

Unapologetic and authentic: Coty, Estée Lauder and L'Oréal brainstorm the 'gender freedom' rise in beauty

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Genderless and gender fluid have risen as beauty concepts over time, but gender freedom takes things further to capture and empower the hearts and minds of every consumer identify, say leading beauty execs.



Last year, CosmeticsDesign-Europe spotlighted **'Beauty for All' as one of five beauty trends to watch across the EMEA region in 2021**, driven by a consumer desire to flout dated labels and escape being pigeon-holed by meaningless marketing terms. In the same year, WGSN said **'gender fluidity' was a key driver behind the growth of five beauty 'personas' to watch in 2023**, as consumers sought out hybrid and inclusive products that empowered total self-expression.

According to market insights specialist Beautystreams, these concepts were set to **shift up a gear over the next five years** into 'gender freedom'. And in a dedicated expert panel discussion during last month's Cosmoprof Worldwide Bologna event in Italy, Michael Nolte, senior VP and creative director of Beautystreams, asked beauty leaders to shed light on why this 'gender freedom' movement was set to become so central.

'De-gendering' beauty categories to create 'uid futures'

"Beauty has this role to inspire people to be unapologetic about ourselves; about this will to be creative and this will to create our own narrative. And this is new because it's radical," Sarah Léa Chicheportiche, global prospective and global insights at Coty, told attendees.



Gender freedom is a liberating movement to celebrate 'all identities' [Getty Images]

"Breaking through" from historical binary 'genderation', she said, liberated joy and happiness to celebrate "all identities", and there was plenty going on to spur this across fragrances and nails.

"We had CK1 already blurring the boundaries of gender, but most recently with a fragrance like Marc Jacobs Perfect telling people to embrace this joy whatever gender, race and size; this is really important," she said.

And in the nail category, Chicheportiche said there was a lot of new brands and influential people in the space, including celebrities like Harry Styles who were *"totally changing the message"* and *"de-gendering"* the category as a whole.

"This is about building new fluid futures," she said.

Sam Cheow, SVP and global head of makeup innovation, portfolio and product development at The Estée Lauder Companies, agreed: *"It goes back to the power of being you, and being individual (...) It's a bigger message gender freedom – it activates that part of yourself that is more about authenticity. This is where the world is going; this is where beauty is going."*

Beyond labels towards 'authentic' expression

Gender freedom bounced beyond 'he', 'she' and 'they' labels, he said, empowering consumers to be *"authentic"* and *"liberate"* themselves, which impacted every facet of life, including fashion, fragrance, makeup and more. It also stretched across all age groups, he said, creating an age freedom too. *"It's not about gender, for me personally, it's about allowing the individual to express themselves when they are ready, and you give them the opportunity."*



Gender freedom is about enabling consumers to express themselves when they are ready [Getty Images]

"...The bigger message is, when we're allowed to become who we are, it translates into beauty, makeup, sub-categories, gestures, looks," Cheow said.

Barbara Doussard, prospective director for L'Oréal Group, said the gender freedom shift had clearly been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the closures of barbers and salons empowering and enabling people to embrace new styles and looks.

"One fun case was the pandemic long hair for males," she said, where many discovered curls during the grow-out phase and therefore a new need to care for and manage their style.

Moving forward, she said the continuing rise of sex tech would build out the 'gender freedom' movement further, liberating gender through sexuality and pleasure.

Chicheportiche agreed: *"Sexual wellness is not a taboo anymore, this is mind and body reconnected for wellness, health and happiness."*

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