Feminist Consumerism and Conscious Consumption:

Three Case Studies of "Empowerment through Cosmetics"

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Women should be beautiful. All repositories of cultural wisdom from King Solomon to King Hefner agree: women should be beautiful. It is the reverence for female beauty which informs the romantic ethos, gives it its energy and justification. Beauty is transformed into that golden ideal, Beauty— rapturous and abstract. Women must be beautiful and Woman is Beauty.

Notions of beauty always incorporate the whole of a given social structure, are crystallizations of its values. A society with a well-defined aristocracy will have aristocratic standards of beauty. In Western "democracy" notions of beauty are "democratic": even if a woman is not born beautiful, she can make herself attractive.

— Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality*

Beauty, women's business in this society, is the theater of their enslavement.

— Susan Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging"

INTRODUCTION

There is a strong precedent of cosmetics corporations using feminist ideals to promote products to a morally-minded audience in a phenomenon known as feminist consumerism.[1] This paper will focus on the particular mechanics of feminist consumerism in the past few years to explore the implications of this upon women. How have cosmetics brands in the past decade incorporated feminist ideas into marketing efforts? Supplemental questions include: what are the particular linguistic mechanisms used to promote a product to a target audience of women? What are the different feminist concepts involved in various advertisements, and how is their inclusion meant to impact the audience? What possible implications could this have on women's product consumption, psyche, and self-image? Can cosmetic products be meaningfully empowering, or do they merely reinforce traditional beauty standards under the guise of feminist rhetoric?

This research paper investigates three prominent beauty brands— Too Faced Cosmetics, Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez, and Urban Decay— to evaluate how they incorporate feminist principles into their branding and marketing strategies. By analyzing the alignment between each brand's identity versus their product offerings and advertising methods, this study aims to uncover the extent to which these brands successfully integrate feminist ideals into their consumer practices or perpetuate existing beauty norms. The individual case studies of each brand will take a combined visual and linguistic approach, informed by feminist media theory and past scholarship on feminist consumerism. My analyses will aim to identify similarities and variations in the mechanisms of feminist consumerism across brands. This paper will deconstruct

[1] Goldman, Robert, et al. "Commodity Feminism." Critical Studies in Mass Communication, vol. 8, no. 3, Sept. 1991, pp. 333–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366801.

the process of feminist consumerism to shed new light on the individual and broader implications of female cosmetics usage, and the impossibility of reconciling consumerism and feminism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1963 – 1980s: Second Wave Foundational Texts

The concept of feminist consumerism is a rather modern phenomenon, given that it relies upon corporate recognition of women as an independent consumer demographic informed by a political consciousness.[2] However, feminist thought from as early as the Second Wave, a period that predates widespread economic independence for women, is a highly beneficial lens for interpreting current examples of commodity feminism in advertising and popular culture. The beginning of the Second Wave in the 1960s marked the expansion of feminist thought to new demographics of women in the West, particularly to more diverse racial groups and economic classes.[3] The Second Wave built upon the gains of the First to question the greater societal institution of patriarchy, focusing on issues both in the domestic and public sphere: reproductive rights, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and more. Beginning with Simone de Beavoir's 1949 book *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, women questioned how philosophies of gender and their manifestations in society confined and restricted women.

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[2] Goldman, Robert, et al. "Commodity Feminism." Critical Studies in Mass Communication, vol. 8, no. 3, Sept. 1991, pp. 333–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366801.

[3] Brunell, Laura, and Elinor Burkett. "Feminism | Definition, History, Types, Waves, Examples, and Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 29 July 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/feminism.

As a part of the broader trend of revisiting gendered societal norms, many authors and activists became interested in the relationship between beauty and the feminine;[4] although *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf, one of the more major texts formally on the subject,[5] was not published until 1990, authors and essayists as early as the '60s and '70 had begun discussing it alongside other observations. In particular, the works of Susan Sontag and Andrea Dworkin from this period provide an early look at the specific beauty standards for women. Sontag and Dworkin, despite identifying outside the feminist mainstream in different senses, articulate many harmonious views of the role female beauty standards played in the subjugation of women. Sontag, as a liberal intellectual, did not self-identify as a feminist,[6] and Dworkin's radical feminist works were periodically unpopular with the mainstream feminist movement.[7] These insights are now part of a theoretical foundation for critiques about modern-day feminist consumerism in advertising and other forms of media, and their differing ideological perspectives also offer an opportunity to analyze how visions of left-wing politics between the liberal versus the radical could impact the trajectory of women's progress.

