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# UNEQUAL BEAUTY: EXPLORING CLASSISM IN THE WESTERN BEAUTY STANDARD

by

LEAH KOZEE YOUNGBLOOD

Under the Direction of Rosalind Chou, PhD

## ABSTRACT

The Western beauty standard revolves around three main attributes: thinness, youth, and whiteness. Combined, this ideal corresponds with privilege. Past studies have explored how racism and ageism are embedded in the beauty standard, but little work has explored how classism is included in the Western beauty standard. Utilizing the classical theoretical work of Bourdieu and Simmel, I explore the ways in which the Western beauty standard is dependent upon privilege and cultural capital. Using the methodology of a content analysis, the current study examines four women's fashion and beauty magazines. I find that the both the language and the imagery used in the magazines allows for classism to be explicitly and implicitly displayed. I also explore the intersectionality of classism, racism, and ageism to develop a clearer understanding of how the three types of privilege are sustained within the beauty standard.

INDEX WORDS: Beauty standard, Beauty work, Inequality, Classism, Intersectionality, Content analysis

UNEQUAL BEAUTY: EXPLORING CLASSISM IN THE WESTERN BEAUTY STANDARD

by

LEAH KOZEE YOUNGBLOOD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

UNEQUAL BEAUTY: EXPLORING CLASSISM IN THE WESTERN BEAUTY STANDARD

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## **1 EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEAUTY AND PRIVILEGE**

Scholars can agree on the main attributes of the Western beauty ideal as youth, thinness, and whiteness (Craig 2006; Frith, Shaw, and Cheng 2005; Gooden 2011; Mazur 1986; Shaw 2005; Wiseman et al. 1992). It is evident that the beauty standard is narrowly defined, with only a small subset of the population fitting those three characteristics. The narrowness of the beauty standard allows us to understand why it is harmful to women, both physically and mentally. The narrowness also reveals deep levels of inequality.

The three main attributes of the beauty standard share a common thread. Thinness, whiteness, and youth are all reflections of privilege. Essentially, beauty requires privilege. The groups of women left out of the definition of beauty are those at the lower levels of social stratification. Taking a macro-level approach, we can see how inequalities are embedded in the Western beauty standard. The one-dimensional beauty ideal privileges certain groups over others (Gagné and McGaughey 2002; Kwan and Trautner 2009).

Beauty is arguably a form of discrimination; scholars from many different fields agree that the Western beauty standard revolves around racism, ageism, and classism (Gooden 2011; Lee 2009; Lewis, Medvedev, and Seponski 2011; Peat et al. 2008; Sengupta 2006; Shaw 2005; Slevin 2010; Taylor 2012). Much attention has been focused on examining the extent of racism and ageism in the beauty standard (see Craig 2006; Lewis et al. 2011; Peat et al. 2008; Sengupta 2006; Shaw 2005; Slevin 2010). However, research examining the Western beauty standard for evidence of classism has been less prominent.

A review of the relevant literature highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the classist representations of beauty ideals within print media. Popular women's magazines serve as a tool to learn about the classism in the beauty standard. For decades, scholars have examined

print media for indicators of the beauty ideal (for examples of similar methodology, see Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014; Garner et al. 1980; Lee and Clark 2014; Wiseman et al. 1992). Following the justifications of these classical pieces, I have analyzed four women's fashion and beauty magazines to answer two main research questions. First, how does print media perpetuate the idea of beauty as a commodity? By this question, I am interested in how magazines may pressure women to consume products in order to achieve beauty. Essentially, being beautiful in conventional ways shown in these magazines requires constant consumption. By buying the latest trends in fashion and beauty, any reader can be beautiful. Of course, this consumption requires financial freedom to do so. Secondly, how is classism depicted in the representations of the beauty standard? Representations of beauty are explicitly classed through the use of language and display of prices. Once readers see the price of an item or read a poetic or wordy description of an item, that reader can make a connection between the product and privilege. Products can also be implicitly classed, through the use of prestige that is associated with a brand.

