A SITE OF DOMINATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MILLENNIAL BLACK

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN BLACK BEAUTY SUPPLY STORES

by

JALEESA REED

(Under the Direction of Katalin Medvedev)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored millennial Black women's relationship with beauty retail spaces including national big-box retailers and local beauty supply stores. Data was collected through 20 semi-structured virtual interviews. Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and Black feminist geographies (McKittrick, 2006) informed the interview questions and data analysis. The study describes and defines the Black beauty supply store and demonstrates that Black beauty supply stores are culturally relevant sites, which support millennial Black women's ability to self-define while also providing the setting for racial profiling and harassment.

The study found that the thought process behind going to the Black beauty supply store involves the following: 1) the admission that *only* the Black beauty supply store has products specific to managing Black women's beauty (especially hair). Because of this, Black women invested in managing their beauty have to shop there. 2) The continued reinforcement of the feeling of being watched, suspected of wrongdoing, and assumptions of criminality directed at them affects their psyche. This leads to: 3) a desire for a quick and convenient experience and disengagement from an important Black cultural site; and 4) the realization that fully satisfying and empowering beauty experiences in beauty retailing do not exist for Black women. Despite

the obstacles and constrictions of the Black beauty supply store, millennial Black women continue shopping there to cultivate their individual styles.

INDEX WORDS: beauty supply stores, millennial Black women, beauty retail, beauty

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DEDICATION

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

"I wrestle with affirmations, settle for masking faces
After all, the stolen lands are always greener places
I said, "Mama, we gon' make it here someday"
-"Someday" by Ruby Ibarra

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me to new scholars and ideas. The Institute for Women's Studies also provided me with community, a space to read and write, and an assistantship when I needed it the most. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Black women are often left out of the history of beauty at all levels. Comprehensive

historical analyses of beauty have focused on Western ideals (Gunn 1973; Marwick 1988) and

suggest that white men have been the dominant decision-makers of who or what is considered

beautiful. An analysis of beauty retail spaces, specifically, the Black beauty supply store,

demonstrates the underlying power dynamics that are present in beauty retailing, which already

appear in the discussions and depictions of beauty around the world. The retail space where

Black women are buying their beauty products represents political and personal investments in

beauty. Racial profiling, or "shopping while black" is one example of how personal bias from

employees can affect minority experiences within retail stores (Pittman, 2017). Black people can

identify racial discrimination more frequently, due to repeated personal experiences, shared

knowledge, and conversations around racial profiling within the community (Bennett, Hill, &

Daddario, 2015). Hispanic, Latinx, and Asian American consumers are just as likely to

experience racial profiling in stores (Bennett, Hill, & Daddario, 2015). Yet, Black women have

been relegated to the ethnic beauty aisles in stores such as Wal-Mart and Target and barely

acknowledged in department stores where high-end beauty products are sold within heavily

branded areas and from behind glass counters (Reed & Medvedev, 2018). These experiences are

specific to beauty retail, where personal motivations for shopping are often hedonic rather than

utilitarian.

Black women have an existing outlet for products specific to their hair, skin, and cosmetics needs: Black beauty supply stores. A beauty supply store is a retail store that provides cosmetics ranging from hair, nail, and skin products. Cosmetics, beauty products, and beauty supply stores make up a $15 billion global industry (Plunkett Research, 2019), but the mention of a beauty supply store brings different images to mind. According to Plunkett Research Firm (2019), Ulta and Sally Beauty are the top two beauty supply stores in the United States as well as globally. Yet, when most Black women hear "beauty supply store," Ulta and Sally Beauty are not the stores that come to mind. This discrepancy between the references is apparent in two articles, one written by a Black Canadian woman who referred to her local beauty supply store (Candace D., 2019), and another article in *Glamour* (Rambharose, 2017) which referred to Sally Beauty as the ultimate beauty supply store. In a post written for *Medium* (2019), Candace D., states: "If it wasn't for us, black people, stores like this wouldn't even exist and I'm starting to think that maybe they shouldn't." Candace's experience as an employee and consumer of a beauty supply store is unique to this space; it is contextualized by her identity as a Black woman, working alongside other Black women, selling products to Black women, while enduring microaggressions and outright racism from predominantly Asian owners.

On the other hand, Rambharose (2017) describes beauty supply store brands as the ideal place to shop for beauty products. Not only are the products cheaper in Sally Beauty Supply, but the shelves are stocked with hidden gems and the displays are easy to navigate. While Black beauty supply stores may also have unique and rare finds, the spatial layout of the store is laden with power as merchants are positioned above the salesfloor with reflective mirrors and cameras to help with surveillance. Lee (2000) found that these employees positioned on high chairs and ladders contributed to an immediate sense of distrust between the customers and merchants.

Many beauty supply stores servicing African American women in the U.S. are owned by Jewish or Korean immigrants (Silverman, 1998; Ryoo, 2005; Yi & Hoston, 2020). Minority entrepreneurship faces unique barriers, and the beauty industry is no exception. Silverman (1998, 1999) describes how the ethnic beauty aid industry has two channels: professional and retail. While Black Americans were present in both during the 1950s and 1960s, when a distinct Black beauty identity was emerging, they were edged out of the beauty retail industry by larger companies with more capital. White-owned companies provided the products to Korean and Jewish entrepreneurs in Chicago, which caused a split in Black consumer loyalty (Silverman, 1999). This led to Black entrepreneurs committing to the professional channel of selling products to hair stylists and salons to sustain their businesses. To consolidate their power, Black American beauty product manufacturers established the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI) in 1981. The AHBAI helped create relationships between Black-owned product manufacturing companies and beauty retailers, with manufacturers eventually seeking more control over their in-store merchandise displays (Chain Drug Review, 1991). Though Black manufacturers were forced out of the beauty retail industry, they continued to work towards controlling their product representation in large retail markets. This technique allowed them to indirectly expand to a market outside of beauty supply stores.

Within the retail environment, Korean immigrants' preconceptions of Black Americans combined with the effect of the model minority myth on both the Korean employer and the Black American consumer can create a tense environment within the Black beauty supply store. Yet, Black consumers are forced to continue to shop in these spaces because a wide assortment of products they need are only available there. Candace, from the *Medium* (2019) article mentioned above, was fired because she refused to surveil others, stating that she knew all too well what it

feels like being subjected to surveillance herself. Candace stressed that beauty supply stores, like the one where she worked, would not exist if Black Americans did not shop there. Despite the negative experiences in these stores, Black beauty supply stores continue to exist and turn a sizable profit.

Different spaces exist to meet the beauty needs of Black women from the hair salon to beauty supply stores, but they all offer products for Black women specifically. In some Black beauty supply stores, walls are covered with different wigs, hair of different texture, length, and color, all seeking to cater to a certain aesthetic. Women can express their identities with the variety of products available in the Black beauty supply store, facilitating the production of a fluid Black American beauty standard. Other stores, such as Sally Beauty Supply may target licensed professionals, but also provide products to consumers. Black hairstylists in the early stages of their career may find the beginnings of financial independence in beauty supply stores. Beauty supply stores cater to the independent entrepreneur who may be starting a hair salon out of her home or renting a chair in a new salon, hoping to pay rent. These stores, then, are not only important to the women who are shopping there, but also important to the women depending on these products to make a livelihood. Beauty supply stores are important social and cultural markers in Black women's lives – they represent an entrance into Black beauty culture, while also exposing young Black girls to early lessons with interracial conflict.

Beauty retail, in general, is not a prevalent consideration in retail and merchandising discipline. Yet, beauty has been relevant to all cultures for centuries. While studies exist on Black beauty, Black women's shopping experiences, especially within beauty retail, have been rarely studied. Black women's beauty concerning hair has been studied from multiple perspectives (Banks, 2000; Rooks, 2000; Craig, 2002; Johnson, 2016; Davis-Bundrage,

Medvedev, & Hunt-Hurst, 2018), but their perceptions and relations to their beauty are rarely studied from the perspective of cosmetics usage. Studies on racial profiling in apparel stores do not include beauty retail stores. Yet, perceptions and expectations surrounding beauty could inform the decisions of beauty consumers and retailers alike.

As the retail environment is multidimensional, millennial shoppers are also multifaceted. Millennials are in tune with atmospherics, they are self-aware and opinionated on everything from product displays to lighting and customer service (Calienes, 2016). While the importance of atmospherics such as color, merchandise display, and marketing stimuli have repeatedly been studied at both product and retail levels (Moore & Carpenter, 2008), generational perceptions of the retailing environment for clothing and fashion-related products have been studied far less. Attention to retail design could increase millennial traffic in brick-and-mortar retailers and encourage greater engagement and alignment with brands seeking millennial consumers (Parment, 2013). Creating retail environments that connect with specific consumer groups helps retailers leverage physical stores as critical components of brand building (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Kumar & Kim, 2014; Calienes et al., 2016). Studying the retail experience from a millennial perspective could enlighten researchers on millennial purchase intentions and boost future retail prospects.

To transform retail spaces and make them more inclusive of differences, retail store designers and scholars must attempt to theoretically understand how consumers see their identities and their experience interacting within the retail environment. They also need to consider how retail spaces can enrich the everyday lives of people that frequent them. This can be done by investigating different groups of people and their interactions with various retail environments, such as shopping malls, department stores, and boutiques. Different formats of retailing can also

offer valuable experience to diverse consumers. Fashion trucks (Hodgkiss, 2018), for example, could offer a service that brings curated products directly to people of color when entrepreneurs possess social capital but lack the finances to open a brick-and-mortar retail space. Some retailers have also suggested public spaces as a new shopping environment. Otherwise vacant or under-used public spaces, such as shopping mall courtyards, or outdoor spaces near office buildings, offer opportunities for new retail experiences which meet the expectations of today's consumer.

Significance of the Study

Black people's experiences within space are deeply rooted in historically documented experiences such as slavery, segregation, and integration. Thus, when they interact within retail spaces, they are not only participating in a market exchange but also operating in a space with historical ties to inequality and difference. So much of how consumers experience a retail space has to do with the products, the location of the store, and how much they can afford to spend. Race and ethnicity have often served as "rough proxies for class" and have been used by retailers, marketers, and advertisers to separate the wealthy customers whose patronage seems more promising than their poorer shoppers (Bay & Fabian, 2015). Many Americans tend to see consumption as a matter of individual preference (Bay & Fabian, 2015) where consumers can purchase whatever they can afford but, in actuality, who we are shapes our experiences within the market. According to Bay and Fabian (2015),

> patterns of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation shape American consumers' retail opportunities, experiences, and preferences in much the same way that they shape the demographic composition of our nation's housing projects, ethnic enclaves, affluent suburbs, inner-city neighborhoods, and gated communities. (p. 2)

In other words, racism is a form of systematic oppression exhibited through various channels, from health care to education, and retail spaces intended for consumption are not exempt.

Scholars outside of the fashion industry have examined retail space from angles as diverse as gender, race, and class, yet within the discipline, scholars continue to view retail space from two perspectives – as an artistic representation of a brand, worthy of museum status, or as a space meant to influence consumer behavior. Both fail to honestly examine the nature of retail space and how it may affect consumers. The emerging problem here lies in the disconnect between retail designers' intentions and the actual experience of the consumer. Though there are competing influences, such as the sales personnel, the location of the retail store, and the context within which it is located (mall, boutique, outdoor mall, etc.); consumer satisfaction remains the primary focus.

The pandemic has also influenced beauty retailing in important ways. In contrast to the fashion industry, the beauty industry experienced growth and record sales during the COVID-19 quarantine (Strugatz, 2020). While product sales were increasing from e-commerce, changes specific to beauty retailing were made to the in-store experience. Beauty retailers such as Sephora, Ulta, and Glossier temporarily shut their doors. Sephora and Ulta were able to weather the initial storm and pivoted by supplying individually wrapped makeup samples and sanitizing their stations and testers every two hours. The ability to try and test products before buying them has been a key driver for brick-and-mortar beauty stores. For national beauty retailers like Sephora, a no-touch policy for display testers is enforced in stores but may vary according to regional health guidance (Sephora Health & Hygiene, 2020). In cities where local health officials allow it, limited in-store product testing is also allowed. In-store testers, a hallmark of beauty retail, have decreased dramatically in stores as consumers express concern over cleanliness and

sanitizing procedures (Nanda, 2020; Strugatz, 2020). These small changes increased consumer confidence in in-store shopping, especially during a time when consumers are choosing between spending on small luxuries, such as beauty products, or increasing their savings in fear of an economic downturn. Despite the social, political, and economic realities around COVID-19, consumers continue to look to in-store experiences as a mental break from endless Zoom calls and quarantine hobbies. Some beauty companies have shown that they can remain relevant during these times. The companies which can provide a shopping experience that factors a public health standpoint into consumer experience will likely thrive in this new normal.

With these considerations in mind, this study will investigate how millennial Black women's perceptions of beauty relate to their shopping experiences and beauty retail environments. This includes assessing which interior design cues can affect the beauty retail shopping experience. The data suggests that these differences may differ across classes and that the Black beauty supply store signifies the continued existence of radicalized retail spaces.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How have beauty spaces impacted millennial Black women's shopping preferences for beauty products in the United States?

    1. How do millennial Black women make meaning of their relationship to beauty within the context of beauty retail spaces?

    2. How does class status influence millennial Black women's shopping experiences?

3. What aspects of beauty spaces are relevant to millennial Black women's experiences when shopping for beauty products?

    4. Based on the literature, what are the key factors used to attract millennial women?

5. From the perspective of millennial Black women, which retail store elements are relevant to their shopping experiences?

Objectives

- To understand how spaces set up for beauty retailing impact individual perceptions of beauty

- To understand how millennial Black women, relate their shopping experience to their goals of achieving a desired level of beauty

- To understand how Black women's beauty retail experiences may differ from mainstream depictions of shopping experiences within retail environments

- To understand how class status affects millennial Black women's beauty retailing preferences

Definition of Key Terms

Beauty supply store is a retail store that provides cosmetics ranging from hair, nail, and skin products. In this study, it refers to a Black beauty supply store where customers can find merchandise for appearance management geared towards a Black clientele. Typical products cater to Black women's various hair types and range from cosmetics, hair tools, wigs, hairpieces, fragrances, skincare, nails, and salon and barber supplies. The beauty supply store is akin to a Wal-Mart or CVS, depending on the size, except, all products cater for the maintenance and enhancement of Black women's beauty. In the literature, beauty supply stores have also been referred to as *ethnic beauty aids* (Silverman, 1999) and *ethnic beauty supplies* (Lee, 2000).

Black is defined as a person whose ancestry originates in African origin, comprising multiple African ethnicities, on the continent of Africa, and in the international African community (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Throughout this dissertation, Black is capitalized because it refers to a group of people connected through the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. Epistemological issues are at the root of feminist research (Harding & Norberg, 2005); questioning what can be known, how knowledge is legitimated, and how we know what we know. Epistemologies are also culturally specific (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and point to the ways power relations shape whose knowledge is valued and why (Hill Collins, 2008).

Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). It is the largest generational cohort to date (Fry, 2020) comprising 1.8 billion of the global population. The majority of the world's millennials live in Asia (24%), and 4% are located in the United States (MSCI, 2020).

White is defined as an American individual whose ancestry traces back to Europe. White is not capitalized throughout the dissertation because it is used to loosely refer to a group of people in the form of white communities and white people (Kapitan, 2016). White people may not share class or ethnic similarities, but due to the social construction of whiteness, they are grouped together based on their ability to benefit from white privilege and white supremacy (Bonds & Inwood, 2016).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tensions in Beauty History

Beauty is a reasonable pursuit for all individuals; it has been repeatedly demonstrated that beauty provides benefits ranging from social capital to tangible advantages like higher grades or career advancement (Anderson, Grunert, Katz, & Lovascio, 2010; O'Connor & Gladstone, 2018; Urbatsch, 2018; Webster & Driskell, 1983). Individuals who are conventionally beautiful according to the standard of the time, possess aesthetic capital, which can be used at their discretion. However, aesthetic capital is not always an easily tapped resource. To use it, individuals have to rely on contextual gender norms to activate and receive the benefit (Sarpila, Koivula, Kukkonen, Aberg, & Pajunen, 2020). In other words, conventional beauty is tied up in conventional ideas of femininity, sensuality, and intellect. Being beautiful is not always an advantage. In certain contexts, attractiveness can be associated, for example, with less financial knowledge and serve as a moderating factor of whether or not women receive business loans (Kuwabara & Thébaud, 2017). Society creates a beauty standard and reinforces it through pop culture and visual imagery, making it seem as if beauty is necessary for attracting attention, fame, and good fortune.

Cosmetics have religious and class connotations and are historically reflective of power relations. The history of beauty from the 1500s to the 1960s is predominantly European and mostly depends on artists' representations of beauty in art (Marwick, 1988). Although one book or artist or institution cannot represent all types of beauty throughout history, the Western view

of beauty has been the standard. The dominant history of beauty has privileged European features, styles, and cultural preferences**.** This history is apparent globally from the Middle East, Greece, and Rome where colonialism was a driver in spreading beauty rituals and ideals from one cultural group to another (Gunn, 1973). European colonizers were introduced to modern cosmetics and toiletries during their conquests. Alexander the Great, for example, did his part in spreading ideas of cleanliness and hygiene during Antiquity. As he conquered groups throughout the Middle East, he facilitated the exchange of beauty rituals between cultures (Gunn, 1973).

Gunn (1973) describes the use of cosmetics as a means of cultural exchange not only in products but also in beauty ideals. The dominant actor in Gunn's (1973) history of beauty is the "Roman lady" or "Society woman". Occasionally, a "slave girl washed off [a Roman woman's] face" (Gunn, 1973, p. 44), but she did so in passing as if the ritual would happen without the enslaved girl mixing the dyes and compounds or preparing the tools before her mistress's application. The slave girl reappears throughout the book, but always only as a passing mention. However, her image transcends history, because no matter the continent or time, there is always a "slave girl" assisting someone with the process of beautifying themselves. In sum, while Gunn (1973) introduces cosmetics as a political and cultural tool, he pays no attention to the actual people who make the cosmetic ritual possible. To exercise power through cosmetic rituals, there has to be an individual without access to the perfumes and bath times. In Gunn's perspective, the enslaved women are mere accessories to the process.

Throughout history, beauty has been frequently examined from the perspective of social position and wealth. Women could generally use their beauty to advance socially, but it required strategic risks, for example, in Catherine the Great's court (Marwick, 1988). While one's beauty

was noticed, it did not override one's social and political position. Consequently, the argument that beauty is more than a means to social advancement in Western society is fairly recent.

Marwick (1988) confines his history of beauty to Western civilization because as he puts it, Western civilization "dominates the world". As a result of such thinking and the authority of European ethnocentric views, beauty histories have not done adequate work to include a nuanced discussion of Black beauty. Instead, they continue to reinforce the cultural standard of Western ideals and whiteness as the norm. Despite this, beauty has been historically influenced by multiple diverse cultural groups. For example, new images of Black American beauty were documented throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, and from the 1980s to the present, American beauty ideals have also been affected by drag culture and the LGBTQ community. The continued relevance of beauty brands such as Makeup Art Cosmetics (MAC) which has celebrated LGBTQ creativity from its inception in 1984 is one example of this (MAC Loves Pride, 2020). Furthermore, Kim Kardashian's use of dark and light shades to contour her face and create the image of an ideal bone structure relies on makeup techniques that were originally championed by the drag community (ELLE, 2018). Despite this, Marwick's decision to deliberately confine the full picture of beauty to white beauty reinforces and upholds an exclusively white standard of beauty.

Similar questionable assumptions about Black beauty are not limited to beauty history but even apply to disciplines like Women's Studies. Audre Lorde, a Black feminist, speaks to this issue in *The Uses of Anger (1981)* when she states that the 1970s feminist movement was not adequately addressing issues of racism because Women's Studies departments did not have anyone equipped to teach race work. However, Lorde argues that if feminism intends to address all life concerns and possible futures of women, racism cannot be seen as a problem that only

belongs to Black women. Everyone invested in the advancement of women must be concerned with all women and scholars invested in the history of beauty should be concerned with beauty culture outside the West as well.

Tracing American beauty's lineage and history from Black women's perspective provides an opportunity to present a counter-narrative. Despite the burden of dealing with various forms of oppression daily, Black women continue to cultivate and care for their beauty. In this dissertation, I draw attention to how millennial Black women have managed their beauty and its relationship to the spaces where they shop for their beauty products.

Beauty is a "combination of qualities, such as shape, color or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight" (Merriam-Webster). It is contextual, ephemeral, and almost always associated with women and femininity. To be beautiful is to be feminine and to bring pleasure to others through appearance. Yet, beauty can exist without femininity and vice versa. For most people, beauty is understood as a physical characteristic of the human body. Femininity, on the other hand, is a social construct. As an ideal, femininity changes and its relevance to womanhood and female bodies has also changed throughout history. Conventional definitions of beauty describe it as an object, but an explanation of Black women's beauty is more than that. Tate (2009) describes Black women's beauty as a performative process, an ongoing political and stylistic negotiation of Black aesthetics, informed by feminist and Black National ideology. Her definition captures the many facets of beauty for Black women – a political tool, a performance, and a creative expression. Tate's definition, notably, does not include the aggregate of characteristics but instead focuses on the uses of beauty practices and the rationale behind why Black women would engage with beauty differently.

Naming the "combination of qualities" (Merriam-Webster) restricts beauty to boundaries and limitations that are not applicable across cultures. Stereotypes of Black people's hair as unmanageable, nappy, and bushy are the legacy of today's conversations around "good hair" (Rowe, 2019). "Good hair" has a loose curl, or wavy texture while "bad hair" is textured, with a tight afro-like curl pattern. This dichotomy of "good hair" versus "bad hair" originates in slavery, when straight hair without curls was considered the ideal. In contrast, textured hair was closer to African hair, and thus labeled as "bad hair" (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). The qualities that identified "good hair" are rooted in chattel slavery, which dehumanized people by reducing their humanity to property. In other words, "good hair" was an indicator of market value at the time of its conception and thus placed the slave owner's white conception of beauty as more valuable than others.

Being described and valued as having "good hair" was important to slave traders at the site of the auctioneer's block. McKittrick (2006) uses an excerpt from *Clotel; or the President's Daughter* by William Wells Brown, to situate the sale of Clotel, President Jefferson's daughter, on the auction block. Clotel is described by her "fair skin," "wavy black hair," and "graceful appearance," which made her a "valuable, desirable, commodity". Her looks were used to make assumptions and claims about her intelligence, temperament, and moral character, resulting in a $1200 sale of Clotel's body. It is not known whether $1200 is a relatively high price compared to other sales, but McKittrick (2006) states that:

> Clotel's bones, muscles, sinews, blood, nerves, and sexuality sold for five hundred dollars; her moral character sold for two hundred dollars; her improved intellect sold for one hundred dollars; and her chastity and virtue sold for four hundred dollars. (p. 66)

So, it is not so much the price that matters but the meaning, and subsequent value, attached to Clotel's bodily characteristics because she was African and white. The valuing of white features over African features in the U.S. slave market was not limited to the auction block and slaveholder preferences for light-skinned women were more than skin-deep. The ability to trace and identify whiteness in a slave's bloodline increased the price of the person for sale, which meant that slave traders were more interested in characteristics such as lighter skin and wavy hair because they were visible markers of assumed obedience (Johnson, 2000). Thus, at the slave market and on the auction block, beauty standards that placed white and African features in opposition were defined and validated, demonstrating that evaluations of beauty have spatial dimensions as well.

Judgments of beauty are based on individual aesthetic value such as what an individual or a group deems beautiful in its respective context. Yet, one thing has remained constant in the media – Black women's expressions of beauty need to be controlled, which is indicative of a larger issue with Black people and Black culture. Take, for example, the policing of Black people's bodies and expressions of beauty. The CROWN Act is a legal intervention into the judicial system aiming to ban race-based hair discrimination. Hair discrimination is specific to Black hair texture or protective hairstyles such as braids, twists, or Bantu knots. CROWN stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair." Compared to non-Black women, Black women are 1.5x more likely to be sent home from work because of their hair (C.R.O.W.N. Research Study, 2019). 80% of Black women in the same study felt that they had to change their natural hair to fit in at the office (C.R.O.W.N Research Study, 2019). Hair-based discrimination has real consequences for Black women, as employers exercise their bias during the hiring process and throughout the time the employee works there. What line does Black women's

beauty cross that makes it necessary to have laws that state it's illegal to discriminate against Black people because of their hairstyle? Black women's attempts to wear protective hairstyles, such as cornrows, Bantu knots, and dreadlocs, are seen as an insult to an otherwise "professional" façade in a corporate setting, which generally reflects a white aesthetic. Thus, Black people's hair is inadvertently made political by the very people declaring a specific type of hairstyle as professional. In reality, professionalism is a behavior, driven by principles and not a hairstyle or skin color.

These vague but deterministic qualities of beauty as described by Merriam-Webster are more than likely racialized qualities. In addition to the historical legacy of Black women's hair, racializing beauty is also evident in the case of *Renee Rogers v. American Airlines* (1981). Airlines' policy prohibited employees from wearing their hair in cornrows. Rogers challenged the policy, arguing that Black women have been wearing braided hairstyles for centuries, and therefore cornrows are historically and culturally relevant styles to the African American community. According to Rogers, American Airlines' policy discriminated against Black women based explicitly on their hairstyle. The court did not rule in Rogers' favor, paving the way for companies to legally uphold a specific type of hair style or texture as professional, and thus define which hairstyles are appropriate for public spaces. The presiding Judge Abraham D. Sofaer rejected Rogers's claim of cultural relevance with a reference to Bo Derek, a white actress who wore her hair in the style of Fulani braids, from the Fulani ethnic group in West Africa, for the 1979 movie *10*. When asked about the hairstyle in 2015, Derek said "it's a hairdo! That's all it is!...of all the important racial and cultural issues we have right now, people are going to focus on a hairstyle? … I'll save my efforts toward important racial and cultural issues" (Davis & Jones, 2015). Ironically, Black women's hairstyles are important political, racial, and cultural

issues *because* of Judge Sofaer referenced Derek's image as evidence that Black people did not have a cultural claim to braided hairstyles. In addition to allowing companies the right to uphold arbitrary standards of professionalism, the cultural and political significance of hair braiding in Black American communities was also erased by the verdict.

