

Complexion

Introduction

From personal experience, although I am not considered to have dark skin, I have found that even in my brown mid-range skin tone I still feel that I cannot find products easily for me. In cosmetics, I feel even if I find my tone, my undertone shade is not offered. I can never find a nude lip tone that I do not need to first line my lips with a darker color first in order to wear it. In fashion I have found that the standard “neutral” tone is always shades lighter than me, therefore it cannot be considered neutral to everyone. In hair I have found that products for my hair type are always a store’s second thought and the preferred hair type is of a much straighter, silkier, and looser texture than mine. In all these areas however, I have found that in brand’s advertising the standard neutral is of a fairer skin individual, and when darker complexions are included they do not feel integrated in the material, but are featured to show the brand is “diverse.”

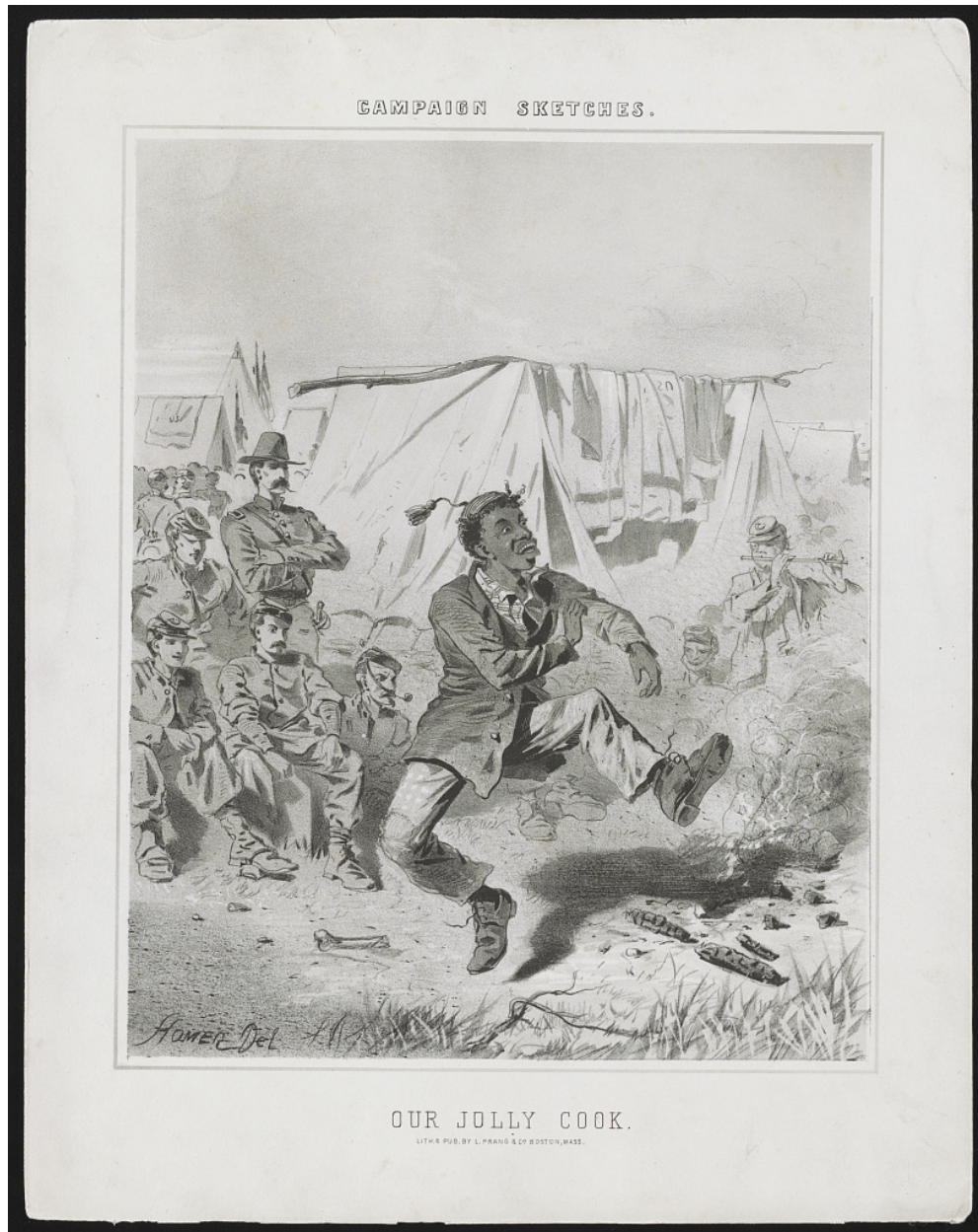
Through this project I will examine the lack of integration and inclusion of dark complexions in the beauty industry. This work will serve as a platform for different people of a range of skin tones to voice their experiences, especially in people of color, and show pride in their skin tone, as well as serve as a call to attention to the many realms of the beauty industry and the inequalities that still lie within. Through a series of interviews and photos, I will be able to form these into a collective poster series to best display the message the beauty industry has given to its consumers, and an opportunity for individuals to celebrate their skin tone.