This work explores how adherence to the beauty standard is tied to class status and privilege. Overall, this work illustrates how beauty represents privilege. The association between beauty and privilege is not a novel idea. This same argument is echoed in past literature and research. The history of beauty closely aligns with privilege and class status. Yet, scholars still have not explored print media for this connection. Next, I explore the relevant literature on beauty work and the beauty standard.

## 1.1 Literature Review

The beauty standard is criticized for replicating structures of inequality (Kwan and Trautner 2009). However, there are some gaps in this field of research. A majority of the work directly assessing classism within beauty standards falls outside of the United States. These studies examine the impact of the Western beauty standard present in non-Western countries (for examples, see Hopkins 2007; Lee 2009; Luo 2013). Furthermore, no other studies have utilized print media to demonstrate how classism is embedded in the beauty standard, despite its relevance in the teaching of the beauty standard. Scholars have often relied on in-depth interviews to reveal classism in the beauty standard (see Gimlin 2000; Lee 2009).

Despite the gaps in assessing classism within the Western beauty ideal, specifically in the United States setting, there is a large body of past research from which to draw. Scholars do recognize that adherence to the beauty standard is associated with class status, through the consumption of beauty products and services as well as cosmetic surgery (Hopkins 2007; Kwan and Trautner 2009). Throughout this thesis, I explore how beauty, as presentation of self, can be considered a performance of class status. Some women have the economic freedom and class standing to engage in beauty work, while others are left with the stigma of unattractiveness. In order to illustrate how the beauty standard relies on classism, I discuss the theoretical frameworks of inequality and self-presentation, the historical context of the beauty standard and fashion trends, and recent research.

### ***1.1.1 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Theory of Culture and Inequality and Trautner's Doing Class***

Pierre Bourdieu (1984:414) asserts that appearance is a crucial source of differentiation for the upper class. The upper class is able to consume products of culture; they have the disposable income to spend on trivial items, like beauty products (Bourdieu 1984; Gartman 2012). The privileged groups use their financial freedom to set themselves apart from those groups who are not privileged. Therefore, what we assume to be personal preference or taste is a reflection of social class standing.

Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated that upper class and professional women were more likely to adhere to the societal beauty standard. The lower class women's non-participation is not viewed as unwillingness to adhere to the ideal. Instead, Bourdieu (1984) points out that these women do not have the economic freedom to participate. The classical theoretical work of Bourdieu points to the privilege needed to adhere to the beauty standard. Disposable income and beauty work go hand in hand.

The participation of the upper class and the exclusion of the lower class in the beauty standard raises several interesting questions. Most pertinent to the current study, are there recognizable differences in the beauty standards of the polarized social classes? Do we see these differences of beauty played out in particular settings? Trautner (2005) found these notable class presentation differences in an examination of strip clubs. Those exotic dancers employed by the upper class clubs were more likely to follow the Western beauty standard, with thin frames, large (and mostly unnatural) breasts, long hair, and expertly styled makeup (Trautner 2005:777). The women who were employed by working class clubs did not follow the beauty standard so closely (Trautner 2005).

Trautner's work (2005) centers on the idea that class status is performative, just like the classic sociological work by West and Zimmerman on doing gender. Self-expression and self-presentation is the mechanism for establishing class status. Privilege and status is recognized through our self-presentation, just as the strippers in Trautner's work make their class status apparent through their self-presentation. People use fashion, jewelry, and beauty work to establish and reflect class status.

From this body of theoretical work, I argue that class standing is associated with self-presentation. Class status can be interpreted from one's appearance, most importantly from women's adherence to the Western beauty standard. Beauty work is a way of doing class; it is closely aligned with women's class status and privilege. Throughout the remainder of this review, I demonstrate how both the historical and current conceptualizations of beauty are intertwined with privilege and how women interpret beauty as privilege.