Since Rogers' case, there have been multiple hair discrimination cases related to texture (Pitts v. Wild Adventures, Inc., 2008) and color (Greene, 2011). Yet, these cases have upheld the ruling in the Rogers' case; they confirmed that employers have the right to create policies to define expectations around hair because it is not an immutable characteristic. Because employees can change their hairstyle to comply with the policy, employers are not discriminating based on race.

In one sense, American mainstream culture's repeated attempts to consume Black women's styles without acknowledging their roles in the creation and proliferation of those hairstyles keep Black women out of the beauty spotlight. Yet, even as Kim Kardashian wears Fulani braids today with no repercussions besides a brief social media backlash crowning her as the "face of cultural appropriation" (BBC Newsbeat, June 2018), Black women are still discriminated against in the workplace for the same hairstyle. How does the same hairstyle communicate different messages based on the wearer's body and social status? From the observer's perspective, the difference is the status placed on lighter skin colors and class. Kardashian, and her celebrity social status, may make her seem like an exception to the rule but celebrities are not above critique and reformation. In fact, it is because of Kardashian's celebrity status that the implications of her behavior are more drastic. Even as recent as 2018, Kim Kardashian captioned a photo of her hair styled in Fulani braids with "Bo West," another reference to Bo Derek from *10*. The title of the film, 10, referenced the maximum score a woman

can get for her beauty and sexual allure. Kim Kardashian and Bo Derek profiting from a braided hairstyle with African origins, while selling sexuality, highlights the relationship between Black women's bodies, sexuality, and beauty and their commodification.

Janell Hobson, Professor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, explores the relationship between Blackness and beauty in popular culture from an embodied perspective in *Venus in the Dark* (2005). She argues that the parading of Sarah Baartman throughout Europe and the eventual fascination, objectification, and scientific usage of her body to falsely justify racial physical differences has laid the groundwork for a violent narrative of Black women's beauty. Hobson discusses a counter-aesthetic of beauty that affirms the Black body politic by embracing Black bodies' new representations. She emphasizes the agency of the artist who is knowledgeable of the legacy of the Black body politic. Through their knowledge and renegotiation of their physical representations, they reframe the history of Black bodies.

A counter-aesthetic exists when the woman controls the gaze and the lens (Hobson, 2005). Hobson provides examples of Black artists who pay tribute to Sarah Baartman by recreating the site and memories that Baartman's body represents. Placing their body within the historical reference of Baartman's body adds a new layer to the narrative, allowing artists to express their agency in showcasing their bodies how they want. Reframing the beauty narrative does not require an active awareness of the beauty industrial complex, the patriarchy, or the history of Black women's beauty. Beauty knowledge and alternative beauty standards and expectations are passed down amongst Black women who may see them as cultural rituals, rather than political actions.

In fashion, the acknowledgment and incorporation of Black women's beauty is relatively new. During the 1950s, representations of Black women as glamourous emerged in the fashion

industry for the first time. Models like Helen Williams and Naomi Sims provided Black women

with an aspirational ideal of Black femininity, one that was glamourous and also respectable

because it reinforced "white-dominated ideals of beauty, femininity, and respectability"

(Cheddie, 2002). Because this notion of beauty was also upheld in Black magazines like *Ebony*

and *Jet,* Eurocentric beauty standards were not challenged until the Civil Rights Movement

during the late 1960s. According to Cheddie (2002), the emergence of the natural hair movement

provided an alternative ideal for Black women with different notions of Black femininity and

beauty.

Issues with Black model representation from the 1950s are still present in the 21st

century. Summers (2017) critiques the 2008 *Vogue Italia* issue, which featured global

representations of Black beauty with Black models from Europe, the U.S., and Latin America.

The models chosen for the issue also support the singular, white, heteronormative conceptions of

Black femininity and the Black female body. The issue provides exposure to a global and safe

Black beauty that does not challenge patriarchal standards and also reinforces the dominant

white beauty standard. Summers (2017) argues that blaming the modeling agencies, or the

designers who uphold their aesthetic over social and political issues (such as race), ignores the

structures of race, gender, class, and sexual inequalities within the fashion system. And even if

the industry increases the number of Black models, we should be wary of a strategy where the

quantity of Black models becomes the measure of change in the fashion industry.

As *Vogue Italia* demonstrates, a fashion magazine with a full cast of Black models can have

commercial success due to the commodification and marketing of Blackness as novelty and

diversity.

Black beauty is a profitable business; Conde Nast reprinted this issue for the first time in its history due to its popularity. So, attention is being paid to portraying and containing Black women's beauty in an acceptable way. In the same way that *Vogue Italia* sought a global representation of Black women's beauty by selecting Black models from Europe, the U.S., and Latin America. There were also opportunities to choose a diverse set of Black models, in body type and skin color. Presenting the multiplicity of Black beauty is also a chance to affirm its global diversity instead of constraining it to a white lens. The selection of Black models who fit the white Eurocentric beauty norm of thin bodies demonstrates that only a particular type of Black beauty is acceptable for *Vogue Italia.* The deliberate selection of Black women from other geographic locations only affirms a narrative that Black beauty does exist globally and is acceptable. Unfortunately for *Vogue Italia,* this approach centers Italian women's views instead of accurately representing Black women (in an issue that supposedly celebrates them), which renders the diversity of Black beauty invisible and exposes the lack of cultural diversity on the *Vogue Italia* editorial team. Again, a mistake that could have been avoided.

Claiming the Black body challenges the assumptions that it is a shameful body that should be hidden (hooks, 1992). In that sense, the assumptions around controlling Black beauty, and emphasizing its difference, also extend to beauty. While Black women's beauty has been portrayed as undesirable to the mainstream, their beauty practices have simultaneously been embraced by non-Black bodies. Thus, the commodification of Black women's beauty continues without adequate acknowledgment, attribution, and compensation.

Beauty and Mainstream Feminism

Throughout history, feminists have argued that beauty is a feminist concern, but they also referred to it as an unimportant and inconsequential concern for women (Monteverde, 2016; Elias & Gill, 2018). First-wave feminists were advocates for women's suffrage and concerned with naming and identifying women's place in society (Gray & Boddy, 2010), but this did not explicitly include a woman's right to shape her appearance. First-wave feminism can be dated as early as 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women,* an early example of feminist literature, was published and as late as the early 1800s when Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony organized the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 (Issitt & Flynn, 2018). Wollstonecraft, Stanton, and Anthony were concerned with feminist issues of women's humanity and the right to vote. Though beauty standards existed throughout the 1800s, they were not presented as feminist concerns.

Second-wave feminists pushed forward critiques of the beauty industry and its relationship to the performance of gender. For example, Susan Brownmiller (1984) describes beauty as the mask of femininity, an ideal that society continues to uphold at the expense of women, and for the benefit of men. Femininity, and by extension, beauty, cripples women by keeping them constricted physically through form-fitting clothing that hindered movement. Brownmiller (1984) argues that the construction of femininity reinforces differences between the sexes, upholding a heteronormative standard of beauty. Maintaining this difference through attention to one's beauty prepares the female body for the male gaze, ensuring that men gain pleasure from looking at women, and women keep performing the labor needed to keep men happy when looking at them.

This perspective centers white women as an object to be gazed upon by white men, leaving out that historically, Black women have been subjected to the gaze of white men *and* women. Faludi (1991) modernizes the feminist approach to beauty by highlighting beauty as a constant but moving standard, which cultural institutions monetize. At points throughout Western history, beauty standards have encouraged women to manage their appearance and embrace such extreme ideas as invalidism. To achieve the ideal look, European women went as far as using arsenic-laced facials during the Victorian era (1837-1901), which were detrimental to their health. In contrast, to meet the beauty standards of the 1970s, women were encouraged to embrace their natural, unadulterated beauty. However, a mere decade later, women turned to cosmetic surgery to achieve the beauty ideal in the 1980s and 1990s. In sum, as Faludi states, women are expected to keep changing their appearance to meet society's new standard of beauty.

Faludi states that the backlash experienced by women who show strength rather than fragility is capitalized on by the beauty industry which profits from the change in women's beauty desires. During the second wave of the feminist movement, for example, Revlon's profits fell by 40% from 1968 to 1969 when women began to embrace their natural features and reject cosmetics (Faludi, 1991). Yet, because the beauty industry adapts similarly to the fashion industry - trends increase until they reach a culmination point or a point of excess. Declining sales across cosmetic, fragrance, and hair companies caused the beauty industry to pivot and become medicalized. Medically informed beauty features doctors selling skin treatments and plastic surgery in advertisements. Faludi argues that the medicalization of the beauty industry contributes to women feeling less-than, and always in need of additional beauty products.

Second-wave feminists contributed to our understandings of how people in power manage our perceptions of and feelings toward beauty. They exposed the previously invisible

hand of the beauty industry in creating, managing, and amplifying bodily insecurities. The beauty industry, as a structural power, commodifies women's liberation to entice users to buy their products (Faludi, 1991). As Faludi states, there is always a backlash when women step out of their "place". These critiques support the beauty industrial complex as oppressive to women, but do not extend this analysis to all groups of women and fail to recognize the differential politics of Black beauty.

According to Wolf (1991), the pursuit of beauty is based on political, social, and economic manipulation. The beauty myth makes us believe that beauty is objectively measurable and exists universally. As women get closer to obtaining political or economic power, their beauty becomes a weapon turned against them. Because the beauty myth maintains that beauty is an inherent quality and a key characteristic of women, women cannot be both powerful and beautiful. Power is reserved for men. Wolf's argument comes at the beginning of Third-wave feminism (1990-2010). She argues that beauty, defined by women, is attainable as long as women develop alternative beauty standards. Alternatives can include distinguishing beauty from female sexuality, bonding amongst women, and visual pleasure. In other words, beauty is not a prerequisite for sexuality, friendships, or pleasure. Wolf also mentions that simply seeking inclusive representation in advertisements will not change women's relationship to beauty. Advertisements, and the work they do upholding a beauty standard, were not created to represent all forms of beauty. Therefore, Wolf recommends that Third-wave feminists focus on identifying how beauty is manipulated for political power at the expense of women who are socialized to seek it.

On the one hand, Wolf is correct – representation of diversity is not an answer to the structural issues that exist within and because of the beauty industrial complex. Mainstream feminists have critiqued the beauty industry as a structural power, exposing how it works to restrict women rather than empower them. But this insight comes from the perspective of white women, who have seen themselves reflected positively (and negatively) in media throughout the history of the United States. For Black women, whose controlling images are limited to the mammy, matriarch, the jezebel, the welfare queen, and the Black lady (Hill Collins, 2000), a positive representation of beauty may provide an alternative outlet for Black women to define themselves.

Black American Beauty

Regardless of whether scholars are pro-beauty or anti-beauty, Black women are repeatedly excluded from the discussion, a practice that serves to reaffirm whiteness as the beauty norm. Black women are generally regarded as an afterthought in the history of cosmetics if they are mentioned at all (Gunn, 1973; Marwick, 1988), and discussions of mainstream beauty ideals revolve around the concerns of white women, without taking Black women's experiences into account.

Anna Julia Cooper was an early Black feminist scholar, educator, activist, and proponent of critical pedagogy (Moody-Turner, 2018). In *A Voice from the South* (1892/2016), Cooper argues for Black women's place in society, using her epistemic privilege to elevate Black women's political concerns. Cooper viewed Black women's voice and equality as integral to America fulfilling its promise of the American dream. In 1892, Cooper highlighted Southern white American femininity's influential role in maintaining the oppression of Black women by stating that civility was often used as a placeholder for equality. Cooper (1892/2016) argues that

segregation based on race upholds these beliefs and makes it seem as if Black women are inferior to others. But Cooper states that Black women deserve more than civility because they have made social, political, and intellectual contributions to everyone's advancement. A key point of Cooper's argument is that investing and educating Black women will raise the quality of life of their families and others. Cooper underscores the value Black women bring to these spaces, arguing for their right to be taken seriously and considered equal.

In the *Criteria of Negro Art* (1925), W.E.B. Du Bois argues that Black Americans can create, identify, or judge beauty because true beauty is a reflection of truth and justice. Because of their lived experience, Black Americans understand truth and justice and can offer a true judgment on what is or is not beautiful. Du Bois ruminates on beauty throughout many speeches, essays, and books, from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to *Dark Princess* (1928). Though Du Bois mainly addresses beauty through art, he also extends his analysis to Black women and their embodiment of truth and justice if they measure up to the Black beauty ideals of the early 1900s.

In the *Dark Princess* (1928), Du Bois describes Black women's beauty as natural, innocent, and in his narrative, beautiful women never know or admit to their beauty. Black women's bodies and beauty remain static in gender relations between Black men and Black women, but exotic in spaces where Black women accompany Black men to political spaces. Though Du Bois argues that Black women's beauty should be appreciated, he also upholds a narrative that Black women should be concerned with supporting Black men in leading a cultural revolution, instead of focusing on their looks. Thus, Du Bois distinguishes the revolutionary Black masculine subject from Black women's feminine self-fashioning. Though both groups are participating in appearance management, Black women who are concerned with their appearance are portrayed

as narcissistic and materialistic. Black men were allowed to fashion their appearance to increase their credibility, while Black women were fixtures of the political scene.

While Du Bois was discussing beauty from a philosophical standpoint, Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1919), and her daughter A'Lelia, were creating a beauty empire. Sheehan (2016) brings Du Bois and the Walkers into the conversation to establish Black women's beauty culture as a source of a Black internationalist and political aesthetic. Du Bois wrote about the potential of Black beauty to be appreciated internationally from the perspective of a male protagonist in the 1920s, but Madam C.J. Walker and A'Leila were living this reality. Both created "black-authored spaces" (Sheehan, 2016), which allowed Du Bois and the Walkers to create alternative social and political formations.

Du Bois states that Black Americans can truly judge beauty because they have seen its opposite: true American ugliness as enslaved recipients of oppression for centuries. Yet, in *Dark Princess* (1928), it is clear that Du Bois sees Black *men* as the true beholders of beauty, and Black women as the *suppliers* of beauty. In other words, Black women's beauty is for everyone, because Du Bois expects it to communicate political, social, and cultural messages all at once. The lived experiences of Madam C.J. Walker and her daughter, A'Leila, contrast with Du Bois's ideals for women and more accurately reflect Anna Julia Cooper's (1892/2016) assessment of the role of colored women. Black women are better qualified to weigh, judge, and advise on questions affecting the well-being of their race than men. Madam C. J. Walker also brings up the woman question and addresses the problem of race but does not go as far as Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) who combines these questions. However, the convergence of Black women's lived experiences through gender and race is not acknowledged by the general population.

Anna Julia Cooper, Madam C.J. Walker, and her daughter, A'Leila Walker are examples of Black women who recognized their epistemic privilege and interjected Black women's voices and experiences into the larger political climate during the first half of the 1900s. Fictional women, such as Princess Kautilya in *Dark Princess* (1928), also tackled the woman question and race problem. In Du Bois' perspective, her beauty is primarily brought up to signify her virtuousness, and the detailed description of her modest outfits is meant to reinforce and uplift the respectability of Black women's beauty culture.

Historically, managing Black identity has been a political act. Appearance management within the Black American community has always been tied to respectability politics. Respectability politics is based on the idea of looking, acting, and talking respectfully to be accepted into the white mainstream society. To look and act respectfully is often coded language for the ability to pass as white. But a focus on appearance as a way to gain acceptance and achieve equity is not how Black people, and Black women especially, have traditionally participated in the beauty and fashion market. Instead, their focus on appearance was framed by their cultural context and beauty conception. Foster (1997), for example, has argued that the way the enslaved peoples fashioned themselves communicated their refusal to accept the social and cultural annihilation of Black Americans by whites in the U.S. The retention of women's traditional head wraps also used during slavery, and its continued use today as a fashionable accessory demonstrates that Black women have a distinct perspective of what they consider beautiful and that their self-fashioning is rooted in a cultural and historical tradition of their own.

Respectability politics means that white ideals are the standard to uphold. These ideals are also considered superior when compared to other cultures. The superiority belief was triggered by European colonization and the subsequent marginalization of people with dark skin. Haney-

Lopez (2006) makes a compelling argument for the "Black is Beautiful" campaign, by comparing it to the futility of a "White is Beautiful" campaign. A "White is Beautiful" campaign would only support the current construction of race and confirms stereotypes of White superiority and the inferiority of minorities. In comparison, the "Black is Beautiful" campaign serves a purpose. It works to celebrate Black beauty and reinscribe positive connotations onto Black physical features. Black is Beautiful campaigns challenge dominant stereotypes of Black beauty, criminality, and intelligence and offer a critical lens for appraising its alleged contrast – White beauty and its associations with innocence and superiority.

Managing one's appearance provides an opportunity to envision a life outside of the narrow boxes of how Black women should look, feel, act, and be. For some Black women, bell hooks (1992) posits, internalized racism creates a feedback loop where Black women are oppressed by a beauty standard they can never measure up to. For others, the refusal to participate in the White beauty industrial complex provides an option for a life they are in charge of and which they shape, and which depends solely on their imagination. The pursuit of self-initiated and -realized beauty opens up new avenues for self-expression and hope.

The contention between accepting a white beauty standard and refusing it has been evident throughout Black American media. Since its beginnings in 1945, *Ebony* has provided a place for Black women to share, examine, and critique Black beauty ideals. With controversial editorials like, *Are Negro Girls Getting Prettier?* (1966), readers often wrote letters contradicting the article's viewpoint, signifying that a Black-owned magazine cannot represent all views of Black women. *Ebony* was one of the first publications where advertisers considered large-scale marketing towards Black people. Yet, advertisements in the magazine disproportionately promoted skin-whitening creams and hair straightening products throughout the magazine.

Ebony was not unique in recommending skin-whitening creams and hair straightening products to promote a white beauty ideal. Beauty advertisements from White-owned companies fed into and maintained American beauty culture standards from the 1900s to the 1960s. Though advertisements written for Black magazines, such as *Ebony*, were more progressive, the style of ads and their design were similar to the ads targeting white women (Jaremski, 2020). Early advertisements used renderings of women by artists rather than actual photographs. These drawings of Black women used *race advertising* to justify the bold and colorful designs to attract Black women to white products (Jaremski, 2020). Despite the change in ad color and design, Black women were still drawn with popular white hairstyles or images showing their hair "in progress" from curly to straight with the use of a pressing oil or hair treatment oil. Racist ads may seem like a thing of the past, especially with today's push for diversity in media representation. Yet, almost 50 years later a content analysis of advertisements in Black magazines revealed that the majority of Black models reinforced White standards of beauty with straight hair, medium-sized noses and lips, and thin body types (Hazell & Clarke, 2008). *Ebony,* and *Jet,* targeted the larger African American community with their editorials and articles, while *Essence* targets Black women, specifically. Thus, no matter who the magazine's main audience is, Black women's beauty ideals are still subject to internal and external critique. The depiction of Black women in *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence*, demonstrates that Black women's beauty is contextually complex. Depending on who is involved, and the purpose of the interaction, beauty ideals for Black women can be affirming or negative.

The cultural revolution of the 1960s brought about a new standard of beauty expectations for Black women. They were publicly encouraged to accept their beauty on their terms and wear their hair in its natural state. The Black Pride and Black Power Movement in the U.S., both of

which highlighted the afro as a new symbol of Black identity. Eventually, the rhetoric around the afro evolved into ad campaigns and products to enhance the afro's shape and size. While the afro gained popularity, some Black women persisted in straightening their hair as it represented their autonomy in choosing which beauty standard to ascribe to.

Much attention has been paid to the afro and its symbolism during the Black Power Movement. Afros helped maintain a collective identity by encouraging the wearers to learn more about Black history, thereby solidifying the group's beliefs (Garrin and Marcketti, 2018). Furthermore, "natural" Black women were typically seen as either having dreadlocks, a well-shaped afro, or braids styled to their liking. Tate (2007) notes that prioritizing natural Black beauty does not mean automatic freedom from a beauty routine. Natural hairstyles have maintenance involved with keeping dreadlocs neat and oiled to protect the hair and scalp, or picking the hair with a special comb to shape the afro, or the design intent of the stylist creating the braids to match the wearer's vision.

Outside of hair salons, the cosmetics industry is one of the few areas of commerce where Black consumers demonstrated a preference for Black product manufacturers and marketing (White & White, 1998). Black entrepreneurs such as Anthony Overton, Annie Turnbo Malone, and Madam C. J. Walker all started their companies in response to the "patronizing, exploitative way that white companies treated their Black customers" (White & White, 1998, p. 185). The cosmetics industry made a considerable impact on how Black women came to view themselves and their self-worth by providing them with the tools and the training to fashion their appearance. With such changes, Black women were also able to fashion other possibilities for themselves outside of a life of domestic service (White & White, 1998). Envisioning their beauty in a different light empowered them to pursue roles outside of their homes. When Black women

used products created by Black entrepreneurs, they knew that their needs were represented during product conception and creation. This reassurance allowed them to develop trust or at least, assume that products were made with better quality ingredients.

Black Beauty Spaces and Black Beauty Processes

Racial segregation and discrimination continue to exist in less noticeable ways. These subtleties may be more dangerous because people are not cognizant of an injustice taking place, which is the case in beauty retailing. Access to products with clean ingredients, the right shades for one's skin tone, and an ideal store experience can influence self-perceptions of beauty. These perceptions, along with positive or negative shopping experiences can define what consumers believe they deserve in a beauty shopping experience. Because of this, Black American beauty can also be contextualized within beauty retail spaces. These beauty spaces are different from apparel stores because assessing a stranger's beauty is different from assessing how they look in clothing. Self-perceptions of beauty are harder to change.

The discriminatory practice of *redlining* has its origins in the banking and insurance industry. Officials in these industries would outline ethnic-minority neighborhoods on a map with a red line as a reference for where they would limit loan provisions or insurance policies (D'Rozario and Williams, 2005). *Retail redlining* is a similar practice. Ethnic-minority neighborhoods are abandoned by national chain retailers, leaving consumers to deal with local retailers who often provide fewer options and charge more for lower quality products (Shannon, 2020). In this form of redlining, retailers, instead of bankers, actively control which areas receive outside investment and development by choosing their locations based on neighborhood demographics. Retail redlining can range from national chains withholding resources from local franchisees to companies refusing to place a store in an area due to the racial or ethnic demographics of the

neighborhood despite the profit potential. Though there are multiple types of retail redlining, beauty consumers are most likely affected by the lack of an upscale chain store's presence in an area, or the refusal of a national beauty chain to serve customers in a promising area. For example, half of the Black-owned beauty supply stores in GA are located in areas where the dominant population is Black and accounts for 50-90% of the area (Census & PolicyMap, 2017; Appendix B). In comparison, all of the Sephora's in GA are located in places where the dominant demographic is white and accounts for 50-70% of the population (Census & PolicyMap, 2017; Appendix B). From this small piece of data, it seems that Sephora is selecting predominantly white areas to place their stores. Yet, the locations that Sephora chooses are also stratified by income. In Georgia, the median household income in neighborhoods with a Sephora is at least $73,208, but Black-owned beauty supply stores are located in a wider median household income, ranging from $40,750 to 73,208 or more (Census: Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS), 2018). When considering median household income and race, it appears that Sephora may be engaging in retail redlining by placing their locations in areas where the consumers are predominantly white. In contrast, Black-owned beauty supply stores exist in areas with a wider range of income levels, signifying that Black women at all class levels may seek beauty supply stores for their beauty needs. Still, these stores will likely be located in predominantly Black areas.

Beauty supply stores offer products for hair stylists and consumers, blending the line and distinction between the two. Hair stylists need only the right products, skills, and a space to establish a business. Historically, Black women as beauty entrepreneurs connect to a distinguished entrepreneur lineage, beginning with Annie Turnbo-Malone and Madam C.J. Walker. These two women were beauty contemporaries who started their own hair product lines

and generated revenue from selling products as well as training beauticians who also used and sold the products (Bundles, 2001). Yet, during the early 1900s, Black beauticians were traveling door to door to sell beauty products or relying on advertising in magazines and newspapers to spread the word. Walker's advertisements for her beauty parlors in Black newspapers such as *Negro World* and *Messenger* helped her reach a wide audience while also providing financial and political support to radical Black thought leaders of the time like Marcus Garvey (Gill, 2010).

Standards of beauty can operationalize and appear in multiple spaces. Alongside, beauty supply stores, Black hair salons have also been Black women's exclusive gathering spots (Gill, 2010). More often than not, hair salons are owned by Black women entrepreneurs, who may lease a building, and rent out spaces in their shops to other Black stylists. From the 1940s to the 1960s, Black hairstylists upheld the ideals of the civil rights movement by crafting natural hairstyles under the impression that a Black woman's appearance influenced her ability to secure economic independence (Walker, 2007). Beauty salons are not only relevant to Black women in the US. For Iraqi and Afghan women, they can be feminist spaces where political and private power are discussed, analyzed, and sorted out (Enloe, 2008). For women of color, who tend to have limited access to political power, beauty salons are "safe spaces" where they can begin the process of organizing and mobilizing for political action. Thus, the beauty shop doubles as a communal space where women of color can discuss and cultivate resistance strategies and develop political leadership styles.

