

AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S COSMETIC CONFORMITY: AN
IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF 1920'S ADVERTISING OF HAIR
STRAIGHTENERS AND SKIN WHITENERS

THESIS

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By

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I dedicate this book to a true idealist Burton Michael “Miracle” Crayton. He was
a true believer that there could be harmony in America.

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CHAPTER ONE

FROM CHARACTER TO COMMODIFICATION

At the turn of the twentieth century the African-American was not only a freed person but also a wage earner. Michael Fultz states that between 1890 and 1930 the African-American was presented with opportunities to uplift the race by taking advantage of urbanization. Due to the availability of employment, a new African-American middle class was created. There was now a new social and economical dimension in the African-American community (Fultz 97-98). As the twentieth century came into existence the Victorian ways of life started to deteriorate and consumerism was born. Mothers and single women started leaving the house for employment in the public sphere and pristine values slowly started to diminish or were challenged. James McGovern argues that “it was not until the 1920’s that the code of women’s innocence and ignorance crumbled” (317). During the 1920’s women became assertive and independent. The new wage earners, women and men, now had more money to spend and the American corporations took advantage of this. In particular, African-American wage earners found different ways to consume their extra time and money in the dominant, capitalist culture. Even though African-American individuals had the lowest jobs as far as quality, and received the lowest wages, there was a new sense of prosperity within most African-American communities like those in Harlem, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Focus of Study

The focus of this study is to look at the beauty industry, in particular the consumption habits of the African-American female. This analysis will explore the symbols advertisers use to communicate the message of consumption. This study will expand on the literature already within the communication discipline by looking at other artifacts within the communication process. The study of symbolic action, rhetoric or communication gives insight about the ideals of the time period, and information on how the messages within an advertising text were utilized. This study concentrates on advertising from four different African-American newspapers. The *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* were distributed nationally, while the *Richmond Planet* and the *Palmetto Leader* were local. This study is based on collection of over 250 advertisements which were published from 1920-1929. This set of advertisements was selected because of the time period and location of the newspapers. These newspapers cover not only the North but also areas of the South. The time frame was chosen because it is when African-Americans experienced an increase of income and the beauty industry grew into a major market. Economist Paul K. Edwards, in his research on African-Americans' spending and how companies appealed to this new audience through advertisements, reports that in 1929 the *Chicago Defender*, a Negro weekly, sold 19 % of its advertisement space to the beauty industry. Approximately 9 % was sold to companies selling skin bleachers/whiteners and ten percent was sold to companies selling hair straighteners. These advertising discourses informed readers about what the culture valued, and by omission, what was not important.

This analysis first will describe the beauty advertisements in Negro weeklies targeting African-American females and then interpret the messages within the copy. Next, this analysis will address some of the implications these advertisements might have had for African-American women in regards to how to be presentable in society. I will argue that the values and perceptions initiated by advertisements of the 1920's perpetuated the white middle class standards of beauty for African-American women and that these values continue in contemporary cultural discourse. Third, this analysis will explore what appeals motivated these women to purchase such beauty products as hair straighteners and skin bleachers/whiteners. Finally, I will explore the affects of such advertisements on the African-American female consumer today.

This topic is significant because African-American women still are facing the same value questions about beauty in today's society. In today's market young girls and women have beautiful African-American women like Vanessa Williams and Beverly Johnson to look up to; however, no matter how notable these women become the media find ways to discredit them and their accomplishments. During her Miss American reign pornographic pictures of Vanessa Williams that were never previously published were found and published by Penthouse after her crowning. Gossip tabloids discussed Johnson's personal life and the suspicion that she stalked her White male ex-lover. Another component that makes these women's notoriety questionable is their skin color and hair texture. These two women have light skin complexions and have long straight hair, "good hair". Iman, who is of a darker complexion, also is held up as an image of beauty in the media, yet she usually is wearing a long wig or a weave when pictured. Is this desire to make oneself

“beautiful” motivated by the Afro-centric image or the adoption of milder Euro-centric image? These advertisements in the 1920’s Black weekly papers should present strong evidence to help answer these questions dealing with beauty.

The Three C’s: Consumerism, Consumption, and Culture

To understand the beauty industry, some background about consumerism in this time period is necessary. There were many cultural changes during 1920’s; I will try to describe some of the important ones pertaining to this analysis. One of the major changes was technology as industrial devices such as the automobile, the assembly line, and the refrigerated boxcar had a major impact on the era. The new consumerism was brought about for many different reasons but the main one was technology. Daniel J. Boorstin, in his book *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, looks at one of America’s popular forms of democracy, “consumerism” or “capitalism”. By the 1880’s technology was on the brink of industrializing America, from Ford cars to ready-made clothes. One of the biggest changes in technology was the amount of time it took to make something and the quantity one could produce. For example, in 1880 a single machine controlled by as few as four individuals could produce approximately 1500 tin cans a day (Boorstin 316). In 1881, Swift, at the same time as the *Armour* meat company, found new ways of slaughtering animals and new ways of transporting this meat by using refrigerated train cars. Meat that once had to be sold immediately now remained fresh from Chicago to New York (Boorstin 318). However, the most revolutionary technology of this time was the automobile. This object became a necessity, which encouraged governments to fund new roads, companies to build batteries, and the search for ways

to refine gasoline. Juliann Sivulka states, “advances in technology and more efficient manufacturing methods were fundamental to the economic boom and dramatically increased factory output” (143). By the 1920’s these methods of production allowed Americans to work shorter hours and earn more money. The six-day week was decreased to five and workers had more leisure time, including some paid vacations (Sivukla 142). In addition, Stuart Ewen believes that “shorter hours and higher wages were seen as a first step in a broader offensive against the notion of thrift and an attempt to habituate a national population to the exigencies of mass production” (29). The correlation is that technological advances did lead to shorter hours and higher wages; however, the “capitalists” used this as a form of control. The capitalists in this instance are business owners, advertising agencies and the government.

One of the biggest challenges companies had during the 1920’s was how to convince individuals to purchase their products. There really was no need for these mass-produced products. Companies depended on advertisements to create a want instead of a need among the consumers, and the advertising industry continued reinforcing prosperity messages to the consumers. The idea was the more one consumed the happier one would be. Sut Jhally describes how capitalists use advertisements to reinforce these consumption messages noting, “advertising is part of ‘a discourse through and about objects’ because it does not merely tell us about things but how things are connected to important domains of our lives” (228). The use of this mode of communication allowed business owners to reach a larger audience. Advertisements in newspapers and magazines became the tactic businesses

used to make more money by selling more of their product. Julia Bristor, Renee Gravois Lee and Michelle Hunt state that advertising is one of the ways that the dominant culture can reach its audience and transmit its ideologies (2). Ewen argues that “advertising offers itself as a means of efficiently creating consumers and as a way of homogeneously controlling the consumption of products” (33). On the same note, Roland Marchand argues that advertisements reflect values and the shaping of ideas of their time (xv) and continues by stating “[advertisements] surpass most other recorded communication as a basis for plausible inference about popular attitudes and values” (xix). The values of consumption are encoded within these advertisements.

Next, the companies select a target audience to whom they market their specific product. In the 1920’s the target audience was predominantly women, especially housewives and working women. In addition, the product and the target audience influenced the type of persuasive appeals companies used. In the 1920’s advertisements addressed individuals’ hidden fears and desires. Jackson Lears states, “advertisements did more than stir up desire; they sought to manage it--to stabilize the sorcery of the marketplace by containing dreams of personal transformation within a broader rhetoric of control” (10). Advertisements attempted to control consumers’ consciousness; individuals started caring about what others thought about them instead of how they felt about themselves, developing a “looking glass self” (Ewen 34). Consumers started viewing themselves as they thought their neighbor or significant other would view them. The main target audience of most of these advertisements during the 1920’s was women, mostly middle class housewives and the working girl who had to be educated about how to read these advertisements.

Consequently, these advertisements were very text based, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, then finally they became more visual (Jhally 228).

Two of the most popular forms of advertising strategies used were the sensational style and the testimonial style. Marchand explains, “the testimonial advertisements tell us which public figures a well-informed and highly motivated advertising elite believed the consumer would identify with and accept as adequate authorities” (xix). A modern day example of a testimonial advertisement is Senator Bob Dole and his Viagra commercial. The second type of advertisement strategy features the sensational style. This approach was co-opted from tabloids and women’s magazines such as True Story. The format deals with a dramatic real-life challenge that only the product can help remedy. This format also gives advice on the best ways to respond to these types of situations (Sivulka 154). These two types of strategies are used predominantly in the 1920’s. This analysis will explore also these two types of strategies in the Negro weekly advertisements. The sensational advertisements became a popular strategy during the middle and late 1920’s while the testimonial was used throughout the era. Furthermore, both strategies still are capable of addressing the fears of consumers and the desire of consumers to be accepted.

The African-American Consumer of the 1920’s

One of the particular groups of consumers targeted by these new persuasive advertising appeals was the African-American community. Many companies depended on the fears of the African-Americans to sell their product since they were new to this form of transaction. As the members of the dominant culture started to enjoy their newfound wealth and leisure time in the twentieth century, so did African-

American citizens. During the early 1900's African-American workers started leaving the south and migrating north for better opportunities. In 1920 there were approximately 10,463,131 African-Americans in the United States; 84.1% were considered Black and 15.9% were considered Mulatto (Work 429). Within this population there were 2,730,469 individuals who comprised the Black female voting age (Work 429). Paula Giddings reported that between 1915 and 1920 approximately 500,000 Blacks migrated North. Between 1922 and 1924, 73.4 % of the African-American population lived in 10 industrial districts: Indianapolis, Detroit-Toledo, Cleveland-Youngstown, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Columbus-Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York (Work 9). The top seventeen southern meccas for blacks were Norfolk, Richmond, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, New Orleans, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Memphis, Birmingham, Chattanooga, Nashville, Knoxville, and Louisville. The African-American community made up 25.2% of the top seventeen populations (Edwards 38).

As the African-American communities started to increase in size, so did the wealth of individuals in these communities. This was one of the reasons for the migration to the cities and the North. African-Americans also found other employment opportunities. Giddings noted that according to the 1918 Bureau of Labor Statistics Report, at least 40% of the 28,520 of the workers at the 150 plants (in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina) surveyed were African-American women (141-143). The 1920 census reported that out of all the women employed in manufacturing and mechanical industries 104,983 were African-American. A more detailed report stated that in 1920

there were 241,871 African-American women employed in the North, 688,063 African-American women employed in the South and 11, 238 African-American women employed in the West. These women were employed as servants, laundresses or in other non-agriculture pursuits, and each was sixteen years old or older (Greene and Woodsen 241).

As African-Americans gathered in the cities they not only found more independence from their former rural cultural circumstances, but also increased wages. These new opportunities are some of the reasons why farm hands moved north. Lorenzo Greene and Carter Woodsen state that when Negro farm hands or unskilled laborers, who formerly earned 75 cents to \$1.25 a day, found that they could earn from \$2.50 to \$3.75 a day, and later \$4.00 to \$5.00 a day in the North, they began to withdraw their children from domestic employment and arranged to send them to school (225-227). Edwards reports that in 1929 the African-American female in Nashville earned 11% of the annual \$3,400,207 income (34). In addition, 84.3% of the females' earnings were from common and semi-skilled labor (Edwards 34). The highest earnings in the South were received by working in iron and steel factories, meat packaging plants and oil refineries (Edwards 31). Giddings reports that in the 1920's, a laundress or a cook could earn more money up North in one day than a woman could earn in an entire week in Jackson, Mississippi. The average earnings for a laundress or a cook up North ranged between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per day. Giddings also reports that an unmarried woman in domestics up North could earn approximately \$8.00 a week, which is approximately twice as much as she would

earn in Mississippi. Finally, she notes that a woman in an industrial job earns \$3.00 a day compared to the 50 cents a day for picking cotton (141).

As African-Americans found more opportunities with employment options they also increased their independence with their pocketbooks. In her article “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: the Experience of the Chicago Workers in the 1920’s,” Lizabeth Cohen states that through this mass consumption the African-American found an avenue for independence (23). These consumers might not have had many options concerning where they live or work; however, they had great power over what they purchased. The African-American consumer had two preferences, the chain stores and standard brand goods (Cohen 23). Cohen argued that unlike their ethnic counterparts (Irish, Italians, Asians, etc.), African-Americans distrusted bulk goods such as flour or sugar which were stored in barrels, and they started purchasing mass-produced products that could be stored on the grocery selves. Some of the favorite brands, especially in the South, were Calumet baking powder, Maxwell House Coffee, Quaker Oats, Campbell’s Pork and Beans, and Post Brand Cereals (Edwards 153-154). Edwards reported that in the South the greatest part of the food consumption was of products such as shortening, meats, butter, potatoes, flour and corn meal (560). As far as clothing brands, African-American consumers went beyond their income means. An advertising manager of one of the largest department stores in the South stated “the Negro buys gaudy, loud merchandise which is durable and will wear well”; he continued by stating that the Negro “wears better clothing in proportion to his income than the White man” (qtd. in Edwards 48).

The African-American consumers became a part of the mass culture; they shopped at chain stores and bought name brand foods and clothes.