### ***1.1.2 Fashion and Beauty as Privilege***

Scholars argue that fashion and beauty trends serve as signs of privilege (Bourdieu 1984; Kwan and Trautner 2009; Phelan 2002). The theoretical work, discussed above, echoes this sentiment as well. Historically, the beauty standard has represented the privileged class. This argument rings louder if we consider how the shifts in privilege correspond to changes in the beauty standard. The American standard of beauty has centered around the privileged groups of women throughout history.

Beginning with the beauty standard of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, frailness was the epitome of beauty. Women achieved beauty through extreme slenderness, pale skin, and short stature (Mazur 1986; Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore 1994). These characteristics mirror those of the privileged class- those who do not have to engage in manual labor in the harsh outside conditions. The current standard requires tan skin and a thin and curvy frame<sup>2</sup>, among other attributes (Harrison 2003). This current ideal is reflective of modern privilege. The thin and simultaneously curvy ideal is not a normative naturally occurring body type; women seek out dietary restrictions and cosmetic surgery to achieve this ideal. These measures of maintaining the thin and curvy ideal require excessive financial resources. Having tanned skin requires leisure time and financial resources to either vacation or artificially tan.

The historical and present trends in beauty mirror the ever-changing privileged population. It is also important to note that the changes in the beauty standard correspond to the changes in the privileged population. This has been established through research: scholars are aware that beauty reflects privilege. Because of this association, an important question begs to be answered. Are women recognizing the association between privilege and beauty? If so, in what ways? Next, I explore how women are aligning beauty, privilege, and status.

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of time and space within this thesis, the 19<sup>th</sup> century beauty standard is a starting point. Scholarly work on past beauty standards extends past this point in time. See Mazur 1986 for more.

<sup>2</sup> The thin and curvy ideal, discussed by Harrison (2003) reflects the standard in which women must maintain an overall low BMI while simultaneously have larger breasts. This ideal is markedly different from the thin ideal, in which women are only required to be extremely thin.

### ***1.1.3 Recognizing a Beauty Hierarchy***

Women do recognize the relationship between beauty and privilege. Women, in various studies, describe how adherence to the beauty standard affords them more status or power (Lee 2009; Taylor 2012). Lee (2009) brought attention to the hierarchal structure of beauty work<sup>3</sup>, in which women's adherence to the beauty standard corresponds to their placement within the hierarchy. Increased consumption of beauty products and services places women towards the top of the hierarchy and rewards these women with higher social status (Lee 2009; Luo 2013; Taylor 2012). In a sense, this beauty hierarchy reflects a class hierarchy (Lee 2009).

Scholars have also drawn upon the concept of conspicuous consumption to illustrate how beauty work and adherence to the beauty standard is associated with higher-class standing (Hopkins 2007; Luo 2013). Conspicuous consumption involves the acquirement of goods and services in an effort to reflect social class standing (Veblen 1994). Conspicuous consumption also requires the knowledge of the products' prestige (Veblen 1994). Combining the financial resources needed and the prestige associated with particular products, we can begin to understand how classism is embedded in the beauty standard.

Women are aware of the prestige that beauty brings; they have spoken explicitly about the beauty hierarchy (Lee 2009). Women can determine a woman's socioeconomic status based on her observed beauty work (Lee 2009; Taylor 2012). Women associate beauty work and the products required to do so with prestige (Lee 2009). Clearly, conspicuous consumption, aligning privilege with consumption, allows for classism within the beauty standard to persist.

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<sup>3</sup> Beauty work is understood as the maintenance of appearance, upholding the feminine requirement of attractiveness (Kwan and Trautner 2009). Beauty work may require the consumption of cosmetic products, regular salon visits for body hair maintenance, couture clothing, dietary restrictions, and exercise.

Beauty work can serve as a marker of class- through the acknowledgement of what beauty work entails. Consuming expensive cosmetics and clothing, salon visits, and elite forms of dieting all require financial freedom. Women are aware of this association (Lee 2009). Economically disadvantaged groups cannot afford to participate in expensive beauty work (Gagné and McGaughey 2002; Lee 2009; McRobbie 1997; Taylor 2012). Yet, this type of beauty work is not the only source of class distinction. The thin and curvy ideal has led to a new form of class distinction: cosmetic surgery.