Aside from the political and personal opportunities for community organization, Black hair salons also offer culturally specific hairstyles. In these salons, Black women experience a service informed by a shared cultural understanding. For example, a "silk press" and a "blowout" involve the same processes of shampooing and styling hair. Yet, the different terms imply a

different approach for textured hair. A "silk press," is usually provided at a Black-owned hair salon, where the hair is washed, dried with a hairbrush and blow dryer, and then smoothed with a flat iron to press the hair. This is different from a "blow-out" which can straighten hair easily with a round barrel brush and targeted heat from a blow dryer. Culturally, the "silk press" became a mainstream beauty trend in 2018, when celebrities created the *glass hair* trend by popularizing a style with straight hair finished with additional shine (Diaz, 2018). *Glass hair* was highlighted in various fashion magazines from *Allure* (Sy, 2018) to *Marie Claire* (Metzger, 2018), while Black news outlets commented on the repeated cultural appropriation taking place, claiming that the silk press was a huge trend in the 90s amongst Black women attending Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) (Ford, 2018). On a national scale, the *glass hair* trend reflects a continued appropriation of Black American culture, specifically in the beauty realm. While most of the beauty appropriation transgressions revolve around hair and fashion apparel, beauty and its frequent dissociation with Black features once it becomes mainstream is rarely acknowledged or taken seriously in beauty critiques. Thus, beauty supply stores may represent spaces where Black women can buy the products that contribute to the creations of these styles, which have become nationally relevant in popular culture.

Millennials and Retail

Millennials are more tolerant, trusting, and better traveled than many of their parents (Furlow, 2011), but their close relationship has also established and influenced many millennials' current shopping habits. As the first demographic group to come of age on the Information Superhighway (Bowman, 2007), they are also electronically connected through social networking sites and able to share their shopping experiences amongst group members despite physical barriers (Moroz, 2008). This high access and rate of trading information create

consumers who take seconds to make purchasing decisions. Millennials are often in motion and multitasking, accessing products through mobile phones and in-person at retail stores (Harris, Stiles, & Durocher, 2011). Additionally, millennial consumers make use of shopping online by "web rooming," and "showrooming" at a physical store to find the best deal on a wanted product (Calienes, 2016). Though this presents multiple opportunities for a retailer to snag millennials' interest, it also narrows the time window for a retailer to captivate the attention of a millennial. Knowing that millennials tend to "flash shop," or make quick purchase decisions without reviewing the brand's reputation (Harris, Stiles, & Durocher, 2011), retailers need to adapt their techniques to cater to millennials' in-store shopping experience.

The many facets of an in-store experience (service, product selection, price, display, social aspects, time, consumer mood) (Backstrom and Johnson, 2006; Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009), can have a lasting impression on millennial consumers' perceptions of a brand. In other words, to capture millennial dollars, companies need to provide the right products, quality service, and an engaging experience. According to the VALS consumer segments, which profile US adults into eight distinct types based on psychographics and key demographics, millennials are action-oriented "experiencers" (Valentine & Powers, 2013), meaning that retail stores must offer a novel experience to attract and keep millennials attention. As a consumer, the millennial shopper seeks a multi-sensorial environment that creates an emotional and memorable experience (Ballantine et al., 2010; Petermans, Kent, & Van Cleempoel, 2014).

Though sometimes rightfully described as "self-centered and demanding" (Parment, 2013), millennials take this personality characteristic further by viewing the retail stores as a stage, where the retailer puts on an entertaining performance to captivate their attention (Baron et al., 2001; Kim, Sullivan, & Forney, 2007). Some millennials even view the shopping experience as

fulfilling their aesthetic, escapist, and utilitarian desires (Sullivan, Kang, & Heitmeyer, 2012). These studies fail to address whether these wants are the same for BIPOC- (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) identifying millennials making it difficult to predict what changes, if any, may be requested by them.

Combining millennial values with a retail experience requires the addition of experiential value into the retail environment. Experiential value includes utilitarian and hedonic consumer interactions through usage or appreciation of goods and services (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001). In experiential retailing, consumers value the shopping experience, even if there is no product purchase (Sullivan, Kang, & Heitmeyer, 2012). Regular shopping experiences are elevated by stimuli that consumers can feel, touch, engage with, and relate to (Pine & Gilmore, 2000). Experiential retailing is essential for millennial consumers because it allows customers to connect with the brand through interaction, not just buying products (Ann, 2006). Product consumption, in the experiential view, holistically considers the interactions between consumers' feelings, relationships, society, lifeworld, and related products (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Because consumer experiences are stimulated by thoughts and senses, multiple consumer and retailer benefits could arise from this potential partnership (Kim, 2001). Thus, a favorable experience could result in a loyal millennial consumer.

Influences on Millennial Shopping Habits

Millennials are partly influenced by the economic prosperity experienced during their formative years (Moore & Carpenter, 2008), making them more supportive of social causes and socially responsible companies (Furlow, 2011). These optimistic attitudes towards companies result in paying special attention to company messaging which can influence their purchase intentions (Cone, Inc., 2006). Though they value the opinions of their peers, as opposed to

celebrities or paid endorsers (Fromm & Garton, 2013; The Nielsen Company, 2014), millennials also react positively to brand messaging that speaks to their interests directly (Smith, 2011). Thus, a celebrity's poor shopping experience is less likely to impact millennial shopping behavior when compared to a prior negative experience of a peer (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010), mainly because they tend to choose the product first and the retailer second (Parment, 2013). This means that millennials would be expected to buy products with socially conscious messaging or identify with brands that align with their values.

Millennial Preferences for Store Design

Besides product availability, a neat and orderly environment is also key to millennial satisfaction (Calienes, 2016). An environment designed with time-efficiency and effectiveness in mind adds value for millennial shoppers. Designing a "high impact, high performance" retail space involves making the store layout seamless, hiding storage fixtures, and providing service areas where ongoing maintenance and staffing will take place (Calienes, 2016; Sullivan, Kang, Heitmeyer, 2012). A simple way to increase effectiveness would be to utilize mobile electronic devices such as mobile phones and tablets to present millennial customers with an "at your service" experience where they are inconvenienced less and satisfied more by product availability. To maximize efficiency, millennials expect a knowledgeable staff and self-checkout areas within stores (Harris, Stiles, & Durocher, 2011).

Millennials desire products that express their interests and values, but also reinforce their individuality. With increased access to information on the internet, purchase decisions are more nuanced than examining price, quality, and country of origin like their Baby Boomer parents once did. Millennials form their brand perceptions from online interactions rather than in-store experiences (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2020). When encountering unfamiliar brands, research

gathered from online perceptions of interactivity, brand relevance, and quality affect millennial expectations for retail stores. Even regarding the type of retail store, millennial preferences are torn between specialty retail outlets and department stores (Martin and Turley, 2004; Moroz, 2008, Weitzman, 2011). Thus, the retail type becomes less important than the overall shopping experience.

Millennial shoppers have high expectations and a "predisposition to expect perfection" in stores (Ruggless, 2015). When shopping, millennials expect a perfect match between their perception of the brand and the brand's expression through the store environment and merchandise displays (Calienes, 2016). Shopping preferences also differ across genders. Millennial women value aesthetics and privacy (Ameen et al., 2021), while millennial men value customer service, convenience, personalization, and variety in their shopping experience (Funches et al., 2017; Ameen et al., 2021). An ideal approach to attracting millennials to physical stores requires a focus on quality and creating a personal relationship between the retailer and consumer (Besenthal & Pohl, 2018). When millennials feel understood or represented in their retail experience, they are more likely to make a purchase.

Beauty Supply Stores

Black beauty supply stores or ethnic beauty aids (Silverman, 1999) have been studied from the perspective of minority-owned business developments and entrepreneurship (Silverman, 1998; 1999; & Lee, 2000). While Silverman's (1998) work focuses on the beauty supply store, his argument centers around the interactions between the product distributors, and retail store owners of beauty supply stores in Chicago. Lee (2000) advances Silverman's work by analyzing merchant-consumer relationships using Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian customer interviews within the frame of neighborhood demographics. Though Lee's findings reveal that minority

groups are more likely to experience racial profiling within predominantly white neighborhoods, they are not specific to beauty supply stores. Instead, the sites reflected in Lee's (2000) study included hair salons, clothing, and ethnic beauty supplies in busy commercial areas. Studies that cite Silverman (1998/1999) follow Lee (2000) and continue to discuss the relationships between the ethnic-minority owners and consumers within retail spaces (Boyd, 2018). There are no existing studies on the exterior or interior considerations in designing a beauty supply store. The following literature reviews approaches to how apparel and fashion stores have been analyzed, which provides considerations for beauty supply stores and beauty retailing, in general.

Constructing Retail Environments

Retail identity has been examined in multiple disciplines: building design in architecture, ideal location to increase retail profits in retail geography, redlining in urban geography, brand identity in interior design, and influencing consumer behavior in visual merchandising. Each approach has its limitations. In visual merchandising and retail literature, studies on retail space typically take a quantitative approach to atmospheric variables, such as music, lighting (Park & Farr, 2007), scent (Doucé & Janssens, 2013), and color (Cho & Lee, 2017; van Rompay et al., 2012), which may trigger a response from consumers. Tangible spatial dimensions, also known as atmospherics, influence shopper's experience, but intangible elements such as scent, lighting, and customer service can also enhance the appreciation of the retail environment (Kotler, 1973; Calienes, 2016). As early as 1973, Kotler refers to these characteristics as the elements that retail store designers can consciously manipulate to create desired effects in consumers. Most studies on retail store design employ Kotler's (1973) understanding of environmental cues and their ability to generate consumer responses. Turley and Milliman (2000) identified five categories of atmospheric variables: general interior, layout and design, point-of-purchase, decoration, and

humans, which furthers Kotler's (1973) original understanding by adding that the intentional control and structuring of environmental cues can influence consumer behavior. Consumers may judge the quality of a store environment and products based on the type of colors used and the type of music played (Oxenfeldt, 1974; Doucé and Janssens, 2013). The color, red, for example, can create a physiological response to the design elements, by raising consumer heart rates.

The embodied experience of shopping is difficult for researchers and consumers to identify. Consequently, it has not been examined much in retail and merchandising studies. Stevens, Maclaran, and Brown (2019) attempted to close this research gap by drawing on theories of embodiment to show that consumers bring more to the shopping experience than an immediate intention to shop in the retail space. A study on Hollister, a global young adult brand selling clothing and accessories in retail stores and online, introduced a framework that accounts for the intended and unintended responses that consumers may receive from the retail environment. In Hollister, retail consumers have an "immersive somascape experience," which includes sensory activation, brand materialities, (dis)orientation, and corporeal relationality (Stevens, Maclaran, & Brown, 2019). Brand materialities are a relevant theme to this study because researchers were able to demonstrate different responses to structural store elements. To create the idea of a private space, shutters were used as dividers to create multiple private spaces within the store. Some participants interpreted the shutters as a sign of exclusivity and luxury, while the same shutters triggered a fight or flight response in others who feared feeling excluded or isolated in the store (Stevens, Maclaran, & Brown, 2019). In this case, retail designers provide a private experience for teens to access a luxurious retail environment, like a private club, that otherwise would be inaccessible for their age group.

Buildings, as much as the interior of the space, are distinct parts of the company's brand strategy because they visually project the brand's identity (Kent, 2007; Kirby & Kent, 2010). Some architects see buildings as a means for communicating a consistent brand identity (Kirby & Kent, 2010). Visual merchandisers prioritize the interior of the store and focus on product organization and placement. Lastly, retail store designers discuss retail spaces without adequate attention to people who have prior expectations for the everyday functions of the space (Bitner, 1992; Turley & Chebat, 2002; Magrath, 2005; Iannilli & Vacca, 2014). The gaps in these approaches leave room for a culturally informed understanding of retail spaces, and the people that frequent them.

Retail store identity is also influenced by geographic location. Cities, with their cultural histories and societies, lend their culture to the brand or company choosing a physical location in the city. Geographic location can also affect consumer perception of product quality and brand attachment (Inman & Winer, 1998; Underhill, 1999). Pop-up stores, for example, are unique store experiences that are contextual to the city. Because they are temporary, and seemingly "pop-up" out of nowhere, brands can create a brief but memorable experience for loyal consumers, deepening ties with them. Pop-up stores also lend themselves to word-of-mouth marketing and can attract new consumers to an established brand (Klein, Falk, Esch, & Gloukhovtsev, 2016). For companies with an existing retail presence, temporary stores offer additional opportunities for brand exposure. Even if new consumers do not buy anything, they likely have gained increased brand recognition and a new experience to add to their existing familiarity. Thus, the city where the retail store is located also plays an associative role with the brand. From the retailer's perspective, consumer demographics and shopping habits within the region influence retail policies, hours of operation, and merchandise (Diamond, Diamond, &

Litt, 2015). At the same time, consumer assumptions around cities may influence their expectations of a brick-and-mortar retail experience. All these items are influential in understanding a brand's identity and its retail store placement.

Consumers who embrace certain lifestyles may also prefer store attributes that are in line with their values. For example, the use of recycled construction materials in store design may be appreciated by a consumer who values sustainability (Erdem, Oumlil, & Tuncalp, 1999). Yet, valuing visual signifiers of sustainability does not necessarily have to be accomplished through store design. Companies can create an aura of sustainability with corporate social responsibility policies and live up to their statements by donating to non-profits to support their efforts. Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI), an outdoor recreation retail co-operative with a lifetime membership, is one example of a store whose brand identity and corporate image are reflected in its interior store design. REI's emphasis on connecting nature to local communities is suggested by their offerings of outdoor-themed classes and events in their local communities, an in-store bike shop, and access to expert knowledge through their website. In 2019, REI opened four stores and launched a new in-store experience, which turned REI stores into a launching pad for outdoor equipment suggesting that at REI anyone can meet to plan their trip, pick up rentals, or find a new piece of gear (REI, 2019). This strategy appears to have been successful as brick-and-mortar retail at REI, fueled by its co-op membership, went up by more than 25% respectively, in the past 5 years (REI, 2019).

Knowing that retail space may influence consumer behavior (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992), companies are increasingly turning towards experiential retail spaces to customize consumer experience and increase brand loyalty. Consumption and the pleasures associated with the shopping experience are connected through the retail space. Therefore, it makes sense for

companies, in an increasingly competitive environment, to create a retail spectacle that can influence consumer behavior. The ESPN Zone can highlight and celebrate masculinity with visual and architectural cues within the themed environment (Kozinets et al., 2004). Creating a retail spectacle involves creating a media-worthy moment. In the context of this ESPN Zone, the sports arena also doubled as a retail environment. With multiple areas for simulating sports activities such as golf, boxing, bowling, basketball, and motorcycle racing. The variety of simulation technology available as well as the ability to purchase food, beverages, and team paraphernalia creates a retail spectacle. These retail spectacles will become more interactive as technology advances, allowing for further connections between place, technology, and the self. Within the ESPN Zone, consumers felt inspired and satisfied with their experience with the retail spectacle. In other words, consumers leave the store with memories of a satisfactory experience and a product as a souvenir of the experience. Millennials expect a retail experience to this extent, except they also prefer a visual environment with a ready-made photo area to document their experience. Traveling pop-up experiences such as 29Rooms, an "immersive world of cause, culture, and creativity" (29rooms, 2021) provides this experience by building spaces with the photoshoot in mind. Though these are experiential spaces, they can also be considered retail spaces because food, drinks, and souvenirs are sold inside them, in addition to the entrance fee. The attention to visual culture is a part of the millennial aesthetic, therefore, companies interested in attracting millennials should also consider what makes an experience worthy to purchase a souvenir.

Millennial Beauty Culture

Millennials, with their penchant for the "authentic", are attracted to brands with imagery that conveys aspirational realness. Glossier, a millennial-focused beauty brand, carefully constructs an illusion of the everyday in their advertising and social media (Findlay, 2019). These aspirational images and marketing emphasize the potential for consumers who seek to look like the models featured on Glossier's Instagram. Of course, achieving the Glossier standard of natural beauty requires consumers to buy the products and participate in Glossier's 'cool girl' culture. The ideal fashionable woman is not exclusive to Glossier or the 21st century. Fashion imaginaries or representatives of cultural standards in fashion media have been constant throughout the history of beauty.

Fashion imaginaries are influenced by social representations and repeatedly reinforced through fashion images in women's magazines. Fashion magazines are not the only participants in the construction of beauty ideals, they are part of an influential and widespread media network. In the realm of fashion magazines, the ideal characteristics attributed to women change every decade. Yet, since the 1930s, two constant beauty standards appear---slenderness and youth (Brownmiller, 1984; Salesses & Romain, 2014). During the late 2000s, "natural beauty" emerged as a fashion imaginary. This concept of beauty is associated with symbolic spontaneity, where natural beauty was discreet and understated. Natural beauty was depicted as achieving a sense of harmony between the individual and her appearance (Salesses & Romain, 2014). From fashion magazines, we can see that the "natural" part of beauty is not natural at all. It is curated and changing from one decade to the next. For millennials, the beauty imaginary is also culturally diverse, reflecting the images they see in media as well as their cohort demographics.

The main parameters of "natural" beauty are youth and slenderness. Over time, slenderness has come to symbolize the "participation of liberated, independent, dynamic, and mobile" women in public (Salesses & Romain, 2014). This beauty ideal of a highly attractive, youthful body is presented as natural in the fashion imaginary. However, this natural ideal does not include conventional Black American beauty.

The idea of natural beauty is not only contested in thought but also in retail. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, there is no established definition for "clean" and "natural" as it relates to cosmetics. Terms like *clean beauty* and *natural skincare* are open to broad interpretation. Beauty retailers, like Sephora, have defined clean beauty by creating a list that specifies products without harmful ingredients. Many denouncements of ingredients that have been demonized by the clean beauty movement are not supported by research. Studies show that ingredients like propylene glycol, parabens, and sulfate are non-toxic and non-carcinogenic by the Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR) Expert Panel (Genter, 2019). Despite this, the clean beauty movement continues to gain traction with beauty influencers and retailers.

Sephora, a beauty retailer with over 2,600 stores in 34 countries, applies the "Clean at Sephora" seal to skincare, makeup, and hair brands that are formulated without specific ingredients. The full list excludes products with one of the 54 ingredients, which can include parabens, sulfates SLS and SLES, phthalates, mineral oils, formaldehyde, formaldehyde-releasing agents, retinyl palmitate, oxybenzone, coal tar, hydroquinone, triclosan, and triclocarban (Sephora, 2020). Notably, some of these ingredients are non-toxic and non-carcinogenic according to Genter (2019), but this does not matter to the clean beauty movement. The *Clean at Sephora* seal has been applied to 76 brands and numerous products within those brands. Just as fashion magazine advertisements demonstrate, natural beauty is a fashion

imaginary that is kept up by retailers such as Sephora who lend credence to the clean beauty movement. As consumers buy into "clean beauty," they associate natural ingredients with preserving or enhancing the beauty they already possess, rather than creating a new natural aesthetic of beauty. As Sephora describes it, "clean beauty" arises from curating innovative beauty and relying on powerful ingredients to get big results (Sephora, 2020).

When people advise women to embrace their natural beauty or to wear their natural hair proudly, it is as if natural beauty is as simple as removing yourself from the capitalist system. Not buying a product is not enough, while buying a "natural" product does not fully accomplish the goal either. The idea of what is "natural" is not even agreed upon, not by society or by institutions such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), yet millennials aspire to achieve a natural-looking beauty and pay considerable attention to product labels if they are also engaged in environmental activism (Furlow & Knott, 2009). Selling a natural look, whether through marketing or selling complementary skin-colored cosmetics makes natural beauty seem attainable. The need or the suggestion of the need for the product keeps ideal beauty out of reach. Consumers still have to buy something to define or enhance a part of their face.

Postfeminist analyses of beauty seem more appropriate for critiquing millennial beauty culture, in general. In postfeminist culture, women are autonomous, self-reinventing subjects, whose lives are the outcome of individual choice and agency (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017). An emphasis on the individual approach to beauty highlights the close relationship between the body, beauty standards, and the notion of women participating in beauty standards for pleasure rather than to meet societal expectations. These critiques illustrate how consumerism interacts with self-improvement products where the slim, young, white beauty norm is still portrayed as the achievable ideal (McRobbie, 2009). Beauty products hide the consumer's aspirations towards

this norm while presenting women with ways to appear perfect in all spheres of their lives. However, relationships with beauty in a postfeminist culture are complex; pre-teen girls participate in beauty practices while also critiquing brand authenticity and portrayals of a perfect, ideal woman (Jackson & Vares; 2015). Today's consumers are not naive and are more receptive to inadequate marketing. Motivations for participating in beauty culture vary depending on their age, race, gender, and class, including the life experiences that come with these categories.

Critiques of millennial beauty culture are not limited to purchasing products. Beauty apps, like *Golden Beauty Meter, Beauty Mirror, and Instaglam* are available to anyone with a smartphone and internet access. These apps present subjectivity, surveillance, and authority by applying a friendly, "girlfriend gaze" to entice consumers (Elias & Gill, 2018). Girlfriend culture (Winch, 2013) uses entrepreneurial and empowering narratives to create and reinforce the networks of comparison, feedback, and motivation needed to sustain the beauty app audience. When women download beauty apps, they reflexively critique their face shape and appearance based on quantifiable norms determined by measurements. Furthermore, participation in beauty apps requires consumers to scan their facial symmetry, brows, or eye shape to receive product recommendations. What do beauty companies do with this facial recognition data? Research on beauty apps and data privacy is limited, but the portrayal of beauty apps as voluntary hides the problematic behaviors of self-surveillance amongst women. Individuals participating in beauty apps are now subject to an intense, metricized self-scrutiny, which is just as troubling as when they compared themselves to images in popular culture.

This hyper-focus on beauty routines, from the level of knowledge and skills required to choose the right products, layer them on the face, and eventually remove them in the correct process to preserve and protect the skin, has been referred to as over-beautification (Dosekun,

2016). As a result of keeping up with the changing products and culture, the 'aesthetic labor' (Wissinger, 2013) needed to participate in beauty culture also requires 'aesthetic rest' (Dosekun, 2016) where consumers balance their makeup usage to let their skin breathe and protect their hair by using hair extensions. For women engaging in a neoliberal beauty system where self-surveillance is promoted under the guise of self-improvement, the distinction between participating in beauty culture for personal pleasure and their contribution to upholding the idea of an achievable beauty standard can seem irreconcilable. Other feminist scholars see participation in beauty culture as a survival method in a patriarchal culture (Jeffreys, 2014) but do not consider it an empowering or feminist behavior.

The postfeminist approach to participation in the beauty industrial complex may be contradicted by this study's approach to millennial Black women's beauty behaviors. I appropriate the post-feminist view that some empowerment can be accessed through the everyday actions of self-definition, and the ability to refine an individual beauty standard. These actions may even strengthen an individual's determination to get through the day, but it is not real structural change. For example, Dosekun (2016) describes the need for aesthetic rest, or recovery time, after wearing makeup and hair extensions for extended periods. This may be true for white women, but for Black women, makeup and sew-ins (when hair is sewn into a styled braiding pattern on an individual), are typically used as armor put on to deal with living in the pressures of American society. Participation in the beauty industrial complex is complicated for Black women, who may see beauty management as a political statement.

While there is Black joy and pleasure in these acts, there are also instances for critique. Public appearances begin with how we look, and there is extra labor involved in becoming acceptable but what we do when looking respectable is more consequential. Without a historical

and spatial consideration for Black women's shopping behaviors and perceptions of beauty retailing, it is difficult to understand how Black women see their participation in beauty culture in relation to the larger issues of access to quality products and ingredients within the beauty industry.

Rationale

The retail space is an important, everyday part of fashion that is often underestimated. The power within a retail environment lies within its ability to communicate a brand's image and evoke feelings that last even after consumers leave the store. In that sense, a retail space must resonate with the consumer on multiple levels; not only should consumers be aesthetically attracted to the store, but the environment must facilitate a decision to purchase, and ultimately, a desire to return as well.

Most of the existing research on retail environments focuses on controlled variables that store designers can manipulate to affect consumer experience. For example, lighting, music, and a store's layout are some of the first options that are changed from one store to the next (Anteblian, Filser, & Roederer, 2013). This focus on controllable variables alludes to the idea that retails spaces are constructed. In this construction, spaces can be conceptualized as a means of communicating power.

Retail store designers focus on bringing a brand aesthetic to life. A recognizable retail brand image is important not only to consumers but also in a competitive marketplace (Pegler, 2007). Lighting and store layout are not enough to embody a large idea such as a fashion or beauty brand, which is often described as manifestations of an ephemeral idea (Tungate, 2012). During the process of creating an intangible brand aesthetic, there are often underlying powers at play in

a retail environment, and these powers help create different experiences for different consumers – one brand with one aesthetic correlates to one ideal consumer.

Historically, retailers have failed to create a welcoming environment for consumers of color. According to a mail survey of 1,000 households, 86% of Black Americans polled felt they experienced different treatment based on their race when shopping in retail stores (Williams, Henderson, Evett, and Hakstian, 2015). Some of these feelings of difference and discrimination can result from the interactions that consumers may experience with salespeople. Employees at a perfume shop, for example, claimed that their shop's owner alerted security when dark-skinned customers entered the store by stating, "We need the light bulbs changed" (Williams et al., 2015). Another instance occurred in an opera house when the owner would tell employees that it was "too dark in here" or, in other words, it was too Black in here (Williams et al., 2015). These racial codes appear not only in employee-to-consumer interactions, but also in retail store locations, the products sold within them, and how the fashion industry characterizes consumers (Kwate, 2015). Thus, racial dynamics not only influence retail but also create the only retail experience that some consumers know and operate within.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How have beauty spaces impacted millennial Black women's shopping preferences for beauty products in the United States?
   a. How do millennial Black women make meaning of their relationship to beauty within the context of beauty retail spaces?
   b. How does class status influence millennial Black women's shopping experiences?
2. What aspects of beauty spaces are relevant to millennial Black women's experiences when shopping for beauty products?
   a. Based on the literature, what are the key factors used to attract millennial women?
   b. From the perspective of millennial Black women, which retail store elements are

relevant to their shopping experiences?

