participants as a group and provide a description of their demographics. Then, I will identify and analyze significant themes found within the focus group interviews. I coded the focus group transcripts by pinpointing common themes amongst all three focus groups. Additionally, I will highlight some individual differences found in the data to prevent essentializing Black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty culture. The overarching themes I found are: 1) difficulty finding appropriate foundation shades, 2) distrust of makeup counter associates, 3) perceived beauty ideals versus personal preferences, 4) childhood experiences with skin tone and beauty preferences, and 5) additional beauty concerns. Alongside the analysis, I will discuss the implications of the results and how this research compares to previous literature.

Participants at a Glance

A total of fifteen women participated in the focus group. All of the participants self-identified as Black women. Fourteen of the fifteen participants identified their nationality as American and the other participant indicated Yemeni. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years old. Twelve of the participants indicated that they wear foundation, a cosmetic product generally applied to the face to achieve an appearance of even skin tone and clear skin; additionally, they shared that they have difficulties finding an appropriate shade of foundation. The three remaining participants indicated that they do not wear foundation, but two of them specified in a subsequent question that they also have difficulties finding an appropriate shade of foundation when they attempt to purchase this product. I have included self-disclosed frequency of cosmetic use and the corresponding number of participants that disclosed for each category: always (two participants), often (seven participants), sometimes (four participants), and never (two participants). While I did not ask participants self-identify their skin tone due to the subjective nature of the process, the participants represented a variety of skin tones and often acknowledged skin tone differences within discussions. To further prevent essentializing Black women, I have given pseudonyms to my participants; I hope the pseudonyms help the readers humanize and recognize the validity of the participants' experiences.

Significant Themes

Difficulty Finding Appropriate Foundation Shades
Distrust of Makeup Counter Associates
Perceived Beauty Ideals versus Personal Preferences
Childhood Experiences with Skin Tone and Beauty Preferences
Additional Beauty Concerns

Before delving into the significant themes, I will describe the structure of the focus group interviews. I organized the focus group interview script into two sections: cosmetics and beauty. To help the participants settle into a focus group environment, I asked the participants why they choose to wear makeup and how makeup makes them feel. Most of the participants enthusiastically expressed that they liked how makeup made them feel more confident about themselves. Then, I guided the discussion to focus more on foundation products. I asked the participants what factors did they consider when purchasing foundation products and if they encountered any problems with finding foundation that best fits their skin tone. After discussion challenges, I asked the participants about their solutions to being unable to find foundation that matched their skin tone. Additionally, I expanded the question to ask if they experienced any other challenges in finding other cosmetic products, such as lipsticks and eyeshadow, that complemented their skin tone. I concluded the first section with questions about their opinions on the cosmetic industry's attempts to incorporate more diversity and swatches from popular foundation product lines.

I thanked the participants for their participation in this research study so far and informed them that I would be switching over to questions about beauty. I asked them if they felt that they faced different issues in the beauty industry as Black women. After

every participant indicated they experienced different challenges, I asked them to describe the ideal beautiful woman. Most of the participants discussed the ideal beautiful woman both in terms of United States society and their personal preference. Next, I asked about how the lightness or darkness of their skin tone impacted the way they view themselves and others. Many of the participants responded with recent experiences and some delved more into their childhood experiences. I opened the discussion for the participants to discuss anything they felt relevant to the interview and/or did not have much time for elaboration. Afterwards, I thanked them again for their participation and asked them for any advice for future focus group interviews and research endeavors.

Difficulty Finding Appropriate Foundation Shades

All but two of the participants shared that they encounter difficulties finding foundation shades that match their skin tone. One of the two participants specified that her only difficulties involved coverage of her pores, but felt satisfied with her options of foundation shades. However, the other participant continued her statement by explaining that she does encounter some difficulty and she will not purchase any foundation that does not match. Alana stated:

“I might be a mix between two... But my shades are usually the last two shades, so it’s like after that go[es] from like a drastic to no in-between. So if I can’t find one, there’s like no in-between for me. [shrugs] If they don’t carry my skin color...”

While those two participants do not experience much difficulty finding an appropriate shade of foundation, the rest of the participants felt frustrated with their limited options. They shared that their preferred solution involved buying multiple liquid foundation products to personally mix and create an appropriate foundation shade. Some participants

discussed that mixing foundations involved not only creating a suitable shade, but also one with the right undertone. For instance, Alyssa elaborates:

“I usually have to mix two colors together to find the right color... Sometimes it’ll appear to be my skin tone, but it’ll make me look dead. So, I need a red undertone. I usually mix foundations and I probably have like 10 different foundations.”

Of those participants, their statements consistently implied that the undertones of foundation products played a significant role in negatively altering their skin appearance. Thus, participants felt that the wrong undertone would make them appear “dead,” “ashy,” pale, too red, or too orange/yellow. The unique challenges of trying to find a foundation that matches both their skin tone and undertone demonstrate that cosmetic companies are not producing suitable products for Black women – particularly dark-skinned Black women.

Furthermore, other consumers of color (Latinx and Asian) with darker skin tones also experience the difficulty of finding appropriate foundation products. For example, Susan Yee, the founder of Zhen, a cosmetic line aimed at Asian women, describes similar experiences in 1996, “... finds that shopping as an Asian woman can be frustrating, especially at cosmetics counters. Even with the wide palette of foundations and eye shadows offered by the big manufacturers, she can't find the shades that would highlight the yellow undertones of her complexion.”¹³⁷ Yesenia Almonte, the beauty editor at Latina Magazine, also agreed that the beauty industry does not address the unique needs of Latinx consumers in 2002, “I think cosmetics companies have come a long way, but there is still a lot to do. Latinas tend to be oilier, we are a wide range of shades, our undertones are more yellow, and being prone to hyper-pigmentation makes finding the right foundation complex. Mixing and matching is annoying.”¹³⁸ The previous statements

were from interviews in dated newspaper articles, but there does not seem to be any research exploring Latinx or Asian consumers' experiences with cosmetic products.

