Bicultural Beauty: How Latina and Asian American Women Interpret American Beauty Advertising

Katy Snell

University of Miami, k.snell@umiami.edu

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BICULTURAL BEAUTY: HOW LATINA AND ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN INTERPRET AMERICAN BEAUTY ADVERTISING

Katy Snell

Approved:

Wanhsiu “Sunny” Tsai, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Advertising

Alyse Lancaster, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Mass Communication

Christina Lane, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Cinema and Interactive Media

M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

George Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology
SNELL, KATY (Ph.D., Communication)


Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Wanhsiu “Sunny” Tsai.
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This dissertation investigates how bicultural-identified Latina and Asian American women interpret, negotiate, and utilize American beauty advertising in their identities as well as provides analysis concerning the broader marketplace ideologies embedded in the texts. This work is two-fold, utilizing critical textual analysis to examine advertisements featuring Latina and Asian women to then inform the questions for in-depth interviews between myself and 60 self-identified bicultural Asian and Latina American women. Under the paradigm of cultural studies, I utilized critical cultural theory, rhetorical agency, distinctiveness theory, and visual representation theory. In the in-depth interview section, I found that this burgeoning group of women experience simultaneous empowerment and disenfranchisement within beauty advertising. Specifically, Latinas feel that beauty advertising is a space in which they are glorified and yet commodified as sexual objects while Asian women still struggle with a sense of invisibility and disconnection. Latina American women are unique in that they seem to associate their beauty ideals and physical features as contributors and even originators of the new wave of American feminism and body acceptance. Meanwhile, Asian American women feel increasing pressure to participate in the rising national discourse on race placing them in a new double bind to remain the passive model minority and simultaneously follow the
American trend of liberalism, advocacy, and outspokenness on behalf of one’s ethnicity and culture. Ethnic heritage plays an important role for both groups and implications for advertisers to tap into this crucial sense of identity are discussed. In the critical textual analysis, I observed new iterations or orientalism and tropicalism used as marketing strategies to appeal to White consumers instead of women of color. Also, the variability of skin color for Latinas and Asian women is narrow, causing a disconnect between Asian and Latina consumers who do not match the light or dark skinned ideals purveyed in American beauty ads.
DEDICATION

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Tsai, for being such a persistent and motivating mentor to me. You pushed me beyond what I thought I was capable of, and I just want to say thank you for making my doctoral endeavors a wonderful and enriching experience.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of this Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Background</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and Consumer Culture in the U.S</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Construction of Beauty</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight and Body Image</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Beauty Advertising</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Responses to Media Representation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialization and Sexualization of Women of Color in the Media</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinas in American Popular Media</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a Consumers and Advertising</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians in American Popular Media</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Consumers and Advertising</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beauty Imperative for Women of Color</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Representation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overarching Theoretical Framework: Critical Cultural Studies</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Perspective</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and History</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Culture Theory</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Identity Projects</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sociohistoric Patterning of Consumption</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Depth Interview Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Agency</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness Theory</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Textual Analysis Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Representation</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faceism</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealization</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exoticization</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. METHOD</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Textual Analysis</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Depth Interviewing</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CRITICAL TEXTUAL ANALYSIS</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Print Ad Analysis</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinas as Paradoxically Agentic and Sexualized</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tropical Maja as The True Latina</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Print Ad Analysis</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientalism 2.0</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Ad Analysis</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialization for Identification</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: INTERPRETIVE FINDINGS</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina American Women</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Americans: Body Positivity and the American Attitude of Beauty</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Double Bind</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences and Shared Experiences</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes and Cultural Artifacts as a Targeting Strategy for White Consumers</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The White American Ideal</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty as a Domain for Self Esteem</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitting a Particular Racial Box</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing a “Pan-Ethnic” Identity</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. REFERENCES</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. APPENDICES</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5A</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Each culture has a set of general beliefs and ideals about what constitutes beauty. These ideals can change over time, as evidenced by the shifting faces and figures we see in the media (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005). As a multiracial, multicultural society, American cultural beauty standards are unique in that they must reflect a population that is incredibly diverse. Advertisers have seized on this reality by increasingly incorporating multiculturalism into their advertisements via showcasing models with a range of skin colors (O’Barr, 2006). Yet the idea that a diverse advertising campaign is one that simply includes models of different skin colors may be too narrow a conceptualization of diversity to appeal to an increasing population: the bicultural consumer. Little research examines the reception and resonance of the multiculturalism advertising approach among this important group of Americans, let alone in the context of beauty advertising. As such, this dissertation seeks to answer questions of how bicultural women incorporate beauty advertising into their identities through a cultural studies approach.

Previous research has positioned the media as having the ability to influence how society defines and views the concept of ideal beauty (Cohan, 2001; Mazur, 1986; Spurgin, 2003; Vacker, 1993). For over 50 years, scholars have primarily evaluated how female consumers’ body image and self-esteem may be harmed by the deluge of slender and seemingly perfect models that saturate popular media and advertising (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004; Spitzer & Henderson, 1999). There have also been some significant strides to try and understand minority representation in advertising by body count and positioning, namely that some product categories and contexts seem to incorporate specific ethnic models as opposed to others (i.e., Asian models for
technological ads and African American models used for trendy or cool product categories) (Bailey, 2006; Cui, 2000; Mastro & Stern, 2003; Taylor, Lee & Stern, 1995). However, much of this research on media representation and stereotyping has focused on African American men and women and it is only recently that scholars have turned their efforts towards studying the Latino and Asian American populations in media representation, especially in the context of beauty advertising. Considering the rapid rise of both groups, it is time to better incorporate both populations into race research, media effects research, and audience reception studies.

Currently, the literature is lacking empirical analysis from the qualitative vantage, specifically in regards to women of color in the beauty context. Moreover, there is a paucity of empirical data addressing how women of color themselves interpret and negotiate with the beauty ideals perpetuated in mainstream media (Duke, 2002). This dissertation seeks to fill that need by providing one of the first qualitative, multi method studies utilizing the cultural studies paradigm. According to this approach, the role of media in audience’s social relationships, (e.g., how certain people may utilize media texts as resources in interpersonal relationships to express or validate their own identities), and how media may help to define, change, and/or confirm their social roles (Lull, 1980; Tsai, 2006).

In keeping with Glaser and Strauss’s Chicago school heritage, qualitative research needs to be aimed at inquiry beyond simple descriptive studies and moved to a realm where theoretical frameworks are utilized to provide abstract and conceptual understanding of studies phenomena (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Moreover, the role of the relationship between researcher and participant deserves a deeper
understanding. Specifically, understanding that people are active agents in their lives and that researchers have their own privileges, perspectives, and interactions that make each interview and observation a unique construction (Charmaz, 2006). As such, this work takes a constructivist, grounded theory approach, using inductive data to construct abstract analytic categories through an iterative process. Specifically, this work integrates in depth interviews from the perspective of Latina and Asian American women to understand how they explicitly and tacitly perceive, integrate and respond to beauty advertising in America. Additionally, qualitative methods such as critical textual analysis, which enable the researcher to decode deeper symbolic and ideological meanings as well as embedded power relations is a method that can be useful for discovering alternative dimensions of research that may otherwise be inaccessible when using only empirical methods (Bennett, 2005; Phillipov, 2013). Both qualitative methodologies will be utilized within the cultural studies perspective that assumes there is an intertwined relationship between the production and reproduction of symbolic meanings and actualized meanings.

**Background**

Examining previous work, researchers have positioned magazine ads and television commercials as cultivating a narrow conceptualization of beauty replete with rigid guidelines for gender roles, femininity, sexuality, body weight, height, ethnicity, social economic status, and age. For example, even in ads targeted toward adolescent girls, Hsu (2013) found a strong focus of physical attractiveness in female celebrity ads, confirming a continuing emphasis on beauty and fashion even in girlhood. Another concerning disjoint between the women watching and reading and the women depicted on screen and inside the pages is the color of their skin. Specifically, Englis (1995) has
noted that marketer’s tendency to “assume all consumers are attracted by alluring images of young, urban upscale Caucasian success” (p.16) is misguided and possibly harmful to other consumer groups. It is exactly the “other” consumer groups that this dissertation focuses upon. Jackson and Ervin (1991) point out that the consequences of mediated standards of beauty might be even more detrimental to racial and ethnic minorities who are underrepresented and frequently stereotyped.

In today’s highly segmented marketplace, many of the studies concerning communication with ethnic minorities such as the Latino/a and Asian American population are often focused on issues of ethnic identification, acculturation, and multiculturalism (e.g., Appiah, 2001; Appiah & Liu, 2009). Specifically, much research examines how consumers who are more assimilated or acculturated into the mainstream react to ethnically targeted advertising messages. For example, Appiah and Liu (2009) found that ethnic consumers respond more favorably to ads with identifiable ethnic cues (e.g., such as language and the race of characters). However, much of the research in this vein is from the quantitative perspective and is unable to tap into the nuance of the relationship between advertising and identity among minority consumers. For example, what do Latina and Asian American women perceive to be advertisers’ motives in using this targeted approach? Questions about their perceived social positon as consumers and the larger race dialogue in the country are potential areas to explore.

Moreover, I am interested in understanding how bicultural women specifically negotiate the media landscape. Biculturalism is defined as “knowledge of two cultures’ languages, customs, history, behavioral characteristics, cultural identity, identification, and preferences” (Moon & Park, 2007, p. 326). As such, bicultural consumers are aware
and receptive to both the cultural cues associated with their ethnic culture as well as that of mainstream society, and often change their cultural referent accordingly (Chattaraman, Lennon, & Rudd, 2010). However, it remains unclear how bicultural consumers incorporate and cope with potentially conflicting cultural expectations. In the context of this dissertation, I am particularly interested in conflicting expectations within the domain of beauty.

As this dissertation follows the critical cultural studies perspective, it is important to examine the historical and contemporary political and social contexts within which beauty ideals for women of color are shaped. Historically, people of color have been the victims of racial ‘othering’ in American media (Hall, 1997). For example, Bogle (2001) proposed five main stereotypes of Black people in popular culture, including the tom, the coon, the tragic mulatto, the mammy, and the bad buck. Each is a stereotyped based on singular behavior or emotions. For example, the mammy is subservient and mothering while the bad buck is an aggressor and a threat. Well into 20th century advertising, there exists countless examples of Bogle’s stereotypes in racialized imagery of Blacks as well as other signifiers of difference including exaggerated physical characteristics (e.g., large lips, broad noses, and other reductive features) and inferior positioning (e.g., a shuffling, subservient Black character) (Hall, 1997). More subtle, racialized othering exists in more modern media as well. For example, Washington (2012) points out that in the popular prime time medical drama, Grey’s Anatomy, even as a vetted cardiothoracic surgeon, the Black male character, Dr. Preston Burke, still exhibits Tom-like qualities such as never being allowed to get angry; acting controlled and contained, never menacing or threatening (which are qualities many White physicians are free to exhibit).
Racial othering and stereotyping abounds for Latinos/as and Asians in American media as well. First theorized by Said (1977), orientalism is an association with exoticism, mysticism, and, oftentimes, the inferiority of the Asian in the Western view. Said posits orientalism as an attitude of utter foreignness towards the entire middle and East portions of the globe. This othering of the Asian body has led to both the alienation and objectification of Asian characters in film and entertainment television (Marchetti, 1994). Similarly, Latinos/as have historically been stereotyped in media depictions, with some time periods demonstrating a more positive representation than others (Beltrán, 2009). For example, in the 1920s, Hollywood experienced the first ‘Latin Wave’ (Beltrán, 2009), which included tango becoming a national dance craze and a rash of Latin-esque films such as The Mark of Zorro (1920). Yet, as with other people of color, Latinos/as only gained popularity in the media insofar as they qualified as members of the exotic and the different.

The U.S. Hispanic population reached 50.5 million in 2010 while the Asian population climbed to 14.7 million (U.S. Census Bureau). In comparison to African Americans, Asian and Hispanic American consumer behavior and attitudes are understudied, particularly in the qualitative setting. A 2014 Nielsen report placed the buying power of the Hispanic market at $1 trillion in 2010 and projected that figure to rise. Although less populous than the Hispanic market, in 2012 Asian American households spent 19% more than overall households (Nielsen, 2013). Since both consumer groups are rapidly growing in population and buying power, marketers are increasingly interested in trying to understand how these groups make their purchasing decisions.
Yet, with advertising playing a role in shaping socio-cultural norms, marketers and scholars should also be concerned with how bicultural consumers, particularly females, are impacted by these messages as well. As discussed earlier, there are destructive body image consequences when women see unrealistic body standards among models portrayed in advertisements (Silverstein et al., 1986; Silverstein, Peterson, & Perdue, 1986; Wildes et al., 2003). For women of color, this disconnect between what they see in advertising could be even more powerful since advertisements often lack diversity, realism, and nuance (Frisby, 2004; Jackson & Ervin, 1991). For example, homogenizing all Asian American women as being of Chinese or East Asian descent or creating a pan-Latin image of a Latina in which she is an amalgamation of multiple Central and South American cultures but not singularly representative of any leaves much to be desired in terms of identification between the consumer and the advertisement. Latinas and Asian American women often do not see themselves accurately or relatably represented in advertising messages (Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997; Paek & Shah, 2003; Perez-Firmat, 1994). Targeted marketing and advertising campaigns are further complicated when these bicultural consumers exhibit bicultural behavior and thinking. As defined earlier, biculturalism can be defined as “knowledge of two cultures’ languages, customs, history, behavioral characteristics, cultural identity, identification, and preferences” (as cited by Moon & Park, 2007, p. 326; Napoli & Marsiglia, 2002; Padilla, 1980; Szapacznik, Scopettea, Kurtines, & Arnalde, 1978). It is the first generation immigrants who came to the U.S. at a young age and have had to assimilate as well as their bicultural children that this study will focus on. This new wave of Americans experience a clear disparity in their struggle to carve out an
identity, which Kibria (2002) termed “a part yet apart” (p. 28). One major influence on the shaping of this identity is the mass media. In particular, advertising, which is ubiquitous, reflects social norms, informing viewers about cultural values and stereotypes. Gerbner (1990) argued that “the television set has become a key member of the family, the one who tells most of the stories most of the time” (as cited in Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 299). Many of these stories come in the form of advertisements. Yet how much do advertisements truly reflect the consumers in which they attempt to appeal to? As such, this study will also focus on understanding how bi- and consumers interpret their representation and race at large in advertisements.

**Statement of Problem**

The majority of research on race in media representations has been conducted from the quantitative vantage, either through content analyses, offering descriptive observations, or experimental designs focused on determining the most effective ethnic cues for improving advertising function. This perspective fails to address the socio-cultural role of advertising in informing and shaping consumer identities (Ewen, 2001). Communicating with ethnic minorities such as the Latino/a and Asian American population in today’s highly segmented marketplace is complicated with issues of ethnic identification, assimilation and acculturation, and multiculturalism, which necessitates qualitative methodologies that focus on gathering the experiences and perceptions of these social groups for a broader understanding of how media texts impact their identities. Moreover, studies on ethnic consumers have primarily focused on immigrants and investigated how their degree of acculturation drives their advertising evaluation (e.g., Koslow et al., 1994; Ueltschy & Krampf, 2011). As more children in the U.S. are
born to one or more immigrant parents, immigrate to this country at a young age, or grow up in households that are culturally distinct from the American mainstream, the bicultural and multicultural population will continue to rise, necessitating research on how this new culturally heterogeneous, multiracial generation responds to advertising.

**Purpose of This Study**

Although male consumers are certainly not excluded from advertising involving stereotypes, beauty, sexuality, and gender roles, this study is more concerned with these issues as they pertain to female consumers, especially those from minority groups. As a female researcher, I have both academic and personal motivations for studying beauty advertising. Moreover, as someone living in a highly diverse area of the country with many friends of color, I seek to give voice to minority consumers by listening to and analyzing their responses to beauty imagery in the media. Finally, previous research has shown that, to many minority consumers, mainstream advertisements are often interpreted as an index of their status in the sociopolitical hierarchy (Tsai, 2011; Tsai & Li, 2012). Given the recent rise of racial discourse and tension in the country, this work is timely in that it incorporates these issues.

Both the Latin and Asian American populations have a long and complicated history of marginalization in the U.S., and as such may be more predisposed to a minority consciousness while viewing beauty advertisements. I seek to understand how multicultural advertisements that include Asian and Latina models are interpreted as validating the Asian American and Latino/a communities as crucial or equal members of the American multi-ethnic society. Kymlicka (1995) notes that a fundamental element of the American identity is inclusiveness and underlying multiculturalism. Yet how will
minority women of color interpret messages of multiculturalism in beauty advertising, particularly participants who experienced cultural alienation as a numeric minority growing up? I seek to answer this question and address the overarching issue of socio-political representation and status in this work.

In addition to synthesizing previous research on minority responses to advertising this dissertation will be one of the first to empirically examine self-identified bicultural minority women’s responses to advertising. As such, this study will be an exploratory look at how female bicultural Asian and Latina consumers navigate their cultural duality and make purchasing decisions based on the content of advertisements. According to Carrey’s (1975) early vision of qualitative research, it is meant to “seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systemize them so they are more readily available to us” (p. 190). Put differently, qualitative research is meant to look at how people interpret things differently and provide a richly detailed account. Instead of focusing on what stimuli or context produces what response in people, qualitative research is often interested in how the unique upbringing of an individual impacts his or her perception of a phenomenon. For example, one approach to qualitative research is the phenomenology tradition. According to Seidman (2014), the phenomenological approach to qualitative interviewing should “come as close as possible to understanding the true ‘is’ of our participants experience from their subjective point of view” (p.17). In other words, understanding each unique individual’s construction of reality is more important than gaining a general sense of a truth though collecting a large volume of data from many participants. Thus, understanding the nuance and complexity of bicultural
women of colors’ responses to advertising can be best achieved in this work via qualitative methods.

**Methodology**

In regards to the methods used to collect data for this study, they are two-fold: in-depth interviewing and critical textual analysis. Textual analysis is a qualitative method of analysis that “focuses on underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (Fürsich, 2009, p. 240). Using critical textual analysis, I will examine several beauty advertisements featuring Caucasian, African American, Asian, and Latina women. Critical textual analysis will be useful in interpreting advertisements as artifacts of material culture and moreover to investigate the processes of meaning-making inherent in these forms of promotion (As cited by Applequist, 2015; Williamson, 1978; Lentricchia & Dubois, 2003; Crockett, 2008). These ads will come from beauty and fashion advertisements that feature Asian and Latina models wither in solo or group settings. I will use mainstream and ethnic-targeted magazines to collect ads for textual analysis and to facilitate discussion during the interviews. 

Due to the exploratory study nature to understand Latina and Asian American women’s relationship with beauty ideals in advertising, I adopted an interpretivist approach to explore how consumers experience advertising and media representations in the contexts of their lives (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Tsai, 2011). Through qualitative interviews, this study seeks to understand participants’ point-of-view to understand their meaning-making about media representations in their own words. I am situating my analysis within the field of cultural studies in order to consider how a selection of beauty advertisements featuring women of all colors may impact individual interpretations and
the broader symbolic meaning of what it means to be a beautiful woman in America and subsequently a beautiful woman of color.

**Significance**

Perhaps most significant within this dissertation is its theoretical contribution. Since there is some evidence of minority consumers constructing alternative readings of mediated texts, this study will contribute to the critical cultural area of rhetorical agency (e.g., Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Vats, 2014), which focuses on how marginalized communities transform and make do with their representation in the American mainstream. This growing body of research examines the alternative, negotiated, and highly nuanced readings that minority consumers construct when they engage with beauty advertising.

Issues of stereotyping, marginalization, and sexism abound in research regarding minorities and representation in the mass media. While this dissertation includes these important findings, I also attempt to probe deeper by questioning women of color on how they may or may not interpret beauty advertisements positively or find agency in a space that may seem limiting at a cursory glance. This dissertation seeks to listen to women of color directly to understand how they accept, reject, utilize, and negotiate the symbolic racial and socio-political ideologies presented in beauty advertising.

Moreover, utilizing consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnowld & Thompson, 2005) this work will look at the ways in which Latinas and Asian American women form consumer identity projects utilizing the beauty advertising texts as well as their interpretive strategies and broader meaning-making concerning their position in society as evidenced by how marketers utilize women of color in beauty ads. Consumer culture theory focuses on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are
not as readily accessible through experiments, surveys, or other quantitative methods and thus proves advantageous for this work (Sherry, 1991).

Concerning marketing implications, this study will inform companies that engage in consumer advertising, especially those in the beauty industry. Specifically, if participants do not feel any resonance with or affinity toward how women of color and women in general are portrayed in a company’s beauty advertisements, the company could take a step toward featuring more realistic models in their advertisements. Moreover, participants’ observations about how they perceive advertisers to be positioning them in the socio-political context are significant issues. Whether advertisers make the conscious choice to do so, how they utilize women of color in their advertisements is often reflective of the broader race dialogue of the times. Understanding how bicultural Latina and Asian American women engage in meaning making with these advertisements will provides marketers with insight in how to better engage with these consumers.

Finally, this study has important implications for Latina and Asian American women with an unrealistic image of true or attainable beauty. Different body types and physical features make the Caucasian standards of beauty unattainable for some. More importantly, this dissertation will analyze how advertisers demarcate the boundaries of beauty for women of color and how women of color themselves interpret these limits. Identifying the balance of validating the social assimilation of Latinas and Asian American women while affirming their ethnic heritage and pride is the key to appeal to the growing and influential bicultural generations. Also, the American population is undergoing a major shift demographically, most notably the rise of bicultural citizens
who may speak different languages, celebrate different holidays, or practice different religions while still participating in the American mainstream. Advertisers must learn how to best appeal to these new multifaceted consumers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Study Background

In this chapter, advertising and consumer culture in the U.S. society and a historical review of the emergence of minority women in beauty advertising are presented. Additionally, I discuss how beauty is socially constructed and how beauty for women of color in America has adapted over time.

Advertising and Consumer Culture in the U.S.

Many researchers have argued that consumption and consumerism is central to the American identity, which has resulted in a stream of research known as consumer culture theory (CCT). Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) crystallization of 20 years of CCT research is what I will refer to in an overview of this area. First, the consumption of market-made commodities and desire-inducing marketing symbols is central to consumer culture (Holt, 2002). Within the new stream of CCT, the term “consumer culture” conceptualizes an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that consumers use, enjoy, incorporate, transform and identify with, to make sense of their everyday surroundings and to direct identity projects (Kozinets, 2001). Further, CCT conceptualizes culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action (Geertz, 1983) and holds that consumer culture is often fragmented, constantly fluid, and often intermingling.
Arnould and Thompson (2005) note that CCT has a methodological predilection towards qualitative analysis because of the sorts of questions it is focused on answering. “CCT focuses on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys, or database modeling (Sherry, 1991), including such issues as product symbolism, ritual practices, the consumer stories in product and brand meanings, and the symbolic boundaries that structure personal and communal consumer identities” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 870). Moreover, there are four distinct areas of study beneath the umbrella of CCT, namely, marketplace cultures, sociohistorical patterns of consumption, consumer identity projects, and mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer interpretive strategies. I will focus on the latter two areas as they are more relevant to this work. This research sits squarely within the CCT realm of interest as it focuses on understanding the symbolic meanings that Latinas and Asian American women themselves uncover in beauty advertisements as well as those meanings that are not fully articulated by participants and that I need to explicate from their narratives.

Within CCT research, there are many studies examining concerns over the coconstitutive, coproductive ways in which consumers, when met with advertisements and other marketing materials, forge a coherent or fragmented sense of self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). It is the link between the consumer’s self identity and advertisements that I am most keenly interested in. For instance, Kates (2004) reports that gay consumers often customize or transform brand meanings that enhance their own coming-out identity projects and ideology. Similarly, Peñaloza’s (1994) study on Latino consumers demonstrates that the meanings Latino consumers associate with various products and
services are often different from mainstream consumers’ meaning making of the same products and services. Consumers are able to negotiate marketing messages, customizing them to fit into their self identity.