The most crucial concept that underpins the misogyny of "feminine" beauty is the idea that women have been historically defined as "other" in comparison to men, who are considered

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[4] Gay, Roxane. "Fifty Years Ago, Protesters Took on the Miss America Pageant and Electrified the Feminist Movement." Smithsonian Magazine, 11 Dec. 2017, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/fifty-years-ago-protestors-took-on-miss-america-pageant-electrified-feminist-movement-180967504.

[5] Wolf, Naomi. The Beauty Myth. 1990, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA11247009.

[6] Frankovich, Nicholas. "Against Anti-Liberalism." National Review, 16 June 2018, www.nationalreview.com/2018/06/against-anti-liberalism-allure-and-error-susan-sontag.

[7] Bindel, Julie. "Why Andrea Dworkin Is the Radical, Visionary Feminist We Need in Our Terrible Times." The Guardian, 16 Apr. 2019, www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/apr/16/why-andrea-dworkin-is-the-radical-visionary-feminist-we-need-in-our-terrible-times.

wholly human without a doubt, as pioneered by Beauvior.[8] Dworkin and Sontag both build upon this view to explain beauty as a feature of the oppressor-oppressed dynamic; what is beautiful has been defined by the foreign oppressor, to the dehumanizing detriment of the oppressed. Instead, women are limited to a narrow few criteria to establish success or retain power. Sontag describes how the social phenomenon of aging particularly highlights this discrepancy between men and women, as women are not able to establish meaningful self-identity by means other than trivial work ("menial, low-skilled jobs in light industries, which offer as feeble a criterion of success as housekeeping").[9] Instead, there are a few narrow criteria for women to retain value, one of which being their status as sexually desirable to men. Failure in this area, given the lack of other avenues to power, can mean diminishment of value, or even becoming "alien, untouchable" to men, as Sontag describes how men can view old women.

The democratization of beauty combined with its continued importance make the maintenance of beauty deceptively mandatory, since women cannot "choose" to be ugly without disproportionate social disapproval; Sontag writes: "to be ugly [as a woman] is to be seen as faintly embarrassing." The prevalence and importance of beauty harms women in many symbolic ways as women separate their bodies into parts for inspection and improvement.[10] Despite this constant scrutiny, Sontag writes, "Even if some pass muster, some will always be found wanting". Dworkin argues that the main issue with these standards is that the application of arbitrary measures of perfection to a woman's natural body affects numerous aspects of the inner self: "[Standards of beauty] prescribe her mobility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to

[8] De Beauvoir, Simone, and H. M. Parshley. The Second Sex. 1949, cds.cern.ch/record/2728998.

[9] Sontag, Susan. On Women: A new collection of feminist essays from the influential writer, activist and critic, Susan Sontag. Random House, 2023.

[10] Dworkin, Andrea. Last Days at Hot Slit: The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin. MIT Press, 2019.

which she can put her body. *They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom*." Dworkin goes even further to argue that the unnatural methods of achieving beauty also harm women in a literal sense, (including the out-of-fashion, such as Chinese foot binding, or the modern, such as the use of heat tools and brassieres) as they encourage the acceptance of pain as part of womanhood, socializing women to accept abuse from men in various literal and abstract forms.

As a result, Dworkin and Sontag observe that women appear to fundamentally lack "self-respect," (Dworkin) held back from the ability to be "fully responsible, independent adults" (Sontag). The first step both authors believe in is a dramatic rejection of these standards. For Sontag, this means that women must aspire to not only reject the temptation to avoid conventional marks of ugliness like aging, but also achieve the characteristics that provide men with personal value past youth. However, Sontag differs from Dworkin in her belief that multiple beauty standards repeating and changing often in a cyclical way can disrupt the stronghold of conventional ideas of beauty that are more restrictive to women; in areas like fashion with fast-changing, self-referential trends, Sontag considers a possibility that beauty can be made to be more inclusive. In a more utopian hypothetical, androgyny is proposed by both authors as the only way to fully dissolve the dynamic of oppression; so long as the man-woman polarity exists, women will always be defined in contrast to men's humanity, and women will suffer.