Although Hunter mentions cosmetics in *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, she briefly references cosmetics and discusses more about cosmetic facial surgery.¹³⁹

Like Almonte indicated for Latina women, some participants also felt that their uneven skin tone or hyperpigmentation contributes to the difficulty of finding an appropriate shade of foundation and could only be addressed with mixing foundation products. Rey stated:

“For me, I don't know if it's being a minority, but I have different shades on my face. This part is lighter, and this gets darker. Finding colors is kind of... I'd definitely have to mix color[s] though, not gonna lie.”

The above statement reflects similar concerns of the participants in Caisey et al.'s research; while both Black and white women indicated concerns of acne and wrinkles, Black women highlighted *additional* beauty concerns of uneven skin tone and hyperpigmentation.¹⁴⁰ The participant's mention of “if it's being a minority” may imply that she commonly sees uneven skin tone and hyperpigmentation as concerns for women of color. Additionally, her statement implies that universal solutions for finding a suitable shade of foundation do not cover all people of color. For example, some cosmetic stores use color-matching technology that attempts to capture customer's skin tone and pigmentation in different areas of the face, but hyperpigmentation in certain spots may not be able to produce a suitable result.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the results only produce matches to high-end and middle-grade foundation products; drugstore makeup brands do not currently have the option of using any imaging software to correctly match one's skin tone.

When I asked if the participants had any other solutions for the problem of foundation-matching, a participant reiterated that she would not wear any foundation if she could not find a matching shade. Another participant agreed:

“There’s kind of really no other option if you want your original skin tone to show. There’s no makeup to do that... you just kind of have to go bare face, I guess.”

While there are tinted moisturizers or beauty balm (BB) creams targeted at achieving the “natural” look, some of these products do not achieve a natural look for Black women because many non-foundation products do not offer a variety of suitable shades. Many of these products do not have a wide enough range of skin tones that effectively includes Black women. Furthermore, products that are inclusive of Black women are not as readily available in Midwestern towns like Mankato, Minnesota. Some products contain SPF properties that may not be suitable for a variety of undertones; ultrafine titania and zinc oxide, common cosmetic sunscreen ingredients, “can make the skin look unnaturally white...”¹⁴²

Most participants expressed a preference for mixing liquid foundations to achieve their desired shade. However, some participants indicated that they sometimes use liquid foundation first, then layer with a pressed powder foundation over it. When mixing did not seem like a viable option, a couple of participants stated that they sometimes keep and use unsuitable foundation products instead of disposing of them:

“If it really doesn’t match my skin tone, I try to only use a slight layer where you can’t really tell I’m wearing foundation. But, you can because it’s not my color. I just try to do it very lightly.”

“I personally keep using it because I can’t afford to buy another one.”

“I just go with it.”

The above statements suggest how class plays into the consumption of beauty products. While most of the participants preferred mixing their foundations, it requires at least two products. As discussed, some of the participants cannot afford more than one product at a time – let alone a high-end product that may be suitable for their skin tone.

Additionally, some participants felt that they did not have a wide range of product options that are affordable, good quality, and suitable for their skin tone. Most participants indicated cost and quality as the main factors for purchasing cosmetics, but felt that drugstore brands suited most of their needs. However, some participants stated that they prioritize skin-type suitability (sensitive, oily, combination) and ethical concerns, such as cruelty-free testing of products. Most participants indicated that they buy drugstore brands, but like to buy higher-end products when they have extra spending money. Some participants use the higher-end foundation as the main product and mix in some of a drugstore brand foundation to make a more suitable shade:

“I use Urban Decay for my foundation then I also use a CoverGirl one to mix the two together. Because Urban Decay is too dark for me, it just makes me look really yellow and burnt. And then, the CoverGirl one kind of just balances it out because it’s lighter.”

Most of the participants indicated that they do not mind mixing their foundations and seem to be content with it. Some participants stated that they would consider trying specific products to lighten/darken foundation products, but they prefer their method of mixing foundation products because they trust themselves to create a suitable foundation match. Alyssa stated:

“I think I’d rather stick [to] what I know. Ratio is a big thing because you can add a little more of one and not add so much. And I think I like that, that way of doing it.”

Most participants indicated that they would buy foundation products from Black-owned beauty companies, but felt that they were often too expensive, that they lacked the opportunity to physically sample the product, and that these products were inaccessible due to the online-only availability. Some participants would like to try and support Black-owned beauty companies, but also indicated that they did not want to go through the process of buying and mixing new foundation products again. The participants' expressed preference for mixing products demonstrates the disinterest to experiment with a variety of products and methods again. Some cosmetic companies are currently attempting to expand their selection for Black women, but their attempts of inclusion may fail due to the established distrust of foundation products.

When shown some foundation swatches from popular cosmetic companies (Appendix F) without the branding or company names visible, all the participants felt that there was not enough representation of darker shades. Additionally, most participants commented on the wide range of lighter foundation shades:

“There’s like 50,000 shades of pale. In the beginning, there’s so much diversity among white colors, but there’s not even within the Black colors.”

“They have a lot of shades for white people... This is winter Brittney and this is summer Brittney. We shouldn’t be the last row of options. It’d be nice if it could extend.”

“There are way too many white shades. Even if you have the shade down, it doesn’t take into account if you’re warm skin toned or if you’re cool toned. So regardless if it even matches your skin tone, it may not look right. They don’t have those options out there.”

The first participant’s statement demonstrates how cosmetic companies invest more in the diversity of light skin tones, but not for Black women. This participant analyzed all three swatches offered more shades for lighter skin tones than darker skin

tones. Furthermore, the second participant's statement, "This is winter Brittney and this is summer Brittney." illustrates how cosmetic companies have the capability to create darker shades, but only do so for white women. The participant also pointed out how a specific swatch seemed to have three rows of light shades of foundation, but ones she deemed appropriate for Black women were all in the last row. Most of the participants agreed with the second participant's statement, "We shouldn't be the last row of options. It'd be nice if it could extend." The lack of diversity within darker shades of foundation implies that cosmetic companies have little regard towards their consumers of color and do not wish to expand their product lines for them.

