

Grace Nunekpeku

BUF 4700

Critical Argument Paper #2

Modernity: Past and Present

In the early 20th century the concept of modernity was marked by notable social relations and cultural shifts. Industrialization, urbanization, technological advancements, and shifts in values and attitudes, were some of the wide range of changes that took place. The 1900's welcomed progress, innovation, and interrupted traditional norms. In its various forms, modernism assured a much less restricted future. Shaping a vision of a more free and inclusive future, modernism encourages freedom of expression, experimentation, simplicity and favors making art and design accessible and cost-effective. This era was strongly characterized by a willingness for efficiency, rationality, and living the past behind. Also playing an important part in shaping and spreading the idea of modernity is the beauty industry. The beauty industry capitalized on the changing social landscape as the rise of consumers increased. Using the concept of modernity, the beauty industry adapted to the wants and aspirations of a society that was also learning to adapt to something new.

The 20th century saw the arrival of mass production, the availability of cosmetics and beauty products to a larger consumer base. This accessibility made it possible for people to improve their appearances in ways that were once only exclusive to the elite class. This also aligned with the contemporary ideals of inclusivity and progress. Mass production not only led to a decrease in the cost of manufacturing, it made it more affordable and gave way to a more extensive range of beauty products that were made available to consumers. This gave consumers

the ability to choose products that catered to their specific needs and preferences. As fashion in Europe and North America started to shift from traditional Victorian styles to the new era of cosmetics, French manufactures started to produce the first industrial made lipsticks. Chemists, cosmetologists, industrial magnates, and fashion designers quickly embraced the lucrative industry, and achieved remarkable progress within a few short years (Cosmetics in the 1920s; n.d).

By the 1920's a new generation of women who were raised in an ever changing fashion environment decided that it was time to break away from the past and welcome in the new. Becoming a global phenomenon of the era was a new style called the Flapper look. This fashion style consisted of a bold aesthetic featuring dark eyes, red lips, red nail polish, blush, mascara, and sun-kissed skin which were all achieved using cosmetics. The Flapper look served as a direct response to the restrained and feminine pre-war styles of the Victorian and "Gibson Girl" eras. Women from this era embraced the Flapper look as it made its way into vibrant nightlife, jazz music, avant-garde theater and art (Cosmetics in the 1920s; n.d). Products like sun tanning lotion introduced by Coco Chanel in 1920, and mascara pioneered by Maybelline in 1917 provided fashion designers with new tools to create innovative looks. These looks were popularized by famous actresses on stage and screen, as well as music stars, playing a part in the widespread adoption of the Flapper style.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the beauty industry also emerged as a significant and viable profession for women; specifically African- American women as they pioneered products tailored for diverse hair textures. Entrepreneurs like Madame CJ Walker and Marjorie Joyner, both African- American, utilized their expertise to establish a fresh beauty standard within their communities (Brandon, 2014). Madam C.J Walker specialized in hair care products

that addressed the unique needs of African-American women, promoting healthier hair and provided solutions to common issues such as hair loss. Her business model empowered many African American women by offering them opportunities for independence. She trained and employed thousands of women as sales agents, specifically empowering them in a society where job opportunities were limited. Marjorie Joyner revolutionized hairstyling in the 20th century by inventing the permanent wave machine to achieve long lasting curls in hair (The National Inventors Hall of Fame n.d). She was an important figure in the life of African- American women as she was instrumental in training and certifying them as beauticians that used her invention. This not only created career opportunities in the African American community but also helped standardize hairstyling techniques.

To be modern in the context of beauty incorporates a range of factors and values that reflects the current beauty culture and industry. Modern beauty celebrates diversity and inclusivity, acknowledging that beauty comes in many forms, including different skin tones, body types, and gender identities. Pioneered by Rihanna Robyn Fenty, Fenty Beauty is a beauty brand that celebrates inclusivity (LVMH n.d; McKinnon, 2023). In 2017 Time magazine recognized Fenty Beauty as its best invention of the year, stating that "Fenty's unabashed celebration of inclusivity in their makeup campaigns put an unprecedented spotlight on the need for diverse beauty products" (McKinnon, 2023).

Though Fenty Beauty was not the first to launch 40 shades of foundation, they made a significant impact when launching their own. For context, Make Up For Ever had already offered a wide shade range and even stated that "40 shades is nothing new to us" in an instagram post after Fenty Beauty launched their 40 shades of foundation (McKinnon, 2023). Rihanna managed to disrupt the beauty industry with her unwavering commitment to inclusivity. She made

inclusive marketing a fundamental aspect of her brand's business model. Her vision not only extended to serving dark-skinned consumers but embraced the idea that options should be given to individuals with very pale skin, dark complexions and every shade in between.

Another example of Rihanna's unwavering commitment to inclusivity is her lingerie brand Savage X Fenty. By featuring plus-sized models and developing gender-neutral products, Savage X Fenty resonates with a diverse range of consumers who believe that the brand understands their wants and needs. The brand's collection features bra sizes that range from A cups to H cups with band sizes ranging from 30 to 46 and extra small to 4X in underwear. Unlike Victoria's Secret who does not cater to a wide enough audience, Savage X Fenty's included plus sized, older, pregnant models as well as models with disabilities in her shows paying tribute to individuals from different backgrounds. Although plus sized models like Paloma Elsesser and Jill Korvette were featured in Victoria's Secret 2020 swimwear collection, many consumers quickly noticed that the largest size in the collection was an extra large, proving that this brand only offered lip service.

In conclusion, the early 20th century's concept of modernity was characterized by societal transformation, and the beauty industry played a pivotal role in communicating and capitalizing on this idea. It adapted to the changing values, desires, and technologies of the era, offering products and narratives that aligned with the aspirations of a modernizing society. The beauty industry's influence on fashion, standards of beauty, and advertising strategies has continued to shape our perceptions of modernity and beauty in the years that followed.

Reference

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