Objectives

- To understand how spaces set up for beauty retailing impact individual perceptions of beauty
- To understand how millennial Black women, relate their shopping experience to their goals of achieving a desired level of beauty
- To understand how Black women's beauty retail experiences may differ from mainstream depictions of shopping experiences within retail environments

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This project is framed by two Black feminist theories – Black feminist thought and Black feminist geographies. However, the underlying driving thought for this project is intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality highlights the various ways that identity categories, like race, class, and gender, interact in Black women's lives. It also asserts that lived experience can vary across race, gender, and class all at once. Black feminist geographies provides a framework that allows these experiences to be found, named, and interpreted within beauty retail spaces. This study focuses on Black women in the millennial cohort. Millennials span a generation that was not born into the age of the internet, but one that remembers and recalls having a physical retail store, catalogs, and the home shopping network as the only places to shop. This characteristic, along with their race, and gender, makes millennial Black women a group with unique insight into today's beauty retail shopping experience. Intersectionality provides the analytical framework for considering how race, gender, class, and generational cohort influence a beauty retail experience simultaneously.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) centers Black women's ways of knowing, and is used in this dissertation to frame how millennial Black women make sense of their beauty. Black women's experience with beauty includes hair, clothing, makeup, and the tools and rituals they participate in to manage their bodies' appearance. These beauty practices, and the objects that make them possible, are left out of mainstream media, relegating depictions of Black

women's beauty to movies, TV shows, and music that target a predominantly Black audience. Still, these ideals can be influenced by mainstream white media; Black women in magazines for Black audiences, such as *Ebony* and *Jet*, do not always represent Black beauty standards. Beauty standards maintain a bar that people must always reach to be considered acceptable in society, which is why manipulating one's beauty can provide pathways to privilege. Because there is no singular definition for Black women, there is no all-encompassing definition of Black beauty. Yet, throughout history, Black women have worked on their appearance to affirm their humanity for themselves and others. To do this, some Black women have turned away from mainstream beauty standards and forged a beauty path rooted in self-definition, self-creation, and self-authority, which are the core tenets of Black feminism. In addition to providing a framework to understand how Black women interact with beauty spaces, Black feminist thought offers ways to reevaluate the relevance of beauty space for Black women who have cultivated an aesthetic that differs from mainstream, white beauty standards.

This study is informed by Black feminist thought in recognizable ways, such as the purposeful sampling of millennial Black women as the study's participants. It is also an attempt at altering the dominant narratives of Black women's beauty. Seeking and exposing narratives of Black women's lived experiences is in line with Black feminist thought. Beauty depends on the visual and therefore requires a witness. If the victors write history, and the dominant writers of Black American history have either been white, misinformed, or worse - non-existent - who has documented Black women's beauty practices and relationship to beauty spaces throughout history? No one, besides other Black women. The occasional documentation of Black beauty in mainstream fashion media is not a celebration of Black women's beauty. It is a halfhearted nod to the influence of Black culture in fashion. It is typically curated by overworked Black fashion and

beauty professionals working behind the scenes to represent their group in the ways they know, feel, and see themselves. *ELLE* magazine's recent spotlight of Black Beauty tastemakers is one example of a well-intentioned magazine drawing attention to Black people's role as drivers of fashion and beauty trends (Penrose & Hall, 2021). Representations of Black beauty are reserved for moments, such as the token Black History Month, without a genuine approach to inclusivity throughout the year. Despite the tensions between educating and representing Black culture, these representations affirm the identity and relevance of Black women and culture to the fashion and beauty industries.

Furthermore, there is no single way to define Black beauty. Black women are diverse in terms of geographic location and representations of beauty. Tate's (2009) definition of Black beauty draws the boundaries around the Black diaspora and describes Black beauty as the "link between the psyche and the social mediated by the surface of the skin and a process of self-discovery throughout one's life" (p. 9). Beauty provides social capital. However, learning what is and what is not beautiful can be painful process for all individuals who do not measure up to mainstream society's standards. The techniques involved in maintaining some styles of Black beauty require products and tools found in Black beauty supply stores. If the consumer's shopping experience for beauty products is limited to a specific type of store and location, they may be forced to make decisions around their appearance based on time and affordability. As consumers push for more Black-owned brands in national retailers like Sephora and Ulta, millennial Black women are presented with more choices in where to shop for their beauty products. Tate's (2009) definition of Black beauty informed the analysis of perceptions of beauty and its relationship to product access and shopping experience for millennial Black women.

Black Feminist Geographies

Katherine McKittrick's work *Demonic Grounds* (2006) is an interdisciplinary analysis of Black women's geographies within the context of the Black diaspora. Black feminist geographies oppose "traditional geography" which McKittrick defines as Eurocentric, heteronormative, and classed. Traditional views of geography uphold spatial legacies of exploitation and conquest. In contrast, Black geographies prioritize the "subaltern or alternative geographic patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies" (p. 7). Spaces that Black people occupy are the "terrain of political struggle itself" (McKittrick, 2006) or a crucial site where a perspective of struggle takes place. Acknowledging how Black people represent and interact with the world around them reveals Blackness and Black humanity materially and theoretically. McKittrick's theory of Black feminist geographies positions Black women as creators of spaces of Blackness, instead of their presence acting as markers for identity and experience. In other words, just because Black women are all in a room does not mean that they are all having the same experience at the same time. That goes for all people, but for Black women, who are often lumped together as one monolithic group, this is especially important to differentiate identity and experience. Instead of considering the presence of millennial Black women as a reason to evaluate a space, McKittrick posits that Black women give space meaning with their presence. Their presence signifies that there are tensions or interactions taking place that warrant evaluation. Her analysis uses the "memories, writing, theories, and geographies of slavery" to show that locations of captivity provide Black women with a different sense of place.

Safe spaces for Black women are places where they can freely explore issues relevant to them, where the spatial design fosters Black women's empowerment and their ability to participate in social justice actions (Hill Collins, 2000). These spaces are safe because they are

free from surveillance from powerful groups, which affords Black women the freedom of self-definition. Self-definition, developed and cultivated in the presence of other Black women, is a tenet of Black feminist thought. The beauty supply store is an interesting site, as it is mostly occupied by Black women. One would assume, that a retail space frequented by Black women would automatically be a safe space, but Black beauty supply stores are heavily surveilled with cameras, hired security, and spatial considerations which influences the space. In this sense, the beauty supply store is also a site of domination in McKittrick's analysis, despite the prevalence of Black women shopping in the store.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This study examines millennial Black women's experiences when shopping for beauty

products. Their experiences will be examined from the perspective of the beauty retail space, its

location, store type, and interior store design. I hypothesized that millennial Black women's

shopping experiences and preferences would differ across class, and education level, but the

beauty spaces they have access to may signify the continued existence of racialized retail spaces.

Research Design

This qualitative study examines millennial Black women's experiences when shopping for

beauty products using semi-structured interviews. This study began with an ethnographic

research design, which included a case study, store observations, and interviews but became an

interview study due to COVID-19 related limitations. Interview questions were descriptive,

asking participants to describe the space, recall an experience, or provide an example of their

experiences in beauty retail spaces. Descriptive questions elicit descriptions of a specific place,

especially a culturally relevant site with unique people, activities, or objects (Roulston, 2010).

Feminist research explores power differentials through the research questions it poses and

throughout the research process; it acknowledges that all research is designed, and bias is

inherent in research. However, in feminist research, these power dynamics are mitigated through

the practice of reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process.

I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews (Table 1) to explore millennial Black women's

perceptions of beauty, and how those perceptions relate to their beauty retail preferences.

During the interviews, participants were asked to recall or reflect on their past shopping

experiences of beauty products, and their experiences as customers in beauty retail stores. All

participants were classified as millennials, born between 1981 and 1996. In the analysis, their

experiences are interpreted using the tenets of Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and

the theoretical lens of Black feminist geographies (McKittrick, 2006).

Table 1
Participants Listed in Order by Birth Year

Name	Birth Year	From	Current Location
Kora	1981	Chicago, IL	Washington D.C.
Nicole	1986	Indiana	St. Louis, MO
Garcelle	1987	New York City	New York City
Michelle	1987	New Jersey	New Jersey
Angelique	1988	Connecticut	Hartford, CT
B. Wells	1989	Atlanta, GA	Atlanta, GA
Natasha	1989	Miami, FL	Miami, FL
Tiana	1989	Guyana	Duluth, GA
Dionne	1990	Columbus, GA	Raleigh, NC
Heather	1990	Jackson, MS	Athens, GA
Jones	1990	Atlanta, GA	San Diego, CA
Jesse	1991	Georgia	Florida
Kennedy	1992	Marietta, GA	Marietta, GA
Cooper	1993	Seattle, WA	Washington D.C.
Taylor	1993	Jacksonville, FL	Athens, GA
Morgan	1994	New Jersey	Gaffney, SC
Diamond	1994	Chicago, IL	Atlanta, GA
Sunshine	1994	Detroit, MI	Athens, GA
Mavis	1994	Atlanta, GA	Chicago, IL
Marie	1996	New Orleans, LA	Michigan

Positionality

Reflexivity, or the ways we think about our social and political positions, affects researchers'

interactions with participants and their fieldwork. Feminist research rejects the notions of

positivism and objectivism. It posits that there is no single knower or carrier of all knowledge.

Instead, all knowledge is situational, and women, from their unique locations in society, are also

creators of knowledge. Paying attention to the power dynamics in the research process is an ongoing process. It requires reflexivity on the researcher's behalf, throughout the conception and application of research methods and best practices. I disclose my positionality because it informed my methodological decisions, my approach to analysis, and where I focused my discussion of the results.

My approach to millennial Black women's perceptions of beauty is informed by my identity as a biracial, cisgender woman. All researchers have social capital which they can use at various points throughout the research process. Researchers strategically select which parts of their identity to tap into from their ethnographic toolkit (Reyes, 2020). In other words, perception of the other is a two-way street in interviewing; the researcher is observing the participant at the same time that the participant is observing the researcher. Both parties adjust accordingly based on their perceptions of the other. Throughout the interviews, I related to my participants using our similarities in class, education, and personal experiences with beauty retail spaces when those moments were accessible and needed. These disclosures of my identity led to interesting interactions. Hamilton (2020) describes this power dynamic as one where the researcher must perform or remain silent in order to successfully recruit participants or complete interviews. Some participants asked me why I was studying this, and if my focus was on discrimination in stores. To both, I replied that I was interested in hearing about their shopping experiences in their words. My interest in their perspective, and acknowledgment of my own biracial identity, pushed me to focus on their words and not what I wanted to hear or hoped to prove with their experiences (Opie, 2007; Reyes, 2020).

I acknowledge that the right kind of beauty can present societal advantages or a pretty privilege (Mock, 2017) for those who have it. My relationship with beauty started in my

childhood, where I learned that beauty was something I needed to preserve and manage. Watching my mother, I learned about the time and labor that went into managing her beauty, but the products she used interested me the most. In fashion magazines, I learned about the newest skin creams, ideal products for women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, and how to choose products based on ingredients. In high school, my beauty knowledge was my social capital. Other mothers discouraged their daughters from wearing makeup, while my mother reminded me to put "something on my lips" before leaving the house. I had the products to try and the knowledge from frequently browsing the aisles with her at Wal-Mart.

My relationship with beauty has changed over time. As I have become more educated, I see the power relationships embedded in how beauty is presented and upheld in popular culture. Beauty retail spaces, for example, also have power relationships within the space between employees and store design. My interest in beauty retail spaces is motivated by questions such as, why does this space exist? How do consumers relate to these spaces emotionally and pragmatically? Black beauty supply stores are restrictive spaces, which do not celebrate the fluidity of Black beauty, although they are selling products targeting Black women's needs. There is potential in these spaces, to create a store where Black women can experiment with their beauty and celebrate it.

The women pictured in the beauty advertisements are rarely involved and do not benefit from the actual creation of the beauty product they use on their faces. I see the mainstream beauty images, and I recognize that my skin tone is just right not to appear threatening, and my hair has the right amount of loose curl that is within the limits of what is tolerated. I recognize that I have characteristics similar to the models pictured around the store, even if the people who work in the store do not look like me. While I observe the store ads, I also experience what my

appearance signifies to employees, as I notice them follow me around the store at a cautious distance, close enough to see, but far enough to appear busy if I glanced at them. These experiences influence the questions I asked, how I set up my interview guide, and how I used the theoretical frameworks to interpret the data.

Experiences of racial profiling in the retail environment are well documented in the literature. There are many retail alternatives for apparel, but fewer options exist for beauty retailers catering to the needs of Black women. A participant from my thesis recalled going to Ulta with questions about products. She was met with disregard as the employee instructed her to do her research on YouTube beforehand and only then come to the store to purchase it. How does it feel to freely buy products in a space, but no one in that space can be bothered to pretend to care about your concerns? Reflecting on this question, recalling my experience with and knowledge of American beauty culture, and immersing myself in the existing literature on Black women's beauty, led me to my dissertation topic. My perceptions of beauty spaces and how others react to me made me acutely aware that there are assumptions around beauty that are operationalizing in beauty retail spaces. My awareness of this has influenced the questions I ask and the approach I take in the study.

Data Collection: Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used in this study. Qualitative interviewing, in comparison to clinical, motivational, or interrogation interviewing assumes that other's experiences are meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit (Patton, 2015). Interviews allow us to enter another's perspective to discover feelings, thoughts, and intentions around an event or life experience. In this study, 20 interviews were used to illuminate the differences and similarities in how millennial Black women experience beauty and shopping

for beauty products by examining beauty retail spaces. All interviews took place through a unique Zoom link and passcode provided for each meeting. By logging onto Zoom at the set meeting time, participants signified their consent. Most interviews lasted between one hour and one hour and 30 minutes.

The interview guide (Appendix A) provided thematic structure to the conversation and ensured that the data related to the research questions. Interview guides increase the range and depth of data collected compared to an informal conversational interview (Patton, 2015). I conducted three pilot interviews before finalizing the interview guide. Pilot interviews allowed me to remove repetitious questions, rearrange the flow of the questions, and add probing questions where needed. Though the exact wording and sequence of the questions were determined in advance, at times I deviated from the guide to explore a comment. For example, I did not ask direct questions about Sally Beauty Supply but participants would casually reference the store. In those moments, I would follow up if they mentioned it repeatedly, or if it became clear that they had positive or negative feelings about the store. In addition, data collection became systematic and rigorous when the same questions were asked repeatedly, allowing for gaps in data to be anticipated and closed during the interview process (Patton, 2015).

Interviewing establishes power dynamics, with the researcher leading the conversation with pre-set research questions and goals while the participant may feel inclined to answer questions "correctly" to appease the researcher. This was noted during the interviews when participants asked, "Is that enough?" Or "Is that what you're looking for?" At these points, I responded with "yes, it makes sense" or "I understand it as you explained it" to affirm the participant's perspective throughout the interview. Power differentials, in the interview setting, are also present in terms of knowledge production as the relationships between methodology and

epistemology are made explicit (Conti & O'Neil, 2007). Methodology or the way research is carried out, is decided by the researcher. The researcher has the opportunity to review and select the best methodological approach for the study. While the participant does not have a say in how the study is set up, they do provide the data which gives weight and perspective to the study. The participants' lived experiences as millennial Black women provide a lens to consider beauty retail spaces, and the Black beauty supply store, as racialized spaces. Thus, the researcher constructs the boundaries of the knowledge discussed. I chose a qualitative approach, interviews, and the theoretical frameworks which inform my analysis. But without the knowledge from my participants, there would be nothing to report.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews require high skill, as there is a thin line between making participants comfortable and talking too much throughout the interview. While a goal is to make the interview flow like a conversation, researchers must be careful not to push their interpretation on to the participant. Researchers have to self-manage their affect and balance between collecting data with research questions in mind, and also recognizing their participants, and the careful handling of other's lived experiences. During the interview process, I followed the participant's lead in setting boundaries. While the consent letter describes the audio recording process, it does not state whether participants should have their cameras on or not. Most women joined the Zoom meeting with their cameras on, which helped with the flow of the interview. For the interviews with cameras on, I noted how body language shifted when we talked about negative and positive experiences. I recorded smiles when thinking about celebrating Black beauty and dreaming about ideal beauty spaces, and nonchalance when addressing the surveillance and store design of Black beauty supply stores.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Participants met the following criteria to qualify for the study: 1) born between 1981 – 1996, 2) self-identify as Black American, 3) self-identify as a woman, and 4) frequently shop in a physical setting for their beauty products. Participants who mostly bought products online were not excluded from this study, as long as they also had physical store experiences needed to reference for the interview. In this study, Black is defined as a person whose ancestry is African or comprises of multiple African ethnicities. I also included any participant from the international African community (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). McKittrick and Woods (2007) analyze racialization as an underpinning for the production of space, making their definition of Black relevant to Black women's spatially informed perceptions of beauty. Self-presentation in terms of clothing, hair, music, and basic aspects of personal style and taste are the most formally coordinated aspects of asserting African diaspora claims at the cultural level (McKittrick and Woods, 2007), making the production and selling of beauty a shared practice in the African diaspora.

Study participants were recruited through purposeful random sampling, which allowed for a random selection of individuals throughout the U.S. I shared an IRB-approved flyer (Appendix A) on my Instagram account and invited potential participants who met the criteria to fill out a screening form (Appendix A) created on Google Forms. The screening form was linked in my Instagram bio while the data collection period was open. I also asked friends to share the post on their social media. The screening form was open for 12 days, from February 18, 2021, to March 2, 2021, and collected 28 potential interviewees. Of the 28 women who responded, 20 women ended up participating in the interviews.

Before the interview, participants received the consent letter and completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A). Though participants may have passed the screening criteria and identified themselves as Black, I also wanted to capture their differences in racial or ethnic identity. Participants identified as African American (9), Black American (5), Black (4), Afro-Caribbean (1), and Afro-Creole (1). The majority of them were middle class (9) or lower-middle class (7), though others also identified themselves as working class (2) and upper-middle class (2). There were no measures or income ranges provided in the questionnaire, so participants interpreted their class status based on their personal assessment of their class status. Despite variations in class status, participants were similar in education level; 19 of the women were college-educated, and 12 earned graduate degrees.

Study of Millennial Black Women

This study is informed by Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and Black feminist thought (McKittrick, 2006) which positions Black women as creators of knowledge theoretically and spatially. Depending on the access to beauty retailers throughout their lives, millennial Black women preferred to shop in local beauty supply stores, large department stores like Macy's, big-box stores like Wal-Mart or Target, or in national beauty retail chains such as Sally Beauty Supply, Ulta or Sephora. Considering the diversity in shopping options, combined with the availability of Black beauty brands online and in Black beauty supply stores, the current level of access to beauty products for Black women is unprecedented.

Millennial Black women differ from millennials because of their 'race' and differ from other Black women on a generational basis (Allen, Davis, McDonald, & Robinson, 2020). Perceptions of beauty and access to beauty retailers differs across generations of Black beauty. While older generations are more inclined to prioritize a professional and respectable look, Black millennials

are more interested in comfort, authenticity, and naturalness. When Black millennials were asked to rank images of their peers with different types of hairstyles, such as straight hair, twistouts, or dreadlocks, they chose the images that countered mainstream beauty ideals by representing textured hair (Orey and Zhang, 2019). They viewed images with dark skin models as more attractive and images with light-skinned women were perceived as less supportive of political and social views of Black liberation. The claim that Black women possessing different beauty ideals than the mainstream is not new. But millennials, unlike previous generations of Black women, have come of age during an "aesthetic revolution" that has encouraged them to embrace darker skin tones and different textures of natural hair. Thus, millennials are more likely to appreciate and ascribe to a diverse beauty standard, which is more inclusive of different types of beauty.

Millennial Black women are also considered unique, when compared to the generational cohorts that came before (Generation X) and after (Generation Z) them. Older millennials were born before digital tools and access to the Internet were prevalent and did not engage with the internet until early adulthood. Thus, millennials have had a taste of both worlds – their childhood experiences were shared with the generations before them, while their adulthood is a bridge between their parents and Generation Z. However, delayed access to social media has not stopped millennials from creating positive representation on the Internet. Hashtags, like #BlackGirlMagic allowed Black women to celebrate themselves and others (Berry-McCrea, 2019). Similar hashtags, such as #melaninmakeup and #Blackbeauty were used during participant recruitment to increase interest in the study.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed from a critical perspective, using Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and Black feminist geographies (McKittrick, 2006) as guiding critical theories to interpret the experiences of millennial Black women in beauty retail spaces. Critical change inquiry analyzes existing conditions in an attempt to bring attention to power, economic, and social inequalities (Patton, 2015). This approach fits the study, as Black beauty supply stores are spaces laden with power, economic, and social inequalities. Yet, they are understudied and viewed only as typical fixtures in predominantly Black neighborhoods. The locations, ownership, products, and consumers create a dynamic where perceptions of beauty are intertwined with interracial group relations in the marketplace. The complexity of this site, and the people who frequent them, were unpacked by centering the millennial Black women's experiences and their interactions and interpretations of these beauty retail spaces.

The research questions drove the analysis and the resulting themes. For each interview, I printed an interview guide and took notes on patterns or recorded interesting anecdotes. Afterward, I transcribed the interviews and coded them using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that allowed me to group interview data by selecting quotes as cases and patterns. Transcripts were coded using an open coding process, where larger themes such as thoughts around beauty, routines, products, and spaces were identified first. Next, data was coded around intersecting themes like different types of beauty routines related to skincare, makeup, hair, or body care. The resulting themes are reported in the chapter on results and discussion. Quotes from the interviews were used to support the thematic analysis.

Assumptions and Limitations

Before collecting the data, assumptions were made around whether or not millennial Black women were shopping at Black beauty supply stores, and whether or not they could name issues pertaining to beauty retail store design. Some interpretations of the data, as related to class and education, are limited by the sample size (n=20). Thus, the results are not generalizable to the larger population. Nonetheless, the results suggest associations between where the participants grew up and their perceptions of Black beauty. Most participants (14) grew up in predominantly Black or Brown neighborhoods and identified Black beauty positively. Four participants grew up in predominantly white areas, while two grew up in mixed-race neighborhoods. Participants who grew up in predominantly white areas had slightly negative interpretations of Black beauty.

Assessing Data Quality

The quality of the data and the credibility of the study were assessed using critical change criteria. Research engaged in critical change inquiry critiques existing conditions and to bring about change in the individual, community, or system (Patton, 2015). This study looks at beauty retailers and their relationship to millennial Black women. The data reveals that participants have different expectations of various beauty retailers, but they have similar experiences despite different preferences, expectations, and social status. Focusing research on critical change requires the researcher to focus on 1) investigating social injustice, 2) interpreting findings as a critique of the existing injustices, and 3) using the findings in a way that informs change (Patton, 2015). Beauty retail spaces have been investigated as sites of discriminatory practices. In the Black beauty supply store alone, millennial Black women experience features of oppression and injustice alongside nostalgia and creative expression. Their relationship to their beauty and the continued efforts to cultivate an alternative beauty standard provides a new sense of happiness,

freedom, and justice concerning beauty. Millennial Black women's interpretations of beauty

reveal that managing beauty can also be a form of self-care. However, the majority of these

practices are taking place at home instead of in public. Millennial Black women's experiences at

beauty retail stores can inform alternative beauty retail spaces which provide an experience that

centers Black women's needs.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section blends the interview data from all participants to create a full picture of

millennial Black women's experiences in beauty retail spaces. In sections where contradictory

evidence was provided, both positive and negative experiences were examined. The analysis is

informed by Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2000) and the insights of Black feminist

geographies (McKittrick, 2006). Both are used as guiding critical theories to interpret the

experiences of millennial Black women in beauty retail spaces. This analysis of 20 millennial

Black women's perceptions and their interactions with beauty retail spaces reveals the conflicts

in their lives around beauty. Millennial Black women participate in multiple beauty categories

(hair, skincare, cosmetics, nails, body), but are restricted by their inability to find products and

tools to manage their beauty in mainstream retail stores. Despite differences in beauty retail

preferences, all of the women in this study shopped at Black beauty supply stores to find the

necessary products and tools to manage their beauty.

Perceptions of Beauty

Millennial Black women's perceptions of American beauty aligned with previous studies on

the influence of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black women's perception of their beauty

(Robinson-Moore, 2008; Sekayi, 2003). The majority of participants described American beauty

as "restrictive," "Eurocentric," "perfect," and "unattainable". Images that came to mind were

white women, thin, with blonde hair and blue eyes - a trope that stands the test of time.

Perceptions of a more inclusive American beauty still leaned towards Eurocentric ideals.

Participants who saw American beauty as more multicultural, or at least, attempting to be, described the ideal as "people who are lighter," or someone with light eyes and "curly hair or [anything] closer to that". Views of American beauty were distinct from Black beauty and general definitions of beauty, itself. Participants were aware of American beauty standards but did not always subscribe to them. Black women have an established history of pursuing beauty standards outside of the mainstream; the Black Panther movement and its encouragement of natural hair is one example. The political association between Black people's styles and ways of fashioning their bodies also extends to beauty. Sunshine, for example, positions Black beauty outside of the beauty industrial complex when she states: "white supremacy is always, like, the reference when we're thinking about beauty." While Sunshine can define Black beauty and describe American beauty, she knows that Black beauty is viewed in relation to white supremacy rather than on its own. In a way, Sunshine draws attention to the fact that American beauty standards are so restrictive that Black people must create an alternative beauty standard that is more reflective of their community.