The last participant's statement further demonstrates the challenges of finding an appropriate shade of foundation. For example, "Even if you have the shade down, it doesn't take into account if you're warm skin-toned or if you're cool-toned." By this, the participant references how simply matching one's skin tone to a shade of foundation is not enough because many cosmetic products do not take undertones into account. In general, there are three different types of undertones: neutral, warm, and cool. Red and yellow undertones tend to be grouped together under warm. Whereas, blue and green undertones tend to be grouped together under cool. Neutral tends to be targeted towards consumers who may not have a strong undertone of either warm or cool. If a cosmetic company releases forty shades of foundation with only warm undertones, it does not represent a diverse range. Furthermore, her statement demonstrates that the current options fail to include a variety of shades and undertones.

All participants also felt that the darkest shade available on the swatches were not dark enough. Before I revealed the cosmetic companies and product lines, all participants

felt that the most affordable product line (*Maybelline's* Fit Me) offered the least amount of suitable shades for Black women; they also felt that the most expensive product line (*Lancôme's* Teinte Idole) offered a larger range of suitable foundation shades for Black women than *Maybelline's* Fit Me and *NYX Professional Makeup's* Total Control Drop Foundation. The participants' comparison of swatches confirms my previous findings from research of how cost intersects with shade availability. To achieve the most suitable shade, Black women either must buy a higher-end product or multiple products. While white women do not necessarily always find perfect foundation products that match their skin tone, this section suggests that Black women face more obstacles in finding a suitable shade of foundation. This parallels how early cosmetic companies offered "flesh" tone powder appropriate for white women. While options emerged from Black-owned companies, they could not compete with the larger white-owned companies; Black-owned companies lacked the resources to compete with the white-owned companies' tactics of mass-marketing. Like in the past, some Black-owned cosmetic companies struggle to compete with white-owned beauty companies due to the established reputations of big companies and lack of resources to market towards Black women in predominantly white regions.

Distrust of Makeup Counter Associates

Due to their geographical location, many of the participants only have access to large beauty chain-stores. In addition to limited options for Black skin tones, all of the participants felt that they were also underrepresented in terms of makeup counter associates. All of the participants indicated that they do not trust makeup counter

associates at stores like Ulta Beauty and Sephora. Most of the participants stated that they would frequently experience the makeup counter associates applying foundation that did not match their skin tone, oftentimes using shades lighter than their true skin tone. Focus Group A discussed their experiences and felt that the unintentional usage of lighter foundation indicated a preference for lighter shades. Taylor stated:

“And I think it’s almost preference of them too... what they like rather than what actually would look good on you or what you would like.”

Her statement illustrates how she perceives makeup counter associates reinforcing a Eurocentric beauty ideal by applying a lighter shade of foundation than her skin tone. She felt that this makeup counter associate intentionally used a lighter shade of foundation because light skin is preferred over dark skin in U. S. beauty culture. Additionally, the participants agreed that they felt the makeup counter associates may have avoided matching darker foundation out of fear of offending them; the participants discussed how they love their skin tone, but felt that people, like makeup professionals or friends, may still believe that dark skin is less desirable than light skin. The participants continued to comment on this experiment, “Like I’m not *that* dark.” This statement suggests that the participants felt that makeup counter associates perceive them negatively as darker than their skin tone. This particular statement relates to Aisha Phoenix’s research and conclusion, “the results and the implicit message they convey are the same: women of colour, whatever their skin shade, are not light enough for mainstream media because they are not white.”¹⁴³ For makeup counter associates, it does not matter if the consumer of color has relatively light skin because all non-white skin does not meet Eurocentric beauty standards.

The participants' experiences with makeup counter associates indicates that these associates may have minimal professional knowledge of products for consumers of color. It is also possible that most makeup counter associates have not been properly trained to address the beauty concerns/products for people of color. To avoid an unsuitable match, most of the participants purposely sought a makeup counter associate of color. However, participants also stated they rarely found any associates of color to assist them. The low likelihood of finding makeup associates of color may indicate the ways that the cosmetic industry centers whiteness. As a result, the cosmetic and beauty industry strongly discourages people of color from participating in the U. S. beauty culture via the lack of available products suitable for people of color.

Although participants expressed distrust of makeup counter associates, all participants agreed that online social media beauty gurus were a better source of finding beauty products suitable for their skin tone. All of the participants expressed a trust in social media beauty gurus over makeup counter associates. Generally, participants follow social media beauty gurus whose skin tone is similar to their own to find appropriate foundation shades and additional cosmetics, like lipsticks and eyeshadows. Mari stated:

“I usually find a YouTuber who I know is my skin tone. I’ve seen her use products that I use, and I’m like, ‘I know she’s my skin tone,’ then use whatever she uses.”

The above statement illustrates how women locate other individuals similar to them for advice. In terms of the cosmetic industry, Black women do not rely upon makeup professionals because they tend to be white and do not understand the unique beauty concerns of consumers of color. Rather than wait for the beauty industry to offer fully inclusive beauty products, Black women have turned to themselves to address their

beauty concerns. Furthermore, one participant elaborated that it was nice to have a community to discuss each other's experiences and solutions. Social media has allowed for Black women to find community and collaboration. Additionally, social media illuminated the supposedly personal beauty concerns of Black women to an even greater level; again, the pattern of Black women's personal indicates a systemic issue within the beauty industry.

The preference for social media beauty gurus over makeup counter associates parallels the times of Annie Turnbo Malone and Madam C.J. Walker when Black women stepped up to help their own community amidst a white-dominated beauty industry. Like the beauty culturalists during the Reconstruction Era, Black social media beauty gurus often feature and review products for their viewers. However, these social media beauty gurus do not directly depend on selling their viewers products; oftentimes, these social media beauty gurus are offered sponsorships to feature products or receive money for allowing YouTube to incorporate advertisements in their videos.

Additionally, Black social media beauty gurus often use their platform to discuss the lack of inclusion in the beauty industry. One particular Black social media beauty guru, Jackie Aina, openly criticized how beauty companies often claim "darker skinned people don't buy as much cosmetics" by tweeting, "Because we don't have as much to buy in the FIRST PLACE."¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the release of *Fenty Beauty* by Black pop star Rihanna demonstrates Black women's support of Black beauty professionals and gurus. For example, *Fenty's* twelve darkest shades of foundation have consistently been sold-out weeks after its launch.¹⁴⁵ Another Black-owned cosmetic company, *Beauty Bakerie*, further illustrates how Black women have been addressing the lack of diversity within the

beauty industry by starting their own inclusive businesses. *Beauty Bakerie*'s founder, Cashmere Nicole, stated on the company's website, "We are proud to uplift and inspire the beautiful faces of the skin tones and ethnicities that span over 100 countries."¹⁴⁶ A key detail of *Fenty*'s release and *Beauty Bakerie*'s statement is how they did not exclude any consumer. Although they are Black-owned companies, they also offer products for white consumers and other women of color. For example, white women with lighter-skin tones praised *Fenty* for having foundations light enough for very pale skin tones.