Yet brand messages can be powerful enough to actually change facets of a consumer’s identity. For example, consumers have been shown to become emotionally attached to the brands they love (Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012; Shimp & Madden, 1988). Noting this phenomenon, Fournier and Alvarez (2012) conducted a study in which they explored how consumers anthropomorphize certain brands and how consumers imbue certain brands with characteristics such as warmth, competence, power, and excitement. In other words, consumers can form human-like relationships with brands. As relationships are integral to our self concepts, it stands to reason that identity can be influenced by brand messages and, similarly, notions of beauty can be influenced as well.

Perhaps most prolific in CCT research, many critics have accused advertising as responsible for turning products into obsessions and fetishes and promoting intense consumerism. Americans measure success based off of accumulation, which is achieved via consumption of the endless products available in the marketplace. Moreover, accusing advertising as being a “three-pronged monster” by facilitating consumerism, conformity, and uncritical thinking, Frantz (2000) goes on to say that “mere familiarity with advertising slogans is not a major problem in itself. Rather, the problem arises when advertising convinces us that consumption is the answer to life’s challenges” (p. 2). By buying the product or service being advertised, the consumer is somehow able to fill a void, improve a deficiency, and tangibly “succeed” in American culture.
Beyond issues of rampant consumerism, the socio-political dimension of marketplace and consumption has been noted, especially in relation to minority consumer groups and social movements. In CCT, “the symbolic nature of consumers’ consumption behavior defines the consumer and reflects the social, political, and cultural contexts of the individual” (Tsai, 2006, p. 16). Arnould and Thompson (2005) refer to this vein of research as “consumer identity projects” and note that consumer culture theorists have turned attention to the relationship between these consumers' identity projects and the structuring influence of the marketplace, “arguing that the market produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit” (p. 871). In other words, while individuals can and do pursue personally satisfying goals through these consumer positions, they are also negotiating and repurposing cultural scripts that align their identities with the structural norms and imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy. In the context of this work, I am interested in seeing how Latinas and Asian American women may repurpose beauty advertisements to align with their identifies, especially considering the homogenizing, stereotypical, and sometimes rare nature of these ads to begin with.

**Social Construction of Beauty**

To begin, Berger and Luckmann (1966) identified and developed the social construction of reality theory, which posits that humans derive all knowledge, including that of everyday reality, from social interactions. Via interactions with the social world, learning takes place and, through these interactions, people are able to form their own reality. As an omnipresent force, the mass media play an integral role in the social construction of reality, especially since the media is able to bring forth an awareness of
people, society, culture, and other events that many people do not have the ability to experience directly.

Our concept of beauty is socially constructed and constantly changing as evidenced in scholarly work analyzing the shifts in beauty advertising throughout the years. For example, Goffman (1979) conducted an analysis of media advertisements in the 1970s to explore the media’s portrayal of men and women in advertising in order to draw conclusions about society in general. In particular, Goffman explored differences in representation according to gender. As Goffman (1979) points out, “Gender displays, like other rituals, can iconically reflect fundamental features of the social structure” (p. 8). In most of the advertisements Goffman (1979) analyzed, women were portrayed as subordinate to men, as evidenced by subtle facial and bodily cues, as well as general background and ancillary positioning of women in relation to men in various ads.

According to popular culture and the media, part of being a woman, let alone a beautiful woman, necessitates a certain degree of femininity. Swan (2008) noted there is a conflation of being emotional with being feminine, and that it places masculinity in direct opposition as being associated with emotional control, rationality, and independence. Thus, to be a woman is to be irrational, polarized, and unable to think independently. Moreover, there are certain physical and behavioral characteristics associated with a traditional conceptualization of femininity. Citing a 1941 *LIFE* article, McEuen (2011) noted that the archetype for the perfect woman during the decade in women’s magazines portrayed a modern housewife “as the sort of woman who keeps her figure, her husband, her makeup and her humor no matter how tough the going” (p.7).

Femininity and beauty is constructed in direct relation to a man’s expectations and
desires, which is similarly noted in other research. In a case study of the American cosmetic and skin care company Avon, Feitz (2010) noted that while “selling and consuming beauty aids can rightly be called a “woman’s” business at Avon, its management and oversight has primarily been executed by Avon’s male executives until the late 1990s” (p. 11). More recently, the company has taken on a tone of consumer empowerment in its marketing messages via attempting to “harness the power of women’s social networks to facilitate the global sale and appeal of its products” (Feitz, 2010, p. 14). Yet the company ultimately sells products meant to conceal, combat aging, and ultimately help mitigate the insecurities women face when they do not meet the social beauty standard ideal.

Currently, Merriam-Webster defines beauty as “the quality of being physically attractive.” Yet, modern female consumers seem to have a more complex understanding of what beauty encompasses. For example, Martin and Peters (2005) studied how young females perceived the types of beauty valued in American culture to determine how age factored into cultural encoding of beauty types. Rather than perceiving beauty on an “attractive versus unattractive” continuum, young females tended to view beauty in a more multifaceted manner. Using several categories of beauty types, Martin and Peters (2005) found that girls tend to prefer certain types of beauty over others—characteristics such as “being ‘normal’ or ‘regular,’ being ‘yourself,’ and being ‘pretty’” (p. 398). The middle group of girls tended to prefer beauty attributes such as “cool,” ‘smart,’ and ‘regular,’” while the oldest group of girls preferred beauty attributes like “‘pretty,’ ‘casual,’ and ‘social’” (Martin & Peters, 2005, p. 398). Additionally, the older girls were more likely to associate certain models with products or brands, which
could indicate that a model’s beauty might pair well with certain types of products.

This has implications for women of color as previous research has shown that certain ethnicities are associated with certain product categories. For example, in a content analysis of African American men in magazine advertisements, Bailey (2006) found that African American men were used in advertisements geared towards style and fashion-related products, namely clothing, shoes, and accessories. In a content analysis of several mainstream magazines from 1979-1992, Cui (2000) found that alcohol advertising toward African Americans, especially women, appeared to be more intensive than that toward the overall population.

Similarly, research has uncovered a link between product categories and race among Asians in advertising as well. Paek and Shaw (2003) found that the occupations of Asian models were quite clearly shown in ads, with a focus on professionals, technicians, and business people. This led to a link between Asian models and technology-centric product advertisements. In contrast, it seems that Latinos/as have been understudied when it comes to research linking product category and race. Although there have been notable studies that examine overall minority representation (Taylor, Lee, & Stern, 1995), representation in primetime commercials (Mastro & Stern, 2003), and primetime television stereotypes (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005), and the tendency for Spanish language newspapers to focus on a Latina’s sensuality and motherhood rather than personal achievements (Correa, 2010), there is little available research examining Latinos/as in relation to specific product categories. This is possibly because, racially, the Latin population is diverse and less easy to identify. For example, a Latina model could be dark or light-skinned with any combination of hair texture, color, etc., making it more
difficult to present an instantly identifiable Latina in advertisements.

Although some beauty advertising imagery and symbolism may be seen as repressive or one dimensional for women, there have been recent strides to change the way women are depicted in the media. In 2004, Unilever’s Dove brand launched an international advertising campaign called the “Dove Campaign for Real Beauty.” Dove created the campaign in response to a study that showed women perceive beauty portrayed by the media as unattainable and unrealistic (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D’Agostino, 2004). Essentially, Dove sought to challenge society’s collective perceived reality of what comprises beauty by introducing a new way to advertise beauty products. Dove’s “real” beauty included using heavier models, women of varying age groups, and more women of color in their advertisements. This, in turn, causes society to question the use of unrealistic images in advertising and introduces a new way of envisioning what beauty could actually be. This campaign is worth noting in the context of this dissertation because I am interested whether or not women of color take note of Dove (and other advertiser’s) shift towards more inclusive advertising and what it means to them to be recognized in beauty advertising.

**Weight and Body Image**

Body weight, one element of overall body image, continues to be a significant factor in the present-day beauty ideal for women. While a plumper, more curvaceous body may have been the beauty norm 50 or more years ago for American women, there is an increasing emphasis on thinness and fitness. Concurrent with this increasing norm of thinness, rates of body image and body weight dissatisfaction and eating disorders among women have risen (Botta, 1999; Peterson, & Perdue, 1986; Silverstein et al., 1986).
Research on body image indicates that women consistently perceive themselves not only as overweight but also as heavier than they actually are while also reporting a desire to be thinner (e.g., Cohn & Adler, 1992; Mintz & Betz, 1986). Additionally, women tend to report an ideal body size that is significantly thinner than their perceived actual body size (Cohn & Adler, 1992). Scholars have attributed these shifting body weight ideals to multiple causes, one of them being advertisements that perpetuate this new, often unattainable body shape. For example, in a study examining whether exposure to TV ads that portrayed women as sex objects causes increased body dissatisfaction among women and men, Lavine, Sweeney, and Wagner (1999) found that women exposed to sexist ads judged their current body size as larger and revealed a larger discrepancy between their actual and ideal body sizes (preferring a thinner body) than women not exposed to sexist ads.

Further distorting to the notion of ideal beauty among American women is the more recent trend of using photo-enhancing computer technology to shape and perfect a model’s body and correct her flaws. Removing wrinkles, increasing bust size, changing skin tone, editing out scars and other flaws; all of these photo editing techniques create unattainable images of beauty. In a critique of the photo-editing practices rampant in so many advertisements, Spurgin (2003) deemed it is an unethical practice, as many women cannot tell the difference between computer-enhanced images and natural, untouched images, and therefore ascribe to a sense of beauty that is not even possible.

Although research has consistently found gender differences in body dissatisfaction, differences among women are less clear (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). A problem with the existing research on body image is that much of it has been conducted
predominantly with samples of Caucasian women and girls, with little focus on other ethnicities. However, women from different ethnic/racial backgrounds may vary in the extent to which they are dissatisfied with their bodies because meanings of the body depend on cultural and social group context (Crago & Shisslak, 2003). For example, it has been reported that Black women adopt a larger ideal body size, are more accepting of overweight body sizes, experience less social pressure about weight, and are therefore more satisfied with their body image than White women (As cited by Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Streigel-Moore, et al., 1995). This may be in part because Black women resist conforming to White notions of beauty and attractiveness (Allan, Mayo, & Michel, 1993).

While less prevalent in the body image literature, there is some evidence that Latinas may resist White notions of beauty as well. For example, in focus groups examining Latinas’ assessments of their individual body shape and weight vis-a`-vis their beliefs and attitudes regarding mainstream and alternative body images, Viladrich and colleagues (2009) found that Latinas held paradoxical views. In their study, all participants reported a preference for thinner body types than what they actually considered themselves to be. Furthermore, “all women were conspicuously aware of the mainstream American norm that privileges thinner body types as the predicament to which women should subscribe” (Viladrich et al., p. 26). Interestingly, the qualitative analysis also showed that participants acknowledged the acceptance of heavier and curvier body types, “in accordance with Latino/a paradigms that are more in tune with fuller shapes” (p. 26). This intersection of cultures is at the heart of this dissertation. How do Latinas negotiate these seemingly oppositional expectations and standards of beauty
between the American and Latin beauty ideals?

Although limited, there has been some notable research in terms of Asian American women and body image. Unlike Black women, who do not find mainstream beauty images relevant to themselves, Asian American women are more likely to endorse mainstream beauty standards in a fashion similar to White women (Evans & McConnell, 2003). More specifically, Mintz and Kashubeck (1999) found that while overall levels of body dissatisfaction did not differ among White and Asian American women, Asian American women reported lower satisfaction with race-specific body parts (i.e., eyes and face). The idealization of the double eyelid among Asian women, a common physical feature among White models, is thought to reflect adoption of White, mainstream standards of ideal beauty (Kawamura, 2002). Moreover, there are cultural predilections that may predispose Asian American consumers to harsher self appraisals. For example, it has been hypothesized that Asian American women may be vulnerable to experiencing high levels of body dissatisfaction because of cultural values such as collectivism (Hall, 1995). In other words, “Asian American women may feel a burden to correct the negative images of their culture in the United States and work diligently to be the so-called perfect Asian woman by attempting to conform to an unrealistic ideal in ways that other women of color may not” (Grabe & Hyde, 2006, p. 625).

A History of Beauty Advertising

Women’s relationship with beauty has a long and complicated history in America. While beauty can incorporate many different products (e.g., clothing, fragrances, skincare, hair products), perhaps none better signify the beauty industry than cosmetics. According to Merskin (2007), before the 1920s, “nice girls” simply did not wear
cosmetics as it was associated with women who were lower class or perhaps working as prostitutes. In fact, in 1942, there was a four-month ban on cosmetics that was meant to show women’s commitment to and solidarity with the war effort by conserving essential resources (Black, 2004). Yet the ban was short-lived because of public outcry from women. This is perhaps one of the early indications that women desired cosmetics and other beauty related products as tools of self-expression more so than for their utilitarian purposes.

After WWII, when women and families returned to domestic life, Merskin (2007) notes that many turned to escapism and fantasy in the form of cosmetics advertising. In a time period noted for a return to conservative gender roles, 1950s cosmetic advertising campaigns were one outlet for creativity and individuality. For example, Peiss (1990) stated that wearing makeup can act as a social lubricant for girls’ interactions with their peers and for establishing friendships. Similarly, adult women are given an implied promise that they can “escape the day-to-day doldrums if you buy/wear this” (Merksin, 2007, p. 592). Beauty advertisements during this time period are characterized by the conflation of domesticity, femininity, and sexuality.

As Poole (2010) noted in his analysis of 1950s cinema and film’s portrayals of women, there existed a duality in terms of women’s beauty standards of the time. “As much as there occurred a sexualization of the housewife, there also was the coin’s flip side, the domestication of sexuality and along with that a de-empowerment and objectification of the feminine” (Poole, 2010, p. 212). Poole noted that with every White skinned, voluptuous, blonde bombshell popularized in the media at the time, there were also actresses such as Doris Day, who embodied a different type of “naïve” sexuality.
Citing Rowbotham (1997), Poole asserted that Doris Day typified how a certain type of femininity could be promoted as consumable market product for the majority of women:

“Doris Day’s image apparently contained no complications whatsoever. This really was an all-American beauty as wholesome as cornflakes, with antiseptic, good-sport looks. Her pert, fresh, freckled face was always happy; unmarked by experience, it still had character. This was an idiom of femininity which suited suburban and would-be suburban women. Her body was an attainable size 12 and her pastel sweaters, slim skirts and shorty pajamas were ideal mass-fashion prototypes” (p. 309)

In other words, the 1950s marked another shift in how advertisers purveyed cosmetics and other beauty items to women. Indeed, beauty products could be used to cultivate a sexual appeal, but they could also be utilized as tools of assimilation into the targeted audience of White, suburbanite women.

In the 1960s and 70s with the rise of civil rights issues, political critiques of cosmetics companies and the entire beauty industry began to flare. According to Merskin (2007), in a climate where capitalism and the ruling hegemony were suspect, cosmetics were “viewed as tools designed to gain women’s consent to their own (hegemonic) oppression” (p. 592). Thus, not wearing cosmetics was making a political statement and viewed as an area of resistance. A liberated woman was a woman who chose to forgo makeup and embrace a more natural look. Ever savvy, marketers followed the trends of the time and rebranded cosmetics lines to appeal to these newly “liberated” women. For example, Clinique, an offshoot of the Estée Lauder Company, was created in 1968. The word “Clinique” is clinic in French, which suits the scientific modus operandi the company continues to use today. Clinique premiered as one of the first allergy tested, dermatologist created brands. The company emphasized science and practicality rather than sexuality and fantasy. Many of the ads during this time period feature close ups of
the product itself with no models, highlighting the product as a helpful tool in the pursuit of taking care of one’s self rather than a means of calling sexual attention to one’s body.

Despite fluctuations in the social implications of cosmetics and other beauty products for American women, sales have historically remained somewhat resilient. For example, lipstick sales have an inverse relationship with economic downturns with sales rising during recessions (Merskin, 2007). According to a 2012 Library of Congress report, the U.S. is the largest consumer of cosmetics worldwide with sales remaining resilient even in the face of the recent global economic recession. Women buy beauty products even when times are tough, hinting that attention to and presentation of one’s best self is an important component of what it means to be a woman, especially a beautiful woman, in American society.

**Minority Responses to Media Representation**

As previously discussed, most research on minority representations in the media comes from the perspective of the majority consumer (i.e., White consumers). As such, I will begin with an overview of relevant research that looks at media representation from the perspective of minority consumers themselves. In the quantitative context, previous research has examined minority representation in popular mainstream media but not necessarily within media popular among minority consumers themselves. Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates (2006) conducted a content analysis comparing advertisements in magazines with the highest concentration of readers from the three largest minority groups (i.e., Hispanic, African American, and Asian) with ads in the highest selling consumer magazines targeting the populations as a whole. They found that while each magazine had more ethnically salient models depending on who was being targeted (e.g.,
an African American magazine had more African American models in ads), Hispanic models were significantly less prevalent in Hispanic (and mainstream) magazine advertising and Asians models were even less prevalent in those respective categories (Knobloch-Westerwick & Coates, 2006).

Recently, research indicates a growing awareness of racialization, objectification, and sexism in media among minority consumers, and they are subsequently rejecting or questioning advertisements and other media depictions. For example, in an experiment where three sexualized fictive ads were shown to young adult Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents, Kelsmark and colleagues (2011) examined differences in attitudinal responses to establish whether any ethnic and gender differences exist. Specifically, the researchers found that Hispanics appeared to be more sensitive to use of sexual imagery in ads and that this leads to less favorable responses to the ads. In addition, females were even less inclined to view sexualization favorably.

While it has been observed that White women seem to have a uniform notion of what “beauty” should be (Parker et al., 1995), and their conception of beauty tends to match the culturally popular images of women in mainstream media (Wolf, 1991), this is not so with Black women. Specifically, Black women have been found less likely to hold uniform notions of beauty and are far more likely to describe beauty in terms of personality traits rather than physical ones (Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992; Parker et al., 1995). In other words, Black women rely less of mediated representations of beauty. In her mixed methods study, Poran (2002) asked 157 women to explain what beauty personally meant to them after being shown several different mannequins of different skin colors to spark conversation. The responses of Black and Latina women
differed from those of White women in that there was a greater awareness of race, specifically that Black and Hispanic beauty was very different than the White beauty standard of being thin, having blue eyes, and blonde hair.

Although Black women have shown some resistance and renegotiation when it comes to their mediated depictions, some scholars have noted that other stigmatized groups, particularly Asian American women, seem to endorse mainstream beauty standards similar to White women (Chin-Evans & McConnell, 2003). In their study, Chin-Evans and McConnell notes that “although there may be several reasons for why Asian women adopt mainstream standards, perhaps one contributor is that Asians have a strong need to conform to cultural standards” (p. 163). As noted by Markus and Kitayama (1991), Asians may believe in an interdependence between the self and the dominant culture (as part of their collectivist viewpoint). Thus, they should attempt to conform to the standards perpetuated by mainstream culture (see also, Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Asian American women’s strict adherence to cultural norms may be especially psychologically damaging, particularly when they strive for mainstream beauty ideals that may be difficult or even impossible to attain in terms of racial possibilities.

Latina responses to mediated depictions is, as with other research from the perspective of women of color, lacking. However, there are some notable exceptions. For example, conducting in-depth interviews with Latinas, Viladrich and colleagues (2008) found that “although generally participants acknowledged the unrealistic expectations set by media images of ultra-thin women, most conveyed that these representations exerted an omnipresent pressure to judge their own weight and shape, along with their on-and-off
efforts to lose weight” (p. 25). Thus, the paragon of beauty in American media and society, according to Latinas in this study, was summarized as being thin, tall and White.

Yet it is the focus of this dissertation to look beyond issues of stereotyping and examine how Latina beauty is constructed and negotiated within society and by Latinas themselves. In her book, Dangerous Curves (2006), Latina author Isabel Molina-Guzmán examined the tension between “the culture industry’s demands for ethnic female sexuality and the continuing backlash against ethnic and racial minority women…” which positions “Latina bodies in the media landscape as both culturally desirable and socially contested, as consumable and dangerous” (p. 2). While Molina-Guzmán makes many arguments, I will discuss her points on how Latinidad is hyper visible, increasingly gendered and racialized, and how Latinas and Latinidad has symbolic meaning in our society.

First, regarding gendering, racialization, and hypervisibility of Latin bodies in American media, Molina-Guzmán notes that within the mainstream media, “Latinas are often gendered as feminine through language about their assumed fertility, sexuality, domesticity, and subservience, among other characteristics” (p.12). This is easily seen in shows such as Jane the Virgin, Modern Family, and Desperate Housewives, each featuring Latina characters who embody at least one or, more commonly, all of those characteristics. Furthermore, Latinas are often categorized on a spectrum of desirability according to media discourses that “reinforce Western racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual normative standards of femininity, domesticity, beauty, and desirability— of global marketability” (Molina-Guzmán, 2006, p.13). She goes on to say that:

“Because the essential male body and the essential white body traditionally have held the most symbolic worth, representations of Latina beauty and desirability in
the media translate into the privileging of Latina whiteness over Latina blackness and Latina femininity and heterosexuality over Latina masculinity and queerness. Within this schema, European Penélope Cruz is more beautiful, desirable, and consumable than Afro-Cuban Rosario Dawson… Stories about the hyper-heterosexual Puerto Rican Jennifer Lopez are easier to tell and sell than those about queer Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, whose life story was reimagined in the movie Frida by emphasizing her heterosexuality. In other words, the gendering of Latinidad depends on the production of docile Latina bodies palatable to global capitalist demands for exotic sexuality, racial flexibility, and socially acceptable femininity while increasing the economic, social, and political subjugation of those same ethnic bodies” (p.13)

This may be why it is more common in the mass media to see light skinned Latinas who wear their ethnicity as an incidental and sometimes exotically enticing badge rather than darker skinned Latinas who seem to have been pigeonholed as being symbols of sex. Since there is a lack of research among Latinas and Asian American women themselves seeking to understand how they interpret these trends and symbolic representations, this dissertation will act as one of the earliest empirical attempts at giving voice to these women and exploring how they make meaning of their beauty representations.

**Racialization and Sexualization of Women of Color in the Media**

In their critical textual analysis of women of color in print ads, Kim and Chung (2005) found that, across several product categories- alcohol, business, and cigarettes- women of color are united in cultural appropriation. “The ads that feature women of color consistently promote the strongest cultural references in the series: an African woman in a colorful headdress, a dancing Latino woman in a light cotton weave and wooden beads, an Asian woman in heavy makeup and traditional Chinese dress” (p. 82). In other words, minority models are often unified in the sense that they are portrayed as being foreign or different. This racialization in advertising imagery is just one way in which women of color are commodified and differentiated. There are also issues of sexualization and
objectification, which I will discuss in this section.

To begin the analysis of racialization and sexualization in the media, I would like to begin by discussing possibly the most recognizable beauty cultural institution in the country: The Miss America beauty pageant. The pageant has run since 1921 and the website for Miss America still touts the same mantra and mission statement for the pageant today: “Miss America represents the highest ideals. She is a real combination of beauty, grace, and intelligence, artistic and refined. She is a type which the American Girl might well emulate.” In a detailed analysis of the genesis and socio-political implications of the Miss America pageant, Watson and Martin (2004) note that its most detrimental impact of this event springs from the pageant’s historical rewarding and glorifying of White bodies as the ultimate beauty ideal. Speaking on behalf of Black women, the authors write:

“We straighten our hair, bleach our skin, flatten our figure, and re-create identities that uphold white beauty and values disassociated from black beauty. The legacy of whiteness as the standard of beauty and “the beautiful” informs how many black women see themselves through other people’s eyes. Beauty acts as a primary agent of acceptance and “American” representation, and at the same time intensifies the desire of many black women to become a part of western standards of beauty. The problematic nature of this desire to possess western beauty standards lies in the inherent conception of what and who is beautiful: the epitome of western beauty being tall with long limbs, golden skin, and long hair.” (p. 94)

The authors go on to note that apart from the Miss America pageant, this type of White beauty is highly commercialized in beauty magazines, across billboards, and in other state and national pageants. Thus, advertising is potentially still manipulating minority consumers. For example, Ferranti (2011) offers a historical and critical account of the way in which advertisers have shamed Black women into believing that they need to purchase feminine deodorizing products, so effectively in fact that they are four times
as likely to purchase them as White women. In a content analysis of advertisements, Dufur (1998) examined the over representation of Black athletes and the stereotypical images that are presented in magazines. The study found many stereotypical images of African American athletes. Of Black athletes, 57% were portrayed as succeeding because of physical abilities such as speed, strength, or size, while only 4% of Whites were portrayed in this manner.