Besides being employed by the dominant culture, members of these African-American communities started their own businesses. African-American individuals began opening hotels, grocery stores, restaurants, and laundries which served the African-American consumers and employed African-American workers. The beauty industry employed many African-American women as sales representatives; moreover, these women were employed the African-American beauty companies. These companies succeeded due to products such as hair growers, straightening creams, and skin whiteners that appealed to the African-American female consumer. Alternatively, some of the larger cosmetic companies were owned by whites and usually did not employ African-Americans except in janitorial positions. Moreover, the main purchasers of these beauty products were women. Some of these women believed these products could help them fit into the dominant culture.

The Cultural Images of African-American Women

The way the dominant culture in America views or classifies African-American women has not changed very much since the turn of the century. The changes that have been made have been related more to physical characteristics. African-Americans were projected in a more realistic manner in the 1920's advertisements, instead of the degrading images of the late nineteenth century advertisements. An example of this is the image of Aunt Jemima. The first image depicted was that of a wooden cutout; later, the company used the depiction of an

actual African-American woman. One reason for that change can be attributed to the change in the economic status of the African-American.

The social roles of African-Americans in popular culture still didn't change. They still fulfilled stereotypical roles in the movies, advertisements and the comics. The African-American female either could play a good girl who was proud to serve the white employer or a bad girl who defied all (male and female) and was usually sexually active. K. Sue Jewell makes a similar argument with the characteristics and make-up of African-American women. She states that the emotional make-up or quality of the African-American woman images have not changed much in the twentieth century from the established ideals created in the nineteenth century (35). In the early twentieth century there were four dominant stereotypes that defined the African-American woman: Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and Matriarch. These four images negatively defined what the ideals of womanhood were within the African-American community. Not all of these images revolved around slavery; indeed, some of these images were perpetuated by the African-American community itself and were later co-opted by the dominant culture.

To understand the constraints that African-American women had to overcome, knowledge of the origin of these stereotypes is necessary. Several critics have described these categories. Patricia Hill Collins argues "there are four interrelated socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (71). Collins and Leith Mullings both list these same four stereotypes. Fances S. Foster gives four different images ranging more in age rather than

characteristics. The first is that of a child called “Topsy” who has big eyes, long skinny legs, and plaits throughout her hair. The second one is an older child named “Peaches” who is considered luscious, sly and loose. This description is similar to that of the Jezebel. “Caldonia” is the matriarch who is fat, loud, emasculating, and a usually a single mother. Finally, there is the old wise “Aunt Chloe”. Michelle Wallace also gives an all-encompassing list of images and stereotypes in her book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. The stereotypes were predominantly the same even though they were called something different. Some of these stereotypes even had more detailed characteristics while others were more general.

Based on the foundation provided by these voices within the dominant culture and the African-American community, I will only look at two of the images most pertinent for this study. These two images, the mammy and the jezebel, were the only two images that were prevalent in the 1920’s. The other two images, Sapphire and Matriarch, came at the end of the decade and were present during the 1930’s and 1940’s. The mammy is the good girl in this dialectical tension and the jezebel is the bad one. Both images were created during slavery and are still affecting African-American women today.

The mammy image originated in the south during slavery. She is submissive toward her superiors (white employers), is large in size, and has a dark complexion. She always is smiling and happy at her present position. Collins describes her as the faithful obedient servant, the ideal female relation with the dominant white male power (71). She also is considered asexual due to her appearance and role. Mullings describes her as “the religious, loyal, motherly slave devoted to the care of the slave

owner's family" (267). The mammy is considered to be a surrogate mother. The mammy is the good girl in the dominant culture's eye.

On the other hand, the jezebel was the sexually aggressive whore. Just like the mammy this image was created during slavery. Unlike her counterpart, the jezebel was a mulatto or had a fair complexion. She was thin and her facial features were Euro-centric. Among the four images this one is the closest to the standard of beauty held by the dominant culture. The jezebel is the slender, Euro-centric individual who appears to fit almost all of the requisites for the white standard of beauty. Jewell states that this individual was not naïve, she was worldly (46). Mullings states she is the woman who is governed entirely by her libido (267).

These were the two main stereotypes governing the African-American woman's interactions with the dominant culture. If she was not in a servitude role then she was in a sexual role. As the turn of the century came about and the African-American middle class started to rise, there were many political voices about what were the ideals for womanhood. The ideals of the dominant culture still were ideals presented in Barbara Welter's "cult of true womanhood": piety, submissiveness, purity, and domesticity. The African-American middle class agreed with these ideals, but stated that the African-American female also had to subscribe to other ideals. The main ideal that was not held by the dominant culture was the ideal to uplift the race. African-American women during the 1920's were no different than their white counterparts, but undoubtedly were perceived by Whites as more aggressive because of their activity in the public atmosphere even though this was acceptable within the African-American community. These women were considered helpers by the Black

community in this fight to uplift the race. These genteel African-American women were intelligent, well educated, involved in their community, and among the upper class and middle class. They were involved in uplifting the race by being teachers and activists. No matter how involved they got in the public sphere, however, these women knew their main place was in the home (Carlson 61-69). Giddings states that femininity, not feminism, was the talk of the 1920's for these women (185). In addition, Shirley Carlson states, "the true black community [Chicago] did not regard intelligence and femininity as conflicting values as the larger society did. African-Americans did not believe that because a woman was intelligent and aggressive she would begin to develop masculine characteristics such as thickening of the waist, diminution of the breast, hips and finally the growth of facial hair" (Carlson 69). These myths were not the problem, but the standards of beauty were. No matter how feminine the African-American woman became she still was considered inferior to her white counterparts due to the dominant culture's beauty standards.

The hardest task in this research is defining the term "beauty." There are so many different interpretations of what beauty is. bell hooks defined beauty "as objects, one's reality is defines by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship with those who are subjects" (2). Deborah R. Grayson states that "skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body shapes continue to serve as the arbitrary visual constructs used for the purpose of assigning human worth and value in American culture" (14). Grayson argues that these constructs prescribed by the dominant culture are difficult for Black women to obtain. Margaret Hunter argues that the constructs of beauty are "... the

physical traits such as straight blonde hair and white skin, [which are] the physical traits of civility and beauty” (519). Because of the constructs held up as beauty ideals, ideologically, these constructs take on meaning, which the dominant culture introduces and the rest of society accepts. Among the African-American community these constructs set up two major dialectical tensions: dark skin vs. light skin and good hair vs. bad hair. I will readdress these tensions when I discuss the color-caste hierarchy and intercultural racism among the African-American community in chapter two. The definition of beauty this analysis will refer to is that beauty is a culturally normative status (Hunter 519).

To reach the normative standards of beauty in the 1920’s culture, African-American women had to purchase cosmetics such as hair straighteners and skin bleachers. Giddings states that purchasing these products was the only way women could reach the dominant white culture’s standard of beauty (186). These products enter the market for African-American consumers around 1850. This was a profitable business; in one year the cosmetic industry in the 1920’s earned approximately 500 million dollars (Giddings 185). African-Americans owned some of these companies, but Whites owned most companies. The beauty industry became a lucrative market for everyone involved. The 1920’s were a time of change not only for the dominant culture but also for the African-American. The capitalists constructed a role as a consumer for the culture to partake in, particularly for females, which is my central interest in this study.

Preview of Chapters

This chapter provides an overview of the cultural context at the turn of the twentieth century. The chapter 2 elaborates on the beauty concept used in this study by relating it to the color caste hierarchy and discussing some of the research related to this concept. Within this chapter also is a discussion of the dialectical tensions dealing with the hair and complexion, and how these affected the beauty industry. The color-caste hierarchy is an important factor because it influences African-American self-concepts. Chapter 2 also includes an explanation of the methodologies in the study. This analysis uses ideological criticism as well as semiotics, and chapter 2 incorporates an example to show how these two approaches work together. The Chapter 3 contains the analysis. Here the themes within the advertisements are analyzed to show how advertisers played on the fears of the African-American woman. This new consumer only wanted to fit in and advertisers used many appeals to sell their product as a remedy to this problem. An explanation also is offered to clarify how the artifacts were chosen, and the analysis will be contextualized within information about particular companies. In the final chapter, the results of the analysis are discussed and conclusions are drawn about how these ideas established in early advertisements affect the culture today.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGIES AND COLOR–CASTE APPLICATIONS

The first chapter provided the historical backdrop necessary for understanding this analysis. This second chapter looks at the methodologies, ideology and semiotics, and how I will use these methodologies to interpret the artifacts I have chosen as the focus of the thesis. Second, I explain certain correlations between beauty ideals, success, and acceptability. This explanation will clarify why there is a dialectical tension between African-Americans' beauty ideals and the dominant culture's beauty ideals, and how advertisers might use this tension to persuade African-American women to purchase their products.

Dialectical Tensions: Shades and Textures

The dialectical tensions of shades of skin and hair texture that were used to sell beauty products in the nineteen twenties have been with the African-American culture since slavery. These two binary oppositions of dark vs. light and straight vs. kinky still are present in today's society. To understand the use of these appeals in advertisements and the motivations of the African-American consumer, it is important to understand where these beauty ideals came from. The color-caste hierarchy deals with the conflict between light skin and dark skin as well as hair texture. African-Americans have continued to use this gradation of color to assign value to others, especially women.

The history behind this hierarchy can be attributed to slavery. Bell hooks states that most Black people who know about “North American history, slavery, reconstruction, etc. [...] know that racist white folks often treated lighter skinned black folks better than their darker counterparts and that this pattern was mirrored in Black social relations” (120). Margaret Hunter states that “both whites and African-Americans recreate [this] hierarchy on a daily basis by making decisions because of these racial ideologies” (521). This issue is important because of unfair advantages given to African-Americans due to their appearance. Studies have shown a correlation between skin color and marriage chances and economic status. In the following paragraphs I will acknowledge some of the results these researchers have discovered (Hunter; Henshel; Hall; Makkar, et al; and Bond, et al).

The standards by which individuals evaluate each other varies according to their skin color/shades and hair texture. Light skin, long straight hair, and Caucasian features were seen as beautiful in the twentieth century (hooks 127; Hall 176). Biracial looking women, like Vanessa Williams, receive more value due to the appearance. Being born dark meant starting off with a “handicap” and having some disadvantages. To be a dark female meant one would have to work harder at projecting a positive image. Hooks states, “[a] female’s dark looks diminish her femininity” (129). Dark individuals are considered ugly, threatening, evil, treacherous, and bitchy (hooks 127; Hall 172-173). Darkness implicitly brings to mind negative stereotypes; the disturbing part of this phenomenon is that the Black community keeps perpetuating this bias.

The other cultural problem or tension is hair texture (straight or natural). An advantage of most interracial mixed individuals is that these individuals are more likely also to have good hair. Good hair is defined as “straight Caucasian type,” while bad hair is the “kinky African type characteristic” (Hall 178). Furthermore, each hair type usually is associated with skin color. Individuals with good hair most likely are light skinned, while individuals with bad hair are associated with dark skin.

The type of hair a woman has today is a choice. Deborah Grayson states that “choices Black women make about hairstyles or body appearance often mean the difference between acceptance or rejection by groups or individuals” (13). The main motivation behind these choices is the desire to fit into society. Mate selection also is one of the factors that influence individuals’ use of beauty products. The values that individuals place on beauty have had a direct correlation with their marriage ability as well as their economic status. Hunter found out that the popular conception of light skinned women as more desirable to marry than darker skinned women still remained true in the present (522). This phenomenon could be explained as a social exchange, which is based on perceived rewards the partner could offer within the relationship (Yancey). A traditional exchange is the male offering financial support in exchange for the female’s physical beauty (Yancey). Accordingly, when a marriage between two such persons does occur, it will require a disproportionate exchange of assets for the stigma associated with the assimilation of the darker-skinned spouse (Hall 174). An example is when a light skinned individual marries a darker skinned individual who has higher status economically; it is a trade of goods. One trades their privilege of color for wealth and security, where the others obtains status by marrying someone

visually desirable in exchange for their wealth. In another study, Thomas Cash and Selena Bond discovered that darker females of lower socioeconomic status were less likely to marry dark-skinned Black men of higher status than their lighter counterparts.

In addition, economic status is directly related to these binary oppositions. Researchers have shown that lighter skinned individuals are more likely to have more schooling, higher and more prestigious occupations and increased income (Hunter 521). If they have Caucasian features they are more likely to be accepted in affluent African-American organized clubs (Makkar and Stubbs 1547). Skin color has been shown to be a predictor of educational attainment and occupational status as well as personal wealth (Giddings 186). If one were fairer skinned he/she was most likely associated with the upper class; however, Willard Gatewood states, “that most aristocrats of color were mixed bloods does not mean that mulattos in general gain entry into the highest stratum of Black society” (10). One needed economic stability, education, and most important the right last name. Research has shown that in general, African-Americans with Caucasian attributes were more likely to live more rewarding lives.