1990 - Present: Past Scholarship on Cosmetics, Feminism, and Consumerism

Following the Second Wave, the Western world experienced significant formal progress for women in society; women achieved laws that improved life in the public sphere and in

private life,[11] resulting in increasing numbers of women who were able to develop meaningful careers, achieve economic independence, and improve the conditions of sexual relations with men. Yet, the achievement of beauty persisted as a cornerstone of life for women; according to a study on regular female beauty habits from 1990, the "ritualistic" act of cosmetic application was a method of negotiating power and constructing identity, as well as a way to connect with other women through shared experiences.[12] Through adoption of various cosmetic procedures to enhance physical attractiveness, women must accept their distance from the physical norm and commit themselves to modifying their shortcomings, internalizing the standard; exposure to idealized images of beauty also was noted to decrease self-esteem in women.

In the ever-adapting market of product advertising, the concept of "commodity feminism" or "consumer feminism" resulted from the reappropriation of feminist values into specific brand names, simultaneously capitalizing on the social currency of a popular movement while neutralizing the threat of feminist discourses that criticize the role of products marketed to women.[13] This results in an imitation of a movement being integrated into society, though the reality of feminist ideas in such marketing is often contradictory and farcical. Scholarship from the past decade has honed on the particular phenomenon of femininity as an "empowering" concept, described as "power femininity."[14] In 2007, an analysis of Shiseido "beauty" ads (ranging between advertisements including cosmetics, skincare, and other products) from 2001

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[11] Bergeron, R. (2015, August 17). 'The Seventies': Feminism makes waves. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/living/the-seventies-feminism-womens-lib/index.html

[12] Rudd, Nancy Ann. "Cosmetics Consumption and Use among Women: Ritualized Activities That Construct and Transform the Self." Journal of Ritual Studies, vol. 11, no. 2, 1997, pp. 59–77. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368986.

[13] Goldman, Robert, et al. "Commodity Feminism." Critical Studies in Mass Communication, vol. 8, no. 3, Sept. 1991, pp. 333–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366801.

[14] Lazar, Michelle M. "'Discover the Power of Femininity!'" Feminist Media Studies, vol. 6, no. 4, Dec. 2006, pp. 505–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770600990002.

to 2005 in Singapore's main English newspaper found that these advertising techniques typically fall into several key categories of messaging: beauty products as "empowering agents," beauty knowledge being an empowering force, the connection between product usage and collective female agency, and usage of products as avenues to sexual power. The study ultimately found that such empowerment relied upon conventional conceptions of femininity— failing to subvert expectations or standards for women in a meaningful way— and reinforced the social sanctions of opting out.

Other approaches to understanding feminist consumerism have broadened beyond cosmetics, but found similar patterns in areas related to mainstream feminist goals, such as the fat activism movement. A 2008 study compared two "activist" marketing strategies: global beauty brand Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" and the local-level activism of a Toronto-based fat activism group, Pretty, Porky, and Pissed Off (PPPO).[15] The study found that the Dove campaign, which focused on emphasizing the importance of seeing beauty in unconventionally beautiful features (such as fatness, freckles, or old age) through various advertisements, did not question the implications of women *needing* to feel beautiful as a synonym for other signifiers of value or personhood. Additionally, through Dove's conflation of using Dove beauty products to the act of finding yourself beautiful, a curious connection was made between consumption, self-grooming, and confidence in natural beauty. On the other hand, PPPO's local performances on both mainstream and counterculture stages explored the relationship between beauty, womanhood, and violating the conventions of conventional

[15] Johnston, Josée, and Judith Taylor. "Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign." Signs, vol. 33, no. 4, June 2008, pp. 941–66. https://doi.org/10.1086/528849.

attractiveness in a more nuanced way; though PPPO also made connections between self-acceptance and feeling beautiful, other explorations of the meaning of womanhood, the pain of being fat, and the importance of confronting narrow beauty ideals took precedence. The study concluded that surface-level campaigns did little to disrupt the "hegemony of beauty ideology," often due to a lack of substantive activism beyond shallow consciousness-raising. In fact, the Dove campaign reproduced and reasserted the connection between positive self-value and beauty— no matter what beauty means.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will take a holistic approach to understanding the complete branding and marketing processes of three companies that primarily produce cosmetics: Too Faced Cosmetics (Too Faced), Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez (Rare Beauty), and Urban Decay. To identify the strategies used by highly visible and successful brands, two of these brands have been selected from the Women's Wear Daily "WWD Beauty Inc Top 100" ranking of the highest-grossing beauty companies (Urban Decay is owned by Estée Lauder Companies, and Too Faced Cosmetics is owned by L'Oréal S.A.).[16] In addition, Rare Beauty, though not owned by a major beauty conglomerate, was the fastest-growing beauty brand on TikTok in 2023 and is valued at $2 billion dollars.[17][18] All three brands enjoy a strong presence on TikTok, with each brand

[16] Wynne, Alex, et al. "The 2023 Top 100 Beauty Companies." WWD, 29 Apr. 2024, wwd.com/lists/top-cosmetic-companies-2023-1236299225.

