



# Diversity in Beauty

*Cynthia Johnson; Cindy J Cosmetic Labs, LLC*

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## Introduction of research

Consumers around the world spend over \$330 billion a year on fragrances, cosmetics, and toiletries. The global beauty business pervades our lives, influencing how we perceive ourselves and what it means to be beautiful [1]. However, the global industry has been criticized for its lack of diversity and inclusion. In order to bring awareness to this movement, some businesses have shown change to its center stage. Naomi Campbell became the first black woman to cover Vogue in 1989. Fast forward to today, Fenty Beauty pushed the boundary of the makeup industry toward more inclusivity and diversity regardless of complexion and gender [2]. Even MAC Cosmetics launched its M-A-C VIVA GLAM program to support healthy futures and equal rights for women, girls, and the LGBTQ communities. Diversity goes beyond the center stage or a marketing campaign. Consumers are seeking out products that are personalized for them in addition to pushing inclusivity and transparency from the brand.

This industry has different spices of color, texture, shape and size which create a unique blend of cultures and backgrounds that we can all learn from [3]. The challenge of diversity is not only ensuring representation of historically underrepresented groups. The challenge of diversity is also creating an environment where “we” is everyone [4]. This paper shows four different stages of challenge found today in the beauty industry: race, gender neutrality, age and careers.

## Diversity and Inclusion in Beauty

Diversity in beauty means recognizing all ethnicities, races, cultures, skin tones, body types and backgrounds are beautiful [5]. It also means giving the same space and opportunities [6] in all different settings such as product development, scientists, marketing, and supply chain. Beauty companies must enhance organizational success by valuing their employees and consumers. Ulta Beauty and Sephora have used their platform to show their inclusivity by pledging 15% of shelf space to Black-owned businesses. But is this enough to address the lack of diversity? Thanks to the #PullUpOrShutUp challenge, beauty companies have noted the lack of organizational inclusion efforts. Brands such as L’Oréal USA, Ouai and Morphe posted their employee statistics on social media along with their call for action.

Inclusion creates an environment that acknowledges, welcomes, and accepts different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences. It also requires individuals to become culturally competent. One must work on becoming aware of inequities and developing skills and abilities to recognize, accept and adapt to cultural differences and similarities [4].

## Race

The beauty industry has been criticized for neglecting people of color and glamorizing a certain representation. The predominance of white western concepts of beauty among multiple ethnic groups in the United States has raised concern [7]. In order to bring awareness, beauty companies have researched ways to include everyone. This does not mean highlighting a person of color to show consumers a brand constitutes diversity and inclusion; it means a company must hire diverse groups of people internally for positions such as chemists to product development to marketing [8]. During the Black Lives Matter



Movement, companies have shown their use of profitability rather than inclusivity. The black haircare market represents more than \$2.5 billion [9]. Some African American women internalize racism and think of their hair as a problem [7]. In order to express individualism, 14 states have passed the CROWN Act in the United States, which prohibits race-based hair discrimination by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles. These styles include braids, locs, twists and bantu knots. A person of color with these styles are often referred to as “ghetto” until they are proven “fashionable.” These styles are glorified by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Christina Aguilera, and Katy Perry. Their styles are often referred to as unique and extraordinary.



Kim Kardashian (left) and Cynthia Johnson (right) have braided hairstyles. Society sees Kim Kardashian’s hairstyle as unique [10]. Cynthia Johnson’s hairstyle is considered non-professional in the workplace.

Colorism and racism have had a huge impact on the black community. The majority of cosmetic products sold are marketed for white people and light-complexioned minorities. Eurocentric beauty demeans the physical features of black consumers. This results in drastic changes in black regimens including skin lightening, chemical hair relaxers and eye color surgeries.

Insensitivity to one’s culture has also been an issue within the industry. The Asian-Pacific Beauty industry was valued at \$163.92 billion in 2020 due to the “skincare at home” dynamic of the COVID-19 pandemic [11]. Even though the innovation was effective, respect is still lacking toward our peers. Tarte Cosmetics made an insensitive joke against Asian people on social media. The meme used the terms “ching chong” as a racial slur to describe how a person’s brain functions in the morning. This is an example of racial insensitivity against another ethnic group. Thanks to social media, Tarte Cosmetics deleted the meme, issued an apology, and recognized the need for racial language education.

