

THE BEAUTY GAP: BLACK WOMEN AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
BEAUTY STANDARDS AND THEIR DECISION TO PURCHASE MAC
COSMETICS

by

JALEESA JANELLE REED

(Under the Direction of Katalin Medvedev)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the relationship between millennial Black women and MAC Cosmetics and compared their experiences and sentiments to the existing literature on millennials to investigate if there were discrepancies. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. Three major themes emerged from the interview data: 1) Self-image management and presentation are important to millennial Black women who use MAC to create and reinforce an acceptable image for themselves as well as mainstream society. 2) Millennial Black women have an emotional relationship with MAC, which is created and influenced by specific aspects of the store environment and the customer service they experience at the MAC counter and 3) MAC employees' ability to educate millennial Black women on new makeup techniques, while also providing them with professional expertise in regards to product choice, makes them feel empowered, which increases brand loyalty.

INDEX WORDS: MAC Cosmetics, Black women, African American women, Millennials, Intersectionality, Queer Theory, Beauty

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DEDICATION

Whether we worry or not, we will get there eventually because if it is meant for us, then it will come to fruition.

Matthew 6:25-34

I dedicate this work to my younger sister, Marissa. In many ways, beauty is such a big part of our lives. From waiting on Mom to finish her never-ending makeup routine or trying to fulfill society's expectation of what a mixed girl should look like. Inadvertently, you led me to this topic. I was hoping that, for our sake, there was more to beauty.

I hope that you see how beauty is not the same for everyone and that you define your beauty, for yourself, always.

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Also, the Institute for Women's Studies at UGA has been influential in exposing me to works and authors that validated my thoughts but also my personal convictions. The classes were challenging and the readings were always mind-blowing but you gave me a feminist foundation to stand on and I love the view, from here.

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My acknowledgements would not be complete without a nod to Nayyirah Waheed, whose poetry kept me moving forward when I doubted myself...

i will crawl for white beauty.
eat my arms.
barter my legs (make my thighs into altars of
grief).
for
skin that does not drink night.
hair that is not angry.
body that is not soil.
i place curses on my flesh
call them diets
tell my ancestors
they are ugly.
howl at my nose until it bleeds.
run my heart across my teeth, repeatedly.
i am dying.
to be
beautiful.
but beautiful.
is
something.
i
will never
be.
- by the time we are seven

Waheed, N. (2013). "by the time we are seven." *Salt*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social media allows cosmetic brands to engage with millennial consumers through popular mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media combined with celebrity endorsements has allowed cosmetic brands to create a brand image that reaches consumers instantly through their mobile phones. Brands such as MAC Cosmetics have the highest followings on social media when compared to drugstore cosmetic brands like Maybelline, Revlon, and Covergirl due to MAC's strong commitment to maintaining a social media presence (Mintel, July 2013). Specifically, MAC's partnership with singer Rihanna exemplified how "leveraging the Twitter network of a celebrity" can generate greater interest than traditional marketing campaigns (Mintel, July 2013). When Rihanna used her 30 million Twitter followers to promote the release of her lipstick collection, RiRi for MAC sold out within two hours in stores and online (Mintel, July 2013). Besides promoting the release on Twitter, Rihanna also collaborated with MAC on her Diamonds World Tour by allowing fans to purchase the lipstick ahead of its release date at MAC pop-up stores inside the concert venue (Mintel, July 2013). During this time, MAC recorded heightened interest surrounding the release of Rihanna's lipstick collaboration (Mintel, July 2013). Based on these events, it is evident that MAC knows how to use celebrity influence and social media to reach their consumers.

As a millennial, I noticed friends on Twitter and Facebook commenting on their experience shopping for Rihanna's limited edition lipstick. My friends were expressing

disappointment with not being able to buy the lipstick, dealing with website crashes, and slow Internet access. I became interested in the appeal of MAC to Black women since they seemed to be the only people on my newsfeed concerned with Rihanna's lipstick. At that moment, I thought everyone knew about this lipstick and this company, except for me. The fact that I am a woman of color also influenced my interest. It seemed to me that Black women were particularly interested in MAC and as someone who was not familiar with the brand, I thought there must be something that I was missing as a biracial woman. I felt that MAC was targeting Black women with their choice of Rihanna as a creative partner, which I found peculiar for a luxury cosmetic brand. Based on my observations and my previous knowledge, I decided to look into why some Black women like MAC and see if MAC actually was targeting Black women or if I was witnessing a freak occurrence. The goal of this research is twofold; a) to understand how MAC reaches Black consumers and b) how some Black millennial women make the decision to purchase MAC products.

The majority of current research focuses on Black women as a reflection of White beauty ideals and conclude that Black women are judged against White norms. Research on beauty ideals and cosmetics tends to focus on Black beauty in terms of hair and body size. Past research often uses Eurocentric ideals regarding beauty, according to which Black women are measured. Overall, compared to research on White women and their beauty habits, there are fewer academic contributions analyzing Black women. Furthermore, when the prevalent research on Black women is broken down into categories such as hair and body issues – cosmetics and make-up are areas that researchers do not focus on. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add a new layer to

the understanding of Black women and their beauty regimens by focusing on how they interact with a brand such as MAC Cosmetics.

The presence of something is what makes it real. In that same vein, absence deems it unworthy of attention. The absence of research on Black women and their cosmetic use leads to uncertainty regarding their actions as consumers. Why do Black women use make-up? Often, the audience assumes that Black women change their appearance in order to look more like White women. The idea of a Black woman using cosmetics or straightening her hair *because she likes it* is almost never entertained as an option. The relationship between make up usage and self-esteem is complex:

Not every woman who decides to straighten her hair or change the color of her eyes by wearing contacts believes that beauty is synonymous with whiteness.

Trying on a new look, even one associated with Europeans, does not automatically imply self-hatred...for some women, these changes may simply be another means of self-expression (Jones & Gooden, 2003, p. 178).

Regardless of this fact, Thompson (2009) asserts that the opinion of Black women is not relevant unless it is being compared to White or mainstream culture. In other words, “blackness does not count” which explains why researchers do not ask why a Black woman wears makeup and how it fulfills her ideas of beauty in comparison to the White norm (Thompson, 2009). Black women’s experiences are shaped by intersecting systems of oppression that include gender, race, and social class (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012). The media also contributes to these systems of oppression by depicting Black women in the stereotypical roles of the Mammy or the Jezebel (Watson et al., 2012). The Mammy is an “image of quintessential maternalism, lacking sexuality” while

the Jezebel is “characterized as a hypersexualized animal in heat” (Watson et al., 2012, p. 459). Because of these stereotypes, Black women are expected to act according to these scripts based on race, gender, and class, which is an expectation that White women experience less frequently (Watson et al., 2012). What is missing from current research is how Black women cope with this oppression through their “communal ties and strong social support” which allows them to create positive views of themselves and redefine their existence in society (Watson et al., 2012, p. 468). Therefore, Black women are a unique group that is aware of society’s views regarding their body; yet, they continue to redefine images of Black women in popular culture for themselves. The same can be said for millennial Black women. Millennials are considered the most racially diverse generation to date and their viewpoints on race are reflective of this diversity. Yet, the beauty industry does not recognize the millennial Black woman as a new consumer and research studies on millennials often fail to explore the diversity within this group. Instead, millennial Black women are treated with the same indifference as the women that came before them. In this study, millennial Black women’s experiences within the cosmetic industry will be examined in order to understand how they cope with discrimination based on race, gender, and class.

By understanding the relationship between the marketing done by MAC to target Black women and the decision-making process among Black female millennials reacting to these marketing efforts, we shall be able to see what techniques MAC employs to attract and retain their consumers. Black women have one of the highest purchasing powers within the beauty industry, yet they are often overlooked (Intel, December 2013). Where most brands seem to be unaware of this connection, MAC has created a

space within the beauty industry by offering products with the motto – “all ages, all races, all sexes” – and Black women are identifying with it.

The objective of this research is to understand the relationship between the marketing done by MAC Cosmetics and the decision to purchase MAC Cosmetics by Black female millennial consumers. This research will be conducted with the following research questions in mind:

1. What attracts consumers to MAC?
2. What marketing or sales techniques does MAC employ to attract and retain their consumers?
3. How does the environment created by MAC influence Black women’s ability to explore their relationship with makeup?

Justification

Research studies on millennials cite their generational characteristics but few actually explore whether these attributes can represent the entire population of millennials regardless of their respective gender, race, and age. Within the 20-year age frame for millennials, there can also be differences in social attitudes and political outlooks depending on the individual’s birth year. Without this knowledge, companies create advertising strategies geared towards a group of people that may not be receiving the intended message. This study will 1) break down the generalized characteristics of millennials into subcategories of race and gender and 2) discover whether current generalizations are representative of smaller groups within the millennial age cohort.

MAC was chosen as the focus of this study for two reasons. For one, the company motto, “all ages, all sexes, all races,” indicates that it attempts to serve a variety of consumers. Also, a previous study entitled, *African American Women’s Use Of Cosmetics Products In Relation To Their Attitudes And Self-Identity*, identified MAC as the main brand preference for the participants. MAC was their favorite brand because they “have rich pigmented lipsticks, its foundation is oil free, and there are extensive colors from which to choose” (Davis, 2013). Many women in Davis’ study also commented on how MAC foundation complemented their skin tones.

To understand how and why Black women decide to purchase from MAC, we must understand how Black women view themselves in relation to the standard of Euro-centric beauty. Yet, knowledge of Black women and their purchasing habits and motivations are lacking in current research. Therefore, this study also aims to fill this gap within the current literature in an effort to understand how MAC captures and retains the attention of Black millennial women and how MAC’s strategies can be replicated for other companies wishing to attract Black women as consumers. To understand these various issues, I will provide detailed descriptions of Black women’s views of beauty, millennials as consumers, and MAC’s company history and marketing strategies in the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Idea of Beauty

“Beauty’s American history is a white woman’s history” (Craig, 2006, p. 161). This sentence sums up much of what was found through an extensive literature review of beauty in American society. Historically, beauty has been seen as a “manifestation of inner moral qualities” and a belief that outer beauty is a reflection of inner morals (Craig, 2002, p. 49). Helena Rubenstein, a cosmetic industry mogul, once stated, “there are no ugly women, only lazy ones” (Craig, 2002, p. 24). This statement makes it seem as if beauty is attainable by any woman, as long as she works to achieve it but dominant beauty standards do not include “brown skin and short, tightly curled hair” (Craig, 2002, p. 23). In other words, if beauty status were merely a matter of effort, Black women would be considered beautiful due to effort alone. After all, Black women spend three to four times more on cosmetic and beauty products than White women (Jones & Gooden, 2003). Because beauty is more than effort, Black women’s physical attributes are often left out of the discussion of what is beautiful. Since beauty rests on the belief of outer beauty and inner beauty being equivalent, Black women had to establish the inner worth of their race to gain entrance into the beauty conversation (Craig, 2002). After asserting that they are valued for more than their looks, Black women were able to move forward and embrace the enhancement of their physical attributes through the use of cosmetics.

To add context to Black women's place in the history of beauty, one must examine where their beauty routines historically took place. Black women's beauty culture was embedded in their everyday routines. Meeting in salons and receiving beauty treatments at home provided a place to discuss topics related to ethical and political culture (Black, 2004). In these safe spaces, Black women were able to provide services for economic support while also discussing politics (Black, 2004). The process of becoming beautiful, while also staying informed on community matters, overlapped with providing financial support to Black businesses.. Therefore, the evolution of the beauty industry from a home business to a multi-million dollar industry shifted the control of Black women's beauty practices to the mainstream industry, which identified more with White beauty standards.

During the nineteenth century, beauty products were sold as ways to enhance natural beauty – not as a way to create a new look. At that time, makeup usage was considered daring (Black, 2004). Women entrepreneurs in the beauty business faced difficulties in establishing the respectability of beauty as a business (Black, 2004). In general, beauty products were still associated with “loose morality and vanity” (Black, 2004). To increase awareness of their products, women marketed their products by using their personal experiences as advertising. Business owners also portrayed the beauty routine as a necessity for women to preserve their natural attributes (Black, 2009). As women's interest in beauty grew, the marketing techniques within the beauty industry also flourished. Around 1900, the woman as a consumer who was more aware of her self-identity emerged (Black, 2009). Advertisers and women's magazines responded to this new identity by introducing women to brand name products and smart, price conscious

shopping. Department stores also saw a new woman emerging and created “a feminine paradise of abundance, pleasure, and service” at the beauty counter to attract these new consumers (Black, 2009, p. 50). These changes in cosmetic selling practices shifted the control of the beauty industry from the consumer and sellers within their network to companies interested in profit.

Today, beauty is a way for women to be evaluated based on their physical attributes. It is important to note that a woman’s beauty is measured against culturally constructed norms of beauty (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004). Herring, Keith, and Horton (2004) define beauty as a social construct informed by race and gender. For example, the US is considered to be a racist society and as a result, light skin is more beautiful and more desirable than darker skin (Herring et al., 2004). Beauty is neither objective nor neutral, yet it is often treated as a standard that does not change. As an ideology, beauty serves “to support White supremacy and male dominance” because white or light skin and European features are prized (Herring et al., 2004, p. 30). In terms of gender, beauty is assigned to the feminine role, meaning that women are defined by their looks as much as their deeds (Herring et al., 2004). Therefore, to be beautiful is to possess a “supposed material, fixed, ahistorical, and unprejudiced characteristic” (Moreno Figueroa, 2013, p. 149) and one automatically knows when they perceive something to be beautiful based on their exposure to the rules of socialization. Even across racial groups and classes, groups tend to agree on who possesses beauty (Herring et al., 2004). Research shows that though the definition of beauty is not concrete and perceptions of what is beautiful constantly changes, society still uses beauty as a measurement of success. For example, women who are considered attractive because of

physical attributes such as skin color and hair texture have more opportunities in the work force. The question then becomes: if we are not measuring beauty in terms of physical attributes and beauty cannot be obtained through effort, what are we really speaking of when we discuss beauty? The importance of beauty as a social construct is important to understand in order to differentiate beauty as a pleasing aesthetic from the form of oppression that it actually is.

Racism influences the beauty ideals for Black women. It creates experiences that frame an individual's life. It also places minorities at a disadvantage (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). Racism is manifested in the beauty industry. For example, non-White representations of women are rare, if not completely absent from the majority of brand advertisements. The absence of Black women in advertisements serves to strengthen the expected "place of white women within beauty regimes" (Chapkis, 1986; Craig, 2006, p. 172). As a result, Black women prefer to compare themselves to fellow women of color rather than the White majority in order to protect their "self-concept or self-esteem from threatening comparisons" (Frisby, 2004, p. 343). If Black women were to compare themselves to the mainstream beauty standards, they would always find themselves "lacking" in the areas of skin color, straight hair, and Eurocentric features. Discussions of race frame Black women's discussion of beauty (Craig, 2002; Ducille, 1996; Herring et al., 2005; Hunter, 2002; Jones & Gooden, 2003; Thompson, 2009; Watson et al., 2012). Therefore, a simple celebration of the beauty of a light-skinned or dark-skinned Black woman is tempered by the knowledge of a "society structured by racial inequality" (Craig, 2006, p. 172).

One of the key discussions regarding Black women's beauty concerns light skin versus dark skin. Mainstream U.S. society defines beauty as light skin in addition to European facial features (Hunter, 2002). Women with lighter skin tones feel that they are able to blend into the majority of society with ease (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). This allows them to be more confident in themselves and more comfortable in society (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). Lighter skin color also becomes a form of privilege. A difference in skin color can influence opportunities and public treatment. For Black women, lighter skin can mean higher rates of marriage, a better education, and higher income (Hunter, 2002). Black women with darker skin receive fewer opportunities, even when they invest the similar amounts of work as those with lighter skin (Hunter, 2002). This differential treatment based on skin color can manifest itself in lower wages for darker skinned women with the same skills than their lighter counterparts (Hunter, 2002). As physical appearance becomes more important for women seeking jobs, skin color can become a factor influencing "negotiations for obtaining jobs, getting promotions, and raises...even getting an education" (Hunter, 2002, p. 188). These issues are due to colorism, which arises from "racist ideology, class-based assumptions, the symbolism of the colors white and black, or from a combination of these things" (Herring et al., 2004, p. 7). Colorism implies that Whites assigned meanings to skin color, thereby causing society to value light skin and dark skin differently: "Whiteness is believed to represent civility, intelligence, and beauty. In contrast, Blackness/Brownness is seen as representing primitiveness, ignorance, and ugliness" (Hunter, 2002, p. 187).

These attributions to skin color are further exemplified in a study done by Jones and Gooden (2003) that discusses four women who illustrated colorism's definition of

dark skin being seen as “bad, ugly, and evil”, while light skin was seen as “good, pure, and beautiful” (p. 196). The association of skin color with specific personality traits is not a new phenomenon. An examination of advertisements from the twentieth century reveals that complexions were often paired with descriptive words. For example, lighter women were described as an “olive tan sophisticated type” which signifies that lighter skinned women are also considered to be sophisticated (Craig, 2002).