[17] Lobad, Noor. "Rare Beauty Was the Fastest-growing Beauty Brand on Instagram and TikTok in February." WWD, 31 Mar. 2023, wwd.com/beauty-industry-news/beauty-features/rare-beauty-was-instagrams-fastest-growing-beauty-brand-in-february-1235595518.

[18] McIntyre, Hugh. "Selena Gomez Doesn't Mind Being Compared to Rihanna–At Least When It Comes to Business." Forbes, 30 May 2024, www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2024/05/30/selena-gomez-doesnt-mind-being-compared-to-rihannaat-least-when-it-comes-to-business.

featuring a product that went "viral" in the past 5 years.[19] [20] [21] All three brands also emphasize female empowerment and subversion of conventional beauty standards in their brand philosophies available on each brand's official website.

Through individual case studies, each brand will be evaluated for its consistency between purported brand philosophy versus the implementation of said philosophy into output. This evaluation will take place across three areas of company product: best-selling beauty products, "traditional" advertising in static digital or print, and "non-traditional" advertising via social media campaigns or video advertisements. Information about each beauty brand will be sourced from each brand's official website, press from the past five years, digital records of past advertising campaigns, and the social media platforms of Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube.

CASE STUDIES

Too Faced Cosmetics

As a brand philosophy, messaging on the official Too Faced website consistently emphasizes "empowerment" to be one's best self and to "feel good about yourself every day." Too Faced exhibits many examples of "empowerment femininity" as noted in other historical examples of feminist consumerism.[22] The brief "About Us" section of its website includes several instances of the denoted "empowering language" categories: cosmetics as an agent of

[19] Valenti, Lauren. "TikTok Made Me Buy It: The Rare Beauty Liquid Blush That Gives Me Sculpted Cheeks." Vogue, 6 June 2022, www.vogue.com/article/tiktok-rare-beauty-liquid-blush.

[20] Murden, Kiana. "14 Best TikTok Makeup Products in 2023: Beauty, Skin Care, and Hair Tools." Vogue, 21 Dec. 2023, www.vogue.com/article/tiktok-makeup-products.

[21] Ricketts, Mica. "I Just Tried the 10 Most Popular Beauty Products on TikTok." WhoWhatWearUK, 24 Aug. 2021, www.whowhatwear.com/uk/tiktok-viral-beauty-products.

[22] "MPP - About Us." TooFaced, www.toofaced.com/about-us.

power ("We believe makeup is power, giving you the freedom to express yourself and the confidence to take on the world") and cosmetics as empowering knowledge ("We take the mystery out of makeup and give you the tools you need to spark creativity and create your own looks"). The brand image consistently promotes makeup as a method of "empowerment" to be one's best self and to "feel good about yourself every day." Early on, the connections being made can be unclear to the consumer; without cosmetics, does one's freedom to self-expression or one's self-confidence disappear? Prior to evaluating the success of these philosophies with actual product design and marketing, these claims are already self-contradictory, reflecting a recurring problem with the combination of feminine products and feminist marketing previously noted by scholars.

Some of the best-selling products of Too Faced include the "Better Than Sex Volumizing Mascara," which the brand names as the #1 mascara in America, and the "Born This Way Flawless Coverage Natural Finish Foundation," which is meant to emulate the look of a natural, perfect skin texture.[23] Both of these products encapsulate a larger theme of surface-level feminist issues incorporated into a product that does not reproduce those feminist values in practice. The "Better Than Sex" mascara co-opts sex-positivity to connect women's sexual empowerment to the usage of a mascara; however, nothing in the act of applying mascara is necessarily sex positive. More insidiously, the "Born This Way" foundation implies that "feeling your best" means covering up your natural flaws; a woman can pretend to others she was born perfect by laboriously applying a $47 dollar foundation, hiding her genuinely natural imperfections. The

[23] "Best-Selling Makeup Products | Too Faced Cosmetics." TooFaced, 7 June 2024, www.toofaced.com/products/23789/best-sellers.

foundation innocuously upholds the constant performance of beauty that women are expected to uphold and maintain as a pretense to reality.