Contextual Discussion

The representation of darker complexions

The representation of darker complexions across many industries, specifically looking at the African American race, stems from a false picture painted of the race that dates back to the 19th century. Michael D. Harris discusses this issue in his book, *Colored Pictures Race and Visual Representation*. His examples range from classic Renaissance paintings all the way to advertising dating back to the early 1900s. An example of where the false picture stems from is a lithograph done in 1863 by Winslow Homer titled, *Our Jolly Cook* from Homer’s *Civil War Campaign Sketches* series. In this piece, White soldiers are sitting outside their tents watching their Black cook who is centered in the piece with a goofy expression and dancing. In this work, the African American cook is centered and acting in a clownish manner to emphasize the false illusion of Black people being buffoons. Johns states, “blacks were often depicted in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American painting and in minstrelsy.” Johns also argues that even dating back before the 1830s “blacks were depicted as monkey-like presences in a crowd or, at best, as servants on the margins, clowns in the middle of a group, at other times laborers at the edge of gatherings.” On the other hand, if one observes the presence of the White men in the photo they take on a completely different persona. They are displayed as just observing with “controlled

dignity.” The completely opposite of the black cook being perceived. The argument displayed in this piece is that Black people were merely humorous to the White race. The Black cook had abilities beyond being the entertainment, obviously, he was the cook. Instead however, he is depicted as nothing more “than to amuse and serve” white people.



Winslow Homer; Our Jolly Cook, from Campaign Sketches, 1863, lithograph 14" x 10 7/8"

In similar context, when we think about some of the most famous Black representation or branding in products, even these depictions are false stereotypes that were forced onto the African American race. Aunt Jemima, the Black woman you know on everyone's favorite

pancake mix box is a prime example. The woman hired to portray Aunt Jemima, Nancy Green, was forced to depict a stereotypical appearance in order to make an income. This depiction is as described:

As Aunt Jemima she masqueraded as a former slave with a love for the Old South and devotion to the whites she served. As a human trademark, she became an advertising icon and the latest twist in the complex history of blacks and commerce in the Americans; from advertisements announcing the arrival of slave ships to ads for runaway slaves, to an entertainment industry of minstrel performance based on the appropriated Black culture, to product icons.

Aunt Jemima was a made up character based off of the stereotype of the Black women of the 1860s. It was a “persona,” the way White people wanted to view their Black servants as both the lithograph and the advertising character of Aunt Jemima have played an influence in the way Black people have been viewed, as “lesser.” That view of the Black race has traveled with them through history, and although there were many attempts, successful and failed, of creating equality across races, as time goes on the idea that was planted centuries ago, can still be seen and depicted today. The false depiction is seen in the beauty industry today as what or who is defined as “beautiful,” despite some efforts to make things better, opportunity, product, and inclusion is still not equal across races.