Some founders are putting real representation to practice. Joanna Rosario, co-founder of the Latinx brand, Vive Cosmetics, explains, “Authentic inclusivity and diversity is not a trend nor a recent company initiative, it is in our brand DNA from day one.” Latinas spend twice as much on beauty products in the United States than other ethnic groups [12]. Big beauty companies continue to overlook the community and how the Latinx voice can affect product development and decision making. Vive Cosmetics launched their brand in order to show the economic power in the Latinx community.

## **Gender Neutrality**

Gender neutrality, which refers to terms that are non-gender specific, plays a vital role when discussing diversity and inclusion. Traditionally, men took care of the public and political life, while women took care of the private life and body [13]. Today, the beauty industry has faded out these specific roles of genders. Marketing has changed drastically as people are calling for more gender-neutral products. Idris Brown, a male hairstylist says, “Beauty has no particular form just like love [14].” Gender-neutral beauty advertising and content marketing are important for a new adaptation for brands. This means targeting the social issues of today and the consciousness of health.



The men's personal care market is expected to reach \$166B by 2022 [9]. This means that men are breaking the barriers and limitations regarding grooming. Men should be allowed to feel confident in their own skin and use the cosmetics they want even breaking the "macho" stereotype [15].

### **Age**

With increased services such as hair coloring, waxing, and nails, diverse products for people of all ages have become a necessity [16]. Baby boomers (mid-50s to early 70s) have more experience with marketing than any other age group. The end result of a product is more interesting than the science behind the product. For example, women and men with grey hair experience brassiness or yellowing in their hair. Using a purple dye shampoo will cancel out the yellow that is shown resulting in shine and brightness.

Generation Z has a huge influence on genderless beauty. They have a passion for learning about ingredients and developing an enthusiastic relationship with brands. They not only buy products; they buy experiences [17]. The Gen Z community can easily access social media to exhibit how they feel about a company's product, marketing and branding. They are demanding and affecting changes with a simple comment under a social media post.

### **Career**

Diversity in beauty can also be defined as having diversified thoughts and strategies where every hand involved in development is allowed to express themselves through a well-intentioned product [18]. This concept is vital in the workplace. The boardroom should reflect its industry's core consumer. According to the Harvard Business review, increasing the level of female leadership has shown to improve a company's bottom line. Increasing leadership from 0% to 30% associated with 15% profitability shows impact on women's lives and demonstrates fairness. But why do some companies promote women to senior level leadership with a broken system? It has shown that the engagement level of those working for female leaders are higher than male leaders [19]. This indicates that women communicate energetically, build relationships and inspire employees to a healthier workplace.

Isolation is an indispensable role in the workplace. People of color often feel neglected, lonely and alienated from their coworkers. Also, black professionals are less likely to hold senior level positions than their white counterparts. The stereotype of "microaggression" and "anger" has led to disconnects between professionals. Employees want to feel included and valued within the company. Cassandra Celestin, a black female cosmetic chemist explains, "As a black woman, diversity means seeing and also valuing diverse race representation as well as promoting inclusion in business models, products and services [20]." Employers should create diversity groups within their organization. The diversity groups will give the underrepresented a voice with fresh insights, experiences and intuition to bring disruption and innovation into the industry [21]. These groups can create social activities that educate the employees on different cultures. One example might include a food festival which can cultivate employees on the history of the other ethnic groups.

### **Conclusion**

The beauty industry can only be accomplished if there is diversity and inclusion within their brand. Brand companies have started to educate themselves on different cultures and created ways they can include people of color. Hiring diverse groups of people as important decision makers brings better business decisions, understanding of the consumer's values and authenticity to provide representation. "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" as quoted by International poet, James Baldwin.





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### About the speaker



Cynthia Johnson is the Founder, CEO, and cosmetic chemist of Cindy J Cosmetic Labs, LLC. She earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry from The Lincoln University. She holds a Master of Science Degree in Cosmetic Science from the University of Cincinnati.

Cynthia is also a Green Star Award Recipient sponsored by the Society of Cosmetic Chemists. She is also the recipient of the University of Cincinnati's School of Pharmacy's G.O.L.D. Award – Graduate of the Last Decade.

In addition to receiving awards, Cynthia was most recently featured in the October 2020 issue of Harper's Bazaar Magazine. She is proud to serve as Vice Chair for the 2021 year with the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists.