

# WHEN BEAUTY INDUSTRY IS INCLUSIVE, EVERYONE WINS

*With needs of women of color often underserved by mainstream cosmetics brands, entrepreneurs go for untapped market*



Katonya Breaux, founder and chief executive of Unsun Cosmetics, far right, talks with Mented Cosmetics co-founders Amanda Johnson and K.J. Miller, as well as reporter Ray Smith during The Wall Street Journal: The Future Of Everything Festival in New York on May 20, 2019. PHOTO: ADAM SCHULTZ/PRODUCTIONMANAGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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## READING TIME

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**W**hen Katonya Breaux, the founder and chief executive of Unsun Cosmetics Inc., first noticed black spots on her skin, she freaked out. She immediately contacted her doctor, who laughed, prescribing one thing: sunscreen.

Though it seemed obvious, the experience made Ms. Breaux realize that there was a common misconception that African-American communities didn't need sunscreen because of their skin

tone. “Our melanin was everything,” she said at The Wall Street Journal’s Future of Everything Festival on Monday, referring to the pigment in skin that absorbs light and has long been misunderstood to completely protect dark skin from the sun.

The lack of awareness points to larger issues in the beauty industry, where the needs of consumers of color are frequently ignored. Often, sunscreens can end up looking chalkish on darker skin tones, and until recently, a matching foundation shade was nearly impossible to find.

Despite “women of color outspend[ing] our white counterparts by 80%,” it was rare to see black or Indian women in beauty advertisements before the rise of social-media influencers, said Mented Cosmetics co-founders Amanda Johnson and K.J. Miller. As consumers, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Miller felt that the stories of women of color didn’t “seem to matter or are considered afterthoughts” to larger cosmetics brands.

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According to a Nielsen study, African-Americans spent \$53 million of the \$63 million total industry spending for ethnic hair and beauty products in 2017. They also spent significantly on beauty products not necessarily targeted to them, making them both a deeply underrepresented and untapped market. Responding to this need, a new wave of brands owned by black women has recently grown in prominence. Alongside Unsun Cosmetics and Mented Cosmetics, brands such as Beauty Bakerie, Juvia’s Place and the blockbuster Fenty Beauty by Rihanna have made inclusive beauty the norm.

After the launch of Fenty Beauty in September of 2017, the cosmetics industry reached a watershed moment. Promoted under the tagline “Beauty for All,” the brand initially offered a total of 40 different shades, adding 10 more at the beginning of this year. Soon, longstanding brands such as Tarte were criticized for their limited range, and other major beauty brands such as Too Faced opted to collaborate with social-media influencers such as Jackie Aina, who is outspoken about racial issues in the beauty industry. Most recently, Pür Cosmetics launched a foundation range with a whopping 100 shades.

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Mented Cosmetics said a diverse mix of people is investing in the business, whether they believe in the cause as advocates or in the real dollars that come out of this industry every day. “Everyone is ignoring this demand. They saw the opportunity,” the co-founders explained.

Addressing the fresh competition coming off the success of Fenty Beauty, the founders said they aren’t worried, citing the seemingly infinite number of brands that don’t necessarily identify as inclusive brands. “We deserve the options as well.”

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