Too light, too dark or just right? A qualitative study of how colorism has changed in cosmetics ads with the body positivity movement.

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Abstract

Media marketing communications are one of the main ways companies keep their customers informed of their products or activities. They have been proven to be successful at reaching a company's target group, this is also true for cosmetics companies. Generally speaking, these communications feature hegemonically beautiful people who meet Eurocentric beauty standards. However, for many minority groups, particularly Black communities, media representation is a point of contention. As their looks do not typically align with Eurocentric beauty standards, they receive less media representation. When they are represented, it is typically done from a limiting or inaccurate point of view. Similar arguments can be made for representation within cosmetics

This has been the norm for many years, but the body positivity movement is working to change this and promote more natural and realistic standards of beauty. Many people look to the media as a source of representation. Proper representation is important as many people, particularly adolescents, rely on the media to help construct their views and opinions regarding body image. Having narrow views of beauty or poor representation contributes to these groups experiencing low self-esteem or body image issues. Furthermore, without good representation, many minority groups harbor feelings of inferiority or even nonexistence.

With that said, the researcher chose to investigate how the introduction of the body positivity movement impacted colorism in media marketing communications featuring Black female models. Therefore, this research project will focus on identifying what constitutes colorism, how it affects Black representation and body positivity, and how it presents itself in print marketing communications.

In terms of approach, online databases were used to filter through and retrieve the advertisements. In total, 100 ads were collected and analyzed. In terms of processing the content, a visual content analysis was conducted to code the images, while a thematic analysis

was used for the codes. Additionally, the thematic analysis was used to identify the relevant themes and patterns within the data.

Moreover, the ads from cosmetics companies were analyzed. Specifically, pictorial print advertisements were used for this study. The results from the analysis indicated that the body positivity movement has shifted the presence of colorism within these marketing communications. Additionally, the data yielded three major themes: skin tone, facial features, and hair type. Within each theme, there was evidence that showcased the diminished effect of Eurocentrism, and increasing effects of Afrocentrism.

The findings of this study revealed that though colorism was evident in the marketing communications, its presence and prominence have been significantly diminished. This is due to a significantly higher level of Afrocentrism present than what was deemed the standard based on theory and literature. Additionally, these findings indicated that the body positivity movement made an impact on colorism within the marketing communications. This is attributed to the fact that many communications opted to embrace a more natural or Afrocentric look through the visibility of dark skin, full lips, and short kinky hair.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction

For many Black people, media representation and diversity are quite important. Frequently this representation is tainted by the notion of appealing to European beauty standards via skin tone bias and colorism. The media has an extensive history of misrepresenting several ethnic groups, including Black women (Alm et al., 2021). This is particularly accurate in relation to the beauty industry, specifically cosmetics companies. Cosmetics ads are a vital part of the industry, as it is the most common means for consumers to stay in touch with a brand's activities (Sifferlin, 2015). Additionally, they are also one of the main ways by which society continues to perpetuate the notion of narrow, Eurocentric beauty standards (Antioco et al., 2012).

Conventionally, White models are frequently featured in the media. Many companies have been called out for this, and have even refuted these claims (Mitchell et al., 2022). Some companies responded to the claims by showcasing their dedication to diversity by including models of color in the campaigns. However, this attempt at diversity is typically done in an exclusionary manner (Alm et al., 2021). It has been proven that when Black models are featured in media marketing communications, they typically select those with light skin, thinner noses, and looser hair textures (Mitchell, 2020). The brands rarely ever include models with dark skin, wider noses, and kinkier hair in their campaigns (Awad et al., 2014). Though diversity is present by including models of color, it loses its true meaning. This display of diversity is rooted in colorism as the companies actively exclude women with less Eurocentric features and more Afrocentric features. Over the years, these actions have contributed to the continued reinforcement of the narrow societal beauty standards.

With society's expanding access to resources, media continues to have a prevalent impact (Pounders, 2018). With the pervasive nature of media and concepts such as cultivation theory and encoding/decoding, accurate representation is important (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Cultivation theory deals with the lasting effects that audiences may experience after consuming media (Potter, 2014). Encoding and decoding theory are involved with the reception and perception of media products (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). With that said, accurate representation is of utmost importance for adolescents as they use media to help form thoughts, views, and

opinions (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Social movements like the body positivity movement, have been working to challenge this narrative. It challenges society's unrealistic beauty standards and promotes embracing one's natural or realistic appearance (Nittle, 2021). Additionally, it is geared towards all aspects of the human body but has become increasingly popular with weight-related conversations. Very few academics have focused on its impact on the representation of people of color, specifically in relation to the representation of skin tones and physical features. Therefore, this project focused on investigating this aspect of the movement.

1.1. Research Focus

Media is a very pervasive form of communication. Many companies, including cosmetics companies, use it to their advantage to market or promote products. They often feature models whose beauty aligns with societal standards, and exclude those who do not (Alm et al., 2021). They frequently feature white models who meet Eurocentric beauty standards. However, models with more Afrocentric features are rarely featured. Currently, the body positivity movement is working to challenge this notion by promoting natural beauty. With that said the purpose of this research project was to investigate how colorism in media marketing communications, specifically pictorial print advertisements, has been impacted by the introduction of the body positivity movement. More specifically, this research project observed how the representation of Black women's skin tones has changed. Due to the wave of body positivity that society is currently experiencing, diversity has become a popular concept (Leboeuf, 2019). Many companies and individuals have embraced the movement and worked to adhere to its teachings (Leboeuf, 2019). However, many companies have chosen not to embrace the movement and continue to promote narrow and unrealistic beauty standards. Many individuals have fought and are continuing to fight against archaic and exclusionary societal norms, such as limited representations in ads (Nittle, 2021). With that said, the body positivity movement has been geared towards promoting self-love through embracing one's natural and authentic beauty, which is quite contrary to what is typically displayed in the media. The media has a long-standing history of colorism and depicting limited types of beauty.

This research project is going to investigate the matter. Several companies including Dove and Proctor and Gamble have been working to push the body positivity agenda through self-acceptance and self-love. However, the researcher was interested in observing what the overall impact is on cosmetics marketing communications.

With that said, in order to observe the changes, the research has been centered around media marketing communications for cosmetics companies. As outlined in Chelysheva & Mikhaleva (2022) and Sama (2019), media and its products are one of the most common ways in which audiences consume information. Moreover, media marketing communications are the main methods companies use to communicate with their target audience. From the audience's point of view, this is the main way that they stay up to date with the brand, and receive information (Sama, 2019). These thoughts in mind, it has led the researcher to the formal research question:

How has the body positivity movement impacted colorism in media marketing communications?

1.2 Academic Relevance

From an academic frame of reference, this research is relevant as representation is a very impactful concept (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). In terms of media and representation, Gerbner's cultivation theory and Hall's encoding and decoding theory are applicable. African Americans and women are among the groups that are significantly impacted by the effects of these theories (Mosharafa, 2015). Cultivation theory states the lasting effects of concepts represented in the media will determine the way in which the audiences choose to construct said concepts in the real world (Adams-Bass, et al., 2014). Moreover, Hall's theory involves the intended messaging encoded in the products, and how they are decoded by the consumer (Gürkan & Serttaş,2023). In other words, what the audience sees represented as being beautiful in these ads, will also affect what they deem as beautiful in their everyday lives.

1.3 Societal Relevance

Socially speaking, this research may serve as a directional indicator of where the body positivity movement is headed, and how much progress it has made. Identifying colorism and using more accurate representations of beauty may reverse negative effects, and promote women to celebrate their natural beauty (Dove, 2021). They are the demographic of the population who are most vulnerable to body-positive messaging, as it is geared towards them (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Additionally, this research is also relevant to younger people. As previously outlined, they rely on the media to help form their opinions and views. Therefore, if they only see a narrow set of beauty standards represented in the media, they most probably will have a narrow scope of what they deem as beautiful (Potter, 2014). On this note, many young girls of color receive comments and remarks perpetuating internalized racism based on dominant beauty ideologies (Dove, 2021). Moreover, the results of this study may serve as a stepping stone towards eradicating the stigma regarding colorism, and help society to live gracefully without the pressure of attaining near-impossible beauty standards (Dove, 2021). Therefore, it is important to bring awareness to this issue. Furthermore, the body positivity movement is also geared toward improving people's mental health (Lazuka et al., 2020). It works to combat poor body image, which leads to depression, low self-esteem, and even eating disorders (Pounders, 2018). The movement works to break the toxic cycle of adhering to unrealistic beauty standards showcased in the media (Cherry, 2020). It works to normalize and increase the visibility of natural bodies in the media, which may improve the effects of cultivation theory on the audience. Ideally, the results of this study can serve as a stepping stone for future studies.

1.4 Structure

This study has been broken down into five chapters. Each chapter is responsible for thoroughly tackling and exploring different aspects of the study. This initial chapter is geared towards familiarizing the reader with the study through a brief outline. The subsequent chapter consists of the theoretical framework. It serves as a detailed exploration of the main research concepts. It dives into the deep-rooted nature of colorism and how it presents itself in the

media. The framework also discusses the history of the body positivity movement and its importance to Black communities. Moreover, the research also uses this chapter to discuss Black representation. As representation is important, Cultivation theory and Encoding/Decoding theory will also be discussed due to their relationship to the concept.

The third chapter of this report is dedicated to covering the relevant research methods. During this chapter, the researcher will discuss methodology through research design, sampling methods, validity, and reliability. The researcher will also discuss data collection and analysis via the use of visual content analysis and thematic analysis. Furthermore, the operationalization will define colorism and cosmetics ads as they are the large and abstract concepts within this project. Overall, this chapter will serve as a justification for the selected research methods and design.

Next, Chapter 4 will shed light on the results and findings of the research through the analyses that were conducted. It will guide the reader through the results that the researcher obtained in the data collection process. The reader will be immersed in the data analysis, and observe the connections linked to the theoretical framework. Additionally, they will also be able to observe any deviations that may occur.

Finally, the 5th chapter has been reserved for answering the research question and concluding the project. The reader will be guided through a detailed conclusion of the research question. The researcher will take the time to thoroughly discuss the findings and the insights associated with the results. The information will be interpreted and linked to the relevant theory. This chapter will also cover the limitation of the study addition and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

Racial discrimination has been a prominent issue in the United States for many decades (Hunter, 2007; Landor et al., 2013). Members from communities of color have been denied access to opportunities and resources due to this bias. Additionally, It has kept these minority communities at a steady disadvantage in the labor market, housing market, and education sector (Hunter, 2007). Colorism is a very common form of racial discrimination. Unlike racism, colorism is based on skin complexion and not necessarily on race (Landor et al., 2013). In other words, this concept is primarily based on how a person looks. Colorism may be defined as a form of bias rooted in receiving privilege or disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin tone (Hunter, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2022). It measures how well one's physical features align with Eurocentric beauty standards (Mitchell et al., 2022). The features include but are not limited to skin tone, hair texture, and facial structure (Dove, 2021).

2.1 Colorism in society

Racial discrimination has been a prominent issue in the United States for many decades (Hunter, 2007; Landor et al., 2013). Members from communities of color have been denied access to opportunities and resources due to this bias. Additionally, It has kept these minority communities at a steady disadvantage in the labor market, housing market, and education sector (Hunter, 2007). Colorism is a very common form of racial discrimination. Unlike racism, colorism is based on skin complexion and not necessarily on race (Landor et al., 2013). In other words, this concept is primarily based on how a person looks. Colorism may be defined as a form of bias rooted in receiving privilege or disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin tone (Hunter, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2022). It measures how well one's physical features aligns with Eurocentric beauty standards (Mitchell et al., 2022). The features include, but are not limited to skin tone, hair texture, and facial structure (Dove, 2021).

2.1.1. Texturism

With that said, hair is a major point of contention within Black communities (Baird, 2021; Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). As outlined, colorism is a form of discrimination based on appearance and physical features, however, there is also a form of discrimination specific to hair. This discriminatory act is referred to as texturism and may be defined as the notion of certain hair types being superior to others. Straight hair or loosely curled hair types are frequently seen as the desirable or superior hair types, also known as "good hair" (Smith, 2022). These textures align less with Afrocentrism and more with Eurocentrism. The kinky and undesired textures are typically referred to as "bad hair", and are in full alignment with Afrocentrism (Smith, 2022). Over the years, many Black women have opted to chemically relax their naturally kinky hair or wear straight hairstyles. Black women used these styles as a means of ascribing to conventional and dominant Eurocentric beauty standards (Thompson, 2009). It is frequently seen as a way to maintain a more socially acceptable appearance and stray away from the stigma associated with natural hair and Afrocentrism (Thompson, 2009). In terms of stigma, long straight hair is associated with femininity, while shorter hair is frequently associated with masculinity (Smith, 2022). Due to the silky straight nature of European hair, it hangs, which allows the length to be easily displayed. However, this is not the case with Afrocentric hair. Due to the kinky coily texture of Black hair, it shrinks and typically appears to be short. For many Black women, these stigmas and associations have a negative impact on their self-esteem and self-identity (Thompson, 2009).