Historically, advertisers have also contributed to reinforcing lighter skin as a beauty standard. In 1914, advertisements in *The New York Age* represented women of mixed racial heritage as the standard for Black women (Craig, 2002). The prevalence of lighter skinned women with long hair in the media caused middle class Black women to accept this as their ideal representation (Craig, 2002). Even 100 years ago, it is evident that Black women were not fully represented as themselves in popular beauty advertisements. Those ads that targeted Black women were often for skin bleaching creams, which reinforced lighter skin as the ideal beauty standard. *Ebony*, a magazine for Black women, contributed to this standard by including ads for a product called the Beauty Star Skin Whitener which was meant to evoke hope for lighter skin and “a complexion that invites and holds romance” (Craig, 2002, p. 56). In line with the opportunities associated with lighter skin, the advertisement promised “marriage, and the right kind of love for women who could achieve the right, light kind of face” (Craig, 2002, p. 56). The accepted standard of beauty propagated by the media moved further away from Black women when advertisers expanded the definition of beauty by including women who did not identify as White but were still light enough to pass for White. Beauty then became described in the appearance of Jewish, Southern European,

and Latin American women, who were considered embodiments of exotic beauty (Craig, 2006). Although these ethnic women added variety to the beauty standard, they still represented lighter skin tones. In other words, the addition of other ethnicities into the accepted beauty standard did not change the fact that skin color was and is still an important factor for a woman's success. Because a woman's value is closely tied to her physical appearance, skin color takes on multiple meanings and can result in very important consequences for women with darker skin tones (Hunter, 2002). If, for example, employers internalize White racial hierarchies, women with light skin will be more desired by them (Hunter, 2002). Since the cosmetic community prefers women with lighter skin colors, women with darker skin are often left out which results in fewer products developed with them in mind. As a result, makeup brands with greater product and color pigment variety will have an advantage in the cosmetic industry and brands that offer more color selections have the potential to attract a larger number of consumers.

The relationship between skin color and cosmetics may not be obvious at first but for a Black woman, finding a matching foundation or colors that favors her complexion can be rather difficult today in America. Thompson (2009) argues that options for Black women cannot exist without comparisons to White, or mainstream, culture. The existing options are not created with the attributes of Black women in mind. Instead, they can serve as a reminder of where Black women fall in the social hierarchy (Thompson, 2009). If a Black woman cannot find a matching foundation shade, she may interpret this as a sign that she is not relevant to that company. The lack of appropriate cosmetics at beauty counters serves as a reminder of her place in the beauty spectrum. Under the stress of living in this society, Black women often buy into the Lily Complex, "the belief that the

only way to be beautiful is to look as close to ‘white’ as possible” (Jones & Gooden, 2003, p. 177). This may create a strain in their personal and professional relationships and result in a lack of self-confidence. Jones and Gooden describe the consequences of internalizing society’s message:

The black woman may take on too many tasks, becoming an overachiever to compensate for her lack of beauty and prove that she still has worth. She may even settle for an unfulfilling romance, believing that she cannot do any better. She may lose faith in her capabilities, striving for less because she does not believe she can achieve more. And she may ultimately slip into depression...Indeed, researchers have found that black women who internalize beauty ideals are more likely to be depressed than those who do not (Jones & Gooden, 2003, p. 180).

As a result, it is easy to understand why Black women spend three to four times more on cosmetic and beauty products than White women (Jones & Gooden, 2009). Within the mainstream culture of beauty, Black women are not seen as beautiful. Rather, “capitalism has appropriated...signifiers of *Blackness* and made them marketable” (Ducille, 1996, p. 27). Black feminist, bell hooks, refers to this as “the commodification of Otherness” where the beauty of Black women is seen as a spice or seasoning for White mainstream culture (Ducille, 1996). This spice is then sold under the notion that there are benefits of experiencing and acknowledging racial difference (Ducille, 1996). Ducille explains this further with the suntan phenomenon: “many white women and men risk skin cancer to darken their pale flesh without seeing black – that is black people – as beautiful” (Ducille, 1996, p. 27). In other words, certain aspects of Black women are

considered beautiful, but these characteristics, such as skin color, are appropriated for White mainstream usage. The fact that these characteristics are associated with Black women remains irrelevant to the new user. If a darker skin color is considered beautiful on White women but not Black women, beauty is once again out of their reach. It is not so much the characteristics that cannot be obtained but the respect and value that is associated with these attributes; beauty, once again, becomes an unattainable goal for Black women. Since dominant standards continue to exclude Black women, “beauty status [is] unavailable to them” (Craig, 2002, p. 24). As a result, Black women’s continued purchases in the cosmetic industry can be interpreted as a sign of their willingness to succeed in American society. Throughout history, Black women have been left out of the beauty discourse and the new generation of Black millennials is no exception. In fact, Black millennials are held to the same Eurocentric beauty standards as the Black women before them. Therefore, understanding millennials as a generation and in comparison to the Black women before them is central to this study.

Millennials

Although there is not a consensus, the majority of researchers agree that millennials were born between the years of 1980 and 2000 (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). Millennials have a misconception of being “lazy, rebellious, promiscuous, hedonistic, and celebrity-obsessed” when in fact they are “industrious, optimistic, family and friend focused, choosers of conformity and respect” (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 12). They are characterized by their diversity, tolerance, and love of social media. Compared to previous generations, millennials are more “racially diverse” and “politically active” (International Business, 2012). Seppanen and Gualtieri (2002) reported the following

statistics of millennials: 19% identified as Hispanic, 14% as Black, 4% as Asian, and 3% of mixed race or other. The remaining 40% identified as White. Additionally, 11% of millennials are born to at least one immigrant parent. Millennials are a diverse group of individuals, therefore “single-race ads would seem unnatural to this multi-ethnic generation” (Williams & Page, 2011, p. 9).

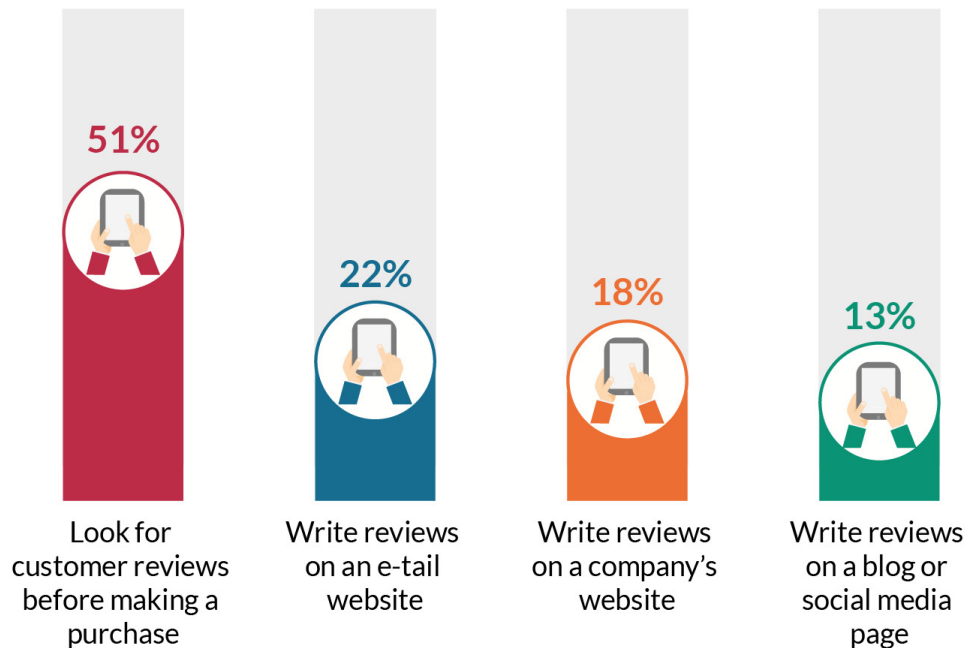
Because millennials grew up with the Internet, they are more educated and informed in areas such as fashion and beauty where new forms of knowledge spring up daily (Corcoran & McEwen, 2009). One should also note that growing up with the Internet has made millennials impatient, causing them to expect immediate satisfaction from products and relationships (Williams & Page, 2011). The millennial’s sense of instant gratification can also be misconstrued as “entitlement to luxury” which has earned millennials a bad reputation (Who’s Holding the Handbag). Millennials prefer products that are customized to their needs and because “content is king for this generation” (Williams & Page, 2011, p. 10), they expect brands to have content that stimulates entertainment, interest and excitement and are also available and accessible on a variety of platforms (Bellman, Teich, & Clark, 2009).

The millennial consumer is rather elusive. 53% of surveyed millennials shop within a week. Of that number, 81% of shopping happens locally rather than online (Donaldson, 2013). Despite their high shopping rates, the majority of millennials have low incomes due to age-based limitations, which in turn leads to a low shopping conversion rate for millennials (Donaldson, 2013). Millennials are eager to look but are less eager to purchase. No wonder researchers describe them as a “generation that distrusts traditional advertising” (Aquino, 2012, p. 20). To attract the millennial

consumer, brands need to deliver relatable personalities along with quality products. Success often comes from building a brand around a personality that millennials will be comfortable supporting. While they find it hard to get behind a product, characters or lifestyles appear to be an easier way to attract millennial consumers (Aquino, 2012). For example, Old Spice, a 70-year old deodorant brand, was able to revamp its target market by catching the attention of millennials with commercials like “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like,” featuring NFL player Isaiah Mustafa (Aquino, 2012, p. 23). The combination of a celebrity presented in a relatable way along with a social media component resulted in an online campaign complete with Facebook, Twitter, and a series of YouTube videos that garnered millions of views (Aquino, 2012). Old Spice is an example of a company that was able to attract millennials by rebuilding their brand with social media and celebrity personalities that appeal to millennials.

When shopping, millennials tend to rely more on the opinion of peers than experts as a result of their relationship with social media (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Suggestions delivered through social media are perceived as more important and trustworthy than traditional advertisements. Most of millennial media consumption takes place online, but not necessarily on a computer. Cell phones are other popular sources of media consumption of online activity that can be used to connect with others and read user reviews of products. Millennials are heavily engaged with product reviews. As shown in Figure 1, 51% of millennials read customer reviews before making a purchase decision.

INTERACTIONS WITH COMPANIES AND BRANDS - REVIEWS, DECEMBER 2014



Base: 708 internet users aged 20-37
SOURCE: LIGHTSPEED GMI/MINTEL

Figure 1: Image adapted from a February 2015 Mintel report entitled *Marketing to Millennials*, showing that while millennials rely heavily on reviews, they are more reluctant to write them.

In addition, news and television can both be watched online and 2/3 of millennials actually spend their time doing this (Aquino, 2012). The array of options presented to millennials causes them to shift their attention between media platforms 27 times per hour (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2002). Consequently, for a brand to be successful, they must know how to use social media in an unobtrusive way (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2002). Despite their transient nature, researchers agree that millennials are drawn to brands that are honest, authentic, and interested in making a difference (Aquino, 2012; Corcoran & McEwen, 2009; Donaldson, 2013; Tran, 2008). Millennials are more informed than the average consumer, when it comes to technology and are therefore, very conscious of

obvious marketing techniques. This knowledge causes millennials to see brands not only as product providers but as life and lifestyle supporters as well (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). In the eyes of the millennial, an authentic brand is led by design. Millennials assume that the “people behind authentic brands radiate their love for their craft” (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 106). In turn, that authenticity allows millennials to experience a product as a result of the designer’s love for their work. This is important to millennials because they expect a brand to resonate with their own beliefs. For example, the Levi Strauss Company was one of the first brands to show their support for the gay community. Levi advertised in gay publications, extended employee benefits to same-sex couples, and terminated its affiliation with the American Boy Scouts because the organization banned gay scout leaders (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Levi has done more than state their support for the gay community. This is evident in Levi’s actions as a global company, which is important because millennials take note of the company’s actions as well. Millennials expect a company’s mission statement to resonate not only with their products, but with employees as well. For this reason, companies like Virgin, a travel, entertainment, and lifestyle company, request applicants to “perform, sing, mime, or dance” as a way to recruit employees who are willing to go above and beyond to satisfy the millennial consumer (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 107). Millennials want to feel “respected and valued for their opinion” which is why brands should pay attention to details such as how their employees treat customers (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 116). This tactic of recruiting and training employees to understand the needs of the customer on a deeper level is also relevant to MAC and their makeup artists.

Brands should also appeal to millennials belief that they can make the future better (Williams & Page, 2011). The success of MAC Cosmetics' Viva Glam lipstick line is a prime example of this. One hundred percent of the proceeds from Viva Glam sales go towards the MAC AIDS program. Nancy Mahon, the executive director of the MAC AIDS Fund, says millennials "are attracted to retailers' efforts to connect with causes," (Yarrow & Donnell, 2009, p. 198) which is evident by Viva Glam's position as one of MAC's best-selling products. When consumers purchase Viva Glam products, MAC employees remind them that "the cost of one tube of Viva Glam [lipstick] can provide seven hot meals to homebound AIDS patients" (Yarrow & Donnell, 2009, p. 198). Ideally, a social responsibility component should influence millennials to buy a product but Van den Bergh and Behrer (2011) note that millennials try to avoid buying unethical brands but they will not choose a brand just because of its social responsibility campaigns alone. Ethics are important to millennial beliefs, but convenience and price are more important factors. In the eyes of the millennial, a socially responsible image does not change poor quality (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). While it is important for brands to focus on the community over the product, it is not always an appropriate strategy for winning millennials. Brands that can successfully combine quality products with social responsibility campaigns and relatable personalities are more likely to evoke positive relationships. It is the relationship with a brand on all three of these levels that attracts and keeps the millennial consumer.

Contrary to their reputation of being lavish spenders and seekers of luxury items, millennials are very conscious about price. They enjoy a "good deal," including free samples and discounted merchandise (Tran, 2008; Yarrow & Donnell, 2009). Millennials

are independent shoppers who “demand that retailers demonstrate a value proposition in every transaction” (PR Newswire, 2012, p. 2). Compared to previous generations, they are close to their parents (International Business, 2012; Who’s Holding the Handbag?). Parents empowered millennial children by providing them with a chance to learn and experience multiple activities such as travel, art, and sports (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Though they have few sources of income, their opinion and relationships can influence their parents’ purchasing decisions, which makes them an important target for companies.

Constructing a lifestyle brand that is compatible with millennial beliefs has proven to be a challenge for retailers. Millennials prefer to feel like a creator in their relationship with a brand, rather than the consumer – “a brand is not what a company wants it to be, it’s what millennials want it to be” (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 26). Brand credibility and brand experience are the most important factors for Millennials. They want to feel as if the brand understands their lifestyles by providing products that support their needs (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Once brands create social media accounts, millennials expect them to act as a distant friend rather than a close and highly attentive helicopter parent. Therefore, brands are responsible for creating content that facilitates a relationship by “providing involvement and perceived control over the brand” to millennials (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011, p. 27). Examples of approved content are tangible services that relate to the company’s product rather than advertising. In this respect, global brands tend to have an edge over local brands since millennials assume that their quality and reliability has been tested previously over the years by a large number of consumers (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). This notion can also be

applied to celebrity endorsements. Millennials associate a celebrity's endorsement with "an assurance of quality and style" (Yarrow & Donnell, 2009, p. 42). In other words, millennials believe that celebrities have access to everything; therefore the products they use are the best in that category. Celebrity endorsements also serve to unite millennials with their favorite celebrities through shared purchases (Yarrow & Donnell, 2009).

Many research studies exist on the characteristics of millennials as consumers and individuals. Yet, even though millennials are the most "racially and ethnically diverse" generation in history, there are not many studies focusing on whether or not differences can exist within the millennial perspective (Henry, 2008). Most of the existing research focuses on a euro-centric perspective of the millennial. For example, many research studies reviewed in this section acknowledge the diversity within the millennial generation and then go on to describe the characteristics of millennials as if there would be no discrepancies within each racial group that may make up millennials. General characteristics such as brand identification, shopping habits, and values may be influenced by experiences unique to specific racial groups. Henry (2008) notes that a unique aspect of the millennial generation is its "distinct hip-hop culture, which has roots with [Black] and Latino life-styles" (p. 17). Articles like Henry's are few and far between but they bring attention to oversights in the extensive research on millennials. While there may be a large amount of research on millennial habits and characteristics, there are limits to whether or not these characteristics can be applied to all millennials given their diversity. Given this information, some brands are more successful than others in attracting millennials to their products. MAC, for example, understands how to interact

with millennials online and as a result, create feelings of ownership with millennial Black women.

MAC: A brand for everyone?

In 1984, MAC was founded in Toronto, Canada by two men; Frank Toskan and Frank Angelo ("Our History"). Originally conceived as a makeup brand exclusively for freelancing makeup artists, MAC opened the first Pro store in Toronto. MAC Pro aims to provide makeup professionals with “unique educational experiences and the most comprehensive selection of professional makeup” (“Become a Member”). Today, the MAC Pro program has Pro stores that cater to students and makeup professionals all over the United States. This element of MAC explains their close relationship to the makeup artistry world. The relationship between MAC and makeup artists is also conveyed through their employee selection process and their offering of discounted products to licensed makeup artists.