Black beauty standards exist outside of and in relation to Eurocentric standards of beauty. In this alternative, millennial Black women define Black beauty as "the essence of your aura," or as Taylor said, "how you treat people, the space you take up when you're in a room with someone or how you can make someone feel - all those things would be considered to be beautiful to me." Black beauty was connected to the internal being, the "way you exude confidence and beauty within," and "what reflects to the external world that already lives within you". These answers demonstrate that beauty is not just about the physical or the external aesthetic for millennial Black women. Diamond described this relationship between inner and outer feelings of beauty:

I think Black beauty first would start with confidence, and I think that's why I relate to beauty inside and out because, you know, a lot of the pictures in the world do not define Black women as beautiful. So, I feel like, as a Black woman, I have to remind myself a lot of little things that make me beautiful, that society either frowns upon or is just now getting on the wave. So my hair, the way I walk, you know, my skin complexion, my shape is like Black beauty, as in, having to and wanting to appreciate everything, not just this, this one ideal package.

Diamond's answer acknowledges that she is aware of these controlling images about Black women in society. Hill Collins (2000) names five restrictive images for Black women: the mammy, the jezebel, the welfare queen, the matriarch, and the Black lady. When Diamond states "a lot of the pictures" do not *define* Black women's beauty, she reveals that she knows that images of Black women in the media cannot be relied on. This is important because as Hill Collins (2000) states, these images reveal power relations. They shape a) how people treat Black women, b) how Black women receive those images, and c) how Black women respond to those images as a site of potential resistance. Diamond does not normalize these images and thus resists co-opting the dominant narrative when describing her own beauty. In this small action, Diamond takes a step towards full consciousness by recognizing that these images are all negative.

For the most part, general definitions of beauty were similar to definitions of Black beauty. Although Marie, a graduate student in Michigan, felt there was no Black beauty standard, she did see an overlap between Black and American beauty: "Black [beauty] really tries to be independent of American beauty, but they end up doing the same thing, just in a different way, more so by [highlighting particular] features and hair texture". The overlap, as Marie identifies

it, is in the hierarchy of acceptance of different types of Black beauty. In other words, within the Black community, Marie believes that colorism and Eurocentric standards influence who gets to be considered beautiful by placing lighter skin and white features as the top preference. While Marie agrees with Hill Collins's (2000) analysis and recognizes that these controlling and restrictive images exist she has not yet moved to actively resisting them. This is a common theme throughout the study; millennial Black women range in their political consciousness and also in their commitment to buying Black-owned brands.

Beauty Management as Self Care

Dionne and B. Wells viewed their respective beauty routines as "therapeutic". While Dionne had a wash day routine for her hair, and B. Wells had an in-depth skin care routine that included an at-home steam facial, both women viewed the time spent managing their beauty as time for themselves. As B. Wells stated "I find my self-care routine is more so about, okay, I'm taking care of myself, for myself. I'm not doing it for anybody else. Like Diamond, B. Wells also sees her beauty existing outside of the American beauty standard. When she takes care of herself, she retreats back to the privacy of her home to recharge. At home in a comfortable environment, millennial Black women are able to get away from the ever-scrutinizing white gaze. Even making time for one's self and resisting the expectation of Black women being all the time on and available for everyone can be an act of resistance (Hill Collins, 2000). Dionne had similar sentiments, stating, "I take my time…It's actually kind of therapeutic for me to do my hair." Spending time with one's self in a busy world allows millennial Black women to make space for themselves and reflect on their personhood through their own eyes, and not others. Through self-care, in the form of personal beauty management, millennial Black women reinforce their

alternative beauty standard. It is not the actual action, such as hair washing and skin care, but also the time spent on managing these processes that adds to its meaning.

All the women in the study participated in at least one of the following sectors of the beauty industry: hair, skin, nails, body, or cosmetics. Time and approach for each process varied according to the individual. While all participants had a hair care routine, the type of routine created, and the time commitment depended on the individual's preference. Women who had their hair twisted in locs or other protective styles required less daily maintenance. Still, they kept up with routine hair maintenance such as oiling their scalp every two weeks or getting their style refreshed at the salon. Taylor had locs, which required retwisting as a part of the maintenance process. To keep up with her hair care routine, Taylor drove five hours to Florida to visit her trusted loctitian. Others, who wore their hair naturally, set aside a day or two to four hours to go through the full process of cleaning, conditioning, and styling their hair. Washing their hair was not as simple as the process shown in hair commercials. It required planning and setting time aside for maintenance. Diamond describes her wash day routine as a "long process" reserved for the weekends:

> [My hair] could either be in braids or twists and I'll take that down, then I'll wash, condition, deep condition. I might just do an oil rinse, might just do an aloe vera treatment. So, that can range to like four hours if I'm blow drying my hair too. But for the most part, I let it air dry now.

Self-care is also evident in the time millennial Black women are setting aside to spend with themselves. Study participants had various hairstyles from locs to box braids. Some wore their hair in its natural state, without a relaxer, or were transitioning their hair to becoming fully natural. Despite their styling differences, all participants carried on some level of weekly beauty

routines. Beauty rituals and routines can ground people, especially during a pandemic when more people are spending time at home. The new normal of virtual meetings on Zoom has millennial Black women more invested in keeping their skin clear and glowing, instead of putting on a full face of makeup.

Mainstream Beauty Shopping Experiences

For millennial Black women, shopping in mainstream beauty retail stores, like Sephora, Target, and Ulta can be a hit or miss experience. Mavis, Jones, Heather, Sunshine, and Diamond mainly shopped at Black beauty supply stores. Everyone else shopped at a range of stores for their beauty products (Table 2). Target, Sephora, and Ulta were the main stores that participants went to for the majority of their products. Drugstores, like CVS and Walgreens, and department stores such as Nordstrom and Macy's were all mentioned as additional places where participants shopped for beauty products. However, all participants supplemented their preferred store with trips to the Black beauty supply store. Lighting, product organization, assortment, and knowledgeable employees are the top considerations for millennial Black women in beauty retail environments. Participants sought employees who were knowledgeable about Black hair and skin, especially regarding cosmetics.

According to participants, Ulta and Sephora, provided different experiences depending on the store location. Participants discussed having a preferred location, due to convenience or the likelihood of product availability. Millennial Black women are motivated to shop in Sephora or Ulta when they are looking for specific brands or seeking quality cosmetics such as a "high-end foundation by Marc Jacobs". Participants would seek out employees in Sephora or Ulta purposefully, perceiving them to be knowledgeable about the products. Angelique, for example, felt that Sephora and Ulta employees were more knowledgeable than employees in the beauty

supply stores. However, millennial Black women do not assume that a store employee is automatically knowledgeable about the beauty products in the store, especially if they are specific to Black people. Mavis described an Ulta visit when she went to a different location outside of her norm:

> I remember when I used to go to […] one specific Ulta in Chicago and it was on the south side like in Hyde Park, because I knew that they were going to have mostly Black people working at that Ulta

She goes on to describe a time when she strayed from her routine and visited the Ulta in downtown Chicago, where "mostly white girls [were] working" and she received the wrong shade of foundation. Finding the correct foundation shade remains a problem for millennial Black women, even though the cosmetic industry has advanced in its recognition of different skin tone shades since the launch of global pop star, Rihanna's makeup brand, Fenty Beauty. Fenty launched with 40 shades of foundation, surprising well-established beauty conglomerates with their ability to innovate in the beauty market (Reed & Medvedev, 2020). Even with knowledgeable employees on site, millennial Black women may still have to do their own product research before shopping, or travel to a location where the employees are Black and can understand women their needs. Furthermore, some stores leave the product and brand knowledge education up to their employees. Taylor, a former Ulta employee, took it upon herself to provide better customer service to Ulta shoppers, but that is not the norm. Because of the lack of proper training of their staff, Mavis and others would receive the wrong shade of foundation. Taylor and Mavis's experiences from the internal and external perspective on Ulta sells products for Black women but does not require their employees to learn about the new brands, which suggests that they devalue their customers of color.

Table 2
Participant's Beauty Retail Store Preferences

Name	Current Location	Stores
Kora	Washington D.C.	BBSS, Beauty Counter, Sephora
Nicole	St. Louis, MO	BBSS, Sephora, Target, Ulta
Garcelle	New York City, NY	BBSS, Online, Sephora, Target, Ulta
Michelle	New Jersey	BBSS, Nordstrom, Target, Sephora
Angelique	Hartford, CT	BBSS, Sephora, Ulta*
B. Wells	Atlanta, GA	BBSS, MAC, Sephora, Wal-Mart
Natasha	Miami, FL	BBSS, CVS, Sephora, Ulta, Walgreens
Tiana	Duluth, GA	BBSS, Online, Sephora, Target*, Ulta
Dionne	Raleigh, NC	BBSS, Sephora, Target*, Ulta
Heather	Athens, GA	BBSS*, Kroger, Target
Jones	San Diego, CA	BBSS*, Sephora, Target*, Ulta
Jesse	Florida	BBSS, Walgreens*
Kennedy	Marietta, GA	BBSS, Online, Sephora, Target, Ulta
Cooper	Washington D.C.	BBSS, Online, Sephora, Target, Ulta
Taylor	Athens, GA	BBSS, Target, Ulta*
Morgan	Gaffney, SC	BBSS, Target, CVS, Sally's Beauty Supply, Walgreens, Wal-Mart
Diamond	Atlanta, GA	BBSS*, Sephora, Ulta
Sunshine	Athens, GA	BBSS*, Target, Ulta
Mavis	Chicago, IL	BBSS*, African store
Marie	Michigan	BBSS, CVS, Macy's*, Stein Mart, Target

Note. Black beauty supply stores (BBSS) are distinguished from Sally Beauty Supply because participants clarified that they were not the same. Asterisks designate preferred stores, but all participants did not identify a preference. Participants shopped at Target and Sephora the most (n=14), followed by Ulta (n=13), Walgreens (n=3), CVS (n=3), and online (n=4).

Natasha, a property manager in Miami, also described an incident at Ulta with her mother, who speaks Spanish. She was attempting to redeem her reward points when she ran into an unexpected issue:

So, the girl at the register, I guess she was new. She didn't understand what she was

doing. So, she called somebody else that worked there, who I've seen time and time again

in the store. So, we recognize each other, and she calls him over to come and help her

like, apply points or whatever. […]. He comes over. They're figuring it out. And you know, up until that point, the girl was speaking english, right? He came over and in Spanish he told the girl not to give me my points. I didn't catch it, but my mother caught onto her. And then my mother was upset. She was just like how could you tell her not to give my daughter her points? […]. And then he turned bright red, and I immediately asked for her supervisor because that made no sense.

This was only one of three separate incidents, which ultimately caused Natasha to stop shopping at Ulta. When asked what the final straw for her was, she stated, "I've always had a negative shopping experience at Ulta…and I just don't think it's fair for me to spend money in spaces that, like, I really don't feel appreciated in." Multiple participants discussed Sephora and Ulta not stocking enough products to meet the specific demand of Black women in their area. This can make millennial Black women feel excluded, because as Michelle points out her "beauty was defined by availability in the community". The lack of product availability in mainstream stores reinforces the feeling that the full expression of Black beauty is not a social and business priority. Overall, women who had a negative experience seemed to have multiple ones at the same store. B. Wells also reported multiple incidents at Sephora, where she felt that the employees watched her walk around the store. Another participant found the employees at Sephora to be "so pesky" because "they ask you 'can I help you?' every 5 minutes". Though some women preferred Ulta, others, like Sunshine, found it to be expensive, and also, an exclusive space. Sunshine preferred Target to Ulta because of price: "I thought I was about to go in and buy a popular eyeshadow [palette] for like $20 and it was like $70…that time, I was like, oh no matter where I go, I'm going to Target". Sunshine, an avid Black beauty supply store

shopper, could not justify spending $70 on an eyeshadow palette when there are cheaper options at Target.

Shopping at big-box stores like Target or Wal-Mart was motivated by convenience *and* price. There was a clear preference for Target amongst participants, while Wal-Mart was described as an isolating experience. Target was Garcelle's primary store, and her preference over the Black beauty supply store: "At Target, I feel like I have a little bit of options. But the beauty supply store does have better options for Black hair stuff. So, that's kind of the issue." Garcelle is making choices between quality, product assortment, and convenience when she shops for her beauty products. Even before she gets to the store to shop, she engages in a thought process that might involve researching and considering which stores in which parts of the city will have the products she needs. She is not alone in this. Most participants reported doing some sort of research prior to shopping for beauty products. Information seeking ranged from searching for product recommendations to looking up the racial or ethnic identity of business owners.

Compared to Target, participants were not fond of Wal-Mart. Critiques of Wal-Mart ranged from their business practices to the way they kept Black haircare products in locked cases. Kennedy took issue with Wal-Mart's business ethics, calling them the "definition of capitalism and racism all at the same time" because they "target poor and lower-income areas and have built their wealth [on them] but never give back to those areas". She also took issue with their retail experience, stating that checking out "takes forever" and "their associates hate their lives". Because of her strong feelings, Kennedy decided not to shop at Wal-Mart and preferred Target instead. Diamond also had issues with Wal-Mart, stating that she prefers stores with "easier access" like Sephora or Ulta because things are not "locked in a case like at Wal-

Mart". When shopping for beauty products, Diamond stated she was primarily motivated by price and product availability. While Wal-Mart does provide products at the right price, Diamond was also frustrated with the way products were presented: "First, I'm in my own section, then it's locked up, then I have to go find someone to unlock it so that I can buy it from you," which brings to mind the question - if the purpose is to sell something, why is it so hard to get to it? Similarly, to other participants, Diamond expects a quick experience when shopping for beauty products and feels that something as small as a bottle of shampoo should not require so much work. Black hair care products in this section range from $5 - $30 depending on the size, and there are far more expensive products in Wal-Mart that are not locked up. Juxtaposing Kennedy and Diamond's perceptions and experiences reveals how Kennedy's perception of lower-income areas being the target market for Wal-Mart relates to Diamond's experience with Wal-Mart locking up the Black hair products. If the issue was that people in the area are more likely to steal, then one would expect all the shelves with valuables to be locked up. Yet, locking up the hair care products for Black, textured hair signals to other customers in the store that Black people may be criminalized for something as trivial as hair care. In other words, this practice in Wal-Mart's around the U.S. suggests that Black bodies cannot be trusted around these beauty products.

In addition to issues related to price, product availability, employee knowledge, and racial profiling, the experience of shopping in mainstream stores forces millennial Black women to recognize their Blackness in the beauty aisles. Mainstream beauty retail spaces such as Ulta and Sephora are constructed to uphold whiteness. From the corporate perspective, the average consumer is white. McKittrick (2006) states that "whiteness, white femininity, white masculinity, and white corporeality," are, for the most part, protected and seen as worthy of

protection in all spaces. There are rarely representations of Black beauty visible in big-box stores outside of Black History Month, so millennial Black women, like Cooper, look for "the little sign that says 'ethnic'" to find their hair and beauty sections. Once in the aisle, Cooper continues "looking for the brown bottles first," insinuating that the bottle color signified who they were made for. This "spot in the corner" is usually a section of a shared aisle in the beauty section. Though Wal-Mart previously called their aisles, "ethnic", they are now labeled with the more politically correct term "multicultural hair", yet all the products have images of Black people on them. Target's 'ethnic' aisle is now called "textured hair" with information about the Black-owned brands in the store. In this aisle, Morgan is reminded of her importance compared to the white woman shopping near her; "there's a lot of stuff here, and it's not for me." Though millennial Black women are shopping at mainstream stores, they are still othered in the space. Even in the 'ethnic' section, there are silent struggles taking place. Participants identified these struggles as an overall lack of beauty knowledge which ranged from re-learning how to manage their hair after transitioning to its natural state, to choosing the right product for their hair type. Anyone shopping in the main beauty aisles at Target and Wal-Mart may be confronted with choices, and not knowing which product to choose can feel overwhelming in any store. But there is a difference in choosing between *multiple* brands selling hair products that repair, protect, and hydrate one type of hair versus finding the "textured hair" aisle just to realize that there are no products for a specific curl type or porosity. The situation awaiting millennial Black women in the aisles of Target and Wal-Mart begins with the purposeful reduction of Black women's beauty during chattel slavery (Johnson, 2016), and continues in the form of systemic racism that is even reflected in the beauty section of big-box stores. Admittedly, the diversity of Black women's beauty cannot be contained within this section and this experience is not specific to millennials.

Yet, sectioning off the beauty aisles in big-box stores is an attempt to provide "separate but equal" product assortment on the surface. A quick assessment of the square feet given to the beauty section, compared to the amount allowed for the "multicultural" hair section reveals that while these sections are separate, they are definitely not equal. Different brands of hairspray, shampoo, conditioner, and more have shelf space in a big-box retailer. In the "multicultural" hair section, all these categories are compressed into one section of an aisle. Furthermore, big box retailers are under no obligation to stock Black-owned products or products which target Black consumers. 15 Percent Pledge (2021), a non-profit started by Aurora James, encourages major retailers to pledge 15% of their shelf space to Black-owned businesses because Black people make up 15% of the U.S. population. In regard to beauty brands, Sephora and Bluemercury are the only beauty retailers that have made the commitment.

The experiences described above draw attention to where messages about Black beauty are coming from for the millennial Black women in the study. Part of the problem is that millennial Black women have been exposed to different products and experiences throughout their lives, which raises the expectations for their retail experience as well. So, millennials know that there are more products available to them, and they recognize that they deserve more than a section in a big-box store, yet they are confronted by the lack of options available to them when actually purchasing these products in Target and Wal-Mart. Despite what they may expect, mainstream stores provide a sobering reality.

But this is not just an issue with product availability and assortment, it is also about the quality of options millennial Black women have when shopping for beauty products. Generally, people who experience bad treatment at a retail store, whether it be a grocery store or a Macy's, can expect their issues to be addressed, if they decide to speak up. Individuals can also choose

not to speak up and go somewhere else. There is privilege in having enough choices that one can go anywhere and remain optimistic that there will be a better experience at another store. Because the majority group of the population feels that their needs are met in all retail spaces, it creates the illusion that there is enough for everyone, which then means that there is no need to challenge the status quo.

While people from historically marginalized groups do have more options than they used to, they are not optimistic that a new store would provide better treatment. For millennial Black women the experience of shopping in beauty retail spaces is not only about the product assortment, but also about identity creation and self-presentation. In comparison to mainstream stores, the Black beauty supply store provides millennial Black women with the product assortment they seek.

From the participants' perspective, it is clear that mainstream retailers are not providing a full experience. Millennial Black women are dealing with racial profiling in specialty stores, such as a lack of product variety and assortment while compromising on their desire for convenience and low prices, creating an opportunity for millennial Black women to seek out different beauty retail spaces that can meet their needs in one place. The Black beauty supply store is one of those places.

Introduction to the Black Beauty Supply Store

Black women's beauty should be examined in the Black beauty supply store because the act of naming the place and the experience is also an act of naming the self and self-histories (McKittrick, 2006). In other words, naming the Black beauty supply store as an important cultural site in millennial Black women's lives exposes the self-histories that are created and contained with this space. Exploring the Black beauty supply store as a place where Black

women learn to use the tools to enhance their beauty anchors the experiences of millennial Black women and shapes their journeys to self-realization in a physical space. When discussing Black beauty supply stores, participants displayed a range of emotions from excitement and happiness to disappointment and annoyance. Despite millennial Black women's mixed emotions towards Black beauty supply stores, they continue to frequent them for beauty products, ranging from hair, nails, shoes, clothes, jewelry, and shea butter. Black beauty supply stores are public spaces where millennial Black women can consider and act on how they want to beautify themselves. My data shows that Black beauty supply stores are an introduction to creating, defining, and managing millennial Black women's beauty internally and externally.

Black beauty supply stores are located in "a certain part of town that [white] people don't go to, "in the hood," or, in other words, " a predominantly Black neighborhood". Garcelle framed the stores in relation to the neighborhood, stating that in New York City, "most of the time, they're in areas where there's a high number of people of color but I don't think I've ever seen somebody Spanish" in the store. Women who grew up in predominantly Black or Brown neighborhoods described the Black beauty supply store's location as relatively near their homes, or, in Diamond's case, "about eight blocks away". When I asked participants to describe where "the hood" was, they described environments where "people are so impoverished and have fun with so little". These places also have "high crime" and a "high theft rate". Participants also cited the store's location as a possible reason for why Asian business owners would feel the need to protect their stores: "when you're in a predominantly Black neighborhood, of course, your only offenders will be Black." In this sense, participants linked the location of Black beauty supply stores to the protective measures taken by Asian business owners.

Black beauty supply stores are early fixtures in millennial Black women's lives. Participants recalled going to the store as early as "four or five years old" with their mom or older sisters to pick out barrettes or hair beads for their hairstyle. Early experiences were generally positive and described as a time for creative discovery and exploration with beauty. Although Mavis did not remember her age at the time of her first experience, she remembered being "fascinated by all the different colors [of] barrettes". Cooper remembers the fun of looking for "barrettes, baubles, and things like that for [her] hair" while her mom looked at relaxers. Exploring the store and considering the possibilities for their appearance was a source of nostalgia and positive memories for participants. Diamond recalled shopping with her mom and looking forward to choosing new hair accessories to distinguish herself: "I'm the middle child – so, I don't want the same balls and barrettes as my sisters. Like, at least give me a different color". Diamond is one of five sisters in her immediate family and saw this as an opportunity to differentiate herself as a child. Morgan also recalled distinguishing herself by the color of her beads:

> I was, again, a child of my time, so I had like 30 different rainbow beads in my hair, and my mother wonders why I grew up queer. (laughs). It's like, 'you threw rainbows on me my entire life!' I remember being really, really, excited to go to the hair store because when my mom would put beads in my hair, she used to let me pick the color beads. […] So, I remember being super stoked about that when I was a kid.

In this instance, Morgan connects her queer identity to her ability to express it through the color of her hair beads as a child. An awareness of the self as an autonomous individual began at the Black beauty supply store for some millennial Black women, as they were allowed to choose from the variety of products in the store whether that be barrettes, jewelry, or lip gloss. This small encouragement of agency in self-expression can be significant for a Black queer woman,

like Morgan, seeking to express her identity at a young age. Though she may not have had full control over her style, she did have a choice in her bead color and the color pattern used in her hair.

As Hill Collins (2000) states, "crafting one's agenda is essential to empowerment." Before someone can craft an agenda, they must come to know themselves. So, in the act of choosing the barrettes and hair beads, Morgan, and others realize they have autonomy in creating their external appearance. The Black beauty supply store helps them achieve that goal. Figure 1 shows an aisle with a variety of barrettes in different colors, shapes, and sizes. The barrettes are typically in nondescript plastic packages without a brand name, but generally labeled "barrettes". When looking at a wall of beads and barrettes, one has the option to choose the colors, types of barrettes, and beads that they felt expressed their style and aesthetic best.

Figure 1

Wall of Barrettes, Beads, and Bows

Note. This figure shows a wall of assorted beads and barrettes at Super Sunny Beauty Supply in Conyers, GA. The image displays nine rows of hair accessories in different colors, styles, and sizes. Super Sunny Beauty Supply is a medium-sized Black beauty supply store with tall shelves and long aisles, unlike most Black beauty supply stores which makes displaying a large product assortment more visually appealing. The shelves prevent employees from looking out onto the store floor and identifying where customers are, but the store still has cameras that hang from the ceiling and cast a wide view of the store.

This experience is unique to the Black beauty supply store because these "barrettes," "baubles," "knockers" or "balls" (Figure 2) as they were referred to by different participants, can only be found at this level of variety in the Black beauty supply store. And having options is key to their ability to self-define. From an early age, participants learned that the Black beauty supply store had the products they needed to manage their beauty from their hair to cosmetics, jewelry, and nails.

Figure 2

Hair accessories for kids, referred to as "balls" or "knockers"

Note. This close-up of the options for kids' hair accessories are from a Black-owned beauty supply store in Stockbridge, GA. The image displays fewer options compared to Figure 1, which is expected at a Black-owned beauty supply store, according to participants.

The Black beauty supply store is an important public space for millennial Black women. As shown in Morgan's example, parents condoned and supported millennial Black women's interest in self-definition by financing their daughters' efforts for developing self-autonomy and expression. Hill Collins (2000) describes the private relationships between mothers and children as a site where resistance is taught and learned. She also connects the maintenance of these relationships to slavery in the U.S., stating that "when Black mothers taught their children to trust their own self-definitions and value themselves, they offered a powerful tool for resisting oppression" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 51). Tiana recalled going to the Black beauty supply store with her mom to buy braiding hair for her annual back-to-school style: microbraids. Microbraids are a thin version of box braids, with a higher number of braids in the completed style but are

more versatile for styling because they are less dense and can be easily pulled into a bun when needed. When Tiana was growing up, the price for microbraids was likely around $100-$120. Today, the cost ranges from $150-$250 depending on the stylist and style length. This price may or may not include the money paid for the braiding hair needed to complete the style. Because participants, including Tiana, frequented Black beauty supply stores with their mothers at an early age, they learned that spending this amount of money on hair is not only permissible but expected and condoned.

Experiences with creativity and autonomy with the Black beauty supply store are also evident in case of millennial Black women who grew up outside of the community and throughout participant's lifetimes. Jesse reported feeling a sense of ownership over her identity, stating "I just felt very independent, because I was, you know, picking out something that was for *me* with *my* own money, and I was going to do *my* own hair." Jesse emphasized that it felt good not to depend on anyone when it came to changing her hairstyle because she was able to "slap down $100 or whatever to get [her] hair done at the time". This process of self-defining happens repeatedly throughout millennial Black women's lives, and the Black beauty supply store is a key retail space helping them achieve their looks. Millennial Black women can begin and continue the process of coming to know themselves at the Black beauty supply store.