Another suggestion to deal with the color caste hierarchy was to assimilate. Assimilation would allow all shades and all textures to become one; consequently, the idea of assimilation in the 1920’s was to just adopt the dominant culture’s ideals. This meant that Blacks would adopt the White beauty standards and re-establish their White norms (hooks 124). Warnings against this were prevalent in the 1920’s African-American newspapers. Researchers have discovered that African-Americans

were continually bombarded with articles speaking against assimilation on one page of the newspaper and an advertisement for skin bleachers on the other. In her book *Hope in a Jar*, Kathy Peiss gives examples of how prominent African-American newspapers would print articles about how black was beautiful but also have advertisements of skin whiteners on other pages. The choice was continuously left up to the consumer. Consequently, no matter if the consumer accepted or rejected the white standards of beauty, these consumers were still judged by these standards by other African-Americans.

Charles Horton Cooley would call the process of judging the “looking glass self”. W.E.B. DuBois calls this process “double consciousness”, a passive voice so one would not offend (Hall 175). The African-American is skilled in synthesizing the two worlds of White and Black. These are two ways the African-American community negotiated the reasoning for accepting the dominant culture’s ideals of beauty. Neither approach was wrong or right. Both ideas had the same reasoning but different focuses of control. In Cooley’s concept of “looking glass self” the consumer gives the neighbors, significant others, and strangers control over their image of self. In the “double consciousness,” the consumer has the control by making the choice of how to merge into the culture. Consequently, no matter which way consumers look at the ideas, the dominant culture still has the ultimate control due to the fact they set the standards that consumer's battle with in their process of identity formation.

Methodology

To find the dominant culture’s messages within the advertisements, this analysis uses an ideological approach and a semiotic approach. Using this dual

methodology allows an exploration of reasons why consumers use these products and an examination of messages within the advertisements. This section of chapter two consists of a review of literature about each approach and an explanation of the terms that are used within the analysis.

Various definitions of ideology exist in scholarly literature. Mimi White states that when beliefs are taken as natural then ideology is being perpetuated within society (165). Sonja Foss defines ideology as “a pattern or set of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, values, and interpretations of the world by which a culture or a group operates” (291). There has been much discussion about ideological criticism and cultural studies in rhetorical and media studies. Ideological criticism allows scholars to get to some of the meaning and ideals of the time in which rhetorical and media artifacts are present.

The significance of ideological criticism is that sometimes the dominant messages are taken for granted and consumed. One way to look at competing ideologies is by understanding hegemony. Foss defines hegemony as “the privileging of the ideology of one group over that of the other groups; it thus constitutes a kind of social control, a means of symbolic coercion or a form of domination of the more powerful groups over the ideologies of those with less power” (294). Charles Lewis calls hegemony “a continual process of articulation striving to frame various definitions of reality within one particular ideological formation of dominant in society” (280). White paraphrases Marxist Antonio Gramsci when he states that hegemony is a complex way in which the dominant class maintains its control over society and a predominance of a particular class or ideological interest is imposed on

the society (167). No matter how we look at a text, oppositional ideologies are still “morphed” into the text so that the dominant ideology structure stays protected. Therefore, the primary goal of using this method of analysis is to discover the dominant ideologies within the artifacts and how these ideologies have hegemony over other alternatives.

Another approach to get to the meaning and dominant ideology of the artifact is the use of semiotics. Semiotic analysis allows me to provide clarity for my arguments. Carl Botan and Francisco Soto state that semiotics is a “general theory of signs that studies the production and interpretation of meaning” (4). Ellen Seiter states “semiotics is the study of everything that can be used for communication: words, images and much more” (31). Semiotics studies signs, which are the smallest unit of meaning (Seiter 33). Charles Peirce, a philosopher, created the term “semiotics”. Peirce saw communication as an ongoing process of signification (Botan and Soto 4). Every sign, the smallest unit of meaning, is composed of a signifier. A signifier is the material form of the sign. Gillian Dyer states it is a material vehicle (118). The signified is “a mental concept or reference” (Dyer 118). These relationships are arbitrary and culturally governed. One example is the sign “dog”; this is a three-letter word wherein the signifier is the basic material make-up of a dog, something with four legs, ears and that barks--a material form. The signified could be Goofy, the dog from Mickey Mouse; each individual’s experiences and references will affect the signified. Seiter states that “a word’s meaning is derived from its difference from other words in the sign system of language” (33). The meaning of all signs is learned through repetition and collective use (Seiter 33).

There are two types of meaning, connotative and denotative. The denotative meaning “is the first order of signification: the signifier is the image itself and the signified is the idea or concept—what it is a picture of” (Seiter 39). Connotative meaning “...is a second-order signifying system that uses the first sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches an additional meaning, another signified to it” (Seiter 39). The level of connotative meaning is where the ideological meaning lies (Seiter 34).

Moreover, Stuart Hall states “every visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value, or inference, which is present as an implication or implied meaning, depending on the connotational position” (133). One example is a bathing suit as the first level signifies “summer wear” (denotation) but at the connotative level it could signify spring break, swimming, *Sports Illustrated* models or diets. At this second, connotative level is where ideological approach becomes helpful because it allows me to look at the visual sign and make different interpretations depending on the signified. The connotative level is where hegemony also occurs; these messages become part of society where they are almost denotative.

Codes is another area of semiotics that is helpful in interpreting meaning. Dyer defines a code as “a set of rules or an interpretative device known to both transmitter and receiver, which assigns a certain meaning to a certain sign” (131). There is one main code in this analysis; the code of beauty influences three other codes within this analysis. The code of beauty consists of most of the ideals expressed in chapter one of this analysis. This code in turn influences the codes of acceptability, success and romance. Another code that will be seen in this analysis is the code of prosperity. Some of the basic signs that make up these codes are

admiration of the opposite sex, clothing, accessories, and friends. These codes will be seen throughout the analysis are keys to the ideological meaning behind the messages.

Using the structuralist/semiotic approach allows me to focus on paradigmatic relations of signs (Seiter 51). A paradigm “is a group of signs so similar that they can be substituted for one another in a syntagm”; a syntagm “is the ordering of signs and is ruled governed” (Seiter 46). Roland Barthes explains that paradigms are a classification of signs and that the meaning assigned to the syntagm is derived from the absences of other signs in the paradigmatic choices (Seiter 46). Looking at the relationship of what is present and what is absent will help explain the ideological implications. The choices made about which signs to use is a conscious decision by the source to create a desired effect in the audience.

This analysis explores the rhetorical devices and ideological devices as well as the cultural implications. As Linda Scott states, “most of the interpretive work on the analysis of advertising visuals has been grounded in semiotic theory” (259). Sut Jhally, Judith Williamson, Steven Kates and Glenda Shaw-Garlock have looked at images of advertising from a social criticism perspective. These researchers as well as others in media and rhetorical studies have created a firm ground for semiotic analysis. The next section of this chapter will demonstrate how the two methodologies work together.

Trailer: A Demonstration

This section is a brief demonstration of what is explained in detail in the analysis.

This demonstration is an examination of one advertisement, while in the analysis there are descriptions of individual advertisements as well as campaigns. This one advertisement, then, is an introduction to how the analysis proceeds. The advertisement chosen is an example from my collection of advertisements during the 1920's.

The first part of the analysis describes the advertisement. This advertisement appeared in the *Richmond Planet* on June 12, 1920, and is a *Golden Brown Ointment* advertisement (8). The caption in italics states, "Your mirror will reflect a beautiful, clean, clear, soft, smooth, light, complexion if you use *Golden Brown Ointment*." This whole slogan was in bold print and is accompanied by the image of a woman's reflection and a profile. The first set of signs within the text that I will discuss is "beautiful", "clean", "clear", "soft", "smooth", and "light". Looking at these signs one could say the opposites are "ugly", "dirty", "unclear", "hard", "rough" and "dark". The ordering of the signs, or the syntag, also is creative. The first sign, "beautiful", is the desired effect and then the successive signs are characteristics of being beautiful. As discussed earlier, the ideals of beautiful are to be light, gentle, and clean; on the other hand, the characteristics of ugly would be to be dark, dirty, and rough.

These choices of signs had the capability to penetrate the fears of consumers about being accepted and achieving beauty. Further, within the text the advertisement uses the pragmatic terms that were absent in the opening caption. The advertisement states, "do not delay, but apply, *Golden Brown Ointment* to your neck, face, and arms, and in a few days your swarthy dark, muddy complexion will become

light bright, soft, smooth and clear.” The advertisement express that to have skin like this is to be beautiful. After describing the acceptable presentation of beauty, the advertisement uses a bandwagon approach. The wording within the text uses the pronouns of “we” and “our”. The advertisement uses the idea of togetherness when stating “our race”. For example, it states, “our race now have beautiful light skin” and that this is “best preparation that has ever been offered to members of our race.” The advertisement also uses the “we” to establish understanding and a sense of community. The text states, “we cannot be white, but we can be light, bright, and attractive.” The fear approach used in the text was a way to manipulate the African-Americans’ insecurities about their appearance.

The other signs, the visual images, also convey the same messages of insecurity and fear. The main image is that of a reflection from a mirror. The reflection is that of a light skinned woman whose features are Caucasian, with a poised stance. The other image is that of a dark skinned woman with a profile from the back. This image is like an over the shoulder shot where the individual’s head is slightly turned toward the camera. This darker face is almost inhuman due to the fact the profile has no face. Except for the hair, all features are indistinguishable. On the left hand corner of the reflection is a box of *Golden Brown* Ointment. In this advertisement the darker image is seen as an indistinguishable person whose only worth will come from using the product. The advice of the advertisement is to use *Golden Brown* Ointment to be desirable and beautiful. This advertisement implicitly states that the desired appearance is that of the White beauty culture and even though Blacks cannot be White they should become as close to those ideals as possible.

The dominant ideology is not explicitly stated in the bold caption; however, within the text the advertisement states what is desirable and acceptable. One could argue that by purchasing these products, individuals accept the ideology. Advertisers depend on consumers to accept these ideals and view them as natural. Mimi White calls this suppression of one group's ideologies and the dominance of someone else's ideologies hegemony (167).

The next chapter consists of more 1920's advertisement examples and the application of these methodologies. These approaches reveal the ideological makeup of the 1920's, as well as contribute to understanding of how advertisers persuaded African-American women to adopt these ideas. Also, I will explore the signs within the advertisements to show how the codes influence the meaning within the advertisements and how some of the codes change during this decade. Some of the codes expand while others disappear. The advertisements are divided into five groups. The first group consists of advertisements from 1920-1923. These advertisements are an example of the beginning of a major market and strategic campaign. This grouping of advertisements is rudimentary in their textual reading; the advertisement text gives a complete explanation on what the product is and how it works. The second grouping consists of advertisements from 1924-1925. These advertisements are not as explanatory as the earlier advertisements. These advertisements begin to deal more with the appeal of fear, and address the concepts which the consumer should fear. The third and fourth groups are during the advertising frenzy; because of the abundance of advertisements and the different strategies, 1926 and 1927 will be handled separately. These two years consist mainly

of newer strategies that entertain the consumer by telling stories or readings someone's testimony on the effectiveness of the product. The final group consists of advertisements published during 1928-1929. These advertisements present the end of the decade and the beginning of a declining consumer culture due to the depression. The exploration of each of the groups will demonstrate the particular persuasive appeals advertisers used as well as reveal the advertisers finesse in communicating their message to the consumer. As each year comes to an end the consumer becomes a little more educated on how to read the advertisement texts.

CHAPTER 3

BEAUTY IDEALS EQUAL SUCCESS

In chapter two I provided a brief example of the methodologies and how they are used in this analysis. This chapter consists of corroboration, elaboration, and explanation of other research that has been done on advertisements during the 1920's. This analysis also is unique and offers new insights because I am focusing on African-American women in Negro weeklies. Most of the research done on African-American advertisements during this time focuses on the efforts and motivations of African-American companies. There has not been an extensive study done on the White companies selling products targeting African-American female consumers. Noliwe Rooks did an extensive study on Madame C.J. Walker and briefly covered the other companies within the beauty industry. She used the White owned companies in her analysis as a comparison to the works of Madame C.J. Walker. Kathy Pesis book briefly covered this topic in one chapter. This analysis is the first attempt to look at the other side of the spectrum, the White owned companies that are usually accused as the assailant. In addition, previous research is helpful in explaining these new ideas because it provides standards, strategies, methods, and categories that other researchers like myself can elaborate.

Many scholars have used Roland Marchand's analysis of the advertising industry to examine texts. Marchand's analysis presents categories that are helpful in describing advertisement texts, and also explains how advertisers used certain

symbols within the artifacts to achieve a certain response. One illustration is his discussion about how a woman who is illustrated in front of a mirror is a “symbol of the judgmental gaze of the world outside the boudoir” (175). Another use of the image of a woman in front of a mirror is to show her vanity or to remind her that her duty of being presentable is inescapable (Marchand 176). Marchand states that “advertisers insistently remind women that they might lose the very opportunity to embark on their ‘great adventure’ of homemaker or fail to hold their treasured position as a companion unless they repeatedly won these privileges in the ongoing ‘beauty contest of life’” (176).