Perceived Beauty Ideal Versus Personal Preferences

When discussing their distrust of makeup counter associates, some of the participants felt that some of the makeup counter associates adhered more to traditional Eurocentric beauty ideals. In addition to their perception of beauty ideals of makeup counter associates, participants discussed their perspectives of the societal ideal of beauty and their own beauty preferences. All of the participants acknowledged a societal standard of beauty; some participants stated:

"She's [the ideal of female beauty] tan, but you can still tell that she's white. She's got tan skin. Huge boobs, but not too big... a good size. Real slim here, wider hips and a big butt. Not too big. Probably blonde hair, blue eyes."

"White woman, white, blonde, skinny, yup, skinny. Long, long flowy hair. I feel like blonde women are the standard... the beauty standard in our society."

-

"The first image that came into my head was a white woman, which is really sad to me."

The participants' statements demonstrate the endurance of dominant beauty ideals. While some beauty ideals have changed throughout history, race and skin tone

remains the same: white and light-skinned. The statements also uphold the social norm of how the race and/or ethnicity of the person matters more than their actual skin tone. As gender and women's studies professor Ayu Saraswati's research demonstrates, society attaches more meaning to the intimate relationship of race and skin color than biological technicalities.¹⁴⁷ For example, Saraswati discusses how Europeans have argued that their white skin was different (and more beautiful) than Chinese white skin due to European superiority.¹⁴⁸ Similarly in United States society, a white woman's tan skin is seen as more desirable than a Black woman's light skin – even if it is the same shade. Despite the acknowledgement of societal beauty ideals, some participants felt that the current popular culture seems to be slowly embracing more definitions of beauty and redefining the traditional viewpoint of beauty. While some participants do not believe it will center Black women, they felt content with the current shifting of beauty ideals away from white women.

Contrary to the previous discussion of societal beauty ideals, participants shared their perceptions and definitions of beauty. Most of the participants emphasized internal qualities as the best definition of beauty and others felt that beauty existed in all forms:

“[My ideal of beauty is] A carefree Black girl. Because in America, we really cannot be ourselves. And you have to be way more confident than you normally should have to be. Why does it have to come down to me picking at someone else's body...? I should be allowed to be who I am as long as I'm comfortable and confident in who I am and present myself well... That makes me beautiful in my own way. You're beautiful in your own way. We're all beautiful women, we're all just different.”

“If I had a picture of my ideal beauty, I really don't think anything is ugly... I don't have a perfect idea of whatever. But I think there's all different types and forms of beauties. I just think there needs to be a lot more appreciation for other types of beauty except this idealistic one.”

“I’d say [being beautiful and pretty] means carrying myself with confidence, loving myself, and doing things like cosmetically that make me happy and not necessarily appealing to other people. But things that look good on me and that I like.”

The above statements demonstrate how Black women continuously interrogate the status quo and hegemonic definitions of beauty. Initially, I asked the participants to describe the ideal beautiful woman. However, most of the participants immediately asked for clarification, “society or personally?” Because I had a question already about their personal definitions of beauty, I asked them to provide me both definitions. The significant differences between their perception of societal beauty ideals and their personal preferences includes the emphasis of physical traits for societal beauty ideals and internal qualities, like confidence and high self-esteem, for personal preferences. These significant differences indicate Black women’s detachment from dominant definitions of beauty and theorization of their own definitions of beauty.

In addition to the above statements, the participants often remarked how they believed certain practices in the U. S. beauty culture were “tools of oppression” or relegated them to the bottom of the beauty hierarchy. In “Theory as a Liberatory Process,” bell hooks states “When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice.”¹⁴⁹ bell hooks’ statement highlights the importance of theorizing for self-recovery. The participants’ recognition of oppressive practices within the beauty industry allowed for them to dissolve some of their internalized oppression. For instance, some of the participants indicated that they did not feel confident or beautiful in their childhood, but learned to embrace themselves and redefine beauty on their own terms. In the next section, most of the participants highlighted their journey of embracing their identity and

defining beauty on their own terms. Additionally, a few of the participants mentioned some initial forms of collective liberation in discussions of their efforts to establish a Black women's student organization on campus and how Black women must stop projecting internalized oppression at each other; most of the participants felt that subverting Eurocentric beauty ideals required collective liberation, that every Black woman ought to find herself and others beautiful.

Childhood Experiences with Colorism and Beauty Preferences

While participants shared the differences between societal definitions of beauty versus their personal preferences, they also elaborated on the experiences that influenced their preferences. The participants shared their childhood experiences of learning about the preferences of beauty and skin tone from family members, friends, and schoolmates. Most of the participants indicated that they learned white or lighter skin as the ideal skin tone. Some participants stated:

“It took a while for me to actually love the color of my skin. I used to not want to go outside in the summer... being afraid to get darker. Growing up, I would always compare myself to a white person. All my friends were white; I didn't have any Black friends or anyone with the same skin color as me. People would be like, ‘Oh my gosh, you're so gorgeous for a little Black girl!’ Why can't I just be [a] beautiful, little girl?”

“For me, it was way back when I used to do ballet. That's when I felt cute. My hair was straight... basically feeling white back then was pretty to me.”

“From what I can see in the Black community, people do hold lighter-skinned people on a higher pedestal.”

The shared experiences of these participants illustrate how Black women learned the association between beauty and white characteristics. For example, the first statement

highlights how dark skin is stigmatized as below the standard of beauty: “you’re so gorgeous *for* a little Black girl!” It also implies that Blackness and beauty are not meant to be associated with each other. Additionally, the other statements demonstrate how communities influence the definition of beauty. The second participant learned to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards in the predominantly white activity of ballet, and the third statement exemplifies how color-struck attitudes persist within Black communities. Although the statements do not indicate direct negative associations with dark/non-white skin, celebration and praise of white skin is enough for children to learn the distinctions.