2.1.2. Discrimination knows no bounds

Furthermore, colorism can take many forms. It can be discreet and covert, or overt and blatantly shameless (Landor et al., 2013). Hunter (2013) discussed two levels that racial discrimination typically occurs on. The first level consists of race, which involves discrimination on the basis of race regardless of one's physical appearance. Moreover, the second level of discrimination consists of colorism, which is based on skin tone and phenotype. Phenotype refers to the physically observable expression of one's genetic composition (Wojczynski et al.,

2008). In essence, it refers to the physical bodily features that a person has based on their genetics. With the second level of discrimination, the intensity of discrimination is determined by the darkness of one's skin tone (Hunter, 2013). Both levels of discrimination have a common denominator. They can be linked to the concept of institutional racism, as it involves policies, ideologies, systems, or procedures to exclude or penalize people of color based on their race or looks (Hardeman et al., 2018). Similarly to Hunter (2013), Hall (2017) also shares similar sentiments regarding colorism and the levels of discrimination. She explained that Black people with darker skin tones are subjected to secondary marginalization. First, they face discrimination based on their race (being black), which relates to the first level of racial discrimination. Then they face discrimination based on the darkness of their skin tone, which relates to the phenotypical secondary level (Hall, 2017).

2.1.3. Deep-roots

Colorism affects people of all ages and most demographics. Children of color feel the effects of colorism from a young age. As parents are the main source of their socialization, the parent's views and opinions of colorism are easily passed on to the children (Landor et al., 2013). A study concluded that within Black families, skin tone bias is a concept that is "learned" and "reinforced" (Landor et al., 2013). Even for children, colorism rhetoric presents itself in many forms. For example, when playing outside they are advised to avoid playing in the sun for extended periods of time. This serves as a cautionary measure to prevent their skin tone from becoming any darker (Mitchell et al., 2022). For women, colorism also plays a major role in their lives. Society pressures women into thinking that beauty is of utmost importance (Landor et al., 2013). They are socialized to believe that appearance is everything, and that it will affect their quality of life (Clay et al., 2005). Being perceived as attractive allows for better employment and education opportunities, thus a better quality of life (Hunter, 2013). These arguments showcase a few ways in which colorism has embedded itself within media and society, but it also has deep historical roots.

Colorism is not a new concept and is rooted in slavery. Some scholars believe that this is where colorism originated (Mitchell, 2020). During slavery, the concept was used to create a hierarchical system among the slaves by the slave owners (Landor et al., 2013). The slaves with lighter skin tones received more "privileges" than those with darker skin. Some of the privileges consisted of working inside the house as opposed to working outside in the field. Occasionally, they also got the chance to read and write (Landor et al., 2013). Moreover, this was also the case for mixed-race children. Many Black slaves were raped by White slave owners, and it resulted in their children being ranked higher in the slave hierarchical system, thus receiving preferential treatment (Abrams et al., 2020). Slaves with lighter complexions worked in the plantation house and received "privileges". Some mixed-race people had skin light enough to be deemed "white-passing", granting them the ultimate privilege of escaping slavery and integrating into white society (Mitchell, 2020).

2.1.4. Quality of Life

The disheartening effects of colorism affects several aspects of life for Black people and other communities of color. For many individuals, it has had negative implications on access to vital resources, education, and employment opportunities. In the United States, this deep rooted construct is linked to institutional racism (Hall, 2017). Those with lighter complexions are at a social and economic advantage, while those with dark complexions are inherently disadvantaged (Hunter, 2013). Hypothetically speaking, despite two people having similar backgrounds and opportunities, ultimately judgments are still made based on their appearance and skin tone. A person with a lighter complexion will be granted access to great opportunities, while a person with a darker skin tone will have to fight harder to obtain them (Mitchell, 2020). Furthermore, people of color earn less than their white counterparts, with dark-skinned individuals earning even less than those with lighter skin (Hunter, 2013; Hall, 2017). Moreover, colorism also effective people's living conditions. People with lighter skin have higher-status occupations and are able to live in better neighborhoods. Colorism also has implications on marriage for black women. Light-skinned women are more likely to have higher-status spouses (Hall, 2017; Hunter, 2013). The construct has also made its mark on judicial systems. Many

individuals have been victimized by prejudices and biases present in the judicial system. Generally speaking, people with darker skin tones receive harsher and lengthier sentences for the same crimes committed by those with light skin (Hunter, 2013). For many people of color, racial bias has made its mark on their lives. As previously outlined, this concept has been deeply embedded into society.

2.1.5. Beauty is Pain

For many Black communities, discussing colorism can be quite triggering and embarrassing (Mitchell et al., 2022). With time, this concept has also made its way to other communities of color, affecting most races and ethnic groups. In comparison to ethnic and Afrocentric features, Eurocentric features are seen as more beautiful and highly favorable (Hunter, 2013). Darker individuals with wider noses and fuller lips are subjected to various forms of discrimination. While, individuals with lighter skin, thinner noses, and lips receive preferential treatment (Abrams et al., 2020). Studies have shown that people who are deemed as hegemonically attractive are perceived as being smarter and friendlier (Abrams et al., 2020). This issue has resulted in decades of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma to communities of color.

Colorism has caused Individuals to go to extreme lengths in hopes of becoming hegemonically beautiful and receiving preferential treatment (López et al., 2012). Hegemonic beauty refers to the dominant type of beauty within society. In this case, it refers to Eurocentric beauty as it is the prevalent standard of beauty (Mitchell et al., 2022). Many have tried to achieve these goals through skin bleaching. Skin bleaching is an epidemic affecting communities of color, particularly Black communities (Daftary et al., 2022). It is rampant within developing areas of the world (Hunter, 2013). The desire to engage in skin bleaching is rooted in cross-cultural differences in beauty standards (López et al., 2012). People of color who participate in these activities do not aspire to be White per se, they are just attempting to align with the standard of beauty (López et al., 2012). With that said, skin bleaching has become a multi-billion-dollar global industry. The bleaching agents work to block melanin production, which is responsible for skin pigmentation (Sommerlad, 2021). Some popular, yet toxic, ingredients

include mercury, lead, and hydroquinone (Glenn, 2008). Due to their level of toxicity, these ingredients have been banned in several countries across the globe (Sommerlad, 2021). Mercury is a dangerous ingredient with serious side effects. It may cause itchiness, permanent kidney damage, and nervous system damage (Ricketts et al., 2020). Mercury poisoning can enter the bloodstream and cause fatal consequences (Abrams et al., 2020). In addition, hydroquinone can also cause adverse effects. Hydroquinone is a skin-lightening agent that is typically prescribed by a dermatologist and used under their strict supervision (Owolabi et al., 2020). However, it has become a popular ingredient in over-the-counter skin-bleaching products. It has been known to cause liver damage, thyroid issues, and even leukemia (Owolabi et al., 2020). Side effects may also include brain and kidney damage, sun sensitivity, and ochronosis, which disfigures skin giving it a gray or blue hue (Glenn, 2008; Sommerlad, 2021). The use of skin-bleaching agents is harmful, especially for women as they may cause birth effects or result in stillbirths. In utero babies are able to feel the effects of mercury poisoning (Hunter, 2007). Similar effects also occur with unsupervised hydroquinone use.

Many skin-bleaching cosmetics companies are aware of the dangers of the products but use false health claims to continue marketing the products. For example, some companies may label the products as "certified organic" to make the products appear safe and beneficial to the consumers (López et al., 2012). It is alarming to see consumers choose to risk their lives by using bleaching products instead of choosing the safety and security of loving themselves. Keith et al. (2010) also argue that skin complexion holds more value to self-esteem than a person's success, and this is visible with the bleaching epidemic. It highlights how deeply colorism has affected self-image and self-esteem within communities of color (Keith et al., 2010).

2.1.6. Black Women and Colorism

In terms of gender, colorism has a more adverse effect on Black women than on Black men (Hall, 2017). This is attributed to the fact that matters relating to identity, skin color, and attractiveness are large concerns for women (Keith et al., 2010). Many dark-skinned women have expressed feelings of helplessness when confronting the social, economic, and relational

limitations in their lives (Hall, 2017). Black consumers, particularly women are most affected by colorism, discrimination, and exclusion in media (Mitchell et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that the vast majority of black women featured in media marketing communications were young and thin with straight hair that had a light color. Additionally, they are rarely ever seen in mainstream communications (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Furthermore, colorism does not solely impact self-esteem, it has also been linked to mental and physical health implications (Daftary et al., 2022; Sommerlad, 2021). Studies have revealed that darker-skinned women suffer more physiological deterioration than women with lighter complexions (Daftary et al., 2022). It determined that the darker women had higher blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and larger waist circumferences. Studies have also shown that dark skin women are three times more likely to desire a lighter complexion, while women with lighter complexions hardly ever long for a darker complexion (Hall, 2017).

2.2 Body positivity

Body positivity is a social movement centered around diminishing cliché beauty norms. It may be defined as a movement eradicating traditional beauty standards and encouraging others to embrace broader, more realistic standards of beauty (Lazuka et al., 2020; Pounders, 2018). In other words, it encourages individuals to love themselves, and appreciate the beauty in diversity (Leboeuf, 2019). For example, within communities of color, particularly Black communities, people prefer relatively larger and shapelier bodies (Awad et al., 2014). This goes against the slender and less shapely Eurocentric norms (Awad et al., 2014). Furthermore, media plays a vital role in establishing beauty norms within society (Clay et al., 2005; Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). Media is a very pervasive form of communication and its messaging has had a large effect on the body positivity movement (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). It has had a significant effect on the current wave of the movement, particularly with social media. Due to the easily sharable nature of social media, the movement has garnered mainstream popularity (INittle, 2021). Individuals, particularly adolescents, are heavy social media users. This demographic uses media messaging as a socialization agent for developing body image (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Simply speaking, they construct their notion of body image through

sociocultural factors displayed by the media (Clay et al., 2005). This may be harmful or less than ideal since the media is known for perpetuating inaccurate representations of real-life concepts (Alm et al., 2021). In terms of body positivity, most content is geared toward a female demographic (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Studies have shown that women are significantly more affected by skin tone bias than men are (Coard et al., 2001; Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022; Steele, 2016). This is fitting as body image and self-satisfaction are different for women and girls. Unlike boys, they have been socialized to think that their appearance is important and relevant for different forms of life evaluations (Clay et al., 2005). Some of these evaluations may include academic or employment opportunities. Low self-esteem and negative body image among black women have been linked to lower academic achievement, and poor mental and physical health (Rosario et al., 2021).

2.2.1. Fat Acceptance Movement

The current body positivity movement, as society recognizes it today, originated from the Fat Acceptance Movement. Over the years the Fat Acceptance Movement has experienced numerous changes and challenges, with one being the shift to overall body positivity. For the most part, the movement can be broken into three major waves defining its evolution to the current wave of the movement.

The movement originated in the 1960s but grew in popularity during the early 2010s (BBC, 2022). Society experienced its reemergence through social media in 2011-2012. Initially, body positivity started with the fat acceptance movement of the 1960s (Nittle, 2021). Which focused on recognizing larger bodies and making it known that they're worthy of acceptance and equal treatment. The movement was geared towards women and was started by radical feminists and queer fat advocates (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). This reinforces the relevance of most body-positive content and messaging are directed toward women, as they are heavily impacted by body image issues (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Eventually, these actions led to the creation of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) in 1969 (Nittle, 2021). The name, National Association to Acceptance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) was purposely

selected. The goal was to parallel weight discrimination to the way the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) fought racial discrimination (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015; Kirkland, 2008). The NAAFA focused on boosting members' self-esteem and eradicating negative cultural assumptions regarding fat demographics (NAAFA, 2023).

The second wave of the movement originated in the 1990s. 1970 to 1990s was the height of diet culture (Bruno, 2021). Though exercise inclusivity grew in popularity, obesity was also on the rise in the United States (Kirkland, 2008). This forced advocates to fight for acceptance in the media (NAAFA, 2023). Many of the activist groups were seen actively striking and fighting for the rights of people with larger bodies in the media (NAAFA, 2023).