Beauty Standards

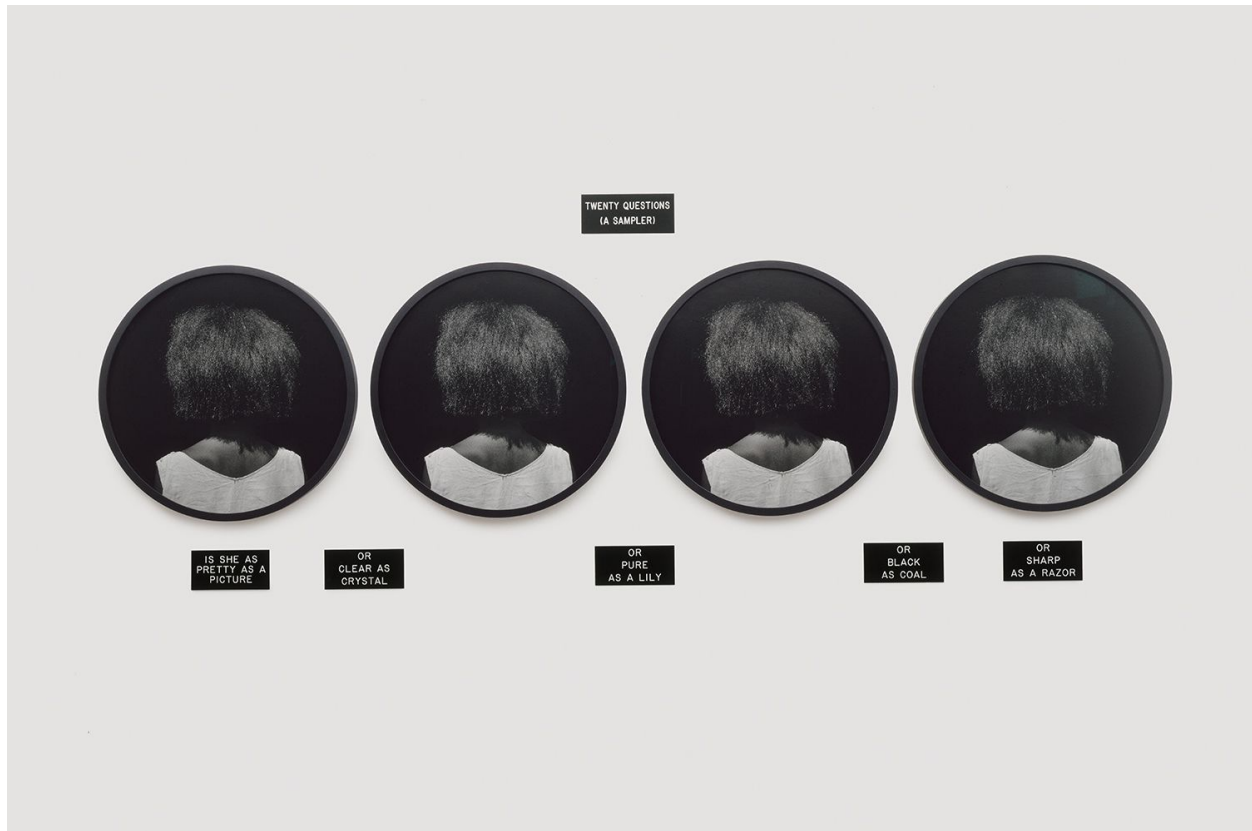
Evidence that there are still issues in the industry can be seen in how skin color is treated in the beauty industry. *Black Beauty and the Cosmetics Battlefield*, is an article that was featured in the *Washington Post* in 1980. This is a conversation held between the publisher of the article and Rusty Jackson, a former IBM marketing support manager. In this conversation Ms. Jackson is speaking about her involvement in the beauty industry. Specifically experience she has had being Black and the difficulties other Black women have had during that time as well. Throughout the course of the article she speaks on how Black women and women of darker shades had to mix their foundation colors, sometimes two or three at a time. Do to this she was able to encourage the industry to create a brand specifically for women of darker complexions to eliminate this inconvenience. Once this brand was launched, many mainstream and well known brands followed this example. Today however, despite the make up brands who still do not include darker complexions, Jackson is pleasantly surprised to see so many more brands including darker foundation shades for women of color because this was not a luxury to her just decades ago. It is important to acknowledge how far things have come in terms of racial inclusion, but it is even more important to acknowledge that inclusion should have no limit and should not be a shock. Until inclusion of skin tones becomes second nature in the beauty industry, it will never be equal.