However, some participants shared negative childhood experiences:

“People would make fun of me. I always used to tell my mom like, ‘What age do I have to be to bleach my skin?’ Because I hated the idea of being Black. I absolutely hated it... I was always saying, ‘Mom, my skin literally looks like shit. Because that’s what kids at school would tell me.’”

“Because I know when I was darker, I didn’t like my skin tone at all, which I think is what a lot of Black girls go through when you’re younger.”

These statements illustrate how color-struck attitudes impacted more than the participant’s attitude toward their skin tone, but also extended to one’s racial identity. These statements also relate to the testimonies of Black women in the Jim Crow and Civil Rights era. For instance, “I didn’t like my skin tone at all, which I think is what a lot of Black go through when you’re younger,” parallels how a Charleston beautician, Mamie Fields, felt that she experienced a double standard of colorism. Fields’ brother also had dark skin, but he was able to attend a prestigious school and have an active social life. Additionally, the statements support Coard et al.’s research where Black women received messages of light skin preferences from their family and men. Although Coard et al.’s

research did not explore childhood experiences, their research found that Black women's self-perceived skin tone and preferred skin tone closely matched. The participants in this research expressed confidence and love for their skin tone despite some negative childhood experiences.

Although the participant did not reference skin bleaching or lightening practices after this statement, the negative childhood experiences seemed to resonate with the other participants. Furthermore, none of the participants shared positive childhood experiences with their skin tone; most of their discussions centered around either neutral or negative. The end of the last statement seemed to especially resonate with the other participants in that focus group, "what a lot of Black girls go through when you're younger." Although only a few participants shared negative childhood experiences, it seemed like there were shared experiences of anti-Blackness. The participants' empathy and understanding of each other's experiences demonstrates that "the personal is political." These experiences were not just personal to the participant, but may be a pattern in most Black women's lives.

Some of the biracial and lighter-skinned participants shared similar experiences that they often felt excluded from both Black and white communities. A few of participants stated:

"For me, I feel like I'm too dark to fit in with the white people and I'm too light to fit in with the Black people. We grew up in a white community, but we weren't white. When you go into the Black community, we're still considered white."

"My white friends were never hostile towards me or anything, but there's just a connection that you're missing. No matter what you do, you're just not going to get that same connection."

“They treat me almost as if I’m biracial, and I’m not... Like ‘I’m Black. Don’t exclude me like that.’ They’re kind of isolating you. Why is that within the Black population, there’s so much distrust and disconnect? That’s where most of the feeling ugly comes from within [the Black community] more than anything. It comes from other Black girls. This is what I do not understand.”

The first two statements exemplify the experiences of cultural marginality. For example, the biracial participants felt caught between two worlds: the white community and the Black community. The first two statements reflect research in “Biracial Females' Reflections on Racial Identity Development in Adolescence.” Doctoral students Karia Kelcholiver and Leigh A. Leslie researched biracial women’s experiences with racial identity in adolescence. The most prominent issue involved being marginal in two cultures; the participants did not feel accepted in either white or Black communities.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, their research also found participants received different messages of beauty. Their participants shared how white standards of beauty were more narrow and unrealistic, whereas Black standards embraced a wider range of physical attributes.¹⁵¹ Although biracial participants for this research may have been exposed to more positive skin tone and beauty preferences, the barrier of cultural marginality prevented some biracial participants from fully embracing their identity early in life.

Although the second statement does not indicate any direct hostility, she felt that there did not need to be any hostility to feel the lack of a connection. While lighter-skinned participants were not necessarily biracial, their experiences often related to the biracial participants. Social scientists Ekeoma Uzogara and James Jackson’s research suggests that light-skinned women may be a source of resent for darker-skinned women because lighter-skin women tend to receive more social privileges, such as more dating opportunities and preferential treatment from family members.¹⁵² Additionally, some

light-skinned women are stereotyped as “not Black enough,” which contributes to more division within Black communities.¹⁵³ For example, tensions can rise when individuals deny a person’s racial identity based on skin tone. Uzogara and James provide further support in that light-skinned women face rejections differently than medium or dark-skinned women; light-skinned women may be more likely to be denied their racial identity than medium or dark-skinned women.¹⁵⁴ The lighter-skinned participants shared experiences like the last statement and often felt that sometimes the colorism within Black communities could be overwhelming. For example, one participant felt uncomfortable when Black women darker than her made snide comments about her lighter-skin. Again, participants felt that Black women must confront the internalized prejudice in order for all Black women to be valued.

Additional Beauty Concerns

After a discussion about the difficulties of finding appropriate foundation shades, I asked the participants about any other difficulties finding cosmetics. Most of the participants listed additional cosmetic and beauty products with difficulties of matching. A couple of participants shared that setting powder tended to whiten their complexion:

“Setting powders are so hard. The one I have now is the Sasha Buttercup one, which everyone uses. But when I first started using it – because I had bags under my eyes – I used to put a whole bunch underneath there, and someone said, ‘You look so ashy.’ I had to go back in with foundation again... just to get some color back into my skin.”

The above statement reflects some of the comments from the participants’ discussion on foundation products. For instance, most of the participants felt concerned with looking “ashy” from foundation products. Additionally, “I had to go back in with foundation

again... just to get some color back into my skin,” implies that there is also not a wide range of appropriate shades of setting powders for Black women. However, it seems the current conversation in the cosmetic industry is the expansion of foundation shades due to *Fenty*’s release, but there does not seem to be any conversations about expansions for setting powders. As *Fenty* and other Black-owned companies continue to address the lack of diversity in the cosmetics and beauty industry, they may be the first ones to include setting powders for consumers of color. Although *Beauty Bakerie* currently offers a brown setting powder, it does not seem to be dark enough for darker Black women.

In addition to setting powders, some participants shared their experiences of the difficulties of finding a suitable shade of nude lipsticks and feeling dissatisfied with how lip products tend to fade from their visible inner lip. A couple of participants stated:

“There’s like no nude lipsticks! I put that stuff on and that is not the right color.”