The ability to self-define in Black beauty supply stores is limited to one-on-one interactions between customers or between customers and employees. In the Black beauty supply store, older female role models, such as parental or guardian figures, facilitate this rite of passage to managing personal beauty and cultivating an individual style. Returning to Hill Collins (2000) concept of stereotypes as controlling images, the matriarch is expected to be everything for everyone. Black women have consistent, but not uniformly, negative stereotypes: the mammy,

the jezebel, the matriarch, the welfare queen, and the Black lady. Hill Collins (2000) wants Black women to realize that such controlling images are negative and challenge themselves not to internalize their impact. In the process of resisting these images, and discovering new ways to resist them, Black women begin the process of formulating Black feminist thought. Thus, Hill Collins (2000) adds that while these five controlling images are all negative, Black women still have the opportunity to resist by introducing small but intentional actions into the everyday to provide a positive and alternative representation. In this sense, matriarchs are facilitating a rite of passage for young Black girls to introduce them to themselves and their ability to define themselves to the public. Matriarchs pass down important knowledge about the Black beauty supply store; it is not heavily advertised and would likely go unnoticed by people who are unfamiliar with them. Matriarchs and other important female figures in millennial Black women's lives introduced them to the preferred locations, set their expectations for a satisfactory experience, and educated them on the products in the store. Thus, matriarchs reaffirm the importance of a Black cultural space in order to continue the practice of cultivating an alternative beauty standard in future generations.

Having an individual and recognizable sense of style is important in the history throughout the diaspora. Style is agency (Tulloch, 2016); it is a significant tool of the construction of the self. The toolkit of self-construction consists of accessories, fashion, and beauty regimes. By making stylistic choices in how they adorn their bodies every day, people in the African diaspora participate in a process of self-telling in which their style and clothing choices become a part of their autobiographical narrative. In the Black beauty supply store, millennial Black women are also participating in this culturally embraced practice to cultivate and create an individual style. To gain visibility, individuals assemble a head-to-toe look in an attempt to communicate their

identity. In the African diaspora, communicating one's sense of style has shared importance across class. Black beauty supply stores can help individuals "fit" into society's defined categories, by providing the products to make their hair "appropriate". Purchases from the Black beauty supply store provide the means to create a hairstyle, buy an outfit, and accessorize that outfit in one space. The store also provides flexibility and creative liberty when it comes to choosing a new wig or buying synthetic or natural hair to create a new style. Beauty trends such as the *silk press* and *Fulani braids* created in Black communities but named "glass hair" and "Bo Derek braids" by mainstream media are anchored in the choices provided by the Black beauty supply store.

In sum, participants, as children, remembered Black beauty supply stores as a feminized space and a site of literal and emotional discovery. All participants recalled visiting the space with female figures, such as mothers, older sisters, and high school best friends. Primarily, the space is used to discuss, compare, and buy beauty products for Black women. Because participants reported going to the Black beauty supply store at four or five years old, they started the process of discovering the options in the store and making an emotional connection between the act of seeing themselves and the desire of being seen. With more options than mainstream stores, millennial Black women have the opportunity to refashion themselves with every store visit. However, despite the presence of Black women in the store and its cultural importance, this is not a space that structurally fosters a tight-knit community. Though some participants, like Heather, recounted "running into people I haven't seen in a while and just kicking it and catching up," as a positive experience in Black beauty supply stores, the majority of participants shopped alone and quickly because the space felt unkempt, overwhelming, and cluttered. At the same time, only Black beauty supply stores offer products that are specific to Black women's needs.

The product diversity is evident in the range of categories available in the store and the wide variety within each category. For example, a large Black beauty supply store can sell hair, clothing, jewelry, and shoes. The hair category can break down to braiding hair, wigs, weaves, crochet hair, and more. These can be further divided by color, texture, and length. From the wide assortment of products, consumers can choose their favorite brand, feel the consistency of braiding hair, or try on the wigs. In sum, in the Black beauty supply store, the "ethnic" section is the entire store, plus more.

Defining the Black Beauty Supply Store

The Black beauty supply store is a familiar place that all the participants knew well and could recall from memory with a similar description despite their differences in regional location or class status. The "plug and play design" as many participants called it, refers to the tendency to have the same interior store design and experience regardless of the city. Kennedy described this as an "aesthetic that just has been plugged and played and I don't know where it originated, but it is almost the same, regardless of who owns it". Diamond echoed Kennedy's description, stating that the stores seemed like they came "from a manual" because "that's how [she could] find her lip gloss at most, if not all" stores. Below, I have included Jones' description of a Black beauty supply store because it concisely captures the range in answers. Jones grew up in Atlanta, Georgia but lives in San Diego, California, and her answer is informed by experiences in multiple Black beauty supply stores around the U.S.:

What does the store look like on the inside? A mess? … It is overwhelming. When you walk into one … it's like a one-stop shop. So, you'll see aisles of wigs, of synthetic, real, mixed types of hair. You'll see your beauty section where you get like, you know, cheap makeup,

hair bows for the kids, combs, gels, weaves, clothes, slippers, glue, any, anything under the

sun really.

The interior store descriptions were almost the same for every participant, and similar in

detailing aisles packed with products, a section for wigs, mannequins for clothes, jewelry in

cases, and packages of hair lining the walls (Figure 3). Some Black beauty supply stores also

feature additional sections with specialized employees such as a barbershop or a wig fitting area.

The following definition of a Black beauty supply store was created with participants'

responses to the question, "How would you describe a beauty supply store to an outsider?"

A Black beauty supply store is "a [Black] cultural" experience; "a store for beauty

products" "ranging from hair, lashes, makeup, clothes" and "jewelry". Beauty products in

the store are "tailored to Black or Brown women". Stores "come in different sizes,"

"depending on the place that you go" and some can be "large, like malls" or

"playgrounds". Most take a "minimalist" approach to merchandising.

In addition to defining what is in the store, the products sold, and its target market, I also added

Black to the beginning of the term to center the primary consumers who shop at the store.

Figure 3

Interior of a Korean-Owned Black Beauty Supply Store

Note. This store interior is from a Korean-owned Black beauty supply store located in Belvedere Plaza in Decatur, GA. This store does not have a specified wig section. Instead, mannequin heads are placed around the store to display the wigs. Clothing options are visible on the right. Two types of cameras are also evident. White cameras drop down from the ceiling, and black dome cameras are attached to the ceiling.

Product Assortment at the Black Beauty Supply Store

It is important to note that while Black beauty supply stores share a target consumer, they range in merchandising techniques and product presentation. Their lighting, store layout, aisle space, products, and shelving varies from one location to the next. Perceptions of merchandising techniques and store design varied depending on the participant's experience.

In smaller stores, participants found a large number of products to be "cluttered" and "disorganized." Garcelle described it as a "crazy organized chaos," while Sunshine interpreted the product presentation by location: "the ones in the hood are super cluttered because they're trying to get as much product in there as possible so they can get our money." Natasha described

this as a feeling of "everything being on top of each other, like, we have so much of this thing girl, you could buy three if you wanted to, like we don't run out. We got you." For her, this was a "good thing, because there's an abundance of the things that you need". Sunshine interprets the product availability positively and negatively because she has more options in Black beauty supply stores, but this also means more opportunities to spend her money in a store she does not feel excited about. On the other hand, Natasha sees the clutter as being a sign of diverse product assortment. To her, it signals is that she does not need to worry about product scarcity. Natasha's previous experiences at Ulta with product unavailability, especially for foundation shades, may also influence her appreciation for diverse product assortment at the Black beauty supply store.

The major beauty category in the Black beauty supply store is hair. Participants listed different types of hair (sew-in weave, wigs, track weaves, braiding hair, crochet hair), hair tools (hair scarves, combs, brushes, hairdryers, curling irons, bonnets), and haircare products (shampoo, conditioners, gel, hair dye) as the main items in the Black beauty supply store. It makes sense then, that some participants (n=4), referred to the Black beauty supply store as the "hair store" or "hair care store". Three of the four participants who used the term "hair store" were from the Northeastern U.S., while one participant was from Jackson, Mississippi, suggesting that this may be a regional way of referring to Black beauty supply stores. There was equal mention of makeup (eyelash glue, lashes, makeup brushes, eyebrow pencils, foundation, lip gloss), and clothing (sandals, slippers, hats, tote bags, cheap outfits). Jewelry, the final product category, was mentioned less often but included hoop earrings, toe-rings, anklets, and decorative finger rings.

Participants felt that three products could only be found at a Black beauty supply store. The number one product mentioned was edge control, a thick gel-like paste that is applied to the

fine hair that frames the face (see Figure 5), or baby hairs, with an edge-control brush, toothbrush, or fingertips. Edge control is used to lay down these hairs in a stylistic wave pattern along the hairline. Tools, like rat-tail or pin-tail combs, with thin metal handles, are perfect for making straight, even parts for braiding patterns. Multiple participants stated that these combs can only be found in Black beauty supply stores. A couple of participants expressed that while Sally Beauty Supply store has similar skinny combs, the handle is plastic instead of metal, which does not help with parting hair.

Participants talked about changing their hairstyles based on their taste, the season, or workplace requirements. Michelle described how she moved through different hairstyles throughout the year:

At least two times a month, [I make] a visit to the hair salon. And if that's not happening, then… I'll have my real hair out, which usually, about three times a year makes an appearance. Outside of that, it is the, once every six weeks install, or the once-a-month braid routine.

Michelle is making time for her hair style, but also considering what hair or tools are needed for the style. Installs, or sew-ins, require braiding natural hair up into a pattern or braiding style that allows the weave, or hair extensions, to be sewn into the braid. As Cooper stated, Black beauty supply stores have "hair tools, like crochet needles, hair thread or threading needles for sew-ins." Sew-ins require curved needles or threading needles, and hair thread, two products that are easily found at Black beauty supply stores. The resulting style keeps natural hair protected while allowing women to experiment with different lengths, colors, styles, and textures of weave. Michelle describes the additional hours needed to maintain her style and mentioned that the extra work of maintaining her hair is not accounted for in the workplace, despite aesthetic expectations

around professionalism and customer service. Other participants discussed the amount of time spent managing their hair, from four hour wash days to sitting at the hair salon for at least three hours for a style, and in Michelle's case spending three to four hours prepping her hair for the next day. Her point about needing extra time to get ready carries weight when we consider that to some extent, professionalism and expectations around appearance and behavior are skewed towards white American values. So, there is a larger unspoken understanding that to work at a high-end jewelry retailer, as Michelle does, one is expected to look, speak, and act a certain way. Michelle accomplishes this look, in part, at the Black beauty supply store.

Many women spoke about the $3 lip gloss, which is always located near the register, as an impulse buy. Kora recalled her first encounter with the Black beauty supply store on a trip with her best friend to buy some lip gloss. When asked if there was a product you could only get at the Black beauty supply store, Kora said "I don't know this for a fact, but I would venture to say definitely those lip glosses. You can't find those lip glosses no place else":

> I was with my best friend at the time […] in eighth grade. It was a beauty supply store on the corner of 79th and Jeffrey in Chicago, Illinois, and we got (laughs) this is so terrible, I don't even know what was in those lip glosses. They used to have these lip glosses […] and it was completely sheer [with] very electric colors, like really red or really orange or really, really green, but it was see-through, almost like Jell-O and you put them on, and your lips will look like you just ate a whole bucket of chicken by yourself, like just really grease on top of grease.

Kora's experience builds on previous themes of the Black beauty supply store being a cultural site of beauty for millennial Black women. The lip gloss itself is not significant – it has no special long-lasting qualities and questionable ingredients but remains a nostalgic item for

participants. B. Wells also recalled the lip gloss as one of the first products she remembers buying from the store with her mother. When participants discussed the lip gloss, it was usually in connection to its place in the store, and always a pleasant experience to recall. Melissa Butler, a millennial Black woman who founded The Lip Bar, a vegan line of lipsticks targeting Black women, describes the importance of lip gloss in the history of Black women's access to beauty:

> A lot of Black women are in that similar boat, where it's like, I don't do lipstick at all because I can't find this color that works on me. So, we gravitated towards lip gloss. I remember lip gloss being such a huge thing for our community, and now that lipstick has taken over, we're still in that [stage of], 'I'm willing to play with lipstick but I'm still a gloss girl'. (The Glam Gap, 2019)

Butler's statement adds support to the cultural relevance of the lip gloss found at the Black beauty supply store, and reasoning for why women like Sunshine and Diamond still seek it out today. Sunshine believes that the "best lip gloss is going to come from the beauty supply store" and, according to Diamond, the lip gloss was a staple, and not regionally specific: "one of my go-to lip glosses is from the beauty supply store. No matter where I move, it's the perfect lip gloss…and it's always $3".

Jewelry was one of the least discussed product categories in the Black beauty supply store amongst participants, but most stores do have considerable jewelry sections. Sunshine stated "if I want hoop earrings, they are going to come from the beauty supply store. I haven't seen them anywhere else. [At least] not like the ones I like." The Black beauty supply store has hoop earrings, but as with everything else, there is considerable variety in the earrings provided. In large stores, styles range in metal color, size, and type. Hoop earrings are considered a part of Black culture and a cultural symbol of "resistance and strength" for Latinx folks (Pivet, 2017).

André Leon Talley, former creative director of *Vogue*, stated that hoop earrings became associated with Black American beauty in the 1960s and 1970s when political activist, Angela Davis and singer, Nina Simone, started wearing them (Garcia, 2018). Hoop earrings may be considered a political statement for Sunshine, who was passionate about her frustration with Asian-owned Black beauty supply stores. Other stores outside of the Black beauty supply store may have hoop earrings, but they do not have the array of hoop options that Sunshine needs to express herself on any given day. Fashion designer Tracy Reese stated that large hoop earrings may come across as "more bohemian [or] more political" and smaller hoop earrings are "more conservative" (Garcia, 2018). From bamboo earrings (Laren, 2019) to circles, the shape and size of the earrings matters in communicating one's identity within their group. The majority of the products that were not specific to hair care and styling could be found in other stores, but participants still expressed a preference for the version in the Black beauty supply store.

Quality and Convenience

Millennial Black women would also choose a Black beauty supply store over a large retailer for quality or convenience. For example, Kennedy described an experience where her bonnet broke and she went to Target to buy a new one because the beauty supply store closed at 7 p.m. Bonnets are typically worn at night, while sleeping, to preserve a style or protect the hair from breakage. Bonnets are culturally significant, "for many black girls, tying your hair up at night with some sort of head covering is akin to brushing your teeth" (Hughes, 2018). At Target, Kennedy was dissatisfied with the bonnet options, stating:

> I don't want this like, something y'all bought randomly off of China or whatever this crap [is that] y'all [are] trying to sell me. I don't want that. And it was like $4.99. […] The thing I need is like $1.97 at the beauty supply store

So, even if mainstream stores such as Target stock bonnets, they may not meet the standards and expectations of millennial Black women who want quality products at a reasonable price point. There is also a cultural element, as Black beauty supply stores have bonnets in different materials, colors, and styles. While Target may offer one style in two colors. Kennedy knows this from experience, and elaborated on this later, stating "it's not that the big box retailers don't have a substitute, but it's not what [I'm] looking for". She also knows that the Black beauty supply store has multiple options in color and style for bonnets. This means that the product in the supply store has not only the same functionality, but higher quality and more styles as well, not to mention a better price.

The availability of different textures, colors, and styles of hair is also unique to Black beauty supply stores. Kora also mentioned that the product assortment was specific to location:

When I was living in Chicago, […] I would do my own kinky twists where people added hair - that was a thing for that time. There was a certain kind of hair, […] like even though the package would look similar, I'd be able to know how the hair performed just by looking at it. Sally's never carried any of that stuff. I knew I had to go to a beauty supply on the south side of Chicago, maybe the west side, but I'm not a west side [person]. I knew I had to be on the south side […] to go to a beauty supply that would have this hair.

The variation within product categories suggests that millennial Black women have different styles and tastes in beauty products and that those trends can be traced back to specific locations, such as the Black beauty supply store, which has been able to keep up with the trend changes in Black beauty.

At the Black beauty supply store, participants typically find the right product for their needs at the right price because of the rich variety in product assortment. The Black beauty supply store may be located in Black neighborhoods, and that location is convenient to an extent because millennial Black women are using their education to move up the social ladder. As a result, they have more options and financial resources when it comes to shopping for beauty products. Yet, the availability of products at the Black beauty supply store reminds millennial Black women that their beauty belongs in "the hood" because they have to travel back to the location. Wherever they are, they are reminded that they do not fully belong there. Even if they live in a mixed neighborhood, they have to travel to the Black beauty supply store. Where is the respite?

Black Beauty Supply Stores as New Grounds for Black Feminist Geographies

With their presence, millennial Black women provide meaning to the Black beauty supply store, making it a site of historical and cultural relevance to the Black American community. According to McKittrick (2006, p. 121), Black feminist geographies appear through three processes:

1. Ideas about Black femininity, racial superiority, and difference are spatialized, consequently curtailing subaltern geographic desire and opportunities

2. Black women's geographic concerns are concealed by racial, sexual, and economic processes

3. These real and discursive sociospatial processes evidence struggles – over the soil, the body, theory, history, saying, and expressing a sense of place.

In the first process, McKittrick posits that ideas about Black femininity, racial superiority, and difference are spatialized. She then states that *because* these things are materially evident,
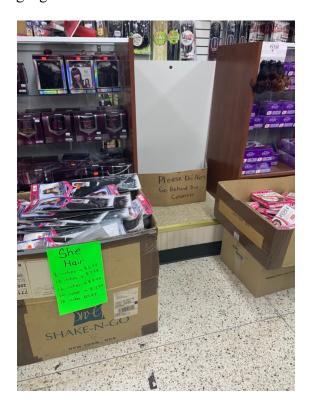
historically marginalized people's ability to tap into desires and opportunities in spaces are reduced, if they exist at all. The Black beauty supply store is an example of this because millennial Black women seek and purchase the tools they need to manage and express their inner beauty, externally, yet the spaces for purchasing these tools are limited. Thus, the full expression of millennial Black women's beauty is restricted to spaces, such as the 'ethnic aisle' and the Black beauty supply store. As discussed earlier, millennial Black women shop at Target, Ulta, Sephora, Wal-Mart, drugstores, and department stores for their beauty products. These stores are portrayed as spaces that cater to everyone, regardless of their identity categories. Yet, participants still felt they had to return to the Black beauty supply store to purchase products that could only be found there.

The Racialization of Beauty Supply Stores

Interior elements, such as the store design, facilitate and reinforce power differentials. Participants felt this in the Black Beauty Supply store, through the use of raised counters, cameras, security guards, and more. First, participants noticed an "abundance of hair," or "different types of hair," with the "valuable hair" locked up behind the counter (Figure 3). Where and how that hair may be displayed around the store varies. Multiple participants commented on the "boxes of braiding weave stacked across the floor" (Figure 4) when describing the interior of the stores as if they were an expected part of the environment. When recalling her first experience, Jesse described the Black beauty supply store as "kind of disorganized" with "a lot of piles [of] boxes everywhere". To provide the product assortment that millennial Black women are seeking, open boxes line the floors alongside shelved products. Signs with prices and product descriptions are taped to some of the boxes on the floor, while others are taped closed and

stacked for restocking. Owners and employees are not bothered to fix these things, and customers are also not bothering to request that they be fixed.

Figure 4

Boxes of Hair and Store Signage

Note. This interior shot is from an Asian-owned Black beauty supply store located in the Hidden Hills Village Shopping Center in Redan, GA. The green sign on the box (L) states the price for different lengths of braiding hair, which ranges from $5.99 to $14.99. Between the boxes is a small step where employees step onto the raised platform to get behind the counter. In this store, the counter wraps around from the front and continues along the left wall pictured here.

In retail, there are various ways to display products to increase visibility and access for customers but placing the boxes directly on the floor is not a recommended practice. The beauty supply store's "basic minimalist" approach to merchandising, which leaves the product in a shipping box, is evident here. Placing boxes on the floor carries a connotation of low priced and low-quality products. It also forces the customer to bend down and look through the box in a

small space, preventing other customers from walking by in the aisle. It is not only inconvenient for the customer, but also a fire hazard for the retailer.

The cash wrap was consistently mentioned for its placement in the store. It was described as being "in a square center in the middle of the store," depending on the store size. Participants placed the checkout area in the middle of large stores, while smaller stores, according to them, typically have the register towards the front door. Regardless of where the checkout area is located, it is almost always on a raised platform (Figure 4). Store owners that are generally of Asian descent are able to step up and above their customers as a physical and visual reminder to both parties that racial hierarchy is at work here. Cooper interpreted this as a power move, stating that "if someone's standing over you as you're sitting, trying to talk to you like that, there's some power stuff involved". Diamond reiterated this point when she described the Black beauty supply store she frequented at home:

> The register was really high, to the point when we were like checking out, we were looking up at them, kind of thing, … It was purposeful because they can stand up there and they can see, you know, pretty much see the aisles.

Diamond sees the cash wrap as a way to see the store. Dionne also connected the raised counters to an opportunity for watching customers: "the cash wrap…is set up high so they can kind of, see over the span of the store if they are going to watch [but] I guess I've never really seen anybody watching anybody in the store". Unlike Dionne, Kennedy sees the raised counters as evidence that employees are supposed to be watching customers regardless of whether they knew it or not:

> They see, they look at you…and they're watching for you, to make sure you're coming up to the register. And I know they're like seeing where you've gone to make sure you didn't sneak nothing in the bag.

Kennedy highlights how the store design facilitates the ability for store owners to watch customers move through the space. The raised counters combined with the short aisles, and small space provide an opportunity for employees to note where customers are at all times. The height of the cash wrap in most stores is an indication that customers will be watched. But it is the ethnicity of the store owners and the intensity of the surveillance that moves participants to generalize their views of Asian-owned Black beauty supply stores.

Tiana, for example, describes an incident of visiting a new store to buy a pack of hair for a hair appointment the next day:

> I was just running through to quickly pick up something. I got into the store and it was me and like three other customers. And the guy was behind the counter that was sitting up high. He saw me come in, and usually somebody would acknowledge, 'hey, how you doing? Welcome in' or something. He just looked at me and didn't say anything. And I just said, 'good evening or good afternoon' or whatever the case is, and just went about my business looking for […] the hair. It was very far, far in the back and the other two customers were in the front, so, you know, [I'm] just looking or whatever. I looked up and happened to see him looking at me, and he literally walked all the way down behind the counter to see where I was. And I'm like, okay, it's two other people in here? Why? You know, one, you didn't acknowledge me. And two, you're observing me as I'm trying to look for hair. And I went around the corner, um still looking, you know, looking for stuff. And he was just following me the whole time. So, I was like, you know what, I

don't like this energy. [...] He has yet to come and say, 'oh, ma'am, can I help you with something? I know you've been looking for a long time,' none of that. So, I just ended up leaving, which messed me up because I still needed to go to my appointment the next morning. But I just had to cancel the [hair] appointment because I didn't feel like being bothered.

Frustrated with the treatment and outright racial profiling she experienced, Tiana left the store without any products. The experience "just changed [her] whole mood about getting [her] hair done," so she canceled her hair appointment. Because she leaves without the purchase, she also misses out on the opportunity to change her hairstyle with her stylist. Tiana's experience of being disregarded, watched, and followed, is not unique to the Black beauty supply store. For example, Tiana notes that the man is seated "up high" and "behind the counter", and although he does not acknowledge her presence, he does see her as suspicious enough to get up and follow her around the store. In this case, the raised counters allowed him to spot Tiana moving throughout the store. It is clear from Tiana's interaction, however, that the store design is not the main driver in this interaction. While she makes note of the height of the chair, the counter, the number of people in the store, and her distance from the employee, it is ultimately the employee's personal decision to assume that Tiana will steal something and thus get up to follow her around the store. These actions reinforce racial hierarchies in the space. Cooper reported a similar experience in a Black beauty supply store, suggesting that because these stores have a "plug and play design" they may also have a plug and play experience. Cooper's incident revealed her level of consciousness about the experience, in comparison to Tiana: "I've had a couple of experiences where, I could see the person at the other end of the aisle, like following me as I walk down the aisle picking up stuff". In those moments, Cooper battles with herself in terms of what to do next. First, she

considers where she is. At home in Seattle, she knows that there are "only three or four other places … to choose from and within a certain area of … other beauty supply stores". With these limited options, Cooper asks herself:

> Am I going to suck it up and just let that person continue to try and profile me? Or am I just going to put my stuff down and walk out? Unfortunately, because I just can't go to, like, a Target or whatever for certain things, like…hair, I'm just going to suck it up because I'm on a mission to get [this] and I'll deal with [the rest] later.

But is there actually time to deal with it, if the women in this study are constantly moving from one place to the next, bracing themselves for the next experience? While Cooper stated that she did not have an issue with Asian ownership, she did have an issue with the fact that "you know that your clientele is mostly Black. Yet you're still perpetuating things like anti-Blackness [by] following people around".

Reinforcing Difference

In the Black beauty supply store, millennial Black women learn about difference, and how it limits their expectations for an equitable and social experience. Spaces, where Black women are typically found, are unprotected, whether that be in nature, at home, or within the community. This relationship between spaces and bodies means that Black women's bodies are repeatedly "retranslated as inferior, captive, and accessible to violence" in spaces where Black women are the main inhabitants (McKittrick, 2006, p. 82). Participants acknowledged that "in a lot of Black neighborhoods, a lot of the businesses aren't owned by Black people – the gas stations, the corner stores," and because of the prevalence of other historically marginalized groups having the economic power in Black neighborhoods, participants felt that they were "used to it". As Diamond stated, "you get used to shopping with people …giving your money to

people, or having those people in power, that just does not look like you at all." Outside of the Black beauty supply store, participants noticed a difference in who owned the stores and who is shopping in the stores in their neighborhoods. Their expectations towards the Black beauty supply store are contextualized by this knowledge and those experiences in the same place. Sunshine, for example, stated that her experience in Black beauty supply stores was similar to the way she felt "in gas stations". Within the neighborhood, in any store they frequent, millennial Black women have come to expect the same type of experience, if the owner is not Black. The experience within the store is reinforcing something that is already known amongst millennial Black women i.e., that skin tone criminalizes you before you even get through the door.