The Fitzpatrick Skin Type Test created in 1975 was a new way to identify a person’s skin type. It was not solely based off of skin tone however, but off of how a person’s skin reacts to the sun, their eye color, hair color, as well as their skin tone. This system was created however for

scientific purposes so people would be aware of the level of sun exposure their skin can take in order to take proper precautions to prevent and lower their risk of possible damage from the skin as well as skin cancer. If one were to examine the skin chart however, one would notice that it is categorized in six different categories. All the way from an ivory description of skin to a darker, deeper skin tone. Although, this is a skin typing system for science, it can also be seen being applied in foundation typing in the beauty industry. The unfortunate side to this that although this kind of information is available to brands to see the range of all skin tones that exist and how they are different, a lot of times, brands will not offer products for consumers in the type six skin range and sometimes even in the type five skin range. This limits the products to women of a medium brown skin or lighter, leaving out and neglecting an entire market of women who want the opportunity to have products accessible to their complexions as well.

Jackie Aina is a well known beauty guru in the world of Youtube and is constantly calling out brands for limiting their products and not extending their line to cater to darker women. She was able to set the example of an inclusive line by having the opportunity to launch her own line with the make brand *Born this Way*. With their help she was able to create multiple beauty products that catered to people of darker complexions especially in the most troublesome area: foundation. Aside from her love for make up, she uses her platform to make her audience and brands aware that brands need to keep an all or nothing approach when it comes to make up. There are no women of darker complexions buying your product because you do not cater to their skin tone. The market for make up for darker complexions should not have to be separated or segregated from the general market of women of lighter skin tones. When brands expand their range of foundation and makeup products to accommodate darker tones they are always surprised in the sales, not realizing that darker complexions use makeup too, a they are just not included or provided for in the beauty industry in the same way that lighter tones are.

Due to integration and equality not always being a priority in the beauty industry, a lot of times African Americans have to create their own subcategories, not only in this industry, but across multiple different industries and platforms. Lorna Simpson is a photographer who became well known through her works that were high scale photographs/ text works she released in the 1980s. These works “confront and challenge narrow, conventional views of gender, identity, culture, history and memory. Lorna Simpson’s work magnifies, explores, and allows the uniqueness of African American hair. When it comes to mainstream media, she is well aware that, “often times, media portray white women with straight hair as the beauty ideal.” This is due to what has been depicted of the Black and White races through history.



Lorna Simpson, Twenty Questions, 1986, four silver gelatin prints

Self Love

The Humanae Project is by photographer Angélica Dass. The project is known as the Humanae Institute. The Humanae Institute is not an institution or university or a physical place or establishment, as Angélica Dass states in her mission statement, “The Humanae Institute is an organization that uses art an education to confront race and skin color to reject intolerance and discrimination.” Before this project sparked into a movement for education in order to share with children an example of diversity and pride in their skin tones, this started as an art project that Ms. Dass created. Ms. Dass’ initial project was a photography based one in which she photographed different people matching their skin tones to a paint tone delivering a strong message that beyond the context of race, skin tone is just a shade of color. Dass’ message is so important especially to instill in younger generations. Her project and mission gives children an example of diversity and pride in their skin tones. Her work is able to “confront and challenge the narrow, conventional views of gender, identity, culture, history and memory.”



Angélica Dass, The Humanae Project, photography

Society's Limitations

Within only a year of Fenty Beauty's launch in September of 2017, the cosmetic brand has pulled off a makeover of the makeup industry. Fenty Beauty is a make up brand started by singer Rihanna Fenty, and is praised not because of the singer's popularity and presence in the music industry. Rihanna Fenty is praised for her brand for the intent to include all skin tones in both her products and marketing campaign. It is clear that it was her aim to "cater to all women, regardless of skin color." As soon as her brand was launched other brands caught on to the "market" that exists in darker complexions, as if darker individuals desiring to wear makeup was a new trend. Rihanna successfully has done what every mainstream brand has failed to do, make products with the true intention to include not just people of fair to light skin or even fare to brown, but fair to black.