As the internet grew in popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the movement also became increasingly active online (NAAFA, 2023). The presence of activists on Tumblr and Instagram contributed to the third wave of the movement as we know it today (NAAFA, 2023). The 2010's wave of the movement was a result of rampant social media and hashtag use. This also resulted in the movement growing in popularity and prominence due to the rise of social media and media marketing (Cohen et al., 2020). In terms of social media, Instagram usage had a significant impact on this new wave (Cherry, 2020). Studies have shown that Instagram has an effect on self-esteem and body image (Cohen et al., 2020). Members of the fat acceptance movement took advantage of the hashtag function and started using hashtags such as *#BodyPositivity,* and *#BoPo* to push the movement (Nittle, 2021). This initiated the shift from being a weight-related initiative to an overall appearance-related movement (Leboeuf, 2019). These actions led to the 2012 evolution that is the current body positivity movement (Cherry, 2020).

2.2.2. Body Image and Self-esteem

In terms of body positivity, skin color plays a major role in body satisfaction and self-esteem for Black women (Jameca & Neville, 2000; Mbure & Aubrey, 2017; Rosario et al., 2021). According to Roberts (2014), social science research has revealed that many African Americans suffer from low self-esteem. Research has revealed that individuals with darker skin experience higher rates of low self-esteem, low self-image, pride, and ethnic affiliation (López et al., 2012).

Additionally, the research also proved that the results were quite prominent among the female participants. A lab study indicated that women exposed to ideal images felt lower self-esteem, and higher levels of body dissatisfaction in comparison to those who viewed neutral images (Antioco et al., 2012). Research also stated that the use of non-idealistic images positively impacts the self-esteem and confidence of the viewer. Furthermore, Black women's self-esteem is also impacted by racial and gender biases within society, such as colorism and texurism (Rosario et al., 2021). Colorism impacts their sense of self through *perceived attractiveness* and *authenticity* (Rosario et al., 2021)*.* Perceived attractiveness relates to Black girls and women with lighter skin tones receiving preferential treatment, while perceived authenticity is slightly more complex. It relates to the notion that Black girls and women with darker skin tones are perceived to be more ethnically authentic than those with lighter skin. Within black communities, perceived authenticity strengthens self-esteem (Rosario et al., 2021). However, outside of these communities, it makes them more vulnerable to discrimination, or, in other words, colorism. These are a few of the reasons why skin tone is such a point of contention for Black women.

2.2.3. "Black is beautiful"

In terms of body positivity, this movement was monumental for Black communities, as it caused major shifts in their pride and self-esteem. Black communities were finally able to love and celebrate the attributes that had caused them shame and sadness for many years (Baird, 2021). Tightly coiled hair and dark skin were finally seen as beautiful instead of unsightly and shameful (Camp, 2015; Baird, 2021).

In terms of Black self-esteem, dissatisfaction with skin color and hair texture are the main culprits within Black communities (Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). Skin tone and hair are some of the most important body image factors for black women (Awad et al., 2014). "Black is beautiful" was one of the first social movements geared towards uplifting Black people and boosting their self-esteem (Coard et al., 2001). The slogan "Black is beautiful" originated from

the politicization of African American culture during the civil rights era (Baird, 2021; Camp, 2015). Black communities were becoming more politically conscious about cultural expression and beauty ideals, therefore encouraging them to embrace a more natural look and expression (Camp, 2015). It encouraged them to bask in their authenticity. The movement worked to combat the exclusionary norms in society by transforming attitudes towards beauty standards in Black communities. It focused on hair, facial features, and skin tone, as they were the main points of contention (Baird, 2021; Coard et al., 2001). These points that brought the community immense shame were now the main points of celebration (Camp, 2015). The movement encouraged people to let go of Eurocentric beauty standards and embrace Afrocentric beauty. Similarly with the body positivity movement, it focused on helping people embrace the beauty in diversity and build self-esteem (Baird, 2021).

With that said, it is interesting to take note of current beauty trends. For many years, people with larger lips, particularly Black people, were teased for having large, full lips (Landor et al., 2013). However, beauty trends continue to change, and fuller lips have become desirable. Many people use plastic surgery to achieve this aesthetic. Plastic surgery, namely facial fillers, was initially used to reverse the signs of aging. However, over the years, the procedures have embraced a more aesthetic role (Zaccaria et al.,2021). Lip fillers are commonly used to achieve the appearance of fuller lips. Cheek fillers are used to give the appearance of higher, more sculpted cheekbones. (Zaccaria et al.,2021). These desired features are all common within communities of color. As with any medical procedure, these surgeries involve risks of complications, with some being quite severe (Zaccaria et al., 2021). Though consumers are made aware of these risks, they continue to undergo these procedures. With that said, they are typically done to achieve a more aesthetic look in relation to contemporary societal beauty standards.

2.3 Media representation

Though we live in a more progressive world, media products still lack diversity. It is a serious issue plaguing the industry (Pounders, 2018). This exclusionary behavior has been deeply embedded in companies and agencies, which contributes to the perpetuation of racism and colorism (Mitchell, 2020). With society continuing to perpetuate the notion of hegemonic beauty, it continues to prove why movements like the body positivity movement or "Black is beautiful'' are vital to communities of color (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Many magazines and companies have embraced the body positivity movement and showcased body positivity in their ads and publications (Cherry, 2020). They now include a variety of body types, skin tones, and aesthetics (Pounders, 2018). The increased variation of skin tones in the media is a result of global convergence culture, or globalization (Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). On the other hand, arguments can still be made for the lack of diversity in the media. Studies have also shown that there is a lack of diversity when it comes to representing different body types in the media (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). One interesting thing to note with current body positivity messaging is that it is typically conveyed using individuals with smaller bodies (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). These messages are rarely delivered to a diverse range of body types. This is one flaw associated with the current popularization and commodification of the body positivity movement in the media (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). This shows how the media continues to influence society and its beauty standards.

Currently, there is an overall increase in body-positive messaging in the media (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). Dove, a hygiene and body care company, took a stand and challenged traditional beauty standards (Hunter, 2013). In 2004, they launched their "Real Beauty Campaign" with the goal of promoting self-love and confidence. The campaign tackles several aspects of body dissatisfaction, including skin tone and hair texture. The purpose of the campaign was and still is to improve the relationship that the next generation has with their bodies. It focuses on increasing self-esteem and helping people understand their full potential (Millard, 2011). Dove claims to work towards changing attitudes toward bodies and building confidence (Dove, 2020). This is important as the media has a flagrant history of misrepresenting or underrepresenting several ethnic groups (Alm et al., 2021). It is reflected in

the deep preference that colorism and marketing media communications have for purposefully showcasing people with lighter complexions. With that said, poor representation affects many demographics of people. It is dangerous as individuals lean on media and representation for identity development, particularly during adolescence (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). This is why accurate, diverse representation matters in media marketing communications.

2.3.1. Cultivation theory

This theory is quite popular in the world of media and representation. Initially, this mass media theory was used in relation to television consumption, but it has been proven to be relevant for other forms of media (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). George Gerbner introduced cultivation theory during the last years of the 1960s, which is when television grew in popularity and became a pervasive medium (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). This further justifies why this mass media theory was originally focused on television (Potter, 2014). Gerbner's cultivation theory may be described as a theory focused on examining the lasting effects of media consumption on an audience (Potter, 2014). It proposes that media has the ability to shape and mold one's views, values, and beliefs based on what is observed in media products (Mosharafa, 2015). The theory also posits that consuming more media increases the likelihood of an individual constructing their thoughts and feelings regarding a concept based on what they observe in the media (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). In other words, individuals tend to construct their thoughts and feelings about real world concepts based on what is reflected in the media. For example, in a study conducted by Gerbner et al. (2002), it was proven that audiences exposed to a show portraying women in a prejudiced light developed these views as well. The study revealed that the subjects scored relatively high on their "sexism scale" (Mosharafa, 2015). With that said, the essence of this theory might be harmful, as the media has an avid history of misrepresentation (Alm et al., 2021). In other words, media products often feature false or inaccurate portrayals of people or concepts. These false images or ideas are ingested by the audience, which makes real-world decisions based on these inaccurate portrayals. These actions can have consequences. In terms of body image and self-esteem, the media is one of the main contributors to dissatisfaction (Zerhouni et al., 2022). This occurs when the images are

viewed and taken as the norm or standard by an individual. Insecurities and dissatisfaction form when the individual compares their body to the ideal imagery and observes that it does not (perfectly) resemble the image (Zerhouni et al., 2022).
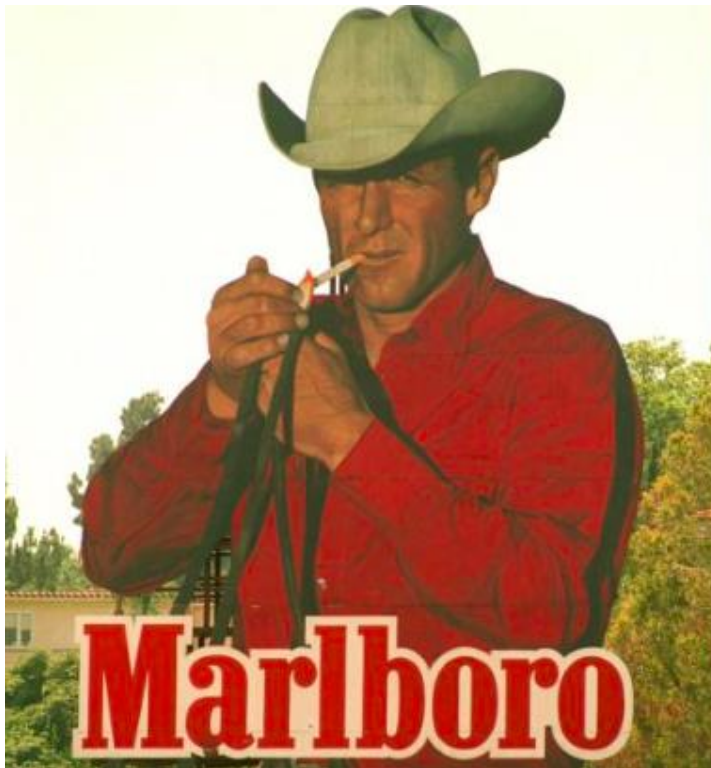
Moreover, cultivation theory focuses less on how people interpret the message but rather on what message is being disseminated to them. Gerbner understood that messages are interpreted on an individual basis; therefore, he stated that the theory focuses on the dominant meanings of the messages (Potter, 2014). In terms of the meanings and readings behind messaging, Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory is also relevant. This theory also refers to the meaning behind messages and the impact that they have on the audience. This 1970s theoretical concept involves sender intention and reader perception (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). It may be defined as a communication model examining how mass media messaging is produced, disseminated, and understood (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). Similarly, cultivation theory was initially geared towards television consumption but has transitioned to other forms of media as well. Additionally, it also examines the relationship the audience has with the media (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). Unlike cultivation theory, encoding and edcoding place emphasis on how the message is interpreted by the audience, specifically the decoding aspect. Encoding may be described as the process of senders embedding meaning into a message intended for the receiver (Kropp, 2015). The message is then received, and the receiver interprets it and constructs their own meaning from it, which is known as decoding (Kropp, 2015).

With that said, Hall argues that individuals may have different interpretations of the same message, as interpretation is quite personal and subjective (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). When a message is relayed to an audience, they typically process it through dominant, negotiated, or opposite readings. The dominant or hegemonic reading may be described as the position that the sender would like the audience to have when reading the message (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). With negotiated readings, the audience receives the message as the sender intends, but they adopt certain aspects and combine them with their own views and opinions. Finally, opposite readings entail the audience completely rejecting the sender's intended interpretation of the message and adopting their own views and opinions (Gürkan & Serttas, 2023). An example of these readings may involve an ad for Malboro cigarettes, where a man

dressed like a rancher, with reigns in his hands, is about to light a cigarette (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). The dominant reading may associate the ad with masculinity and cigarettes. The viewer can see a confident, masculine rancher taking the lead with the reins in his hands (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). The negotiated reading will acknowledge the rancher and his masculinity but criticize the masculine stereotypes associated with the image. Finally, the opposite reading may focus on the irony of the company selling a product, which may lead to impotence, which contracts the strong, confident masculine imagery (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

Figure 1.