Racialized depictions are not always negative but they are always limiting. This is why bell hook’s (1992) call for the oppositional gaze is as relevant as ever because we cannot have critique only coming from the academic community. In her work *Black looks: Race and representation*, bell hooks offers several essays commenting on different aspects of the Black experience in America. From understanding the collective Black identity to offering a call to action to begin loving blackness and to stand together and challenge the prevailing misrepresentation of Blacks in American media and society via undertaking an “oppositional gaze,” hooks’ work still holds resonance in race studies today. According to hooks (1992), an oppositional gaze is a critical and analytical gaze that is figurative and literal. In the context of her original work, she wrote about the oppositional gaze as it applied to the Black community. hooks relates the critical look to the media world, primarily film and television. According to hooks, many Black women simply avoided patronizing cinema as it seemed to offer only negative imagery. According to hooks, this negative imagery included stereotypes such as the angry Black woman or depictions of Black women being undesirable or acting in servile roles. In order to enjoy what they were watching, many had to forgo critique, overlook racism and even sexism, all in the name of an “adoring black female gaze... that could bring pleasure
in the midst of negation” (p. 312). This was only possible by identifying with White women, which hooks deemed “regression through identification” (p. 312). Thus, hooks called for an oppositional gaze, which is meant to restore agency she believes has been lost among the Black community. hooks called for the Black community to bring issues of race and sexism to the forefront by engaging with media and speaking out about it, which is relevant to this dissertation since I am interested in examining how other minority groups may engage in oppositional gaze. Specifically, how are Latina and Asian American women critiquing and engaging with different media texts in which advertisers attempt to appeal to their ethnic group, and, more importantly, how are they discussing about these issues among themselves and more publicly (e.g., in blogs, forums, rallies, etc.)?

Regarding sexualization in advertising, although the objectification and commodification of the female body is not a new issue in marketing research, it is often particularly inflammatory when it involves women of color because of their marginalized position in society to begin with. The 2007 American Psychological Association (APA) Report on the Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls maintained that sexualized images of girls in the media (including advertisements, televisions, music videos, magazines, and on the internet) had negative consequences on girls: “Ample evidence indicates that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs” (p. 21-22).

These negative effects are particularly harmful among girls and women who are racial minorities. In the introduction to Can’t Buy Me Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel, Jean Kilbourne (2012) remarks that, beginning in the 1960s,
she began to take note that “women were often infantilized… little girls were sexualized in advertisements” (p. 18). Agreeing with this remark in her essay critiquing the hypersexualization of Black women in popular culture, Dagbovie-Mullins (2013) states that this infantilization/sexualization “has a particularly deleterious effect on the perceptions of black girls in American culture” especially since “societal expectations for black girls, particularly economically disadvantaged black girls, are not high” (p. 748).

**Latinas in American Popular Media**

As a demographic category, Latinidad describes any person currently living in the United States of Spanish-speaking heritage from more than 30 Caribbean and Latin America countries. It is an imagined community of recent, established and multigenerational immigrants from diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and economic backgrounds (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). In her analysis of Latina/o stars and Latinidad throughout the history of American film and television, Beltrán (2009) notes that despite positive trends of representation of Latin faces in the media, there are still many instances of Latina stardom predicated on sexuality. Specifically, the publicity over Jennifer Lopez “admires, obsesses on, and ruminates on Lopez’s backside…. It cannot be denied that Lopez was sexualized in this publicity and categorized under a familiar spitfire label” (p. 143).

One of the most enduring tropes surrounding the signification of Latinas in U.S. popular culture is that of tropicalism (Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997; Perez-Firmat, 1994). Tropicalism erases specificity and homogenizes all that is identified as Latin and Latina/o. Under the trope of tropicalism, attributes such as bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown or olive skin comprise some of the most enduring stereotypes about Latina/os
Tropicalism is gendered as well, with characterizations such as male Latin lover, macho, dark-haired, mustachioed, and the spitfire female Latina characterized by red-colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). These stereotypes abound as recently evidenced by characters such as Gloria in *Modern Family*, played by Sofia Vergara.

**Latino/a Consumers and Advertising**

It is only recently that research on Hispanic consumers has begun to be delineated by sex, so I will begin by citing more general Hispanic consumer research before moving to studies pertaining to Latinas specifically. As with much of the research on bicultural American consumers, acculturation is one major variable that determines the decision to buy as well as how a consumer shapes his or her self-identity. Tsai and Li (2012) utilized the acculturation orientations to predict how Hispanics would respond to ethnically targeted advertising. Specifically, “bicultural ads were found to generate the most favorable attitude toward the ad and the highest purchase intention from integrated Hispanic consumers, especially compared to assimilated Hispanics” (p. 316).

From the quantitative vantage, incorporating elements such as generational status, language preference, acculturation agents (e.g., media) and cultural values, Alvarez, Dickson, and Hunter (2014) identified four clusters of U.S. Hispanic consumers: retainers, biculturals, assimilators, and non-identifiers that vary according to language preference and cultural identification. Interestingly, higher interaction with American culture (implying a more assimilated acculturative orientation) does not lead to loss of original cultural values (i.e., Hispanic values). In other words, Hispanic identification can
be quite robust in the face of acculturation effects, supporting the idea that a consumer can be more connected to their heritage culture despite being surrounded by the American mainstream culture. Similarly, Perez and Padilla (2000) concluded that Hispanic consumers retain their cultural values across generations, which further suggests that original cultural values do not diminish when a person is exposed to an additional culture, even over time.

If consumers are able to vacillate between two different sets of cultural values, then it is possible that different ad elements may determine which cultural attitude is more relevant. Testing this idea, Chattaraman, Lennon, and Rudd (2010) found that bicultural consumers with a foot in two cultural worlds are less committed to either world and respond more to cultural primes in ads. In other words, consumers may pay more attention to an ad with cultural signifiers (e.g., an ad attempting to evoke Asian imagery using models in kimono or landscapes with cherry blossom trees) than an ad lacking any major cultural symbols or signifiers. Bicultural consumers are able to change their cultural referent depending on what situation and cultural signifiers they encounter. For example, a Latina model may induce a Hispanic cultural referent, meaning language, attitudes, and behaviors may be different than if a Caucasian model were present. Similarly, Forehand and Deshpandé (2001) argued that apart from explicit situational cues, contextual and stimulus cues can also influence ethnic self-awareness. Advertising is uniquely positioned to provide cues that can appeal to a particular culture. For example, if a product is being advertised with music in Spanish playing in the background and a Hispanic consumer is watching, they may experience momentary
cultural identity salience, choosing the Hispanic cultural referent over the American cultural referent.

With advertising directed at Asian American consumers, we rarely if ever see native language advertisements because of the sheer number of languages and dialects that Asian American consumer may speak. This is not the case with the Hispanic market as the majority of Hispanic consumers share a common heritage language: Spanish. As such, language becomes another way in which ethnicity and race can act as a lens through which to view advertising. There is some debate within the Hispanic marketing literature as to whether advertisers should incorporate Spanish language into their campaigns. Koslow et al. (1994) found that the exclusive use of Spanish in an advertisement may trigger language-related inferiority complexes among some Hispanics. Similarly, Ueltschy and Krampf (2011) found that whereas less acculturated Hispanics preferred advertisements written in Spanish, highly acculturated Hispanics preferred advertisements written in English.

Recently, however, this trend seems to be slowly changing, with a growing number of Hispanic youth expressing a preference for Spanish over English (Gardyn, 2001), underlining a shift towards retro acculturation and renewed pride in the Hispanic culture (Hernández & Newman, 1992). Additionally, young Hispanics seem to blur English and Spanish together in a mixture called “Spanglish,” which some research shows to be the most effective way to reach Hispanic consumers. Callow and Gibran-McDonald (2005) conducted a content analysis of full-page print advertisements appearing in magazines targeting Hispanics with one publication using a combination of Spanish, English, and Spanglish and one using only Spanish. The researchers found that
advertisers may have more success using Spanglish because of younger generation’s preferences for the hybrid language. For instance, one of the article headings in their study included ‘Can your amor survive his cultura?’ and ‘Sexy clothes that adore your curvas (road tested by real mujeres)’. Spanglish offers a more accommodating strategy for reaching out to the Hispanic segment by employing code-switching techniques in their advertising campaigns.

Regarding Hispanics and their responses to beauty and fashion advertisements, we see a situation that is almost the complete opposite than that of Asian American consumers. Hispanics, particularly Latinas, are heavily sexualized in advertising imagery. For example, in an experiment where three sexualized fictive ads were shown to young adult Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents, Kelsmark and colleagues (2011) examined differences in attitudinal responses to establish whether any ethnic and gender differences exist. Specifically, the researchers found that Hispanics appeared to be more sensitive to use of sexual imagery in ads and that this leads to less favorable responses to the ads. In addition, females were even less inclined to view sexualization favorably. This is at odds with what we see in most advertising images, which depict Latinas as primal, sexual beings, such as what Ramirez Berg (1990) described as the “female harlot,” a common Latina character who is typically provocatively dressed and often exhibits lustful tendencies. Knowing that advertising contributes to the conceptions women hold of cultural beauty standards in the U.S., it is important to look to research that examines the discursive strategies that women of color employ to explain their relationships with their bodies, and their relationships to dominant cultural standards of beauty. In her mixed methods study, Poran (2002) asked 157 women to explain what beauty personally meant
to them after being shown several different mannequins of different skin colors to spark conversation. The responses of Black and Latina women differed from those of White women in that there was a greater awareness of race, specifically that Black and Hispanic beauty was very different than the White beauty standard of being thin, having blue eyes, and blonde hair. Interestingly, Poran also found that Latina respondents had a greater focus and awareness of consumerism, the media, and money in relation to American beauty standard and regarded models as selling tools in advertisements (perhaps more so than role models or images of success and desirability). This again differentiates the Latina population from the Asian American female population in that there is a pronounced skepticism and involvement with advertising that Latinas have and Asian American women do not.

**Asians in American Popular Media**

In Marchetti’s (1994) *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, she gives a chronological overview of how Hollywood has produced narratives featuring Asian-Caucasian sexual liaisons. Examining film between 1915 and 1986, Marchetti focused on demonstrating how Hollywood worked to ideologically “uphold and sometimes subvert culturally accepted notions of nation, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation” through interracial relationships on screen (p.1). There are several cinematic tropes that Marchetti elaborates on including the rape fantasy, the threat of captivity, passport seductions (i.e., the allure of Eastern locales and culture), Madame butterfly stories, White (Caucasian) knights in Asian contexts, transcendent interracial love, Japanese war brides, and an eventual return to modern iterations of tired cinematic models of the East being subjugated by the West.
Perhaps one of the most longstanding narrative patterns in Hollywood, the “Madame butterfly” story as well as the “white knight” characterization of White men pursuing Asian women (both domestically and in Asia) carve out the most prolific and unidimensional portrayal available to Asian women on screen: modest, compliant, and ultimately, self-sacrificial. Marchetti describes how films using these plots and story lines focus on the martyrdom of the Asian woman. For example, in her analysis of the film Madame Butterfly (1915), she notes that the film takes on both a sympathetic and condescending light towards Cho Cho San (An Asian female character who waits for the return of her White lover and ultimately commits suicide after turning over her interracial child born to the same white lover and his new White wife back in America).

“… Cho Cho San’s waiting underscores the emotions and qualities associated with her abandonment-masochism, passive acceptance, misplaced faith, saintlike endurance. She represents, too, all the ambivalence associated with those qualities and emotions- the utter stupidity of her belief in men, her foolish gullibility, the foreigner’s ignorance of American perceptions of prejudice. Her situation both elevates her as a model for female behavior and places the viewer above her as intellectually and culturally superior” (p. 87).

In more recent media, including advertising, we see similar iterations of this modest, compliant, and sexually available female character in the form of what Jung (2010) labels the “Dragon Woman” or “China Doll” stereotypes. Dragon Women are those who are sexually aggressive while China Dolls are meek, submissive, and feminine. Lucy Liu is a perfect example of the modern Dragon Woman, outfitted I tight fitting black leather in her appearances in Charlie’s Angels films, and often being characterized as sexually promiscuous.

However, I would like to note Shimizu’s (2007) important work, *The Hypersexuality of Race*. Shimizu also offers critical insight regarding Asian and Asian
American women on screen but with a greater focus on issues of sexuality. Shimizu explains that, as an understudied area, she wanted to examine the “complex intersections of sexuality in terms of race, gender, class, and diaspora comprising Asian American women’s lives” (p. 10). She does so by taking a sometimes inflammatory and uncommon tact though- often reveling in the objectification and hypersexuality of Asian American women in film and countering complaints of victimization by seeking out self-edifying spaces in what most would consider marginalizing works. Shimizu describes modern Asian/American feminism as one-dimensional, offering a self-righteous dismissal of salacious representation when minority communities should not so readily “acquiesce to the power and prevalence of dominant perceptions and representations” (p. 21). In her first chapter, Shimizu begins to lay out her argument by examining the Broadway show Miss Saigon, a musical that has often been criticized by Asian American scholars and activists as an Orientalist fantasy. Through interviews with some of the cast members, she argues that the actors' redefining of sexuality is a "technology of personal strength and self-authority" (p. 51), stating that the specific choices made by the actresses possess the potential for resistance against and reinterpretation of the producers' original intentions for their roles. In the next chapter, Shimizu performs close readings of texts by examining films starring three well-known Asian American women performers from different eras: Anna May Wong, Nancy Kwan, and Lucy Liu. She compliments her own readings of films by adding interview content from the actresses themselves. For example, in an interview where Lucy Liu was asked if she was concerned about perpetuating stereotypes of Asians doing martial arts in the film Kill Bill, Shimizu highlights how Liu prioritizes of her own personal agenda in the face of limited
opportunities (i.e., riding off the popularity of a mainstream film to create momentum for an audience for her own projects). In other words, instead of focusing on limitations, Shimizu seems to laud Liu for making the best of the roles she is offered, even if they do come out of her racialized position in Hollywood.

Perhaps most shockingly, Shimizu moves into a discussion of Asian female sexuality and empowerment in pornography. While this would the easiest chapter for her to fall into line and decry the poor position of Asian women in film, she still takes an optimistic view and analyzes how facial expressions of the actresses resist victimization. Noting the ambiguity of their faces during the sex act, Shimizu discusses, for instance, how the "facial expression of pain cannot serve as factual evidence of her oppression when the facial expression of pleasure looks similar" (p. 178). In other words, the facial expressions of these women are a form of oppositional gaze, both literally and figuratively.

**Asian American Consumers and Advertising**

Although studies of African Americans and even Hispanics to some extent have a longer academic history, advertising research on Asian Americans did not begin until more recently. In an analysis of portrayals of Asian Americans in magazines, Taylor and Lee (1994) found Asian representation was disproportionately high in tech-based ads and for ads in business and science industry publications versus general interest magazines. In an analysis of television ads, Taylor and Stern (1997) found a higher representation of Asian models but the models were often depicted in background roles and were underrepresented in the home setting or in social relationships. More recently, Mastro and Stern (2003) found that only 2.4% of speaking characters in television ads were Asian
Among advertising research on minority consumers, one major vein of study is stereotyping. While scholars have examined portrayals of minorities in news broadcasts, print journalism, and episodic dramas and found the depictions often demeaning, the literature is not as robust in the context of advertising and marketing. However, there are notable exceptions. For example, in a quantitative and textual analysis of new magazine advertising, Paek and Shah (2003) found that Asian Americans are “frequently depicted as highly educated, proficient with technology, and affluent” (p. 225). These are all attributes of the “model minority” stereotype, common to Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. mass media. The researchers note that although this stereotype may appear positive on a superficial level, it is actually a stifling homogenization of all Asian American groups. The researchers found that almost all models in ads are of East Asian ancestry (ignoring South and Southeast ethnicities) and that characterizations do not account for more isolated, blue collar Asian Americans who do not fit the model minority image of affluence and success. Other studies have found similar model minority stereotyping including Taylor, Landreth, and Bang (2005) who additionally noted that Asian Americans are seldom seen in family or social contexts in advertisements. Perhaps most alarming, Zhang (2010) found that non-Asian Americans demonstrated perceptions and judgments about Asian Americans that aligned with media representations (i.e., Asian Americans are academically successful, nerds, least likely to initiate friendship).

Prior research examining Asian American consumers has focused on their attitudes toward targeted messages and examined the roles of language use, models’ race, subcultural cues, and strength of ethnic identification in shaping those attitudes (e.g.,
Appiah & Liu, 2009; Green, 1999). For example, Asian Americans have greater affect towards a company when there are Asian American models in the ad while less acculturated Asian Americans tend to find companies using Asian models to be more culturally sensitive, especially female consumers (Karande, 1998). Interestingly, the concept of being “Asian American” does not seem to be shared among Asian Americans themselves or readily promoted in advertisements. For example, in a content analysis study, Knoblach-Westerwick and Coates (2006) examined ethnic-targeted publications to see if they had a larger percentage of in-group ethnic models in ads (i.e., models who matched the ethnicity of the targeted readership). While this was the case for African American and Hispanic-targeted publications, this did not hold true for publications targeting Asian Americans. The researchers noted that there are no ethnically targeted publications that reach Asian Americans readers in the same broad manner that other ethnically-targeted publications do. Instead, there is a wide diversity of magazines targeting Asian Americans slightly with (i.e., more minority models overall in ads, including Asians), "reflecting the heterogeneity "hidden" in the label ‘Asian American’" (p. 606). Although I am more interested in the discursive strategies that Asian American women use to explore how Asian Americans incorporate the symbolic meanings constructed from mainstream advertising, these studies quantitatively demonstrate a sort of disconnect between the Asian American consumer and marketers. Specifically, marketers would do well to include more Asian faces and maybe move away from using a pan-East Asian targeting approach by including other types of Asian faces (e.g., Indian, Vietnamese, Filipino, etc.).

Although studies show that women of all races are impacted, typically negatively,
by advertising images when it comes to their body image, Asian women seem to be disproportionately affected. Wildes, Emery, and Simons’ meta-analysis (2003) found Asian American women to have significantly greater weight and dieting concerns, greater body dissatisfaction, and a smaller ideal body weight than Caucasian women. In a cross cultural experiment, Kim and Aubrey (2015) found that body image was in a closely tied relationship with cumulative thin-ideal media exposure. More interesting though was how East Asian participants reacted differently than their American counterparts. Specifically, the researchers found that American participants (who were less likely to fully endorse thin ideals) developed cognitive intervention strategies focusing on internal strength whereas their East Asian counterparts did not. In other words, American participants were less harsh on themselves in terms of comparing their image to what they see in ads. Although they did not differentiate Asian American participants’ views from the entire sample, this has interesting implications for how Asian American women may negotiate the impact of advertising on their body image depending on how closely they identify with their Asian heritage.

Previous research has shown that some minority consumers are dubious about mediated images of their particular ethnic group. For example, in interviews with teenage African American girls about their attitudes towards teen magazine ads and content, most participants “did not defer to the magazines' authority in defining their conception of femininity, which instead was strongly influenced by culture and frequently defined in direct opposition to the mediated ideal” (Duke, 2002, p. 212). Similarly, in negotiating dual identities (i.e., Indian and American) interviews with young South Asian girls concerning the role media played in their lives and how it influenced their sexuality
demonstrated that “rather than attempting to find a place in both cultural spheres, they recognized the need to assert a new identity position that, in a sense, rejected the options offered by Indian as well as American media texts” (Durham, 2004, p.155). In other words, if minority consumers are aware that they have limited representation in the media, does this ambiguity in their ethnic identity lend to a sort of freedom in negotiating identity, possibly allowing these consumers to resist popular culture categorizations?

**The Beauty Imperative for Women of Color**

According to Merskin (2007), the “American cultural imperative of beauty prompts many women to doubt their self-worth and keeps attainment of the beauty ideal just out of reach” (p. 591). To be the best woman possible in American culture seems to entail a pursuit of aesthetic betterment. Witz and colleagues (2003) suggests that the “aesthetic labor” of wearing cosmetics fulfills goals of the hegemonic ideal as it results in women taking the default positioned of an appearance-based self (p.38). Women are what they look like and thus have to wear cosmetics in order to declare themselves, “to announce their adult status, sexual allure, youthful spirit, political beliefs— and even to proclaim their right to self-definition” (Peiss, 2002, p. 269).

For those groups of women that do not fit the beauty standard of young, White, lean, and symmetrical, the pursuit of beauty and the aesthetic labor to attain it can be difficult. For example, LaWare and Moutsatsos (2013) examined advertisements for antiaging products aimed at women in their 40s and 50s, a demographic once almost completely absent from the beauty advertising landscape. This particular age group has historically been ignored in beauty advertisements, with models in their 20s more often the faces of beauty in advertisements. Yet advertisers have been taking a different tact in
recent years, featuring aging celebrities such as Andi MacDowell and Diane Keaton, both of whom are meant to provide “authentic voice” within the advertisements for other aging female consumers (LaWare & Moutsatsos, 2013). By including middle aged women in beauty advertisements, the assumption on behalf of marketers is that inclusion will equate authenticity.

Yet when it comes to presenting an “authentic” representation of women of color in beauty advertising, we still see imagery in its formative stages. For example, many researchers have criticized the relatively recent wave of “multicultural marketing,” which seeks to appeal to women of color via including a model of color in a multiracial/multicultural setting. The problem with this tactic is how the ethnic model is often rendered. According to Kim and Chung (2005), images of Asian models in a multicultural ad series often employ traditional themes of American Orientalism. These themes are typically reductionist and seek to ascribe Asian symbols and signs to an otherwise innocuous Asian model. “Examples of this include recent trends in Asian meditation and spa products and youth-oriented clothing lines that have incorporated “Oriental” paraphernalia like dragons and happy Buddhas into their apparel” (Kim & Chung, 2005, p. 77).

Similar to orientalism, tropicalism erases specificity of nationality and homogenizes all that is identified as Latin (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). According to Guzmán and Valdivia, “Latin” in American popular culture means bright colors, rhythmic music, a propensity for being a passionate hot head and, above all else, over the top sexuality. Sexuality plays a central role in the tropicalization of Latinas via the narratives of sexual availability, proficiency, and desirability (Valdivia, 2000). We see
the sexual Latina everywhere in popular culture from the erotic music videos that Shakira and Jennifer Lopez create to characters played by Sofia Vergara and Eva Longoria in prime-time television dramas. Yet there is a commonality among this particular brand of Latina beauty, which Llorèns (2013) has labeled the *Maja* woman: “The *Maja* is white or light-skinned, has brown, green or preferably, blue eyes, a ‘fine,’ ‘feminine’ or European nose, is curvaceously thin, and has slight brown (or a shade of blonde) long flowing straight hair” (p. 550). Again, we see a particular type of ethnic representation favored, one that favors women of color who resemble their White counterparts more closely than not.

**Modern Representation**

When analyzing health and beauty sales in the U.S., Nielsen (2015) found that Hispanic Americans are driving growth in the beauty industry by spending more discretionary income on products such as hair care, lotion, and cosmetics. Similarly, Asian American spend 70% more on skincare products than the average share of the U.S. population (Nielsen, 2015). As two of the fastest growing groups of purchasers of beauty related products, what does this signify about the beauty imperative among women of color? If more and more women of color are being portrayed in advertisements for beauty products coupled with the reality that minority women are actually purchasing more beauty products than ever before, this indicates a shift in the social class of Latina American and Asian American women. Yet the question becomes not so much whether women of color are represented in beauty ads or not but the specifics of how they are showcased. For example, what product categories (e.g., retail vs. luxury items) are women of color paired with? What is her posing in relation to her background and other
models in the image? Ultimately, I seek to interpret the modern biases in ads to more deeply understand this changing social position.