In 1994, MAC launched three interrelated social responsibility campaigns: MAC Kids Helping Kids, MAC AIDS Fund, and the Viva Glam campaign (“Campaign History”). MAC Kids Helping Kids and the Viva Glam campaign are derived from the MAC AIDS Fund, which was created by the company’s original founders. The program, MAC Kids Helping Kids, sells cards painted by children living with HIV/AIDS (MAC Cosmetics, 2000). The Viva Glam campaign revolves around various shades of lipstick and is described as “the first lipstick created to directly confront and raise money and awareness for AIDS” (“Campaign History”). Viva Glam is more than a fundraising initiative for MAC. The company describes Viva Glam as the “heart and soul” of MAC and is meant to celebrate “life and the outspoken attitude of the company” (“Campaign

History”). Unlike Kids Helping Kids, Viva Glam is accessible year-round and advertised considerably more to the average consumer. Kids Helping Kids is often featured as a special collection that is only available during the Christmas season (MAC Cosmetics, 2000). Nonetheless, all the profits from Kids Helping Kids and Viva Glam go directly to the MAC AIDS Fund. These funds are used to provide daily care for individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the form of “medical care, emergency food supplies, medicine, and more” (MAC Cosmetics, 2000). In summary, Kids Helping Kids and Viva Glam work together to help the MAC AIDS Fund fulfill their mission:

The MAC AIDS Fund's mission is to serve people of all ages, all races and all sexes affected by HIV and AIDS. To partner with the bold, the visionary and the brave who confront the epidemic in countries and communities where people are most neglected, off the radar and at highest risk. Responsive, agile and alert, MAF funds innovative programs that deal directly with the most marginalized, stigmatized and under-heard victims. MAF celebrates humanity, life, creativity and individuality. Making a difference, one VIVA GLAM lipstick at a time (MAC AIDS Fund, 2014).

In 1995, Estée Lauder Companies purchased 51% of the company while the creators retained creative control. This partnership lasted until 1998 when, shortly after the death of Frank Angelo, Estée Lauder Companies acquired the remaining 49% of MAC. With Estée Lauder Companies came resources that allowed MAC to become the global brand that it is known as today. MAC has cultivated a strong brand image in line with its motto of “all ages, all races, and all sexes” (“Our History”).

To understand what attracts consumers to MAC, one must first understand how MAC exists as a brand. The various levels of portfolio management influence MAC's decision making on the customer interaction level because MAC is a subsidiary of Estée Lauder. Brands are comprised of tangible and intangible aspects that influence consumer responses. In MAC's case, these aspects are controlled by Estée Lauder's overall brand management. According to Alessandro Deserti (2014), there are three levels of portfolio management: brand, sub-brand, and product. The intangible knowledge, or that which influences the brand but is not apparent at the consumer level, would be received from Estée Lauder. At this level, Estée Lauder manages the companies it controls in order to balance the individual brand image with the overall concept of the parent company. Therefore, everything experienced with MAC is influenced by the ideas and principles of Estée Lauder. At the sub-brand level, MAC presents a diversified merchandise mix, which "manages the expression of the brand in coherence with the funding values" (Deserti, 2014, p. 259). With that being said, one should understand that above all MAC is not a stand-alone brand, but a derivative of Estée Lauder. It may stand for more in the eyes of consumers, but it is a sub-brand nonetheless. As stated earlier, consumer responses are influenced by the tangible and intangible brand components.

Figure 2 explains the categories that belong to each aspect and how they relate.

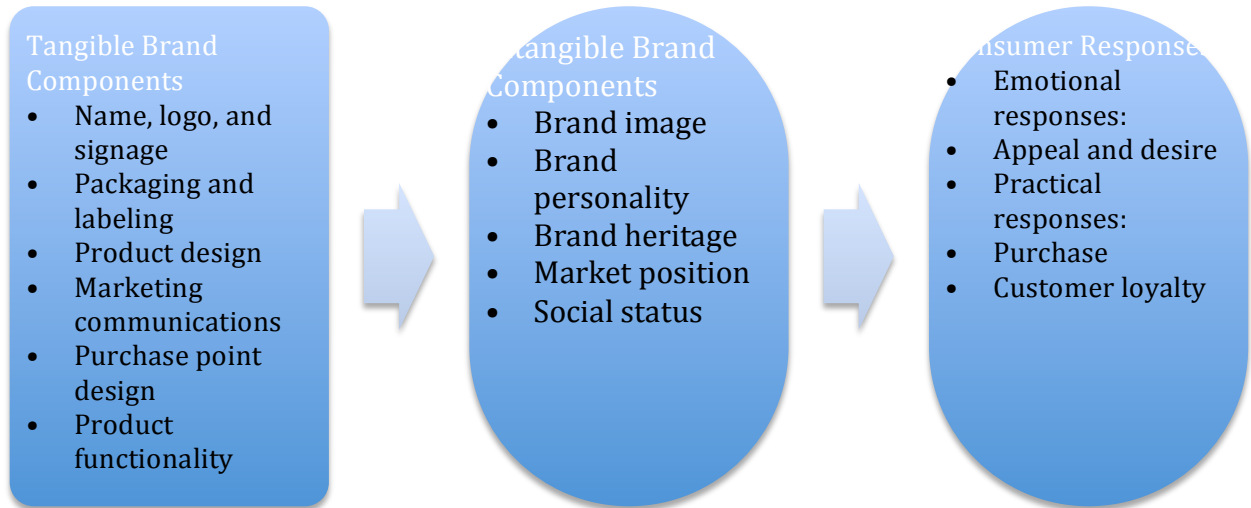


Figure 2. A practical model of fashion brand management relating tangible and intangible brand components to consumer responses. Adapted from “Making the Marque: Tangible Branding in Fashion Product and Retail Design,” by S. M. Wigley, K. Nobbs, and E. Larsen, 2013, *Fashion Practice*, 5(2), p. 249.

New monthly collections are a key component of the MAC brand. Collaborations range in theme from professional makeup artists, celebrities, fictional characters, fashion brands, and artists. MAC keeps a close eye on what their consumers may be interested in, and collaborations seem to be chosen in relation to consumer interests (“Our History”). For example, MAC refers to its strong and intimate bond with customers and makeup artists as the foundation of their “impressive array of award-winning products” (“Our History”). These relationships are a key factor in MAC’s new collections and product releases. During the early years of MAC’s existence, celebrity collaborations included Eddie Lizzard and Liza Minnelli – who were both active representatives and outspoken supporters of the LBGTQ community. In 2005, celebrity endorsements expanded to magazine editors, fashion designers, and actresses. Perhaps this was a nod to MAC’s

original purpose as an industry makeup brand to be used on consumers but not necessarily by them. Originally, MAC was sold to makeup artists, models, and photographers (“Our History”). Eventually, the brand expanded by selling to fashion stylists and magazine editors. Therefore, it makes sense that their celebrity collaborations also expanded in this manner. After 2009, there is a definite shift in celebrity collaborations moving from political and social activists to representatives of pop culture. Occasionally, there are still collections with special effect makeup artists but they are few and far in between. In relation to MAC’s motto, it should be noted that there are attempts to include celebrities from various age groups, race, and gender. In 2007, Paulina Rubio, a Mexican singer and actress collaborated with MAC and shortly afterwards; an Indian fashion designer, Manish Arora, also hosted a collaboration in 2008. An attempt to include all races is actually reflective of MAC’s globalization as a brand. Typically, Americans would assume “all races” would reflect the dominant racial groups in the US, but MAC is a Canadian brand at heart and the inclusion of race in its motto is more reflective of cultural tolerance for which Canada is known.

Celebrity collaborations are also evident in MAC’s Viva Glam campaign. Every Viva Glam campaign features at least one celebrity in the initial advertisement. Viva Glam lipsticks and lipglass were created to “raise money and awareness for AIDS [victims] at a time when the pandemic dramatically affected the fashion makeup communities and was greatly stigmatized as a gay disease” (“Campaign History”). The goal of the Viva Glam campaign is to “celebrate life and encompass the diversity of MAC’s catch phrase, “all ages, all races, all sexes.” MAC chooses Viva Glam representatives that meet the following criteria: “provocative, alternative, influential, and

[reflective of] diverse communities” (“Campaign History”). The first Viva Glam spokesperson was RuPaul, a drag queen, followed by kd Lang, “a non-lipstick lesbian” (“Campaign History”). Since its inception, MAC has employed celebrities such as Elton John, Lil Kim, and Dita von Teese to represent the campaign. MAC presents Viva Glam as a groundbreaking philanthropic campaign due to its attention to marginalized communities. Yet, upon closer examination, the advertisements reveal that basic advertising principles are still at work within this groundbreaking content. The advertisements display contradictory elements that appear to be different at first, but “framing, setting, body language, gaze, and anchorage” determine the meaning behind them (Weiss, 2010, p. 44). Multiple images from the campaign attempt to justify the alternative image of the brand, but all of these elements still operate within a commercial mindset (Weiss, 2010). Though the images may shock consumers or appear edgy at first, closer examination reveals that the advertisements do not challenge traditional consumer views. MAC presents edgy ideas within an advertising context that the average consumer can still access and relate (Weiss, 2010). Examining these elements shows that the advertisements still function within “the prevailing structure of brand advertising” which, in turn, leaves dominant conceptions of MAC acceptable for the general public (Weiss, 2010, p. 44).

Summarizing MAC’s collaborative relationship with celebrities, Rihanna can be examined as a reference. Rihanna, a popular singer from Barbados, is viewed as a representative of the millennial Black woman. Though, Rihanna is not Black, her constructed identity as a celebrity is often identified within Black culture. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, Rihanna is viewed as a pop culture representative of the

Black woman. I am aware of the problems that arise from treating Rihanna as a Black woman in this research but this study revolves around how beauty for Black women is measured against an impossible standard and Rihanna's appearance reinforces Eurocentric standards. By choosing Rihanna to be a creative partner rather than a collaborator, MAC allowed Rihanna to choose packaging and colors, makeup textures, and finishes that appealed to her taste (Conti & Naughton, 2013). When asked how Rihanna fit MAC's brand image, John Demsey, group president of the Estée Lauder, MAC, Tom Ford, Bobbi Brown, La Mer, Prescriptives and Jo Malone brands, referred to her as a star who has the world's attention in regards to her entire image including hair, nails, and clothing (Conti & Naughton, 2013). Demsey is known for his ability to spot talent and stay current on pop culture (Smith, 2014). Demsey's choice of Rihanna as a representative of MAC solidifies her relevance to mainstream culture. Yet, MAC executives are not the only ones who seem to find Rihanna captivating. Marketers also believe Rihanna has a "heavyweight image" and a "strong personality" (Born, 2011; Groves & Feugere, 2008). Rihanna reinforces her own heavyweight image by suing companies, such as Topshop who wrongfully used her name and image to sell a product. In 2013, a judge ruled in her favor and stated that "many fans of Rihanna regard her as important [and] as their style icon" (Conti, 2013). The verdict stated that if fans bought a product believing that Rihanna endorsed it, they would be deceived in this case and Rihanna's "goodwill" would be damaged (Conti, 2013). The care taken to preserve Rihanna's image is parallel to her importance as a celebrity brand. Even her perfume was described as "not a shrinking violet kind of fragrance," a description meant to reinforce Rihanna's strong personality (Born, 2011). This perfume, Reb'l Fleur, was also marketed

heavily through a distribution of 500,000 samples, a marketing technique that millennials love (Born, 2011). As a result, one can see why Rihanna has been referred to as the defining factor of the millennial generation for advertisers (Lawrence, 2006). As a millennial, she understands what they value and strives to make sure that her reputation and image line up with their opinions.

Rihanna's identity can easily be merged with MAC's because they both aim to sell authenticity. While writing her second album, Rihanna stated: "I want to be me. I want people to fall in love with who Rihanna is" (Lawrence, 2006, p. 34). The version of herself that she chooses to construct or sell during various times of her life is a part of Rihanna's authentic brand image. Rihanna also views her brand collaborations as another important representation of authenticity. She chose to collaborate with MAC because she views MAC as a "legit" brand that she has used on tour repeatedly (Conti & Naughton, 2013). Since Rihanna views MAC as a credible brand and MAC sees her endorsement important to her fans, the two brands are able to sell their partnership as truth (Conti, 2013; Conti & Naughton, 2013). In fact, during the creation of her collection with MAC, Rihanna was very involved in choosing the colors and products, a characteristic that caused Demsey to stress how the Rihanna collections were "not a front" and did not involve Rihanna simply attaching her name to their products (Conti & Naughton, 2013).

Rihanna's incorporation of her image as a victim of domestic violence altered the control of her public image. In 2009, Rihanna and her then boyfriend, Chris Brown, engaged in a very public domestic violence scandal. Images of Rihanna's bruised face were all over news outlets. This image along with eyewitness accounts allowed the media to label her as a victim of domestic violence (Fleetwood, 2012). Though she never denied

the issues within her relationship, Rihanna worked to separate herself from images of helplessness and victimization. She was able to accomplish this by incorporating her suffering into her “public persona as a highly eroticized and highly desired woman” (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 420). The videos and songs she performed after the incident were about “intimate partner violence, erotic longing, and negative attachments” (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 424). When asked about the publicity following her assault, Rihanna stated:

I put my guard up so hard. I didn't want people to see me cry. I didn't want people to feel bad for me. It was a very vulnerable time in my life, and I refused to let that be the image. I wanted them to see me as, 'I'm fine, I'm tough,' I put that up until it felt real (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 429).

By refusing to be labeled a victim by the media, Rihanna encompassed the image of a female rebel and has “pushed the aesthetic and performance of sexual explicitness for female artists of various races” (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 427). Yet, Rihanna has not pushed the envelope so far as to be socially unacceptable. Just as the MAC Viva Glam campaigns reveal; what seems to be scandalous is actually a performance operating within the known boundaries of what society has deemed acceptable. Rihanna dealt with her domestic abuse situation publicly. Through this, she became an example of how Black women can overcome the stereotype of the “battered woman” (Fleetwood, 2012). This is important because the public ordeal actually made Rihanna's image appear more honest and authentic. As a result, the mainstream media's conversation portraying Rihanna as a victim does not align with how young Black fans interpret the case and Rihanna now has a following that identifies with her personal experiences as well as her body of work (Fleetwood, 2012). After analyzing Rihanna as a celebrity, one can see how

fitting it is for Rihanna to be a creative partner and the face of Viva Glam's newest advertising campaign, which chooses those celebrities who are "provocative, alternative, influential, and reflect diverse communities ("Campaign History").

Although MAC started during the millennial years, up until its collaboration with Rihanna, MAC had little to do with millennial celebrities. When it does deviate from its fashion and makeup legends, MAC reaches out to the celebrities that millennials love. Millennials have "grown up in strong economic times" and, as a result, are "very well educated and self assured" (Yalcin, Eren-Erdogmus, & Demir, 2009, p. 262). MAC is able to create a bond with millennials by tailoring their experience with the brand.

The in-store experience is very important for millennials. Being aware of this, MAC tries to deliver a unique in-store experience for millennial customers. To generate a relationship with millennial consumers, brands should create a "shopping experience with a memorable, unique, friendly atmosphere and young, knowledgeable responsive sales personnel" (Yalcin et al., 2009, p. 271). MAC pays attention to these qualities and implements both of them in their stores worldwide. Memorable atmospheres can be creative design elements such as a "soaring ceiling in an elliptical arch" or look books throughout the store "so people can browse different styles," which is visible, for example, in the MAC store in Paris (Weil, 2013, p. 1). "Stimuli generating entertainment, interest, and excitement" within stores is also important to securing the millennials' attention (Bellman et al., 2009, p. 54). In the Paris store, James Gager, Creative Director for MAC, created small panels to hang from the walls with product information. In his opinion, the panels allow you to have a "pre-information or pre-knowledge of products" (Weil, 2013, p. 1). Millennials like to make informed decisions

before spending their money. Therefore, the inclusion of interactive elements and product knowledge in a unique environment attracts the millennial and ultimately causes them to purchase said product. Gager also created the in-store visuals for the 2011 Wonder Woman Collection, which featured “MAC-ized Wonder Woman cartoon” displays within the store (Naughton, 2011). These visuals were accompanied by an extensive social media campaign, including a Foursquare component, which were intended to reach MAC consumers in store and through their social media websites (Naughton, 2011). The attention to meaningful details, such as the Wonder Woman campaign, within the store environment creates a memorable experience for millennial consumers.

MAC’s training process creates highly responsive sales personnel, an attribute of which they are very proud. Company literature states that MAC was the first brand within the cosmetic industry to invest in training and educating its staff on products and how to enhance the customer’s experience (“Our History”). Given this fact, one can understand why MAC makeup artists are known for their product knowledge and use of techniques. In the 2005 version of MAC’s product knowledge and training manual, sales associates are taught that the “MAC formula is simple: Offer a great product at a reasonable price with superior service and knowledgeable staff” (MAC Product Knowledge and Training Manual, p. 1). It is not by accident that customers feel welcomed at the MAC counter. The company specifically trains employees to understand that a “happy and informed customer will be the most loyal” (MAC Product Knowledge and Training Manual, 2005, p. 4). While customers may feel as if an employee is taking specific interest in their wants and needs, they are actually listing off a series of questions:

Step 2 – Investigation

Evaluate the Customer's needs. Listen to the Customer carefully. Let the Customer know you understand and see his/her point of view. Have a conversation with the Customer to find out what he/she really wants.