#### ***1.1.4 Current Research: Cosmetic Surgery***

Feminist scholars have long since problematized the increasingly popular trend of cosmetic surgery (Eriksen and Goering 2011; Gimlin 2000; Morgan 1991). Typically framed in an argument of structure versus agency, scholars are polarized on whether cosmetic surgery is the ultimate sign of oppression of women or the freedom utilized by women to reclaim their own bodies. Those scholars arguing on the side of structure maintain that pursuits of cosmetic surgery ultimately serve the interests of men, not the women engaging in cosmetic surgery (Morgan 1991). Emphasizing agency, scholars explore the personal narratives of the women who are opting for these elective surgeries. These women often explain the surgeries as a way to improve themselves or promote self-confidence, without thought towards the beauty ideal as a source of social pressure (Eriksen and Goering 2011; Gimlin 2000).

While the agency versus structure debate has yielded a wealth of knowledge about women's participation in cosmetic surgery, future work needs to extend beyond these arguments. We should examine the class connotations that cosmetic surgeries perpetuate. More and more women are becoming consumers of cosmetic surgery. In 2014, Americans spent roughly twelve

billion dollars on cosmetic surgery<sup>4</sup> (The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery 2014). The popularity of this surgical trend, coupled with our knowledge of the thin and curvy model, warrants a closer look into the class implications of cosmetic surgery.

The thin and curvy model demonstrates how class status allows privilege to align with beauty attainment. Past scholars have long since argued that the beauty ideal requires extreme thinness. Yet, Harrison (2003) has noted the emergence of the thin and curvy ideal. This ideal requires a thin frame and larger breasts, a body type that is commonly unnatural to maintain. Women have turned to cosmetic surgery to fit this ideal. How do we know women are resorting to surgical interventions? The most common form of cosmetic surgery was breast augmentation in 2012<sup>5</sup> (ASAPA 2012). There has been a 226.8% increase in breast augmentation from 1997 to 2012 (ASAPA 2012)<sup>6</sup>. These numbers speak volumes to the popularity of cosmetic surgery.

How exactly is this new ideal considered a reflection of classism? We know that the body is crucial for today's beauty standards (Frith et al. 2005). Therefore, many women may feel pressure to obtain the thin and curvy ideal to feel beautiful. The alteration of breast size requires surgery, as the body fat distribution for larger breast size and a simultaneous thin frame is unnatural (Harrison 2003). This surgically designed body ideal privileges those with the financial resources to participate in an elective operation (Gagné and McGaughey 2002).

Class status is at the root of cosmetic surgery. In reviewing the narratives of women who have undergone cosmetic surgery, it is evident that class standing is playing a crucial role in their decision-making. For some, cosmetic surgery is a source of social status (Gagné and McGaughey

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<sup>4</sup> In 2012, the American Association for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported over 11 billion dollars spent on cosmetic surgery.

<sup>5</sup> Breast augmentation is still one of the most popular forms of cosmetic surgery in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> In 1997, 101,176 women underwent breast augmentation. In 2012, 330,631 women underwent breast augmentation.

2002; Hopkins 2007; Luo 2013). Undergoing cosmetic surgery will allow the women to enjoy an increase in their social status. For others, class status allows these women to engage in cosmetic surgery. Scholars have voiced how these women feel as if they have the right to “treat themselves” to a surgical alteration of their bodies (Gagné and McGaughey 2002:828). The idea of deserving of this luxury reflects their class position. These women have the financial freedom to view an expensive and risky surgical procedure as a treat to make them fit the beauty standard.

### ***1.1.5 Investing in Beauty***

Beauty marks distinction between the social classes, both in a historical context and within the modern beauty standard. The upper class has closely adhered to the normative standard, making an association between beauty and high socioeconomic status evident (Bourdieu 1984; Trautner 2005). However, how can we explain the participation of the lower class in beauty work? I argue that the economically disadvantaged groups view their involvement in the beauty standard to be an investment.