In terms of basic body counts, some evidence of this changing social position can be seen in other research on advertising representation. For example, in a content analysis of mainstream women’s magazines in 1999 and 2004, White women were overrepresented while Latina and Black women were underrepresented in mainstream women’s magazine articles in 2004 compared to U.S. Census data, although not as much as in 1999 (Covert & Dixon, 2008). This may indicate that from an inclusion strategy perspective, marketers may be slowly realizing that simply including more models of color is not the best approach to attracting minority consumers.

Regarding Latinas specifically in American popular culture, they seem to occupy a liminal space that is both marginalized as well as desired (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). As mentioned earlier, Latinos in America are subject to tropicalism (Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997), which simultaneously exoticizes and homogenizes the Latino community in America. Sexuality plays a significant role in the tropicalization of Latinos/as through the widely distributed representations and narratives of sexual availability, experience, and desirability (Valdivia, 2000). Furthermore, Wade (2013) notes the popular trope of representing Latinas as domestic service workers as enforcing themes and stereotypes of sexualization via subordination and inferiority. This sexualization is readily seen among popular Latina celebrities such as Selma Hayek, Penélope Cruz, and Jennifer Lopez, but it is also visible among the Latina faces and bodies lacking celebrity used in beauty advertisements.

For Latino/a marketing and advertising agencies, Guzmán and Valdivia (2004)
note that for the past 20 years, there have been strides attempting to reframe the dominant discourses about the U.S. Latino audience. They note that the current discourse represents the Latino audience as “ethnically homogenous, racially non-White, Spanish-dominant, socioeconomically poor and most often of Mexican origin” (p. 208). With the popularization of Latinidad (Molina-Guzmán, 2006), there is an increasing centricity of Latinos/as in American popular culture, yet not enough research has examined how this is being articulated in advertising texts, particularly those of the beauty industry. One exception to this paucity is the work of Molina-Guzmán (2006, 2013) who has analyzed textual constructions of Latinidad in popular media. In her analysis, Molina-Guzmán notes the inability of consumers to engage in polysemic constructions of Latinidad, namely, that Latinos are brown, not Black, despite that fact that Afro-Latino identity is a deeply rooted identity of its own (López & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2016). There is no space for Black Latinos in American popular media, and Latinas are faced with being typecast as Latina only if they resemble the Maja ideal (Llorèns, 2013).

Another significant trend in the representation of women of color in beauty advertising is the significance marketers have constructed concerning minorities and grooming practices. Grooming practices, encompassing all kinds of sensory modifications women are encouraged to perform on their bodies, are manipulated in endless ways in beauty advertising (Moeran, 2010). According to Moeran, such manipulations include:

“bathing, cleansing, anointing, moistening, and coloring skin; cutting, shaving, plucking, braiding, waving, setting, and dyeing face, head, arm underarm, leg and/or pubic hair; both deodorizing and scenting the body; coloring or marking the lips, eyes, cheeks, face, nails, or other exposed regions; cleansing, coloring, straightening, and filing the teeth; molding, emphasizing, training, restraining,
and/or concealing various parts of the body; and so on” (p. 495-496).

As noted earlier, marketers have created racialized advertising imagery when it comes to beauty products as well as personal grooming products for women of color. Ferranti (2011) found that Black women are disproportionately targeted by marketers selling feminine hygiene products. When it comes to fashion, Sengupta (2006) found that the lack of Asian models in beauty advertisements in adolescent magazines sends a message as well: that Asian women are all work and no play. This may possibly suggest that Asian women lack the physical capacity, desirability, or social standing to be utilized in beauty advertisements as a face and form for other American women to aspire to. Yet while Asian women are sometimes excluded from beauty advertising, Latinas seem to be becoming the norm, especially those embodying the Maja beauty ideals (Llorèns, 2013). This is perhaps the reason for a recent increase in Latina models in mainstream beauty advertisements. For example, Sophia Vergara is now the leading spokesperson for COVERGIRL cosmetics while Maybelline routinely uses popular Latina (e.g., Daniela de Jesus) models for its advertisements.

While there are certainly many presumably Latina, African American, and Asian models used in beauty advertising, it is critical to note that those models some may assume to be of one particular racial or ethnic category may actually be an example of the phenomenon of a rise in the use of multiracial models, a distinct category necessitating critical scholarship (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). Previous research has demonstrated how cultural cues associated with being Black have been utilized by marketers to appeal to the general market (Appiah, 2001; Crockett, 2008). Thus it is possible that by positioning mixed-race bodies as the new standard of
beauty, marketers may be attempting to represent a racial bridge via the incorporation of more models of color, especially those of indeterminate origins, into their messages.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Overarching Paradigm: Critical Cultural Studies

For a long time, it was thought that popular culture was an omnipotent force with somewhat sinister motives, able to manipulate consumers into accepting the status quo (Fitch, 2009). According to Fitch (2009), this was the legacy of the Frankfurt school, which insisted that “We were all dupes, the theory went, mindlessly watching TV, eyes glazed over, too busy to think about politics, revolution, the poor, or foreign wars because we were too busy planning how to get enough money to buy the products advertised” (p.31). Following a major paradigmatic shift, the prevailing school of thought that media was becoming too powerful was tempered by the next era of mass communication, which (Baran & Davis, 2012) label as the “meaning-making perspectives on media” era. Especially with the advent on the internet, a medium with the unique ability to offer instant, unfettered communication capacity as well as comprehensive information-seeking abilities, scholars are now beginning to view the audience as active in their meaning-making process with media rather than passive vessels that receive information.

This new media landscape has also impacted scholars, often leading to a heightened awareness of symbolism and critique within all media texts. “In this new line of thinking, everything from soap operas to Harlequin Romances was biting social commentary” (Fitch, 2009, p.31). As Modleski (1998) points out, “No doubt there are many reasons why scholars increasingly are abdicating their responsibility to criticize
popular culture and instead are celebrating it as subversive and emancipatory. Many of us fear being called elitist; we don’t like to appear to be in the business of policing other people’s fantasies.” Modleski (1998) continues to say that cultural studies scholars are in a unique position to see past the simplification that popular culture is mere escapism and to understand how it “influences and is affected by people’s fantasies, desires and anxieties, as well as how society might respond to those desires and anxieties in meaningful ways.”

Cultural studies constitute a major research stream in recent media studies. The focus on the “dialectic” relations between individual agency and the broader social structure distinguishes the critical cultural studies approach. Specifically, the critical cultural studies approach pays special attention to the limits of individual agency and the negotiated meaning-making process in the current social and political climate. For example, the power relations implicit in beauty advertisements as well as the subject’s perception of their place in sociocultural institutions must be carefully analyzed. Consumers can transform the intended meanings of marketing messages, and these interpretive strategies are often influenced by one’s ethnic identity and gender in this society, making this theoretical framework significant for this study.

**Constructivist Perspective**

To begin, it is important to define exactly what it means to belong to a shared culture. According to Hall (1997), to belong to a culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe. Language is a type of sign that gives conceptual meaning to whatever thing it stands in place for. This is important to note because although certain culture affix certain words to stand in for objects/things, the material
world cannot be confused with the symbolic and conceptual meanings that cultures can build into particular words and symbols. Although there have been several paradigmatic shifts in the cultural studies approach, I will be focusing on the constructivist approach, which acknowledges this separation of the material and symbolic world and that “neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language” (Hall, 1997, p. 25).

According to Hall, constructivists do not deny the existence of a material world, a shared sort of reality rooted in tangibly existent things. However, it is not the material world that conveys meanings, rather it is the language system or whatever system in place that represents concepts. “It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about the world meaningfully to others” (p. 25). So it is the social actors and their conceptual frameworks this dissertation will examine. This includes the marketers, the Latina and Asian American consumers, and the highly symbolic texts (advertisements) that are being used as a communication vehicle between them.

**Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and History**

Interpretations of media are subject to a person’s relative power and socio-political position in society, which is an approach originally formulated by Michel Foucault. Regarding power, Foucault’s (1990) theorization of power and how power circulates through institutions and subjects provide a useful framework for understanding negotiation mechanisms, particularly as they apply to advertisement interpretations. Foucault’s idea of power rejects the oversimplification that power is only processed by
the dominant group and is repressive in nature. Instead, he argues that power is dispersed, indeterminate, and productive. In other words, power is something which can be used by particular people in specific situations. Finally, Foucault argues that power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. Power is in the hands of marketers because they set the aesthetic standard of beauty for minority women but it is also in the hands of the minority consumers themselves because they choose how they will respond to this imagery.

Foucault was concerned with the production of knowledge (rather than just meaning) through what he called “discourse” (rather than just language) (Hall, 1997). Foucault argues that we can only have knowledge of things if they have a meaning and that meaning is constructed through discourse. Most significant to Foucault was the link between power and knowledge. Specifically:

“Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, ‘becomes true’. Knowledge once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and disciplining of practices. Thus, ‘There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not predispose and constitute at the same time, power relations’” (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

In other words, knowledge does not operate in a void. It is put to work through certain technologies, constraints, and historical contexts. For example, what we think we “know” about beauty standards for minority women is shaped by technology (e.g., social media forums online), constraints (e.g., we have freedom of speech to say what we want but also face social constraints of political correctness about what is and is not socially acceptable to say), and historical context (e.g., the racial tension and issues of today are different than they were pre civil rights).
Finally, citing Foucault’s call for integrating history into analysis, Moores (1995) argues that the critical cultural studies approach does not simply categorize the subject’s interpretations of media but understand them in relation to the broader socio-historical contexts. In particular, the power relations structuring the subject’s position and those that are negotiated between individuals and the sociocultural institutions have to be carefully analyzed. As Ang (1996) explains the purpose of cultural studies is not is not “a matter of dissecting ‘audience activity’ in ever more refined variables as categories so that we can ultimately have a complete and generalizable formal ‘map’ of all social, political, economic and cultural forces” (p. 42). Rather, the purpose is to examine the audience activity and agency, specifically paying attention to the constantly shifting contexts within which consumers live. Political and social shifts are dynamic and ongoing, thus the critical cultural approach means constantly taking into account historical and contemporary socio-political shifts to make sense of consumer’s interpretive strategies of marketing messages.

**Consumer Culture Theory**

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is an interdisciplinary field that comprises macro, interpretive, and critical approaches to and perspectives of consumer behavior. While not a grand, unified theory, CCT instead refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (Arnold & Thompson, 2005). Under the CCT umbrella, there are four dominant research programs: (1) consumer identity projects, (2) marketplace cultures, (3) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. Although none
of these programs are mutually exclusive, as this work is concerned with broader socio-political, -historical, and -cultural implications and the dynamic interaction between consumers, their identity, and the marketplace, it is primarily consumer identity projects, the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretivist strategies that are of relevant application.

Finally, it is the critical, qualitative nature of CCT that is of interest in this dissertation. In CCT, consumer culture researchers have explored the heterogeneous distribution of meanings that exist within the broader socio-historic frame of market capitalism. Due to a focus on the various dimensions of personal, experiential, sociocultural, and political aspects of consumption, including concerns with product symbolism, ritual practices, marketplace ideologies, and brand communities, the field, rather than the laboratory, serves as the natural context for consumer culture research (Arnold & Thompson, 2005).

This vein of research holds relevance for both the in-depth interview and critical textual analysis sections of this dissertation. Participants’ interpretive strategies and consumer identity projects will be organized thematically in the in-depth interview chapter while marketplace ideologies will be discussed in the critical textual analysis.

**Consumer Identity Projects**

Consumer culture theory is concerned with the co-constructive, co-productive ways in which consumers negotiate with marketing materials to forge a sense of self (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). In the consumer identity project perspective, consumers are seekers and creators of identity via the media they consume. In this dissertation, I seek to understand how Latinas and Asian American women cohesively or disjointedly
build community or a shared sense of identity around certain product categories such as makeup, clothing, skincare, and other beauty-related services or items. As there are no studies examining this directly, I will refer to other research that has implications for this work.

Beginning with a definition, brand identity symbolizes what a brand means to consumers and delivers special, superior value to consumers from the company (Wang, Butt & Wei, 2011). Thus, when a brand community is formed, the brand becomes a form of identity for the brand community members. Although tangentially related, research on brand communities is still relevant as it addresses some of the most distinctive features of the intersection between the market and culture. Related to consumers’ identity seeking and maintenance through consumption, consumers are also seen as culture producers and purveyors. The key concern raised in this perspective is the role of consumption as stimulant in the creation of unique cultural groups (Arnold & Thompson, 2005). Brand community studies highlight how consumption activities and the related shared beliefs, sensibilities, practices, and experiences, such as fandom (Kozinets, 2001), alternative lifestyles (Kates, 2002; Thompson & Troester, 2002), and consumption communities (Arnould & Price, 1993), can help construct communities and forge group identities.

While sometimes similar, brand communities are not the same as marginalized subcultures. Hebdige (1979) explains that subcultures use the symbols that the larger culture defines in ways that are inconsistent with the meanings attached to these goods by the majority. For example, Muniz Jr. and O’Guinn (2001) noted that punk rockers took images from a variety of other subcultural sources and recombined them to effect an identity that stood in opposition to a majority culture. In other words, the meanings that
subcultures create stand in opposition or indifference to the accepted meanings of the majority. In comparison, brand communities do not typically reject aspects of the surrounding culture’s ideology, rather, they embrace them. So, the distinction between a subculture and brand community is important because this dissertation will seek to uncover instances of either form of community among participants.

**The Socio-Historic Patterning of Consumption**

In this aspect of CCT as theorized by Arnould and Thompson (2005), the various social identity factors that systematically influence consumption practices, such as class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and gender become important facets of study. Consumption choices and behaviors are shaped by social class hierarchies (Allen, 2002; Holt, 1997, 1998; Wallendorf, 2001); gender (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Thompson & Haytko, 1997); and ethnicity (Reilly & Wallendorf, 1987; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983). As ethnic minorities who have historically struggled for equal treatment and, more recently, egalitarian representation in the media, it is important to consider the historical precedence of media representation as well as the current social, political climate to truly understand Latina and Asian American women’s roles as consumers and as unique social groups.

**Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies**

Much work on this research field overlaps with critical cultural studies and media studies, as semiotic and literary critical theories are the common theoretical tools used. Studies informed by this perspective investigate consumption ideologies embedded in mass media and the rhetorical tactics and narratives that are employed to make these appeals possible. Moreover, studies operating in this research domain explore how
particular cultural production systems and institutions, such as advertising, work to systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of subjective positions and identity projects.

Specifically related to this dissertation project on Latina and Asian American women audiences’ reading of beauty and fashion advertisements, this domain of CCT considers popular culture texts, including advertisements, as lifestyle and identity project guidelines that convey marketplace ideologies and idealized consumer types (Hirschman, 1988; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). By decoding and deconstructing mass-mediated marketplace ideologies from advertising texts, consumer culture theorists reveal the ways in which cultural production systems such as advertising invite consumers to embrace certain identity and lifestyle goals (Arnauld & Thompson, 2005).

Although there is little that directly connects the discursive strategies women of color use to negotiate marketplace ideologies of beauty, there are a few studies of note. Schuller’s (2009) study analyzing Mexican American author Maria Cristina Mena's short magazine fiction is significant. Schuller’s article illustrates how the emerging U.S. beauty industry produced whiteness for sale in the neocolonial marketplace. Specifically, Schuller discussed how Mena’s representations of Mexican women's use of cosmetics articulate “how the beauty industry both lends structure to and is structured by the idea of race; at the same time, she reminds her audience that the impact of beauty products and services is in large part determined by the political and economic context of the goods themselves” (p. 82). For example, Schuller noted that Mena’s characters illustrated the ways that beauty was correlated to whiteness by reddening their cheeks with rouge, applying extra powder to whiten their skin, and even going so far as to have elective
surgeries to de-pigment their skin and re-shape their “ethnic” features (e.g., lips, noses, etc.). Mena’s characters were influenced by the marketplace beauty ideology that pronounced whiteness the standard of beauty. For this dissertation, I am interested in what Latinas and Asian American women perceive the prevailing marketplace ideologies to be and how they interpret them.

Using a multi-methods approach (e.g., ethnographic interviews, participant observation, content analysis of television shows), Llorèns (2013) explored Latina women’s experiences with the beauty and plastic surgery industries. Her article illustrates how multiple actors – doctors, beauty pageant promoters, stylists, beauty queens, media and plastic surgery consumers themselves – construct notions of universal beauty. Additionally, Llorèns (2013) analyzed the reality television show Dr. 90210 and the Miss Universe Pageant competition to understand the ways in which multiple actors/agents influence Latina/o beauty ideals and how these in turn influence plastic surgery practices. In her findings, Llorèns (2013) summarizes media depictions ofLatinas as coalescing into what she calls the Maja beauty:

“One look at television shows ranging from Telenovelas produced in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil to Miami’s Telemundo’s Al Rojo Vivo or Univisión’s Despierta América reveal the media’s construction of a remarkably consistent prototype, with some regional variation, of the acceptable (and desirable) Latina woman. She is light skinned, has straight but flowing long hair dyed either blonde or a shade of brown, and is curvy but thin (though compared with mainstream Hollywood body standards these Latina TV personalities would be described as “curvaceous,” or possibly even as, “fat”)” (p. 550).

Regarding Latina’s view on plastic surgery as a result on their inundation of this Maja ideal, Llorèns states that “a long history of colonization, slavery, and subjugation, racial and ethnic prejudice deems the Latino/a body as inherently deficient when compared with the European body” (p. 566). She postulates that this history or
marginalization and oppression may possibly explain the consistently large number of Latino/as undergoing elective aesthetic surgery. Llorèns notes that the “media, advertising, and beauty industries work together to produce and uphold White (European) beauty ideals, which large numbers of people by virtue of their skin color, race, nationality, ethnicity, size, hair texture and so on will never be able to attain” (p. 566). Her study is a prime example of how mainstream market ideologies can have real and often detrimental implications for minority consumers.

In-Depth Interview Theoretical Framework

Rhetorical Agency

As this dissertation is primarily interested in how minority consumers themselves make use of and contend with advertising representation, it is important to include theoretical insight into how marginalized populations give voice. Rhetorical agency is a complex subject to which a great deal of critical attention has recently been devoted (Enck-Wanzer, 2011). As Sowards (2010) notes, despite recent efforts to theorize and define this term, it remains “ambiguous and unpredictable” (p. 226). Perhaps offering the best starting point for a definition of rhetorical agency, Campbell (2005) proposes that agency: “(1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is ‘invented’ by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is affected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal” (p. 2).

Rhetorical agency is radically contextual, contingent, and performative (Enck-Wanzer, 2011). Moreover, as West (2010) argues: “Nothing is guaranteed in advance as subjects necessarily work in between the constraining and enabling conditions found in
the contingent and the probable, whether they recognize it or not” (p. 160). In the context of this study, how minority consumers interpret, make use of, and transform the symbolic content within beauty advertisements operates within the racialized, gendered, and commercial climates at play.

Rhetorical agency is a useful analytical lens for minority populations in particular because it illuminates how marginalized groups can make do with the material forms propagated in our popular culture by creating fissures of the built environment to craft literal and figurative spaces for/of a diasporic and unofficial culture (Enck-Wanzer, 2011). For example, Enck-Wanzer (2011) performed a critical analysis of the rhetorical agency of Puerto Rican people living in El Barrio in New York City. His article argues that “everyday spaces evidence a tactical, tropicalized rhetorical agency that underwrites cultural citizenship in El Barrio” (p. 344). Locals exhibited agency in the form of casitas, gardens, flags, and murals, which Enck-Wanzer described as imbuing “rhetorical scenes with an indelibly Latina/o ethos—which accents everyday material forms in East Harlem and demonstrates productive forms of cultural citizenship” (p. 344).

In in-depth interviews with second generation South Asian girls, Durham (2004) discovered that the participants were forced to forge new identities from a lack of relatability in media representation. The girls in Durham’s study saw both Indian and American popular culture as “marking the boundaries of those two worlds, neither of which they claimed as their milieu” (p.155). Thus, instead of trying to find a place in both cultural spheres, they recognized the need to assert a new identity than what was offered in media texts. This is also a form of rhetorical agency in that this rejection of the status quo resulted in those participants contemplating what they would prefer to see instead. I
am interested to see how Latinas and Asian American women may or may not “make do” with mainstream beauty advertisements in their own unique ways.

Examining the high fashion industry, Vats (2014) argues that racial performance in high fashion functions as “a disciplinary visual rhetoric which severely constrains objections to the myth of postraciality and enables claims that race is no longer a meaningful category of analysis” (p. 112). Essentially, Vats (2014) argues that it has become chic and marketable in the fashion and media industries to employ racially and culturally influenced costuming. Vats cites shows such as *America’s Next Top Model* and a recent editorial spread using black and whiteface in *Vogue Paris* as just two of many instances where racial performances helped to undermine rhetorical agency. Specifically, Vats goes on to say that racial performances limit the rhetorical agency of marginalized groups in two ways: By reducing racial identity to a mere accessory and by framing racial interaction as a short-lived tourist encounter. This is of interest for this work because I will be critically analyzing beauty advertisements to see in what ways racial costuming and performance may be present and how that may have repercussions on minority women’s agency in interpreting and possibly challenging these representations.

*Distinctiveness Theory*

Another important theory when analyzing the relationship of ethnic minorities to advertising messages is distinctiveness theory. Originally proposed by McGuire (1984), the theory holds that an individual’s distinctive traits in relation to other people in their environment will be more salient to that person than will other more common traits. This theory has important implications for the effectiveness of using ethnic spokespersons in targeted advertising. Applying distinctiveness theory to Hispanic consumers, Deshpandé
and Stayman (1994) found that their participants were more likely to spontaneously mention their ethnicity when they were ethnic minorities in their city. In other words, being a minority where they lived, they were more likely to mention that as part of their identity. The researchers also found a carryover effect between those Hispanic participants who were ethnic minorities and how they responded to ethnic elements of advertising. Specifically, Hispanics were more likely to believe a Hispanic spokesperson in an advertisement was trustworthy if they grew up as minorities in their city.

Building on distinctiveness theory, Grier and Deshpandé (2001) proposed that there are dimensions other than numeric prevalence in society that affect the observable effects of distinctiveness theory. Ethnicity acquires value relative to the structural and cultural beliefs and characteristics attributed to it via society (Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway & Balkwell, 1997). Thus, Grier and Deshpandé (2001) analyzed how social distinctiveness affects distinctiveness theory beyond numeric dimensions by testing Black and White participants’ ratings of ethnic importance in South Africa where social status and numeric status are negatively correlated. They found that social status distinctiveness did indeed affect participants’ responses. In other words, if participants perceived they had higher social status, they were less inclined to rate a spokesperson’s ethnic similarity to them as important. This has important implications for this study because bicultural consumers are unique in that they are an amalgamation of cultural influences and identities. Depending on how participants identify as well as how they perceive the status and importance of their social class, ethnic salience of a spokesperson may be decreasingly relevant as the population becomes more and more ethnically and culturally heterogeneous.
Critical Textual Analysis Theoretical Framework

Visual Representation

To analyze the magazine advertisements, I selected for the critical textual analysis portion of this dissertation, I referred to Hall’s (1997) call for examining meaning in imagery wherein dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, and race are often foregrounded in efforts to highlight cultural differences, which he labeled visual representation. In this body of research, many scholars have noted the importance of othering and the use of binaries of dominance and subordination between different genders, races, etc. (Hall, 2001; Potter, 1996). In beauty and fashion advertising, it is important to understand how models of color are positioned in relation to one another, their White counterparts, and the background elements of the advertisement because each component may exemplify how these cultural binaries are perpetuated or dismantled.

While many researchers have concern over the ethical use of imagery in advertisements, media researcher Larry Gross’s (1988) articulation of image ethics perhaps best encapsulates the argument. Gross (1988) proposed two fundamental principles: First, that groups should be allowed to speak for themselves and, second, mass media should be used to equalize the unequal distribution of power in society, or at least not to perpetuate inequality (As cited by Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005: Gross, 1988). Several iterations of this proposal have occurred, including visual communication theorist van Leeuwen’s definition (2000, 2001), who identified two basic questions regarding the conventions of visual representation:

(1) How are people depicted in relation to each other or their surroundings?