You should ask questions like: 'What type of look are you interested in?' 'Which colours and textures do you like?'

You will probably be asked, 'What's my best colour?' Even if you have heard this same question many times, it is the first time this Customer has asked you. Treat this question with the same respect as any other question. Be cooperative, enthusiastic and sincere. Learn why your Customer chose to come to MAC as well as what he/she needs. Listen carefully to the Customer, because until you know what he/she needs, you can't really help the Customer or answer his/her questions. (MAC Product Knowledge and Training Manual, 2005, p. 4)

With such instructions in their training manual, MAC accomplishes a variety of goals. On one hand, MAC is able to train an employee to work with a diverse group of customers. Extra effort is required from all employees to note the gender of the customer, which is manifested by the frequent use of personal pronouns for both genders like "his/her" and "he/she" in the manual every time a customer is mentioned. This demonstrates that the employees need to be equally comfortable in working with men and women. Being a gender neutral company makes MAC unique within the cosmetic industry, which is typically aimed at women. Urging the employee to find out why the customer chose MAC also sets an expectation for employees to be invested in the interests and personal lives of their customer. Although, the willingness of the MAC

employee to build a relationship may seem genuine to the customer, it is actually a company mandated sales mechanism for the employee. Intentions aside, MAC does succeed in employing and training makeup artists that are knowledgeable and able to build relationships with millennials.

What differentiates MAC from other beauty counters is the experience and customer-employee interaction that takes place. Wigley, Nobbs, and Larsen (2013) discuss the importance of tangible brand components in expressing “brand image, personality, heritage, and market position to consumers” (p. 254). Indeed, some elements are more successful than others in terms of creating an experience. Various studies of retail environments have manipulated stimulants such as music, color, and lighting to show their influence on purchase decisions (Turley & Milliman, 2003). This intense focus on attracting a particular type of consumer creates an atmosphere that can produce different responses depending on the context. Because freestanding MAC stores are hard to find outside of prominent cities, variables such as design layout and human interaction are more important than exterior ones for MAC stores located in malls and department stores. General interior variables include, but are not limited to, color schemes, lighting, music, and merchandise (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Turley and Milliman’s (2000) review of research focusing on atmospheric store elements reveals that the right music can have a significant impact on sales and customer perceptions of a brand. In MAC’s case, music not only attracts consumers that may be walking by but it becomes synonymous with the overall edgy image that MAC tries to convey. This association becomes an imprint on the memory of millennials who may associate their MAC experience with music.

Millennial consumers are online shoppers who know how to navigate a website selling a product they want (Yalcin et. al., 2009). Shopping is considered a social activity whether it be within the store or online through a website (Bellman et al., 2009). Online, MAC also pays extensive attention to their millennial shoppers. For a 2008 collection, MAC created a microsite and a “cheeky teaser” for online promotion (Naughton, 2008). The microsite functioned as a smaller version of the MAC website with links and information created specifically for the 2008 collection. The microsite along with the teaser allowed MAC to create a temporary online presence meant to garner attention for their upcoming collection. MAC’s creative advertising was also notable in the MAC Me Over campaign, where another microsite was created to “tap into the brand’s fan base and find a real-person face for the Fall 2011 color collection (Costello, 2010). MAC also increased their presence on social media during various Fashion Weeks by providing fans with tweets and status updates from makeup artists behind the scenes in New York, London, Milan, and Paris (“Ricky and Nicki team up for MAC,” 2012). The goal of their online presence on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube is to provide their followers with first hand experiences through “exclusive beauty visuals and backstage videos” (Naughton, 2012). While it may seem that MAC has its hand on the millennial pulse through unique advertisements and celebrity endorsements, these aspects are actually a part of their brand commitment to “integrating social media into the company’s overall structure” (“Shopping for beauty products,” 2013). By hosting “regular live chats with makeup artists” and inviting fans to ask questions related to products and techniques, MAC is able to establish “credibility as a professional, high-quality makeup brand [that] aims to foster more interaction with consumers” (“Shopping for beauty products,” 2013).

Compared to other cosmetic brands, MAC captivates more Facebook and Twitter followers by providing content that fosters more online interaction between the brand and the consumer than any other cosmetics brand (“Shopping for beauty products,” 2013). By limiting the use of competitions and coupons, MAC is able to maintain their label as a luxury makeup brand.

In an industry where it may be a challenge for Black women to find color matching foundation shades, MAC has made an effort to have a shade for every woman. For example, the MAC Studio Fix foundation has 16 shades and the Pro Longwear foundation has 23 shades. Every formula has its own shade numbers due to different ingredients that may affect the color. Romero Jennings, a MAC Pro-Team makeup artist advises women with deep complexions to worry about “concealing problem areas and warming the skin by highlighting and bronzing” (Turner, 2007). In the event that a woman is unable to find a suitable match for foundation, Jennings urges Black women to test different colors and blend if necessary. No wonder, magazines oriented towards Black women such as *Essence* suggest MAC as one of the brands that “get it right” for Black complexions (Turner, 2007). MAC gets it right because they attempt to include “all races” within their target market. As they plan to open more stores in Europe, MAC’s Vice President, Jean Guillaume Trottier, believes there is potential in targeting the “underserved ethnic population” by customizing color and face products for every consumer (Olsen, 2010) and thus making MAC a truly global brand. To achieve their goal, they aim to customize the coloring of their products for their consumers in every country. In Nigeria, for example, MAC has created a Studio Fix Foundation in 50 shades, including “very dark shades” that are also humidity-resistant to serve the African

woman's lifestyle (Naughton, 2013). MAC also believes that their variety of shades will allow them to appeal to the Nigerian market (Naughton, 2013). India is another country where MAC implemented their global branding strategy. A collection specifically made to complement Indian skin tones was created with Bollywood makeup artist, Mickey Contractor (Jones, 2011). As evident by their global branding efforts, MAC recognizes that there are lifestyle and skin color differences among their consumers. By creating products that appeal to a variety of consumers, MAC is able to reinforce their position as a cosmetic brand that truly caters to people of all ages, all races, and all sexes.

Finally, there is the idea that MAC may present a comfortable environment for millennial Black women to learn new makeup techniques while also surveying product choices. Space is filled with “meaning and differentiation, whether one sits *at the back* of the bus, comes from the *wrong side* of town, or lives in a neighborhood where retailers are *absent*” (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013, p. 32). It is evident that people inhabit retail space, whether they are employees or customers, and attribute meaning to it, which are historically and socially significant. Critical spatial theory claims that businesses seek to preserve and create a specific retail hierarchy where their power remains intact (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013). As a result, social spaces tend to reflect the needs of consumers who have more access to power and resources. According to Les Back (2005), “racism is by nature a spatial and territorial form of power. It aims to secure and claim native/white territory but it also projects associations on to space that in turn invests racial associations and attributes into places” p. 19). The needs of consumers who have less access to resources are invisible in retail, which makes it a space where Black women can experience discrimination and the effects of their lack of social power. Retail

space, particularly in the case of MAC, is more than an area where products are exchanged for profit. Within spaces, social interactions generate our understanding of race. Analyzing a space “reveals its racial grammar as forms of social practice to which race gives rise” (Back, 2005, p. 31). In essence, when we think about retail space and the elements that it is comprised of, we must also think about how the employees, the atmospherics, and the merchandise all play a role in selling and enforcing an overshadowing narrative that speaks to some consumers but not to all.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative research seeks to answer research questions by examining social structures and the individuals that live within them (Berg, 1998). A qualitative methodology strengthens research that seeks “cultural description and ethnography, delves in depth into complexities and processes, or explores novel, ignored, or often marginalized populations” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 90). This research study accomplished all three of these goals by gathering information on a marginalized population (Black women) and exploring the complex relationship between their views of beauty and cosmetic purchases from MAC. For this reason, qualitative research was a good fit for a study that aimed to evaluate this relationship. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with Black millennial women in four cities in Georgia: Athens, Atlanta, Columbus, and Savannah. The women that participated were born between 1982 and 1995. Semi-structured interviews revolve around predetermined questions and topics, which is similar to a standardized interview. A noted difference between the two is that a semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to probe participants for more information beyond the set questions (Berg, 1997). Since I wanted the option of probing participants for more details, interviews were used instead of a survey with predetermined questions.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth Year</u>	<u>Age</u>
Gabrielle	1982	33
Storm	1983	32
Dionne	1985	30
Hope	1987	28
Alana	1987	28
Jordyn	1989	26
Natalie	1989	26
Victoria	1990	25
Harper	1990	25
Nicole	1990	25
Sasha	1990	25
Camille	1995	20

Table 1: Participant details broken down by birth year and age

Data Collection

The use of a semi-structured interview was intended to create a conversation with the participants. Qualitative research that relies on in-depth interviews aims to capture the “deep meaning of experience in the participants’ own words” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 93). Interviews started with questions relating to Black female MAC users’ overall experience with makeup and gradually moved toward specific topics such as why and how they started using MAC.

Sampling and Sample

To qualify for this study, participants had to identify as Black, consider themselves consumers of MAC, and have a birth date falling between 1980 to 2000. For the purpose of this study, the term Black generally referred to a person whose ancestry originates in Africa but it can also signify all non-White minority populations, which is usually the case in politics or power struggles (Agyemang, Bhopal, and Bruijnzeels,

2005). Participants were allowed to choose whether they considered themselves to be Black.

Snowball sampling was the primary method used to recruit participants. This method was chosen due to the limitations of accessible sites where MAC products can be purchased. Also, collecting data from related participants allowed for insights and connections within the data in order to build on a foundation of knowledge established by the initial participant (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Through snowball sampling, participants were able to “identify cases of interest from people who know what cases are information rich” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 111). In line with this, participants were filtered through their friends and family before they were referred to me. It should be noted that time and trust limited semi-structured interviews. Participants had less time to build trust into our relationship before moving into the interview and that may have affected the quality of the information collected. In these situations, I resorted to finding a similarity between the participant and I before or during the interview, which in turn allowed them to feel comfortable expressing their opinions. One purpose of this study was to discover and define the participants’ perspectives on events that occurred in relation to their usage of MAC. Therefore, their subjective view is what mattered the most and this view is most readily obtained through interviewing.

Initial participants were within my social circle. From there, participants reached out to friends and family that qualified for the study. Most of these people were directed to me through social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, though a few participants contacted me through email. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonyms, which were used to protect their

privacy. Though the questions and material collected did not seem to present any risks to participants, pseudonyms were employed to ensure participants were protected. Before interviews took place, a consent form was distributed and participants were also able to ask questions. As the leader of the interview, I informed participants that if they felt uncomfortable at any time, we would pause the interview.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data revolves around the search for general relationships and underlying themes between the participants' opinions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In that respect, coding and analysis happen simultaneously because analysis requires deep thought and reflection which can only occur from going over the data many times in the coding process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To aid in finding these relationships, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed thoroughly and annotated for patterns related to topics, themes, and issues; patterns were coded using phrases or categories. Coding data can also be seen as a representation of analytical thinking (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this sense, categories and themes must be generated from the data by reading through the transcripts and marking appropriate passages that relate to specific categories. In other words, analysis of the data happens as the researcher reads through the transcripts multiple times in order to generate codes. Generic codes may come from a variety of sources including the literature review, repetitive words or phrases found in the transcript, and behaviors mentioned in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

To analyze the data, I used the process of open coding, axial coding, category generalization, and finally interpretation. Open coding took place using the qualitative

software program, Dedoose. On Dedoose, I continuously compared codes and generated the theoretical properties of the categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Codes were then grouped according to their conceptual categories to reflect their similarities and expose their connections. This process is referred to as axial coding because the codes were “clustered around points of intersection, or axes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 215). After axial coding, excerpts were filtered through again in order to find themes. Categories emerged by noting evident patterns that were expressed during the interview. In summary, coding was an extensive but crucial process to presenting and understanding the variables that may have influenced participants’ choices in qualitative data.

Themes emerging from the data are reported in the chapter on results and discussion. Excerpts from the interviews were used to support the themes found. Only those passages that served to illuminate the story were added to the discussion. The following principles informed quotation selections in an attempt to achieve a more reflexive analysis and acknowledge differences amongst participants: a) the intensity of the speaking voice, b) the contradictory moment, and c) emotional content or tone (Opie, 2007). Paying attention to these cues in the transcripts and audio recordings allowed me to identify moments that were important to the participant rather than focusing on what I was waiting to hear. Interpreting the data brought significance and unity to the themes, patterns, and categories developed. These linkages provided a story line that made sense of the data while also being engaging to read (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

counters. Because the primary focus of this study was on the practices of MAC, Black women who did not use MAC were not included.

This study was limited by region. Only Black women within the Southeast region of the United States were interviewed. Women in other areas may have different views of MAC. MAC employees were also considered as participants of this study but a conversation with MAC's customer relations department revealed that MAC prefers to keep all marketing techniques and employee experiences confidential due to the competitive nature of their business. Therefore, information obtained in this study about MAC is limited to the information published by second party outlets and within previous research. One participant, Gabrielle, was a former MAC employee and while her data served to clarify some aspects of MAC, it was not sufficient enough to include in the discussion.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results are presented in a narrative form to create a cohesive picture that integrates the voices of all the participants, while also justifying the themes found in the data collected from my informants. Two feminist theories were used to guide my analysis: queer theory and intersectionality. Queer theory was used to analyze MAC stores as queer spaces that attempt to shatter the invisible divisions found in the beauty section of department stores. As described by Halperin (1995), queer theory consists of many approaches but in essence it theorizes “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, [and] the dominant” (as cited in Milani, 2014, p. 203). Queer theory problematizes “normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality” (as cited in Milani, 2014, p. 99). Intersectionality was used to explain how millennial Black women experience shopping for makeup differently from White women because their experiences are filtered not only through gender, but race and class as well. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) defines intersectionality as a place where systems of race, gender, and class oppression meet in order to examine how these factors affect the lived experience. In relation to MAC, class is also an important aspect of how the participants interact with the brand. In general, most Black people in the US belong to lower socio-economic tiers. Therefore, their access to quality products and their perceptions of luxury brands are also filtered through the lens of class.

The first section, “Millennial Black women as Consumers” answers the following research question:

1) What marketing or sales techniques does MAC employ to attract and retain their consumers?

While the section entitled, “The MAC Environment” answers the remaining two research questions:

1) What attracts consumers to MAC?

2) How does the environment created by MAC influence Black women’s ability to explore their relationship with makeup?

I sought answers to the above questions based on whether or not millennial descriptive characteristics such as an attraction to lifestyle brands apply when broken down by race and gender and class in this study.

Millennial Black women as Consumers

A Better Version of Me

In terms of attracting consumers, specifically millennial Black women, participants identify heavily with their emotional and practical responses to MAC, which result in customer loyalty. Harper, a recent graduate, describes how MAC influenced her self-confidence: “Thankfully MAC has evolved with me. As I’ve gained a better sense of self that was when I started using MAC.” Harper goes on to describe how using MAC lipsticks such as Rebel, Heroine and Paramount particularly influenced her impression of MAC due to the “response that people gave [her].” In her opinion, Harper’s self-

confidence has increased due to her usage of MAC. During her first experience with makeup in 2006, her brother asked her to stop wearing it because she was “getting very good at it” and “that was scaring him.” After hearing this, Harper complied with his request, showing how all women are affected by the patriarchal notions of beauty culture. Her brother expressed concern when she used cosmetics as an empowering skill to change her appearance and her status in life. Generally, men are concerned when women take control of their appearance due to their perception of women’s appearance being created to please the male gaze. Aside from this, Harper views MAC as more than a makeup brand; she also sees it as a tool for self-expression. Her loyalty to MAC revolves around her perception that this brand, and no other, can transform the image she displays in public:

MAC has allowed me to express myself the way I see myself... the most difficult task that I decide every morning is my gender expression. Am I going to be tomboy chic? Am I going to be sexy and ravishing? ...And my lipsticks, my makeup, and what I do with my eyeliners or what I don’t do – it allows me that same opportunity.

Price and Convenience

In this case, the tangible brand components, i.e. the name (MAC) and product (lipstick) influence Harper’s consumer response. Lipstick names such as Rebel, Heroine, and Paramount reinforce MAC’s edginess as they use words that connote strong feelings and lend strength to their wearers. Consumers seeking MAC identify with the names as well as the store environment and this departure from the docile, feminine image is reflected not only in the product names and the makeup artist’s appearance but also in the

type of consumer MAC wants to attract. Using MAC incites an emotion in Harper, which causes her to return and continue to buy their products. When looking for makeup, Harper claims that “whatever you buy...needs to be as natural looking as possible. No matter how creative it is, it needs to still look like it could’ve come from you. It’s an extension of you.” Harper and other participants want to look natural, or in other words, like better versions of themselves. The women in this study are not looking for makeup that allows them to fit into the White norm. In fact, many empathized with Camille who “prefers to look natural.” They seek makeup that reinforces their views of themselves. Yet, while Harper identifies herself as a primary user of MAC, meaning all of her makeup products outside of one or two are MAC, secondary users, such as Sasha, have more brand diversity in their makeup collections. While they exhibit an emotional attachment to MAC as a significant status indicator, their attachment is not definite because they also see it as not affordable.

