

Do trends like “UK Black Girl Makeup” harm the identity of Black British Women?

Trends can reinforce a flattened beauty ideal of Black women and constrain their ability to freely and creatively express themselves.

Its hailed as the ultimate ‘face beat’ for Black women; glossy chocolate lined lips, bright under eyes, an immaculate skin like base, all framed by sleek flawless hair. The UK Black Girl Makeup trend, derived from social media, distinguishes Black British women’s glam looks as its own separate thing. All compiled into a singular hashtag, it has been picked up by Black women globally, desperate to get the same polished aesthetic.

After being made popular in 2022, the reins for the trend was taken by British YouTuber Uche Natori. Initially known for her makeup tutorials for hooded eyelids, she took to TikTok to provide a “Makeup School” series, educating viewers on how she achieves her distinct makeup base. [Other creators trying out the UK Black Girl Makeup](#) look often label her as the inspiration, as well as generally crediting Black British women. Admiration of the UK Black Girl Makeup look has led to over 58 million views of videos with the hashtag on TikTok.

Separately, users on X continue to show their excitement, praising this beauty ideal. Users said, [“When I accomplish the UK Black Girl Makeup, I’ll finally be happy in life”](#), another said [“UK Black girls got this makeup shit on lock!”](#), and again, [“UK Black girl makeup is top tier”](#). It’s become an aspirational goal and highly coveted makeup look. As well as Uche Natori, British makeup artists Bernicia Boetang and Ngozi Edeme known as @PaintedByEsther are also pioneers of the trend. Some [X users have even noticed the changes in American singer Chloe Bailey’s](#) look after she had Ngozi Edeme do her makeup, claiming “she looked so much better with makeup better for her features”.

As with many trends online, the UK Black Girl Makeup trope was born out of pure intentions and has been well received by so many, globally. Yet it carries downfalls that constrain the identity of Black British women, rather than celebrating their individuality.

Despite being a Black focused trend, the social and cultural landscape in which these trends exist cannot be ignored. The beauty industry, especially online, is a predominately white field. Even with a plethora of micro makeup trends accessible online, from strawberry girl to glazed doughnut, the common face of them is always white women. Comfort Adedayo, a Black beauty content creator from South London, addresses its lack of inclusivity . “It may seem as though trends are innocent, but when you scroll through hashtags and see the main videos. A lot of women are white, thin [with] perfect skin. Whereas trends who are popular among the ‘others’ are full of creators who are blemish prone, have acne, disabled, non-binary etc”. Black beauty content creators have clearly felt alienated in trends and representation.

The demand for a Black focused trend in beauty was clear. After instances of culture appropriation, silent erasure and western beauty standards dominating the media, the accreditation of Black women was necessary. It was easily achieved with this hashtag, yet

those who identify as a British Black woman may not necessarily associate themselves with what the hashtag represents.

Although we have seen Black beauty celebrated, it is overwhelming apparent there is a lack of understanding of the wide range it has. Sagal Mohammed, Editorial and Creative Lead of Google Shopping and former Glamour editor shares her views on this. “Many of today’s editorials champion diversity within beauty and make space for inclusive representation, although these representations can still be one-dimensional, portraying a singular ‘type’ of Black beauty that is palatable. Ultimately, there is still A LOT of work to be done in achieving accurate, inclusive representation of Black beauty in British media, but I do believe that though we’ve only just scratched the surface, important steps forwards have been made.”

From a more critical perspective, the trend could appear to be passive as it implies that all British Black women have the same make up style and interests. Having this singular trend to represent an entire community is not only limited and restrictive, but implies that if Black women are not found with a full face of makeup, bright highlight and skin-like base, then they go unrecognised within the make-up community.

The expectation of the trend robs British Black women the option of being versatile. The trend does not support them having a clean girl aesthetic – natural and barely there makeup, greatly contrasting the luxury glam aesthetic found in the UK Black Girl makeup trend. Or editorial makeup – a style usually found on fashion runways and print, featuring colourful abstract and Avant Garde looks. Anything other than the glam face beat, would mean it is not a UK Black Girl Makeup look. Perpetuating this can lead to a flattened identity, downplaying the freedom many individuals experience in beauty and makeup.

The psychological impacts this can have on Black women is important to consider. As many reports show, social beauty standards pose serious detrimental effects to individual’s self-esteem; in a [survey](#) of over 7,000 participants, only 1% of women felt very positive about their bodies. Applying beauty standards within an already marginalised group can intensify these issues. Individuals may struggle with acceptance not solely within society as a whole, but also within their own communities, conforming to societal pressures to look a certain way.

[One TikTok user](#) explained elements of the trend, such as heavy concealing and maintenance of false lashes, were too expensive and didn’t work with her features. [Some on twitter explained](#) their disappointment with its results. “Sometimes they do UK Black girl makeup on me and I’m like ...oh, I do not look better than I usually do”. The implications of a female doing a makeup style that isn’t working out for her, yet constantly depicted that it should, is a classic case of unrealistic standards being demanded. It refuses individuality and fosters uncertainty about their self-esteem and identity.

Progress of improving the space for Black women in the industry has been slow but sure. It roots to initial issues of western beauty standards, and depictions of light skin as the ideal beauty. This was not solely online but with products too. The very fact that there was a lack of representation has caused for generalised trends like this to be created. “Beauty products, from skincare to makeup, are so skin and race specific” says Sagal. “Most beauty

trends, who are formed or started by non-Black content creators (who are the overwhelming majority when it comes to those with the biggest platforms and followings) will likely never consider or include Black women everything from hair to skin, and even the shades of eyeshadow we wear are so different”.

Black beauty brand owners such as Kemi Ola Joseph, founder of KEM Beauty, have openly expressed their desire to improve this. “As a woman of colour, I’ve experienced firsthand how the beauty industry often treats our needs as an afterthought” she says. “I believe representation matters, so I ensure that women of colour are involved in every step of the process”.

Thankfully, modern day technology has made it so content we consume is relevant. Algorithms enable most users to receive content in tune with their interests, as Sagal points out. “The beauty trends that show up on my TikTok FYP tend to be based on topics and tips the algorithm has strategically targeted me for based on all sorts of search history and data”.

There is potential for a balance of wanted and unwanted content, but how realistic is this really? Algorithms are not guaranteed to provide users with what is healthy for them, despite there being disliking options. A Black woman not finding the trend beneficial may still be unintentionally interacting with it, and therefore seeing more in her feed, voiding her of the chance to benefit from other content.

Another aspect contributing to the trend’s downfalls include the fact that not everyone knows about it. Unfortunately, the saying “the girls that get it, get it” fails to apply here, as the women being referenced are not actually aware it exists. Sagal mentions she never heard of the trend.

A reason for this could regard how superficial the trend truly is. UK Black Girl Makeup is exactly that, British women wearing makeup. Trying to make it into a ‘trend’ or segmented category inadvertently separates Black British women wearing makeup away from the rest of the population. The lack of specified terms in the trend does not help either. If it was based on a distinct element the categorisation would be more valid. Segmenting a greatly broad subject like this, and further associating it with only one style of makeup, only imposes further limitations.

We know that British Black women wearing makeup does not conform to one aesthetic, yet the UK Black Girl Makeup trend overlooks this. Whilst rightful global recognition has been given to Black British women in the beauty industry, it must be ensured that it stays positive for all of them, celebrating the many different ways that British Black women express themselves through makeup. As an already marginalised group, it’s important that the industry rectifies its pitfalls, avoiding passive and tokenistic trends. Thankfully, it is clear that steps are being made in the right direction.