

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Esté Lauder empowers Black women to discuss inclusive beauty

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Some of the Esté Lauder employees in the Beauty In Me video series. Image credit: Esté Lauder

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Beauty brand Esté Lauder is giving a platform to Black women in a special series to commemorate Black History Month, allowing them to share their perspectives on the beauty industry.

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In the "Beauty In Me" video campaign, Black women who are part of the Esté team share their thoughts on inclusive beauty. The YouTube series comes as luxury brands are becoming more forthcoming about their inclusivity and diversity efforts as consumers become more values-oriented and public discussions around social justice become less taboo.

"For a global, iconic brand such as Esté Lauder speaking in favor and celebration of Black History Month lets their consumers know they care about them and are working to make sure they're included," said Romey Louangvilay, communications director at [ELMNTL](#), New York. "This is innovative as most luxury brands tend to continuously push out models and campaigns that feature traditional beauty standards, whereas Esté Lauder sets their own definition."

Inclusive beauty

Rather than turning to celebrities, models or influencers, Esté Lauder tapped its own employees for the effort.

Each woman speaks candidly about "the beauty in diversity," sharing their own perspectives and touching on different aspects of the topic. They appear individually in spots running about one to two minutes, as well as a montage-style hero video.

Maiah Martin, director of consumer engagement at Esté Lauder, admits that it is challenging to be underrepresented in corporate settings and be seen as representative for an entire community. Through corporate initiatives and external, consumer-facing efforts, Ms. Martin works to uplift the Black community and other underrepresented groups.

"Beauty In Me" debuted for Black History Month

In her video, Amanda C. Jones, North America product marketing lead at Esté Lauder, touches on similar themes.

She explains how she helps create products, visuals and messaging aimed to resonating to all of the brand's consumers, no matter their race or ethnicity.

"The vision I continue to see and create is that more women that look like me have that seat at the table," Ms. Jones says. "I think it's so important for the people making decisions for beauty brands look like the world we represent."

Other participants, including product marketing director Camilla Seawright and director of global brand activation Crystal Sai, are vulnerable about what makes them feel beautiful whether that is accepting their unique features that do not fit into a Eurocentric beauty ideal or seeing Black joy as an act of defiance.

Camilla shared how motherhood changed her perception of beauty and heritage

Another recurring theme is the impact of representation in the beauty industry, and how this has evolved in recent years. Many of the women reiterate that the Black community is complex and diverse in itself, despite often being presented as a monolith.

"When I think of inclusive beauty, I think of being child," says Kara Newsome, a field executive and trainer at Este Lauder, in one spot. "I didn't see many women that looked like me and not many Black women in the beauty industry were being represented."

Authentic diversity pushes

While Este Lauder often features models from a wide range of ethnicities and ages, "Beauty In Me" is notable because it explicitly allows Black women to address issues of inclusivity and racial bias within the beauty industry.

Consumers are becoming more invested in brands' diversity and inclusivity efforts, both in marketing and in the workplace. These issues are especially pertinent within the beauty and retail industries.

According to a recent "Racial Bias in Retail" commissioned by beauty retailer Sephora, nearly 74 percent of retail shoppers felt that marketing fails to showcase a diverse range of skin tones, body types and hair textures, while 65 percent thought stores fail to deliver an equally-distributed collection of products catering to different tastes and preferences.

While retail shoppers appreciate retailers' stances in prioritizing issues related to addressing and preventing racial bias and unfair treatment in their stores, they seek concrete action. Almost half of shoppers say they only want to see diversity in marketing if it is met with a genuine commitment to service diverse shoppers ([see story](#)).

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A post shared by Estee Lauder (@esteelauder)

Estee Lauder revealed the percentages of Black employees at the beauty group

The fashion industry is also facing challenges when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts, and it is likely that beauty companies have similar obstacles to create a more representative and equitable workforce.

Per a recent "State of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Fashion" report, Black employees were less likely than white employees to agree that their companies are doing "what it takes" to improve racial and ethnic DEI, at a rate of 57 to 77 percent. White employees were also more likely to believe the best workplace opportunities went to the most deserving candidates, at a rate of 62 percent compared to 47 percent of Black employees.

A 2019 analysis from McKinsey showed that while employees of color account for 32 percent of entry-level positions in the apparel and beauty industries, they only comprise 16 percent of C-suite roles and 15 percent of board seats ([see story](#)).

In June 2020, amid the Black Lives Matter protests, Estee Lauder Companies revealed on social media that Black employees comprised for only 12 percent of its U.S. workforce. Farther up the ladder, only 3 percent of the executive director-level and above are Black.

While the discrepancy is stark, transparency builds authenticity down the line.

"Brands need to look at themselves to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion are part of their structure and core values, otherwise their marketing will be obviously inauthentic," ELMNTL's Mr. Louangvilay said. "This type of messaging works for Estee Lauder as they've been a leader in using different models for their faces.

"Brands can't just start sharing messages of diversity and inclusivity if it wasn't already built into their belief system," he said. "Consumers are smart today and will spot out a fake message.

"For brands who may not have thought of this when they started, they should do more than just share a message. Donate money to diversity organizations, change your internal policies, etc. And then when they share this type of message, it will have more meaning."