Cameras and metal detectors or sensors were noted by participants, but they were also regarded as pointless. Kennedy, with her retailer insight, saw the sensors by the door but did not understand their purpose because "they don't tag the product". In other words, the metal detectors and sensors seem like they are for show only, if the actual product does not have a tag on it that would trigger the metal detector if it was stolen. The effort around portraying a secure environment for products irritated Kennedy, who felt that fake cameras were also useless but seen often in Black beauty supply stores. Sunshine and Dionne noted metal detectors in the supply stores they frequent as well. These characteristics, along with the "security guards following you around, and all the security cameras, and the signs [that say] you're on security cameras and what not" caused participants, like Heather and Sunshine, to feel "uncomfortable" in the space.

In Nicole's words, retailers like Target and Wal-Mart "were made for and geared toward white women; [they want] to make them pleasing. I don't think that [same] care is put into

beauty supply stores." She notes that while an experience does take place in mainstream stores, it is not curated for her. At the same time, she recognizes that the Black beauty supply store is a space intended for her. What frustrates her is that it is still created with no regard to the pleasurable experience and expectations for Black women. The lack of a satisfying experience makes the moments when participants are treated with dignity stand out as positive experiences. For others, these same positive experiences would be everyday expectations in a retail space. For example, Cooper, Tiana, and Marie all recount positive experiences in the Black beauty supply store where they learned something new or interacted with a friendly employee. These experiences create positive memories and provide references for participants to rationalize their experiences at the Black beauty supply stores. From the perspective of millennial Black women, their experiences are influenced by anti-Blackness within the Asian community and how that plays out when millennial Black women are shopping in these stores.

Asian-owned stores were described by the participants as having a "lack of care". Kora qualified this sentiment by saying: "sometimes I don't feel like there's a level of compassion, warmth, and appreciation for the customer base." Diamond also wished that there was "more appreciation". Should customers expect care, warmth, compassion, and appreciation in a retail store? Likely so, but these are not terms typically associated with retail environments. Despite this, I would argue that we expect basic decency, which is to be treated with respect. This can be easily accomplished by acknowledging and greeting customers when they enter a store or realizing what effect it has on the customer when she is followed around when there are already high chairs, cameras, and security guards in place to protect a store full of mid- to low-priced products. The insult is in the treatment of paying customers, and the injury is in knowing that as a Black woman, you can anticipate receiving the same experience across the country from

Seattle, Washington, to New York City, and Atlanta, Georgia. This means that there is a larger issue at work here because the experience at the Black beauty supply store transcends region, class, and education level.

Black Femininity at the Black Beauty Supply Store.

At the Black beauty supply store, ideas about Black femininity and Blackness are reinforced for millennial Black women. Half of the participants had at least one experience with shopping at Black-owned beauty supply stores but did not shop at them regularly. Natasha, from Miami, Florida, interpreted her Black beauty supply store as Black-owned, stating "I love going there […] the fact that there's actually a Black-owned beauty supply store near me. I love that." This makes Natasha the only participant in the study who has shopped at a Black-owned beauty supply store for her entire life. Michelle visited a Black beauty supply store once and experienced a noticeable difference:

It felt like home and understanding and then also … you know, you feel proud when you walk into a Black-owned beauty supply store because, like, I'm giving these people (non-Black store owners) my money for so long and now I get to give it to someone who looks like me.

Participants added to Michelle's feeling of "home" in the Black-owned beauty supply stores by describing the ambiance with "good music" or "Black music" playing, with "on trend" clothing and shoes, or "stuff that we'd actually wear". These small changes made the store feel more personable and relatable to participants, but the most noted change was the quality of customer service. Mavis emphasized her expectations for beauty supply store employees:

I want you to also be able to tell me about my products or like tell me, if this pack of Kanekalon hair is trash and I need to just go with the X-Pression pre-stretch. I want to make sure you know what products are in your store.

Mavis went on to describe her ability to receive help from the employees as a reflection of her comfort level with Black-owned beauty supply stores compared to those that were Asian-owned. She expected product knowledge down to the brand, length of wear for the Kanekalon hair, and how it would feel once it was installed. Mavis stated that employees should be able to answer questions about the products they sell, and, in her experience, Asian owners were unable to answer queries to this level of detail. Heather also felt that Black-owned Beauty Supply Stores offered a more satisfying experience in terms of customer service:

> In the couple of Black-owned beauty supply stores I've been in, they were much more welcome, and much more inviting. It was more of a 'what do you need? What do you need help with? We got you. [It was] more than a 'get what you came for and go' type vibe

In some instances, Black-owned stores are purchased from previous owners, so their influence on the store design is limited unless they are buying a new place. This was the case at Cova Beauty Supply, a Black beauty supply store located in Stockbridge, Georgia. Dianna Foster, the owner of Cova Beauty Supply, created an experience that combined a Sephora store design with black and white accents on the wall and the products in a Black beauty supply store.

Merchandising for wigs are notable differences in Black-owned beauty supply stores. Diamond, a frequent wig wearer, noticed a change in how the wigs were presented, stating that Black-owned stores "have better wigs, they actually pluck the parts…and they […] sell it, to you, you know?" They made an effort to showcase the potential of the wig in a way that resonated with the people shopping there, instead of "taking it out the pack, and [just] sitting [the wig] on a mannequin." This was one of the things that really stood out for Diamond. To her, the Black-owned beauty supply store knew its customers and their needs and desires. They would anticipate what would sell and merchandised their products accordingly. To a certain extent,

these changes could also be evident in an Asian-owned beauty supply store. For example, Chapel Beauty in Decatur, Georgia, is located in the space of a former Sears at South DeKalb Mall. According to the U.S. Census, 94% of the population surrounding the mall is Black. White people account for 3% of the population in this area, and Asian Americans account for even less at 0.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Chapel Beauty is Korean-owned and has multiple locations; they play current music, with a well-lit interior, and have wide aisles. Their cameras are modern and not as obvious as those in older Black beauty supply stores. Yet, some things remain the same. Unopened and closed boxes are still stacked on the floor and wig merchandising is limited to slapping the wigs on the mannequin heads or adding them to a shelf. Figure 5 provides a comparison between the wigs displayed in Asian-owned and Black-owned beauty supply stores. The number of wigs in the image at Chapel Beauty is consistent with other Black beauty supply stores, but the arrangement can change. The comparison images below are meant to provide a visual as to why Diamond would notice a difference in how wigs were displayed in Black-owned beauty supply stores.

Figure 5

Wig Display Comparison

Note. This figure shows the wig display at Chapel Beauty (L), an Asian-owned beauty supply store, and Cova Beauty Supply (R), a Black-owned beauty supply store. The image on the left shows one of many aisles with mannequin heads and wigs displayed similarly to the image. The mannequin heads face in different directions, and the wigs are not combed or look cared for. The goal is to display as many as possible, to minimize interactions with the consumers, and use the space to the maximum. From this display (L), it is clear that the goal is to sell. The wig on the right is from a Black-owned beauty supply store, where the hairs framing the face are brushed out and curled to show how long they will be for potential styling. The mannequin here also appears to have a "personality" and individuality. It appears sophisticated, with a space of its own, with the wig on full display.

In other words, Black-owned beauty supply stores cater to the millennial Black woman's expectations for a beauty retailing experience. This is made apparent by merchandising throughout the store, but also in the level of Black beauty knowledge that is accessible in Black-owned beauty supply stores. Angelique described her experience in a Black-owned beauty supply store shortly after she began transitioning her hair to its natural state:

I went in after I had cut all my hair off, not really knowing what to buy for my hair [or] how to style it. Walking in, the girl complimented me on my hair. She complimented me on the curl pattern and then also kind of pointed me in the right direction of like, what products to use, what was going to make it easier for me. […] She really just, you know, saw that I was having some trouble and helped me.

Angelique's experience is positive not only because the employee provided specific recommendations for her hair type, but also because she felt seen in the store and acknowledged without having to ask or find someone for help. An employee could relate to her experience and understand her apprehension about her new hair style and what products to use. In the Black-owned beauty supply store, participants felt at ease, at home, and could truly explore without worrying about someone following them or questioning their intentions.

Though Natasha stated that she has "never been to an Asian-owned beauty supply store," her description of the store design of the Black beauty supply store was similar to other participants and fit the definition of a Black beauty supply store provided above. She did not describe any feelings of being watched or followed around, although she did mention that the stores had cameras and metal detectors. When I asked her, if she felt that the owners were worried about theft, she said: "around here, the store owners, they pack some heat. (laughs). That's a fact. I know people would try it, but they are, you know, they're well-equipped to defend themselves." She referenced an Ethiopian store owner and acknowledged that they had the right to protect their store without criminalizing Black bodies by default. Thus, at the Black beauty supply store, the first process of ideological naturalization, according to McKittrick (2006) is taking place. All at once, the space provides 1) a cultural and historically important site to teach young Black girls about Black femininity, 2) a space for predominantly Asian-store owners and millennial Black

women to experience racial hierarchies, and 3) the reinforcement of difference within the store and similar businesses in their neighborhoods.

McKittrick (2006) making a point about ideological naturalization states that Black women's geographic concerns are concealed by racial, social, and economic processes. The concerns that millennial Black women have around Black beauty supply stores are concealed by racial, social, and economic processes happening in the store. The existing information on Black beauty supply stores has been useful in constructing and upholding these racial, social, and economic processes in relation to the store.

Black beauty supply stores are typically owned by a variety of ethnic immigrant groups around the U.S. Participants identified store owners as "Arabic", "Asian," "Vietnamese," "Chinese," but "mostly Korean". Aron Ranen, a video journalist, documentary filmmaker, and corporate media consultant, did an investigative documentary on Black beauty supply stores entitled *Black Hair* in 2006. The documentary described how Korean Americans and South Koreans seized the business opportunity that Black beauty supply stores represented and became the dominant manufacturers, distributors, and retailers in the industry. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, around 70% of Korean-owned wig shops were located in South Los Angeles, where the Black population is concentrated (Chin, Yoon, & Smith, 1996). Sociologist Dr. John Lie, interviewed in the film, stated that Korean Americans and South Koreans relied on their kinship networks to gain control of the Black beauty supply industry. Due to the degree of vertical integration among Korean manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, products can reach consumers quickly and retailers can send information on trends back to South Korean manufacturers fast as well, which allows for a responsive approach to supply and demand (Chang, 2020). Since their networks were more extensive and had more investable cash than

Black entrepreneurs, Korean American store owners ended up taking over the industry at multiple levels. While middleman minority literature describes this as a monopoly, Chang (2020) claims it is more accurate to describe this as an ethnically segmented market because while an ethnic group, Korean Americans, controls the majority of the industry, they do not have full market control of the beauty supply industry as the word monopoly would suggest. The analysis of the presence of Korean Americans and South Koreans in the Black beauty product supply chain reveals business practices that reduce outside competition while consolidating and protecting business power within their ethnic group.

For the participants in this study, the majority of the ownership they have encountered has been Asian-owned so it makes sense that they would assume that Asian-Americans are the majority owners in the industry. Chang (2020) states that "African Americans routinely level generalizations" that Korean Americans have monopolized these markets. Even participants who have shopped at Black beauty supply stores around the country, like Jones, had the perception that the majority of Black beauty supply stores' owners were Asian. Jones shopped at Black beauty supply stores in Chicago, Atlanta, Compton, Brooklyn, and San Diego, but did not come across a Black-owned beauty supply store.

Multiple participants were perplexed by the presence of Asian-American business owners in their neighborhood, but not surprised. After all, the oldest participant in this study is approaching 40 this year, and the youngest participant will turn 25; they are well conditioned to the Black beauty supply store experience. Not only are participants wondering how and why Korean Americans are the majority ethnic group in the Black beauty supply industry, but there are also other questions around why this power dynamic exists. Diamond explained this with:

Sometimes I think [they] aren't able to decipher it or - you can tell - they'll write it off as Black people are just ugh, you know? But like you're only serving Black people, so that's all you're gonna see. You're gonna see the good and the bad, but like don't hold us hostage or you know, tack that on to *all* Black people.

Most participants talked about the connection between the Black beauty supply store's ownership, the employees, and the way they were treated in the store. B. Wells stated,

Oh, it was the owner. She was […] an older lady of Asian descent. I could be right here looking at a box of beads, and I could feel her looking at me from like three shelves down…but that area is high profile for shoplifting and robberies. So, it's like, you [still] can't expect everybody to come in here and be like that, you know?

In the Black beauty supply store, racialization of the space is happening when millennial Black women are in the store and perceive themselves in relation to the Asian owners.

There are also social processes taking place between Black women in the stores. Because this is a feminized space, seeing men in the Black beauty supply store is rare. But if they are there, it is usually with a female figure. To cope with the differences reinforced by racial processes, Asian store owners hire Black female employees to help answer questions, but the employees also become enactors of racialization in the space. After being followed around by an Asian store owner, a young Black employee approached B. Wells to ask if she needed any help, to which she replied, "why is everybody asking me that?" Because Asian-owned Black beauty supply stores hire Black employees to provide specialized knowledge to customers, B. Wells felt that the employee was not genuine in her ask, and only doing what was expected of her. Kennedy also felt this way and voiced her suspicion about whether or not stores were actually Black-owned: "there's this perception that if I see Black people at the counter, at the beauty

supply store, it might be Black-owned. But that is not [necessarily] the case." To make sure she

was buying at a Black-owned store, Kennedy would research the store beforehand, and then

verify once she arrived with the store owners themselves. She would search for "black-owned

beauty supply store" on Google, read store reviews, and then ask to see the owner at the actual

store once she arrived. Few participants actively sought out Black-owned beauty supply stores,

but there are resources such as the Black Owned Hair and Beauty Supply Stores International

Facebook group if people were seeking them. The repeated experiences of being followed

around the store by Black employees are similar to the experiences Candace D. described in her

article on *Medium*, an online publishing platform. Because Candace refused to follow the

customers around, she was fired. In most cases, because these employees need to hold onto their

jobs, they have no other choice than to follow the dictates of their supervisors and participate in

discriminatory customer service. Because of this, both Kennedy and B. Wells have learned to

distrust Black employees in the Black beauty supply store.

On a broader scale, exclusionary business practices are keeping Black people in the

neighborhoods in a disempowered state. Because even if Black entrepreneurs have the capital

now, Asian store owners have control over the manufacturing, retailing, and distribution aspects

of the industry, which has a negative effect on Black entrepreneurial success. People are

welcome to open a store, but without the product assortment to attract the consumer, the store

cannot last for long. Diamond described an instance where a Black woman tried to open a Black

beauty supply store in her community but was blocked by Asian store owners:

> She started the business thinking that this would be something good for the
>
> neighborhood, to come and shop Black and just, not be criminalized when you're
>
> shopping. […] That was her reason for opening. So, in her mind, she just thought that she

would get so much support. But although we were supporting her, she didn't have the

supplies. And that's when she… came out with, telling the community, like, what do we

do? Like, we need to get them out. If they don't want to help me, for whatever reason.

This intentional exclusion from the Black beauty supply industry is documented scholarly

(Silverman, 1998) and anecdotally by Black entrepreneurs (Greenwood Ave., 2020). So, it is not

a generalization, but rather a norm for millennial Black women, and anyone else shopping in

these stores that they will mostly encounter Asian, or Korean American owners or employees in

the store. Learning how successful Korean entrepreneurship has been in the Black beauty supply

industry, along with seeing how Korean American business owners were intentionally

gatekeeping the beauty supply industry motivated some consumers to stop shopping at Asian-

owned beauty supply stores. This information, along with the reasoning that Asian people would

not shop at a Black-owned store if it was in a predominantly Asian neighborhood, pushed Elle, a

lifestyle blogger, to Black-owned beauty supply stores or shopping online for her beauty

products (Elle, 2017). These feelings also resonated with participants, who tried to shop at

Black-owned beauty supply stores when possible but usually did not have one nearby. In these

social processes, millennial Black women learn that they also cannot trust each other, depending

on the role in the store (employee vs. customer), which may change how they feel about the

group they share an identity category with.

The economic process in the store is mainly a transaction for beauty products between Black

consumers and Asian American owners. But the larger narrative of race relations within the store

masks millennial Black women's concerns about where the money spent in their community is

going. Tiana found it "frustrating, because they are making money off of African American

women". Taylor, summed up her views by saying: "I think there was a group of people who

realized the [potential for] profit and they found the most profitable way to capitalize on our beauty needs." However, she also added that she did not understand "how they're able to do it". Many women felt conflicting emotions about the store, their experience, the products offered and the ownership. Dealing with repeated microaggressions in the store can take a toll on their health. Marie, who did not experience any incidents of racial profiling, reported feeling "paranoid" and "crazy for not realizing the pattern" until she "heard about stories of other Black women being ostracized, kicked out, or targeted when they're shopping at supply stores". Though Marie has also had positive and enjoyable experiences at the Black beauty supply store, her knowledge of her shared identity and its visibility makes her negative experiences feel more evident.

These reports pitting Black and Asian people against each other within the Black beauty supply store are common in the media. Most media outlets used a negative tone towards Asian, specifically Korean, ownership. One blog, for example, states "the education, career options and privilege these individuals [Korean Americans and their children] have was paid for by Black women who shopped at those beauty supply stores for years" (Hopewell, 2019). This assessment is supported from a Korean American perspective, by a store owner in Ohio who does not want his kids to work at the store after college (Namigadde, 2018). Transactions at the Black beauty supply store do not explicitly support higher education. Consumers, in general, fund the educations of many small business owners and their dependents. Once the market exchange is complete, the consumer typically has no say in how the money is spent. Hopewell (2019) presents his argument for "buying back" the beauty supply stores from Korean owners as a push for Black economic power, positioning Black consumers and interests necessary to change the status quo.

Kora, Kennedy, and Cooper did not oppose Asian entrepreneurship or their business investments. Still, with a location in predominantly Black neighborhoods, participants felt that Asian store owners could do more. Most participants recognized that they were supporting a business that did not funnel its profits back into the community. Similarly, to Hopewell (2019), Jones saw this as a missed opportunity for Black entrepreneurship:

It's shocking to me how a community, […] similar to Black people, are still able to find ways to keep it, you know, within their community and find ways to like organize and uplift and provide. […] Beauty in the Black community is one of the biggest moneymakers. And we don't seem to have it together like [them]

The missed opportunity is also described as a feeling of loss for Jones, who sees the potential for Black-owned businesses within the beauty industry. It is unclear whether 70% of Black beauty supply stores are actually owned by Korean Americans. This statistic is provided by the Black-Owned Beauty Supply Association (BOBSA) which was founded to help Black entrepreneurs break into the haircare industry, but its validity is questionable (BOBSA News Room Hub, 2019). In the documentary, *Black Hair*, Ranen cites a statistic from BOBSA, that Korean Americans own almost 70% of the 10,000 beauty supply stores nationwide. There is no citation in the film or on the BOBSA website, but the number is repeated in multiple outlets and sometimes without any citations at all (Chang, 2020; Elle, 2017; Idowu, 2020; Penrose, 2020; Sapong, 2017). While the accuracy is questionable, the statistic has taken on a life of its own. Though the documentary was filmed in 2006, it remains one of the main sources of information on Black beauty supply stores as evidenced by the recent article citations above.

In an NPR interview (Chideya, 2006), Ayena Byrd, a journalist and co-author of *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* objects to the idea that Korean Americans

have a monopoly over the industry: "I think that we have to look outside of Koreans and Korean-Americans who own beauty supply stores in black neighborhoods. They were, for the most part, coming in and taking advantage of what was already an opening". She goes on to describe how a high number of Black-owned businesses shut down during the 1980s, and many of those were beauty supply stores. Reaganomics affected Black businesses the most. Changes made to anti-monopoly and fair-trade laws hurt all small business owners but did not translate into better opportunities for Black business owners (Feldman, 2017; Tolson & Hand, 1985). This created a window for Korean Americans and Korean immigrants, with established credit associations, to take advantage of the business opportunity in the Black haircare market. Byrd emphasizes that Black business owners need to organize and provide the material support and network that Korean credit associations provide new business owners in their communities (Chideya, 2006). Yet, this was not a suggestion from any of the participants in my study.

Instead, participants were focused on accountability, in the form of better customer service or more intentional ways of funneling some profits back into the Black community. Every Black beauty supply store is different because of ownership, location, and the resulting customer experience. What is one store to another in the larger system of white supremacy, which ensures that interests which serve the white majority remain that way? While Korean Americans are building communities in the U.S., and Black Americans are funding them to some extent, white-owned conglomerates make plenty of money off *all* women in the beauty industrial complex. Millennial Black women are not beyond the reach of the beauty industrial complex; they also shop at mainstream stores and are affected by American beauty standards. The Black beauty supply store provides a haven for creative experiments with identity. It is also a site for constructing images of beauty. However, because the revenue does not stay within the

community, individuals making the purchases at the supply store do not see the benefit of it for their community.

The Black beauty supply store has been examined, predominantly, from the lens of the white male gaze as a site of conflict between historically marginalized populations (Ranen, 2006), or the black male gaze as a site for Black economic empowerment (Hopewell, 2019), and from the perspective of researchers and Korean American business owners as an ethnically segmented and misaligned market (Chang, 2020; Chin, Yoon, & Smith, 1996). While Black women have written about their spending power in the beauty market and their ability to start Black beauty supply stores (Houseworth-Weston, 2018), only one recent documentary film, *Black Girl Church,* has explored the importance of the Black beauty supply store to Black women's relationship with their beauty (Williams & Pina, 2019). As stated earlier, the Black beauty supply store is a feminized space and Black women, of all ages, are the primary consumers. Yet, there are few examinations of the space from their perspective.

Because there are few examinations of the Black beauty supply store from the perspective of its main consumer, Black women's concerns around community involvement and mistreatment in the stores are concealed from the public's view. In other words, their geographic concerns are concealed by racial, social, and economic processes. The Black beauty supply store is a profitable business, but those profits do not circulate back into the community. At the surface level, it seems that Black beauty supply stores have an advantage over mainstream stores due to their product assortment and location. To meet the lack of Black beauty knowledge, Asian store owners may hire a Black female employee to assist customers. This affects the communal feeling of the store for millennial Black women because Black women are now made to question each other's loyalties. In addition, hiring a Black employee does not fix the treatment that millennial

Black women may receive from the owners or other Asian employees in the store. So, really, the action of hiring a Black employee is for profit, not care. Thus, at the Black beauty supply store, economic processes which keep profit out of Black communities, social processes which divide Black women in a space that is culturally relevant to them, and lastly interracial conflict are heightened by the narratives that only focus on Asian store ownership and Black women as consumers. These processes conceal millennial Black women's actual concerns which are around creating better store experiences and increasing community involvement and support.

McKittrick (2006) reviews these sociospatial processes as examples of struggle, "over the soil, the body, theory, history, saying, and expressing a sense of place" (p. 121). The Black beauty supply store was found to be rife with multiple struggles for millennial Black women. As discussed in the previous sections, the economic and financial concerns are significant. Black Americans face considerable obstacles in opening up a Black beauty supply store. They were, and still are, less likely to get loans to start businesses. Though they arrived on U.S. soil in the early 1600s, Black Americans were not "free" until 1865. Since then, through periods of reconstruction, segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement, Black people have had to rebuild as individuals, families, and communities with limited resources. So, their earlier entrance to the U.S. did not equip them with more resources. While Korean immigrants first arrived in the U.S. in the early 1900s to work on sugar plantations in Hawaii (Yuh, 2017), their subsequent waves of migration built networks from the U.S. to South Korea, which ultimately provided the financial support for the Black beauty supply stores they own.

The continued existence of Black beauty supply stores, despite the struggles taking place in the store, signifies that Black beauty stores are doing more work than just supplying a range of beauty products catering to Black hair. If millennial Black women want to manage their beauty,

and continue to cultivate an alternative beauty standard, they have to find a Black beauty supply store to buy the needed products. Avid Black beauty supply store shoppers like Sunshine, Diamond, and Mavis always looked for a beauty supply store if they were traveling and forgot something. Diamond expressed, that she couldn't find a beauty supply store when she lived in a city on the outskirts of Detroit. To get to a Black beauty supply store, she actually had to go into the city of Detroit.

When participants discussed their dissatisfaction with the Asian-owned Black beauty supply stores, it was about more than the services offered or the store design; it was about their dignity. The Black female body is surveilled throughout the store through the cameras, the racial profiling, the raised cash wrap, and the security guards. In a way, participants have become used to the store design – it did not stick out to many as problematic, because it is expected. Yet, these struggles are also internalized when millennial Black women turn the gaze on themselves and ask, 'what about me warrants this treatment?' Earlier, Tiana's interaction with an employee at a new store was discussed. Her bad experience led her to think that it was due to the fact that she has locs, a permanent protective style created by locking, braiding, rolling, or backcombing hair. In comparison, Tiana noticed that her friends who shopped at the same stores when "their hair looks appropriate" tend to receive "the help that [she] was looking for". It is ironic that Tiana perceives her hairstyle as the very thing preventing her dignity from being realized in the Black beauty supply store.