“When you’re a minority, you have bigger lips. They don’t stay on your [gestures to visible inner lips].”

The first statement illustrates how cosmetic companies fail to consider how lipstick pigments appears differently on consumers of color. For instance, “nude” shades are created for white lips in mind. Black women’s lips tend to be darker; therefore, their shades of nude look considerably different than white shades of nudes. Furthermore, many nude shades of lipstick tend to be pink or red-based, fitting for white women. However, Black women’s lips need more brown-based nude and pigmented lipsticks. Oftentimes lipsticks lack high-pigmentation and can appear washed out on Black women’s lips.

In addition to the nude shades appearing unsuitable for Black women’s lips, cosmetic companies do not create products with their unique challenges to lipsticks in

mind. The second statement illustrates how easily lipsticks tend to fade due to the visible inner lips. A couple of the participants felt that women of color often have larger lips with a more visible inner lip and there seems to be little consideration of developing products to address the issue. Despite the challenge of finding lasting lipsticks, most of the conversation of lipsticks centers on the lack of nude lipsticks for consumers of color.

Some participants also discussed the difficulties of finding affordable hair products and their experiences with feeling ashamed about their hair texture. A couple of the biracial participants mentioned how their white mothers never taught them about suitable hair products. These participants discussed their process of finding hair solutions as mainly trial and error. Before social media, the participants had to rely on themselves to figure out solutions. One participant discussed how her mother's products tended to dry her hair and it would be awhile before she figured out how to take care of it herself. With the aid of social media, young, biracial women may be getting the beauty advice needed for their hair. The specific challenges of hair and biracial women will need to be addressed in future research endeavors.

Additionally, participants discussed their unhappiness with the negative stigma associated with natural hair; some participants specifically discussed about how family members and workplaces reinforce the social norm of having straight and "proper" hair:

"Some of our parents and grandparents still believe we should be straightening our hair. Like, 'You're walking outside with your hair like that?' Even my mom sometimes will say, 'You need to put... you could put some heat on that or something.' They still have that mindset because they grew up in a time where they had to do that in order to get a job interview."

"My friend works at Subway... or she did. They got a new manager, and she had just recently cut her hair. The manager told her that her hair was unprofessional and she needed to do something with it. I don't remember

the consequence, but it was either she was fired or wouldn't be able to go into work for a little bit. How does that affect you as a person?"

The first statement demonstrates a generational shift towards a greater embrace of one's racial identity. The participant styled her hair naturally and highlights how her family still seems uncomfortable fully embracing it through statements like, "You're walking outside with your hair like that?" or "You could put some heat on that [to straighten]." She did not seem too concerned with her family's more conservative thinking and other participants agreed about wearing their hair more naturally to embrace their Blackness.

The second statement discusses an experience of a participant's friend. Her friend styled her hair naturally, but received warnings because the manager perceived it as "unprofessional." The statements illustrate how stereotypes against Black hair still exist. In a 2016 study conducted by the Perception Institute, researchers found that white women rated Black women's hair texture as "less beautiful and professional than smooth hair."¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the majority of their participants (regardless of race) displayed implicit bias against Black women's hair. Additionally, Black women are twice more likely than white women to feel socially pressured to straighten their hair for work.¹⁵⁶ Although the second statement highlights hair discrimination at the work place, it further supports how Black women recognize oppressive attitudes and want to change the social norms surrounding Blackness.

While most participants shared that they believe and see more companies including Black women, it is not enough yet. The participants also stated that there seems to be progress within the cosmetic and beauty industry, but still feel Black women are underrepresented and marginalized. To further support that sentiment, these additional

beauty concerns illustrate how the lack of inclusion of Black women is not isolated to only foundation products. The current focus on expansion seems to be only on foundation products; there does not seem to be a lot of discussion on other beauty products. Many consumers regard foundation as a cosmetic staple, but that is not a justification for cosmetic companies to ignore inclusion in all of their products. Furthermore, some cosmetic companies may be expanding their selection to include more women of color; but, many others refuse to address their lack of diversity.

With the launch of *Fenty Beauty*, Black women enthusiastically responded to the current debate on beauty and cosmetics. As Rihanna plans to expand the inclusive cosmetic line, Eurocentric cosmetic companies are scrambling to compete with *Fenty's* focus on diversity. For example, *Make Up For Ever*, a French cosmetics brand, made a subtle remark in their social media campaign that “40 shades is nothing new to us.” However, Rihanna quickly critiqued how their darkest shades still make Black women appear “ashy.”¹⁵⁷ It seems like Rihanna's *Fenty Beauty* has struck a chord with Black women, but also that Black women will be heard and change will happen on their terms.

Conclusion

This research study explored Black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty to address the gap in literature concerning Black women's navigation and agency. While contemporary research has provided the basis to begin the exploration of how the beauty and cosmetics industry marginalizes Black women, there did not seem to be any literature concerning how Black women navigate the oppression of the beauty industry

and redefine beauty on their own terms. Drawing on previous research, I expanded the research questions of how society and Black women view themselves, but to also include how Black women interacted with these perspectives. This research positioned Black women as not only receptors of social norms, but also agents of social change.

Significant themes emerged out of an analysis of the three focus group interviews. Most of the participants indicated that they have difficulties finding appropriate shades of foundation. Most participant indicated that they felt content with the preferred method of mixing foundation products, but still expressed frustration at the limited availability of shades appropriate for Black women in the presented swatches. Due to their negative experiences with unsuitable foundation application, all of the participants expressed a distrust of makeup counter associates. Many of the participants stated that they would intentionally seek a makeup counter associate of color for help, but often could not find any working at places like Sephora or Ulta Beauty. Furthermore, these participants indicated a preference of Black social media gurus over makeup counter associates. All of the participants referenced the societal expectation of Eurocentric beauty standards. Many of the participants shared childhood experiences where they learned to regard Eurocentric characteristics as pretty and beautiful. Some indicated that their negative childhood experiences shaped their initial definitions of beauty, but learned to detach themselves eventually to redefine beauty for themselves. Participants also highlighted additional beauty concerns where they also felt the beauty industry refused to include them: setting powders, hair products, and lipsticks.