Sasha and other participants would like to use MAC products but their socio-economic class status prevents them from using it:

To be quite honest, when I first got my foundation from MAC, I was like 'oh I am top class, I am elite, I got some MAC foundation like can't nobody touch me' because MAC is so hyped up for no reason. If you have MAC makeup, you're kind of the shit and if somebody sees that you have MAC eyeliner or MAC blush then they know that you've dropped some money on it, so it's like damn you really care about the makeup you wear...A lot of people still wear drugstore makeup and that's perfectly fine.

Class plays into participant's perceptions of quality makeup. For some, such as Harper and Dionne, their mothers always shopped at "Dillard's or Macy's to buy makeup" and never used "grocery store products." In this case, Dionne and Harper are minorities. The majority of participants in this study started using drugstore brands before deciding to purchase MAC. Because MAC is considered a luxury, participants felt that experimenting with MAC or entering the makeup world with it was an expense they could not afford. Storm saved her allowance and used it to buy the "cheap stuff like Wet n' Wild" and took it home to "play with." Once she started working and "had a little bit more money," brands like Revlon became accessible to her. Convenience also plays a role in purchase decisions as Jordyn recalls her grandmother shopping at "Walmart [because] everything was there for her...there was no need for her to really go into the mall and get makeup like that." Grandmothers and mothers are a reoccurring presence in Black millennial women's lives showing how MAC serves as a generational connector for Black women. Black women favor MAC because its brand heritage translates into the communal culture of the Black community. Harper considers herself a "brand ambassador" and claims that she's introduced "so many people [to] MAC just by...wearing the lipstick." The consequences of marginalization and invisibility of Black women in mainstream culture causes them to follow the examples of trusted family and friends in their social circles. For this reason, other participants such as Gabrielle, a former MAC employee, called MAC the "gold standard." MAC's brand image, which seems to be the most influential aspect of MAC, specifically in the Black community,

attracts consumers through word of mouth. MAC's appearance as "elite" and as the "gold standard" makes consumers feel as if they are purchasing a quality product. Regardless of the interaction that may take place at the point of purchase, the tangible components such as the MAC name and product reinforce the intangible aspects of the brand image and social status that really attract the Black consumer. Physical aspects such as packaging, "the sleek blackness with that silver writing" reinforces the brand image and inspires users to feel as if "this is MAC!" according to Harper.

Social status, specifically, seems to be one of the main attractions for millennial Black women. Jordyn knew what MAC was from an early age, but, unlike Dionne who interpreted MAC as the "cool and young brand," Jordyn viewed MAC as a reference and access point to heightened status amongst her peers.

I knew what MAC was. It was the highest thing. If you went to MAC, you were the shit so I wanted to be like 'oh yeah, I went to MAC.' Also, just the fact of going to a counter for makeup was exciting to me. I always wanted to be able to buy MAC products because the people that I knew that went there and could afford to go there, I wanted to be like them. I wanted to be powerful one day. It was that type of thing but they were African Americans. It's like; you would strive to get what they have, to be where they are. They were powerful.

Using MAC would be a sign to Jordyn that she has achieved the status and power that she was seeking. Appearance is important for Black women because they are more scrutinized due to inherent racism and therefore need to put more effort into appearing smart and organized in professional settings. Many of the participants associate MAC

with higher quality and status, while simultaneously seeing MAC for what it is: a brand.

When asked why she thought MAC was special, Sasha replied:

When you think about it, it's really not. It's not like they specialize in anything. Maybe their lipstick colors are a little more vibrant and better but for the most part, it's really not anything different. I haven't tried any other liquid foundation besides MAC, but I feel like I could find one from Maybelline or something like that because I know a lot of people who use drugstore foundations and they look flawless, so I'm pretty sure it's nothing majorly different about the two. It's just the name really and the price tag on it.

Storm, a Ph.D. student, echoed Sasha's sentiments by stating that "MAC carries this really heavy brand recognition with it as far as it being the makeup that you want and need in your life...MAC is like yes, our product, our product only." Sasha and Storm are not unique in their perceptions of MAC as MAC is very successful in maintaining a strong core identity. Millennials, in general, are not easily duped consumers. So if emotional responses, status implications, and perceived product quality attract these women to MAC, what keeps them coming back? How and when do they become loyal consumers?

Presentation is Important

For millennials, presentation in the digital age is crucial. Millennials feel the need to be camera-ready, regardless of whether they are in public or not; for Black women, make up is a part of presenting a complete image of how they would like to be perceived in public. This, partially, stems from the cultural differences between Black women and White women in the US. Where Black culture can be seen as more communal, White culture is typically more individualistic. When White culture dominates mainstream

media, Black women are aware that their appearance will be more scrutinized than their White counterparts. Therefore, it is no surprise that all the women agreed that makeup should always be worn for special occasions and professional settings. Natalie expressed this feeling with the following statement:

When you're meeting with people, definitely, no question, you need to have your makeup on and it has to look right. If you're going to work... and especially if you have a presentation where you're going to be talking in front of people and they're going to be looking at you - you should give them something nice to look at.

In Natalie's eyes, her relationship to makeup also involves the onlookers and their perception of her. Dionne also stated "I feel like if I go to work...it's expected of me to look presentable." The emphasis on looking "presentable" reinforces the millennial idea of constant visibility and also concurs with Davis' (2013) findings, that Black women place more of an importance on being presentable when measured by others perceptions.

Millennials are a visual generation. Makeup is more than a professional necessity; it is a daily requirement for them to be ready for any photo opportunity that may end up on Facebook or Instagram. In addition, the parents of Black female millennials have long emphasized to their daughters the need to work twice as hard in the professional world for acceptance, which their children internalized. They turned to makeup because they saw it as a tool that empowered them and allowed them to succeed in multiple arenas. This trend was also identified in Davis' study which involved women from various age groups and analyzed their reasoning for using makeup. Women's explanations regarding makeup use in Davis's study focused on self-enhancement and

increased self-confidence. Similarly, many participants in this study also commented on how makeup made their look feel “complete.” However, for my interviewees, it was only a necessity when they expected to interact with others or be photographed. MAC, as Hope put it, was an “upgrade in makeup that [she] could use for special occasions but [she] was [also] going to be able to use [it] every day after the occasion as well.”

MAC affords millennials status and creativity in presentation. Self-presentation is a purposeful action by the consumer in an attempt to control how they are perceived by others (Doster, 2013). Millennials are not different from any other cohort in this respect. Other generations have also linked their self-presentation to popular brands in order to associate intangible brand aspects with themselves (Doster, 2013). This perception of using makeup to please the invisible other is prominent amongst women in this study. As my informant, Victoria, stated “sometimes, makeup does make me feel more confident. So I’ll put it on before an interview or something like that. Something where I know everyone is going to be looking at my face.” Jordyn also expressed that “makeup [is] for times and places,” but especially for “a ball” because going without makeup will make “you look like the weird person out of the group.” The influence of others weighs heavily on millennial women’s perceptions of themselves. Take Natalie, for example, who states:

I noticed when I was in college and I was having a really rough day or I just didn't have time, people would ask me like are you sick? Are you okay? And I'm like jeez, do I really look that bad without makeup? For that reason, I think, I like to wear makeup because I don't like being asked if I'm sick or if I'm unwell.

Nicole attributes the need to be presentable not only to millennials, but to all members of her gender. “I just kind of had it ingrained that as a woman [makeup] seems to be a part of our routine and what we put on before we go and see the world.” Harper also believes that “makeup is appropriate, not necessary, but appropriate” if you plan to be “anywhere that pictures will be taken.” The common thread of the expectation to be presentable was best exemplified in Sasha’s description of a night out with her partner:

I went to a ball with my boyfriend not too long ago. Because of his background, being from money, I feel like I have to match him because he dresses nice all the time, every day. And I knew he was going to have on his bow tie and his suit. *Of course*, I was going to put on my black dress and my red lip and I just felt like it matched him. Like I had to be something that he would want to tote on his arm.

Overall, data showed that millennials want to look good, not only for pictures or for themselves but also as a way to uphold the appearance that they have created for others. Davis (2013) uses concepts of power to explain why young Black women would want to put their best face forward. She argues that the ability to take control of their beauty and create “the real” expression of themselves is a form of empowerment. She concluded that makeup, in general, empowered her informants by giving them the tools to create their ideal self. My informants expressed similar feelings and said that MAC aided in this process by providing products for more diverse skin tones in a more inclusive environment. MAC made sure that what was absent before now became accessible, which inherently helped Black women gain control over their image. MAC also helps respondents create an independent, playful, and creative self; an idea that millennials want.

Harper loves that MAC allows her to “be an artist” and “color, paint, and express” herself. Gabrielle also sees makeup as fun and reminiscent of “coloring.” Millennials view MAC as a young and hip brand that targets them because of its wide variation in makeup colors. Harper thinks that “older women are less apt to dabble in bold colors” and for “women in their 20s,” MAC is more appropriate because there are more colors that will “match [their] outfits.”

In many respects, millennial Black women exhibit the same qualities in their consumer buying behavior that have been attributed to their entire generational group. A successful millennial brand has to master three qualities: 1) Quality products at an affordable price; 2) Social responsibility; and 3) Using relatable personalities for advertising. In this study, data shows that millennial Black women identify with MAC on all three levels. MAC was recognized as “the best of the best” by Rachel, for example, and the “gold standard” by Gabrielle, reflecting their belief that MAC has quality products. While they were happy to identify with a brand that cares about marginalized communities, they claimed that this did not influence them to make a purchase. Gabrielle explained her conception of it when discussing MAC’s Viva Glam Campaign by stating:

I think it’s amazing to give back to AIDS and I like the concept but if there’s a color that I like and it happens to be Viva Glam then I’m like oh great, kill two birds with one stone, but I don’t go for it just because its Viva Glam.

Sasha could also see the appeal of Viva Glam to her peers, but ultimately proclaimed, “When I go to MAC, I’m going for a specific color that I know I want. So Viva Glam doesn’t influence me.” Surprisingly, few participants were actually aware of MAC’s Viva Glam and Back to MAC programs as social responsibility campaigns, and actually

interpreted them to be a part of MAC's advertising. Their perception supports the current zeitgeist of millennials who are queer friendly and socially responsible.

Class position was a more important factor for these women when evaluating MAC products. They stated that price was the main deterrent for them in the pursuit of MAC's products. Many felt that MAC was out of their price range, and therefore a luxury. For example, when Victoria was introduced to IMAN, a cosmetic line specifically for women of color, she experienced a sense of relief. Reliving that moment, she stated:

It sucks to have to pay to look beautiful, even though you know, I'm already beautiful. But to be extra beautiful (laughs) you have to pay so much more when other people don't, so it's like okay, now I have an opportunity to be more beautiful in my budget.

In the same vein, Natalie loved how make up allowed her to perform her femininity, but she also stated that she sought products "that work well for the price." Even Sasha felt that MAC would make more profit if the prices were lower:

If the prices drop, people will buy it. Right now, people are like 'I like MAC but I don't have the money to buy it,' so I'm buying like one lipstick a month. Whereas if the lipsticks were \$5, I would have a thousand lipsticks, I wouldn't even care if they looked good or not on me, I would just have them!"

For millennials as a whole, and for the participants in this study as well, quality and price go hand in hand. For example, Dionne stated "I like their quality for the price." So, while MAC may offer the same appearance of quality for everyone, for some participants, the price is *not* right. Women like Harper and Dionne always purchased beauty products from the makeup counters in department stores, which reflect their middle class position.

MAC and Lancôme were a part of their lives growing up. In contrast, other women, such as Storm and Jordyn, bought their makeup from drugstores. Therefore, logically, their perceptions of price are different because they exist within a different frame of reference. What is expensive for one group may be an average cost for others.

So far, MAC has established itself as a brand selling quality products at a price around its worth and while MAC may consider social ethics to be one of the core values of the brand, millennial consumers appeared not to have been generally persuaded by this. In contrast, what does seem to resonate with millennials is the authenticity MAC projects through its celebrity advertisements. In fact, most participants viewed Viva Glam as an advertising campaign rather than a part of MAC's social responsibility programs. Participants in this study were familiar with the celebrities but not with the MAC Aids Fund, which is funded by Viva Glam.

Millennials are very conscious of marketing techniques and respond better to honest and authentic celebrities (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). The right celebrity can easily earn credibility for the brand amongst millennial consumers. Take for example, Victoria's explanation of her decision not to purchase a lipstick from Rihanna's collection for MAC:

Jaleesa: So has Rihanna's line influenced your view of MAC?

Victoria: No, I have a friend that bought it and she really likes it and it looks nice on her. I do like the shade.

Jaleesa: But you do like Rihanna?

Victoria: Yes.

Jaleesa: And seeing her have a line didn't make you want to go buy it?

Victoria: I mean it did, I just knew I couldn't afford it. It'd be different if it was Beyoncé. If Beyoncé came out with a makeup line, I'd probably go and scrape up a little bit.

Jaleesa: Okay, so it depends on the celebrity?

Victoria: Yeah of course, I love Rihanna. I went to her concert like last year but I won't do all that [because of her alone].

Here, Victoria displays how her loyalty to a celebrity influences her willingness to purchase a product sponsored by them. Her priority is on the celebrity she wants to support rather than the product. One can also say that for Victoria, the celebrity representing the brand and the product itself are two separate things. Yet, for Dionne, the opposite is true: "I feel like they (MAC) weren't really doing anything for a long time, just kind of riding their name, but then they picked up Rihanna and Nicki Minaj and that kept them relevant." It is this "love" for Rihanna that makes Dionne feel that "Rihanna and Nicki Minaj have been good for MAC getting the African Americans and the younger girls and revamping their image."

Out of all the celebrity collaborations MAC has done within the past couple of years, Rihanna and Nicki Minaj seemed to be the most relevant to the women in this study. No other celebrities, besides RuPaul, were mentioned in relation to MAC. Rihanna appears to represent the aspirational qualities of millennial Black women as consumers. Dionne describes her as a "definite influence" while Harper described how Rihanna's lips made her pursue MAC lipsticks with these words:

Her lips are...they are gorgeous. They are so beautiful. Whether they're photoshopped or not, the woman has a great pair of lips but also she looks so sexy when she has her lipstick on. I think that's the only time I truly connect with Rihanna because she makes you zoom in on her lips and you focus on the beauty of what God has created in that small shape, right? She truly put me on [to] MAC lipstick.

The rhetoric surrounding how the participants view Rihanna shows that MAC made a smart choice in making Rihanna a creative partner in 2013. Rihanna is clearly considered to be an authentic personality for millennial Black women; one that they can identify with and aspire to be like. When brands are able to master this strategy, it translates into sales.

Dionne expressed how her love for Rihanna made her buy the products:

I've scaled back on my MAC buying...but when Rihanna got on the train and Nicki Minaj then I started buying it again. I had to be at work at 9am and it released at 9am Seattle time, 12pm EST, so I had my dad with his iPad and his laptop and I was like 'you have to do it exactly at 9!' He said it took him like 2 1/2 hours to get it because the server was jammed but he ended up getting it. He still talks about it to this day, like 'you better love those lipsticks! I don't even understand how anyone could know that you have on Rihanna's lipsticks' and I was like 'but it's serious!' and he said 'nothing is that serious, I don't get it' and I was like 'you're not a girl so you don't get it.' But Rihanna, definitely, like, her stuff sells out so fast, it's crazy.

Similar lipstick colors may have already existed at the MAC counter, but Rihanna's version of those colors somehow became more important to millennials.

The need to associate themselves with her supports the strong relationship that a celebrity endorsement can create for a brand (Yarrow & Donnell, 2009).

To summarize the findings of this section, self-presentation and the ongoing upkeep of a desirable public image were found to be important motivations for millennials in establishing and sustaining their consumer relationship with MAC. Because Black and White millennial women are affected by the similar social and gender norms, Black women have not displayed noticeable differences from their White peers in their purchasing habits of cosmetics. However, differences between the two groups do become apparent, if we factor intersectionality into our analysis. Even though millennial Black women seem to live in a post-racial society, my informants appeared to be very aware of the fact that even today only limited numbers of cosmetic products exist or cater to their specific needs. As a result, their daily experiences with cosmetic products and services significantly differed from those of White millennial women.

Even though it was my informants' socio-economic class status that dictated what products they consumed, they all perceived MAC as high quality brand. They were also aware of and appreciated its inclusive service policies. The participants in this study felt they could trust the brand because the brand's philosophy specifically included them and its product offerings were designed with their specific needs in mind. They also could relate to the celebrities that endorsed MAC, which provided credibility and authenticity to MAC in the eyes of millennials.

The next section shows how MAC conveys its brand philosophy and core identity by creating a space that embraces "all ages, classes, races and sexes." It details MAC's

retail strategies that successfully draw millennial Black women consumers to its counters and turns them into loyal MAC consumers.