(2) How are people depicted in relation to the viewer?
In visual representation analysis, the significance of imagery cannot be overstated. Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) note that marketers have learned to rely on imagery instead of text in advertisements to convey messages to consumers because images elude empirical verification. Thus, “images are especially amenable in enabling strategists to avoid being held accountable for false or misleading claims” (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005, p. 580). The researchers used the example of how cigarette manufacturers have learned not to make text-based claims about their products, and instead seem to rely upon visual imagery such as the lone cowboy roaming the American West to inspire sentiments of uniqueness, masculine solitude, etc. In the beauty advertising context, there are similar tactics. For example, an advertisement with an extreme close up of the porcelain white skin of an Asian model, perhaps juxtaposed with symbols of the Orient such as cherry blossom trees, Chinese dragons, or red paper lanterns would be a tacit strategy that relied on the consumer’s interpretation of imagery rather than words. Perhaps the consumer would interpret the ad as conflation of femininity, exoticism, and the Asian mystique, thus transferring an association to the product as something that will help them acquire otherworldly skin. Visual representation analysis is important due to concerns about the persuasive power and rhetorical influence of marketing images (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005).
In Figure 1, I have provided a copy of Schroeder and Borgerson’s (2005) framework for analysis of visual representation in marketing communication. According to the researchers, these four interdisciplinary conventions provide tools to build an ethical practice of seeing via looking, evaluating, and analyzing imagery.

**Face-ism**

Beginning with face-ism, Archer and colleagues (1983) originally identified this as a type of representational bias. The researchers conducted five studies involving various media to investigate the facial prominence of men and women and subsequent social psychological consequences. Their interest in facial prominence stemmed from their belief that, "because the face and head are the centers of mental life - intellect, personality, identity, and character the relative prominence of this part of the anatomy may be symbolically consequential" (Archer et al., 1983, p. 726). Archer and his colleagues found that males were portrayed with more prominent faces than females in news photographs appearing in American periodicals, in newspapers from various countries, and in art portraits dating from the past 600 years. In addition, when asked to
draw human figures, both male and female research participants drew women with less prominent faces and more prominent bodies. In other words, when either men or women appear in images that show more of their body, viewers tended to attribute fewer positive attributes to them. Yet it was found that more men had facial close ups than women. Thus, women are less often represented in a visual capacity that causes viewers to attribute intellect, intelligence, or ambition.

In the context of race, there is limited research examining face-ism among advertisements using models of color, especially as it pertains to Latinos and Asians. However, one study of note does suggest some evidence that minorities are less often showcased with prominent facial close-ups. Zuckerman and Kieffer (1994) found evidence of lower facial prominence in depictions of Blacks than in depictions of Whites in an analysis of American periodicals, American paintings, and American stamps. Interestingly, American paintings and stamps only yielded the effect for portrayals created by White artists. This is relevant for the advertising context because it demonstrates that facial bias in advertising imagery could possibly be an unintentional result depending on who is designing the imagery.

**Idealization**

Within consumer research, numerous studies have revealed specific links between glamorized images in television ads and dissatisfaction with the self (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999; Peck & Loken, 2004; Richins, 1991; Yu, 2014). According to Schroeder and Borgerson (2005), idealized bodies, help construct notions about female identity, attractiveness, and normality in ways that can damage identity. Thus they included this in their framework to analyze imagery in order to seek out the ways in which women are utilized as scrutinized objects of vision in advertising imagery.
Although there is limited research available linking racial minorities in advertising to idealization, there are studies within critical film analysis that support this phenomenon in other ways. For example, Hughey (2009) coined the term “magical negro” to describe the phenomenon of media utilizing black (predominantly) men to act as transformational props to White counterparts. For example, Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus (mentor to Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix* or Michael Clarke Duncan as a magical albeit mentally slow healer in *The Green Mile*. This is one way in which bodies of color can be idealized, although not always in the best interest of egalitarian representation because even idealizing a model is a form of othering. In the context of this work, beyond idealizing women as beautiful objects, I will seek to understand other ways in which women of color specifically are idealized in advertising imagery.

*Exoticization*

A particularly relevant factor for this work, exoticization is “A particularly virulent form of stereotyping that combines several problematic representational conventions, exoticization affects many identity categories appearing in marketing communications, including Africans, Asians, Blacks, Native Americans, and indigenous peoples” (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005, p. 592). Many examples of exoticization have been discussed previously, including tropicalism and orientalism, both of which portray minority communities as different and to some extent less than Whites via a lack of nuance in their depictions (e.g., Latinas only being portrayed as sexual and sensual objects rather than as businesswomen, athletes, single mothers, etc.). Exoticization is a form of othering, and exotic representations function as “markers of social boundaries and devices of domination” (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992). For example, in mainstream
American culture, commonly subordinated elements in advertising texts and popular culture include females, black individuals, and the “exotic,” each of which is subordinated to and defined in relation to elements that are culturally superior—being White, male, and “normal” (Borgerson, 2001)

**Exclusion**

Finally, exclusion is an important facet to consider in advertising imagery because often the lack of representation sends a more powerful message. Although some may argue that increasing representation of once excluded populations in advertising is an improvement over earlier periods, there are others who disagree with the actual implementation. As noted earlier, some scholars argue that stocking a singular depiction of a minority (e.g., one dark skinned black person or one curvaceous Latina) defeats the purpose of inclusion and results in a heavier emphasis on difference and tokenism (Aaker et al., 2000; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Johnson & Grier, 2011).

Critical to Schroeder and Borgerson’s framework is the researcher’s emphasis on the distinction between the marketer’s intention and the consumer’s interpretation. According to them, representational conventions such as these within advertising imagery may operate within marketing communication to systematically and unconsciously influence consumer perception at a fundamental cognitive level, via a process that they labeled “tacit interpretation” (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2004). They add that relatively few people realize how face-ism, idealization, exoticization, and exclusion pervade marketing representations and consumers may remain unable to resist or deconstruct them (Kates, 1999; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).
CHAPTER IV
METHOD

This chapter details the research methods employed as well as the specific procedures followed during data collection and analysis. In the first part of this chapter, I present my rationale for using a grounded theory approach to structure my research. Next, I discuss the research questions guiding the textual analysis of five print advertisements that use Latina and Asian American women. In the second part, I provide the questions and methodological design for the 60 in-depth interviews with the Latina and Asian American female participants.

Grounded Theory

In order to best address how to critically analyze beauty advertisements featuring women of color, my approach to data analysis is informed by grounded theory, which looks at how texts are produced, what meanings are embedded, and examines the structure, in an effort to discover common thematic categories that aide in developing appropriate research questions (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Grounded theory is a qualitative, systematic, and flexible method that approaches the collection and analysis of data to construct theories “grounded” in the data themselves (Charmaz, 2006). Coding of the most common themes seen in the dataset helped to shape an analytic framework for further analysis. In grounded theory, coding is the first step in attempting to define what is happening in the data, followed by the development of an emergent theory to explain the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a reflexive approach, I constantly vacillated between my data and my theoretical framework, reworking and reorganizing to make sure I had the best fit possible between my themes and my relevant theories.
Critical Textual Analysis

To address these questions and other concerns raised in previous chapters, the following research questions served as the guidelines for analyzing the mainstream magazine print advertisements that feature Latina and Asian American women:

(1) How are Latina and Asian American women represented in ethnic-targeted and non-targeted ads in magazines?

(2) What are the common symbols, iconography, and appeals that are used to present Latina and Asian American female characters in advertising?

(3) What are the sociocultural and marketing ideologies that come to work in shaping these representations?

I have chosen critical textual analysis over the more quantitative content analysis for several reasons. While content analysis examines explicit and clearly measurable factors, (e.g., counting minority model appearances in ads), textual analysis is more productive in studying advertising texts that feature women of color in relation to beauty products, since racialization and sexualization is often suggested or implied in ads through cultural symbols or ambiguous scenarios. By uncovering the connotations, denotations, and the deeper social and marketing ideologies shaping these images and messages, I can better guide my discussion with participants as well as build upon the thin literature base looking critically at multicultural advertising in the beauty industry.

Although I am interested in understanding the meaning-making processes that Asian American and Latina American women engage in when they see beauty advertisements, I am also interested in applying a critical lens to the advertisements themselves. Textual analysis "can offer creative ways to articulate experiences that would
otherwise be inaccessible to empirical research methods” (Phillipov, 2013, p. 209).

Furthermore, this method can be useful for discovering alternative dimensions of research that may otherwise be inaccessible when using only empirical methods (Bennett, 2005; Phillipov, 2013). Grounded theories that utilize textual analysis can address the form of a text as well as its content, audiences, and production or presentation aspects (Charmaz, 2006). I selected multiple advertisements featuring Latina, African American, Asian, and Caucasian women featured in beauty-related advertisements. These ads were selected from a variety of print magazines and feature products such as cosmetics, lotion, hair products, clothing, and other beauty-related items.

There are many advantages to textual analysis, especially the richness yielded from close reading of texts which allows significant details to be revealed (Silverman, 2006). Texts are useful for analysis because they are vehicles for human meaning, consisting of interpretations of everyday life for individuals and society (Bernard, 2006). Mass produced texts, such as beauty product advertisements, disseminate particular versions of reality that reinforce power (or powerlessness) of particular classes while simultaneously positioning the “other,” with the other being defined by representations such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, etc. (Applequist, 2015). Much of textual analysis involves placing the text within the intended context, looking at how contextual meanings the text implies, and which realities the text claims to represent (Bogard, 2001). As such, I will examine the intentionality behind each advertisements.

While the researcher’s critical reading is not meant to represent the “true” or “correct” meaning of a text, it is useful for establishing a benchmark to better understand the audience’s response (Hunt, 1997). Specifically, my informed reading will attempt to
uncover how (or how not) Latinas and Asian American women have been accepted and conceptualized by marketers. Any interview project with media audiences must be grounded in the researcher’s familiarity with the media texts in study. An extended textual analysis will provide the first step for the researcher to identify and explain potential similarities and differences between the advertiser and viewer’s values. Textual analysis reveals the semiotic, social and cultural factors that predispose audiences’ interpretations of media texts.

On a deeper level, the ideologies conveyed in advertising speak to both the advertiser’s particular artistic choices as well as a crystallized interpretation of a person or community’s role and position in society. As Kellner (1995) argues, the analysis of ideology is central to cultural studies since “dominant ideologies serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination” (p. 7). Cultural studies emphasizes the multilayered oppression of sexuality, race, gender, and class, which are each intertwined in the interplay of power relations. Through this analysis, the complex ways that sexuality, racialization, and the overall depiction of Latinas and Asian American women are encoded or embodied in multicultural beauty advertising texts can then be observed.

There are several studies of note that I have modeled by analysis after. For example, Redmond (2003) examined the way that contemporary British women’s magazine advertising employs idealized images of thin white women to confer status on a range of beauty products and services. Specifically, the “lean, pure, radiant images of white women are imagined to be natural sources of light, beauty, and the entry point (with the product) to a higher state of female grace” (p. 170). In their textual analysis of women’s fitness magazines, Duncan and Klos (2014) examined the paradoxical
messaging and imagery used in fitness beauty ads. The researchers suggest that order for women to achieve proper womanly status, “they must feel that their femininity emerges by becoming the best they can be through the purchase of appropriate products and services” (p.257). However, in both examples, race is not a key element in the researcher’s analysis, which is largely the case in many critical textual analysis studies in the context of beauty advertisements. As such, this study will be unique in its examination of multiculturalism and racial power relations in beauty advertisements.

The sample of advertisements were obtained through 10 different mainstream and ethnic-targeted women’s and general interest magazines widely circulated in the U.S. (see Appendix A for complete list). These ads were collected from beauty and fashion advertisements that feature Asian and Latina models both solo and within group settings. The ads were chosen using the following criteria: 1.) it depicted a solo representation of a Latina or Asian model, 2.) it depicted a Latina or Asian model in combination with women of other ethnicities (i.e., a multicultural group setting), and 3.) there were explicit or easily identifiable cultural cues in the advertisement. In the third criterion, I attempted to choose advertisements that clearly demarcated a model as a woman of color via emphasizing her Hispanicness or her Asianness. In many instances, this was performed via incorporating cultural cues, colors, or background iconography associated with either cultural group. For example, when using Asian models, this could possibly involve a woman in traditional East dress such as a kimono or cheongsam, Chinese characters in the ad copy, or pan-Asian symbolism such as using martial arts. Conversely, a Hispanic model may be surrounded with food items native to Carribean or Central and South American cultures, or possibly dressed in attire that would be worn when performing
dance such as rumba, samba, tango, etc. It is worth noting that there were more instances of advertisement using cultural cues than not, a finding that is further elaborated upon in the discussion section.

An example of an advertisement that downplays ethnicity or cultural distinctiveness as important targeting strategies for consumers would be those that include Asian or Latina models solo or in a group setting with no explicit reference to any obvious cultural cues. It was important to include advertisements where race seemed incidental because I wanted to analyze the content for evidence of more implicit instances of exoticism, idealization, face-ism, or exclusion under the visual representation theory framework (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). Although I focused on six representative advertisements for the purpose of this dissertation, I have viewed hundreds of examples and used my previous experience in viewing multicultural advertisements to choose the most relevant texts for analysis.

**In-Depth Interviewing**

To explore the research concerns raised from the textual analysis, the following research questions were explored through in-depth interviews with Latina and Asian American women:

(1) How do these self-identified Latina and Asian American bicultural women interpret beauty images in fashion/beauty advertising in relation to their self-identity?

(2) How do these self-identified Latina and Asian American bicultural women interpret beauty and fashion advertising in relation to their minority position in society?
(3) What do these advertisements mean to these bicultural women of color?

**Sampling**

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used for the study. One strength of snowball sampling was its efficiency in finding participants whose attributes are central to the research problem (Lindlof, 1995). Another advantage of using snowballing in this dissertation is that as a White female researcher, I did not have direct access to various local social networks. Through snowballing, I was able to access a broader social network through friends and acquaintances. To achieve theoretical saturation (Morgan, 1997), a total of 60 participants were recruited with one participant omitted due to her predominant identification as a Filipino woman. To capture the heterogeneous experiences of the Asian American communities, I purposefully recruited female participants from different Asian ethnicities, including Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese Americans. However, scholars suggested that South Asians’ experience is often distinct from those of East Asians, due to the dissimilar religions, physical characteristics, and cultural beliefs. Immigrants from East Asian countries like China, Japan and Korea brought with them Confucianism and Buddhism. In contrast, South Asians, particularly Asian Indians, are physical different from East Asians, with dissimilar religious identities as Hindus or Muslims, and thus even the U.S.-born generations do not feel as though they have much in common with East Asian groups (Min & Kim, 1999). Therefore, this study did not include Asian Americans of South Asian heritage. For recruitment of Latina participants, I included Latinas of South and Central American descent as well as self-identified Latinas from Spanish-speaking Caribbean descent, namely Cuban, Dominican, or Puerto Rican.
**Design**

Study recruitment flyers were sent through personal contacts, and to Latino and Asian American Student Associations at a private university in the Southeastern region, and to various Asian American and Hispanic business organizations in the area. A collection of advertisements and editorial pages featuring Asian models from mainstream fashion magazines, as well as supplementary ads depicting Latina and Black models, were shown to the participants during the interview. I purposefully selected a variety of ads that portrayed Asian and Latina models in different settings (i.e., group/solo, outdoor/indoors, luxury/mainstream brand). The list of publications that I collected advertisements from are in a table in the appendix. All ads were featured in publications dated either February or March of 2016 for the sake of recency. Finally, there was a larger selection of advertisements shown to participants than those used in the critical textual analysis section. However, all five ads from the critical textual analysis were included in the larger sample of ads shown to participants.

The ads were not shown as a representative sample of Asian and Latina models. Instead, they were used as a stimulus device for the “auto-driving” technique (McCracken, 1988; Tsai, 2011), through which participants can compare the visual prompts with the media representations they experienced in their everyday lives. Contrasting different representations of Asian and Latina models leads to a more comprehensive understanding of how Latina and Asian American women perceive, construct, and interpret beauty ideals for the Latina and Asian American communities as well as society at large. Additionally, considering the prolonged invisibility of Asians and Asian Americans in media and advertising, participants likely had limited exposure and
recall of Asian representations. Thus, the auto-driving method is particularly apt to allow participants to provide vivid descriptions and rich interpretations of the media representations.

In the interview introduction, I explained my academic background as a doctoral student in advertising. I then explained my research interests in media representations of minorities as the main research motivation, but also included my curiosity about women of color’s responses to marketer’s beauty and fashion product advertising strategies. I emphasized my role as White female researcher who might not be familiar with their experience as an ethnic minority and as a bicultural consumer, in order to motivate my participants to provide thick descriptions and detailed examples. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, signed informed consent forms for the interview, and were promised anonymity.

As a White researcher interviewing women of color about their minority experience within the beauty industry, establishing rapport takes some doing. Merriam (2009) suggests that after a researcher has gained entry, the researcher should establish rapport by “fitting into the participants’ routines, finding some common ground with them, helping out on occasion, being friendly, and showing interest in the activity” (p. 123). During interviews, I took few minutes to inquire about the person’s life and wellbeing before asking the participant anything directly from my list of questions. I also made sure that each interview was fluid, and that I did not rigidly follow the list of questions so closely that I stifled any attempts on behalf of the participant to provide stories and information that may fall outside of the purview of my inquiry.
While researchers can try and distinguish subjective and objective components in a participant’s statement, the qualitative research point of view is that “the informant’s statement represents merely the perception of the informant, filtered and modified by his cognitive and emotional reactions and reported through his personal verbal usages” (Dean & Whyte, 1958, p. 105-106). Thus, although the participant is saying what he or she believes to be true, researchers need to acknowledge from the outset that they are merely receiving that individual’s unique picture of the world as he or she sees it.

So, knowing that a participant’s ideas of what objective reality are may slightly or greatly overlap with what others believe, the real point of interest in this dissertation is the subjective material. Dean and Whyte (1958) acknowledge that there are six different kinds of subjective data that an informant may report on. First, the current emotional state of the informant such as anger, anxiety, fear, joy, or elation. Second, researchers may be interested in the informant’s opinions and, thirdly, his or her attitudes. Next, the informant’s values (i.e., the organizing principles underlying attitudes and opinions), are subjective data of interest. Next, the informant’s hypothetical reactions (i.e., the projection of what he or she would do), and finally, the actual tendencies of the informant to behave or feel when confronted with the situation or phenomenon of interest (p. 106). Each of these kinds of subjective data are elicited depending on the phrasing and kinds of questions the researcher poses, meaning that the researcher can impact the “truthfulness” of the data as much as the participant can. Thus, knowing that much of what an informant reports is already highly situational, the overarching question a researcher asks should not be “is the informant telling the truth?” rather “what factors can we expect to influence this informant’s reporting of the situation under these interview circumstances?” (Dean &
Whyte, 1958, p. 107). I constructed my questionnaire in such a way as to elicit as many of these types of subjective data as possible as one means of triangulating my findings among participants.

**Trustworthiness**

Prolonged engagement, triangulation and member check were used in this dissertation to ensure the study credibility and trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement includes using persistent observation, triangulating data sources, and debriefing participants. To satisfy the need for prolonged engagement, I made sure to remain in constant contact with participants. The interviews were a minimum of an hour long and I made myself available for questions after the interviews. They had access to the transcribed interview notes via e-mail, and I welcomed their feedback in my interpretation of their interviews (debriefing). With several of the women I interviewed, I conducted follow up interviews with visual aids, which satisfied the call for prolonged contact, persistent observation, and triangulation, since I provided a new medium for participants to interact with.

The element of persistent observation is often difficult to achieve in person. People are busy, and carving out longer than an hour for an in-depth interview, especially on a work day, is hard for most. This is where new communication technology such as video conferencing (e.g., Skype) is useful. Of the interviews conducted, 28 were conducted via Skype. While asynchronous communication was previously regarded as subpar to traditional face-to-face interviews, researchers now argue that greater engagement within these two modes of communication is making them a viable alternative. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) offered a detailed overview of Ph.D.
researchers’ experiences using the video conferencing application Skype to conduct interviews. While the benefits of Skype included cost effectiveness, flexibility in scheduling, and a comparable level of rapport-building capabilities as compared to face-to-face interviewing, they also noted a larger rate of absenteeism due to participants not feeling as committed to the interview if it was conducted over Skype. Depending on the population of interest, Skype may be the only way to access participants. In my own research, I found Skype invaluable because the Asian American population in South Florida is small so I had to look outside of not only my city but my state to find potential interviewees. Hanna (2012) notes that the fact that participants are empowered to choose their own interview medium (e.g., telephone or Skype over a face-to-face meet up) is a benefit in of itself. Furthermore, Hanna notes that while mediums such as phone interviews may lose subtleties associated with physical interactions, “this loss allows the researcher to ‘stay at the level of the text’ and avoid imposing contextual information on the data” (p. 240). The fact that Skype, IM, and phone calls are largely free and easily rescheduled means the researcher is less of an imposition on the participant’s life and follow up questioning and longer interviews are possible.

Regarding triangulation, Patton (1990) argues that triangulation not only provides diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but also adds to the research credibility by strengthening confidence in the conclusions. Thus, triangulation was achieved in this dissertation through the diversification of sources, methods, and theories. I made sure to interview multiple nationalities and women of different ages and occupations to accumulate as much diversity in employment, age, and ethnicity as possible. Using a mixed method strategy, critical textual analysis accompanied by the in-depth interviews
provides a multifaceted approach to examining beauty and fashion advertisements.

Finally, the member check method, which has been considered to be the most crucial technique for establishing credibility in qualitative studies (Lindlof, 1995), was used in this dissertation for further confirmation, verification, and clarification. After each interview, notes were transcribed and e-mailed to each participant for their review and comment. No participants edited, commented upon, or changed any of the transcribed interviews.

Analysis

To begin, I structured each in-depth interview following Owen’s (1984) thematic analysis procedure, which provides a means of placing data into categories looking for recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence “is present when at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning” (Keyton, 2006, p. 296). Repetition involves “the explicit repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences” (Keyton, 2006, p. 296). Forcefulness is identified by “vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses, which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from others” (Owen, 1984, p. 276). The lack of Asian and Latina faces in beauty advertising imagery coupled with heavily stereotyped depictions make me curious as to how these consumers engage with beauty advertisements, if at all. We know that advertising and the mass media can act as an influential reference point for consumers, playing an important role in constructing social and cultural ideals of thinness and beauty (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Tiggemann, 2004).

I transcribed and individually coded all the interviews. After reviewing the interview transcripts several times, I identified the key themes and issues independently, and later I identified the significant patterns, primary themes and subthemes that merited
Based on grounded theory that is widely employed in the stream of interpretive advertising research (e.g., Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Tsai 2011; Tsai & Li, 2012), the interpretive themes and corresponding meanings that emerge from participants’ own interview narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were compared to existing theoretical formulations to discover new insights and nuanced divergence.

CHAPTER V
CRITICAL TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

Advertising is one of a myriad of texts that construct, codify, and purvey the social position of a racial class. In fact, print advertisements like those analyzed in this chapter have to “make an immediate connection with the viewer, thereby employing signs and symbols that have been commonplace communicators in the society” (Merskin, 2007, p. 595). The meaning in advertisements is not static, rather it is continuously drawn from the general culture and transferred back and forth between consumers and products (Merskin, 2007). Durham (1998, 2001) noted that people of color are one of many “symbolically annihilated groups” (in addition to people with disabilities, the elderly, the LGBTQ community, etc.) As such, this analysis will examine the ways in which hegemonic forms of dominance are conveyed in advertising imagery and how this may be particularly dubious for women of color.