Internalizing the Experience of the Black Beauty Supply Store

Applying the theory of Black feminist geographies, the Black beauty supply store can be seen as a site of domination. Millennial Black women did not seem to make much of the experience. Most of the interviews were reflective, with participants considering the Black

beauty supply store as more than a place where they shop for products for the first time. The

Black beauty supply store is a complex place, layered with multiple meanings. While the store

design is facilitating the power dynamics between the Asian business owners and the millennial

Black customers in the store, the structural elements in the store are not enough to consider

millennial Black women's experiences in the Black beauty supply store as oppression.

Oppression contributes to keeping systems in place, by perpetuating the systemic or the

everyday (Frye, 1983). In a sense, the Black beauty supply store does keep a system in place by

reinforcing ideas about where Black women belong by restricting their beauty products to

predominantly Black neighborhoods in major cities. Oppression is also systematic, meaning that

oppression does not happen all at once, but through an organized system with steps and

processes. The Black beauty supply store is only one space within a larger network of spaces that

restrict Black women and bound them to acceptable places in the city. The experience at the

Black beauty supply store is one of many that millennial Black women can expect to face when

"shopping while Black" (Pittman, 2017). Oppression at the Black beauty supply store also harms

millennial Black women by limiting the creative process of oppressing their beauty standards to

a specific space where they can freely consider various styles and opportunities in creative

expression, but only under the watchful eye of Asian store owners.

When asked who shops at Black beauty supply stores, participants either responded with

"Black women" the majority of the time or "Black people" in some instances, which underscores

that this is a Black cultural space which is important to more than just one generation. For

oppression to exist, it has to affect a category of people (Frye, 1983). When groups of people are

pressed or immobilized, they are limited not only structurally but also in the possibilities they

can imagine for themselves. These real and imagined limitations are internalized by people placed in double-bind situations where there are no options for recourse.

Psychological oppression involves the double-bind of living in a culture that affirms women's human status while simultaneously denying them adequate agency, autonomy, and cultural expression (Bartky, 1990). Oppression is psychological because it weighs on the minds of the oppressed, causing them to internalize distorted and degrading perceptions of themselves as they are presented by the dominant culture. The majority of participants, especially Diamond and Mavis, clearly ascribed to their definitions of Black beauty, and their beauty retail preferences reflected that. Others, like Marie and Nicole, had difficulties separating ideals of Black beauty and American beauty. They tended to shop in mainstream spaces rather than the Black beauty supply store as their primary store, but still described uncomfortable experiences in both spaces. While participants may not have noticed or experienced racial profiling themselves, they did understand the effects of it happening to people who look like them, in places where they also shop.

Oppression has to get inside the mind, so that the individual is immobilized and repressed in thought as well as movement. In a sense, you are limited by what you can visualize in your mind. Individuals who cannot visualize a life outside of oppression are also unable to actively work towards the vision. This is evident in the repeated ways that participants stated, "I didn't think about that," while describing the interior of Black beauty supply stores, the cameras, the presence of security guards, and the raised registers. But, not thinking about the number of cameras in Black beauty supply stores masks the amount of surveillance Black people may be subjected to in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and also the effects of being surveilled.

People in double-bind situations are presented with lose/lose options. Participants identified products that they can only find at Black beauty supply stores. There were participants who opted out of shopping in the stores by shopping online. Some were familiar with online beauty supply stores which offered a range of hair products and tools, but the shipping delay and general inconsistency in product quality and size turned participants away from using the online stores as their main shopping site. So, while there may be some online options, even stores on the internet cannot fully provide everything in the Black beauty supply store. To keep up with the beauty standards in their society and in their community, millennial Black women spend additional time driving from one store to the next to find the products they need to style their hair, make up their face, and do their nails. The Black beauty supply store is the starting point for these beauty practices and cannot be fully replaced by online alternatives yet. Even Sally Beauty Supply, a beauty products distributor and retailer, cannot meet the needs of millennial Black women. Mavis drives the point home when she compares Sally Beauty Supply and the Black beauty supply store:

> I feel like Sally's [is] the white version of a beauty supply store, and my thing is, they are so convenient, and they pop up every f***ing where – they're so accessible. Whereas, if you need a beauty supply store, you have to go into Black neighborhoods to actually even get them. Even right now, like where I live in Chicago, I live up north, uptown. […]. But I do have to travel south and go into like, the Black neighborhoods to get my hair care products.

The fact that all 20 of the participants in the study were familiar with Black beauty supply stores, and have shopped there, despite their differences in class, location, and education level suggests that the Black beauty supply store is not an optional store in Black women's lives.

So, what is at stake for millennial Black women? The freedom to experience a sense of place in any space, by shopping where they please. Options for shopping in beauty retail stores near their homes are limited. In the stores where their beauty is recognized, it is confined to a section of an aisle with a label to draw attention to the "ethnic," "textured hair," and "multicultural hair" products. In those stores, positive and diverse representation of Black women *and* how they express their beauty is difficult to find, if it even exists in some stores at all. That Black women's beauty is not represented in mainstream stores is also a loss for society in general. Millennial Black women describe Black beauty as fluid, "versatile," " the way you walk," and as an "aura". Compared to participant's restrictive examples of American beauty, Black beauty provides more options for others to consider themselves beautiful, and also participate in beauty culture. Integrating Black women's beauty ideals into representations of beauty would move society's beauty standards past the belief that Eurocentric ideas of beauty are the de-facto and that white beauty standards are the only beauty standard worth upholding.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study investigates a fragment of the beauty industry from the perspective of millennial Black women. Specialty beauty retailers, like Sephora and Ulta, were examined alongside big-box stores like Target and Wal-Mart. Millennial Black women rely on the Black beauty supply store as an additional beauty retailer where they shop for beauty products ranging from haircare, makeup, jewelry, clothes, shoes, and most importantly, hair. Experiences at these stores ranged from helpful and friendly to instances of racial profiling and harassment. Despite this, participants continued to shift between shopping at multiple beauty retailers to meet their beauty needs. However, all participants in the study shopped at the Black beauty supply store.

Black people, regardless of generational cohort or gender, are the target consumers of Black beauty supply stores. Everything from the brands and products offered in the store to the posters plastered on the windows reinforces this fact. Yet, while the stores are typically located in predominantly Black neighborhoods, the majority of them are owned by Asian entrepreneurs. This leads to complex interracial dynamics within the space. Millennial Black women suggest that their introduction to the space in childhood was positive, but, over time, the need for quality products and the effect of racial profiling on their mental health made them seek out other spaces for satisfying their beauty needs. From mainstream stores to the Black beauty supply store, it is clear that millennial Black women are not having an ideal consumer experience anywhere.

Through the lens of Black feminist thought, the Black beauty supply store can be conceptualized as a culturally important space for transferring Black beauty knowledge and

strengthening the generational connection of Black women. It is a site where the rite of passage into Black womanhood begins for some women. By shopping in Black beauty supply stores and making sense of this experience during the interviews, millennial Black women moved through different levels of consciousness. Some participants were "buying Black before it was cool." Others chose convenience (i.e., an Asian-owned Black beauty supply store) over going out of their way and traveling to visit a Black-owned beauty supply store in another neighborhood. While the Black beauty supply store offers options for self-definition, it is limited in its ability to provide resistance. Although in Black supply stores participants are afforded more options in haircare, they are still participating in the oppressive and exploitative capitalist beauty industrial complex. This means that there is no real choice between mainstream stores and Black beauty supply stores. While mainstream stores offer a better consumer experience, and the Black beauty supply stores offer a wider product assortment, shopping at them will likely result in a similarly disappointing experience.

In addition to recognizing their options in beauty retail spaces, millennial Black women also described how much money and time they invested into managing their beauty. They defined Black beauty as a diverse spectrum and discussed their investment in maintaining visibility within that spectrum. Participants with in-depth hair and skin care routines felt that the labor associated with their routines was worth the effort because it provided them with time for self-care and spiritual sustenance. The underlying need for continued maintenance demonstrates that millennial Black women are not beyond the reach of racialized capitalism. Despite this, the study has found that there is a measure of agency in Black millennial women's' decision to shop at the Black beauty supply store and thus support Black aesthetics and culture or the political

economy of the Black community. After all, they can also shop online or spend money at mainstream beauty retailers.

Unlike Sephora, Ulta, or Target, the Black beauty supply store sells hair, a cultural and historical signifier of Black identity. Hair has been seen as a form of resistance and empowerment in the Black community (Johnson, 2013). Because the Black beauty supply store satisfies a basic need, it is unlikely, at least for now, that millennial Black women will forego it. Shopping at Black beauty supply stores allows participants to embrace alternative Black beauty standards and see the Black beauty supply store as a site where these standards are learned and can be maintained.

The cultural importance of the Black beauty supply store is evident in the name of the documentary *Black Girl Church* (Williams & Pina, 2019) which likens the Black beauty supply store to a sacred or religious experience. The store has nostalgic value and provides a rare ability for finding the tools for aesthetic self-definition. The participants stated that positive memories and experiences were formed early in the Black beauty supply store. After middle school, participants were more perceptive about their experiences at the Black beauty supply store. Currently, their relationship with the Black beauty supply store is ambivalent.

Using the lens of Black feminist geographies, the presence of Black women, and no white bodies or markers of white femininity turns the Black beauty supply store into a site where merchandise is valued and protected more than the consumers who shop there. Even if millennial Black women do not frequent the Black beauty supply store, by buying supply store products elsewhere or indirectly at the hair salon, they still contribute to the Black beauty supply store economy. However, the revenue generated from these actions does not stay in the Black

community, which has been viewed as controversial for participants who shopped at Asian-owned Black beauty supply stores.

Many participants questioned why the industry is predominantly owned by Asian entrepreneurs. This study found that the majority of Asian store owners of Black beauty supply stores act as proxies to reinforce an arbitrary racial hierarchy at the expense of millennial Black women and other people of color shopping in these spaces. Millennial Black women's experiences of Black beauty supply stores illuminate the extent of oppression that still exists in our society at one of the seemingly most trivial of spaces: beauty retailers. While the store facilitates interaction between two historically marginalized groups, Black women do not share the benefits of a minority group's ascendance to economic power. Even within the constrictions of the Black beauty supply store, Black women continue their journey of upholding and managing Black femininity.

Although all women, regardless of skin color, are oppressed by the capitalist beauty-industrial complex, Black women are affected from the perspective of representation and retail. The study has found that the thought process behind going to the Black beauty supply store involves multiple steps: 1) the admission that *only* the Black beauty supply store has products specific to managing Black women's beauty (especially hair). Because of this, Black women invested in managing their beauty have to shop there. 2) The continued reinforcement of the feeling of being watched, suspected of wrongdoing, and assumptions of criminality directed at them affects millennial Black women's psyche differently. This leads to: 3) a desire for a quick and convenient experience but also for disengagement from an important Black cultural site; and 4) the realization that fully satisfying and empowering beauty experiences in beauty retailing do not exist for Black women.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative study demonstrates how millennial Black women interact with and perceive their beauty in relation to mainstream white beauty retailing spaces and Black beauty supply stores. Future research in retailing could examine the Black beauty supply store's cultural relevance to Black women in general, without limiting the sample to millennials. Exploring where and how other groups of people construct their understandings of beauty standards in a space (including race, gender, and sexuality) could also be helpful to further the investigation of beauty retail spaces from a human geography perspective.

This study was also limited to millennial Black women in the United States. Future research could continue this focus on beauty culture with millennial Black women around the world. A large research project could also compare how women relate to beauty globally in an effort to map the transnational relationship between the beauty industrial complex and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) identifying women. Researchers could also home in on a specific region for a more detailed understanding of what attracts people to Black beauty supply stores. For example, in the Northeast region of the U.S., some women referred to the Black beauty supply store as a *hair store*. The history and implications behind this term could be explored further.

Lastly, the data also suggest that millennial Black women have different shopping experiences in Black beauty supply stores regionally. Future research could go deeper into this connection by examining who owns the Black beauty supply stores in a specific region and asking the consumers whether they notice owner identity and how that influences their perceptions and experience in the store. Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, and Atlanta could be suitable places for such research.

Industry Implications

Currently, millennial Black women are missing an optimal beauty retail experience. To create this, beauty retailers need to diversify their employees and ensure that they are trained to work with customers from different backgrounds and identities. This will reduce the need for customers to travel to special locations to find a knowledgeable employee. Millennial Black women also expect to see more than a surface commitment to diversity. Outside of inclusive marketing, participants also expect more Black-owned brands in stores and more shelf space for Black haircare products in big-box stores. Overall, participants were looking for an inclusive shopping experience for themselves and also for others.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Guide

Research Questions

RQ1: How have beauty retail spaces impacted millennial Black women's shopping preferences for beauty products in the United States?

RQ1a: How do millennial Black women make meaning of their relationship to beauty within the context of beauty retail spaces?

RQ2: What aspects of beauty retail spaces are relevant to millennial Black women's experiences when shopping for beauty products?

RQ2a: Based on the literature, what are the key retail characteristics used to attract millennial Black women?

RQ2b: From the perspective of millennial Black women, which retail elements are relevant to their shopping experience?

Hi, my name is Jaleesa Reed, and I am a doctoral student in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on millennial Black women's shopping experiences. Specifically, I would like to know more about how you shop for beauty products in stores, and what that experience is like for you. I know that there are so many options when shopping for beauty products these days, so I'm interested in learning about how, why, and where you make your purchasing decisions. I appreciate you taking some time to talk with me today.

Before we start, I want to go over some points from the consent form. First, I want to remind you that any information you share with me will be confidential. This interview will be recorded but only two individuals (my project advisor and I) will have access to the recording. Your name or other identifying information will not be used in the data transcripts or my write-ups of this research. You are not obligated to answer any of my questions – if you would like to skip a question, just let me know. You can also end the interview at any time. I estimate that this interview will take one to two hours. If you have any questions throughout the interview, feel free to ask.

At this point, do you have any questions?

Transition: **Before we talk more about beauty, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

1. If you could choose a new name for yourself, what would it be? This name will be attached to your interview data and will become the pseudonym and identifier for any data related to you. This is meant to protect your confidentiality.

Transition: **So, I'd like to learn more about you and your relationship to beauty. When people think about beauty, many things can come to mind. In your own words, how would you define beauty?**

1. **How would you define beauty? [RQ1a]**
   a. *Probing questions:* How would you describe American beauty? When you think of American beauty, what images come to mind? How would you describe Black

American beauty? When you think about Black American beauty what images come to mind?

2. **When I say, "beauty products," what products do you think of? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What type of beauty products do you use during your beauty processes?
3. **Do you have any beauty routines or rituals? Are there any products that you must have in your beauty routines?**
    a. *Probing questions:* How many steps are there in your beauty process? How much time do you spend managing your beauty in a day?
4. **Do you think about your beauty when you're shopping? [RQ1A]**
5. **Where do you currently shop for beauty products? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* Do you shop online or in person? If this is a chain, with multiple locations: Do you seek it out in other cities (e.g., when you are on vacation)? How would you describe the physical location of your favorite store?
6. **How do you feel when you shop for beauty products? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* How does shopping for beauty products compare to shopping for clothing? Is there anything in the store that makes you feel this way?
7. **If you could shop anywhere for your beauty products, where would you shop? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* Can you provide an example?
8. **When you're shopping for beauty products, what makes you try out a new store? [RQ2b]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What do you notice about the store from the outside? What stands out to you when you visit a new store? How do your expectations change when you're shopping for beauty products vs. when you are shopping for clothing?
9. **How do you feel about visiting a store that does not allow you to purchase, only to look? [RQ2b]**
10. **What's your reaction to this phrase: "retail spaces are neutral"? [RQ2b]**
11. **How would you describe a retail space as an emotion? [RQ2b]**
12. **Who has been the most influential in where you shop for beauty products? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* When you shop for beauty products with others, who do you usually shop with? How does shopping with others affect your shopping experience? Why do you prefer to shop with this individual or group? Are there times when you choose not to shop with them?
13. **What influences where you shop for beauty products? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* Is there anything that makes you choose one store over another? What attracts you to your favorite beauty store? How much time do you invest in thinking about where to shop for your beauty products?
14. **Are there any beauty products that you prefer to shop for in person? Why? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* Have you tried to buy these products online first? How was the experience different?
15. **When you enter a beauty retail store, what is the first thing you notice?**
    a. *Probing questions:* How do you feel about visiting a store without buying something?

Transition: **Let's switch topics– I want to hear about your thoughts on millennials, and how it feels to be a member of this generation.**

16. **How would you describe the millennial generation? [RQ1a]**
17. **From your perspective, how do millennials view beauty?**
    a. *Probing questions:* Does this seem different from Gen X (your parent's generations) and Gen Z (younger generation, current undergraduates) views? Do you think Black millennials are different from millennials, in general?
18. **How does your generation view race relations in the U.S.? and social justice issues?**
    a. *Probing questions:* Do your views on race relations impact which beauty brands you shop with? Do they influence where you shop, in terms of brands and not just places?

Transition: **Let's focus our conversation on where you've shopped for beauty products throughout your life. Do you remember the first time you bought a beauty product? *Clarify that this is not Sally Beauty Supply***

19. **Do you remember the first time you bought a beauty product? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What do you remember about the experience? Where were you? How old were you? Who were you with?
20. **Can you describe the first time you shopped at a beauty supply store? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:*
    b. **If they remember:** Who were you with? What did you buy? Where was the store located? How did you find out about the store? Was there anything special that you remember about the experience?
    c. **If they don't remember:** What is your earliest memory about shopping in a beauty supply store?
21. **How would you describe a beauty supply store to an outsider? [RQ2b]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What products do they typically sell? What does the store look like? How are the products displayed? Who could they expect to interact with? Is there anything about the store design that seems unique to beauty supply stores? How is the cash register step up? Are there cameras, mirrors, or anything like that at your beauty supply store?
22. **Would you say that beauty supply stores are for everyone? [RQ2a]**
    a. *Probing questions:* Who usually shops at beauty supply stores? How did you learn who belongs there?
23. **From your perspective, are there any beauty products that are specific to beauty supply stores? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What are the products? Can you find these products elsewhere? Why do you think they're only sold at beauty supply stores?
24. **Of all the beauty products that you use, do you prefer to shop for any of them in beauty supply stores? Why? [RQ1]**
    a. *Probing questions:* How much time do you invest in thinking about where to shop for your beauty products?

25. **If you could change anything about the design of a beauty supply store, what would it be?[RQ2]**
26. **Who typically owns the beauty supply stores that you've been to? [RQ1/1a]**
    a. *Probing questions: How do you feel about the majority of beauty supply stores being Asian owned? How does the store's ownership influence how the store is designed or set up?*
27. **Have you ever been to a Black-owned beauty supply store? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* If yes: How did you know it was Black-owned? Were there any differences in the way the store looked?
28. **Can you describe a positive experience that you've had while shopping at a beauty supply store? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What made the experience positive? Where you alone or with others? How did it change your shopping habits? Can you describe how the store looked, on the outside? And on the inside? If you think back to this experience, does anything stand out to you about the store's lighting? Music? Smells? Interactions with employees? Did you return to that store? or buy the product again?
29. **Can you describe a negative experience that you've had while shopping at a beauty supply store? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What made the experience negative? Were you alone or with others? How did it change your shopping habits? Can you describe how the store looked, on the outside? And on the inside? If you think back to this experience, does anything stand out to you about the store's lighting? Music? Smells? Interactions with employees? Did you return to that store? or buy the product again?

Transition: **The last topic I want to ask you about are Black beauty spaces.**

30. **If you could dream outside of the box about your ideal place to shop for beauty products, what would it look like? [RQ2a]**
    a. *Probing questions:* How would your ideal place differ from where you go today? What does the store look like? How do you see yourself moving throughout the store interacting with products? with other people? with store employees? If the store was curated for you, would you prefer a physical or an online-only location?
31. **How would you describe a Black beauty space for shopping? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions:* What do you think are the minimum requirements for a Black beauty space? What features suggest that this is a Black beauty space? Who are the consumers? What are their class backgrounds? What is the service like? What brands do they carry?
32. **How might a beauty space celebrate Black beauty? [RQ2]**
    a. *Probing questions*: Have you ever been to a beauty space that celebrates Black beauty? If so, can you describe what this space looks like? How would you know what your beauty was being celebrated?

Final Question: **I don't have any further questions for you, but I want to give you the opportunity to share anything that came to mind for you. Is there anything else you'd like to share?**

Summary Statement: **During the interview, I noticed several themes in what you were saying. These included (insert themes). Do you think I summarized these correctly? Did I miss anything that you think you wanted to highlight?**

Wrap-Up: **I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate your time and insight. If I have any follow-up questions, may I contact you again?**

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT LETTER
BLACK AMERICAN BEAUTY IDEALS AND BEAUTY RETAIL SPACES

Dear Participant,

My name is Jaleesa Reed, and I am a student in the Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors Department at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Dr. Katalin Medvedev. I am inviting you to take part in a research study.

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between millennial Black women and the stores where they shop for beauty products. The focus is on Black American women because historically, they have unique experiences regarding access to beauty knowledge, products, and stores. I am seeking millennial Black women who have shopped for beauty products in physical stores.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions related to your views on beauty and the places you shop for beauty products. Interviews are estimated to last 1 to 2 hours. If noteworthy information is uncovered, you may be contacted again for a follow up interview. The second interview may last up to 1 hour. Interviews will be recorded.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw from the study or the investigator terminates your participation, 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.

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. There might be questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them. By participating in this study, you may become aware of your role as a minority consumer in the beauty industry and find talking about your experiences to be beneficial. Positive emotions, such as feelings of happiness may be elicited by the interview questions. Your responses may also influence the future design and construction of beauty retail spaces.

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 be coded and personal identifying information will be removed. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants for use in reports and presentations. In the future, your information may be used for future studies, after the identifiers have been removed, and without additional consent. 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.

For this research, audio recording will be obtained through Zoom and used for data analysis. 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 2026.

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

If you have questions about this research, you may contact the Principal Investigator at medvedev@uga.edu. If you are interested in participating or have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me by email at jaleesa3@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Jaleesa Reed
Ph.D. Candidate
Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors
University of Georgia
Jaleesa3@uga.edu

Google Form Screening

Title: Black American Beauty Ideals and Beauty Retail Spaces Research Screening

Description:
The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between millennial Black women and the stores where they shop for beauty products. The focus is on Black American women because historically, they have unique experiences regarding access to beauty knowledge, products, and retail stores. This is a screening form to determine if you are eligible for this study. If you are eligible, you will be contacted to schedule an interview.

Questions? Email Jaleesa Reed at jaleesa3@uga.edu
This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia.

Questions:
1. Name
2. What year were you born?
3. Gender (Fill in the blank)
   - Space left for participant to describe their gender in their words
4. Do you identify as Black?
   Description: For the purpose of this study, Black is defined as a person whose ancestry originates in African origin, comprising multiple African ethnicities, on the continent of Africa and in the international African community (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). If you describe yourself as Black American, African American, Biracial (Half Black +) or Multiracial (Black ++), you are eligible for this study.
      - I. Yes
      - II. No
5. If you are eligible for this study, you will be contacted for an interview. If you are interested in participating in this study, provide your email address below.

 Benefits: By participating in this study, you may become aware of your role as a minority consumer in the beauty industry and find talking about your experiences to be beneficial. Positive emotions, such as feelings of happiness may be elicited by the interview questions. Your perspective may also influence the future design and construction of beauty retail spaces.

Demographics Collection and Interview Scheduling Follow-up Email

Subject: [Follow Up] Research on Black American Beauty and Retail Spaces

Hello,

You previously filled out a screening form to determine your eligibility for this study. Thank you for your participation! I'm following up to get your interview scheduled. As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between millennial Black women and the stores where they shop for beauty products. The focus is on Black American women because historically, they have unique experiences regarding access to beauty knowledge, products, and stores.

To schedule an interview, please follow this link and select the times that work for you - http://whenisgood.net/twkw2px. Once you add your name, and submit (in the bottom right corner), I will reach out with the Zoom details for our meeting.

Prior to the interview, please take some time to review the consent form (attached) and submit the short questionnaire here:

Demographics Collection and Interview Scheduling Follow-up Email

Subject: [Follow Up] Research on Black American Beauty and Retail Spaces

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You previously filled out a screening form to determine your eligibility for this study.
Thank you for your participation! I'm following up to get your interview scheduled.
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http://whenisgood.net/twkw2px. Once you add your name, and submit (in the bottom right
corner), I will reach out with the Zoom details for our meeting.

Prior to the interview, please take some time to review the consent form (attached) and submit
the short questionnaire here:

Demographics Collection Google Form
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScWaaomyUfq5zY2Fy69Mw-
oiZU6__pRGJG1Fu2KE8yNYLeXcQ/viewform

Form Description:
Please review the consent form sent to you via email before submitting this survey

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between millennial Black women and
the stores where they shop for beauty products. The focus is on Black American women because
historically, they have unique experiences regarding access to beauty knowledge, products, and
stores.

Questions:

1. Name
2. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
    a. African-American
    b. Afro-Caribbean
    c. African
    d. Afro-Latinx
    e. Black
    f. Other (please specify)
3. Are you monoracial, biracial, or multiracial?
    a. Monoracial (both of my parents have the same race)

     b. Biracial (my parents are of two different races)
     c. Multiracial (my parents have multiple races)
4. Do you have a non-Black parent? If so, which race?
     a. Yes
     b. No
         i. Please specify (fill in the blank box)
5. Did you grow up in a primarily Black or Brown neighborhood?
     a. Yes
     b. No
     c. Other
         i. Please specify (fill in the blank box)
6. What is your highest level of education?
     a. Grade school
     b. Some secondary education
     c. High school diploma / GED
     d. Some college
     e. College degree
     f. Graduate/professional degree
     g. Other – please specify
7. What would you consider your social class?
     a. Working class
     b. Lower middle class
     c. Middle class
     d. Upper middle class
     e. Upper class