The MAC Environment

The type of music, tempo and volume can also have an impression on consumers depending on their age. Evidently, music is a key aspect of the store environment and for MAC, it is often one of the first things consumers notice. Gabrielle reminisces on the first time she noticed MAC; “There was music bumping, it was this big party and that was part of what initially attracted me to it” and Harper also noticed the “music playing” when she entered into the MAC space. This environment, along with the lighting, attracts new consumers such as Gabrielle, Harper and Dionne, who also made the decision to switch to MAC due to its music and overall appearance:

In high school, you're too cool for your parents so I just chose MAC... I felt that MAC was the cool and young brand. My other friends were wearing it and their counter looked more cool in comparison to the Lancôme counter. The workers looked younger and just more...hip.

Department store makeup counters are known for their pristine appearance. The white counters and glass cases are meant to emphasize the clean and pure aesthetic that comes with their form of beauty. As Harper noted, she was turned off both by Clinique’s name and the corresponding clinical feel of the brands counters: MAC “has a youthful edge...that Clinique doesn’t...It’s the name... Branding is so important when it comes to how you advertise your product and MAC sounds chic. It sounds...I don’t want to say festive but it gives me a sophisticated Hollywood edge.” In line with Harper’s sentiments, MAC is often the rebel in the traditional retail environment. It draws millennials in with

its bright lighting, black counters, colorful eye shadows on display and loud music. In comparison to other beauty counters, MAC queers the retail space, which is traditionally reserved for creating a clinical, yet luxurious approach to beauty. The differences seemed apparent for the women in this study because they made frequent comparisons between MAC and their neighboring counters, such as Clinique and Estée Lauder. For example, Camille had this to say:

All my friends use MAC and I think it's a good company. I feel like MAC makeup is made for Black people. Like I said, I like Estée Lauder and I'll buy their powders and things but I don't really use their makeup. Whenever I'm in the mall or just hearing people talk, like the people that do makeup in the mall, they never have Black people working at Estée Lauder or Clinique ... so I think Black people wouldn't want to work for them then. They're probably not using their makeup. MAC seems to always have Black women working the counter. I don't know any White people who use MAC.

Camille interprets MAC to be a space where only Black women work and shop. Though MAC does not portray itself as a makeup brand targeting Black women like Fashion Fair and IMAN, Camille perceives their store environment and their employees to be more appealing to her and, by extension, more appealing to Black women, in general. The lighting, as Harper puts it, is “centered on the mirrors to where...you can see the difference between one side of my skin and the other so I know what I'm buying.” Millennials expect value for their money and the mirror lighting at MAC allows them to see how the product changes their face and ensure that they are making a sound purchase

decision. The lighting and inclusiveness of the MAC counter was also noted by Jordyn who said:

I actually like the lighting of the MAC counter. It's inclusive. It doesn't feel bougie, like no one will want to help you at this counter and you don't feel like you have to worry about whether or not they have your shade. It's like for all when you go to a MAC counter.

Jordyn and Harper's comments on how the lighting feels more inclusive is not a chance occurrence. The store environment becomes a "venue for the realization of the brand," due to the fact that brands are not just selling products but also "lifestyles, images, and aspirational values desired by customers" (Wigley et. al, 2013, p. 258). Harper, who is a typical millennial Black woman, also finds the use of bright lighting to be a proper sales strategy. The bright lights fool no one. The millennial consumer, who seeks value and tactile experiences for her money can clearly see the difference MAC products make by looking at mirrors illuminated by bright lights. Harper added that "MAC is my investment" further supporting the millennial expectations that MAC must be worth the money.

To fit in at the MAC counter, one must be different from the typical consumer. To attract such consumers, MAC's retail spaces must function as a queer space. A queer space is not merely a copy or disruption of a heterosexual space, which is the normative space in mainstream society (Oswin, 2008). Rather, it can be interpreted as a disruption of spaces that are generally typified by race, class or gender (Oswin, 2008). Queer spaces exist in contrast to the dominant narrative expressed by a particular space. Without normative spaces to compare them to, queer spaces are difficult to conceive. Normative

spaces are characterized by mainstream values. In other words, they are White, middle class, and reflective of heteronormative values. Queer spaces exist in opposition to normative spaces by challenging the dominant narrative. Figure 4 shows a side by side comparison of a MAC beauty counter as a queer space and a Clinique beauty counter as the norm. In the process of attracting consumers of “all ages, all races, and all sexes,” MAC turns the typical beauty experience on its head. At a MAC counter, the shopping experience is loud, the retail space is busy and messy, and the beauty tips imparted to the consumer support an alternative beauty aesthetic. A MAC sales associate typically suggests creative ways to express one’s beauty. During their makeup demonstrations, they tell clients to be self-affirming and in control of their appearance.



Figure 4: A typical MAC counter (left) and a Clinique counter (right) in a department store. In a department store setting, these two counters would occupy the same space.

Jordyn made sense of MAC’s retail environment with these words: “MAC is the only counter where I see racial diversity in their workers, which makes it feel like a safe place for me to go.” The emphasis here is clearly on the word “safe.” Makeup counters are not typically described as areas where power struggles and discrimination play out, but for Black women, seeking makeup is more than finding a matching shade, as it

emerged from my interviews. Queer spaces, such as the MAC counter, are “open” as Harper explains. They are places that allow consumers of different races, genders, and classes to participate in market exchanges from which they may normally be excluded or discouraged from visiting. Therefore, the MAC counter is attractive to Black millennial women because MAC does not attempt to fit into the dominant space and can, consequently, function as an access point into the luxury segment of makeup. Thus, MAC becomes a place for the “transport of desire through the transportation of goods” (Wigley et. al, 2013, p. 258).

To fully understand the retail experiences of a consumer, one has to analyze all the interactions that may take place in the store environment. For Black women, knowledge seems to be the most immediate factor that brings them to MAC. Because there are few cosmetic brands that directly target them, makeup product knowledge tends to be low. Consumers with low or incomplete product knowledge base their purchases on interpretations they receive from signals communicated by the design features of the retail store (Healy, Beveland, Oppewal, & Sands, 2007).

At MAC, knowledge is gained from a permanent fixture of the store: the MAC makeup artist. As highly trained employees, MAC makeup artists serve as reference points for consumers. Interaction with employees is a crucial part of the MAC experience. Victoria describes the employees as “very friendly” and “understanding [towards] people like [her]...who are just introduced into the makeup world.” Harper elaborated on the same thing by describing the employees as “attentive,” while also comparing them to sales associates at Victoria’s Secret:

I always get people who know what they're talking about. If they're not doing tutorials to train their new people, they're doing it on your face, telling you what's good and it's kind of like they're the antithesis of Victoria's Secret to me.

Victoria's Secret is like, depressed when they're measuring your bra.

...[Although] they make you feel good, make you feel sexy, which I love. But

with MAC, they do the same thing, they make you feel loved, they make you feel sexy. But, it's like "girl, that's not your skin tone. That color doesn't look good on

you. This is what you've been using? Okay, yeah, that does work for you. Or

maybe you shouldn't use this product. Why do you want to use this product?" I

like that. I like being able to make informed and educated decisions with the truth

and I feel like I get that with MAC.

Thus, Harper feels that working with a MAC makeup artist is similar to getting advice from a trusted friend. She comes away from the experience thinking that she and the makeup artist connected on a personal level and that MAC's sales associate was more interested in helping her than closing a sale, which then makes her want to come back again and again. Like a friend, MAC wants to help their customers but they are also not afraid to point out what you need to change in order to look your best. Healy and her coauthors describe Harper's experience as a result of the interaction between consumers and the brand. Through this process, they argue, consumers such as Harper, are made to believe that they have a degree of control over the operations of the store (Healy et al., 2007). Furthermore, they also take ownership in the value created from these exchanges. Black millennial customers feel that through the knowledge received at the MAC counter the power hierarchy of the White, heteronormative beauty-industrial complex is being

redistributed, which makes their experiences at the MAC counter empowering and self-affirming.

While many participants expected MAC employees to be knowledgeable and full of personality, others viewed MAC's popularity as an obstacle. According to Hope, "they're always busy. I could never actually talk to anyone at MAC because they always had lines...I promise you, you will never see a person at MAC who is not busy." Still, other participants claimed that the MAC employees were precisely the reason they were attracted to the MAC counter. Dionne sums up the participant's notions of the MAC employee with her musings on their style:

I think a really big part of attracting people for MAC is [...] the way the artists dress. They usually have on all black, with crazy hair and tattoos...The other counters just don't stand out to me... They stick to a script basically with how they want their workers to look...it seems like a lot of the MAC makeup artists, they're usually spunky and they have that look. Like you can look at a girl and say, oh she's a MAC makeup artist. I feel like they've done a good job of staying true to that aspect of their business model. It almost speaks for itself.

Gabrielle also expects the employees to have a personality that matches their style, which makes the brand more authentic in her mind:

I went to MAC in Lenox square. So, the guy was a little more flamboyant, which just made the experience a little more "uh uh boo you need to do that, do that lip" So, it just made me like "okay, yeah yeah, let me do that lip!"

The MAC makeup artist seems to be one of the key, if not the most important, factor in sustaining MAC's edgy image. MAC may attract consumers with their nonconventional

store atmospherics, such as using extra bright lighting, loud, thumping music or an inviting, open store design, but it is still the MAC makeup artist that brings the experience to life. In the knowledge exchange that takes place at the MAC counter, MAC inadvertently empowers Black women by teaching Black millennials, such as Victoria, new makeup techniques or matching foundation shades for others. Hope and Natalie both identify themselves as secondary users of MAC who perceive the importance of the brand to their social circle, but are limited by budget to purchasing other brands. Seeing that “MAC has a lot of different makeup... not just different colors. There’s 4-5 different types of foundation based on skin type,” Hope proceeds to be matched by a MAC employee, only to state “I have a cheaper version of foundation that I wear too that works pretty well also. It's by Maybelline so I wasn't that surprised that she could find a color that fits me.” The ability to find a shade through MAC and then find a similar one at a cheaper price at a regular drug store is a special aspect of MAC that Black millennials appreciate. MAC provides Black women with the possibility of gaining knowledge on cosmetic usage from a professional, which in turn also allows them to experiment with other makeup brands within their budget. Exchanges at the MAC counter with makeup artists makes Black millennial women aware that they should look for a foundation color that is specifically for them.

Above all, the products themselves are the drivers of brand expression (Deserti, 2014). As Hope stated, MAC’s merchandise mix is diverse in terms of products and the different segments within a product line, which is what Black millennial women, constricted by limited choices offered by the mainstream beauty industry, mostly seek.

Victoria, when discussing this aspect of MAC, expressed her frustration with finding a foundation that matched her skin tone elsewhere:

I was trying not to have to spend so much money just to find foundation, so I tried some brands that were like “we cater to all women, this, this, or that and the other” but when you bring it home and try it, it just doesn’t work.

Natalie expressed the same sentiments when she described her experience with purchasing drugstore foundation. Even though she was able to find a product that matched her skin tone, her initial perception changed once she took the product home as well:

I recall that they were doing a lot of advertisements for L’Oréal True Match and I think Beyoncé was one of the faces for [it] back then, so I was like oh great, drugstore brand and they’ve got Black people shades and they say that there’s special particles that will like blend or match your skin if you get something that’s just in the general neighborhood, so I thought that sounds like a fool-proof way for me to go pick my first foundation. So, I went and I picked their powder foundation but that broke me out really bad after a few months. Like the first couple of months were great, but then I don’t know what happened but my entire face revolted against that so, I immediately went about trying to find something new.

The ability to try a product before buying it, which is an important quality for millennials that are product savvy, but have limited budgets, lures consumers away from popular drugstore brands such as L’Oréal and Covergirl, who claim to have makeup for everyone,

to MAC, a brand that not only showcases variety but supplies the education to go with it as well.

While for White women, participating in the beauty industry is often only a question of choice, for Black women it is a more complicated matter. Kodak's Shirley card is an example of how pervasive the ideology of White beauty as the norm can be. The Shirley card served as the standard against which all developed film images were measured against during the 1940s and 1950s. To be visible on film one had to be close to or near Shirley's light complexion. People with darker complexions experienced image problems such as "reproduction of facial images without details, lighting challenges, and ashen-looking facial skin colors [which] contrasted strikingly with the whites of eyes and teeth" (Roth, 2009). The difference was not due to the fact that technology was behind, but rather that the chemists and engineers of the film processing industry did not believe Black consumers were interested in film or photography (Roth, 2009). Similarly, from a Black woman's perspective, the beauty industry also assumes that they are not interested in makeup. For example, Victoria's past experiences with Covergirl turned her off from using it in the future. Even though Covergirl attempts to attract her with a new line using Janelle Monae, an R&B singer and songwriter, as a spokesperson for their Trublend foundation, Victoria says "I gave up on Covergirl...I've learned my lesson." In contrast to MAC, Covergirl's Queen line is separate from their main product lines. The separation reinforces the differences that Black millennial women experience in shopping. MAC's product variations are not in the type but rather in the color. One type of foundation may have 30 different colors, while Covergirl may have 3 different product lines with only one specifically targeting Black women. As Roth (2009) explains, the "White-biased

international standard for the ideal flesh tone” has been used as a measurement against which the skin of people of color has been “read negatively as an aggravation — a deviation from the invisible norm” (p. 117). The same can be said for foundation shades for Black women and their negative reading is reinforced by the separation that beauty companies enforce. It is evident from this example that racism is so ingrained and White privilege is so invisible that such practices go unnoticed until they are actually challenged by consumers. It also suggests that Black women’s experience in the makeup world was indeed very different than that of White women because mainstream brands in the past never considered women of all races as their *target* consumers, which proves how unique MAC’s approach actually was when in its motto spoke about “all races.” Roth (2009) shows that what these products and technologies favor or ignore is evident in their design and marketing, which can create a division between Black women and the assumed experience at makeup counters. In this respect, the research on millennials holds true for Black women as well – presentation and image is a priority – but the beauty industry still functions under the impression that Black women are not interested or their needs do not matter.

Drugstore makeup is easily accessible and this plays a key role in purchasing decisions. Jordyn recalls going to Clinique to buy a foundation because “there wasn’t a MAC [store] available” only to find that “at the time, they didn’t have [her] color fully in stock and [she] never went back to try and get it either.” Instead, she made a special trip to MAC where she found that “getting matched at MAC was quicker compared to Clinique.” Similar stories of the various trials and money wasted in search of products for

Black women are prevalent amongst the participants, but it is Victoria's experience at Ulta that best exemplifies why Black women seek MAC as an alternative to other brands.

I don't think she meant anything bad by it but I was asking her [sales associate] about how to apply the makeup and where I need to go to find makeup for my skin tone and she was like, just [go to] YouTube videos for dark skinned girls or something. And there were three of us and we all looked at each other like what?! I don't think she meant anything bad by it ...but like the way it came out – you could tell that anything darker than her, she didn't know about. So, we ended the conversation there. It's sad because she works for a makeup place that's supposed to cater to everybody. Black women, tend to still know a ton about makeup for people that are lighter than them. Like a White person can go and get makeup advice from a dark skinned Black person and she would be able to help them. It's not the same for White people. It's like that world, our world, is just not there. ...[They say] go to YouTube. I'm not touching that and it's like okay! (laughs) [But] You should know this stuff! You're selling it!

If employees are instrumental in creating an environment that is appealing to consumers, then this particular employee surely has created one that lets Victoria know that not only is this store not for her, but they also do not want her business. Instead of attempting to find an associate that would be better understand Victoria's needs, the sales associate just directed her to YouTube, which she apparently thought was the only place Black women could seek assistance on makeup. Combine the sales associates' reaction with the rejection that Victoria and other participants feel as a result of not being able to find suitable products and you come upon the gap in the cosmetics market that MAC fulfills.

Despite this, the question still remains: Does MAC really target Black women or millennials? More than likely, the answer is no. MAC is a global company, which is expected to make as much profit as it can, but as Harper puts it:

[MAC] treats me like an individual. I don't feel like when I walk in, they say, "Oh here's another Black girl". I feel like they look at my skin, they look at my problem areas...and they're like, let's see how we can help you look like a better you.

To be treated as an individual and receive personalized service is important for millennials. Harper goes on to emphasize how just because she is Black does not mean her friends wear the same makeup:

I have friends who are brown skin, light skin, and dark brown and they're all like they're not going to give them the same product they give me and I appreciate that. Don't give me that when you know it's not for me!

MAC provides its employees with the resources and training necessary to make every customer feel like an individual. Although a MAC makeup artist may see 20-50 customers in a typical day, depending on the store location, they still distribute the knowledge of products and the latest makeup trends in these interactions, which allows MAC to appear as if they are 'in the know' and, therefore, a go to place for expert, personalized advice.