Methodology

My methodology involved a lot of reflection and a thorough breakdown of what exactly I was trying to achieve in terms of content and information. Once I was able to establish that my next task was figuring out how I could best display the information I have found while being aesthetically pleasing. In my initial stages of planning in formulating my project, I knew I wanted to do something surrounding the topic of the lack of diversity that lied in advertising and products for darker skin tones in the beauty industry, which included the categories of cosmetics, fashion, and hair. I wanted my work to be a call for attention, but also a call for celebration of all

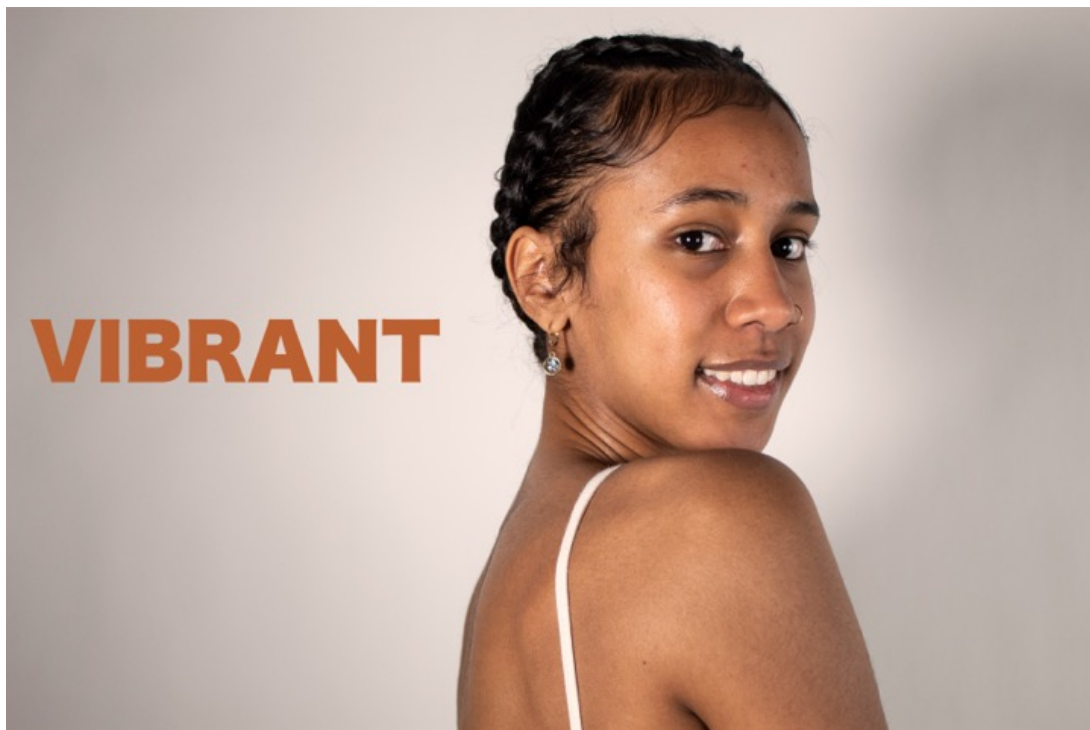
skin tones. So with that in mind I began my research to back up my hypothesis. What I found in this stage is although I was right, many brands in the industry struggle or refuse to diversify their products or advertising. However, I also discovered that diversity did exist maybe not in all brands, but it was much more present today than in the last two generations. The true underlying problem was that although diversity existed, models and products for people of a darker skin tone, or even people of color in general were not being equally integrated into branding and product selection, rather, darker skin tones were being treated as a feature to meet the diversity quota.

Once I discovered this is what my project would be centered around, I then decided that I wanted it to be a poster series/ presentation involving photography, interviews, and branding. Through my series of photoshoots and information I have found in my research, I have asked each person I shot about their background information, if they felt their skin tone was equally integrated in advertising and products across industry, and if they could describe their skin tone in one word what would it be. I found that majority of people had a negative experience in which they felt their skin tone wasn't included. I also found it very interesting and worth noting, that the individuals who felt that their skin tone was included were well aware of the lack of inclusion for darker skin tones. They had this insight and opinion without my influence. Those of lighter complexions acknowledged that they felt represented and that complexions darker than them did not have this same advantage.

Initially for the gallery display, I wanted to split my poster series in to three sections of information in which people would be able to view: my subjects profile and background, their experience with the beauty industry, and one word to describe their complexion. Each section would have a different aesthetic to easily identify a shift to a new section. I later realized however, that the brand should work more as a unit and I do not necessarily need to create three different looks to indicate a shift in information. I was able to make this realization, by talking to various artists and designers, I realized it was important to me that it was easy to identify experiences from skin tone to skin tone.