Marlboro advertisement

Note. Retrieved from New York Post (https://nypost.com/2019/11/09/original-marlboro-man-dead-at-90-likely-because-he-never-actually-smoked/)

With cultivation theory and encoding and decoding discussed, it highlights how these concepts can reinforce dominant beauty standards and promote issues such as low self-esteem and self-identity issues (Zerhouni et al., 2022). Cultivation theory involves audiences

constructing reality based on media portrayals (Potter, 2014). Encoding and decoding involve the intended and perceived messaging within media products (Kropp, 2015). Together, these concepts may become problematic when false portrayals are involved, as the media frequently uses inaccurate or false portrayals in its products (Mosharafa, 2015). For many individuals, particularly young people, they rely on the media to help shape their views and opinions of life and the world (Clay et al., 2005; Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). These opinions are heavily influenced by advertisements. Beauty ads have quite an impact on consumers and their purchasing habits. In terms of these communications, exposure to idealized images can negatively impact consumer self-perception and body image (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2023). Specifically in relation to this study, the constant repetition of narrow beauty ideals encourages the audience to believe that this is the only standard of beauty and societal norms (Stein et al., 2021). Additionally, the slightest disparity between one's body and what is seen in the ads can trigger behaviors of trying to conform to these norms (Stein et al., 2021; Zerhouni et al., 2022). Therefore, this increases the young demographic's probability of developing distorted views and opinions of real-life issues. On the contrary, the body positivity movement can work to combat some of these issues. The movement is focused on promoting more natural and realistic imagery in media products. This may in turn provide the audience with less distorted and more realistic views, beliefs, and opinions (Leboeuf, 2019). Moreover, this may lead to the demographic having a higher level of self-esteem and body satisfaction (Zerhouni et al., 2022). With exposure to more realistic imagery, they will be less inclined to develop a distorted view of reality and their opinions.

2.3.2. Narrow views

Representation is a point of contention for many minority groups. When these groups finally receive representation, it is often in an exclusionary or marginalized light. These actions may also lead to feelings of inferiority among minority groups. Mitchell et al. (2022) argue that actively excluding or underrepresenting groups in the media signals to audiences that these groups are inferior, unattractive, or even nonexistent. This behavior may cause self-esteem and

identity issues, as observed with the "Black is Beautiful" movement (Coard et al., 2001). The lack of representation affects society's outlook on beauty standards. Literature has also argued that underrepresentation is not random or accidental but is completely purposeful. It is in place to further reinforce and maintain the superior status of Eurocentric beauty standards (Mitchell et al., 2022). Media organizations are one of the main bodies behind reinforcing the harmful notions associated with colorism (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Despite several arguments being made for having more diversity and inclusivity in the media, many magazines and agencies continue to give preference to white models. In the study conducted by Mitchell et al. (2022), it was revealed that magazines such as *Vanity Fair* featured more deceased public figures and celebrities than women of color. As expected, models of color with lighter complexions are also favored over models with darker complexions. This is a reflection of how Eurocentrism has embedded itself in media marketing communications (Mitchell, 2020). Women who meet these beauty standards are viewed as ideal and even tokenized, while others are seen as undesirable (Butkowski et al., 2022). Studies have also shown that dark-skinned women are rarely portrayed in media and advertisements, particularly magazines (Baird, 2021; Mitchell, 2020).

2.3.3. Black representation

In media and advertising, Black representation has a history of being negative or disparaging (Chambers, 2008). Prior to the 1960s in North America, there were no advertisements geared towards promoting or uplifting Afrocentric beauty; however, this changed with the emergence of "Black is Beautiful" in the 1960s. This phrase and slogan transitioned into a social movement geared towards promoting Black beauty. It was one of the first instances where Black consumers felt like they were being recognized since they were finally being included after years of exclusion (Baird, 2021; Coard et al., 2001).

Moreover, when shown in the media, Black people are cast in a limiting light. The media also has a history of perpetuating Black stereotypes. It frequently portrays a very narrow and conventional type of beauty, deeming most things beyond these bounds as weird or

undesirable (Baird, 2021). Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in Black female representation since the 1960s, but society has still not broken free of certain practices. In articles such as Baird (2021) and Awad et al. (2014), the authors argue that there is a limited view of Black women being presented in the media. The audience typically sees women with fairer complexions coupled with chemically relaxed or curly hair. Viewers rarely see women with naturally kinky or coarse hair (Awad et al., 2014). Which promotes the narrative of light skin and straight hair as being beautiful (Baird, 2021). Particularly in communities of color, the lack of representation of darker skin tones causes them to be frowned upon in the real world. This highlights the dangers and negative effects associated with poor media representation (Alm et al., 2021; Adams-Bass et al., 2014). The act of the media collectively excluding darker skin tones is triggering and traumatic to the psychology of women of color (Mitchell et al., 2022). It continued to reinforce the narrow standards of beauty that existed for black women at the time. For example, the constant exposure to sleek, relaxed hair made women feel like their natural kinky hair was undesirable or socially unacceptable (Baird, 2021).

Additionally, when people of color are represented, it is done in a tokenized fashion. "The burden of representation" is a concept referring to the responsibility and challenges associated with representing a group in situations where a power imbalance exists (Tagg, 1993). Similarly to cultivation theory and encoding and decoding, this concept also has roots in media and television. In media, "the burden of representation" refers to a person of color being the singular voice to represent an entire community (Childs, 2022). This is also true for black women in the cosmetics industry. Many companies use a token black person to appear diverse, but in reality, this is not true diversity and representation (Baboolall et al., 2022).

2.4 Cosmetic Advertisements

Cosmetics ads are a vital part of the beauty industry. They are highly visible forms of communication displayed on various platforms such as television, billboards, magazines, and social media (Sifferlin, 2015). In addition to sales-related purposes, ads are one of the main ways societal beauty standards are reinforced. The notion of cultivation theory continues to be

perpetuated through these standards. The imagery found in these marketing communications is used to relay information and build trust with the audience (Antioco et al., 2012). In general, advertisements account for approximately 50% of a magazine's content (Ringrow, 2016). In a study conducted by Fowler et al. (2014), it was revealed that a mere 18% of cosmetics ads are trustworthy, while the rest are vague or misleading. These results are alarming, as many people rely on these forms of communication to make purchasing decisions (Antioco et al., 2012; Fowler et al., 2014).

Many Black consumers experience frustration when it comes to cosmetics. The lack of Black representation in the cosmetics industry may be due to large corporations primarily focusing on creating products for non-Black consumers (Baboolall et al., 2022). However, over 41 million Black Americans purchased over $6.6 billion worth of beauty products and cosmetics in 2021 (Baboolall et al., 2022). Black cosmetics brands make up a mere 2.5 percent of the beauty industry's revenue but constitute over 11.1 percent of the total American beauty market. In a study conducted by Baboolall et al. (2022), participants indicated that they had positive feelings towards media communications from non-Black companies despite not feeling represented. However, they had significantly stronger feelings towards Black ads, as they felt represented. One participant indicated that the ads made them think about how "beautiful Black people are" (Baboolall et al., 2022).

2.4.1. (Mis)Representation

As consumers seek representation in media products, accuracy is important (Butkowski et al., 2022). Concepts such as colorism and whitewashing hamper accuracy in terms of racial representation. Whitewashing may be defined as the process of purposefully editing photos and videos to give models a lighter skin complexion (Mitchell, 2020; Pounders, 2018). It continues to perpetuate the ideology of colorism by appealing to whiteness (Brown et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2020). In black communities, it often leads to the question of "being Black enough" (Yu et al., 2017). It calls into question one's *perceived authenticity.* Most notably, whitewashing is not a request of the model but a result of the media industry. The concept is very common in

29

media marketing communications. They are frequently edited to depict someone who meets ideal standards, which often include fair skin, thinner lips, and smaller noses (Ringrow, 2016). Whitewashing is dangerous as it displays a narrow and inaccurate representation of minority groups (Brown et al., 2023). Furthermore, it also brings back Alm et al.'s (2021) aforementioned argument. Physical features that are beyond the scope of what is represented in the media may be seen as strange or undesirable. To prevent this from happening, marketers are known to use conventionally attractive models in their campaigns (Antioco et al., 2012). Besides having proven marketing success, the models are used to reach the target and win their favor. Celebrities are frequently used as models due to their popularity and appeal. However, this does not exempt them from racism, colorism, or whitewashing. Actresses Gabby Sidibe and Kerry Washington have been subjected to the practice upon being featured in popular magazines (Brown et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2020). Furthermore, whitewashing is also prominent in celebrity cosmetics ads. Beyoncé, a singer, has also been subjected to the practice during her time as a L'Oréal model (Mitchell, 2020). Her complexion was edited to the extent that she bore a complexion similar to that of a White woman also featured in the ad (Yu et al., 2017). The ad was featured in *Elle* and *Essence* magazines. It is interesting to note that *Essence* is a magazine marketed towards Black women. This incident highlights the issues that people of color, namely black communities, face with representation (Yu et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Media marketing communications messaging

Generally speaking, cosmetics are marketed with the message that the female body is in constant need of maintenance and improvement. They try to convince women that their appearance can continuously benefit from a little tweaking or refinement, which can be done with the use of a particular product (Ringrow, 2016). These ads contribute to the notion of women being under construction in order to conform to society's narrow beauty standards (Ringrow, 2016). Additionally, these media marketing products continue to perpetuate the superiority of Eurocentric beauty standards through colorism (Mitchell, 2020). They are known for depicting ideal imagery, reinforcing unrealistically narrow standards, particularly for beauty

(Mitchell et al., 2022). Studies have indicated that, in relation to women of color, women with lighter skin complexions are typically used for media marketing advertisements. Further research has also proven that women with darker skin tones are rarely represented in media marketing communications (Alm et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2020). A few cosmetics companies have been working to combat this issue. Following Dove's 2004 "Real Beauty Campaign", other companies shifted towards using non-idealistic models for the ads (Antioco et al., 2012). Another interesting concept to note in cosmetics marketing involves product names. In addition to the ads, racial disparities are also present in the ways in which cosmetics companies name their products (Benson, 2021). Many companies choose exotic or hypersexualized names for the darker shades, such as "espresso, hazelnut, and mocha", and use pure and feminine titles, such as "porcelain or ivory," for products intended for lighter skin (Benson, 2021). This indicates how deeply colorism has planted its roots in media and society.

2.4.3 A New Wave of Cosmetics Advertisements

Some media companies have actively worked towards implementing more diversity, equality, and inclusion in their advertising practices (Mitchell et al., 2022). As previously outlined, when individuals are unrepresented or even excluded from the media, it creates a sense of inferiority or nonexistence (Mitchell et al., 2022). By excluding women of color from the communications, consumers are less likely to identify with or purchase products from said brand (Mitchell et al., 2022). Women of color, particularly Black women, are not classified as having hegemonic beauty, which excludes them from representation in media marketing communications (Mitchell et al., 2022). Cosmetics companies have started taking a stand against perpetuating the hegemonic notion of beauty. As previously mentioned, Dove launched their real beauty campaign in 2004. This campaign has been deemed highly successful. Additionally, it influenced many cosmetics companies to reexamine the language used in media marketing communications (Hunter, 2013). It even prompted Proctor and Gamble to launch the "My Black is Beautiful" campaign. Similarly with Dove, this 2006 campaign was geared towards uplifting and empowering the next generation of people (P&G Good Everyday, 2020). In this

case, it was created to celebrate Black women and create more equality for them (P&G Good Everyday, 2020).

The "Black is Beautiful" movement from the 1960s changed Black presentation in cosmetics ads (Baird, 2021). For many years, advertisers have used the concept of whiteness to sell products and the benefits associated with them (Brown et al., 2023; Hunter, 2013). However, that changed when the "Black is Beautiful" movement started receiving some traction (Baird, 2021). A few of the first cosmetics offered to Black women during the late 1800s and early 1900s consisted of skin bleaching products to give the skin a lighter appearance (Brown et al., 2023). When new companies geared towards Black consumers like Fashion Fair emerged, they made their racial solidarity known by advocating for Black economic nationalism (Baird, 2021). When cosmetics ads initially became popular, there were no ads dedicated to consumers of color (Baird, 2021; Childs, 2022). At the end of the 1960s, American newspapers announced the arrival of cosmetics for Black women. During this time, ads featuring black models grew in popularity with companies such as Avon and Fashion Fair (Baird, 2021). This was the period when the phrase or slogan "Black is Beautiful" also grew in popularity. This phrase served as a means of promoting natural, Afrocentric beauty and denouncing Eurocentric beauty. It encouraged women to stop using harmful hair relaxers and embrace their afros. Additionally, it also urged them to embrace their skin tones (Baird, 2021).

3. Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to explaining the methodological approach of this study. Specifically, it discusses and justifies why these methods were selected to answer the overall research question. The first section, research design, will define and justify the research methods and design for this study. The second section will thoroughly cover the sample-related aspects of the methodology. Moreover, data processing and analysis will outline the methods used to dissect the data, followed by an operationalization of the core concepts. Finally, the last section will discuss the validity and reliability of the methods.

3.1. Research design

3.2.1 Method Described and Justified

This study was geared toward exploring change. Specifically, it focused on understanding how colorism has changed within media marketing communications for cosmetic companies with the introduction of the body positivity movement. In this study, it was important to examine the data's details as opposed to quantifying the data. Therefore, qualitative methods were selected for this project. Qualitative methods aim to contribute to the meaning-making process (Babbie, 2016). They focus on the quality and depth of the data (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Additionally, they also present the researcher with the opportunity to examine the array of truths and meanings behind the findings (Brennen, 2017). As the focus was on "how" the changes were represented, a mixture of two methods were used to dissect the data. The researcher has selected content analysis and thematic analysis as the desired methods.

The first analysis method consists of a visual content analysis, which is a form of visual analysis. It may be defined as a systematic observation typically used in media studies to investigate the ways in which people, events, or situations are represented (Bell, 2004). It is a process that derives meaningful descriptions from photos or video data as it focuses on visual communication (Worring & Snoek, 2009). Generally speaking, content analyses are conducted on existing material (University of Northampton, n.d.). It is a clever way to measure change

over a period of time, which is quite fitting for this project (University of Northampton, n.d.). For this study, the researcher limited the visual content analysis to strictly photographic marketing communications. As content analyses are quite extensive, it is important to define the scope of the research through criteria (University of Northampton, n.d.). For this study, the analysis was conducted on the models in the photos. Particularly, the researcher examined hair texture, hair length, eye color, nasal structure, lip size, and skin tone. As previously outlined, these are the aspects that are most prominent in colorism-related issues. Additionally, they are also the main points of contention in Black communities. Establishing these criteria aided with reliability, which assists future researchers with being able to replicate the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Furthermore, a thematic analysis was used to further analyze the data collected from the visual content analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method frequently used to analyze and identify patterns or themes within a data set (Babbie, 2016). It aims to examine patterns and discuss interesting findings and relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method requires a significant amount of interpretation from the researcher, which can also be seen as a disadvantage (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Overall, subjectivity is a general weakness in the world of qualitative research. However, this flexibility can also be seen as an advantage for the method, as it allows the researcher to create rich and detailed descriptions based on the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Similarly, with any data collection or analysis method, there are disadvantages. For visual content and thematic analyses, one major disadvantage involves subjectivity. Subjectivity is a complex concept involving personal biases, perspectives, beliefs, and experiences (Lundberg, 2022). In qualitative research, subjectivity is frequently seen as a hindrance that is to be excluded from scientific research (Lundberg, 2022). It can manifest itself in several ways and have implications for data, with the main implication involving data interpretation. The researcher's choices in data processing and classification will only be limited by their personal scope of thinking (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, all decisions regarding the data will be made with the researcher's personal judgments and biases in mind. Ultimately, these biases will present themselves in the form of skewed final results and conclusions. The researcher can

combat this disadvantage by working in a group and establishing clear guidelines or criteria for the process (Braun & Clark, 2006; Babbie, 2016). In relation to visual content analysis, the quality of the content may be an issue. Poor quality visuals will affect how the analysis is carried out. Similar arguments can be made for abstract images. However, in relation to this study, these disadvantages did not have any bearing on the results. Specifically with quality, it is not an issue as these images have been created, edited, and published by professionals (Baroffio, 2016).

3.2 Sampling strategy

3.2.1 Sampling Method

The purpose of this study is to examine how colorism has changed within media marketing communications from cosmetics companies. Therefore, 100 print media marketing communications from online databases have been selected as the relevant unit of analysis. The researcher settled on 100 ads in accordance with the academic guidelines. Only communications published by cosmetics companies have been examined. In relation to this research project, these companies included hair care, skin and body care, make-up, and perfume companies. Furthermore, with colorism being a key component of this project, the focus was on advertisements featuring Black women as models. Additionally, as the body positivity movement is another core concept, it also impacted the sample. The researcher examined ads from 2010 to the present, as 2010 was the start of the decade for the current wave of the body positivity movement.

With these guidelines in mind, the researcher selected sampling methods that optimized the ability to achieve these results. As expected, there is an extremely large pool of media marketing communications in circulation, many of which are irrelevant to the study. Therefore, non-probability sampling methods were used to obtain the marketing communications. These methods were fitting for this project as non-randomized criteria are used during the selection process (Babbie, 2016). Essentially, it implies that not all ads had the same probability of being selected for the study. Non-probability sampling may be defined as

an intentional sampling process not done at random. The eligibility of a participant or unit of study will be solely based on the judgments outlined in the criteria (Babbie, 2016). In this case, the criteria consist of cosmetics ads from 2010–2023 featuring Black female models (Wiśniowski et al., 2020). Though this method is cost-effective and practical, making judgments carries a high risk of sampling bias (Babbie, 2016). Subjectivity and generalizability can also pose a risk. This risk can affect the applicability of the results, as they may only be applicable to a sample. Generalizability may be defined as the extent to which the findings are applicable to the general population and not just the sample studied (Smith, 2017). Essentially, it refers to how well the results of the study can be transferred and applied to the overall population that the study is related to.

Furthermore, with the prior criteria in mind, purposive sampling was used to select the desired marketing communications. Purposive sampling is the process of intentionally selecting participants or units based on how well they meet predefined criteria (Robinson, 2014). This method aids in assuring the researcher that they are measuring what they intend to study. This is due to the clear criteria that the researcher has outlined. Additionally, this method allows the researcher to obtain in-depth information from a specific group within a population (Babbie, 2016). However, the purposeful nature of this method can also be seen as a weakness. One disadvantage may be observer bias, which is defined as a researcher's prejudices, opinions, and expectations impacting their perception of the study (Babbie, 2016). It may result in skewed data, which can also affect the generalizability of the results. Participants are selected based on purposeful researcher judgments, which are not free of observer bias. In other words, due to biases on the researcher's part, relevant participants may be excluded from the research and less fitting participants may be included. Moreover, based on the specificity of the criteria, a limited sample size can also be disadvantageous. These issues can have implications for the generalizability and representativeness of the results (Babbie, 2016; Robinson, 2014). These issues may be combated with the use of triangulation. It works to decrease bias and increase credibility through validity and reliability (Babbie, 2016).

3.2.2. Sample

Print marketing communications from cosmetics companies were selected as the unit of observation for this project. Cosmetics may be described as products or items created with the purpose of cleaning, beautifying, and enhancing or maintaining one's condition or appearance (Salvador et al., 2007). With that said, the companies featured in the corpus partake in these activities and create these products. Generally speaking, the most common types of cosmetics are hair care, skin care, or make-up products (Salvador et al., 2007). In relation to the scope, pictorial cosmetics ads from North American companies or ads created for the North American market were analyzed. By limiting the study to this geographical region, the researcher was able to draw stronger conclusions as the relevant literature and theory were based on this region. In terms of forms and formats, the researcher opted for print advertisements, as they were more common in the earlier years of the 2010s and are still present in 2023. In terms of criteria for media marketing communications, ads from 2010 until the present (2023) were analyzed. The researcher has selected this time frame due to its correlation and significance with the literature and the body positivity movement. The movement as society currently recognizes it came about in the early 2010s, specifically around 2011 and 2012 (BBC, 2022; Cherry, 2020). Therefore, the researcher chose to examine ads from the beginning of the decade. As the scope of the research is limited to North America, only media marketing communications shown in this region were examined. In order to secure the images, the researcher used online databases to filter through the relevant ads. Fashion Model Directory (Fashion Model Directory, n.d.) and Vogue Archive (Vogue Archive, n.d.) were used to search for the advertisements. Both websites had an array of print ads from 2010 until 2023.

In addition to the publication year and the involvement of cosmetics in the marketing communications, there were also other criteria present. First of all, the communications had to feature at least one Black model in the photograph, with at least half of their face visible. As women are the largest group of cosmetic models and consumers, the study's research was focused on Black women (female models). This choice was strategically made as the goal of the project was to observe colorism. As outlined in the theoretical framework, women are the primary group impacted by cosmetic media messaging (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022). As a result, they are also most likely to suffer from self-esteem and body image issues. In terms of

the status of the models, the researcher did not limit the corpus to only professional models. The researcher was also open to marketing communications featuring Black female celebrities and public figures who served as models. Filters were another criterion that could have hindered the research. Though most marketing communications are edited or manipulated, the researcher avoided selecting photos with heavy filters that made it challenging to observe the model's skin tone or facial features

3.3 Data Processing and Analysis

As previously outlined, qualitative methods such as visual content and thematic analyses will be used to answer the research question. Content analyses are systematic methods of identifying codes and themes that may emerge from the data (Galanis, 2018). For this research project, these were the initial steps used to collect and sort the data from the media marketing communications. Subsequently, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis. This method was used to process the codes from the content analysis and group them into relevant themes (Babbie, 2016). Throughout the coding process, the researcher made detailed observational notes regarding the appearance of the models. For example, codes were made for skin tone, hair, and facial features. Then the codes were entered in the Atlas.ti software in order to keep them organized. Furthermore, the program was also used for thematic analysis. It aided in grouping the open codes into axial and selective codes (Galanis, 2018).

Moreover, a thematic analysis was used to further analyze the data produced by the visual content analysis. As opposed to using a deductive thematic approach, an inductive approach allowed the themes to emerge freely from the data (Babbie, 2016). The inductive approach, also known as the "bottom up" approach, refers to the themes being derived from the data instead of fitting the data into predetermined themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This gives the researcher more room for analysis and interpretation, as they are truly able to explore the data. As thematic analyses are quite iterative, it suited the nature of this project by allowing the researcher to constantly revisit the data in order to draw meaningful conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With that said, this stage in the process required three levels of coding. Open,

axial, and selective coding were used to conduct the thematic analysis. Open codes may be defined as the initial codes or fragments that emerge from the initial data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These fragments may be seen as "raw" pieces of descriptive information gathered from the data set (Mishra & Dey, 2022). They were used to label or identify concepts within the data. They are then subjected to the second phase of the process, axial coding. This process involves merging the raw fragments based on similarities or commonalities. During this stage, the significance of the codes became more evident (Mishra & Dey, 2022). Finally, during the selective coding stage, the axial codes were grouped into relevant themes that emerged from the data. In this stage, the researcher was able to identify similarities or dissimilarities when comparing the findings to the literature (Mishra & Dey, 2022).

3.4 Operationalization

3.4.1. Colorism

Colorism is one of the defining concepts of this research project. It is rooted in physical appearance and may be defined as prejudice towards darker skin tones (Dove, 2021). It also revolves around one's hair texture and facial features (Dove, 2021). Preferential treatment is provided to those with lighter skin tones and more Eurocentric-looking attributes. As expected, it has caused trauma and self-esteem issues for many women of color (Keith et al., 2010; Leboeuf, 2019). These are some core concepts that the body positivity movement works to combat (Cherry, 2020; Pounders, 2018). For this study, colorism has been broken down into clear and measurable concepts and incorporated into the data collection process. As the research is centered on colorism, skin tones will be the main point of focus. Additionally, hair texture, nasal structure, eye color, and lip size are key components of colorism, which are also included in this study (Abrams et al., 2020). Conventionally, models with more favorable appearances have light skin, light eyes, and a looser curly or straight hair texture. Additionally, they also have smaller noses and thinner lips (Dove, 2021). Models with a less favorable appearance have darker skin, coarser hair, wider noses, and fuller lips, which are synonymous

with Afrocentric features (Abrams et al., 2020). With that said, the researcher is going to conduct a visual content analysis to take note of these observations and analyze them accordingly.

Classifying the fairness or depth of skin tones can be a relatively subjective process. It is primarily rooted in views and opinions rather than scientific theory (Mitchell et al., 2022). However, dermatologist Thomas B. Fitzpatrick created a scale to make the classifications a bit more standardized rather than subjective (Sachdeva, 2009). Officially known as the Fitzpatrick Scale, it was developed for dermatological purposes (See Appendix A). The scale is based on a person's skin tone and how it responds to being sunburned. Additionally, it is also used to determine the degree of skin damage and the risk of developing cancer. Though it is still deemed subjective, it has been proven to have diagnostic value (Sachdeva, 2009). With that said, several academics have used the scale in skin tone-related research. Many have criticized the scale for being limiting and subjective (Goon et al., 2021). They believe that the scale disproportionally focuses on white skin tones and perpetuates skin tone bias (Okoji et al., 2021). Initially, when the scale was created in 1975, it only accounted for skin tones I–IV, which focused on white skin tones. Eventually the scale was adjusted and extended to type VI, which accounted for people of color (Okoji et al., 2021). With that said, for the purposes of this research project, only media marketing communications using skin types IV–VI will be used. This range consists of light brown to very dark brown skin types, which generally encompass skin tones of color (Okoji et al., 2021). Type IV is classified as olive or moderate brown, while type V is noted as being brown to dark brown. Finally, type VI skin tones are dark brown to black (Sachdeva, 2009). With that said, these are the skin tones that are most relevant to this research project.