These ideas are usually constructed within a tableau. Tableaux are advertisements that depict individuals in such a way to suggest they are within the dominant cultural structure (Marchand 165). Marchand calls social tableaux “a slice of life” (166). The main purpose of these tableaux is to give individuals an ideal to aspire to and also to sell a product. Some may argue that tableaux reflect reality, while others argue that they are distorted images of reality used to sell merchandise. Ewen calls this form of advertisement “a historical epithet” of “modern living” (44). He states, “within a society that defined real life in terms of the monotonous insecurities of mass production, advertising attempted to create an alternative organization of life which would serve to channel man’s desires for self [and] social success...” (Ewen 48).

This analysis takes categories and critiques from previous research and applies them to a different set of advertising texts, the set of cosmetic advertisements from Negro weeklies. Marchand and Ewen are helpful because they have explored

the whole era and not a snapshot of the 1920's. Due to the abundance of advertisements collected during this time period, I divided the texts chronologically. Each grouping is divided by strategy as well as year. The first group is 1920-1923, and it uses similar strategies within the group to communicate the messages of beauty. The advertisement texts are explicit. The second group is 1924-1925. These advertisement texts feature celebrity endorsements. The third grouping is 1926, which introduces the use of testimonials, while the fourth grouping, 1927, uses sensational stories and editorial/advice formats. The final grouping is 1928-1929, which brings the advertisement text back to the beginning strategies. Some of the strategies within the groups cross over the years; however, I focused on the strategies that were predominant for that time period.

In the Beginning There Was Fear: Advertising in 1920-1923

Success during the 1920's was measured by how much one was beautiful and admired; failure was to be lonely and ugly. These were the two basic categories that hair straighteners and skin whiteners were addressing. This distinction between what is beautiful and what is ugly is seen among the advertisements during 1920-1923.

In a *Dr. Fred Palmer's* hair dressing advertisement the text describes ugly hair as "stubborn and ugly" (18 Sept 1920: 3). *Black and White* advertisements describe it as "harsh, dry, and unruly" (12 Feb 1921: 7). On the other hand, beautiful hair within this text is described as "smooth, soft, long, and silky." Another *Black and White* quinine pomade advertisement published April 2, 1921, in the *Chicago Defender* states "Look on beauty you shall always see a head crowned with long, soft,

glossy, fluffy hair” (13). Each of these advertisements also states within the text the relationship between the codes of beauty and the codes of romance, acceptability, and success through the description of hair. The same Black and White advertisement continued by stating “so much of your beauty and youthful appearance depends on the hair that every care should be given to it” (2 Apr 1921: 13). These advertisements illustrate the basic dichotomy and hierarchy, which will be seen throughout the 1920’s.

To illustrate the relationship of codes further, a 1920 advertisement published on February 28 in the *Richmond Planet* selling the brand *Black and White* hair dressing will be my example (4). A fair skinned woman with long wavy hair down her back is fixing her hair at the vanity. This image is a profile at the left-hand corner of the advertisement. Behind the image of the lady is a window simply decorated. She is wearing a flowing nightgown. The reflection from the vanity mirror is that of the female, face front. The lady in the reflection does not smile; however the woman in front of the vanity has a smile of satisfaction on her lips. The image of the reflection resembles a mother who attentively looks on as she instructs her daughter how to take care of her hair. The hair in the reflection cascades along the sides of the frame and nicely frames the image of the product. The image of the product is in a square canister, which is located in the lower right hand side of the image. Within the can is a square label diagonally divided. The upper half of the square is white, and the lower half is black. Within this square label is a circle that is divided diagonally by the same line. The upper half of this circle is black and the lower half is white. This circle is centered in the middle of the square label. Within

the circle is the brand name “Black and White”, the type of products, and descriptions of the product’s uses. Within the square at the top is the price and at the bottom is the company name and location. The print, below the image, reads “beautiful, long, soft, glossy, wavy hair” in bold. Underneath this statement in a smaller print reads “the greatest desire of every woman.” The next statement in even smaller print states that “hair is short, coarse, and wiry.” The image of this headline looks like a funnel. The print begins broad in width and narrows as the print flows down the page. In the written text the advertisers elaborate further on the correlation of beauty and acceptability. The text reads:

Most of a woman’s attractiveness depends on her hair. She may have a lovely complexion, her clothes becomingly tailored, but without pretty, soft, glossy, wavy hair; she would lack that charm so much desired. You will be more attractive, popular in social life, successful in business--you will be admired by everybody if you will care for your hair properly so as to make it grow, longer, softer, and dress it to be come your style of beauty.

This advertisement addresses the codes of beauty within the print and within the image. The fair skin and the long flowing hair down the back are both signs that define the code of beauty. This advertisement complements these ideals. There are other signs such as popular and successful that infer the codes of acceptability and codes of success. Furthermore, this advertisement also states that one can be prosperous without having beauty, romance, or acceptability. Within this particular advertisement there is a clear distinction between the codes of beauty and the codes of prosperity. Also within the advertisement the company explains how

the product is used, and how to get other products. Centered at the bottom of the page is “Free: try this new Black and White hair dressing free. Send your name and address for a sample literature and a copy of the ‘Wheel of Fortune’.” The address to receive the product and the company’s name and location are presented at the bottom of the advertisement.

The visual codes as well as the textual codes all lead to beauty. The advertisement not only implied the correlation of success and acceptability with beauty but also explicitly stated it within the text. Ewen discusses how such advertisements convey a sense of paranoia and how advertisers used this to sell their products (48). Advertisers during this time period were using the fears of African-American women. The consumers’ attempts to achieve the dominant culture’s beauty ideals acquiesce in the advertisers making money. Because of the color-caste hierarchy, African-American women were perceived acceptable and marriageable according to their skin tone and hair texture. These advertisements were persuading African-American female consumers to emulate the ideals of the White male company owners and advertising executives. Individuals who had power constructed the images presented in these advertisements.

The *Hi-Ja* Company also followed the same formulaic strategies as the Black and White advertisement for hair straighteners. The *Hi-Ja* advertisement, however, has images of fairly beautiful women with extremely long hair representing their product. Published in the *Richmond Planet* on January 21, 1922, this *Hi-Ja* advertisement begins with a rhetorical question asking “What makes a Woman Beautiful,” and on the left side of this statement is an image of a beautiful woman

with long flowing hair and Euro-centric features (2). The woman also has a smile on her face, which reveals her straight white teeth. The head is tilted to the side, and the long hair lays down on the right shoulder. On the bottom left hand side of the image is a canister similar to that in the “Black and White” advertisements. The product image is smaller than the Black and White canister and has the *Hi-Ja* label pasted on it.

Within the text the advertisement reinforces the stereotype of what a woman’s role is. Earlier in this chapter I quoted Marchand’s explanation about how advertisements stressed women’s duties. The *Hi-Ja* advertisement reinforces the duty that a woman should remain presentable at all times. The text reads “it is every woman’s duty to be beautiful. She owes it to herself to gain the things that beauty holds for her love, admiration, happiness.” In this statement the text not only re-establishes the role of females as decorative but also states that if consumers use the product they will also receive the other codes. If you use this product and get beautiful hair then you will get happiness also. The sign of “hair” is used within the text and establishes again the relationship with beauty. The advertisement states “There is nothing that makes a woman more beautiful than a beautiful head of hair. Hair is a woman’s crowning glory.” One difference in this advertisement from the Black and White advertisement is the use of comparison. This advertisement states the signs “short”, “stubborn”, “kinky”, and “wiry” to show the hierarchy of hair texture between what is considered beautiful at the top of the ladder from that which is considered repulsive at the bottom. The Black and White advertisement omitted these opposites. At the top of the hierarchy of hair texture are the signs “soft”,

“straight” and “beautiful”; these are the desired responses of using the *Hi-Ja* quinine hair dressing.

This advertisement is similar to the “Black and White” advertisement because it explains what the product is used for, how to obtain the product, and the cost. This advertisement within the text also has an “Agent Wanted” statement and a special offer. Unlike the “Black and White” advertisement, this advertisement depends more on the written text than the image to communicate its message. The codes of beauty are still present in this advertisement; also, the codes of acceptability, romance and success can be inferred from the text. However, the code of prosperity is not mentioned in this advertisement. I discovered that in these early advertisements the selling of hair straighteners was not linked with the prosperity message, and no relationship between this message and beauty is shown. The ordering of most of the hair straightener advertisements in this grouping was the code of beauty, which led to the code of acceptability. If one achieved these two, then one will more likely achieve romance and success.

The sign of hair definitely fits in the code of beauty, but not just any hair qualifies. During 1920-1923, the African-American community was presented with advertisements that perpetuated the dominant culture’s rules through the codes presented in these advertisements. This grouping presented images of women with fair skin, straight long hair, and Euro-centric features. Within the images and the textual information the codes of beauty and the ideological implications of this code are seen in this first grouping of advertisements. In addition, hair straighteners were

not the only products guilty of perpetuating these referents. Advertisements for skin whiteners also drew upon these codes.

The amount of skin whitener advertisements was greater than the hair straightener advertisements. The two main companies that advertised whiteners during the early part of the 1920's were *Dr. Fred Palmer's* and Black and White. The Black and White advertisements during this period used a sentence of testimonials from customers to open the advertisements, and also featured catchy rhetorical questions. Examples of these questions are "how to be beautiful"(8 Jan 1921: 10) and "are you satisfied with your complexion" (3 Jan 1920: 5). Other Black and White advertisements used adjectives to gain the readers' attention. There were groups such as "bright, healthy, and beautiful" (12 Feb 1921: 2) and "smooth as that of a baby" (10 Jan 1920: 5). Each advertisement still had the image of the product and fair skinned females with straight wavy hair, small lips, and narrow noses. After the testimonials and description of the product each advertisement explained how the product works.

The basic form of *Dr. Fred Palmer's* advertisements varies more than the Black and White advertisements. The first major campaign in 1920 was a basic introduction of the different products that were under the *Dr. Fred Palmer's* brand name. The products ranged from soap to face powder to skin whiteners. The basic features of the advertisement artifact were the images of each product with the price framing the advertisement, the brand and company name, a brief explanation about each product, and the logo. An explanation of a product would be *Dr. Fred*

Palmer's skin whitener soap is “a cleansing and medicinal soap. Bathe the face, arms and neck each night to keep the skin fair and beautiful” (24 Jan 1920: 5).

At the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 the advertisement format shifted. The new advertisements dealt more with how to use the skin whitening product correctly instead of selling a variety of products. An advertisement published on February 12, 1921, in the *Chicago Defender* is a great example of the explanation or advice advertisement strategy used during this period (2). The image begins with a fair skinned woman with long fingers applying something (the product) to her face. The image of this woman also has basic Euro-centric features. Her hair is bobbed and straight with a slight curl. The image is placed in the upper right hand corner of the advertisement. Opposite the image in the left-hand corner in bold print the advertisement states “Make your skin bright, healthy and beautiful,” and underneath in smaller font and in italics is the statement “It is the aspiration of all women of culture and intelligence to attain beauty.” Next is the text beneath the image and the bold print. The text explains how to use the *Dr. Fred Palmer's* skin whitener preparations correctly, and how to achieve the fair beautiful skin implied in the image and the slogan. The first paragraph of the explanation describes what the product actually is. The second two paragraphs explain how to obtain the product and a statement of guarantee. The next five paragraphs explain the steps to correctly apply the product. The last two paragraphs promote other products under the brand name, and also remind customers not to accept any imitations. The first step in the explanation states “First, steam the face, neck, hands, and arms thoroughly with a turkish towel as hot as the skin can bear. Repeat this three or four times. Then rub

Dr. Fred Palmer's skin whitener soap gently into the skin with a soft wash rag, using hot water. Rub this lather gently, but thoroughly into the skin, and then rise off thoroughly with hot water.” Each step goes into detail about how to effectively use the product, and how to correctly apply the product. At the bottom of the page is the logo of a fair skinned lady wearing a bonnet, the company name, company location, and the product name.

By 1922 the advertisements used more appeals and more prominently presented relationships between beauty, acceptability and romance. Some of examples of these appeals are “You want to be respected, admired and loved by everybody, see that you have a beautiful complexion” (11 Feb 1922: 17). Another advertisement states “you owe it to yourself, and your friends to make yourself as attractive as possible at all times,” (11 Mar 1922: 16) and finally, “it makes others respect, admire and love you” (18 Feb 1922: 11). The signs within these sentences express the relationship between beauty, acceptability, and romance. In addition, these advertisements also reiterate the obligation of a woman to look presentable and beautiful. The opposite of this image is loneliness, unhappiness, and an absence of love. The advertisement implies that if the consumer does not meet these standards then they will be without affection and attention.

This first grouping of early advertisements illustrates the ideals or codes of beauty that will be seen throughout the decade. These codes consist of signs that are fair skinned, long wavy hair, and Euro-centric features. Every advertisement that contained an image of a woman met these guidelines. So, without even reading the written text the message was implied. Another finding is that most of the early

advertisements admitted that one sign of beauty could not function without the other. Great hair was really needed as well as a light complexion to be beautiful and accepted. The codes of beauty are related to the codes of acceptability and the codes of romance. Without beauty one cannot achieve the other two codes. Again, the codes of prosperity and success are not mentioned in this grouping of advertisements; however, they do become prominent within the latter half of 1920's. These early advertisements were the starting point for the major trends seen in African-American newspapers. The products of straighteners and skin whiteners only became more prominent, and the advertisements became more abundant.