Several scholars have addressed beauty as an investment (Gimlin 2000; Gimlin 2007; Lee and Ryo 2012; Luo 2013). Women strive to adhere to the beauty standard for the promise of a raise in social status and to promote themselves in their work environments (Gimlin 2000; Lee 2014; Lee and Ryo 2012; Nash et al. 2006). Luo (2013) illustrates how women in China view beauty work as an investment in their occupational future. These women feel that maintaining the Western beauty standard will allow them opportunities in their careers, previously withheld from their former unattractive selves (Luo 2013). Women feel so strongly about beauty work as investments that they will seek out additional employment and save any extra income, just to be

able to afford products and procedures. Lower income respondents worked multiple jobs to afford cosmetic surgery (Gimlin 2000).

The participation of the lower classes in beauty work mirrors Georg Simmel's (1957) theoretical work on fashion. The lower class will seek out trends that emulate a higher-class standing, while the upper class is focused on distinguishing themselves from the lower class (Simmel 1957). Simmel uses this theoretical argument to explain how fashion only exists in class-based societies. Fashion requires differentiation between classes. I extend this argument to beauty work; beauty work is a similar trend based form of self-expression. Beauty work revolves around class-based differentiation.

This trend is found in recent work concerning cosmetic surgery. It has been established that women are consuming cosmetic surgery to produce an image of an upper class woman (Taylor 2012). This image is dependent on the cost associated with such a surgery; the expenditure gives women status (Taylor 2012). Women have voiced that they prefer surgical enhancements to be obvious to an outsider; the obviousness of surgical enhancement promotes the idea that the women have the means to engage in cosmetic surgery (Taylor 2012). Evidently, the association between beauty work and class status is becoming more and more obvious.

Beauty and fashion has historically been a site of privilege (Bourdieu 1984; Kwan and Trautner 2009; Phelan 2002). Women participate in beauty work and consume beauty products to portray a particular class status (Hopkins 2007; Lee 2009; Nash et al. 2006). In their participation, these women are recreating the social hierarchical arrangement, with white upper-class women at the top (Gagné and McGaughey 2002; Kwan and Trautner 2009; Smolka and dos Santos Braga 2009; Taylor 2012). The class implications of the beauty standard become more

prevalent when we consider how globalization has shaped worldwide definitions of beauty (Hopkins 2007; Smolka and dos Santos Braga 2009).

After reviewing the past scholarly work in this field, it is evident that adherence to the Western beauty ideal is associated with upper class status. However, scholars have not explored why this association exists. How are women learning about the prestige of particular beauty products and services? How does consumption of these beauty products relate to adherence to the beauty standard? The current study turns to the print media as a tool for learning about the Western beauty standard, including how to adhere to the standard and what goods to purchase in order to be considered beautiful.

In this study, I seek to answer two main questions; those questions are: (1) How does print media perpetuate the idea of beauty as a commodity? (2) How is classism depicted in the representations of the beauty standard? By seeking answers to these research questions, I demonstrate how class inequalities are embedded in our conceptualizations of beauty.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Through examining print media depictions of beauty, I aim to shed light on how the consumption of beauty products paints a picture of privileged beauty. The current study extends research in this field by paying exclusive attention to the United States' portrayal of the beauty standard, whereas other studies examining the class inequalities of the beauty standard have focused on other countries. There is a need for a clearer understanding of how class status and privilege are associated with the U.S. portrayal of beauty.

### **1.2.1 Research Design**

The current study entails a content analysis of popular women's beauty and lifestyle magazines. These magazines, targeted to young adult women, have been the focus for many classical studies in this field (see Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). Gagné and McGaughey (2002) explain that women often cite the media as a prime example for the teaching of the beauty standard, whether in print or video form. Therefore, the focus of print media for the study design is justified.