The focus group interviews demonstrate how Black women are continuously finding ways to exercise their agency and express their identity. Although young, Black

girls may still experience negative interactions centered on their skin tone, the participants' resilience provides hope to future generations of Black women. Despite the power dynamics working against them, Black women are able to create a space for themselves and collectively reclaim their identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOVING FORWARD AND FUTURE RESEARCH ENDEAVORS

My research study effectively draws parallels between past and contemporary experiences of Black women and cosmetics. Despite the hegemonic construction of beauty ideals against Black women's characteristics, Black women created a space for themselves within the confines of an oppressive compound of colorism, racism, misogyny, and classism. Black women's experiences with cosmetics illustrate how patterns of "personal" issues extend into the political sphere. However, it is important to position Black women's efforts to change the discourse on beauty as a political endeavor as well. Black women's exercise of agency and collective action subverts the political climate intent on silencing them.

Moving forward, my research study should expand and include Black women in large Black communities, such as metropolitan areas. A couple of participants mentioned the lack of available appropriate foundation shades compared to the larger availability in cities like Minneapolis and Saint Paul. However, there still seems to be a lack of regard for consumers of color from brand name beauty companies with the means to advertise and do business outside the local area. For example, a Minnesotan Black woman, Jasmine Harris, grew tired of throwing out products from her monthly subscription beauty boxes; she realized that these mass beauty subscription box companies did not want to address their lack of inclusion. Harris started her own monthly beauty subscription, HuesBox, for people of color; in these boxes, Harris features products made by local businesses of color.¹⁵⁸ HuesBox demonstrates a form of collective action to address the lack of diversity in the beauty industry.

To have a well-rounded grasp on the intersections of skin tone, race, gender, and class, I would like to also include more people of color in future research endeavors. I would like to delve into how women of color navigate anti-Blackness within their communities and how it relates to their efforts to dissolve color-struck attitudes. For example, Hunter delved into colorism within Latinx communities, but did not include Asian women. Additionally, the current research needs to confront the transphobia against trans people of color in the beauty industry. It is necessary to explore how trans people of color perform gender within the intersection of skin tone, race, gender, and class; such research may be able to interrogate how the oppression of skin tone is gendered against feminine-presenting people.

This research also indicates emerging avenues into how women, particularly women of color, use YouTube videos and other social media platforms to learn and discuss non-white beauty practices. The lack of representation for consumers of color in makeup counter stores pushed individuals to seek out social media. Although white women use social media to learn more about cosmetics, their reasoning behind social media usage contrasts Black women's reasoning. Black women turned to social media out of necessity and survival while it may be more of convenience for white women's relationship to beauty social media outlets.

The covert messages of oppression remain problematic and numerous in the beauty and cosmetics industry, but Black women continue to subvert the industry through theorizing and collective liberation. From Madam C.J. Walker to Rihanna and *Fenty Beauty*, it remains possible that the hierarchies and oppression will eventually dissolve. It is important to continue analyze the power dynamics within the beauty industry to push

for change. Additionally, such research will highlight how Black women and other marginalized communities have established grassroots efforts and the process of theorizing within spaces of beauty and cosmetics. Through persistence and resistance, Black women will continue to liberate themselves.

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to participate in a research study.



SEEKING MSU STUDENTS WHO ARE BLACK WOMEN, AGE 18-25, TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH AND SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH COSMETICS AND THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of black women's relationship to cosmetics and the beauty industry.

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SIGN UP, CONTACT:
ANNE VAN
(ANNE.VAN@MNSU.EDU)**

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ASKED TO COMPLETE A SURVEY AND/OR BE A PART OF AN APPROXIMATELY 1-2 HOUR AUDIO RECORDED GROUP INTERVIEW ON THE MSU CAMPUS.

YOU ARE NOT OBLIGATED TO PARTICIPATE IN BOTH.

**MSU IRBNET ID#
1010703**

Appendix B: Pre-Test Consent Form

ONLINE SURVEY CONSENT

You are requested to participate in research supervised by Dr. Ana Perez and Dr. Kebba Darboe on black women's relationship to cosmetics and beauty. I would like you to complete a pre-survey that will only take about 3 to 5 minutes. The goal of this pre-survey is for the researcher to determine potential group interview participants. You will be asked to provide an email for the student researcher (Anne Van) to contact you about participating in a group interview, but it is not required. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Dr. Perez (ana.perez@mnsu.edu) or Dr. Darboe (kebba.darboe@mnsu.edu).

Participation is voluntary. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and Minnesota State University, Mankato, contact the IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-1242 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu.

Responses will be kept confidential and stored using password protection technology for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the research. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are no more than are experienced in daily life.

There are no direct benefits for participating. Society might benefit by the increased understanding of black women's experiences with cosmetics and beauty ideals.

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

MSU IRBNet ID#

1010703

Date of MSU IRB approval:

Appendix C: Pre-Test Questions

1. Do you identify as a Black woman?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Are you biracial or multiracial?
 - a. If yes, please list your racial identifications
 - b. No
3. What is your nationality?
 - a. United States
 - b. Other, please indicate your country of origin
4. How old are you?
 - a. 18-25
 - b. 26-30
 - c. 31-40
 - d. 41+
5. Do you wear foundation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. If yes, have you encountered problems finding foundation that best fits your skin tone?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Do you wear concealer?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. If yes, have you encountered problems finding concealer that best fits your skin tone?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. How often do you use or wear makeup?
 - a. Never
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Often
 - d. Always

If you would be willing to participate in a focus group interview to discuss your experiences with cosmetics and beauty, please leave your email here:

Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form

Black Women and Cosmetics: The Personal is Political **Informed Consent Document**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Ana Perez, Dr. Kebba Darboe, and Anne Van, from the Minnesota State University, Mankato's Gender and Women's Studies Department and Ethnic Studies Department. We hope to learn more about how cosmetics impact Black women in our society and how they navigate beauty standards. We are looking for Black female study participants between the ages of 18-25 years old and who use cosmetic products like foundation.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a group interview of 5-6 Black women answering questions pertaining to your previous experiences with cosmetics and beauty ideals. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the group interview. Each group interview will last approximately one hour on campus, these group interviews will be audio recorded for data transcription purposes by the researchers. Audio recordings of the group interviews and transcriptions will be stored using password protection technology for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the research.