“You”: Re-emphasizing Responsibility in 1924 and 1925

The advertising industry used many different strategies to attract the African-American consumer. One strategy that was popular was fear appeal. This type of appeal was used to make consumers feel insecure about the way they looked. The new phenomenon of first impressions was due to the new fast life in which people made impressions instantaneously. This new interaction affected the way people viewed one another. The male gaze was only the beginning for the female's insecurity; the way her peers looked upon her also affected her self-worth. Blame was now a tactic advertisers used to sell their product. The accusation of neglect on the consumers' part brought about guilt which advertisers solved through the use of cosmetic goods. The tactic was to sell the product as a solution to be guilt free and happy.

In the 1924 *Golden Brown* advertisement campaign I was able to locate approximately seven different advertisements. Each advertisement within the campaign spotlighted a different product under the *Golden Brown* name. The theme throughout all the advertisements was female duty or female responsibility. The advertisements stressed “your” and “you”, and placed the blame on the consumer if she did not achieve the desired outcome. These advertisements displayed such headings as “Your skin—smooth as satin” (6 Sept 1924: 3); “Your choice—you have the choice of being attractive--beautiful--being invited to social affairs—parties--dances--remember the attractive girl is always popular” (13 Sept 1924: 3); “Your hair—pretty hair is women’s greatest charm—her crowning glory! Smooth, Lustrous hair makes any man look his best” (11 Oct 1924: 3); and “Your face—she is a pretty girl. He is a handsome man” (18 Oct 1924: 3). These advertisements in the middle of the decade placed the emphasis more on the individual. The advertisements suggest that it is your fault if you do not achieve your desires and no one else is to blame for your failures.

Another *Golden Brown* advertisement that associated beauty with popularity and acceptance was published September 27, 1924 in the *Pittsburgh Courier* (3). The advertisement begins with a picture of a famous beauty encircled at the top of the text. The image framed in the circle is a woman with straight, shoulder length hair and fair skin. The name of this woman is Jeanette Slougher. On both sides of Ms. Slougher’s picture are rectangular drawings. One is of a wealthy woman in a fur with shopping bags, and the other is of a casually but fashionably dressed woman. The woman in both of these depictions are the same. The headline

in this advertisement is “your personality” and underneath is a set of rhetorical questions. The first question asks “are you popular,” then “are you invited to social events that really count?” Next, the advertisement makes a correlation between personality and the product. The text reads “if you are probably attractive—you have personality. Now add to this a clean youthful complexion and silky hair with the soft wave and you will be the leader of your set.” After establishing this relationship between the codes the advertisement continues by explaining briefly the correct way to use *Golden Brown* hairdressing. This explanation is different from the previous advertisements because it is approximately three to four sentences long instead of five to six paragraphs. Furthermore, the advertisement ends by introducing the endorsement of the “Shuffle Along” Company, and Ms Jeanette Slougher. At the end of the advertisement the fictional character Madame Mamie Hightower signs the advertisement. This advertisement concludes with the company name, image of the products, a list of other *Golden Brown* products, cost, and ways to obtain the product. Each advertisement within the campaign had the same basic structure; the main difference was the main product it was selling.

The advertisements in the *Golden Brown* campaign relied heavily on a woman’s duty to be beautiful. This same notion was also addressed in the advertisements during 1920-1923; however, this set of advertisements during 1924-1925 used celebrity appeal to address what Roland Marchand has called “democracy of goods.” Marchand states that advertisements “implicitly [define] democracy in terms of equal access to consumer’s products and then by depicting the everyday function of the ‘democracy’ with regard to one product at a time” (218). He calls this

idea a vision of a society that has incontestable equality (218). Another function of these parables is to help lower class individuals feel as if they can be part of the elite class by purchasing the same products as the preferred or upper class (Marchand 220-21). The parable of first impression brought about the idea of immediate success or failure (Marchand 208). As stated earlier, the culture changed and the “external appearance [became] the best index of underlying character” (Marchand 210). This *Golden Brown* campaign used both parables to sell their product, while at the same time reminding women of their responsibility in society.

The same idea of democracy of goods also is understood in the *Hi-Ja* advertisements. The basic *Hi-Ja* advertisement still used the text of fear and the hierarchy of good and bad hair used during 1920-1923; however, the newer advertisements used the testimonial strategy. On June 7, 1924, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* this *Hi-Ja* advertisement was published with the heading “Dazzling Vaudeville Star tells Beauty Secrets” (11). This advertisement used a photo image that was at least half the size of the advertising text. This advertisement is one of the first with this image-to-text ratio. The written text within the advertisement reads “[...] you have admired her long, slightly wavy, beautiful hair. You have also envied her clear, light, vibrantly healthy skin and her wonderful color.” These are the same signs that the advertisements during the early part of the 1920’s depended on to sell their products. The color hierarchy was all that was needed to communicate fear, but the advertisements in the middle of the decade expanded a little further. The advertisement actually used a quote from a star to help endorse the product; the text reads, “this vaudeville star, Esther Bigeou’s answer is ‘I use and recommend *Hi-Ja*

Beauty Preparations.’” To the left of this little statement is a mail-in coupon for a special trial offer. Below this offer is an opportunity to be a *Hi-Ja* beauty agent. Finally, the advertisement makes a connection between Ms. Bigeou’s success and the product; the text states, “these products which have brought beauty to Esther Bigeou will also bring beauty to you. Decide right now that you too will be beautiful and everywhere admired.”

This advertisement, like the *Golden Brown* advertisements, used the idea of “democracy of goods”. The advertisements imply that consumers can have the same beauty as the famous star if they use the product; to show their confidence is using the endorsement to appeal to the consumer but the idea of choice. It is your choice if you want to look like a star or not; it is all up to the consumer to decide. Just like the *Golden Brown* advertisements the choice is the consumer’s and the blame also remains with the consumer if she does not succeed. During 1924, Esther Bigeou was the spokesmodel for the *Hi-Ja* Chemical Company; she had approximately five different advertisements presenting her testimonial about the fabulous *Hi-Ja* products.

The codes used in these hair advertisements were similar to the codes used in the first group; however, these advertisements introduced the codes of success and prosperity. The *Hi-Ja* advertisements used signs such as “star,” “nationally famous”, and “universally acclaimed” to establish the success of Ms. Bigeou and by doing so established a relationship between the products and her success. This advertisement implies that if consumers use their product they too can achieve success and prosperity. In addition, these *Hi-Ja* advertisements explain that it was also her beauty

that made her so admirable and popular. This relationship touches on the codes of acceptability as well as romance. However, the codes of beauty are the same. Also there is an omission of the “ugly” hair signs within the text.

The signs of beauty that were used in both advertisement campaigns are similar to each other and both campaigns established similar codes. There really was not a difference in how they describe beauty among the advertisements. Moreover, the main differences between the two campaigns were the structure of the advertisement, the strategies use to appeal to the consumer, and the wording. The *Hi-Ja* advertisements depended on celebrities’ testimony while the *Golden Brown* advertisements depended only on the image. Also, the advertisements varied according to how they addressed the codes. Some were explicitly stated while others were implicit. Moreover, the main difference between these advertisements and the advertisements used in the first group are the strategies used, the codes addressed, and the format of the advertisement.

The bleaching or whitening advertisements, unlike the hair straighteners, do not introduce the codes of success or prosperity during 1924-1925. Both brands examined in this analysis, *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* and *Nadinola*, still use the strategy that it is a woman’s duty to be presentable and include warnings about the repercussions if a woman does not follow the rules. The *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* skin whitener preparation advertisement from the *Pittsburgh Courier* asks the question “isn’t she beautiful” then continues by stating “how many times have you heard that remark about others and wished it were for you” (5 July 1924: 11). The advertisement offers the product as the remedy. *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* preparations will clear up your skin and make it

more beautiful. Other advertisements within the Dr. Fred's Palmer's campaign use the same approach with the rhetorical question. The advertisements within this campaign read "do you want your skin to be soft, clear and lighter" (12 July 1924: 9); "how to make your skin soft and lighter" (7 June 1924: 4); and finally, "now you can have a soft clear lighter skin" (5 July 1924: 11). The image in this last advertisement also is similar to the images used in other advertisements within the campaign. The image is of a very fair skinned, fashionable belle. In this advertisement the woman has a bobbed haircut and is wearing a hat. In addition, in all the advertisements these women also have an elongated body shape. This campaign introduces the exaggerated body look by making the images longer and slimmer than naturally possible. Marchand describes this image as the "Fisher Body girl" which was created by illustrator McClelland Barclay (179). Marchand describes this heroine as:

...slender, youthful and sophisticated. Her finely etched facial features formed a slight aloof smile, suggesting demure self-confidence in her obvious social prestige and her understated sexual allure. Attired elegantly, but not exotically, she stood tall and angular, her fingers and toes tapering to sharp points. In her role as a model of proper feminine look she gained credit for attracting the attention of women as much as men (81).

One of the advertisements within the campaign has a woman sitting down at a vanity presumably looking in the mirror. Another image within the campaign is the back profile of a female being admired by young fashionably dressed man in a tuxedo looking on from behind a shrub as a harmless admirer.

The similarities in these *Dr. Fred Palmer's* advertisements are that they have three basic paragraphs within the text each selling a different product. The first paragraph addresses the beauty component of skin color. One advertisement reads, "For your Skin" and this paragraph continues by explaining how the *Dr. Fred Palmer's* skin ointment can make "your skin lighter and more charming" (5 July 1924: 11). The second paragraph deals with complexion and how the whitener soap can make one's skin healthy, smooth, and without shine. This paragraph also suggests the use of the face powder for a finishing touch. The third paragraph states that by using this hair dressing product regularly anyone can have long, silky and luxuriant hair. This paragraph even uses the testimonial approach by stating "hundreds use it regularly and will have no other" (5 July 1924: 11). Underneath these three paragraphs are the price, the places to obtain the product, and a direct mail form that asks for name and address.

These *Dr. Fred Palmer's* advertisements were similarly structured; the arrangement might be different or the image and heading might vary but the wording within the three paragraphs is exactly the same. The advertisements used the fear approach primarily to sell the product. The rhetorical questions addressed the duty or need that a female is supposed to fulfill and how by not doing so, she is not only letting herself down but she will not be admired by others either.

The code of beauty definitely is seen within the images. These elegant, sophisticated drawings feature women with fair skin, and narrow lips that are slightly painted, and narrow noses with elongated faces and necks. Each woman depicted also has straight shining hair that is cut in a fashionable bob or neatly pinned up in a

French twist. These images alone address display the codes of beauty. Also, one of the advertisements within the campaign addresses the code of romance. This can be inferred from the image of the man looking on as the female flirtatiously looks away. The code of acceptability also is seen within the images as well as the text, and the idea of others looking on also is emphasized. The code of beauty is still the strongest. These signs within the text are “soft”, “clear” and “lighter”. As one reads the advertisement these three signs are substituted by the signs “healthy”, “free from roughness”, “satiny”, “without shine”, and “free from horrid oily shine.” The choice to use these signs could be justified as an elaboration. The advertisers wanted to express further the ideas of the results about the products. These signs and syntags are used to describe what beautiful skin is. The signs that were within the print were more detailed than the three signs used in the headline. Also the omission of certain signs could be effective because it allows the consumer to focus on the positive and not on the negative. These *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* advertisements addressed the code of beauty by describing what it is to have beautiful skin and hair and implicitly implied the codes of romance and acceptability.

The *Nadinola* bleaching cream advertisement which was published September 19, 1925, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* addresses the same codes as the *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* advertisements (3). The advertisement has a young light skinned lady at the sink washing her neck with a wash cloth. She is modestly dressed in nightwear. Above the image the advertisement states “lighten your skin”; on the side of the image of the young lady in italics is the statement that “*Nadinola* is used at bedtime, after bathing the face. All night its powerful bleaching properties are at work. Full

directions for use in each box.” Underneath the image the advertisement states “*Nadinola* will do it.”

The first paragraph within the text then establishes the relationships between the codes and the product by stating “light, fair skin! How men admire it. How women long for it. And now easy it is to have. Just the nightly application of *Nadinola*—the super bleaching cream.” In this paragraph the text establishes that the code of beauty or beautiful skin is light and fair. Again, this message has been seen during 1920-1923 advertisements. The paragraph within the advertisement elaborates further by implying these ideals will bring about acceptability and romance. One of the main rules within the code of romance is that the relationship is heterosexual. By having men admiring women the assumption is that the possibility for romance can be justified; also, by stating women long for men to admire them, the advertisement implies that women desire the qualities that men find acceptable, thus leading to social acceptance and/or romance. In addition, this advertisement does not address the idea of prosperity or success. The second paragraph of this advertisement explains how the product works and explains what it actually does to the face. The text reads, “*Nadinola* not only lightens the skin, it clears away all eruptions, refines the coarsened texture, absorbs the oiliness, leaves skin soft, smooth and fair.” These are the same signs used in the *Dr. Fred Palmer’s* advertisements. Finally, underneath this paragraph the logo, the price, the address and location of the company, and places to obtain the product are listed. At the very bottom of the page are images of different products under the same brand name, the Egyptian Cream and the Nadine Face Powder.