Although the focus of this work are bicultural women of color, the nature of print ads does not allow for easy identification of a model’s exact cultural background. Thus, another important facet to consider is the use of multiracial models as stand ins for multiculturalism. In this chapter, I define “multiracial” and “mixed race” persons as
belonging to more than one of the racial groups listed in the U.S. Census (i.e., Black/African American, White, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander). Of course, there are many similarities and overlaps between the concepts of race, culture, nationality, and ethnicity (Cross & Cross, 2007). For example, a woman with darker skin tone may be perceived as Black but could very well also identify as a Latina. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the socio-political significance of race in this country as part of this analysis. Understanding why advertisers chose a model of indeterminate race sends a message to consumers just as much as choosing a model who may typify the physiological aspects of a particular race. It is possible that marketers who used mixed race models in their ads do so to appear politically correct without offending or alienating their predominantly White consumer base. In fact, several studies (Aaker et al., 2000; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Johnson & Grier, 2011) have demonstrated that this tactic may result in consumer backlash as consumers of color may possibly resent this form of tokenism and othering that still pitches bodies of color against a backdrop where normalcy is still whiteness.

Similarly, it is important to note that changes in representation do not necessarily equate improvement. While we are seeing more minorities in advertising, including more women on color in beauty advertising, there are many scholars and critics who argue that digital manipulation of these images, especially tone manipulation and whitewashing, are creating ethical dilemmas for both consumers and advertisers (Asim, 2005; Li, 2008; Reaves, Hitchon, Park, & Yun, 2004; Watson, Dejong, & Slack, 2009). Hall (1997) pointed out the ideological role of the mass media by stating that media are not “simply reflective or ‘expressive’ of an already achieved consensus, but instead… reproduce
those very situations which favour and legitimize the existing structure of things” (p. 63).
In other words, mass media such as beauty advertisements are signifying agents of ideology and are important commentary on the social order. As such, the rampant use of digital manipulation (as well as other issues such as stereotyping, sexualization, cultural appropriation, etc.) in beauty advertisements becomes an ethical issue.

The following offers a synthesis and analysis of observations about how minority women are commonly depicted in print beauty ads. After viewing several hundred advertisements across a broad span of publications, I offer the following themes and specific advertisements that I feel typify some of the commonalities I examined across the advertisements. To analyze specific stylistic, positioning, and symbolic elements of the texts, I utilized visual representation analysis (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005) as well as elements of CCT, such as how these media texts reflect marketplace ideologies.

**Latina Print Ads Analysis**

*Latinas as Paradoxically Agentic and Sexualized*

According to face-ism, facial close-ups often denote more agentic personalities (i.e., ambition, dominance, and intellect). In contrast, someone with lower facial prominence and those positioned in a group setting or who are seen as further away are perceived as more warm, compassionate, and likable (Archer et al., 1983; Levesque & Lowe, 1999; Schwarz & Kurz, 1989; Zuckerman, 1986). Across the majority of the advertisements I analyzed that included Latina models, the majority were positioned as more agentic in that their faces were often closer to the viewer. Yet when it came to styling, gaze and positioning, Latinas are also the most likely ethnicity to be sexually posed. Models who I presumed or confirmed to be Latina were often posed with slightly
open mouths, a smoldering gaze, or with large swathes of skin exposed to the viewer. This places Latina models in beauty advertisements in a paradox. While women can of course be both sexually provocative and intelligent, many scholars have pointed out that being consumed via sexuality is often a form of objectification that downplays intelligence. For example, Wade (2013) lists several “types” of Latina popularized in American culture, such as the chola and mulatta who are both singularly characterized by their sexual availability and “animalistic instincts” (i.e., being people controlled by their baser instincts, including their sex drive).

Typifying this pattern of a closer facial proximity to the viewer with simultaneous sexualized posing, I selected Figure 2 as an advertisement that demonstrates both.

**Figure 2**

This ad features a presumably Latina model selling clothing from bebe, a moderately priced retail clothing store. According to the bebe website, the brand describes itself as:

“the go-to destination for chic, contemporary fashion. The brand evokes a mindset - an attitude, not an age. It's a true original, always defining fashion's next stride forward. Designed for the confident, sexy, modern woman, bebe is a global label that embodies a sensual, sophisticated lifestyle.”
The company specifically lists “sensual” and “sexy” as hallmarks of the brand, which are both descriptors that are often applied to Latinas. It is a two-page spread and features three models, a White male and female to the left, and a woman of indeterminate, though possibly Latin ethnicity to the right. The Latina model has an open mouth and the most skin showing of any of the three people featured. Yet, she is also the person with the closest proximity to the camera. This may indicate that in the context of beauty advertisements at least, face-sim may not immediately denote the more cerebral aspects of an agentic personality. In other words, just because the Latina model’s face takes up a greater portion of the ad, her posing and her almost predatory gaze signify a stronger connection to sexuality than a pronouncement of intelligence. Rather, Latina models seem to take on an association of aggression and ambition.

With this advertisement in particular, there is a direct connection to that same “animalistic” persona referenced by Wade (2013). Specifically, the large, pendulous earrings and the headscarf are reminiscent of a particular attitude and style of dress among Latinas known as “chongas.” According to Hernandez (2009), a chonga is “often described by Latinas/os in South Florida as a low-class, slutty, tough, and crass young woman... of dress and comportment that are often considered "too much": too ethnic, too sexy, too young, too cheap, too loud” (p. 63). Furthermore, the models positioning is an example of what Valdivia (2000) would label as sexual desirability and suggestion. The model’s mouth is open, her face is downwardly tilted and the majority of her back is naked, all indicating she is either submissive or available to the viewer.

*The Tropical Maja as the True Latina*
Another pattern across any beauty advertisements that contained a Latina model was the reliance on both the Maja beauty ideal and tropicalism. In the Maja ideal, Latinas have reached the apex of desirability if they are fairer skinned with European facial proportions and yet still maintain the curvaceousness that is so synonymous with Latina beauty (Llorèns, 2013). Moreover, tropicalism is the phenomenon of placing Latin people in contexts that denote foreign, tropical, and exotic locales (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). Many of the advertisements that featured Latinas included one or both of these characterizations, yet it seemed many advertisers chose to combine both Maja beauty standards with tropicalized backgrounds in order to truly racialize Latina models.

For example, in this particular advertisement (Figure 3), there is evidence of tropicalism and the Maja beauty ideal.

**Figure 3**

The contrast of vibrant coral to jewel toned blues and greens harkens back to the trope of tropicalism, which relies on bright colors and associations with the tropical exotic as Latin cultural signifiers. The model is once again a fairer-skinned Maja, more White than
Black with fine textured hair and light colored eyes. Her passive pose (standing upright) is contrasted with a dynamic setting. The crashing waves and blowing wind both indicate motion while the model herself passively stands in resistance to her surroundings. The dress accentuates her lean figure and although she is not as bare skinned as the model in Figure 2, there is little left to imagine as the dress is contoured to her body. Similar to the first ad, this woman is a sexual object with parted lips and a downcast face. The difference here is that the camera is below the model, gazing up, positioning the model as a sort of icon or idol and acting as an instance of idealization (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). In contrast to the dark and somewhat dirty background of Figure 2, this advertisement features a vast, brightly lit, outdoors space. In both ads, the women seem desirous but of what, we cannot know.

Asian Print Ads Analysis

Orientalism 2.0

Unfortunately, across the majority of advertisements I analyzed that contained Asian models, in the beauty industry it seems that Asian women are still portrayed as remote, unknowable, and largely foreign. These are all hallmarks of orientalism (Said, 1977), which positions Asians as outsiders and, possibly, as threats, to Western culture. While advertisements rely less on blatant stereotyping, there were still more instances of using racialized dress and background props (e.g., cultural artifacts) as signifiers of the model’s foreign ethnicity or potentially as part of a brand’s push to appear exotic or different.

I chose two advertisements to include to exemplify this new iteration of Orientalism among Asian beauty models. For example, in figure 4, the interplay between
shadow and light demonstrate a visceral example of how Asian models are often relegated to background positioning or placed in less dominant roles.

**Figure 4**

In this image, we see two women walking down a city street, one White and one Asian. The advertisement is for the moderately priced retail brand Levi. Although similarly dressed, the White woman is clothed in lighter colored clothing while the Asian woman is dressed in much darker hues, which starkly contrast against the paleness of her face and neck. The White model in the foreground appears both better lit as well as visibly happier in contrast to the Asian model’s more neutral facial expression. This parallels Taylor and Stern’s (1997) findings that Asian models are often depicted in background or supporting roles as well as Zhang’s (2010) findings that Asian are
perceived as poor communicators and less friendly. Also, the White woman’s face takes up a slightly larger percentage of the advertisement, backing up evidence found in face-ism research that Caucasian models typically have more emphasis on their faces than minority models (Zuckerman & Keiffer, 1994).

The contrast of the white and black outfits serves as more than just an artistic choice, rather it parallels the racial hierarchy with White being ideal and other ethnicities being inferior. The White woman appears more approachable and more open while the Asian woman seems more reserved, which fits squarely within the typical stereotype of the foreign, unapproachable Asian. Conversely, the text in the ad reads “For every woman. For every original.” Which implies that the Levi brand is a sort of neutralizing agent, allowing anyone who wears the brand to move beyond labels and embrace a sort of individuality. Thus we see contrasting messages. The first is buried within the imagery, which does not position the models as equal, rather in a binary contrast of light and dark, friendly and unfriendly. The second message is implied in the ad’s copy, that Levi is more than a fashion choice, it’s a vehicle for individualistic expression. However, instead of seeing representations that go against popularized stereotypes of White and Asian, we see this ad conforming via the depiction of the White woman being bright and approachable while the Asian woman is perhaps slightly less inclined to socialize.
For this advertisement, I would like to note that this is one advertising campaign of five that I came across during my analysis that featured a female Asian model with
pastel pink hair color. While this particular iteration of foreignness/differentiation is new, it is still part of the overarching pattern of orientalism. In the context of visual representation, this certainly stands as an example of exoticization. Asian models are often used to signify something is odd, unknown or unique, which is the case as seen in Figures 5 a and 5 b. This ad is a three page spread with both pages folding outward to showcase a completely digitized character (also with pastel colored hair) in the center, selling the same handbag the human models are wearing. The center figure is a character named Lightning from the popular Japanese video game franchise, *Final Fantasy*, which is well known for its highly stylized game play that resembles Japanese animation (anime).

According to Lent’s (1999) analysis of themes and tropes in anime, female anime characters are often a combination of cute, sexy, and deadly, both scantily dressed and physically strong (although perhaps diminutive in size). These contradictory natures can be seen in this particular ad with elements of cute femininity and imposing, even powerful stances and facial expressions. For example, the model in the black outfit is standing with her feet positioned hip-width apart, her hands lank at her sides, directly looking into the camera, a confrontational and confident pose. Also, the human models have less of their faces taking up space in the ads, positioning the digitized model as more cerebral and thus more interesting and/or intelligent (Archer, 1983). The choice to style the human models similar to the digital model is both novel and par for the course when it comes to Asian faces and forms in advertising. Although popular, anime is certainly not as much of a phenomenon in the U.S. as it is across many Asian countries. Thus the advertisers choice to use a relatively novel style (e.g., digitized/anime
influenced) as well as Asian models to sell a new and novel concept (i.e., a handbag with a glove attached) typifies how Asian models are most often used in advertising— as synonymous with novelty and foreignness.

**Group Ad Analysis**

*Racialization for Identification*

In visual representation analysis, it is important to tease out the assumptions of advertisers out of the text (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2004). To do this sufficiently, it is important to include analysis of a multiracial advertisement to understand how advertisers represent multiple ethnic minorities in combination. Across the many advertisements I sampled, I chose the image depicted in Figure 6 as representative of the larger trend of racialization in “multicultural” group settings. The rise of multiculturalism in advertisements has become a popular strategy to attract more minority consumers (O’Barr, 2006). As research has demonstrated that ethnic minorities often positively respond to models who appear ethnically similar (Appiah, 2001; 2004; Arpan, 2002), this has led to advertisers attempting to utilize models who are diverse enough to appease the new multicultural sensibilities of American consumers while still trying to remain specific enough to appeal to individual minority groups. What I found across advertisements were similar choices for models who were meant to represent each racial category. In other words, this paradoxical multicultural/targeted strategy has manifested in advertisements containing eerily similar models as representations for certain ethnic categories.

For example, in Figure 6, the White model and Asian model are typical of models seen across most beauty product advertisements in that the Asian model is very East
Asian (i.e., pale skin, jet black hair, slanted eyes, thin) and the White model is blonde and light eyed. However, advertisers seem to be at a crossroads with respect to how to include a Latina model in a group/multicultural setting. Specifically, advertisers more often chose to include a visibly African American model as opposed to a Latina model who may be more ethnically androgynous. In figure 6, it is possible that the darker skinned woman in the pink dress on the left and in the red dress to the right (the same model) is a Latina. However, it is also possible that she is African, African-American, or some other unknown ethnicity. This is a pattern that I found with every group advertisement that I examined: Caucasian, Asian, and African/Black models are readily identifiable while Latinas embody a vague space in terms of skin color in advertisements. In order to confidently identify that a model was indeed Latina, I had to look for other cultural signifiers that may indicate the advertiser intended for the model to be interpreted as “Latina” (e.g., ethnic styles of dress, color patterns, Spanish language, etc.)

Figure 6
In this particular ad, the darker skinned model represents a color rather than an ethnicity. She is simply “brown.” Her ethnic heritage is ambiguous and she is meant to stand in for the politically correct purpose of stocking a beauty advertisement with multiracial models. This is possibly a conscious choice since there are benefits and drawbacks to targeted marketing. African-, Hispanic- and Asian-Americans, as well as homosexuals have reported more positive attitudes towards advertisements that specifically target them (e.g., Aaker et al., 2000; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Torres, 2007; Puntoni et al., 2011). Conversely, the same researchers found that members of majority groups (i.e., White and heterosexual) have demonstrated unfavorable responses to advertisements not targeting them. Thus the ethnic ambiguity of the brown model could be intentional. She is meant to be representative of all Black and Latina consumers, yet not targeted enough to offend majority consumers.

Similarly, the Asian model in this particular ad is physically similar to the other models in height, weight, hair length, and dress with her only defining features being her eyes and her noticeably paler skin. Where she differs is in her positioning and in the imagery used around her. She is obscured by the model in front of her as well as partially obscured by the center fold of the magazine. Moreover, the two dangling cherries directly above her head infer that she is ripe and ready to be plucked or picked. This is similar to the sexually available and compliant stereotype of the China doll (Jung, 2010). Finally, it is worth noting that the Asian model is only shown once whereas the same three models on the left page are utilized again on the right page.
Discussion

Overall, there exists a duality in how Latina- and Asian-American women are represented in these beauty magazine advertisements. Latinas are positioned as being simultaneously empowered and consumed via their sexuality whereas Asian women are likewise utilized with the exception that it is their remoteness and novelty that acts as the fulcrum point of their advertising representation. While neither of these findings are drastic departures from the findings of previous scholarly work on minority representation, they do support the claim that there needs to be continued improvement in representing women of color in the beauty industry. Instead of using Asian models as placeholders to represent something strange or novel, perhaps incorporating them into advertisements in a fashion where ethnicity is incidental should be the goal for advertisers. Similarly, Latinas need to be positioned in less sexualized ways and depicted with a variety of occupations and styles.

In addition, the observation that Latinas become obsolete or incorporated into a pan-ethnic “brown” model in the presence of multiple ethnic minority models is something that needs to be further explored. According to my observations, Latinas function of a spectrum where lighter skinned models are utilized more often for more refined settings (i.e., the Marciano ad) or to advertise higher end products whereas darker skinned models seem to be incorporated when the message of the advertisement is more sensual or illicit in nature (i.e., the bebe ad). Moreover, in group settings where advertisers attempt to depict models of multiple ethnicities, the Latina often becomes obsolete. This may be because she does not stand out as an easily identifiable minority in a multi model setting. For example, an Asian woman with particular ethnic features (e.g.,
more narrow eyes or black hair) paired with a Caucasian woman and a darker skinned Black woman are three readily identifiable racial representatives. Yet the Latina is perhaps too ambiguous to qualify as a distinct minority category in the context of a group advertisement. This is a commonality I found across my analysis of all advertisements before settling on these specific examples for this work.

This phenomenon is not unique to Latinas as there is a spectrum of utilization when it comes to other women of color as well. For example, Beyoncé, who is lighter skinned, was criticized for wearing “Black face” in her photo shoot for *L'Officiel Paris* in which she cosmetically darkened her skin and wore African tribal themed clothing (Stewart, 2011). The implication here is that Beyoncé may not have been Black enough for the magazine editors and thus was tasked with creating a more ethnic representation to suit the aesthetics of the publication. Conversely, she has also been subject to whitewashing, such as in a L’Oréal advertisement in *Elle* magazine where her skin was digitally manipulated to appear several shades lighter (Li, 2008). In both situations, this is evidence of racialized advertising for women, such as Beyoncé, who do not completely conform to notions of blackness, whiteness, or brownness. Moreover, Kim and Chung (2005) found that, across several product categories—alcohol, business, and cigarettes—women of color are united in this type of racializing as well as cultural appropriation. “The ads that feature women of color consistently promote the strongest cultural references in the series: an African woman in a colorful headdress, a dancing Latino woman in a light cotton weave and wooden beads, an Asian woman in heavy makeup and traditional Chinese dress” (p. 82). Women of color are too often depicted as amalgamations of readily identifiable cultural cues and racial stereotypes. Perhaps more
alarming though in this findings that in the group context, Latinas are not dark or light enough to qualify as a strongly recognizable symbol of Latin culture or a model that appears “ethnic “and thus are often left out.

To be Latina or Asian is to be part of a distinct identity and national heritage. There are not enough examples of dark skinned Latinas, Afro-Latinas, or any other representation other than the Maja ideal, especially in mainstream magazines. Similarly, there are few representations of Asian women apart from the more East Asian model aesthetic of pale skin, black hair, and often monolid eyes. This alienates the vast number of Latina and Asian American women who do not resemble the ideal being presented in advertisements. This is further complicated by an increasing presence of mixed race consumers (Census, 2010) who do not belong to a single ethnic category. Thus, it is important for more research to be conducted examining not only the representation of Latinas and Asian women in advertising, but the responses and meaning making from these minority consumers themselves. Thus, one area of future research should focus on engaging with these consumers themselves to understand their meaning making processes involving beauty advertisements.

CHAPTER VI

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: INTERPRETIVE FINDINGS

Introduction

As discussed in chapter four, participants’ meaning-making processes can be best observed by the in-depth detail that qualitative methods and analysis can offer. Furthermore, understanding the nuances within in depth interviews is best accomplished through analyzing the context through which it occurs (Dey, 1993). As such, it’s
important to note the socio-political climate that existed during the time these interviews were conducted. For example, all interviews were collected during and after the 2016 presidential election, and although political affiliation, ideology and the election in general were not an explicit part of the questioning, many participants volunteered their reflections on the election and the status of race relations in the country in general. Many participants expressed that they perceived race relations the U.S. to be in a period of intense fluctuation, and many acknowledged that this held some impact on the topic at hand, namely, how beauty for bicultural women is created, codified, perceived, and consumed. This is important to note because issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and identity in terms of citizenship and nationality all seemed to be particularly salient for participants.

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), within CCT and specifically under the area of consumer identity projects, the prevailing school of thought is that the marketplace has become a dominant source of mythic and symbolic texts through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers (i.e., ethnic minorities), construct narratives of identity (Belk, 1988; Hill, 1991; Holt, 2002). As such, it is the purpose of this section to understand how Latina and Asian American women perceive advertising as a space of legitimacy and agency in addition to more specific questions of how women of color are utilized stylistically. As discussed, beauty advertising has changed to reflect the socio-political climate of the time with race, age, femininity, and sexuality all converging into static texts such as magazine advertisements that are reflective of changing ideologies. While the critical textual analysis uncovered some of these embedded ideologies and symbols, it is the meaning-
making on behalf of consumers of color themselves that this section will highlight. Too often, research is conducted from the vantage of the privileged, the educated, or the remove. Thus, from a constructivist grounded theorist’ perspective, this will attempt to give voice to this group of women by eliciting their definitions of terms, situations, and events via tapping into their assumptions, tacit rules, and implicit meanings concerning their representation in beauty ads and what beauty means to them in a broader context (Charmaz, 2006).

The following is a summary and analysis of the dominant themes that I synthesized across all 59 interviews with Latina and Asian American participants. The findings are organized in sections, first by unique observations for each group and then a combined section detailing the differences and shared experiences that both groups of women undergo. This chapter concludes with a discussion and synthesis of how Latina and Asian American women overarchingly responded to sample ads presented to them as well as how they tie in their observations in the interviews to the broader social and political context of the times.

**Latina American Women**

*Latina Americans: Body Positivity and the American Attitude of Beauty*

Both groups take some relief in American beauty ideals in way that American beauty is conflated with confidence and acceptance. Specifically, many participants enjoy the American attitude of independence and emphasis on self-love as a means of promoting body positivity. Moreover, both groups have parents and community that emphasize the collectivist attitudes of conformity and saving face and some participants, especially those who more readily identified as being Americanized, appreciated being
above the social pressure of their community. Yet it was among Latina American participants where this perceived relief from social pressure to be beautiful was most pronounced. For example, when asked to compare American standards of beauty to those of their parents or of their native country, the following participants all agreed that they felt less pressure within the American framework.

In Venezuela everyone is very judgmental about how you convey yourself. That’s high heels, tight blue jeans, your purse needs to be right, hair well dyed, be coordinated. That’s the way they work and I grew up with that pressure and I was never like that. I was like “I want the baggy pants, the sneakers, the big shirt,” I want something comfortable. When I moved to the U.S., it was everything because no one could care less about what you were wearing.”—Clarissa, Venezuelan American woman

I think to love yourself is more the American ideal [of beauty] and I feel pressure if I go to the Dominican and thinking about it a little bit more, like I have to have my hair straight and nice clothes (in the Dominican)—Sydney, Dominican American woman

In America you have to know who you are, be proud of what that is and be confident in that and you will be beautiful. —Brianna, Puerto Rican American woman

Also, several Latina participants made a connection between women of color, specifically Latinas and Black women, and the body positivity movement. This is an example of rhetorical agency (Enck-Wanzer, 2011) via an alternative reading of a mainstream text, one in which the Latina participants found empowerment in being the perceived inspiration behind many of the diversity and body positive campaigns that are increasingly popular When asked directly about this movement (via campaigns such as Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty) many Latinas responded positively to the images and agreed that showing more diverse body weights and sizes is as important as diversity of skin color. Some even felt that women of color who may be naturally predisposed to certain body shapes (e.g., Hispanic women having broader hips) is powering this new
beauty trend. In other words, women of color with dimensions that do not fit the model proportions of being tall and thin and the faces of many new “body positive” campaigns. Rather than focusing on the limiting implications of being narrowly utilized as sex symbols, many participants chose to view their sexuality as a tool for recognition that has segued into a new brand of feminism, which helps women of all ethnicities embrace their femininity and sensuality.

Consumer culture theory research has emphasized the productive aspect of consumption. Specifically, according to Arnould and Thompson (2005), CCT explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identities (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001, 2002; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Peñaloza, 2000, 2001). From this perspective, the marketplace provides consumers with a wide palette of resources from which they may construct individual and collective identities (e.g., Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Murray, 2002). I observed Latina American women doing just this in how they spoke about certain celebrities, some not even Latinas, as evidence of the Latina beauty wave being a marketable success as well as a form of empowerment for all women.

Hispanic women… certain celebrities… they are redefining beauty. Back in the day you had Elizabeth Taylor and other women in the pin up days, more full bodied was beautiful. Like Jennifer Lopez, and Beyoncé, and Kim Kardashian… they are bringing awareness to different body types. There is a movement like people want a bigger butt but 10 to 15 years ago, it wasn’t. —Marissa, Brazilian American woman

Anything with curves and the body probably has more to do with Hispanic women—Skylar, Cuban American woman
Interestingly, the Asian American participants did not identify this connection. This could be because the body positive movement often has to do with body weight and size rather than ethnic diversity. Since Asian women are typically shorter and more petite in general, they are excluded from the body positivity movement. For Latina American women though, the perception seems to be that the renaissance of American beauty advertising is somewhat attributable to the influence of celebrities and models who are often Hispanic.