I decided that each skin tone would have its own block displaying the subject I shot and their information and opinion all on a back drop of their skin tone, and the other two undertones of their skin tones. From all of the data I collected I was able to have comparative blocks that showed differences, similarities and personal experiences from each skin tone. In addition to this, I will create a digital slide show in which I will be able to display the individuals and experiences I was not able to display on the wall due to space limitations, and I will also be able to split up my poster series. I will be able to display my focus on background, experience, and word to skin tone association in a different way that gives the audience a different experience. This will also put more emphasis on each section especially the section in which I ask participants to describe their skin tone in one word. It was interesting that how some associated their skin tone with a color, others described their skin tone with words that were not colors such as "assured" or "tender."

my skin tone is...



By dividing the project in this way I was also able to feature a logo I created for the work. The logo was a view from a globe. What was significant of the globe is that it was showing the side of the world that traditionally globe images do not display as the representative image. Ordinarily the North and South America sides are shown, but in my logo I illustrated the entire continent of Africa, and only partially showing the Americas. I also illustrated each continent to resemble a fingerprint. The concept behind my logo was to include everyone, and to display the idea that fingerprints and skin tones are apart of everyone's DNA. We do not get to choose the skin tone we are, and at the end of the day we are all people and should not be left out due to the color of ones skin.



The message the beauty industry tells each complexion.

Creative Work

My final exhibition piece features a wall display of nine 15" x 16" posters that displayed each individual and their skin tone, background, experience, and Pantone, with an additional four posters, one at the top (16" x 4") that featured the works read with the logo, "The message the beauty industry tells each complexion." At the bottom there were three posters (16" x 5") asking the participants if their skin tone is represented equally with the "yes" skin tones represented in the pale green tile and the "no" skin tones being represented in the pale red tile. Within each tile I feature each individuals personal experience with the industry. As the reader makes their way down the poster they will be able to read about the individuals background such as race and ethnicity, Pantone color, favorite stores or brands to shop with for cosmetics, hair, and fashion, and of course the word each individual associates their skin tone as or with.

My Industry Experience

“I personally feel underrepresented in the beauty industry when I go shopping for hair products particularly here in Ann Arbor. The Walgreens by my house (predominantly black area) has nearly every brand of black hair products that you could imagine, so when I got here I was very disappointed to see that most of the time, they don't even have eco-styler gel. They are catering to the majority and leaving everyone who doesn't fit in to cater for themselves. I feel like companies believe that "diversity and inclusion" is simply just adding a shade for someone with a very dark complexion in their collection. I hardly ever see anyone that is truly caramel or anything in-between super light and dark. They also never make an effort to pay attention to our undertones or skin issues that affect our community.”



My Background



African, Irish,
Native American (Cherokee)



age 19 20 21 22

Hi my name is Monique Wheeler.