3.4.2. Cosmetics Advertisements

The research is centered around investigating colorism in cosmetics media marketing communications or ads; therefore, it is another prominent concept of the project. Advertising is a popular way for consumers to stay up-to-date with cosmetic companies. Marketing communications are used to create brand awareness, create consumer demand, build

consumer relationships, be informative, generate leads, and increase sales (Duffett, 2017). The representation in these media products also serves as a domain for self-development and identification, therefore making the perpetuation of colorism dangerous (Dove, 2021). It reinforces the rhetoric of there being a single, Eurocentric type of beauty as opposed to promoting all types of beauty (Pounders, 2018). Authors such as Clay et al. (2005), Coard et al. (2001), Daftary et al.(2022), and Sommerlad (2021) have outlined how these issues can impact self-esteem and mental health. With that said, the researcher decided to focus on using cosmetics ads as they directly relate to beauty and colorism. The ads will include ads for hair care companies, make-up companies, and skin or body care companies.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are two important components. They are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the research findings (Babbie, 2016). As with any research project, the process should be replicable and accurate (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Reliability refers to the notion of replicability. Specifically, it relates to how well the research procedures can be replicated should another researcher choose to conduct the same study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). This aspect of research credibility is about ensuring consistency throughout the project. Furthermore, as qualitative methods are quite iterative, future researchers should be able to easily replicate this project. Validity refers to the concept of the research accurately reflecting what the researcher intended to investigate (Babbie, 2016). It ensures the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. In this case, having cosmetics ads as the unit of analysis added to this project's validity. This allowed the researcher to actively study the items that were at the heart of the research.

Moreover, reliability and validity can be increased through triangulation, which involves using different data sources to validate the findings. Reflexivity, the act of a researcher reflecting on their role in the process, is a common triangulation method. It requires the researcher to acknowledge how their actions and potential biases could have impacted the overall outcome of the study (Babbie, 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

4. Results

This chapter of the report is dedicated to reporting the findings of the visual content analysis and thematic analysis. It has been divided into four sections, with three sections based on the final themes identified via the thematic analysis. Section 4 will discuss the general information and demographics of the corpus of communications. Section 4.1 discusses the skin tone-related findings by providing insight into the variety that was present in the corpus. Section 4.2 covers how Black hair was represented in the media and marketing communications and the diversity present. Finally, Section 4.3 discusses the variety of facial features present within the corpus. The findings of each section will be supported with the aid of percentages and visual examples from the corpus of marketing communications.

For this research undertaking, the corpus of 100 cosmetics media marketing communications was analyzed (see the Data file for the full corpus of images). In terms of years, the researcher obtained images from 2010 until 2023, with the majority being 16% from 2019. 2020 came in second with 12 images. The years 2017 and 2018 were tied for the third spot. In terms of the least number of images, the years 2010 and 2023 had two and one image, respectively. The lack of availability of earlier publications featuring Black models may be attributed to the lack of diversity during that period of the movement. This was prior to the 2011–2012 resurgence of the body positivity movement (Cherry, 2020). With that said, the opposite may hold true for ads during the latter portion of the time frame. It may be attributed to the progress that the movement has made over the years. In relation to companies, the corpus consisted of 26. Of the companies, 15 focused on make-up, nine focused on skin care or body care, and three were dedicated to hair care. Within these marketing communications, there were a grand total of 109 Black models. Some ads featured a single model, while others featured a group of models.

Furthermore, the data yielded some interesting codes and findings. With the provisions of Atlas.ti, the researcher was able to identify a total of 68 codes from the marketing communications. These codes were eventually categorized into nine groups, with two being Year and Company type. Upon further analysis, these groups were merged into three major

themes. The first theme, Skin Tone, consisted of five codes. The second theme, hair type, consisted of 11 codes. Finally, the Facial features theme consisted of 10 codes.

4.1 Skin Tone

As outlined by several authors, there's a lack of skin-tone diversity in the media. Skin tone diversity in the media has been an issue for several decades. According to Baird (2021), several Black communities initially witnessed representation in cosmetics ads with the introduction of the Civil rights era. During this time, the "Black is Beautiful" movement worked to uplift communities through promoting natural beauty (Baird, 2021). Furthermore, authors Mitchell et al. (2022), Ringrow (2016), and Brown et al. (2023) argue that Black people are typically represented through the depiction of a lighter-skinned person with thinner noses and looser hair textures. Individuals with darker skin are rarely depicted in the media. Many models are edited to depict a person who meets ideal standards, which often include fair skin, thinner lips, and smaller noses (Ringrow, 2016). Generally speaking, lighter skin tones are at the forefront, while darker skin tones are rarely displayed. Based on the findings of this research, the inverse has occurred. Darker skin tones were heavily displayed, while lighter skin tones received less attention.

In terms of the Fitzpatrick skin tone scale, types IV, V, and VI were used to classify the skin tones. As skin types I to III are typically used for White skin tones, they were irrelevant to this study. The latter three skin types of the six-point scale were used, as they typically refer to people of color (Okoji et al., 2021). With these skin types, the tones range from olive to Black (Sachdeva, 2009). The models within the dataset had an array of skin tones between types IV and VI. Based on the researcher's findings, type VI was the most common skin tone within the corpus. It covers skin tones ranging from dark brown to very dark black. In relation to this study, the majority of type VI models were found to be dark, with very dark coming in as a close second. Moreover, skin type IV, which ranged from olive to moderate brown, had the second highest number of classifications. Finally, skin type V, ranging from brown to very brown, came in with the least number of classifications.

One observation made throughout the visual content analysis involved lighting and editing. As elaborated upon in the theoretical framework, whitewashing is a practice that utilizes lighting and editing to manipulate the appearance of models in photos or videos (Pounders, 2018). Whitewashing is done to give the models a more favorable, Eurocentric appearance. Therefore, it continues to reinforce the notion of colorism through appealing to Whiteness (Brown et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2020). With that said, the researcher observed a few instances where the models seemed to have been affected by whitewashing.

Within the corpus of marketing communications, a few of the models were featured several times. This allowed the researcher to compare and contrast their appearance throughout the ads. Some models had several ads with the same company, while others appeared in different ads for different companies. It was noted that in some instances, there were inconsistencies with the appearance of their skin tones. In one instance, the model appeared to have a lighter complexion, while in other instances, the complexion appeared to be darker. One example of this involves Janelle Moneá's campaign with CoverGirl cosmetics. Within the data set, she appeared in three CoverGirl cosmetics ads. She was featured in one group setting and alone in the others. She was coded as Skin Type V (medium) in her 2013 Whipped Cream foundation ad and lipstick ad. However, based on her appearance in her 2014 ad, she was coded as Skin Type VI (dark) (see Figures 2 and 3 for reference). This ad was done in a group setting with Pink, a White musician, and Sofia Vergara, a Latina actress. The difference in Moneá's appearance can either be attributed to studio lighting or photo retouching. Unfortunately, the researcher cannot conclusively determine the cause of the skin tone disparities. However, if it is related to photo retouching, then the lighter-skinned version of Moneá is a clear indication of the industry continuing to push the colorist agenda and reinforce Eurocentric beauty standards in 2013. As argued by Brown et al. (2023) and Mitchell (2020), whitewashing is a very popular practice used to alter one's natural appearance. It is typically done to better align one's appearance with Eurocentric beauty standards (Hunter, 2018). In this instance, it was lighting her skin to appeal to Eurocentricity. Furthermore, the 2014 ad serves as an indication of the progress that the body positivity movement has made. In this later ad, her

skin tone appears to be darker than in the 2013 ad. This goes against Eurocentric beauty norms and appeals to Afrocentric beauty (Mitchell, 2022).

Figure 2.	**Figure 3.**
Covergirl May 2013 ad	Covergirl January 2014 ad

Note. Retrieved from Vogue Archive (http://archive.vogue.com/).

Note. Retrieved from Vogue Archive (http://archive.vogue.com/).

4.2 Facial Features

In addition to skin tone, facial features are also relevant to observing colorism among the models. Therefore, the researcher made observations about their eye color, nasal structure, and lip size. Among the 109 models represented in the corpus, there were a variety of features present.

4.2.1 Eye Color

From the dataset, 105 of the 109 models had their eyes open, allowing the researcher to make the relevant observations. Of the models coded, 12 had light brown eyes, while the

remaining 93 had dark brown or black eyes. In terms of colorism, light eyes are indicative of eurocentrism. As outlined by authors such as Mitchell et al. (2022) or Baird (2021), features including light skin and light eyes are more favorable as they align with eurocentrism. Upon further analysis, the researcher was able to make a few interesting observations regarding eye color and publication dates. In terms of light brown eyes, the majority of these publications were made towards the beginning or middle of the 2010–2023 time span. However, there were a few outliers, such as the 2023 Amanda Gorman Estee Lauder campaign, the 2019 CoverGirl campaign, and the 2021 Lancôme ads featuring singer/actress Zendaya. In relation to the darker eye colors, a few observations were made as well. The majority of this code appeared towards the latter part of the year. Similarly to the light brown eyes, the darker ones also appeared at the beginning and middle. However, they became more prominent the closer the ads came to 2023.

Figure 4. Covergirl 2016 ad

Note. Retrieved from Vogue Archive (http://archive.vogue.com/).

Similarly to the case of Janelle Moneá and skin tone discrepancies, similar observations were made regarding eye color. In 2022 and 2023, Estee Lauder featured poet Amanda Gorman in their media marketing communications. The ads depicted her promoting a skin serum and foundation. In the 2022 foundation ad, Amanda was depicted with what seems to be her naturally dark brown or black eye color. However, in the 2023 serum ad, her eyes were light

brown and matched the product's packaging. Unlike with the Janelle Moneá case, the researcher is conclusively able to determine that these differences are attributed to photo editing. In other words, the manipulation of the photo was the result of purposeful editing, known as whitewashing. Whitewashing is a very common occurrence among celebrities featured in the media (Mitchell, 2020; Yu et al., 2017). In this case, Gorman was edited to have light eyes, which goes against her natural eye color (see Figures 5 and 6). It was done in order to achieve a more favorable look for the model (Hunter, 2013; Pounders, 2018). In other words, by lightening the color of her eyes, the photo was better aligned with the promotion of Eurocentric beauty (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Figure 5. Lancôme 2022 ad

Note. Retrieved from Fashion Model Directory (https://www.fashionmodeldirectory.com/).
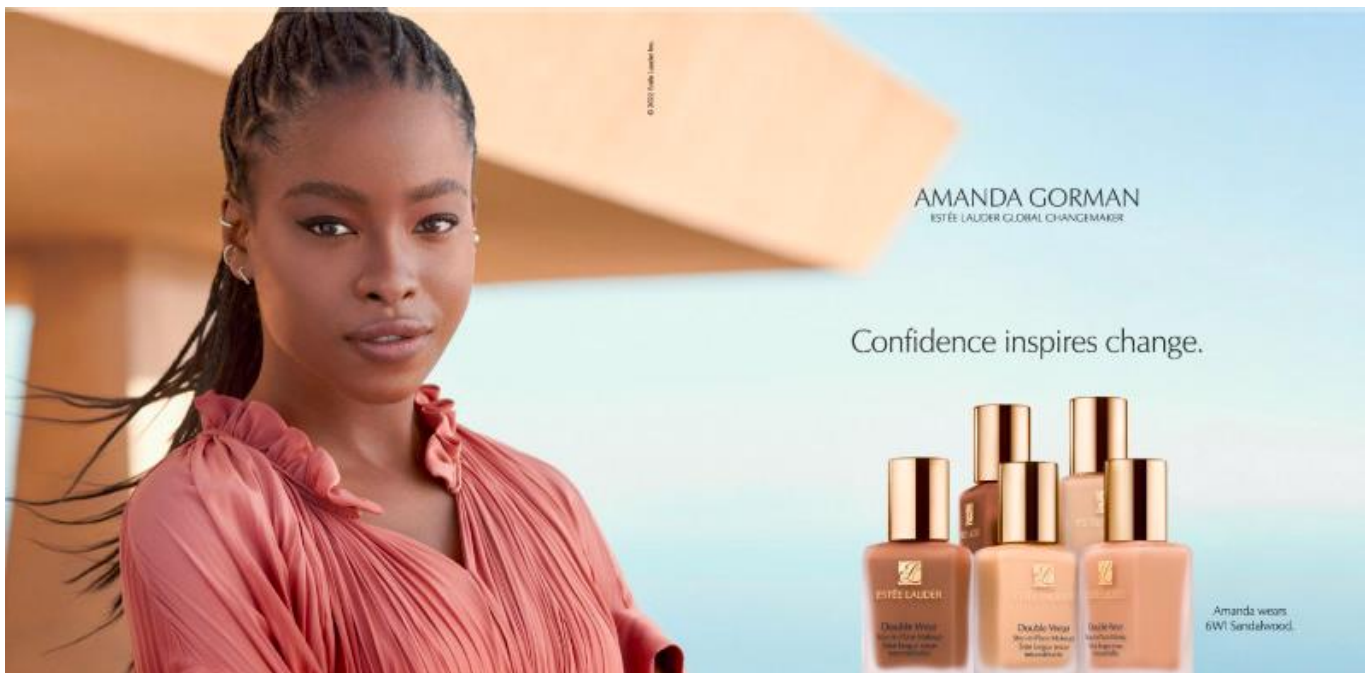
Figure 6. Lancôme 2023 ad

Note. Retrieved from Fashion Model Directory (https://www.fashionmodeldirectory.com/).