The advertisements within this period from 1924-1925 expanded and continued to use multiple styles and strategies from 1920-1923. The advertisements within this time period did not use tableaux as much as the previous group of advertisements. These advertisements dealt more with rhetorical questions and emotive language to establish fear. These advertisements also emphasized even more the duty of the consumer to be beautiful. It is up to “you”, it is “your” responsibility. The skin whitening advertisements basically addressed the same codes as the advertisements in 1920-1923. However, the hair straightening advertisements expanded and elaborated. During this period the hair straightening advertisements associated their products with success and prosperity through the use of celebrities. The *Hi-Ja* Company set up a whole campaign using this strategy. These advertisements addressed the idea that it is not all right to just be beautiful, consumers now needed to be accepted and successful; they implied that if these people can do it so can anyone. The universal idea seen in the hair straightening advertisements is that anyone can look like a star without paying much money. Finally, 1924-1925 was a time for progress in the advertisement industry when it came to hair products. Success and prosperity was now the new message. The skin whitener advertisements just became milder in the language used to describe the negative but continued to use the same strategies seen earlier in the decade.

Can We Get A Testimony: A Strategic Change in 1926

The 1926 advertisements represent not only a remarkable time of change in the advertisement texts but also in products. Smaller companies started exposing their products more by publishing their advertisements more frequently in the papers

and also by changing the presentation of the text. The message of the text would be the same but the image and wording would be different. There was more variety during this time period.

The first impression and the fear appeal diminished during this transition. Testimonials and celebrity appeals increased and became the basic format and standard for most of the major companies selling straighteners and whiteners. These advertisement testimonials range from the woman in the country to a world-renowned actress. Marchand states that in addition to using the tableaux to reflect society advertisements, advertisers also used testimonial strategies (165). These new endorsers were not fictional characters but everyday consumers as well as celebrities (Marchand 165). Marchand states that “testimonials for a product carried the least credibility when delivered by the producer or his sales representative. They were more effective when delivered by an apparently disinterested party, particularly a celebrity” (112). These testimonial advertisements were seen in the 1920’s; however, they became extremely popular in 1926. Most of the advertisements analyzed during this period used some form of testimonial.

The hair companies, *Golden Brown*, *Nelson’s*, and *Pluko* all use the same format. The *Pluko* advertisement published May 29, 1926 in the *Pittsburgh Courier* features Josephine Baker, the Broadway star (2). A *Golden Brown* advertisement introduces screen star Edna Young published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on September 11, 1926 (5). The Nelson advertisements only feature regular everyday consumers.

The *Pluko* advertisement that features Ms. Baker was selling the new and improved *Pluko* hair dressing. At the bottom of this text is a picture of this product

and the price. Also, included at the bottom are the company name, location, and information on how to obtain the product. Next to the image of the product is the quote “always the finest hairdressing, now the easiest to use.” At the top of the advertisement text is a picture of Josephine Baker accompanied in small print with the statement that reads “Miss Josephine Baker is the dainty comedienne of the ‘in Barnville’ Company, the most pretentious and costly musical comedy ever produced by the people of our group. This company is now making a world tour under the personal direction of the famous Broadway producer, Mr. B.C. Whitney.” By making such a claim about Ms. Baker’s success, the product assumes some of her notoriety and prosperity. One could infer that if Josephine Baker endorses such a product, I too can look like that or maybe even become successful. The advertisement quotes Ms. Baker as saying that she owes her long straight glossy hair to this product. The paragraphs after this testimony explain the popularity of the product and the components which make the product work successfully. The *Golden Brown* advertisement that features Ms. Edna Young presents a large image of the product and on the right side encircled is a smaller picture of Ms. Young. Underneath the photo is the quote “they all want to copy my style of hair dress, but they can’t make it stay unless they use *Golden Brown* like I do.” Above the two images in a box reads “Harsh Hair—responds to fashion’s dictates when this wonderful dressing is used.” These two statements imply that by using the product one’s hair will stay in place and look fashionable. Each advertisement within this campaign is formatted in a similar fashion. Some of the headlines in the campaign were “Amazing Results!—follow the use of the famous beauty soap” (20 Nov 1926: 4); “Fair Face--made fairer by this

bewitching face powder” (23 Oct 1926: 4); and “Pimples! Blotches!—disappear after a few day’s use of this wonderful ointment” (9 Oct 1926: 3). There were also different stars used to endorse the product. Some of them were Emma Jackson, Josephine Holmes, and Lina Gray. These women were involved in the “Shuffle Along” Company or were screen stars.

Within the text each campaign gave information on how the fictional character Madame Mamie Hightower discovered the product. The *Golden Brown* hair dressing advertisement reads that “Madame Hightower is devoting her life to the glorification of our own type of beauty. She spent years in the development of this amazing hair dressing, especially for our group. It is a hair grower, dandruff remover, and dressing all combined in one—highly perfumed and without doubt the finest hair preparation ever discovered” (11 Sept 1926: 5). The language within these advertisements has changed from that of 1924-1925. The hair dressing advertisement no longer addresses the idea of straightening. One of the reasons for the change could be the political opposition against false advertisement. Many critics of these advertisements within the beauty industry argued that these products were only grease, not straighteners. Within the text of this advertisement the types and occupations of their consumers are listed. This list addresses Marchand’s idea of democracy of goods. The text states that “among them are men and women old and young in every walk of life. Mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, bankers, lawyers, college professors, doctors, merchants-everybody.” Finally the advertisement states that anyone can obtain the product at their local druggist and even in foreign countries

like Hawaii, France, and Australia. At the bottom of the page there is an address to write Madame Hightower with beauty questions.

Each advertisement within this campaign addresses the idea of prosperity with the use of the celebrity testimonies. Also, this campaign defines the idea of success by being or becoming one of the many people who purchase the product. The image of this product is that it is used worldwide, and because of this special recognition, you too could receive prosperity.

The *Nelson's* advertisement published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on September 18, 1926 takes a simpler stance than the *Pluko* and *Golden Brown* companies (10). First, the written message within the text is simply stated. The advertisement reads, “Those who take pride in their personal appearance should care for their hair.” This is the opening line that explicitly states the message about one’s responsibility, and how to go about achieving that responsibility. It is a woman’s duty to look presentable at all times. Also, the advertisement uses the idea of tradition and history. By doing this they hope to establish the sense of expertise and experience in the beauty industry. The text states that “it is the oldest established hair dressing on the market—the original, and it has led them all because it brings such sure and quick results.” The next paragraphs also are similar to previous advertisements described so far; there is a brief explanation of how to use the product and a list of locations to obtain the product. At the top of the advertisement text are four pictures of the same woman with different poses. Each picture has different statements, which are supposedly from consumers’ letters. Miss Anna Adams from Zellood, Florida states “Before using it I could not catch hold of my hair, but now I can fix it up nicely.”

Another quote is from Miss Annie Beasley from Springfield, Ohio, who states that “my hair has been curly, and it is now straight and combs easily.” Besides quotations there were also many different headlines used in the *Nelson’s* campaign to gain consumers’ attention: “Many pretty girls owe their beauty to Nelson hair dressing” (18 Sept 1926: 10); “Now she goes everywhere-her hair is long and beautiful” (14 Aug 1926: 5); and “Make your hair beautiful”(28 Aug 1926: 5). These are just a few examples presented in the campaign using the format described above. The main persuasive appeal used besides duty was the fear of not being beautiful or admired. The codes of acceptability and romance in relation to the code of beauty were the rules that governed this campaign.

Moreover, the main code within this advertisement, like all the others, is still beauty. The use of signs establishes again the criteria of long, straight, and silky. The Nelson campaign continues to reinforce these ideals by using signs such as “smooth,” “straight,” and “glossy” to define what beautiful hair is.

Another hair campaign during 1926 was the *Pluko* campaign. This campaign was rather large; I have collected 13 different advertisements, each featuring a different beauty product or image. The women who were endorsing these products were socialites or celebrities like Josephine Baker. A February 13, 1926 advertisement in the *Pittsburgh Courier* reads “few of the thousands of admirers and friends of our Miss Lillian Russell, realize how much of her charm is due to her gloriously beautiful, long, straight, glossy, black hair” (3). In another advertisement Miss Gussie Williams of the “Running Wild” Company states that “I just love to use *Pluko* hair dressing. It has such a delightful fragrance and makes my hair so soft and

easy to arrange in any manner I wish” (27 Mar 1926: 4). These two demonstrations use the same signs that were discussed in the *Nelson's* advertisements. The main difference is that *Pluko* utilizes the code of prosperity; this is seen in the titles and photos within the advertisement. One of the *Pluko* advertisements states it is “the aristocrat of hair dressing” (27 Feb 1926: 3) which implies success and status. Within the *Pluko* campaign are images of these straight haired females on the advertisement page. One aspect to note is that the complexions of the females do vary. Some of the women photographed in these advertisements are of a darker skin tone than previously.

These hair campaigns used the codes of prosperity and success the same way the advertisements in 1924-1925 used the codes of acceptability. The three companies adapted their text to fit the communication climate of the time without losing their message. In other words, advertisers repackaged their message to adapt the language to the consumers. The increase of success of African-American women in the entertainment industry influenced the strategies advertisers used. Furthermore, the changes were not just in the format but in the frequency with which the advertisements appeared. The advertisements became more frequent and the advertisement texts drew upon a wider assortment of persuasive strategies.

The skin whiteners, on the other hand, still took a more subtle approach. The *Dr. Fred Palmer's* advertisement published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on April 3, 1926 is the same format as a Dear Abby column or a letter to the editor (5). The headline states “oh how much good it did my face,” and then Miss Beatrice Blakes of Advance, Missouri, says further, “I have tried many things, but there is none can beat

Dr. Fred Palmer's skin whitener Preparations.” Within the letter the advertiser’s voice is seen. The advertisement explains how everyone uses the product “from Maine to California and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf.” This advertisement also uses the term “magic” to describe the effects of the product. The text reads that “*Dr. Fred Palmer's* skin whitener ointment will transform it like magic into a lovely, soft, velvety skin—the blotches and tan marks vanish, pimples clear up, the clearer and lighter and the excessive oil which causes shine disappear.” The next few paragraphs within this letter format promote other *Dr. Fred Palmer's* products. In the advertisement’s conclusion, the text leaves the consumers with the price and location to obtain the product.

This advertisement is skillfully designed because if consumers were not paying attention this advertisement would look like another personal letter to the editor. Unlike the hair advertisements the main code represented in this advertisement is still beauty. This text defines the ideals of ugly as “dark”, “muddy”, or “oily”, while the ideals of beauty are “lovely”, “soft”, and “velvety skin”. These ideals or signs have been the same across the decade. The language is milder and this is pragmatically explainable. Substituting emotive language that has a pleasant reference makes the product more appealing to the audience. The strategy is to be happy during this time, not to instill fear. One reason is because it was an enthymeme. The advertisers did not have to express the negative because the African-American female consumer was able to provide inference for herself. This was also seen in the hair straightening advertisements during this year. The other *Dr. Fred Palmer's*

advertisements within this campaign use the same format, but different letters from consumers.

The *Golden Brown* advertisement published August 28, 1926 in the *Pittsburgh Courier* has a picture of the fictitious character Madame Mamie Hightower (13). This advertisement is also extremely basic; the headline states “*Golden Brown* peroxide vanishing cream.” Underneath this heading reads “rich, creamy, velvety...a soothing skin food that tones up the skin tissue and breathes into the pores a new spirit of entrancing beauty.” The advertisement is exactly the same format as the bleaching advertisements seen in 1920-1923. The advertisement depends on the adjectives or signs to imply the standards of beauty.

The two bleaching advertisements seen in this grouping still depend on former techniques to appeal to the audience. Both brands use a dichotomy of ugly/beautiful to sell their product; however, they communicate these ideas in a more pleasant tone of voice. The codes of acceptability, success and prosperity are still not present in these advertisements.

The advertisements during 1926 were product bound. By this time the consumers knew the brand name and the products were familiar within the African-American community. So, the advertisers concentrated more on selling particular products. As stated earlier, the skin whiteners were similar to the advertisements presented earlier in the decade, while the hair straightener advertisements expanded. The strategies used allowed consumers to infer prosperity and success. The use of celebrities and socialites gave the products more clout than what was seen previously in the advertisements. Also, the codes of beauty were the same across the decade;

long straight, silky hair is still the ideal. The use of testimonials gave the consumers more of a personal relationship with the product and the use of fear was minimized in this relationship. This strategy will again change.

Fact or Fiction: The Sensationalized Stories of 1927

As 1927 comes into being so does the use of the editorial style of advertising. These stories create a setting in which the consumers can visualize themselves participating in the event. Marchand called these tableaux. The idea of the tableaux was seen earlier but this is the first time the visual is accompanied by a sensationalized story. Jackson Lears states that this style of advertisement closely resembles the fiction and advice literature in the national magazines (149). The Mamie Hightower character in the *Golden Brown* advertisements is a great example. This fictitious character was created to give advice to consumers. On the other hand, companies began sponsoring personal experts to give advice to their consumers (Marchand 355). The use of this strategy became a routine in 1927 to persuade consumers to purchase products, and to expand this a little further companies began creating fictional characters and fictional biographical information for their characters. This is seen in the use of Madame Hightower who is a fictional African-American character representing a white company. Finally, as the new strategies are applied, the first impression parable is also revisited within these texts.