pantone 1605U

My Industry Favorites

ASOS
Forever 21
Missguided
Pretty Little Thing

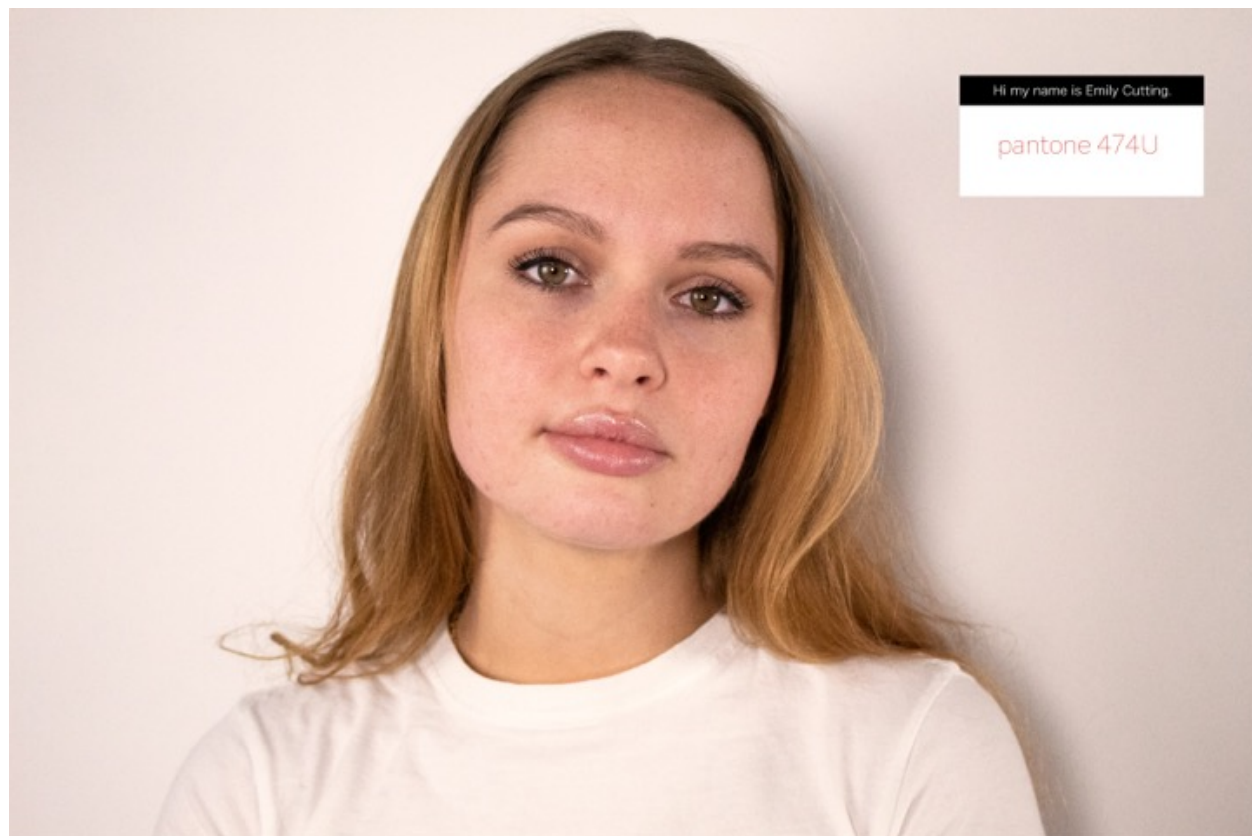
Beauty supply store
cantu
Eden Bodyworks
Miss Jessie's
Shea Moisture

Fenty Beauty
MAC
Morphe
Nars
Sephora
Too Faced

NARS Pure Radiant
Tinted Moisturizer
shade: Malaga

CARAMEL

Although, from my work there is a lot to take in, there is one specific element throughout the entirety of the project in which I hope people will notice: trend. I want the audience to be able to engage with my project and read all of the responses. However, whether they read every response, three, or one. I want them to leave now being informed or reminded of the lack on inclusion that still exists in the beauty industry. I hope that it also gets them to think of other industries with this same issue that is not being addressed or talked about.





“ I feel that my skin color is starting to be more represented in the beauty industry thanks to black creatives like Jordan Peele (film), Rihanna (makeup/models), and Shonda Rhimes (TV). Even though this is true, there is still a disproportionate amount of darkskin people missing from the media. I feel that dark-skinned people are personally discriminated against and if a role is to be filled by a black person, they will most likely be of lighter complexion. **The standard for beauty has been set by white people.** Commercials, models, movies and billboards usually include white people with decent figures. I've become so used to it that I don't even notice the bias anymore. I tend to focus more on advertisements that target myself or other minorities and ignore those that don't.”



Conclusion

From the information I collected my hypothesis is correct. The data from responses displayed how people with darker skin tones are not equally included in brands' advertising and products throughout the beauty industry. Majority of the people I interviewed stated that their experience with the beauty industry is a negative experience because they feel left out, due to brands choosing not to cater to their skin tone. Overall, from all of the participants it was clear to each individual that within the beauty brand there is a focus on select skin tones and select race, and darker skin tones are usually neglected. This is why after the launch of Fenty Beauty in 2017 so many cosmetic lines began to copy the brands initiative in making products that catered also to much darker skin tones. From *Complexion*, I hope that people will realize that yes, diversity does exist in some (not all) aspects, but now it's time for brands to make the effort to incorporate equal integration of skin tones in their advertising and products, and stop leaving darker complexions out and dehumanizing this category of people.

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