The above analysis, relying on the data collected from Black millennial women, showed that MAC provides a safe and inclusive space for this cohort. Because Black millennial women are satisfied with the personalized services and product variety MAC provides them with, MAC ends up not only earning their business, when their budget

allows it, but their loyalty as well. Even in this strong relationship with MAC, Black millennial women understand that MAC is not perfect. Their quest for knowledge translates to researching product ingredients. In their full empowerment, Harper feels that respondents will move away from “using as many chemicals or artificially enhanced products” because they care about their bodies. For the present, MAC is perfect but in the future, MAC will have to change for continued brand loyalty.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The following major themes emerged from the interview data collected from 12 participants in Georgia in 2014:

1. Self-image management and presentation are important to millennial Black women who use MAC to create and reinforce an acceptable image for themselves as well as mainstream society. Despite the limitations of the hegemonic, White beauty-industrial complex, which continues to ignore their specific needs, MAC provides them with appropriate choices for their skin tones and coloring.
2. Millennial Black women have an emotional relationship with MAC, which is created and influenced by specific aspects of the store environment and the customer service they experience at the MAC counter. These include the bright and inclusive lighting used in MAC stores, the loud, in-your-face music they can relate to, the cool, sleek merchandise displays that enhance their shopping experiences and, most importantly, a personalized customer service interaction with MAC's makeup artists.
3. MAC employees' ability to educate millennial Black women on new makeup techniques, while also providing them with professional expertise in regards to product choice, makes them feel empowered, which increases brand loyalty.

Although millennial Black women share consumer behavioral characteristics with other millennials, they experience mainstream retail environments, which generally reflect social hierarchy and dominant power relationships, differently. Because they feel welcome, wanted, and valued at MAC, both through the tangible and intangible characteristics of the brand, they tend to lend their consumer support to it, especially if the products they are seeking are priced within their reach. Though MAC influences how participants perceive themselves, embracing Black female consumers by one company is not enough to change the status quo for Black women in society. While MAC may succeed in targeting all ages, all races, and all sexes; a critical lens reveals that MAC is still a company whose primary focus is not social justice, but the profitability of the company. Ultimately, MAC primarily cares about Black women because Black women's consumer dollars significantly influence the company's bottom line.

This study contributes to academic research in multiple ways. First, it defines Black women's social and personal motivations when it comes to shopping for cosmetics. Second, it adds to the very few existing studies that currently focus on Black women as primary consumers of makeup. Not including a comparative group in the study is a conscious choice I made because research on the beauty industry and its effects on White women abound, whereas research on the needs and perspectives of the Black female consumer groups is very limited. Third, this project applied the concept of queer space in analyzing MAC's retail environment. Up until this point, queer theory as an analytic tool to analyze space has been reserved mostly for outdoor areas, such as parks or aspects of tourism where racial and classist divides are more visible. Applying the concept of intersectionality and queer space to retail and combining it with qualitative data to

understand consumer experience will add depth to future interpretations of the underlying power and racial dynamics that exist in retail.

Brand personality is a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. A brand's image has to reflect this personality through emotions triggered in consumers and experienced by them during interaction (Iannilli, 2014). Thus, the success of a brand ultimately comes down to feeling. How does a consumer feel when they enter a store? Does that feeling remain when they purchase the product? How does the emotional response to the product change once they are outside of the store, when they are at home? What emotions exist in them when they are with their friends discussing the product? Does the brand image live on?

Consumers exist on intersecting levels of race, gender, and class. Consequently, their purchase decisions are influenced by the context in which they live their lives. This qualitative study, conducted from a feminist perspective, analyzed how millennial Black female consumers experience retail environments. It may yield new ways in which merchandisers can apply the concepts of race, class and gender to create retail environments that are inclusive for all consumers.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could expand on the sample size of informants and see how a larger number of research subjects may affect the primary themes emerging from the data. Because this study was limited by region, future research could also expand on the sample by collecting data from Black women outside of Georgia or even women from other cultural backgrounds. Differences in the emotional response to MAC, depending on the age at which participants started using MAC and their knowledge of other makeup

brands that may be considered more high-end than MAC were noted while the research was conducted. Therefore, in future studies it might be interesting to explore the motivations behind how and why Black women move from MAC to other prestigious brands. This research focused only on Black women who use MAC. This study would have perhaps been more complete if it also investigated the motivations of those Black women who, despite MAC's inclusive company philosophy, are not attracted to or choose not to use the brand.

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APPENDICES

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM THE USE OF MAC COSMETICS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Katalin Medvedev
Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors
medvedev@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research is to discover what attracts African American women to and how they make the decision to purchase MAC Cosmetics. The focus is on African American women because they are more likely to experience an exclusion of shade matching options in a typical makeup counter setting. Compared to other women of color, African Americans are the least likely to have brands to choose from that reflect the beauty standard within their community. The goal is to determine the relationship between decision-making among African American consumers, their idea of beauty, and techniques that MAC employs to reach them.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer questions related to your usage of MAC Cosmetics and experience with the cosmetic industry. Interviews are estimated to last between 1 to 3 hours. If noteworthy information is uncovered, you may be contacted again for a follow up interview. The second interview will also last between 1 to 3 hours. Interviews will be recorded.

Risks and discomforts

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

By participating in this study, you may become aware of your role as a minority consumer in the makeup industry. Positive emotions, such as feelings of happiness may

be elicited by the interview questions. You may also find talking about your experiences to be beneficial. This research will shed a light on what African American women seek from cosmetic brands and how these brands can create products that secure some of the purchasing power from this market.

Audio/Video Recording

For this research, audio recording will be used. It will be important to identify individual and collective responses to better understand whether or not trends are apparent. Audio recordings will be retained until all interviews are completed and transcribed. They will be destroyed no later than May 2018.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

All information collected from participants will be confidential. Only members of the research team will have access to related documents. Documents containing information given by participants will not contain any personally identifying information at any time. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants for use in reports and presentations. After audio-recording, digital files will be downloaded to and will be saved in a password-protected computer. Files will be deleted after the analysis is complete but no later than May 31, 2018. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Katalin Medvedev, a professor at the University of Georgia. Dr. Medvedev is supervising a graduate student researcher, Jaleesa Reed, who will be conducting the interviews. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Medvedev at medvedev@uga.edu or at 706.542.4307. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a

research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu. **Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Name of Participant	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Interview Questions – MAC Consumers

Black Women's use of MAC Cosmetics

* Participants may ask questions throughout the entire duration of the interview.

1. Demographic Information
 - a. By what name would you like to be called for the purposes of this research?
 - b. How old are you?
2. First Experiences with Cosmetics
 - a. Think back to when you first started wearing cosmetics. Can you describe your first memory of wearing makeup?
 - b. Who introduced you to makeup?
3. Purchasing Cosmetics
 - a. Can you tell me about your experiences shopping for cosmetics?
 - b. Can you tell me about your experience buying makeup at a local store such as Wal-Mart, CVS, Walgreens, etc.?
 - c. How did you decide which brand and which products were the best for you?
 - d. Tell me about your favorite cosmetic products.
 - i. What attracted you to the product? (ads, celebrity endorsement, peers, etc.)
 - ii. What makes you like it?
 - iii. Why do you tend to choose this over others?
4. Feelings about cosmetic industry
 - a. Why do you wear cosmetics?
 - b. How do you define your ideal beauty image?
 - c. Is there a celebrity whose makeup you would like to imitate?
 - d. Do you feel that celebrities influence your idea of how your makeup should look?
 - e. For what situations do you feel cosmetics are appropriate?
5. MAC Cosmetics
 - a. What do you think of when I mention MAC?
 - b. How do you feel MAC is different from other department store brands?
 - c. Can you remember the first MAC product you bought? Can you describe that experience?
 - d. Tell me about your average experience when you visit a MAC counter.
 - e. Does MAC's offering of various foundation colors affect your decision to purchase from them?
 - f. How knowledgeable do you expect a MAC makeup artist to be?
 - g. Can you describe how MAC's packaging makes you feel?
 - h. What do you think about the environment of a MAC counter?

- i. What do you like about it? What do you think could be done better?
- i. What do you think the typical MAC consumer is? What makes you think that?
- j. Are you aware of MAC's motto of "all races, all classes, all sexes"?
 - i. Does it appeal to you?
 - ii. Explain your feelings about this motto.
- k. Does the "Back to MAC" influence your purchase decisions?
 - i. Explanation of "Back to MAC": If you return 6 MAC packaging containers, you will receive a free MAC lipstick of your choice. Excludes Viva Glam lipsticks.
- l. Have you heard of the Viva Glam campaign?

Sample Transcript: Harper Perry

Jaleesa: So for this research, you get to choose a pseudonym. Do you have any in mind that you would like to use?

Harper: Umm. Yeah. Harper Perry.

Jaleesa: and what year were you born?

Harper: 1990.

Jaleesa: Okay, so can you think back to when you first started wearing cosmetics?

Harper: Um, my first experience with makeup was in ...2006. And I wore it because I had to. Yeah, I had to. But I also liked it and I kept wearing it for like a month and my brother was like, you need to stop. You need to stop wearing makeup and I was getting very good at it and I think that's what was scaring him. And so, I did stop and I didn't wear it again until my junior prom. And then, I was like; yeah I like the way I look here. I look grown, I look different. Um but I didn't start actually buying makeup or doing makeup for myself until my sophomore year of college. I was up one night watching infomercials and bare minerals came on and I was like I need that. I'm tired of being the home girl looking type, tomboy friend, so I bought bare minerals which was the wrong color set, it was just ugh. But it helped. I learned a lot from it.

Jaleesa: So why did you have to start wearing makeup?

Harper: I was in a performance so they wanted us to all look polished.

Jaleesa: Did you have help? How did you know what to pick and what to use?

Harper: That's a good question. I took my mom's makeup and my mom is around your complexion. I am not. And I wore it. I remember, my mom drives and puts her makeup on, or she used to and so I would see her do this and see her do that [motions to her face]. It turned out well, it blended really well.

Jaleesa: And do you remember what kind of products she used?

Harper: Yeah, my mom, ironically, my mom was a huge MAC user at one point in time but it changed because it started breaking her skin out so I think what I used at that moment was Fashion Fair.

Jaleesa: So do you shop for makeup at like Walgreens or Wal-Mart, anything like that?

Harper: No. I used to buy mascara but now I put myself on to MAC mascara so I'm not going to do that anymore either.

Jaleesa: Have you ever tried shopping there?

Harper: Um, for my foundation?

Jaleesa: Yeah.

Harper: No, because I'm a visual learner so I need someone to show me what my color is before I just go and pick it up because that's a waste of product. I bought BB cream by myself and I was like this is disgustbags. It was like...no. It wasn't the right shade, it wasn't the right anything but things like eye shadow and stuff, I'd do that.

Jaleesa: Do you shop at Sephora and Ulta? How would you compare that experience to shopping at MAC?

Harper: I like shopping at Sephora. Um, when I'm in MAC, I feel like a kid in a candy store. I know my way around, I know my products, I know what I like. Um and I just like the edginess that I usually get from the actual MUA's [Makeup Artists]. When I'm in Sephora, I'm on my grown woman. It's like, all right girl, where's your Olivia Pope. And with Ulta, I've been in Ulta to buy brushes but I'm not there financially yet so I turn back out but umm I'm more prone to go to MAC because I trust their products more than...or I have more experience with their products than I do with Sephora.

Jaleesa: And you said that you started using Bare Minerals in college, how did you get from Bare Minerals to MAC? Was there something you used in between that?

Harper: It was Bare Minerals to MAC and I just, I just actually, very recently started using MAC. I went to get my friend's makeup from MAC and they were like, let's do your face! And I was like okay. It just changed my life. This happened in August or September of 2013. So I just decided, I was running out of my Bare Minerals anyway so it's like might as well just make that transition. I like it. People always told me that I have oily skin, so stay away from liquid because of the buildup and all of that stuff and I believed them and I stuck to my powders but I would see that when I would sweat, my Bare Mineral powder would melt down and I would look like I'm melting and I didn't like that. But I got so many compliments, like when I wear my Bare Minerals makeup; I get a lot of compliments. People say I look so light, so polished, so iridescent but when I wear MAC, it's like that's a, that's a smooth face. But I'm more apt, I think because my

MAC is a little more natural than my Bare Minerals, people are more apt to notice me when I'm wearing my Bare Minerals.

Jaleesa: So have you ever experimented with any other brands besides Bare Minerals and MAC?

Harper: For foundation, no.

Jaleesa: And what about Covergirl and their Queen Latifah line?

Harper: yeah I need someone to help me before I buy that color. My mom has never bought grocery store products. She's always gone to Dillard's or Macy's, somewhere or JCPenney to buy makeup. So that's what I'm used to. That's been ingrained in me so I don't deal with that.

Jaleesa: So do you have favorite products for MAC?

Harper: Yes, I do. See I knew there was a reason I bought this. [Pulls out products as she talks about them] I love this finishing skin care product. I love it because as a person who has oily skin, it sets my makeup in a way that doesn't look pasty. And I appreciate that because...give me about 5 hours, all of this is a mess [motions to face]. The holy grail of high end mascara. Like I just. I discovered this because they gave it to me as a sample because I couldn't get a bag. Zoom flash. It's like magic, in a tube! For your eyelashes! Like who wouldn't want that? And lastly, I like their concealers and stuff like that but I love raisin blush. I was reading your purpose of study, and it's right. It's difficult trying to find products that look good on my skin tone and I see that this works. Like I've used this on my friends of different skin tones, from a deep brown, to my mom, to a light brown and it doesn't cake anyone's face, which is good. But my holy grail, for real for real, is my MAC lipstick. This isn't even all of them, they're like scattered around but I love them.

Jaleesa: Do you have any favorite colors?

Harper: I most certainly do. Let me whip them out. I have favorite colors and then I have colors that I actually wear all the time so Rebel. This is what I put on every person who's afraid to have lipstick on. Because lipstick, women are really really afraid of color, or at least dark brown women. I always tell them Rebel is your friend because it's a cool undertone, plum pink thing going on so it works for many different skin shades. This, here, this is Heroine.

Jaleesa: Oh yeah, Heroine is the truth.

Harper: THE TRUTH! Yes. My friends tell me all the time, Harper, you look good in any lipstick color. It doesn't matter, you're fearless, and I thank God for that but I want other women to develop that as well. So I tell them like, don't be afraid. I wear other lipstick colors. This is Cyber [motions to lipstick]. I have on Diva and I am a fan of the Viva La Glam line and the day before I graduated I wore RiRi La Glam and it's just like this nice frosty look, not to be worn with mute colors or really orangey pastels. It was horrible but yeah.

Jaleesa: So why do you think you wear makeup?

Harper: That's such a loaded question. I wear makeup because I like the way I look with it on at the very crux of everything. I feel more confident when my face is polished, when you can't see my acne scars or my black spots but also, it ages me. And I appreciate that because when I have my makeup off, I look a smooth 15-18 years of age and like my sister is 15 and we went out somewhere and I had my face fully done and she said, you look like a 17 year old wearing makeup. And I'm like well, I'm 23. So if that's how I look wearing makeup, I can only imagine how people are perceiving me without it. I've had ageism committed against me because I look so young. So, it's also a self-esteem booster. I started realizing that when I do have on the mask, I feel better. But now I'm getting to this place where it's like, okay girl, 365 days, you're wearing makeup all the way. And I haven't done that yet but just the need to, I don't want that. I love makeup. And then you get to play and be an artist. And I'm a creative so I'm just like draw, and color, and paint, and express, express, express.

Jaleesa: So for you I guess it has multiple functions.

Harper: It's definitely not like I just look at myself and I frown. At least not now.

Probably 21 year old, well no, 19 year old Harper. That could possibly have been me. But now that I'm 23 and I've learned so much about myself, I understand that it doesn't serve a solitary purpose or function in my opinion.

Jaleesa: So as your idea of your self has evolved, how has your usage of MAC changed?

Harper: Thankfully, MAC has evolved with me. As I've gained a better sense of self, that was when I started using MAC. Lipsticks, on the other hand, you know what – scratch everything I just said. It was using Rebel to a Kendrick Lamar concert last June, and the

response that people gave me off of that. Like how great my lips looked, how that color fit me, how my face looked – I was wearing Bare Minerals but that gave me the confidence to broaden my horizons. Not to be afraid to try colors that aren't so muted like browns. I have Paramount, which is a very good and beautiful brown but stepping out to the reds and going to the pinks and purples and blues and stuff like that. So MAC has allowed me to express myself the way I see myself and I, like, just tweeted today about how one of the most difficult tasks that I decide every morning is my gender expression. Am I going to be tomboy chic? Am I going to be sexy and ravishing? Or grown and ravishing, rather. And my lipsticks, my makeup, and what I do with my eyeliners or what I don't do – it allows me that same opportunity. MAC affords me that opportunity.

Jaleesa: Do you think that you've can find these lipstick colors in other brands?

Harper: yeah, definitely. I have a black lipstick. It would've been a MAC but it was for Black Friday so it's from Sephora. I love NARS. I love NARS eye shadows and their blushes. And I love Elf, but more so for their actual beauty products like their brushes, their eyeliner and stuff like that. But umm I'm sure I could but I like names, naming things. My lipsticks have a name and it's easier for me so when people are like "What shade is that Harper?" I 'm not like "50!" Like, no, [picks up lipstick] this is Cyber. The teacher, or the learner in me understands that when you add creativity to it like MAC does but naming their products, people are more apt to get attached to it.

Jaleesa: So how would you define your ideal beauty image?

Harper: Clean skin.

Jaleesa: That's it?