Researchers will keep any information shared within our group interview confidential. Subject identities will be kept confidential by omission of names in final research documents.

Potential risks for study participants may include discomfort with discussing personal experiences. If you, the participant feels uncomfortable answering any of the questions asked you are welcome to decline to respond. Another potential risk is that members of the group interview may not keep the discussion confidential. We will ask that no one in the group repeat what they hear during the group interview. We will also ask that no one in the group share information about other people involved in the group interviews. You have the right to discontinue your participation in this study without penalty at any time by exiting the room.

While this study may not directly benefit you, the participant, it aims to expand research concerning black women and cosmetic use.

Participant Initials _____

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Anne Van at anne.van@mnsu.edu or Dr. Ana Perez at 507-389-5026, ana.perez@mnsu.edu, 221F Morris Hall, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Mankato MN 56001 or Dr. Kebba Darboe at 507-389-5014, kebba.darboe@mnsu.edu, 109G Morris Hall, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Mankato MN 56001. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-1242 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, that you are not waiving any legal claims, and that you are at least 18 years of age. By initialing here _____, you understand that this group interview will be audio recorded. You have the right to a copy of this document. If you wish to obtain a copy of this document, please email principle researchers: Dr. Ana Perez at ana.perez@mnsu.edu or Dr. Kebba Darboe at kebba.darboe@mnsu.edu.

MSU IRBNet ID# 1010703

Date of MSU IRB approval: 3/9/2017

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant Initials _____

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Script

Cosmetics

1. Why do you choose to wear makeup?
2. How does makeup make you feel?
3. What factors do you consider when purchasing foundation or concealer?
4. Do you encounter problems finding foundation or concealer that best fits your skin tone?
5. If you find it difficult to find a foundation or concealer to match your skin tone, how do you find solutions? What products work best for you? What other strategies do you use to fill this gap in products?
6. Are there any other challenges that you have encountered with finding cosmetics that best fit your skin tone?
7. What are some of things that you notice about the cosmetic industry? Do you think there is a wide array of options for darker tones?
8. Has anyone noticed cosmetic companies expanding their products to include darker skin tones?
9. I have a few foundation swatches taken from popular cosmetic companies. What are some things you notice? In your opinion, can you tell me how many shades are appropriate for Black women? Do you think the darkest shade is dark enough?

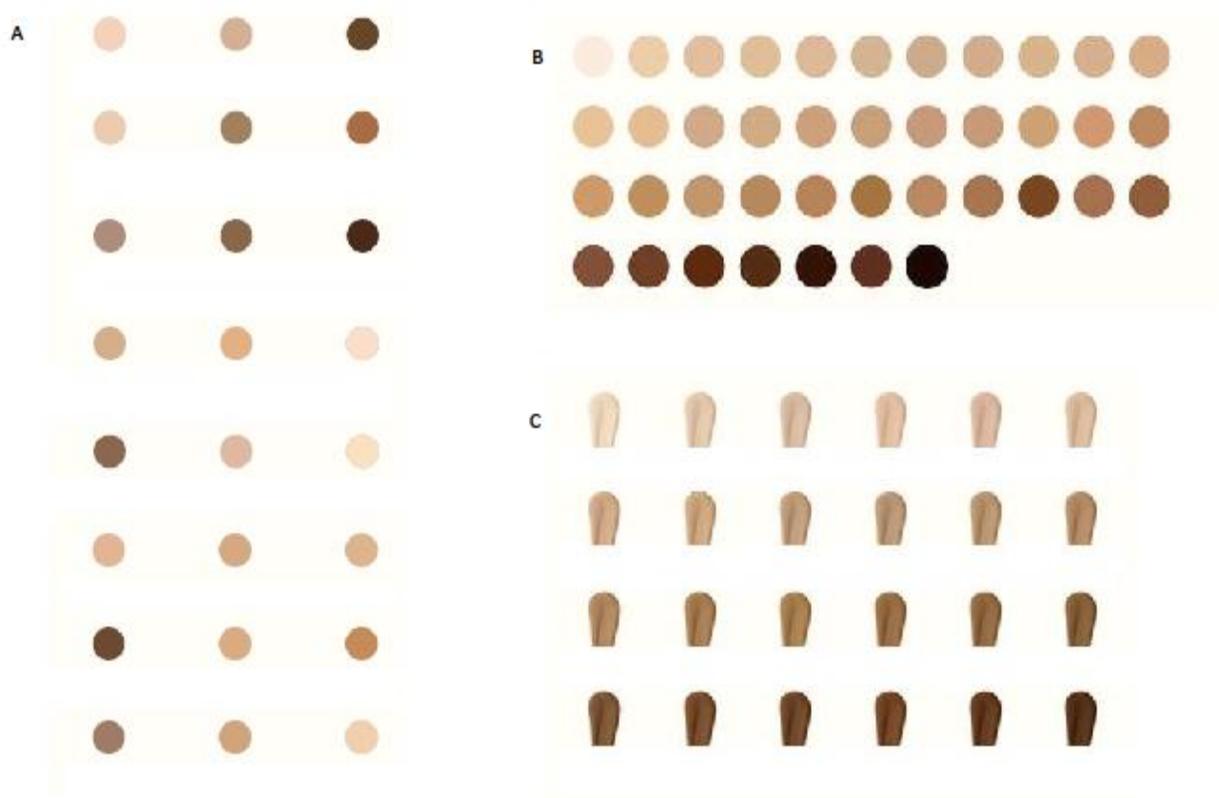
Beauty

1. As Black women, do you feel that you face different issues in the beauty industry?
2. How would you describe the ideal beautiful woman?
3. How does the lightness or darkness of your skin tone affect the way you perceive yourself and/or others?
4. What does being beautiful and pretty mean to you?
5. What are your earliest memories of understanding what it means to be beautiful?
6. Is there anything else we missed that you would like to discuss concerning your experience with makeup and beauty?

Wrap-Up/Possible Clarification

- Is there anything that you heard here that was really important to you and you want to address before we leave?
- I would like to ask about something that you said earlier...
- I didn't get to ask you this earlier but I was surprised when you mentioned that...
- Is there anything we have missed that would be important for us to know?

Appendix F: Foundation Swatches



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