Fenty Beauty: A Summary Analysis of Media, Gender and Self-Presentation

Fenty Beauty is an inclusive skincare and makeup line intended for people with various degrees of darker skin tones. The foundation line is an entrepreneurial venture inspired by Rihanna's frustrating struggles to find makeup that matches her skin colour. The Fenty Beauty foundation line is intended to be a universal representation of beauty, meeting the needs of consumers in a niche market. With the aid of Fenty Beauty's website and Rihanna's established social media presence, consumers and fans alike can further their connection with the singer through her publicized posts, links to user-generated web content and tutorials that include her product. Fenty Beauty's social media campaigns have emphasized the fact that users should feel empowered, enabling makeup enthusiasts to share information about the product through their online networks, ultimately expanding the brand through an inclusive media movement in the beauty world. By using various social media channels such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, Fenty Beauty fans can define their standard of beauty and self-representation amongst the community of people with darker complexions. As such, the following content will provide a brief analysis and overview of Fenty Beauty's Instagram page and how it relates to media, gender, and self-representation. It is will be discussed through the lens of technology, female representation, third wave feminism, consumerism and the gaze explored in *Note to Self: The Visual Culture of Selfies in the Age of Social Media*, by Derek Conrad Murray. Furthermore, this paper will provide commentary on the workflow of the group completing the project.

For years, the lack of diversity and representation in the fashion and beauty industry has been a popular discussion topic amongst the masses that are trying to understand the discriminatory nature of the beauty world. Many companies and manufacturers of high and low-end cosmetic products do not invest the necessary resources to include foundations or complimentary makeup products for dark skin cosmetic users. Unfortunately, in the fashion and beauty industry, dark skin individuals are left behind and ignored by developers of cosmetics in comparison to the development of products for fairer skin consumers. Dark skin consumers are perceived by established cosmetic companies as an uninteresting market segment to

invest in because the demographic is thought to be impoverished, unprofitable and unable to afford luxury cosmetics.

Fenty Beauty's Instagram page illustrates different, yet beautiful, models of varying skin tones during its initial social media campaign and in individual blogs. "The intentions of these young women undoubtedly vary greatly, but […] the aim of some female bloggers is to achieve some sort of recognition […] and to create the kind of unique style and personhood that would not be represented otherwise" (Murray, 2015, p. 496). Therefore, the company is perceived as an inclusive and diverse brand that celebrates people of colour by reposting pictures of media influencers using the product and creating makeup tutorials for novices using the Fenty Beauty hashtag.

Furthermore, third wave feminism is a continuous movement that began in the 1990s that is also associated with Fenty Beauty's media representation on Instagram. The third wave feminist movement is a critical advancement from the first and second wave feminists who were "ignoring the plight of women of colour, as well as women outside the West" by embracing individualism and diversity (p. 493). The beauty industry continues to display an exclusive, objectifying and unattainable standard of female beauty through skinny, Caucasian, young models. Rihanna's Fenty Beauty Instagram posts encompass the theories of third wave feminism by allowing young women of colour to redefine female beauty and feminism. Through selfies and participatory culture, women of colour are constructing an inclusive online narrative by displaying new forms of visual expressions by uploading selfies of females of various skin complexions on the company's social media page.

One problematic aspect of the Fenty Beauty line is seen through the use of selfies and consumerism as going against female empowerment. When the makeup product first launched, it used consumers' self-generating selfie posts as an informational marketing tactic to gain public attention by encouraging online participatory culture amongst female youth. Using smartphones and personal cameras that "have become so ubiquitous, that compulsive self-imaging is engendering a new consumer-based" genre, where consumers are unintentionally creating new advertisements for companies, it somewhat contradicts a female's sexual empowerment (p. 491). Young women are posting their new look on social

media with a hashtag, informing their followers of the product, and then being bombarded by advertisers that dictate that the only way to feel beautiful and empowered is by continuing the circle of consumerism. Consumerism and selfie culture have turned feminism into a commercial commodity by dictating to young girls that they will only feel empowered if they participate in the capitalist system through stereotypical purchasing patterns and allowing them to be used by the system itself. This demonstrates that even if Rihanna's cosmetic line, Fenty Beauty, which stands for diversity, inclusion and female empowerment amongst people of colour, is still a byproduct of our superficially, capitalistic system that feeds off of young women's insecurities. These women are seeking validation of their worth and beauty as women online, and Fenty Beauty is being advertised as the solution.

Lastly, the gaze is an analysis rooted in the field of visual culture that is used to comprehend how audience members perceive people across various media platforms. There have been debates about the manner in which the different sexes perceive each other within the context of the gaze. The male gaze is the theoretical understanding that women are represented from the perspective of a heterosexual man, while the female gaze is meant to be "potentially empowering, it also places the female image-maker in the position of [the] objectifier" (p. 498). In other words, female representation in the media is for the sole purpose of the sexual pleasure of men and therefore objectifies them in the process. In contrast, the female gaze is meant to reclaim a woman's presence within the media through her sexuality, allowing females to pose either provocatively or conservatively. Regardless of their efforts, women will always be seen as a sexual object in our male dominated society. As such, the main issue with the female gaze is the fact that women will be continuously placing themselves as a "hyper-sexualized fetish objects for male viewing pleasure" (p. 500).

Thus, Fenty Beauty's Instagram page analyzed as an artefact of visual culture relates to the concepts of media, gender, and self-presentation. The product's online visual branding does demonstrate a much-needed representation of beauty for women of colour in our Caucasian dominated society. However, as for any online content available on social media, Fenty Beauty still falls prey to the subjective and discriminatory nature of the fashion and beauty industry through commercialization.

The workflow of the group was very efficient. The group had minimal disagreements or problems as we all worked well together. The only issue the group experienced was with our visual artefact. Some group members did not want to pursue Fenty Beauty's Instagram page and thought it would be better to pursue other avenues. In later group discussions, individual members revealed that the reason why they were hesitant about writing and presenting an academic oriented project about Fenty Beauty is because of their lack of knowledge about the brand. These individuals were not makeup enthusiasts. Therefore, they did not know anything about the product, the industry and how women of colour are perceived in a Caucasian dominated beauty world. It presented a huge learning curve for some people, to understand the struggles and disadvantages some people are faced with every day in the cosmetic industry and relating it back to the text.

The group project work was divided equally, even though certain sections required more research and analysis. The group members were able to pick and choose what themes they wanted to pursue and write about, which presented no disagreements or hardships amongst other members. Each group member did express their worries and struggles when faced with an obstacle, but we did help each other throughout the process.

Work Cited

Murray, D. C. (2015). Notes to self: The visual culture of selfies in the age of social media. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 18*(6), 490-516. doi:10.1080/10253866.2015.1052967