Harper: I started off with makeup, with only focusing on my eyes. Like I only did eye shadow, mascara, eyeliner, when white eyeliner was in, thank God it's not in anymore but that's my introduction to doing makeup. Like after everything, and I always said to myself, whatever you do, whatever you buy, whatever you attach to yourself – it needs to be as natural looking as possible. No matter how creative it is, it needs to still look like it could've come from you. It's an extension of you. So the only reason why I even wear foundation or concealer is because my skin isn't clearer. Now if that was it – give me a lipstick, my zoom flash mascara, I'll be good, you know. So that's really what it is, clear skin.

Jaleesa: Is there a celebrity whose makeup you would like to imitate?

Harper: Hmm. Makeup? No. Lipstick? Yes. Rihanna.

Jaleesa: Why lipstick? And why Rihanna?

Harper: Her lips are...they are gorgeous. They are so beautiful. Whether they're photoshopped or not, the woman has a great pair of lips but also she looks so sexy when she has her lipstick on. I think that's the only time I truly connect with Rihanna because she makes you zoom in on her lips and you focus on the beauty of what God has created in that small shape, right? And I love matte lipstick. I love that dry look, I mean not chapped, but the dry look because it's very sophisticated, very grown, and she put me on. She truly put me on MAC lipstick.

Jaleesa: So you would say that Rihanna or other celebrities influence your idea of how your makeup or how you would want your makeup to look?

Harper: Hmmm. No. Makeup artists, not celebrities, makeup artists umm because the makeup artist is doing the celebrities makeup so that's more so... If that were the case...do you know who...and her name just escaped me. That makeup artist.

Jaleesa: Do you know any makeup artists personally or do you follow them on Instagram?

Harper: Oh yes, it's kind of disgusting but my cousin is a makeup artist. I have a lot of friends who are makeup artists, a lot of cousins who are makeup artists and I'm a low key one as well.

Jaleesa: Are there situations where you feel makeup is appropriate or you have to wear makeup?

Harper: Yeah. When I'm going anywhere that pictures will be taken, I make sure that I have makeup on, even if it's just my eyes done or my lips done. And where, if I'm meeting someone for the first time, I usually like to have makeup on – if we're meeting publicly but if you come into a close setting – probably not. Lastly, anywhere that I'm doing something in front of people, so in the professional setting. I believe makeup is appropriate, not necessary, but appropriate.

Jaleesa: Why in the professional setting?

Harper: It adds to the polished look and then people are looking at you. They're looking at your face, they're looking at your lips, they're looking at the way you carry yourself,

the way you dress, and umm apparently this is the money maker (motions to face) and you want to make it look as good as possible.

Jaleesa: do you feel there's such a thing as wearing too much makeup?

Harper: Yes, most definitely. Um. I put on a lot of makeup but I don't think I put on too much or it doesn't look like I do but I have friends where it's just like OH MY GOD Can your skin breathe?! Or to the point where it's like, they feel like they're being deceived and I always ask my friends like, when I wear makeup, do I not look like myself? People can see me with my skin bare and then see me with makeup on and then be like oh I didn't recognize you. That's what I got in high school and I would be like what you tryna say? But now my friends are like Wow Harper you look the same. But where it gets to the point where people are making a whole new face, that's too much.

Jaleesa: So why do you think people, in general, wear makeup?

Harper: I believe, and this is the feminist coming out of me, but I believe that women can feel as though there's a standard of beauty that men require and desire that they have to uphold. As well as men who say that they don't like women with makeup but yet they choose all the women who wear so much makeup so it's just kind of like, the desire to look desirable.

Jaleesa: Who do you think determines what is desirable?

Harper: I'm trying not to sound sexist, but men, a lot of men. Men, media, and the women who feed into the male perspective of beauty and fashion. So you gotta be smaller or you gotta have the big butt or big breasts or your face has to be this shape, your hair has to be this long. I mean I got weave in. I'm natural by nature and I wear it proud but I mean, Statesboro and Atlanta, the heat is real.

Jaleesa: Do you think that there's a women's standard of beauty?

Harper: Umm, yeah. One of my guy friends said that ya'll do all this for yourself because no man cares. And I can understand, and I can actually say that there's a female standard of beauty or a woman's standard of beauty but it's still fed into by what attracts men. So we determine what we wear – how tight it is or how loose it is by what we see the other woman attracting or who we see the other woman attracting. But I also think that we are also our biggest jurors, like we like to poke fun at each other so if my friend said, you

know, Harper, I don't like that look on you. Old Harper probably would've been like let me go change it right? Or if my friend said, Harper, I love that color on you, I could never wear that. You know like she's seeing something that she admires in me and she's setting her standard for herself based off of me which is just as detrimental.

Jaleesa: So since you said that you're a feminist, do you think that capitalism plays a role in how women make their standard of beauty?

Harper: yeah, I think something that we forget is that it's all about making money, like the beauty industry and the sex industry, are two of the biggest industries in the United States and it's for a reason because every woman wants to be desired, like I said before. And every woman wants to feel sexy. Sex and makeup feed into that. Beauty in itself feeds into that. You know, you're 50, you have wrinkles, get this product or you're 25, you're going to get wrinkles so get this product you know? So it's always – we're being fed these things that we're not good enough, we're not enough, we're not enough, we're not enough, and so we internalize that and we start believing that and money keeps being made because we keep buying into the thing, into the thought, into the product that says that I'm not good enough as I naturally am but this product will make me better.

Jaleesa: Do you think it's different for African American women and White women?

Harper: No. No, I do think that Black American women and African American women may have it harder because it's always been a fight but I've seen the struggles of a college White girl waking up 2 hours, 3 hours before her day begins just to look what she considers decent and presentable so I don't think it's too different. They get more products! I went for a nude band aid and I got something that was not my skin tone, but lighter. When I'm frustrated, I get fever blisters so I'm going for the new barely there fever blister but people were like uhh what's on your lip? But I can honestly say that because they have so many more options, the struggle is just as real because they have so many things that they have to decide between to define how their beauty is.

Jaleesa: So what do you think of when I first mention MAC?

Harper: Happy.

Jaleesa: How would you define your relationship with MAC Makeup?

Harper: MAC is that guy that you've always liked and you know he likes you, sometimes y'all dabble with each other and sometimes you're like, no, I don't want you and I don't need you so MAC is like my fling that I'll never not have a relationship with in some form or fashion.

Jaleesa: So it's mutual for you?

Harper: Oh yeah, yeah, totally! I mean, you know, this is an inanimate object I'm talking about BUT just the fact that like, I like being, I pay attention to my brand – how I present myself, how I carry myself, how I look – and I also like being an ambassador for things I believe in and as first world problems as this is, I'm an ambassador for MAC because I've seen it do me well and I've seen how I've put so many people on MAC just by me wearing the lipstick. Or just by me having a smooth finish face with no oily build up and people asking me so what do you wear? And I'm just like well let me tell you! You know? Just being able to teach women how to feel beautiful and comfortable in their skin and sometimes you need makeup for that and MAC has allowed me to help women understand that, like you're beautiful in your skin, makeup isn't there to alter your appearance but it's to enhance what you've already developed naturally and who doesn't want to be better?

Jaleesa: Do you remember the first time you heard about MAC?

Harper: My mom.

Jaleesa: Was it you watching her use it or did you go with her to the counter?

Harper: Probably the earliest memory is her going to MAC, probably for a good amount of my childhood, MAC was the only makeup in existence in my world. And my mom was the one who told me, you can't paint your nails ever, especially not red. You better not wear red lipstick and all these things and like literally, I have 7 right here (motions to makeup bag). But just always seeing her go to MAC and it wasn't until my sister was born when I was 8, and she [Her mother] got rosacea on her face and she started thinking that it was because of MAC so she stopped so I mean, that's all I used to see.

Jaleesa: And you would consider yourself a primary user of MAC?

Harper: Yeah, unless I'm feeling lazy, then I go to my Bare Minerals because it's just like...

Jaleesa: easier to put on?

Harper: Yeah.

Jaleesa: How do you feel MAC is different from other department store brands like Clinique, Lancôme, Estée Lauder?

Harper: It's more commercialized. It has a youthful edge to it that Clinique doesn't or L'Oreal doesn't. I like MAC because of that. Because especially someone who grew up in it, looking at makeup as a grown woman's thing, I still at 20, feel very very young and I am. So just being able to play in my youth now with the mindset of what I used to think was such a grown thing in my childhood and knowing that I can grow with this brand because I'm not going to stop using it. And Clinique, also it's the name. I think the branding is so important when it comes to how you advertise your product and MAC sounds chic. It sounds ... I don't want to say festive but it gives me a sophisticated, Hollywood edge. Whereas Clinique, it's like, yeah something's wrong with you. Let's fix you. Send you to the clinic. You're older, you need to cover up this, you need to cover up that. And you know MAC is like... I get to be beautiful if I want.

Jaleesa: So you said that MAC has a youthful edge but you still feel like you can grow with it?

Harper: For me, everything about MAC is very timeless. It's kind of like how people look at you now compared to in the 50s. That's how I feel about MAC. It's one of those things where you can always feel comfortable and youthful.

Jaleesa: So do you remember the first MAC product that you bought? Can you talk about that experience? Do you still have the first product you bought?

Harper: It was um, Ruby Woo. Before I bought it, I did a stupid amount of research because I knew I wanted red lipstick and I wanted red lipstick that looks good on me. So the very first thing that I saw when I googled was MAC's Ruby Woo and how this was the quintessential red lipstick for any skin complexion, any skin tone, it just worked well. And I wanted it looking matte, looking like OOH I want to kiss her! And I spent like a week and a half researching it and I went to get it the first time and they didn't have it. I was like, what you mean you don't have it? It's a popular lipstick! But my mom and I drove to different MAC stores that we knew existed in Metro Atlanta and then I finally got it. She unleashed the beast! When I put it on... I remember taking pictures and putting them on Instagram and people were like OOH God and I was like yeah because I

loved it! It was like a big dream. Because the struggle to get it, it was a big dream come true to have it. And to see people like embrace it. It was just like, even better.

Jaleesa: So what is your average experience like when you visit a MAC counter?

Harper: Chaotic because there's either music playing or there's a lot of people there but I always receive some of the best customer service. People are attentive. I always get people who know what they're talking about. If they're not doing tutorials to train their new people, they're doing it on your face, telling you what's good and it's kind of like they're the antithesis of Victoria's Secret to me. Victoria's Secret is like depressed when they're measuring your bra. Your bra size when you're at Victoria's Secret is not the same as your bra size elsewhere. So they make you feel good, make you feel sexy, which I love. But with MAC, they do the same thing, they make you feel loved, they make you feel sexy but it's like "girl, that's not your skin tone. That color doesn't look good on you. This is what you've been using? Okay, yeah, that does work for you. Or maybe you shouldn't use this product. Why do you want to use this product?" I like that. I like being able to make informed and educated decisions with the truth and I feel like I get that with MAC.

Jaleesa: So you feel like they take into account what you want?

Harper: Yeah. Like, I'm an individual. I believe in everything being circumstantial, everything being situational. They [MAC] treat me like an individual. I don't feel like when I walk in, they say "Oh here's another black girl". I feel like they look at my skin, they look at my problem areas (which are really just my cheeks) and they're like, let's see how we can help you look like a better you. I have friends who are brown skin, light skin, and dark brown and they're all like they're not going to give them the same product they give me and I appreciate that. Don't give me that when you know it's not for me.

Jaleesa: Does MAC's offering of various foundation colors affect your decision to purchase from them?

Harper: I appreciate it more so yeah.

Jaleesa: Have you heard of Iman's make up line? Have you looked into that?

Harper: My sister has used it so yeah but I haven't personally used it. I know someone who does and loves it. I guess I should support Black women makeup because they're more apt to have my shade but no.

Jaleesa: Can you describe how MAC's packaging makes you feel?

Harper: [laughs] The sleek blackness with that mute silver writing from MAC is just like This is MAC! I like subtle things because I feel like it shows your worth more when you open it up. They don't have to give you the fancy flair with their product. The product does it. I like the black covering because it just goes back to that sophisticated, regal look that I like. So I get excited when I buy a new tube of lipstick. They give me that black box and I'm like yes! It feels good.

Jaleesa: What do you like about the environment of the MAC counter?

Harper: It's colorful. Even though I love the black, I like the colors within it. I think that's very much so my personality. Like subtle and then you get that pop where it matters the most. The lipstick, the foundation, or whatever it may be...for me that's my personality. So being able to have the bright lights, not everywhere, but centered on the mirrors to where you can look at it and you can see the difference between one side of my skin and the other so I know what I'm buying. MAC for the most part, even when they have their own store, it's always very tightly packed. Just the way they structure their store, it makes you feel closed in. It may feel claustrophobic to some people but I'm able to zero in on what I came for.

Jaleesa: Do you think anything could be done better?

Harper: Yeah, bigger stores, more product. But also, they did this in Orlando where I bought my last few lipsticks from. Allow and open to the public, how to put on their makeup. No matter how much I try to teach my mom how to put on her makeup, she just doesn't listen. But if someone else says to her look, this is how you apply it, it might be more successful. Just talk about what's in the product as well because I researched something I picked up and I may eventually move away from MAC because the reason why I get Bare Minerals was because it was a healthy product so if MAC doesn't change from using as many chemicals or artificially enhanced products, I will move away because I do care about what goes on my body and in my body.

Jaleesa: So you are aware of what's in their products but you think that would be a defining point for you to move away?

Harper: Yeah, if they did what Bare Minerals does or... there's this brand of health stuff called Lush. Lush is organic everything, natural products. If MAC were to implement that

into their makeup, they would never not have me as a customer. But because of the fact that I know that MAC puts harsh chemicals into their makeup, I don't sleep in my makeup the way I could sleep in Bare Minerals. I know that. So, I would probably wash my face 3 times when I'm taking my makeup off just so I can take these toxins off my face.

Jaleesa: Who do you think the typical MAC consumer is?

Harper: A woman in her. I know the age range is 18-24 but I think that from 21-37, maybe 39. I think she is middle class. And that's about as far as my imagination is going right now. I would like to say a woman like me, however women like me don't wear makeup every day.

Jaleesa: Why this age range?

Harper: As I've seen, older women are less apt to dabble in bold colors. Women in their 20s are like, hey if it matches my outfit, then let's go for it. MAC affords them that.

Jaleesa: Do you think that as you get older, you will still use bright colors? Or do you think you will tone it down also?

Harper: Well like 3 years ago, I thought I would never wear lipstick and now I'm so addicted to it. But I hope so because it's a major part of my personality. Not like loud colors but I love color. Anyone who knows me knows that.

Jaleesa: Are you aware of MAC's motto of "all ages, all races, all sexes"?

Harper: Yes!

Jaleesa: What do you think of it?

Harper: I love it. It's inclusive. Am I a fan of men wearing makeup from day to day? No but it shows me that MAC is aware and that's what close to my heart.

Jaleesa: Do you feel that their motto is evident in what they do? Can you give me an example?

Harper: Like in my head, I'm looking at their match master foundation and I see the gradient of pale to deep brown in my head. I can go to the MAC counter and I can look at my friend, I can look at a counterpart and say, this is your shade. I like that. The reason why I don't like grocery store [drugstore] make up is because it's so limited. They have limited space, limited product colors. But with MAC, because they have more, you're

able to feel that they are important. Like your beauty is just as important as the Anglo-Saxon, Asian, or Latina perspective.

Jaleesa: Are you aware of MAC's Back to MAC program?

Harper: Yes

Jaleesa: Does that influence your purchase decisions?

Harper: No, it should.

Jaleesa: Have you ever been able to collect 6 things and take them back?

Harper: No. I have a lot of a products and I'm not done with them. I want to though. I thought about cutting some lipsticks off just to get a free one but no.

Jaleesa: And the Viva Glam campaign, does that influence your purchase decisions?

Harper: When I buy Viva Glam, I do feel like I'm doing something. I do like it.

Jaleesa: So if you were picking between two different colors, one Viva Glam, and the other one not, would you choose the Viva Glam product?

Harper: Not just for the sake of it being Viva Glam.

Jaleesa: So only if it was really a color that you liked?

Harper: Yes, it has to be a color that I want.

Jaleesa: Do you get MAC emails? Texts?

Harper: How I do get their information? People who know I'm a MAC fanatic, they tell me. They're the first to tell me.

Jaleesa: So you don't subscribe to their emails or anything like that?

Harper: No, I don't want to. I typically don't do that. Because I mean, when I have money, I'm already going to MAC. I don't need my brain ruined with what's to come so to get that constant mail telling me is not okay.

Jaleesa: How does budget play into which products you choose to buy?

Harper: Almost every time I go to MAC, I get a lipstick. \$15 is whatever. When it pertains to like, this, this, and this [motions to makeup], and I have another MAC concealer at home but it just comes down to priorities. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to buy this for a very long time. But my liquid foundation needs to be bought more often. I'm not going to become one of those hoarders who buys makeup just to have it but I do want to get enough variation in color so that my friends can come over and ask me to do their makeup, as they do already, and I have their colors.

Jaleesa: So it's like an investment?

Harper: Thank you! Because that's pretty much what I've been saying this entire time.

MAC is my investment.