**Asian American Women**

**The New Double Bind**

Both Latin and Asian cultures have facets of collectivism and higher uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), that can potentially drive people to seek conformity and acceptance via tradition, acting in accordance with the majority, and maintaining normality through established orthodox behavior. Thus, in the context of beauty, veering too far from the mainstream ideal of Caucasian beauty could potentially place either group in an uncomfortable position that could drive women to try and achieve a style and look more closely resembling Caucasian models. However, this work focuses on bicultural individuals and, as such, the women interviewed fall on a wide spectrum of acculturation and acceptance of mainstream beauty trends and norms. Yet despite the sometimes moderating effect of American cultural identity on the traditional values of a participants’ nationality of heritage, there was a clear difference in terms of the perceived beauty standards among Latina American participants and that of their Asian American counterparts.

Specifically, Asian American women were more inclined to describe the “ideal”
beauty as being a White woman and additionally expressed that they feel pressure and sometimes a desire to match that ideal. This falls in line with previous research that found Asian women living in the U.S. undergo more intense self-esteem issues when it comes to trying to be beautiful in America (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1980. Moreover, it aligns with the sociohistoric patterning of consumption research within CCT, which holds that consumers are conceived of as enactors of social roles and positions (Otnes, Lowrey, & Kim, 1993). For Asian Americans, those social roles are often submissive and conformist. For example, the following quotes are from Asian American participants who noted a pressure from grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and typically older generations of women in their family to value a lighter, whiter skin tone and thinness as cornerstones of beauty and perpetuations of the social roles they play as Asian women.

So, when I grew up and was dark and my grandma would say “What are you doing, drinking soy sauce all day?”—Maureen, Chinese American woman

My mom… Asian moms are also very… I don’t want to generalize, so Chinese moms are very picky about their daughter's appearance. They are very picky about the way their daughters look. I thought I was fairly average growing up but my mom was always like “eat less, eat less!” “Can you stop eating this?” And she would do it to me in public too and that was completely humiliating and you would get stares and people would be like “what’s wrong with you?” “What’s wrong with her?” “What’s wrong with both of you?”—Amanda, Chinese American woman

Unfortunately, being lighter skinned and thinner are beauty trends that also align with many of the White models seen in beauty advertisements. This was abundantly evident in the advertisements analyzed for the critical textual analysis and a trend mentioned by many participants. However, it is important to note that not all participants endeavor towards this ideal. Some even noted their dislike of the pressure and expressed a sort of resentment directed towards the media, the expectation of family members, or
even ire towards their culture in the sense that they are compelled to fit an ideal that they may not even find aesthetically pleasing let alone physically possible.

I personally just don’t like the stereotypical Caucasian image of female beauty, the skinny blonde, you know what I am talking about.”—Ellie, Chinese American woman

Moreover, some participants noted that as they age, they are beginning to embrace a sort of rejection of this pressure and some perceive, though the minority across interviews, a counter culture of beauty among Asian American women.

You are catching me at a really interesting time at my life because at 22 before I moved to L.A. I would have said I am a white girl trapped in an Asian body but if you ask me that now, I started working for this Japanese guy who said “you know you’re Korean right?” and I have all these terrible stereotypes in my head about what that means and he told me to look at the fact that I was Korean as a good thing. Now at 30 in LA where there are all types of people, I don’t think that white and American are synonymous anymore like I used to. Like I look at the word American in a different way now. I still have people ask me if I’m American because I wasn’t born here. I have citizenship. I look at the word of American less as a physicality and more of a mentality. —Michelle, Korean American woman

Thus, Asian American women are at a sort of precipice in their beauty identities in American culture. Many participants expressed that they perceive Asian Americans as having an underdeveloped sense of cultural importance in the American racial hierarchy. Many participants felt that the Asian American community is comparatively silent when compared to more socially outspoken communities such as African Americans. However, there was evidence of a budding consciousness among Asian American women when it comes to demarcating their identity as a unique group in the American social fabric. While Asian American women are not as likely to experience beauty as a domain for self-esteem (compared to Latina American women) there were a significant number of Asian American participants who felt that questioning the status quo of White beauty as well as the pressures of cultural conformity are issues that need to become more
important. For example, many participants noted the Black Lives Matter movement and the rise of Latino celebrity as two examples of how other minority communities are demanding recognition in American media. This presents a new double bind. Now, Asian American women face pressure and a call to action to become more socially present in the formation and dissemination of their beauty representation while simultaneously being expected to remain silent and pliable per the model minority stereotype.

Differences and Shared Experiences

Stereotypes and Cultural Artifacts as a Targeting Strategy for White Consumers

During each interview, participants were asked to free associate aspects of Latina and Asian women in American popular culture. Irrespective of age, length of time in the U.S., and ethnicity, all participants were able to list a series of adjectives that closely aligned with stereotypes defined in research on racial stereotyping. For Asian American women, this often consisted of descriptions of being pale, having black hair, being diminutive in size and positioning, and being thin. For Latina participants, most women used descriptors such as “loud,” “colorful”, “sexy” and “brash” to describe how they saw Latina models being utilized in the sample advertisements shown. What is interesting in this observation is not that women of color themselves recognize stereotypes that have been time and again discussed in race research (e.g., Jung, 2010; Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004), rather how participants speculated as to the reasons advertisers chose to use these stereotypes. Skylar felt disconnected to the portrayal of Latinas in American television shows as well as the sample ads used in the interview. In describing the typical Latina, she noted a disconnect between the portrayals she sees and the way she perceives most Hispanic women to actually be.
She has an accent, a pretty thick one. And sex appeal and tends to be a stay at home or very menial job, never a head honcho. They think she’s stupid or crazy. She’s the butt of the joke. I don’t think a lot of people are like that. I don’t have an accent. I consider myself pretty American. —Skylar, Cuban American woman

When asked why an advertiser would choose to use a woman of color, the consensus between both groups of participants is that diversity and multiculturalism is a marketing strategy that is sometimes resonant with minority consumers themselves, but largely a statement of political correctness. This falls under the mass-mediated marketplace ideology program within CCT, which asks the overarching question: What normative messages do commercial media transmit about consumption (Hirschman, 1988)? According to both groups’ readings of the sample advertisements, commercial beauty media texts primarily cater to White consumers. For example, most participants agreed that beauty advertisements, even when they feature a woman of color, are still mainly targeted towards White female consumers because they choose to represent minority models in unrelatable ways.

When they pick someone who is supposed to be on the Spanish spectrum, they also pick someone who is on the English spectrum. So Like Pitbull, J. Lo., Shakira, those types of people. And those people who are undercover Hispanics because you know they were born and raised here in White culture like Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato. You see them and you want to identify with them but you know they have had such a different life from most of us. —Lauren, Honduran American woman

I don’t know… I would love to know who their audience is because if they want American women to buy it, maybe they should put her [Asian model] in a kimono. When really she should be next to a white picket fence with a golden retriever. —Michelle, Korean American woman

In regards to using a particular ethnicity for a particular category, Madison, a Panamanian American woman, summarized the advertisements as follows:

So if its beauty care or hair care, you will use Asians because they look so delicate, they look perfect in all the pictures. Most of the time when you use face
creams, you want to whiten or have one same color and most of the Asians have that ability and then when you have African American or Latina American, their body has a good shape and the clothes look good on them and they have more facial expressions. —Madison, Panamanian American woman

The preference for multicultural advertisements strategies is not as strong among Latina women as it is among Asian American women. Latinas prefer more individuality in advertising and are quicker to perceive politically correct advertisements with models of varying ethnicities as a ploy to appeal more diverse. For example, when looking at a sample ad for Estée Lauder with three women (one Asian woman, one Black woman, and one White woman), Florence, a Brazilian American, noted that this advertisement seemed unrealistic.

At this point, society has brainwashed us into thinking that you have to have diversity in everything you do. If I see an advertisement with a Thanksgiving dinner with a Chinese woman… I mean and Asian woman, a white woman, a black woman, a … I just think it looks kind of fake because in reality, at least right now in today’s society, it’s not common to have more than like three races together. I mean generally people are drawn to people that are similar to them whether that be physically or mentally…I know they picked four women that look so different just for the diversity factor. —Florence, Brazilian American woman

[When asked to describe the ideal American woman] In my mind, because America is a very heterogeneous population, I could give you ten. You can’t just ignore a part of the population that isn’t White. —Dina, Argentinian American woman

This may have to do with population size- as a quickly burgeoning group in the United States, Latinos may perceive themselves to have more agency in their advertising depictions as opposed to Asian Americans who are smaller in numbers. Thus, the idea that growing up in an ethnic enclave versus growing up an ethnic minority impacts the reception of the multicultural appeal holds true for both groups but may be less impactful among Latinas because the participants interviewed tended to grow up in areas where there were other Latinos.
The White American Ideal

Across all interviews, participants supported the idea that to be American is still persistently associated with being White. The majority of participants referred to people who were not in their ethnic category as “Americans” and when pressed to define this term further, clarified American to be synonymous with White. To be White is to be monocultural, unfamiliar with the immigrant experience, and the default (in many participant’s minds) beauty standard for women in the United States. It is important to understand the conceptualization of the terms “White” and “American” in participants’ minds because both terms were used as anchors of comparison in interviews. The models in ads were consistently classified on a spectrum of White to non-White by participants, with some models resembling this nebulous ideal more or less closely. Participants seemed to derive a label for models (and themselves) based on their relative proximity to this White/American baseline. When asked to define the “American standard of beauty,” the majority of participants seemed to conceptualize American beauty as predominantly White or at least lighter skinned. Asian beauty and Latina beauty were both perceived as separate and distinct categories.

To understand this synonymous category of White/American, it is important to note that it is a racial classification, a perceived persona and a set of behaviors, and a social construct that women of color view as receiving less scrutiny. For example, when recounting what it was like growing up in primarily White neighborhood, Mary, a
Mexican American woman, noted that the White students around her were more American and thus treated better due to a lack of accent.

Even though my parents would always tell me to be Mexican, part of me would notice how Mexicans were treated by teachers… not that it was discrimination but… I guess… it was different. I wouldn’t say they preferred Caucasian students but in certain aspects they would… so I would try to be very American. I wouldn’t bring up that I was Mexican with strangers. —Mary, Mexican American woman

Similarly, according to Amanda, a Chinese-American participant, she expressed having difficulty in labeling herself as “American” despite being born in a Northern suburb where the population was predominantly White.

Well, I didn’t feel American because it was just a very White term. Well, White or African American I should say because “American” is in the terminology. And the Hispanics where I am… they are very like first generation immigrants. So, I don’t think they would technically define themselves as that either. I always thought it [American] was a very White term, for lack of a better terminology. —Amanda, Chinese American woman

Upon viewing some of the sample ads provided to participants to stimulate discussion, many participants would label some of the visibly Caucasian models as “American” while choosing “Black,” “Asian,” or “Hispanic” for the models of color. Participants were prompted to identify models whom they believed to be Latina if they were Latina themselves or Asian if they were Asian themselves. However, most participants performed this labeling before I was able to deliver the prompt, evidencing a propensity to categorize via ethnicity and race before other classifications. Moreover, if a model in an advertisement is non-White, then participants noted she is likely to conform to some readily identifiable physical features. For example, in describing the typical Asian woman in beauty advertisements, both groups of participants would highlight dark, straight hair, pale skin, thinness, and harshly narrow or monolid eyes. Conversely, Hispanic women were described as sun kissed, voluptuous, and as having hair with
volume and curls. Both groups of women often summarized White beauty typified in a woman with light hair, light eyes, tall in stature, and lean in proportions. All of these observations contribute to an overarching pattern of perceived otherness in which women of color, even those who were born in the U.S. and identified themselves as assimilated and American, still view beauty standards for women of color as something set apart from the “mainstream” ideal of White beauty.

However, this does not mean that participants unanimously approved of some of the stylistic elements common to women in American advertising or even desired to emulate them. For example, Asian and Latina participants often mentioned a cultural emphasis on being feminine and, in some ways, conservative. Both groups seem to perceive American beauty as pronounced, maybe garish at times (e.g., extreme fitness or thinness, bold makeup styles, very sexual posing).

I don’t like this kind of styling in general. (Referencing a Marc Jacobs ad with an appearing exceptionally thin in addition to being topless) I know they were trying to go for something edgy but it doesn’t suit her. I like #10 (a GAP ad featuring a mother playing with her child) I like the clothes she is wearing and this reminded me of how women in Japan are very family oriented. —Rebecca, Taiwanese American woman

I feel like the people here are way more confident than Asian women especially when you go swimming and everyone is in a bikini and ok with their body whereas in Asia everyone is more conservative, more self-conscious. It’s harder for Asian women to be like that because it was the culture I was brought up in. I guess we are just more conservative and we wouldn’t even have a bikini, we would have a one piece. —Veronica, Singaporean American woman

Both Latina and Asian American participants felt that their native culture (or their parent’s native culture if they were not born outside of the U.S.) often emphasizes a conservatism or more traditional gender roles that American advertisers do not seem to appreciate.
**Beauty as a Domain for Self Esteem**

In the context of beauty, this White/American terminology phenomenon is important to note because both Asian and Latina American participants noted that White women still dominant the beauty ideals of America and that some women of color feel more pressure to assimilate than others. There is some evidence of this in the literature in that African American feel the least pressure, possibly because they face more difficulty in achieving a White look (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Streigel-Moore et al., 1995) while Asian women seem to feel an inordinate amount of pressure (Chin-Evans & McConnell, 2003). According to my findings, both Asian and Latina American women are susceptible to the pressure to conform to Whiteness. For example, Latina and Asian American women alike noted that each minority group strives in some ways to “whitewash” themselves.

White women... honestly I feel they have it the easiest. Their beauty is glorified which is why many other women of other races feel insecure that they’re not white-washed enough. (This can be seen in all races getting nose jobs for thinner, narrower noses, hair weaves to get like “Becky with the good hair,” I find that many Black women have harsher beauty standards that almost all other races... many feel the pressure to have longer hair, lighter skin to match the European norms that have become society norms in America. Asian women in my opinion also try to match the white standard... there are so many Asian skin lightening companies its insane. —Brianna, A Puerto Rican American woman

It’s a difficult reality. I do associate White women with America... it’s a society that predominantly portrays blonde, white, tall women in the media. It’s like a mockery in a sense because they expect us to come here and not assimilate easily into the culture because their supremacy is so high like we can never be what they are, we will always be the minority but why can’t we fit in too? … People don’t see me as that white Caucasian girl, American. —Viviana, Venezuelan American woman

I think I talk about it a lot [American beauty]. And it’s something I talked to my mom and my sister about it a lot but like I look kind of different than the average Asian girl with like big eyes and tanned skin and I’m curvaceous. But my sister looks like the typical Asian girl, very skinny, monolid eyes, and she hated her
tanned skin growing up and she hated her eyes, and my mom would buy her whitening lotion and she would say that we would just go to Korea to fix that (eyes) when you’re older, so we talked about it a lot. —Beatrice, Vietnamese American woman

A lot of Asian girls in the media have a flat face and I don’t think that’s attractive I don’t like it. The asian girls that looks more White are the ones I identify with and it’s so crazy because I know I don’t look like that! —Michelle, Korean American woman

However, there is divergence among the two groups when it comes to beauty as a source of empowerment and self-esteem. Specifically, Latinas often expressed feeling validated and appreciated in beauty advertisements whereas Asian American participants were more inclined to highlight other areas of their lives as domains in which they feel empowered. For example, Asian American participants had noticeable difficulty even describing an Asian American beauty ideal and generally expressed a less involved relationship with fashion and beauty overall. Moreover, many were quick to credit other communities as having unique beauty standards and fashion, but rarely did Asian American participants note beauty to be a strong recognition point for the Asian American community.

Look at the African American representations for example. I can think of many African American celebrities who look very different from one another, like Queen Latifah, Oprah, Beyoncé, Tyra Banks, and Halle Berry. They are all beautiful in their own way although they are different in sizes and facial features and skin tones. Same thing for Hispanic women, like Eva Mendes, Eva Longoria, and Salma Hayek. But we [Asian American women] don’t have that wider range of beauty icons in media to look up to. Recently, only recently, we have really made a dent with shows like *Fresh Off the Boat*, so we are just taking the baby steps, not much diversity. —Taiwanese American woman

To many Asian American women, the beauty and fashion domains may be construed as irrelevant or even incongruent to their Asian American identity, which was more commonly informed by the model minority stereotype of being studious, high achieving, and somewhat
unapproachable. As a consequence, Asian American women may have a somewhat indifferent relationship with fashion media whereas Latina American women are overwhelmingly cognizant of being beauty icons in the media. As with any instance of stereotyping, by nature of being consistently labeled as beauties, Latinas are not so often represented in roles that Asian American models enjoy (i.e., business, career, technology). Thus, these two groups occupy almost polar opposite positions when it comes to beauty as a domain for self-esteem with one group largely left out and almost avoidant and the other being consumed and represented almost exclusively via their image.

**Fitting a Particular Racial Box**

Unfortunately, if a woman does not closely match some of the features popularized by models in beauty ads, celebrities in film, or characters in popular televisions shows, she often is faced with a sense of misidentification between herself and the mediated images as well as in social settings. This has important implications for CCT, especially in regards to interpretive strategies among participants that enable them to forge a coherent or fragmented sense of self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Across interviews, depending on how closely participants felt that they matched the beauty typified for women of color across the beauty advertisements, there was a sense of aggravation among some consumers.

For example, some of the lighter skinned Latina participants who have more Caucasian features or who lack a pronounced accent described being misidentified by strangers, even if they were fellow Hispanics. Venturing too far out of a defined racial box leads to confusion, and this was more readily pronounced among Latina participants. While Hispanics face similar pressures to simultaneously blend and yet be held apart via
facets of their foreign culture, Latinas seem to face an additional pressure in the form of identity ambiguity. Even if a Latina American woman strongly identifies with her Hispanic cultural roots, if she does not appear Hispanic in her style of dress, makeup, or physical features, neither Hispanic peers nor non-Hispanic people will readily identify her as being Hispanic. For example, according to Latina American participants, an Afro-Latina is often read by the majority of consumers as “Black” and thus is lacking enough “Hispanicness” to tick the box for that particular ethnic category. Similarly, a light skinned Latina may face criticism from others in the Hispanic community for not being Hispanic enough.

Many participants were able to describe specific physical markers that they perceived to be representative of Latinas, at least in the advertising context. For example, a strong nose bridge, full lips, light brown hair that is voluminous, being tall, and having a distinct, golden skin hue. Ironically, many participants noted that they felt they looked significantly different than the Latina models in the sample ads. For example, most women noted that they felt much shorter than any of the models in advertisements. This very particular conception of how women should look in order to be classified as “Latina” left many of the bicultural Latinas interviewed feeling maligned by both communities (i.e., The Latin community and the White community). Furthermore, it left bicultural Latinas feeling at odds with minority communities overall if they felt they were not perceived as appearing “ethic” enough. For example, Dina, who is a self-described “White-looking” woman, states:

It's kind of offensive is because people value Hispanic opinions when they are talking about racial issues. Like “oh yeah, she gets it, she’s a minority” but then when I start talking they are like “But you’re White…” —Dina, Argentinian American woman
Interestingly, older participants, Latinas more so than Asian Americans, were inclined to read ethnically ambiguous models as more similar to their own ethnicity while younger participants were more inclined to read models via presumed advertiser intentions. In other words, younger participants assumed advertisers would want to stock a multicultural advertisement with at least one African American model, thus the darker skinned model was African American (not Afro-Latina). This may indicate that the racialization of American society, including its media, impacts the perception of beauty among bicultural consumers in that the more assimilated some consumers feel, the more they feel pressured to fit hegemonic constructions of race and beauty. Older participants, especially those who were either born outside the U.S. or spent some time abroad in their parents’ home country, were more inclined to have an expansive view of race. Most Latina American participants who were born abroad or traveled frequently claimed that race is not nearly as emphasized in their native countries as it is in the U.S. For Asian American participants born abroad, race seemed less of an issue due to the homogenous makeup of many Asian counties. For instance, participants from South Korea noted there is little racial diversity in the country unless you visited larger metropolitan cities. Thus, Race only became a significant form of categorization once they moved to the U.S.

In regards to racial labeling for Asian American participants, all reported that they were never confused for any other ethnic category either by Asian peers or non-Asian peers. Participants shared similar stories when they were asked to identify Asian models across the sample ads, with most of the Asian American participants noted that the models seemed to be “Chinese.” When pressed for details, they further explained that the Asian models popular in beauty advertisements are a more Eastern look and thus typify
women from the major East Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, and South Korea). As mentioned earlier, Asian American women face a double bind via the Orientalist/Assimilationist paradigm, which insists upon exotic othering of Asian culture and on the necessity of Asian Americans assimilating into mainstream Caucasian culture (Yin, 2005, p. 104). This was echoed across interviews when Asian American participants noted the preeminence of White beauty and the tokeness and foreigness of Asian models in the advertisements used in discussion. Asian American participants felt pressure to match the beauty standards conveyed in advertisements and yet unanimously expressed the stifling constraints of being an Asian person in the U.S. as being a label that precedes all others.

With white people you don’t have to consider their ethnicity for anything, they just are... They are weirdo, they are emo, they are a jock or they are a hipster. Let’s not be ethnicity first let’s just be. —Natalie, Korean American woman

It is important to note that this phenomenon of associating White beauty with the overarching American beauty ideal is more common among the Asian American participants, which has been supported in previous research (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Hall, 1995). When participants were asked to free associate and describe aspects of a typical beautiful woman according to American beauty standards, more Asian American participants specifically mentioned race than Latina participants. All of these observations are a result of what participants identified as a highly racialized society. Especially for Latina participants who spent some of their lives living in their native country, many expressed the opinion that race is a more prominent issue in the U.S. For example, when asked to compare how people are categorized and evaluated between her home county (Venezuela) and the U.S., Clarissa offered the following analysis:
Over there [Venezuela] it seems to be less racial, less about what color you are its more like a money thing. There’s a very huge difference between how much money you have and that’s a lot bigger than what color you are and over here it’s like a lot more stereotype racist. Even during school when you are going to be in a group or whatever, there are a lot of people that are more hesitant. My parents were very clear since I was little… over here people are very racist and have a problem with my husband who is dark. —Clarissa, Venezuelan American woman

While participants from both groups agree that overall a lighter skin tone is a more desirable one in both their or their parent’s native countries and the U.S., there seems to be a consensus that race becomes the predominant means of classification for them in the U.S. above anything else. Even if participants happened to be of a lighter skin tone, they were still conscious of being labeled as a color or a race before anything else, especially by people outside of their ethnicity. This applied to advertisements as well as most participants in either group perceived the models of color to be utilized as stand ins for a race rather than women chosen to express a personality trait or some other facet of behavior.

*Experiencing a “Pan-Ethnic” Identity*

Asian Americans seem to experience a pan-ethnic identity more readily (e.g., referred to themselves as Asian rather than by a specific nationality) whereas Latinas more often stated they preferred differentiation by nationality. However, when asked to explain their preferences, both groups expressed frustration with being lumped into broad categories. For example, for Latina participants, many stated that they did not identify with the term “Hispanic” because of the connotation that their culture is derived from predominantly a Spanish influence. Similarly, for Asian American participants from Southeast Asian countries or the Pacific Islands, they too expressed feeling too culturally distinct from East Asian cultures to be lumped into one broad category. Moreover,
participants in both groups seemed frustrated by the assumptions that people from other ethnicities often make. For example, many Latina participants reported that non-Hispanics often made the assumption that they were specifically Mexican, which led to resentment from some participants. In a time where there is heightened anxiety and tension over immigration law, especially for Mexican immigrants, participants tended to interpret this mislabeling as a shameful or embarrassing event.