The first campaign during 1927 I will discuss is the *Nelson's* campaign. The *Nelson's* hair dressing campaign consisted of the similar format throughout the advertisements; however, some of the drawings were replaced with actual photographs. Also within this campaign there was the introduction of a free book

titled *How to Have Beautiful Hair*. Headlines during this time period went back to the fear appeal and first impression parable. Some of the headlines read “No longer ashamed of her hair” (1 Jan 1927: 2); “Pretty hair makes pretty girls” (1 Jan 1927: 8); and “Smart appearance depends on the Hair” (23 Apr 1927: 6). Each advertisement either had the image of the product or the image of the new book within the text. Each advertisement also addressed the idea of how over 1000 people use their product. The ideals associated with being beautiful are also the same.

The signs for beautiful hair are “smooth,” “straight,” “glossy,” “long,” “lustrous,” “soft,” and “silky.” These signs were interchangeable between advertisements. Another way to express this idea is by saying that the signs were pragmatically arranged depending on the advertisement text. To address the codes of acceptance or romance, the advertisement text would read similarly to this example published January 1, 1927, in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, “how she dreaded to go out where other girls could see her. How she disliked to meet ‘new’ men. Her hair shamed her” (2). Other advertisements address the idea of duty as well as acceptability. The advertisement published January 5, 1927, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* states that “beautiful hair is not a gift—it is a prize awarded to those who care enough for their personal appearance to give their hair the attention it needs” (2). The advertisement published April 23, 1927 in the *Pittsburgh Courier* establishes the relationship between success and beauty. This particular advertisement reads, “No girl can be smart with unlovely hair” (6). These codes are illustrated throughout this campaign; however, the codes vary among the advertising texts.

The advertisement published June 25, 1927, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* contains a photograph of Miss Ethel Moses, a well-known actress of New York (4). Next to her picture is the image of the book *How to Have Beautiful Hair* and the free offer for obtaining the book. Below the photograph is the headline “If you care how you look—you will consider this book priceless!” The text reads that “the prettiest girl’s greatest claim to beauty is her hair.” The advertisement continues to imply that the right arrangement or hairstyle is now necessary to be considered beautiful. The advertisement explains how members who created the product take pride in their appearance and have received remarkable results. This advertisement continues by promoting other products under the *Nelson’s* brand name. On the bottom right side of the written text is an image of the product and at the bottom is the brand name and location. To the far right next to the brand name is a photograph of a display. Above the photo the statement reads “look for this attractive display in your druggist’s window or on his counter. Let it remind you to get a package of *Nelson’s* hair dressing so your hair will become more attractive.”

This advertisement, like others in the campaign, places the blame again on the consumer for failing. This idea of blame was seen in the 1924-1925 advertisements with the “you” and “yours.” Also, the campaign expands the idea of beauty further. The code of beauty is no longer straight long shiny hair, but now includes new and smart arrangements. One’s success is dependent on following these new rules.

On the other hand, the *Hi-Ja* advertisement campaign used more of the sensationalized style than the Nelson campaign. These *Hi-Ja* advertisements consist

of stories about overcoming one's limitations. One story published July 16, 1927, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* was titled "Men Flock to her Side Like Moths to the Candle," and explains how a woman was laughed at and made fun of because of her hair (3). The text states "her beauty was spoiled by short, wiry hair. Behind her back they laughed and made unkind remarks about her inch long, tangled locks. Men avoided her—she had no admirers." Finally, with the help of a friend and *Hi-Ja* she got instantaneous happiness. The text reads "almost overnight the neglected girl became the most sought after girl in town. Men who had passed her by without a second glance now fought for her favor." This response also illustrates the relationship of the product to the codes of romance and acceptability. This advertisement also defines ugly hair as "nappy", "ugly locks", and "wiry", while beautiful hair is "soft" and "wavy." The signs used to describe ugly hair are almost identical to the signs used during 1920-1923; however, the signs used to describe beautiful hair have changed. Now long hair was no longer a criterion to be beautiful. One reason for this change can be attributed to the change in popular culture's taste. The most popular hairstyle during this period was the "bob." Still this style was not an absolute criterion; in the January 15, 1927, advertisement published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* the print states that "when your hair is long and straight you're popular—when it's short and stubborn you're neglected" (3). Another advertisement published January 8, 1927, in the *Pittsburgh Courier* states that "I know how men neglect them and even pity them because of their hair—you see I used to have short hair myself" (2). These two advertisements still associate long hair with beauty and romance. Also the January 8, 1927, advertisement describes beautiful hair as "long, soft, and silky" (2). Within the

advertisement there also is a special introductory offer for a calendar free with any purchase.

In addition, each *Hi-Ja* advertisement has a photograph representing the situation in the story. One photograph is of a woman with long wiry hair that is extremely frizzy (8 Jan 1927: 2). She is looking in the mirror at her reflection in a panic. Another photograph is of a fair skinned; slender, fashionably dressed damsel in an embrace with a tall, well-dressed male with his arms around her. Looking on is a plump, dark female with wiry hair that is short and all over the place (15 Jan 1927: 3). The idea in these images is to demonstrate the codes of success, acceptability, romance, and beauty. All of these different codes are found within each *Hi-Ja* advertisement in this campaign.

The advertisements within this period focus more on the acceptability, romance and success codes than on prosperity. The only message of prosperity is inferred through the photographs; nowhere in the text is the message conveyed. The signs used are not as mild as the signs used to describe ugly in 1926. Some of these signs go back to 1920-1923, especially the sign “nappy.” The advertisement structure also is adapting to the popular culture. These advertisements are more entertaining.

Another change was happening within the advertising text of skin whiteners, however. As stated earlier, these advertisements had not changed very much across the decade. Now in 1927, skin whiteners started using sensationalized stories. One of the major stories that was conveyed during this time was the biography of Madame Mamie Hightower. In the May 1, 1926 *Pittsburgh Courier* there was a whole

advertisement about the fame and fortune of Madame Hightower. The advertisement opens with

Yesterday a pigtailed youngster skipping gaily, down the street. Next a dashing debutante who never forgot her less fortunate friends. Now securely gracing the throne of the Queen of Beauty Culture. Life holds no stronger tale than this thrilling narrative of the woman with the head of purest gold.. (8)

The advertisement has stories about her early days, her acts of kindness, and then how she came up with her products. The use of showing Madame Hightower as a member of the community goes back to the idea of ‘democracy of goods’. This successful woman has charitably spent her life to help her race achieve acceptability, especially the female consumer. In addition, the use of this fictional character gives the advertisers as well as the company a persona or a shield to hide behind. This is a White company trying to persuade African-American consumers that they are looking out for their best interest. What better way to do that but by creating an African-American female persona; consumers would believe the message communicated from on of their own rather than an individual who was once seen as their oppressor.

One advertisement was called “Hightower Hints to Beauty.” This is a beauty advice column that is created and written by Madame Hightower. This advertisement was also exclusively published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* (11 June 1927: 2). The title of the personal letter written by Madame Hightower was titled “The Girl Who Refused to be a Wallflower.” This advertisement is about an unpopular girl who refuses to be unpopular. The story line begins with the young girl who was not in style. The advertisement informs her to “at night again cleanse the

face, neck, and hands—this time applying cold cream that nourishes the skin tissues. So as you sleep such a cream is developing for you a light, bright, attractive complexion.” Within the text Madame Hightower urges that consumers use *Golden Brown* preparations. The text explains that “each preparation serves a special purpose, having helped thousands enhance their beauty—whether that help be straight glossy hair or a light bright complexion or lips and cheeks that glow with vibrant health, etc.” This ending statement within the advertisement was supposed to be helpful; however, it was still promoting products under the *Golden Brown* name. This advertisement is supposed to be giving only advice; instead it is giving purchasing advice also. This additional advice was seen in most of the skin whitener advertisements.

The *Golden Brown* advertisements take two different strategies: one is the advice-editorial style, the other more of a tableau/story format. Even though the strategies are different the messages within these advertisements are the same. “Clear,” “light,” “bright” skin is the ideal complexion. Also, by exclusively advertising in the *Pittsburgh Courier* the product gains some recognition as being an elite item. One of the major stories that was conveyed during this time was the biography of Madame Mamie Hightower, which was exclusively printed in the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

No matter what format they used, the codes of beauty are the same, and within these advertisements there is a description of the codes of acceptability and romance above that can be inferred. One of the *Golden Brown* texts reads “from a dear friend I learned the thrilling story of a once unpopular girl who refused to decorate the walls

while her friends mingled gaily with their escorts” (11 June 1927: 3). The character was lonely and refused to be lonely any more; she was going to change to find an escort like her friends. Her actions illustrated a need for companionship. *Golden Brown* presents itself as the remedy to the problem. There are no prices but a coupon to receive a free sample of *Golden Brown* preparations.

These two advertisement campaigns demonstrate the use of both editorial and sensationalized strategies during 1927. These new strategies allow the consumer to have a personal relationship with the creator of the product which they are purchasing. This interaction allows the consumer to feel like a participant in the beautification of their community. The advertisers were very strategic in subtly promoting their products while telling the consumers a story.

The new sensationalized storytelling and/or the editorial style of advertisements was the prominent strategy of 1927. This could have been because of the entertainment industry during the time. Movies, Broadway, nightclubs, and tabloids were all ways society found to entertain themselves, so the advertisement pages took heed and mimicked the entertaining styles to sell their products. The codes were still the same, and all the rules applied; however, these codes were hidden among the texts. As stated before, advertisers used enthymemes rather than candidly expressing what one should do or fear. Also, these new advertisements went back to the use of emotive language to create fear and anger within the consumer. These words help establish the enthymeme. The molding of the strategies together occurred during 1927 to make a persuasive appeal. These new advertisements became abundant and more appealing to the mood of the popular culture.

Return to the Basics: Advertising During 1928-1929

During 1928-1929 the advertisements began to revert back to the images presented during 1920-1923. The advertisements during the 1920's seemed to have made a complete circle. The advertisements during 1928-1929 were showcasing each product in the same advertisement text, instead of using individual advertisements as in 1924-1925. In addition, the images became more simplistic and rudimentary.

An example of this shift can be seen in the *Dr. Fred Palmer's* advertisement published June 2, 1928, in the *Richmond Planet* (6). This new advertisement is a little flashier than the advertisements described in 1921 but they both use the same strategy and format. The headline begins with "The Most Marvelous Preparation Known—To Quickly Clear and Lighten Dark Complexion." The opening paragraph uses the same language seen in the 1926 advertisement texts for *Dr. Fred Palmer's* Skin Whitener. The text reads, "No matter how dark, muddy or pimply your complexion is *Dr. Fred Palmer's* marvelous Skin Whitener Ointment will make it supremely lighter, clearer, and velvety soft in a remarkably short time." Within this advertisement there are other beauty items represented. There are *Dr. Fred Palmer's* hair dressing, face powder, soap and hair gloss. Each item comes with an explanation about how the products work. The Pet Hair Gloss is like a gel that holds the hair in place. The product text states they are, "pure and harmless, do not discolor or injure the hair or scalp and guarantee to give satisfaction." Also under each description is the price. Unlike the sensationalized advertisements that entertain, this advertisement informs. There was also an introduction of a new product, HID, the new stainless deodorant. In the advertisement there is a coupon for this product.

The advertisement also points to the abundance of chain stores; the advertisement states that “*Dr. Fred Palmer’s* Beauty Preparations are sold by all Leading Drug Stores and Toilet Goods counters serving race people.” In other words, these are stores that do not serve the white consumer.

As this advertisement demonstrates, there was a circular process during the 1920’s. The basic advertisement goes back to the standard of describing the product, explaining how it works, where to get it, and how much it costs. Also, the use of one advertisement to sell all the products under the brand name has returned. There was again a simplistic arrangement and presentation of advertisements. Moreover, the frequency of advertisements began to decrease.

Summation: Messages of Beauty Communicated Through Straighteners and Bleachers

These five groupings were arranged to show the patterns within the advertisement industry during the 1920’s. The Negro weeklies also presented other hair straighteners and skin bleacher advertisements, but I was concerned with advertisements that presented campaigns and had an adequate frequency of appearance. Most of these advertisements appeared more than once in these weeklies, and also some were presented across different weeklies. In addition, White advertisers created most of the advertisements presented, and Whites owned the companies. The dominant culture had a major impact on the creation of these messages and ideals.

Due to the ownership, one can justify that this was the reason for the signs used within the advertisements. The terms such as “our people” and “our group”

could be the advertisers' attempt to make a connection with the consumer. This could be one of the reasons for *Golden Brown's* creation of Madame Mamie Hightower.

No matter how much information is unknown one can infer that these companies did have an impact on the ideals of beauty because of the economic information that is available. There is information about companies' gross profits and some rough estimates on how much money individuals spent on cosmetics. Secondly, the amount of political attention focused on these campaigns and against these companies also justifies the claim that these companies and the messages they communicated through their advertisements influenced the African-American community.