Figure 1A.) Too Faced Born This Way Foundation, Concealer, and Pressed Powder[24]

Figure 1B.) 0:39 from "Too Faced: Is Your Mascara Better Than Sex?"[25]

[24] toofacedcosmetics. "Born This Way Foundation, Setting Powder and Concealer." YouTube, 6 Aug. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1U4sn0q3lM.

[25] Sephora Česká republika. "Too Faced: Is Your Mascara Better Than Sex." YouTube, 27 May 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXrR5RiTTw4.

In the traditional static advertisement for the Born This Way foundation, concealer, and pressed powder set in Fig. 1A., the advertisement dares a woman to lie about her true face, emphasizing the technology of the foundation that is able to cover blemishes and mimic actual skin. Though the advertisement can be interpreted as provocatively tongue-in-cheek, as many of the other sexual and daring marketing strategies of Too Faced, the entire branding of the product— from its naming, to the repeated suggestion of upholding a pretense, to the ultimate purpose of the product, which is indeed to cover up skin imperfections— is reasserting imperfections that naturally exist.

Fig 1B features one of several sexually suggestive shots from a short video advertisement uploaded to YouTube, where a woman in her dressing room prepares to use the Better Than Sex mascara on her eyelashes. As she opens the tube of mascara, a deep male voice begins speaking to her as the mascara with over-the-top sexual sales pitches, such as "my hourglass-shaped brush arouses every last lash, top and bottom," and "my collagen-fueled formula leaves you begging for more." In response, the woman applies her mascara with various levels of near-orgasmic pleasure; as she finishes getting ready, she places the mascara into her clutch, winking to the camera that it's "*way* better than sex," before leaving. Interestingly, the advertisement seems to position the mascara (a feminine object, used for cosmetic purposes) as a replacement for the male source of sexual pleasure. Yet, the mascara has been gendered as a sultry, seductive male. Even in the privacy of a woman's bedroom, the gaze of an anonymous man remains.

Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez

Rare Beauty's image is primarily linked to that of Selena Gomez, who has been a public advocate for mental health awareness in various instances. The brand philosophy of the company appears to be focused on self-acceptance; from the brand's "About Rare Beauty" page on their website, they claim Rare Beauty is about "breaking down unrealistic standards of perfection," and "not about being someone else, but being who you are."[26] Multiple times, the concept of embracing individuality appears to promote self-love to consumers: "This is makeup made to feel good in, without hiding what makes you unique," and in a note from the founder, Gomez states: "I want us all to stop comparing ourselves to each other and just start embracing our own uniqueness." In vague terms, the brand seems to be criticizing narrow beauty standards (similar the strategy of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign), such as "redefining what beautiful means." The brand also emphasizes its goals in fostering a positive community and making a genuine impact; Rare Beauty has a "signature social impact initiative" focused on raising awareness and funds for particular mental health initiatives.[27] According to its page on the Rare Beauty Impact Fund, Rare Beauty has raised $7 million dollars and donated $2 million towards its various mental health partner groups, such as The Trevor Project.

Two of Rare Beauty's products featured on its "Best Selling Makeup Products" page are the Soft Pinch Liquid Blush and the True to Myself Tinted Pressed Finishing Powder.[28] The liquid blush is touted to look like "a soft, healthy flush," meant to emulate the look of a "soft

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[26] "About Rare Beauty | Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez." Rare Beauty, www.rarebeauty.com/pages/about?srsltid=AfmBOoocbuXcoyuMKbe282ZGGH6DxufZgLGTTHO8VN77NSrZQfnCMU89.

[27] "Rare Impact Blog | Mental Health and Self Care | Rare Beauty." Rare Beauty, www.rarebeauty.com/pages/rare-impact.

[28] "Our Best Selling Makeup Products." Rare Beauty, www.rarebeauty.com/collections/bestsellers?srsltid=AfmBOoqFnD42H3VKmF44UhhvDuqZxK_u_CPPMmLQzebWNNvWk_-iGeyG.

pinch" on each cheek, but longer-lasting. The pressed finishing powder follows a similar marketing strategy as the Born This Way foundation; the sell is that it is *meant* to look like flawless skin when it "blurs, smooths, reduces shine" to fix all imperfections, then it "sets makeup with a natural finish that stays true to you—and your skin." Both products are meant to emulate features that rarely (if ever) exist in real life, though they are considered markers of conventional attractiveness: constantly soft-flushed cheeks and naturally perfect skin. What about a product is "redefining what beautiful means," if it simply reproduces a beauty standard "undetectably" (as the skin powder is described to on its product description) and reasserts the value in being able to look effortlessly perfect, despite undoubtedly having the flaws that require fixing?