That whole Mexican thing really bothers me and I get it, it happens to other cultures. Like Asians are always Chinese or Japanese. I wish we would be able to be defined in a better way. But that's just the way it is. It's funny because Europeans are distinguished though. But when it comes to Hispanic people, we are just distinguished as one. —Brittany, Ecuadorian American woman

The one thing that always bothered me is people always automatically assume I am from Mexico. You need to read a book because Mexico is not the only Hispanic country. A lot of the reason why people get upset, I'm generalizing to include most Hispanics, there is a very bad stereotype attached to Mexicans because “oh you jumped the border,” same with the Cubans who come here by a boat. It’s the same generalizations like you didn’t have permission to come. Now it’s a little worse because their living standards… people who come whom are Mexican immigrants, they live mostly in poverty and a bunch of them together. So I would get made fun of a lot when people would know I was Spanish. And the way they would make fun of you is by saying “Spic” and “wet back” and “go back across the border.” And it was tough because I’m not Mexican. —Emily, Venezuelan American woman

They always think I’m Mexican. They tend to think that we are poor, less affluent. Which is really true of my parent because they are dark. Especially my dad who has the dark facial hair. They always think my dad is some sort of agricultural worker but he works at a bank and is an audit director. They just think lesser than if I were a White person. —Skylar, Cuban American woman

When Asian American participants were initially asked to describe their ethnicity, many would first answer by stating they were “Asian” rather than disclosing their parents’ countries of origin. This may be due to the relative invisibility of Asian bodies in American media to begin. In other words, participants may have begun interviews with the assumption that I was unfamiliar with the myriad of nationalities that fall under the
umbrella of “Asian,” and thus defaulted to simply titling themselves by their pan-ethnicity rather than a specific nationality. In addition, they experienced similar homogenization when it came to questions of nationality. Many participants noted that non-Asian friends and acquaintances would assume they were Chinese and were often unfamiliar with many other Asian nationalities or not interested in learning about the specifics of their heritage. Moreover, there were several instances where Latina participants referred to Asian models specifically as “Chinese” rather than Asian or Asian American. This is interesting because it suggests that even other minority groups are susceptible to the influence of the “forever foreigner” (Tuan, 1998) association when it comes to Asians in the United states.

Despite these differences between the two groups, both were similar in terms of describing cultural traditions shaping their home life in ways they perceived as different than their White counterparts. For example, both Latina and Asian American participants felt they had stronger family bonds, loyalty and traditions. According to Mary, a Mexican American woman, despite some differences across nationalities, most Hispanics are united by food, family, and religion.

And though it’s not a very Mexican American community, I have a lot of Cuban and Puerto Rican friends who tell me that what my parents taught me growing up is the same as what their parents taught them. So like we have some superstitions mixed with our religion because many Hispanics are Catholic and its presence is in everything we do. There’s also the influence of your older relatives and your grandparents, how much your grandparents are still a part of your family. Another big aspect is how we treat food and how meals are a family event. —Mary, Mexican American woman

Similarly, many Asian American participants noted the strong bond to family, but also chose to highlight an intense pressure to succeed academically as a formative part of their identity. This aligns with research on the model minority perception and
phenomenon (Paek & Shah, 2003), which holds that Asian Americans endeavor towards academic and career success and are thus perceived as socially desirable minorities. What is interesting is the pride that many participants gained from this label. Rather than perceiving it to be limiting, many expressed positive regard and agreement for the label, stating that the stereotype exists because it often holds true for many fellow Asian Americans.

I have a lot of Asian American friends especially in high school...we called ourselves the “Asian mafia,” really stupid, but for some reason we are just proud of that name and stuff like that...We took the same math and science classes. They all played piano...I mean there is a reason why Asians are perceived to be doing well at school. —Nicole, Chinese American woman

I actually, if anything, pride myself on preferring being Asian American...I feel like it's the best minority...You are always generally expected or thought to be smarter than other people...hopefully I have all of the model minority stuff, the education achievement, a good job, financial stability, super achieving stuff. —Ellie, Chinese American woman

Overall, regardless of the emphasis on being identified by nationality versus a pan-ethnic label, both groups derive a sense of pride and confidence from their cultural distinctiveness. Specifically, when asked how important maintaining their ethnic heritage is, both groups of women noted that it is something that becomes increasingly important as they age, especially once they have children to pass traditions on to. Similar to Alvarez, Dickson, and Hunter’s (2014) findings that Hispanic identification can be robust in the face of acculturation effects, I found that both groups maintained a sense of their culture of heritage that seemed resilient despite living as an ethnic minority, being born in the U.S., not speaking their language of heritage, etc. When it comes to advertisements though, the critical observation seems to be that Latina American women and Asian American women alike are savvy to the “politically correct” strategy of advertisers
attempting to appeal to a pan-ethnic sensibility via incorporating models of various skin tones as stand-ins for all Hispanics or all Asians. Latinas expressed a desire for more specificity (i.e., including models who are specifically Peruvian, Brazilian, Honduran, etc.) while Asian American participants noted an overall lack of Asian models to begin with. Thus, while both groups seemed to accept and often endorse the multiculturalism appeal popular in many beauty advertisements, they also felt that the pan-ethnic models (i.e., models who were middle of the road in terms of hair color, skin color, stature, etc.) were too ethnically indistinct to be truly resonant with bicultural consumers such as themselves.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

As one of the earliest empirical studies examining Asian and Latina American women’s responses to advertising representations of beauty, this work advances existing theoretical understanding on minority consumers’ meaning-making of advertising messages in several ways. First, in terms of identity construction, there is some evidence in interviews with Asian and Latina American women that utilizing women of color in advertising is helping to change the scope of what is means to be a beautiful woman in America. In CCT research, oppositional reading and negotiation with mainstream texts is an important phenomenon since it uncovers the interaction between advertising and identity as well as highlights how marketers may improve their messaging strategies to better target their consumers (Kozinets, 2001).

In particular for Latina American women, their engagement with beauty
advertisements aligns with the burgeoning study of rhetorical agency theory (Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Vats, 2014) among consumers in that they have taken imagery that is one dimensional in its representation and have chosen to imbue it with meaning that likely goes beyond the original intent of marketers. Instead of frustration at only being portrayed as sexual objects, many Latinas chose to interpret the imagery as a positive for Latinas in general because it positioned them as desireable but also seemed to view the usage of Latinas in beauty ads as spearheading a movement that is becoming popular in the U.S.: body confidence and acceptance. This interpretation is a hybridized one in that it takes Latin cultural facets (e.g., the passionate and fiery attitude often ascribed to Latinos) as well as American cultural facets (e.g., being independent and self sufficient) and combines them. Latinas feel responsible for the next beauty “standard” which is as much an attitude as it is a set of physical features.

Perhaps more so than their Asian American counterparts, Latina American participants expressed pride and almost a sense of ownership over recent beauty trends that emphasize a more curvaceous figure and body acceptance. Citing celebrities such as the Kardashians, Jennifer Lopez, and Christina Aguilera, several Latina American participants noted that even as recently as 20 years ago, these body shapes would not have been as popular as they are today. In addition to different body shapes, there is an attitudinal component of self-confidence that some Latina American participants felt that directly overlapped with and possibly stemmed from the Latin culture’s emphasis on looking good as well as glorifying a bold, self-confident attitude. Despite noting that there is still evidence of tropicalism (Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997; Perez-Firmat, 1994) and the Maja beauty standard (Llorèns, 2013) among many of the models in
American beauty advertisements,Latinas mentioned the show *Jane the Virgin* as evidence that realistic, respectful portrayals of Latinidadare both possible and marketable. This acknowledgement of the success of the Latina in American media as well as the demand for more diverse representation is a modern day iteration of hooks’ (1992) call for oppositional gaze among women of color. More so than Asian American participants, there was a sense of minority consciousness and community among Latina participants and many felt that they greatly contribute to American popular culture and thus need to move past caricatures and stereotypes and strive towards more egalitarian representation of Latina women in the media.

Similarly, as the number of Latino actors and models increases throughout American media, Latina American participants said that they have taken note and commented on the implications for Latinos in American society. In distinctiveness theory (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994; McGuire, 1984; Grier & Deshpandé, 2001), people who perceive themselves as numerical minorities also perceive themselves as more distinct and subsequently are more aware of their ethnic label overall. Further, this perceived distinctiveness is also influenced by ethnic minorities’ perceptions of their relative social desirability as minorities in their community. With television shows increasingly featuring positive, non-stereotypical representations of Latino characters, it is possible that Latino Americans are slowly beginning to perceive themselves as having a higher ranking in the racial hierarchy of the U.S. At the macro level, CCT research investigates the influences that economic and cultural globalization exert upon consumer identity projects (Arnauld, 1989; Coulter et al. 2003). The findings in this work may indicate that as a result of the increasing popularity of Latinos in Hollywood as well as the increasing
economic power of Latinos in the U.S., Latino-Americans are experiencing a modification of their identities as minorities and as consumers. Of course, this observation did not resonate across all interviews as many participants noted the recent 2016 presidential election as a step backwards in terms of equality for Hispanics in America. But in terms of popular culture representations, especially beauty related advertisements, most Latina American participants agreed that this is one venue in which Latinas may experience empowerment.

Unfortunately, the converse is true for Asian American participants. Despite strides in including Asian people in advertisements from a sheer body count perspective, participants noted that advertisers have much to improve upon in terms of resonating with female Asian American consumers. The reliance on the foreign, remote, and heavily Orientalized trope for Asian models in beauty advertisements was a source of some consternation among Asian American participants. However, it is important to note that in interviews, participants themselves downplayed beauty as a domain of empowerment for themselves. When discussing pride in their Asian heritage, many aspects of the model minority label actually resonated with participants in that they commiserated about and celebrated the strict environments they grew up in as children as it often led to academic and career success. When asked what they would prefer to see for Asian models in beauty advertisements, a common refrain seemed to be more of an emphasis on normality. For example, in one GAP ad, there was a smiling Asian woman playing with, presumably, her young child. Several participants noted a sense of refreshment at seeing a visibly happy woman in a role as something other than an exotic ornament. This supports Zhang’s (2010) observations that Asian people are often portrayed as friendless and left
out in American media, which has detrimental effects that several Asian American women noted in terms of their social inclusion.

Perhaps the most unexpected finding, despite feeling removed from the beauty domain as a source of empowerment, several Asian American participants noted feeling, as a community, they need to do more to demand representation. In CCT, consumers’ consumption behavior defines the consumer and reflects the social, political, and cultural contexts of the individual (Tsai, 2006). Many Asian American participants noted they purchased makeup, clothing, hair and skincare products in an effort to be more fashionable and look better. Even for those who expressed they do not like spending money on these products, all participants agreed there is a shared cultural pressure and expectation that to be a beautiful Asian woman means being feminine and putting some effort into one’s appearance. Thus, according to my findings, it is not that Asian American women do not enjoy spending money on beauty products or that beauty is not a significant cultural context for them, rather, they perceive their position in American beauty advertising as one that is somewhat unrelatable and often not seen at all. In other words, it is difficult for many Asian American women to connect to the imagery they see in beauty advertisements. Moreover, it is not an arena in which they have achieved confidence nor do they perceived themselves as legitimate actors, often pointing to Asian models occupying a position of tokenism in beauty ads.

On top of this, they acknowledge that America seems to be undergoing a period of racial turmoil and activism. Issues with police shootings involving minorities, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, even several participants noting a relative lack of Asian American politicians is leading to a burgeoning sense of underrepresentation as a
community, which is also reflected in beauty advertising. Thus, Asian American women are beginning to feel a sense of pressure to speak out, especially during a time where other minority communities have become increasingly vocal, contributing to a new sort of double bind in which the pressure to remain inoffensive as a minority group persists while racial agitation ion the country persists and even grows.

In ethnic targeting theory (Appiah, 2001; 2004; Arpan, 2002) as well as distinctiveness theory (McGuire, 1984), the salience of one’s ethnicity to their identity holds important impact on their reception of commercial messages. The more highly identified a consumer is with his or her culture of heritage, the more they are presumed to respond to ethnically targeted ads. Moreover, members of minority groups perceive spokespeople from their own ethnic groups to be more trustworthy (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994). Yet among both groups of participants, there seemed to be a sense of exasperation with marketers over their lack of understanding when it came to bicultural consumers. Each participant vacillated between two of more identities. For example, Korean American participant Susan expressed that context changes everything for her. She believes that people perceive her differently in the workplace versus in more causal venues. Specifically, she feels people assume she is capable in the office environment but relatively invisible in social situations such as dating. Similarly, Nancy, a Dominican American woman who grew up with strong catholic influence noted that the sexy Latinas she sees in shows such as Modern Family and in the sample ads shown seem at odds with her conservative Catholic upbringing, an observation that several other Latina American participants touched upon.

Thus, marketers would do well do demonstrate an understanding of this duality in
identity in their advertisements. Latinas can be portrayed in ways that are not so sexualized just as Asian women can be approachable in their styling. Participants often favored models who were ethnically ambiguous and perceived targeted advertisements as being more stereotypical and, thus, less relatable. This work directly contradicts ethnic targeting research that holds that ethnic spokesperson similarity is perceived as lending likeability to an advertisement. Bicultural consumers are a unique and growing group who deserve more research to understand the nuanced ways in which they conceive of their identity and their position in the social and racial fabric of the U.S.

Moreover, participants in both groups noted an undifferentiated approach among most beauty ads in that Latinas were always showcased as being flamboyant, bright, and sexually available and Asians were always showcased as being fragile, diminutive, and sometimes odd. Understanding that more and more consumers are an amalgamation of cultural influences but that they do not desire to be pigeonholed for a singular facet is key. When asked how they felt about advertisements that included cultural artifacts and cues (e.g., kimono, sombreros, etc.), most participants admitted that they were not offended by using such imagery, rather it was a nearly exclusive reliance by so many advertisers on those cues that became tiresome. While neither group necessarily wanted to be removed from advertisements that positioned women of color with accompanying cultural artifacts entirely, they do want to be shown in ways where their ethnicity is simply incidental. For example, participants in both groups acknowledged that ads featuring women of color engaging in hobbies that are typically incongruent with their ethnicities’ stereotypical portrayals were preferable. This lends evidence to Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) suggestion that advertisements help construct notions about female
identity and can be detrimental, even rejected if they do not showcase variety and realism.

Overall, this study examined two groups of women that have surprising similarities and differences. Across the literature on representation of minorities in advertising, it is clear that Latinas are often symbols of boldness, sex, and passion while Asian women are often symbols of feminine fragility and quiet passivity. To be a beautiful Asian or Latina woman, marketers have presented a somewhat reductionist form of beauty where women of color are represented by models with attributes that resonate with a minority of women and largely alienate those who identify as Latina and Asian and do not match what they see in advertisements. The key for marketers to more successfully construct appealing images for these consumer groups is to acknowledge that they experience a hyphenated reality in that they are American as well as Asian or Latina and that the variety in both cultures extends well past what is currently represented. Although participants acknowledged resonance with some of the more stereotypical portrayals they viewed in beauty ads, it was clear that assimilation into the “American” beauty aesthetic was something both groups desired to see more of.

Participants perceived the American attitude of beauty to be more significant than an exact image. Although many participants in both groups perceived the ideal to still favor White women, they also noted that American beauty involves a mindset of confidence and self-acceptance that is more important and more marketable than focusing on race and body size alone. In other words, showcasing true racial diversity (e.g., Afro-Latina women or Asian women who do not appear East Asian), women of greater body sizes, women who do not have Anglicized facial features, and women exuding
confidence and happiness rather than a sexuality that appeals to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989). Becoming possessors of their beauty, their bodies, and their status as opposed to objectifications to be consumed was important to participants of both groups.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research, I believe that it is important to triangulate findings by conducting interviews with different ethnic groups, including Caucasian women, to understand how ethnicity and biculturalism are perceived among non-group members as well. Research often focuses on a White/non-White dichotomy, so it is important to examine how minority groups perceive one another as well. This work only began to touch upon how women of color perceive other minority groups positions’ in society, so I would recommend more research that delves into the nuances of beauty perceptions among and between women of color.

Since bicultural consumers are distinct from those who primarily identify as monocultural, this provides new opportunities to test distinctiveness theory. Ethnic identity is becoming increasingly complicated as immigration and interracial marriage increases and globalization continues to rise. As such, a reconceptualization of ethnic identity may be on the horizon for race and media effects researchers.

**Limitations**

It is important to note my geographic location for this work. Living in South Florida, there is a high percentage of Hispanic people and a low number of Asian people. As such, it is possible that some participants who grew up in neighborhoods with a dense population of fellow Hispanic neighbors may have a slightly different perception of their social status in the U.S. as opposed to growing up as an ethnic minority elsewhere in the
country. Moreover, the majority of participants were English-speaking and had some amount of college education. To truly understand the full experience of Latina and Asian American women and how they perceive their representation in beauty advertising, it is important to speak with women who do not utilize English as a first language as well as those who did not attend college or who possibly work in lower paying positions.
References


**CHAPTER IX**

Appendix A

List of Magazines Used for Sample Advertisements

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### Appendix B

#### Latina American Participants

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Appendix C

Interview Discussion Guidelines

Discussion Guide for Asian American Participants

Growing Up and Personal information
1. How old are you? What is your ethnicity? What do you do for work?
2. Where are your parents from?
3. Where did you grow up? Can you describe what it was like? (PROBE) What language did you speak with your parents and your friends?
4. Where did you go to school? Who were your friends? PROBE: How would your friends describe you?
5. Were traditional ________ holidays celebrated in your family? What were they? What did your friends think of them?
6. Do you have any role models that you look up to? Why? (PROBE: Any role models from movies, TV, etc.?)

Biculturalism and Identity Shifting
1. How important is it for you to maintain your _______ (fill in appropriate ethnicity) heritage? (FOR RESEARCHER: Park, 2009: found that ethnic heritage is heavily emphasized by parents)
2. Are there situations where you act more "Asian" than others? Describe one.
3. Do you find that friends/people of other ethnicities talk to you about being ________ (insert ethnicity)? PROBE: How much of what they know about your ethnicity comes from a TV show/movie/book?

Media Consumption and Ads (follow up with beauty section if they start commenting on appearance)
1. Do you read magazines and if so, which ones?
2. What was your favorite show growing up? Now?
3. How did you find out about shows you liked? Magazines? (If foreign content: How did you go out of your way to find them?)
4. Do your parents read/or watch things in a different language?
5. How do you get product information when making the decision to buy something?
6. I want to show you some examples of ads I found and I would also like to look at what you brought:
   What do you notice about the models in these ads?
   Why do you think the advertisers chose her?
   Why do you think this company chose an Asian model(s)?
   What does it say about Asian beauty?
   Who is dominant in each ad?
   What is your impression of the beauty stereotypes and standards for Asian women?
   What are the beauty standards for black women? Latin women? White women?
   Are there new beauty trends you have noticed over the years?
   When you see an Asian model in a commercial or ad, what do you pay attention to (For example, clothes, hairstyle, height, age, etc.)?

Alternative Readings
1. How would you like to be represented in the media?
2. Thinking back to the ads that we looked at, what do you like about them?
3. Think about your own style and that of your friends. How do you express yourselves and is that different than what you see in ads? How?

Representation
1. What do you pay attention to when you see a model in an ad? (PROBE: Do you pay attention to the ethnicity of models in advertising?) (PROBE: Do you take special notice if it’s an Asian model?)
2. Can you describe the most recent advertisement you saw or watched that involved an Asian model?
3. What types of products do you see Asian models selling? (According to Taylor & Lee, it will likely be tech)
   a. (PROBE: Why do you think Asian Americans are only shown with those products?)
4. Why aren’t there more Asians in advertisements?
5. Do you think Asian men and women are portrayed equally? (PROBE: Do you think American media is changing for better or for worse for Asian Americans? Women of color?)
6. According to everything you have seen in advertising and popular culture, what is the definition of an Asian American?

Beauty and Gender
1. Can you tell me what it means to be a beautiful woman in America?
2. Can you tell me what it means to be beautiful as an Asian American woman?
3. How important is appearance in American culture? In Asian culture and why do you feel that way?
5. Do you feel more pressure to look a certain way than, say, some of your non-Asian friends? (PROBE: Does this change depending on which friends you are hanging out with?)
6. Think about what your mother or aunt considers beautiful and compare your personal tastes.

**Stereotypes**
1. Have you personally experienced any stereotyping in your life or seen it happen to someone else? (PROBE: Can you describe a situation where you witnessed discrimination or stereotyping?)
2. Can you describe Asian stereotypes you see in advertising or in popular shows? (PROBE: For men and for women? Is this improving?)

*End with: again, I am not Asian, so anything you can tell me about your unique experiences is great. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to include about being an Asian American woman?*

**Discussion Guide for Latina American Participants**

**Growing Up and Personal information**
1. How old are you? What is your ethnicity? What do you do for work?
2. Where are your parents from?
3. Where did you grow up? Can you describe what it was like? (PROBE) What language did you speak with your parents and your friends?
4. Where did you go to school? Who were your friends? PROBE: How would your friends describe you?
5. Were traditional ________ holidays celebrated in your family? What were they? What did your friends think of them?
6. Do you have any role models that you look up to? Why? (PROBE: Any role models from movies, TV, etc.?)

**Biculturalism and Identity Shifting**
1. How important is it for you to maintain your ________ (fill in appropriate ethnicity) heritage? (FOR RESEARCHER: Park, 2009: found that ethnic heritage is heavily emphasized by parents)
2. Are there situations where you act more "Latina" than others? Describe one.
3. Do you find that friends/people of other ethnicities talk to you about being ________ (insert ethnicity)? PROBE: How much of what they know about your ethnicity comes from a TV show/movie/book?

**Media Consumption and Ads (follow up with beauty section if they start commenting on appearance)**
1. Do you read magazines and if so, which ones?
2. What was your favorite show growing up? Now?
3. How did you find out about shows you liked? Magazines? (If foreign content: How did you go out of your way to find them?)
4. Do your parents read/or watch things in a different language?
5. How do you get product information when making the decision to buy something?
6. I want to show you some examples of ads I found and I would also like to look at what you brought:
   What do you notice about the models in these ads?
   Why do you think the advertisers chose her?
   How can you tell if/when a model is actually Latina?
   Why do you think this company chose a Latina model(s)?
   What does it say about Latina beauty?
   Who is dominant in each ad?
   What is your impression of the beauty stereotypes and standards for Latina women?
   What are the beauty standards for black women? Asian women? White women?
   Are there new beauty trends you have noticed over the years?
   When you see a Latina model in a commercial or ad, what do you pay attention to
   (For example, clothes, hairstyle, height, age, etc.)?

Alternative Readings
1. How would you like to be represented in the media?
2. Thinking back to the ads that we looked at, what do you like about them?
3. Think about your own style and that of your friends. How do you express yourselves and is that different than what you see in ads? How?

Representation
1. What do you pay attention to when you see a model in an ad? (PROBE: Do you pay attention to the ethnicity of models in advertising?) (PROBE: Do you take special notice if it’s a Latina model?)
2. Can you describe the most recent advertisement you saw or watched that involved a Latina model?
3. What types of products do you see Latina models selling?
   a. (PROBE: Why do you think Latina Americans are shown with those products?)
4. Why aren’t there more Latinas in advertisements?
5. Do you think Latin men and women are portrayed equally? (PROBE: Do you think American media is changing for better or for worse for Latinas? Women of color?)
6. According to everything you have seen in advertising and popular culture, what is the definition of a Latina American woman?

Beauty and Gender
1. Can you tell me what it means to be a beautiful woman in America?
2. Can you tell me what it means to be beautiful as a Latina?
3. How important is appearance in American culture? In Latino culture and why do you feel that way?
4. Do you feel more pressure to look a certain way than, say, some of your non-Latino friends? (PROBE: Does this change depending on which friends you are hanging out with?)
5. Think about what your mother or aunt considers beautiful and compare your personal tastes.

**Stereotypes**
1. Have you personally experienced any stereotyping in your life or seen it happen to someone else? (PROBE: Can you describe a situation where you witnessed discrimination or stereotyping?)
2. Can you describe Latino/a stereotypes you see in advertising or in popular shows? (PROBE: For men and for women? Is this improving?)

**End with:** again, I am not Latina, so anything you can tell me about your unique experiences is great. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to include about being a Latina American woman?