With that said, counterarguments can be made for the 93 models who seem to have been depicted with their natural, darker eye color. Unlike the case of Amanda Gorman, these models eyes do not seem to have been edited to appear lighter. However, a counterargument can be made that it is possible to have their eyes edited to appear darker. This seems unlikely, as editing is typically done to achieve a more favorable, Eurocentric look (Brown et al., 2023). However, the researcher cannot conclusively rule out any of these scenarios. Moreover, if the models were edited to have darker eyes, it would indicate that the companies are leaning towards a more natural or realistic look for the models.

4.2.2 Nasal Structure

In terms of nasal structure, only nine of the 109 models were classified as having wide noses. The majority had either slightly wide or average-sized noses, with a two-point difference between the categories, respectively. Finally, the remaining models were classified as having slender noses.

In relation to Eurocentric beauty standards, having a relatively slender nose is seen as ideally beautiful (Brown et al., 2023). This is quite contrary to natural Black or Afrocentric facial features, as it is quite typical to have a wider nose (Abrams et al., 2020). However, this does not mean that slender and average-width noses are not present within Black communities. Based on the data and findings, it was quite evident that the majority of models had slightly wide or average width noses, with a two-point difference between the categories, respectively. These results coincide with the skin tone observations, in that the overwhelming majority of models were coded as having dark skin. In terms of the models with wide noses, they all had darker skin tones classified under the Type VI skin tone bracket. On the contrary, more variety was present among the models with slender noses. Most of those models had Type IV and Type V. Similar to Type VI models, this also coincides with their relatively lighter skin tones. This was particularly accurate for slender-nosed models who were coded as having Type IV skin, as it aligns with Eurocentrism.

4.2.3 Lip Size

In terms of lip size, the visual content analysis yielded three codes: average volume, full volume, and very full volume. Most models, specifically 53, were categorized as full, 40 were deemed as very full, and the remaining 16 were categorized as average volume. In terms of Eurocentric beauty standards, thinner lips have traditionally been viewed as more desirable (Abrams et al., 2020). However, with the popularity of plastic surgery on the rise, this notion is slowly changing (Zaccaria et al.,2021). Many women are opting to receive lip injections for the sake of having larger lips, which goes against traditional beauty standards (Coard et al., 2001). On the contrary, this is in alignment with Afrocentric beauty standards. Within these

communities, fuller lips are the norm and are viewed as beautiful (Mitchell, 2020). Based on the researcher's findings, it is evident that lip size leaned towards the more Afrocentric end of the spectrum of beauty

4.3 Hair Type

Hair is a major point of contention within Black communities (Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). It is particularly tough for Black women, as naturally kinky or coarse hair is seen as unprofessional and undesirable (Baird, 2021). Similar comments can be made for hairstyles specifically intended for natural hair, namely locs or braids. Conventionally, chemically relaxed (straight) or curly-textured hair is more socially acceptable, as it aligns best with Eurocentric beauty (Awad et al., 2014). With that said, these sentiments seem to still be relevant, as they have been reflected in the dataset. Among the group of models, 48 had straight hair, 33 had kinky or coily hair, 13 had curly hair, five had braids, and one had locs. For the remaining models, their hair was not visible, thus making it difficult to determine their hair style or texture.

4.3.1 Silky Straight Hair

In relation to the models with straight hair, a few observations were made. Overall, the majority of models had straight hair. For some of the models, it was difficult to determine the true length of their hair. They were featured in a manner in which the researcher was able to observe the hair texture but encountered difficulties with observing the length without guessing or making assumptions. For example, some of the models were featured with buns and other up-do's. Up-do's are a type of hairstyle that involves gathering the hair and styling it at the top of the head (Turner, 2023). It lifts the hair from the neck and shoulders and secures it into a compact style, therefore making it difficult for the researcher to make length observations. Of the models with clearly visible hair, the vast majority had long, silky hair. Kinky hair came in as a close second. Upon examining kinky hair and hair length, the researcher was also able to make another interesting observation. It was noted that the majority of the models with kinky hair were also coded as having short, medium, or very short hair. This may be linked to the fact that the majority of models had dark skin, which is indicative of natural kinky hair.

Generally speaking, Afro hair has a short appearance, which is associated with masculinity. On the other hand, long, straight hair is associated with femininity and Eurocentrism (Thompson, 2009). Therefore, the models were given a hairstyle that reinforced their femininity and colorism by appealing to Eurocentric beauty (Smith, 2022). A few models had slight waves or curls in their hair, but the texture was visibly straight. The remainder of the models sported short or medium-length straight hair.

4.3.2 Texturism

Moreover, observations were made regarding hair type upon analyzing the results. Similarly to colorism, texturism is a form of bias and prejudice based on appearance. It relates to straight or loosely curled hair types being superior to others kinky textures. Individuals with the desired textures are deemed to have "good hair", while those with kinky and undesired textures are typically referred to as "bad hair" (Smith, 2022). As previously outlined, straight hair made a significant appearance within the dataset. Additionally, curly hair, which is indicative of texturism and colorism, also appeared in the dataset (Smith, 2022). A total of 13 models had curly hair. Ten had relatively loose curl patterns, while three had tighter curl patterns. Looser curls are a clear indication of colorism and texturism, while tighter curls relate more to Afrocentrism. Similarly, with chemical hair relaxers, Black women also chemically alter their hair to achieve a looser curl pattern with Jheri curls. One would typically have a Jheri curl done with the goal of transforming coarse, kinky hair into (tightly) curled hair. Similarly, with relaxers, this was also done with the goal of achieving a more socially acceptable appearance (Smith, 2022). In other words, this is one of the ways in which Black communities can achieve "good hair" despite having kinkier hair textures. With that said, the hair texture-related findings of this study indicate that hair texturism is present in marketing communications.

4.3.3 Naturally Beautiful

Hair and hairstyling have been the source of heated discussion within Black communities for decades (Mbure & Aubrey, 2017). Many natural hairstyles, including braids, locs, and afros, have been deemed untidy, unprofessional, and even unhygienic (Smith 2022). Due to the Afrocentric nature of these hairstyles, they have been highly oppressed by the dominant Eurocentric culture (Baird, 2021; Dove, 2021). Many Black women have faced discrimination for these hairstyles. For some, it has resulted in being removed from or even prohibited from career opportunities due to the "inappropriate" look of the hairstyles (Thompson, 2007). This is another contributing factor to the issues of self-esteem and self-acceptance that Black women face (Coard, 2001). Despite the evidence of colorism within the straight and curly hair findings, there were a few body-positive findings. With 34 of the models coded as having straight hair, a striking 33 were coded as having kinky hair. These results were surprising, as the theory spoke about natural hair rarely being depicted in the media (Awad et al., 2014). In addition to the 33 kinky haired models, five had braids and one had locs. Braids and locs, which are styles typically done on kinky hair (Thompson, 2009), As stated by Awad et al. (2014), these hairstyles are not typically represented in media products. They are heavily frowned upon and seen as unprofessional. Generally speaking, when Black models are shown in media marketing communications, it is done in a Eurocentric light. This is difficult to achieve with Afrocentric styles like locs and braids. In terms of the research findings, Dove, Olay, Estee Lauder, Nars, MAC, CoverGirl, and Lancôme were the main companies featuring kinky hair or Afrocentric hairstyles. Dove, Lancôme, Estee Lauder, and Pantene featured models with braids, and Nars featured a model with locs (see Figures 7 to 9).

Figure 7. Nars 2022 ad

Note. Retrieved from Fashion Model Directory (https://www.fashionmodeldirectory.com/).
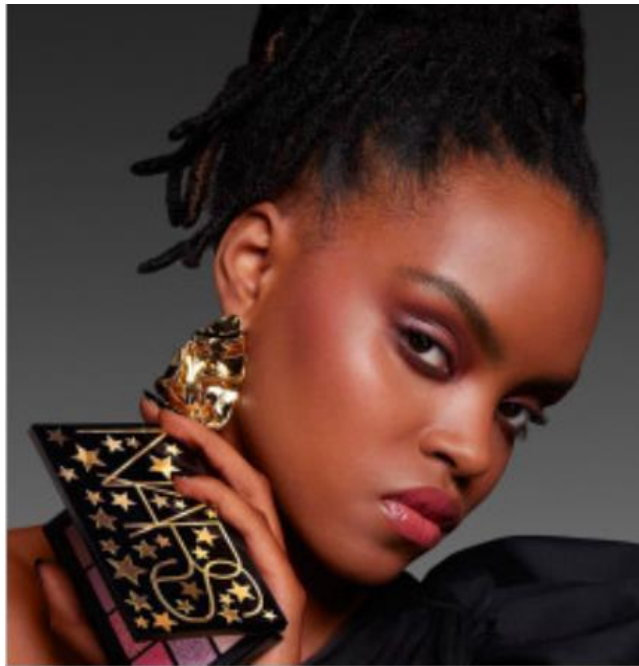
Figure 8. Dove 2021 ad

Note. Retrieved from Vogue Archive(http://archive.vogue.com/).

Figure 9. Pantene 2017 ad

Note. Retrieved from Vogue Archive (http://archive.vogue.com/).

5. Conclusion

In addition to answering the formal research question, this chapter will also discuss the research implications, limitations, and future suggestions. In Section 5.1, the researcher will summarize and interpret the findings with the goal of answering the research question. In the following subsections, 5.2 and 5.3, the researcher will discuss the academic and societal implications of the findings, respectively. Moreover, as with most research projects, there are limitations or areas for improvement. These aspects will be thoroughly discussed in Section 5.4. Finally, Section 5.5 will be dedicated to discussing future research. In these sub-sections, the researcher will detail ideas and suggestions for individuals interested in taking this research a step further.

5.1 Summary and Findings

In order to answer the research question: How has the body positivity movement impacted colorism in media marketing communications? it was important to examine the bodily characteristics involved with colorism present in media marketing communications.

As outlined in the results, 2010 and 2023 were the years with the least recorded number of ads, while 2019 and 2020 held the first and second spots, respectively. Upon comparing the earliest ad to the latest ad, the researcher was able to observe major changes. In the 2010 ad, the researcher observed Actress Kerry Washington with straight hair, light skin, and a slender nose. In the 2023 ad, Amanda Gorman had dark skin, a wider nose, and big curly hair. However, her eyes were edited to be lighter than they appeared to be in her other ads. Besides the whitewashing of the eyes, the 2023 ad is significantly more removed from the notion of Eurocentricity. The model in the ad aligns better with Afrocentric beauty.

In terms of skin tone, the results challenged what was theorized. Contrary to what many authors contributed to theory, dark skin models were highly visible in the dataset. They

constituted the overwhelming majority of skin tones present in the study. This was an unexpected result, as many authors, including Ringrow (2016) and Brown et al. (2023), state that darker-skinned models are rarely seen in the media. This result is a clear depiction of Afrocentrism and indicates a body-positive shift with models within media marketing communications.