These advertisements consistently reiterate the same beauty ideals present within the dominant culture. The reasons behind this process can be found in the companies, advertisers, consumers of all races, communities, and the dominant culture. Consequently, each group has something to gain from this perpetuation. Indirectly the motivations for purchasing the products in this analysis are argued from the evidence found in the advertising text messages. In my consideration of motivation there are two sides, enhancing or emulation. Some argue that the African-American female consumers were ambivalent to this emulation by arguing they were just enhancing their African-American attributes. Consequently, who decides when enhancing ends and emulation begins?

CHAPTER FOUR

ASSAILANT OR VICTIM: WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE CONTINUED PERPETUATION OF THESE BEAUTY IDEALS?

This thesis is an exploration of the relationship between history and the beauty ideals of African-American beauty standards. By looking at rhetorical advertisements as rhetorical artifacts, I attempted to examine two questions: (1) Why were African American women motivated to purchase hair straighteners and skin whiteners? and (2) were advertisements of skin whiteners and hair straighteners communicating the dominant culture's beauty ideals? The exploration of 250 advertisements published in Negro weeklies from 1920-1929 in terms of their ideology and semiotic dimensions yielded evidence about the particular persuasive appeals used and images presented to answer these two questions. The information obtained from this analysis was not conclusive enough for me to answer the question about motivation directly. To get a better understanding of what actually motivated these individuals, I would have to do another study examining the African-American consumers. The only answers this thesis will address will be about inferences from the advertisements themselves. Therefore, this analysis can only address the implications presented in the advertisements and infer from these implications conclusions about motivation.

As stated in chapter 1, the 1920's was a time of social change. There was an increase in the middle class, women began working, and the first impression became

the measure of a person's character. In the African-American community individuals began to prosper economically, which assisted in the construction of their identity as consumers. In addition to this increase of wealth, appearance became an important dimension of everyday life. During this time there were the dialectical tensions between Afro-centric and Euro-centric beauty ideals which African-American women found them accommodating. The only solution to this dilemma between the conflicting beauty ideals was purchasing beauty products such as skin whiteners and hair straighteners. The only way to fit the dominant culture's beauty ideals was through conformity.

Themes: The Messages of Conformity

The beauty ideals presented in the 1920's advertising has an overarching theme of conformity that consisted of codes of beauty, codes of success, codes of acceptability, and codes of romance. These beauty ideals of conformity were seen throughout the 1920's advertisements as analyzed in this study. The message of conformity was communicated through such advertisement styles as editorial, tableaux, the parable of democracy of goods, and the parable of first impressions. The three underlying themes that were seen throughout most of the advertisements were the code of romance, code of acceptability, and code of success. In addition, the way to achieve these three themes was through conformity. African-American female consumers were persuaded to accept the codes of beauty set up by the dominant culture to achieve these three themes. Therefore, the codes of beauty are an integral part of the three themes. The codes of prosperity were seldom mentioned. This could be because the typical audience for the code of prosperity message was

men. Advertisers were not concerned about communicating this message of prosperity because a woman's job was to be beautiful. Prosperity was not important to this target audience and really didn't have a strong correlation with the codes of beauty.

The dominant message about beauty revealed throughout this analysis was that fair skin and straight hair were the ideal. To have these things meant one could obtain success, romance, and acceptability. One example where this was seen is in the *Golden Brown* advertisement described in chapter 2 (12 June 1920: 8). This advertisement states that one cannot be White but one can get as close to it as is possible by using the product. These messages communicated ideals that presumed African-American women had the desire to be White to obtain the code of romance as well as the code of success. In other words, it does not matter how rich one is, if one is ugly by dominant culture beauty ideals one will not achieve these three themes. An example of all these ideas at work is the *Golden Brown*'s "Wallflower" advertisement (11 June 1927: 3). The woman within this advertisement was a socialite who was not accepted by her peers because of her looks.

Moreover, another major theme within the codes and the idea of conformity is that of a woman's duty. Most of the advertisements in this analysis express explicitly and implicitly that it was a woman's duty to remain presentable at all times. This theme was extremely prevalent in the skin whitener advertisements. The advertisements communicated the message that it was a woman's job to remain appealing to the eye and if she did not have these attributes naturally, then she needed to purchase products that would help her achieve this look.

Neutral Playing Field: The Help of Methodologies

In this thesis the messages communicated within the advertisements were deciphered by the use of semiotics and ideological criticism. In addition, the use of semiotics allowed me to break down the components within these advertising texts, and then allowed me the flexibility to arrange the signs syntagmatically and paradigmatically. This process sorts the signs into a hierarchical manner of importance. Also, the absence of signs within the advertisements demonstrates the lack of importance these signs have in this systematic process. Further, the omission of certain signs could be grounds to argue that the signs are hegemonic. This process occurs when something becomes accepted by the consumer that it is so natural they no longer think about it. This is one of the arguments that I make about some of the dominant culture's beauty ideals; these ideals began to be so widely accepted by members of the African-American community that it no longer was important for the advertisers to address these signs explicitly.

These methodologies allowed me to see the process of hegemony as it happened in the 1920's. By exploring the signs within the advertisement texts, I was able to see how the ideological framework changed throughout the decade. Signs were no longer mentioned because consumers now knew how to fill in the enthymeme. On occasion in some of the tableaux and editorials these signs were re-introduced to increase the persuasive effect. An example of this is the *Hi-Ja* advertisement during 1927 when the advertisement describes the hair texture as "nappy" (16 July 1927: 3).

The use of these methodologies helped the themes to emerge from the advertising texts and brought a new understanding of the advertising texts' persuasive appeals. Some of the critics of the 1920's did not agree with the fear appeals. They would read the text and get offended by the implications and standards they were setting; in particular, the language used within some of the advertising critic offended them. As a researcher, I feel the ideological approach gives the text a neutral field to ground a critique upon, and that is why I used this method to counterbalance the other critics.

Controversy, Critics and Contemporary Times

Besides commentary about these themes and messages, there was a political debate within the African-American community about beauty ideals. This debate was seen during the 1920's and is still happening during contemporary times. During the 1920's the major debate among critics was over the advertisement of hair straighteners and skin whiteners. The critics during this time period were predominately middle class, educated African-Americans, and their commentary usually was addressing the lower class individuals in the African-American community. Kathy Peiss discusses this controversy in her chapter "Shades of Differences." She states that "Black critics excoriated an exploitative cosmetic industry, gullible consumers, and a white-dominated society that imposed its beauty standards on all" (Peiss 203). Also, many of the critics were educated middle class individuals who argued that cleanliness was all members of their community needed; bleaching of one's skin color and straightening one's hair was denying one's African-American heritage (Peiss 207). On the other side of this political debate were the

editors of the African-American weeklies. These were the individuals who published these advertisements and received economic gain from them. Toiletries and cosmetics made up 30% to 40% of the advertisements published (Peiss 210). So to handle the controversy and conflicting ideals, commentators and consumers began to denounce White companies and distinguished them from the race-conscious Black ones (Peiss 211). The companies behind the advertisements used in this analysis were some who were under great attack by these critics, such as *Dr. Fred Palmer's* and *Nadinola*.

As we enter the twenty-first century the same beauty ideals are under debate. No longer are critics targeting the products but the images the products portray. This analysis is another piece of evidence that contributes to an understanding of how the beauty ideals constructed in the 1920's within the African-American community still affect African-American females today. The book *Body and Soul* states,

Black is beautiful. That goes for our dark and lovely skin our full thick hair, and our many-shades of brown eyes. But too many of us don't believe this. Our vision has been crowded with images of white women with alabaster complexions, long, straight, hair, aquatic blue eyes and even, white teeth. We look into our mirrors, scan our dusky skin, feel the mass of lamb's wool nesting a top our scalp, check large, gap toothed smiles, and with disillusionment in our plain brown eyes wonder where we went wrong.

However, thanks to the Black Power movement and more recently, the celebration of Afrocentricity, we are able to recognize and honor our own beauty—to a point that is . Old habits die hard. (Villarosa 15)

Consequently, the predominant image of the light skinned female with Euro-centric features is still prevalent in the media today like in the 1920's. African-American scholars and leaders are still debating about the beauty ideals held within the African-American community. The only difference between the 1920's and now is that there are more commentators and consumers and they are louder than their predecessors.

Women today who straighten their hair, who get a weave, or who wear a wig are criticized for their desire to be white. Visual images on television and film screens also are criticized for presenting the same ideals as the advertisements in the 1920's. In addition, most modern stars who are leading ladies and get the part as a romantic lead are slender, fair skinned, and have long hair; the exception to this is comedies. Whoopi Goldberg is a great example of this; even when she is a leading lady and a romantic interest it is still in a comedic setting. Also, most of the images in contemporary media are of women who are biracial, such as Halle Berry, Mariah Carrey and Vanessa Williams.

Closer to home, I was brought up to believe that I was fortunate because of my skin color. My mother would tell me stories about how I was a pale baby and could pass for white. Now I have a color that is lighter than both my parents. Being the inquisitive child, I asked why my color was different. My mother explained that my grandfather's family had a fair skin tone. My grandmother even told me that his family really didn't approve of her because she was darker than they were. So even in the 1940's these standards still were in place.

Today, in the dating world, individuals among the African-American community pick acquaintances because of their skin tone. Many question whether it is a preference or a form of manipulation. I feel the images of beauty required by women in the 1920's influence these beauty preferences that affect African-American women today, especially individuals' ideals of what a beautiful woman should look like. The ideals of what is beautiful among the African-American community will always be debated: One side will argue that the images are too ethnocentric, while other will argue that images are of a "wannabe". So, is the African-American female in the middle at an advantage or is she the forgotten woman? The best way to clarify this is to quote an old saying, which states "If you're white, you're all right. If you are brown, stick around. But if you're black, get back" (Villarosa 16). So the brown individual could be accepted by her community or rejected, but the Black individual was totally rejected by her community because of her color.

Advertisements are just another medium to communicate the message that light skin, long straight hair, thin lips and small physique are what attracts people. Even during the 1950-60's these beauty ideals were still a problem and now after the Civil Rights movement there is still controversy over hair straighteners and skin bleachers. Recently in an African-American magazine I saw an advertisement for a bleacher; however, the advertisement specifies that it was just to be used on small discolorations, pimples and discrepancies in the skin (Palmer 30). This type of advertisement promises some of the same things revealed in the 1920's advertisements in this analysis. The advertisement states "the most beautiful

balancing act in skin care,” and “Fades out spots—evens skintone—nourishes and softens” (Palmer 30).

More research needs to be done on the negative implications previous media forms had for the African-American community and how the African-American community still perpetuates some of those ideals. The advertising industry does perpetuate these standards of beauty but identifying the victim and the assailant of this perpetuation is difficult because the roles are ambiguous. Depending on the perspective one takes, the assailant could be both the dominant culture and the African-American community. There is so much ambiguity within the advertisements that scholars had to make justifications for particular companies. Many scholars have written articles and books justifying why Madame C. Walker, an African-American cosmetic entrepreneur, was successful, for example. Critics have said she made her millions by perpetuating the white standards, while others argue she was just enhancing the African-American attributes of her customers. Personally, I think analysis and scholarly works need to concentrate on what the advertisement texts or companies contribute to our understanding of the African-American community, good or bad, instead of finding faults in what has been done. Individuals need to progress and accept all hues and styles within the African-American community. As a whole, society needs to stop looking for justification by blaming others for the ideals they hold.

Again, straightening and bleaching advertisements in the 1920's represent an ambiguous set of relationships such that no one can really know who is at fault for the perpetuation of these beauty ideals within the African-American community. In

addition, if the white companies were out to get the African-American consumer, why did African-American celebrities endorse these products? There is a difference between loyalty and money. Also, if these celebrities endorsed these products for the money, they gave up their power to set the beauty ideals. The dominant culture again has the ideological control, but should they be blamed for the African-Americans' capitalist ambitions? The African-American female consumer might have had limitations in her purchasing power; however, the purchase of hair straighteners and skin whiteners was a choice she made independently.

Finally, further research needs to be done on advertisements during the 1920's. These studies might include research strategies such as a comparative study dealing with cosmetic advertisements from both the African-American culture and the dominant cultures. A semiotic analysis also can be done on the representations of African-American women compared to those of Caucasian women. Also, a cultural study needs to be done to examine how the media images within the African-American community differ according to demographics, specifically, ages, education, and economic status among the consumers. I believe that more studies done on this topic and at different levels will help clear up some of the discrepancies in the interpretations.

This analysis is just a small step in this debate on finding one's identity and ideals. I feel one's ideals make up one's identity, and until these questions are answered African-American women will still be in flux. Hopefully, the themes uncovered in this analysis will bring some light to the search. These themes are important because they are proscribed by the dominant culture. This study yields

insight into how the dominant culture felt about the African-American woman at that time. In conclusion, by looking at the themes and the way African-American women were presented in these advertisements I feel the images of these Euro-centric African-American women are still seen today. No, there has not been a real change in beauty ideals: A great modern day example is the slogan "Clear, Beautiful, Covergirl."

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