

Diversity and Representation Within the Cosmetics Industry: The Psychological and Societal
Impacts of the Representation of Minorities

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Abstract

Because the cosmetics industry tends to set the standard of beauty in society, the lack of representation of racial and/or ethnic minorities in the beauty industry can have psychological impacts on minority consumers. These impacts are to the point where their perceptions of beauty have been skewed to exclude themselves as a result of not seeing themselves represented in advertisement campaigns and product releases by major cosmetics companies. In this lack of representation, consumers' self-perception, self-esteem, and self-confidence can be negatively influenced. The purpose of this study is to examine the negative impacts that the lack of minority representation in the cosmetics industry has on specifically LMU students, through short surveys to be distributed online via Qualtrics.

Diversity and Representation Within the Beauty Industry: The Psychological and Societal Impacts of the Representation of Minorities

Introduction

In the same way that the fashion industry continuously sets the standard of fashion in society, the cosmetics industry has defined beauty since the industry's rise to recognition. Led by big name companies such as L'Oreal and Estée Lauder, the cosmetics industry is a breeding ground for all things beauty. Industry frontrunners have created the norm when it comes to beauty, through product releases such as foundations and concealers that vary depending upon the consumer's skin tone and advertisement campaigns that feature models who exemplify conventional beauty standards. These beauty standards are typically very Eurocentric, meaning that the models have lighter skin tones, smoother hair textures, and smaller noses and lips (Johnson, 2016). While it is the duty of the cosmetics industry to continually set new beauty trends, there is a long track record of a lack of representation of racial and/or ethnic minorities in the beauty industry at large. For example, Johnson (2016) reported on a study that showed that of the models participating in New York Fashion Week, 82.7% were white, 9% were Asian, 6% were black, and 2% were Latinx. To make this study a bit more focused and to bring it closer to home here at Loyola Marymount University, I intend to study this issue through the lens of a college student. This research project will seek to investigate what, if any, psychological impacts arise for college-aged minorities when they are not represented through product releases and advertisement campaigns set forth by the very industry that defines the standard of beauty in society.

Background

A foundational work, and perhaps the most noteworthy source related to my research, is *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women*. *Style and Status* is a book that examines the beauty industry specifically in relation to African American consumers in the 1900s. This source analyzes racial politics in relation to the beauty industry, the influence of beauty culture and standards on the identity of black women in terms of both race and femininity, and the effects of white- versus black-owned businesses in black communities (Walker, 2007).

When first researching this topic and searching for sources, I noticed there was a lack of academic research that could contribute to my proposal. As the cosmetics industry is typically not thought of when it comes to academic research, most of the sources I was able to find are in the style of opinion-based articles or blog posts. These sources, while they are not academic, still allow for a perspective that can only be cultivated through one's personal experience with the matter at hand. The sources I found center around body image, Eurocentric beauty standards, and the often unattainable standard that the media sets for women. For example, Cicci (2014) argues, "... Photoshopping their models normalizes our cultural ideals to a white society, excluding all other races and ethnicities. The distorted reality we encounter with beauty and body image in mainstream magazines creates an unattainable standard set by media, and most often, 'these standards are based on oppressive, power-laden ideals of whiteness (Beauty).'"

In a contrasting manner, Bryant (2016) reports on the \$1 trillion of buying power African Americans hold – more specifically, the approximately \$7.5 billion spent annually on cosmetics. She discusses just how much black women have been underserved by the cosmetics industry,

even though black women spend about 80% more on beauty products and twice as much on skin care than non-Black consumers. Despite the large amount of African American dollars spent in the cosmetics industry, black women are still significantly underserved, and that has only begun to change due to the social media era we are currently in.

The sources available to me focused on topics such as African American buying power, existing minority representation, and the new era of representation – particularly, post-Fenty Beauty. Rihanna’s new beauty line boasts 40 shades of foundation across a range of skin tones, making it one of the most diverse beauty brands ever (Muller, 2017). The new era of representation has come about following the social media era, in which it is easier than ever for individuals to band together for a cause, and the release of Fenty Beauty, which proved that darker shades of makeup are marketable and in demand.

Though these sources reported on separate aspects of my intended area of research, little to no sources bridged the gap between Eurocentric beauty standards and the perception of beauty itself. This is where my research will fill in. Because this issue is something I have personally encountered, I find it important to acknowledge within the realm of academic research.

Methods

To conduct research on this topic, I am going to survey minority LMU students that identify themselves as consumers of the cosmetics industry. This is typically defined as men and women of color who currently buy or previously have bought cosmetics. A survey would allow for more efficiency, more concise questioning, and a more widespread reach than simply interviews would. In order to complete this portion of my research, I will create a survey via

Qualtrics and distribute the link to LMU students. In my survey, I would ask questions similar to the following:

1. Do you attend LMU?
2. Are you a consumer of the cosmetics industry (or have you ever bought makeup?)
3. What do you currently feel is the standard of beauty & where does it come from?
4. How have you felt your skin tone or hair texture being represented or not represented in advertisement campaigns?
5. What has been your experience with finding makeup in your shade?

In addition to the widespread reach it would allow me, Qualtrics is the most efficient tool for this form of research as the Cross-Tabulation feature would allow me to analyze the data in a more efficient way. Cross-Tabulation will allow me to cross-reference answers from one question with that of another. Though I will be missing out on the face-to-face aspect of interviewing, conducting an online survey is overall the most efficient route to take as it will further my research.

Expected Results

I expect to find that a large number of LMU students that identify as a racial and/or ethnic minority have previously felt or currently feel unrepresented within the cosmetics industry. This lack of representation is likely to psychologically impact their perception of beauty as a whole, but more importantly their self-perception, self-esteem, and self-confidence. The results of the survey will be analyzed through the Qualtrics Cross-Tabulation feature and will likely be disseminated through a presentation that will highlight every aspect of the research

process – from selecting the topic to survey results and the implications thereof, as well as a brief paper.

Conclusion

The cosmetics industry is one that has historically created, sustained, and evolved the standard of beauty in society. This has been done through the release of product lines, including products such as foundations and concealers that are dependent upon the consumer's skin tone, and advertisement campaigns that feature models with typically Eurocentric, conventionally beautiful models. The lack of diversity and representation in the cosmetics industry can have a negative psychological impact on minorities when they do not see themselves being represented within an industry that sets the standard of beauty. Limited research has been done on this topic, which is why I find it necessary to conduct research on the psychological impacts of minority representation. To research this, I will survey LMU students of color that are or have previously been consumers of the cosmetics industry. The survey will be spread to LMU students, both male and female, and the results will then be analyzed through the Qualtrics system. My research will be disseminated through a presentation as well as a brief short paper on my findings.

Budget

First and foremost, because this study involves human beings, I would likely need to get it approved by the IRB. I would budget at least two to three month in advance for this, to ensure that there are no time constraints that would delay my research. I can conduct this research via Qualtrics, an online survey system available to LMU students at no cost. As this is the case, I will not be needing a monetary budget for travel, accommodations, or materials. In terms of

time, I will budget about two hours to curate the survey questions and create the survey, as well as one month to circulate the survey and ensure it is taken by as many students as possible.

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