Moreover, colorism also had an impact on hair length and texture. In relation to texture, the majority of models were coded as having straight hair, which is indicative of colorism. It relates to the notion of long, straight hair being associated with femininity and Eurocentrism (Thompson, 2009). The models were given hairstyles that reinforced Eurocentric beauty standards and their femininity (Smith, 2022). With that said, as kinky hair was the second most coded hair type, it indicated that more Afrocentrism was present within the media marketing communications. As previously outlined, kinky hair is something that is rarely seen in the media, but the results of this project prove that body-positive shifts are occurring. In terms of hair length, the findings correspond with straight-hair findings. Most models had long hair, but short hair was also quite prominent. Similarly, with kinky hair, these findings are also indicative of the body positive changes within society. Short hair is associated with masculinity, and the prominence of this style challenges traditional Eurocentric beauty standards (Smith, 2022). The presence of these images reinforces the body-positive message of self-love and self-acceptance. In these marketing communications, the models did not have to appeal to unrealistic or unnatural beauty standards in order to be accepted. They were able to stick to more natural and realistic standards of beauty (López et al., 2012). Additionally, it is also a sign of *perceived authenticity,* which is a quintessential part of Black hair (Rosario et al., 2021).

Finally, the facial feature findings also challenged the theory. Dark or black eyes were observed to be the most common eye color among the models. This challenged the theory, as it states that light eyes are typically presented. In other words, this may serve as an indication that the self-acceptance and natural beauty appreciation aspects of the body positivity movement have had an impact on media marketing communications. These findings are also indicative of models being portrayed in a more natural or realistic fashion throughout media marketing communications. Similar arguments can also be made for lip size. Theory was also

challenged here, as full lips were clearly most prominently featured, and theory states otherwise. Finally, nasal structure was borderline in terms of being indicative of colorism. Most models had average or slightly wide noses, while only a few had wide noses. As thinner noses are associated with Eurocentrism and wide noses with Afrocentrism, it is challenging to conclude which end of the spectrum this aspect belongs to.

With that said, it can be concluded that the representation of Black women in media marketing communications has changed with the introduction of the body positivity movement. Overall, the data indicated that colorism is still present but has been significantly diminished. Hair texture and length contained the most elements indicative of colorism, as long straight hair is rooted in colorism. By continuing to feature these models with hints of Eurocentrism, diversity loses its true meaning, as it is rooted in colorism. With the other characteristics, eye color, nasal structure, lip size, and skin tone, the data revealed contrasting results. Unlike hair length and texture, these characteristics did not present any overt indications of colorism. Natural kinky hair, darker eyes, full lips, and dark skin are all Afrocentric features, which were prominently displayed within the marketing communications (Baird, 2021; Brown et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2022). Furthermore, the hair texture and skin tone findings were further indicators of the colorism shift. Dark skin was the most commonly recorded skin tone, while kinky hair was the second most commonly recorded hair texture. Additionally, the prominence of short, kinky hair was another contrast to colorism. These findings further indicate the decline of colorism in media marketing communications. Having models with seemingly masculine and undesirable hair clearly illustrates how companies are breaking stigmas and challenging the status quo. It indicates that they are going against tradition and societal norms to promote more realistic appearances. With that said, this research indicates that the body positivity movement has had a positive impact on the degree to which colorism is presented in media marketing communications from 2010 to 2023.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The goal of this research project was to investigate how colorism has changed in print cosmetic advertisements with the introduction of the body positivity movement. From a theoretical

perspective, some changes have occurred. specifically, with the biggest change involving skin tone representation and variety. As discussed by authors including Ringrow (2016) and Brown et al. (2023), darker-skinned models rarely appear in the media. However, the research findings debunked these arguments and revealed that they were the most coded group of skin tones. These findings indicate that the theory needs to be reexamined and possibly adjusted to reflect these findings.

Moreover, the hair-related findings were also interesting from a theoretical perspective. In relation to hair texture, most models had straight hair, which aligned well with the discussions in the theoretical framework. In this instance, the research findings mirrored the theory outlined. However, this was not the case for kinky hair. As discussed by Smith (2022) and many others, kinky hair is a less desirable texture and rarely appears in the media. The research findings revealed that it was the second most popular hair texture after straight hair, with a one-point difference. With that said, this also indicates a shift that theory should account for. Similar arguments can also be made for eye color, as it was also proven that dark brown or black dominated the data set as opposed to lighter colors.

Overall, this research project indicated that the presence of colorism in media marketing communications has changed with the introduction of the body positivity movement. In certain regards, the communications have embraced a more natural or realistic approach to beauty, while in others they have maintained more traditionally Eurocentric standards.

5.3 Societal Implications

The findings of this research project revealed some societally relevant implications as well. First of all, it indicates that the body positivity movement is slowly achieving one of its major objectives: diminishing cliché beauty standards and embracing more realistic standards of beauty (Lazuka et al., 2020; Pounders, 2018). Based on the findings of this study, it has been indicated that the body positivity movement has had an effect on colorism within media marketing communications. Being able to identify a plethora of models with kinky natural hair

and dark skin indicates that society is moving towards embracing a more natural look. This indicates that society is slowly distancing itself from adhering to Eurocentric beauty standards.

Furthermore, the results of this study may have a positive impact on Black women's self-esteem and identity. For many Black women, hair texture and skin tone are the main points of friction. They struggle with these aspects due to the lack of visibility in the media (Coard et al., 2001). As argued by Alm et al. (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2022), underrepresentation and exclusion lead to feelings of inferiority and unattractiveness among minority groups. However, the findings of this project revealed that things are changing for the better. As observed in the results, dark skin, kinky hair, and short haircuts were prominently featured. By receiving more media visibility and representation, they will become normalized and therefore have the opportunity to be seen as socially acceptable and beautiful.

5.4 Limitations

As with many research projects, limitations are inevitable. One of the major limitations of this project involves the Fitzpatrick Scale. This six point scale was initially designed for dermatological purposes and not with qualitative research purposes in mind. As the scale only consists of six points, the latter three are dedicated to skin tones. It does a very limited job of encompassing the wide variety of shades that Black skin tones come in. If the scale had more points with less range between each point, there would be less room for interpretation. With that said, it was relatively difficult to group the corpus of skin tones into those three categories. In terms of reflexivity, this portion of the research relied heavily on interpretation (Babbie, 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020). This made it quite subjective, which left a lot of room for the researcher's interpretation and bias. For future researchers interested in replicating the study, this may have implications for reliability and validity.

In terms of the images, the researcher could have overlooked or misinterpreted certain aspects of the images. For example, if the researcher comes across two images of the same model, they may misinterpret the difference between the images. In one image, the model

seems to have a slender nose, while in the other image, she has a wider nose. The researcher may be under the impression that her nose was edited to appear smaller than it actually is. However, it could have also been possible that her nose was edited to appear wider than it actually is.

In terms of generalizability and representativeness, a few comments can be made. The researcher has a corpus of 100 media marketing communications. This figure only makes up a mere fraction of the total number of media marketing communications published. The results of this study are only applicable to the ads that were studied. They cannot be applied to the entire population, as this small corpus does not account for the variation that could be present in the order of marketing communications. In other words, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population.

The research sample also posed a few limitations. As outlined in Chapter 3, the sample consisted of Black female models in North American media marketing communications. With that said, colorism and body positivity do not only affect Black women; they also affect Black men and children. Therefore, in order to conduct thorough and extensive investigations on colorism in marketing communications, these groups could have also been studied. It would be a step towards making the results more representative of Black communities.

5.5 Future Research Ideas

In terms of future research recommendations, researchers should consider studying the variety of body types present in media marketing communications. For many women, body image, self-esteem, and self-acceptance are very big issues that they struggle with. As discussed by Maes & Vandenbosch (2022), this is largely attributed to individuals using media messaging to construct their views and opinions about body image. As most media messaging is directed towards women, they are highly susceptible to what is being displayed and reinforced. Several studies have shown that the messages have an impact on their self-esteem (Rosario et al., 2021). With that said, this also rings true for women of color. For this demographic, the lack of representation has affected their self-esteem (Coard et al., 2001). As this study examined skin

tones, hair, and facial features, it may be interesting to examine bodily representation. As Black women receive significantly less media representation than White women, their bodies do as well. Within communities of color, larger, shapelier bodies are celebrated and seen as beautiful (Awad et al., 2014). However, this goes against the preferred slender physique of the dominant culture (Awad et al., 2014). Conducting this research may be insightful, as we are currently experiencing the third wave of the body positivity moment, and it is making its mark. Additionally, as the findings of this report have challenged some of the theoretical discourse, the findings of this recommendation may ultimately do the same.

Furthermore, it may also be interesting to expand on this current study by examining different Black communities. For the study, the researcher focused on African American communities; however, black communities go beyond these borders. Though the communities are Black, they still have their differences, with geography being one of the main differences. With that said, it will be interesting to investigate if there are differences in colorism within their media marketing communications. Additionally, it may be fascinating to see how these differences are presented.

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Appendix A

A visual representation of The Fitzpatrick Scale has been included in Appendix A

Figure 10.

The Fitzpatrick Scale

Type 1
Light, Pale White
Always burns, Never tans

Type 2
White, Fair
Usually Burns, Tans with difficulty

Type 3
Medium, White to Olive
Somtimes mild burns, gradually tans to Olive

Type 4
Olive, Moderate Brown
Rarely burns, Tans with ease to a Moderate Brown

Type 5
Brown, Dark Brown
Very rarely burns, Tans very easily

Type 6
Black, Very dark Brown to Black
Never burns, Tans Very easily, Deeply Pigmented

Note. Retrieved from Barris Laser and Skincare (https://barrislaser.com/considering-laser-hair-removal-get-to-know-your-fitzpatrick-skin-type/).

Appendix B

The table below consists of the code tree

General data	Year	2010-2023
	Company type	Different types of cosmetics
	Number of models in photo	Group
		Single
Skin	Skin tone	Type IV (moderate brown)
		Type IV (light brown)
		Type V (medium)
		Type VI (dark)
		Type VI (very dark)
Hair	Hair type	Kinky/coily
		Curly
		Straight
		N/A
		Braided
		Locs
	Hair length	Long
		Medium
		Short
		Very short
		N/A
Facial features	Eye color	Black/dark brown
		Light Brown
		N/A
	Lip size	Very full
		Full
		Average volume
	Nasal structure	Wide
		Slightly wide
		Average width
		Slender

Table 1. Code tree

Appendix C

Appendix C depicts the numeric data from the codes entered into Atlas.ti. See the separately attached Dataset file for the images and corresponding codes.

1.1 Companies

Company	Count
Estee Lauder (make-up)	14
Maybelline (make-up)	13
Loreal (make-up)	12
Lancome (make-up)	9
CoverGirl (make-up)	8
Olay (skin care)	8
Dove (skin care)	4
Revlon (make-up)	4
Garnier (hair care)	3
MAC (make-up)	3
Nars (make-up)	3
Becca (make-up)	2
Fenty Beauty (make-up)	2
Mary Kay (Make-up)	2
Neutrogena (skin care)	2
Yves Saint Laurent (make-up in thi...	2
Bigen (hair care)	1
Burt's Bees (skin care)	1
Clarins (skin care)	1
Jergens (skin care)	1
Origins (skin care)	1
Pantene (hair care)	1
Ponds (skin care)	1
Secret (skin care)	1
Urban Decay (make-up)	1
Wow (skin care)	1

1.2 Year

Year	Count
2019	16
2020	12
2017	10
2018	10
2013	9
2016	8
2021	8
2015	6
2012	5
2022	5
2011	4
2014	4
2010	2
2023	1

1.3 Number of models in the photo

Type	Count
Single	68
Group	39

1.4 Skin tone

Skin tone VI (dark)		33
Skin tone VI (very dark)		32
Skin tone V (medium)		19
Skin tone IV (light brown)		17
Skin tone IV (moderate brown)		9

1.5 Hair type

Straight		48
Kinky/coily		33
Curly		13
Hair type N/A		10
Braided		5
Locs		1

1.6 Hair length

Straight		48
Kinky/coily		33
Curly		13
Hair type N/A		10
Braided		5
Locs		1

1.7 Eye color

◇ Black/dark brown	▬▬▬▬	93
◇ Light brown	▬	12
◇ Eye color n/a	▬	4

1.8 Lip size

◇ Full	▬▬▬	53
◇ Very full	▬▬▬	40
◇ Average volume	▬	16

1.9 Nasal structure

◇ Slightly wide	▬▬▬	45
◇ Average width	▬▬▬	43
◇ Slender	▬	17
◇ Wide	▬	9