Figure 2A.[29]

Figure 2B.[30]

[29] "UGC Erika." Sephora, 31 Aug. 2024, www.sephora.com/product/rare-beauty-by-selena-gomez-soft-pinch-liquid-blush-P97989778.

[30] Instagram. www.instagram.com/p/C1XTsQqRq9L/?img_index=rarebeauty.

Figure 2A.) Soft Pinch Liquid Blush shade ranges, from Sephora product listing

Figure 2B.) “Find comfort in being rare” on Rare Beauty official Instagram, December 27 2023

As seen in Figure 2A., the Soft Pinch Liquid Blush comes in a wide range of colors, allowing consumers of all skin tones to be able to find a blush that will create the correct imitation of flushed cheeks. To analyze the feminist values of this image, there are two separate aspects to tackle: the inclusion of various skin tones versus the ultimate point of the product. Through the intentional development of several blush shades (beyond the typical hues of red and pink), the skin needs and differences between different consumers are accepted, affirming darker tones in particular of the need for products that work for more than pale skin. This could be argued to be opening up the standard of beauty from its historical focus in the Western world on the tones of White consumers. However, the ultimate goal of the product remains the same, reasserting a beauty standard for women to look “lively” and “youthful,” and the implicit expectation for women to conform to these standards is repeated again.

This leads to a partial failure of the brand to truly allow its consumers to “find comfort in being rare,” as shown in Figure 2B. Rare Beauty’s social media presence is characterized by a mix of standard product showcasing as well as more informal motivational and uplifting messages, in the form of to-do lists, desktop calendars, and post-it notes that reiterate the brand’s philosophy of self-acceptance. Yet, besides surface-level branding, the products do exactly what all other beauty products are intended to do: cover up imperfections, create the impression of features that do not already exist, and allow women to “feel” beautiful— once they have used the correct cosmetics to achieve the standard.

Urban Decay

Urban Decay was founded in 1996, and since then it claims to be "unapologetically colorful, expressive" and "the holy grail for lovers of high-pigmented, long-lasting color."[31] In contrast to the messaging of Too Faced, which emphasized empowerment through makeup, or Rare Beauty, which focused on self-acceptance, the Urban Decay philosophy appears to focus on creativity, "inspiration in the unexpected," and "reinvention over perfection." Explicitly, the About Us section of their official website reads: "Conventional beauty standards were never our thing." In addition, Urban Decay highlighted its partnerships with other causes, such as with the Stonewall Community Foundation, Latinx Heritage Month, and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) in 2023.

Some notable products from Urban Decay's best-selling lineup include the All-Nighter Waterproof Makeup Setting Spray, the 24/7 Glide-On Waterproof Eyeliner Pencil, and the Urban Decay Naked Neutrals Eyeshadow Palette. Interestingly, two of the products highlight their durability and ease of application as the focal points for products that would otherwise be standard across companies; the setting spray does not actually change anything about the face, but is supposed to fix makeup in place and maintain whatever look has been created. The eyeliner pencil, while a fairly standard product that perhaps plays into the neonatal beauty standard to have large eyes (a sign of youth), comes in 38 colors, including: black, lime green, gold, and sparkling pink.

[31] "About Urban Decay." Urban Decay, www.urbandecay.com/about-us.html.

On the other hand, the Naked eyeshadow palette seems to fall back on the sex-positive trope of connecting makeup usage to sexual empowerment; on the website, a banner that prompts the consumer to try-on different eyeshadow looks from the palette virtually reads: "See how good you look naked."

Figure 3A.) Advertising featuring Ezra Miller and Lizzo as part of broader campaign "Pretty Different"[32]

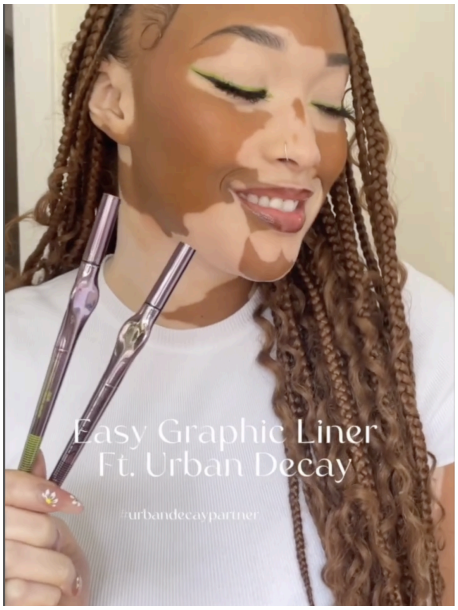

Figure 3B.) "Easy Graphic Liner Ft. Urban Decay" [33]

Figure 3A., an advertisement by Urban Decay featuring the tagline "Pretty Different," subverts the typical gendered concepts of makeup to produce certain facial features; Ezra Miller, a nonbinary celebrity, sports a bright red lipstick. Lizzo, a singer-songwriter known for her body positivity activism, has bright blue eyeshadow fanning across her eyelids. Similarly, Fig 3B.

[32] Fasanella, Kaleigh. "Urban Decay's New 'Pretty Different' Campaign Stars Lizzo, Ezra Miller, and More." Allure, 27 June 2019, www.allure.com/story/urban-decay-pretty-different-campaign.

[33] Instagram. Urbandecaycosmetics, www.instagram.com/p/Ctw4Yv5Jsh8/?hl=en.

Features an influencer partnered with Urban Decay with vitiligo, demonstrating how to use a liquid eyeliner to create a neon green eyeliner look. Both advertisements feature models outside conventional ideas of makeup usage, with bold, colorful makeup that encourages the consumer to think of makeup in an artistic way, without an emphasis on traditional methods of usage.

CONCLUSION

Though Susan Sontag and Andrea Dworkin felt very differently about the relationship between the class struggle and the women's struggle against the patriarchy, the case studies that have been conducted conclude that it is not possible for a company to have a profit interest in selling cosmetic products that benefit from women's adherence to the beauty standard without compromising any possible feminist values that a product could be marketed to offer. Between the three case studies, this occurred in various ways, and the levels to which each beauty brand successfully challenged the role of cosmetics in beauty varied as well. As the most obvious example of feminist consumerism, Too Faced incorporated common ideas of "female empowerment," telling consumers to "own your pretty" with the tools of "self-expression" at their fingertips. The best-selling products all aimed to solve the most common gaps women have between their natural bodies and the conventional standard: bumpy and lined skin, short lashes, facial pallor, et cetera. Despite marketing each product in near-ironically feminist undertones, such as the sex-positive mascara, each product lacked genuine disruption of a beauty norm.

Rare Beauty's impact is slightly less surface-level, given the company's significant financial involvement in various charities related to many different causes. However, the products themselves cannot be deemed "feminist" or impactful in the hegemony of beauty

standards. For each "True To Myself" pressed powder sold, a woman is reaffirmed of her responsibility to have matte, unlined, and unmarked skin, despite the possible opportunities that those funds could provide to the company's various partnered charities.

Urban Decay's messaging that focuses mostly on product quality and unconventional styles of makeup is more successful in dismantling misogynist beauty standards, as it shifts the focus from empowering women to become pretty through the standard application techniques to makeup as a form of visual artistry, creative expression, and subversion of expectations. Urban Decay emphasizes its gender neutrality, and the "Pretty Different" campaign featured ambassadors of various genders, ethnicities, and looks. Urban Decay's advertising strategy reflects the sentiments of Dworkin and Sontag, who emphasized the importance of androgyny and the dissolution of unnecessary gendered norms to achieve gender equality in a genuine sense.

Perhaps as women become more aware of both the perils of female beauty standards and of the hypocrisy of feminist consumerism, such advertising strategies will lose favor with brands. However, as we look to the future and the definition of beauty grows to include more and more people with various features, the grasp of beauty upon culture seems to only further intensify; as Rosalind Gill writes in "Neoliberal Beauty" from *The Routledge Companion to Beauty Politics*: "the beauty industrial complex has extended and intensifed its grip and has also moved deeper into women's psychic lives, calling on women to be smart, responsible, self-optimizing subjects

who work on their appearance and on their character and dispositions to cultivate a beautiful body and an appealing, positive mental attitude."[34]

[34] Gill, Rosalind. "Neoliberal Beauty." Routledge eBooks, 2021, pp. 9–18. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429283734-3.

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