When considering magazines for the current study, I included all fashion, lifestyle, and beauty magazines targeted towards young adult women. Upon researching the targeted audiences of several magazines, I selected the following magazines for analysis: *Glamour*, *Redbook*, *Vogue*, and *Essence*. Each of these magazines is focused on fashion and beauty for young adult women. An emphasis on both fashion and beauty is crucial, given that the beauty standard relies heavily on the body, rather than the face (Frith et al. 2005). In order to gain a complete understanding of the magazines' presentation, I analyzed six months of magazine editions for each magazine. Each magazine produces twelve issues annually; therefore, I assessed twenty-four magazine issues. The magazines were assessed cover to cover. I included every relevant advertisement, element, and feature of the magazines in my analysis. This allowed me to reach saturation with just twenty-four issues.

### **1.2.2 Coding Process**

Keeping in alignment with the research questions, the coding scheme focuses on whether beauty is portrayed to require higher class standing and whether beauty can be obtained through the purchasing of goods and services. The coding process required an initial reading of the

material, followed by an assessment of the product placement and pricing, the use of language to imply luxury<sup>7</sup>, and the inclusion or exclusion of lower priced goods as an alternative for adhering to the beauty standard<sup>8</sup>.

Product placement lends itself to understanding how particular products are advertised, whether as essential for beauty maintenance or as a luxury for privileged women. Do the magazines portray beauty as only accessible to women in privileged positions? Assessing the prices of the products listed in the magazine issues will be crucial to this study. The prices will be indicative of the resources needed to maintain the beauty standard. Is beauty work considered to be an expensive endeavor in these magazines? Luxury language is understood as the wording used to imply a lavish lifestyle, most commonly associated with opulence. The use of such language would imply higher class standing. Are beauty products promoted as luxurious? What would be the advertisers' and editors' motive for this? Finally, the inclusion or exclusion of less expensive beauty alternatives will demonstrate whether or not those with less economic resources are included or excluded in the current societal definition of beauty. Are there cheaper alternative paths to beauty? Can women with less financial freedom pass as beautiful to some degree?

### **1.3 Review**

The connection between beauty and privilege is well established by past research. Beauty work, as self-presentation, serves as an indicator of class status and privilege. Beauty is not a mundane thing; it is an ideal intertwined with privilege. Arguably, the main attribute of the

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<sup>7</sup> The use of language to imply luxury is later referred to as "luxury language".

<sup>8</sup> This coding scheme is the product of a previous class paper, treated as a pilot for my thesis work. It can be provided upon request.

beauty standard is privilege. The changes in the ideal have always corresponded to the upper-class, privileged groups in American culture.

By acknowledging that the changes in the Western beauty standard align with the changes in the privileged population, I argue that beauty is a form of hegemony. The beauty standard serves as a tool to keep less privileged women at the bottom of the social hierarchy. By giving them the label or title of “not beautiful”, the Western beauty ideal is a tool of oppression. The beauty standard gives the privileged groups another title of privilege, being beautiful, because of the class status and privilege that these groups already have.

Clearly, class status is tied to beauty work. Women have voiced this sentiment in many different studies. Women in other countries who employ the Western standard voice that they can assess other women’s class standing by their beauty work (Lee 2009; Taylor 2012). Research has also established that women learn about beauty standards through the media (Gagné and McGaughey 2002). Yet, there is no research examining media forums for the classist beauty standard. As scholars, we need to explore how classist depictions of beauty are portrayed in the media.

Several classical studies in this field have relied on print media to understand how beauty ideals have changed over time. Yet, these pieces have not considered popular women’s magazines. Instead, they have examined Playboy magazine, a publication typically geared towards men’s consumption. Research needs to focus on how women learn about the link between class status and beauty work through the print media that they readily consume. The current study fills in this gap in the literature. I am drawing connections from the interview-based

studies; women are aware of the classism embedded in the beauty standard. The current study informs us of how classism is portrayed in the beauty ideal.

### ***1.3.1 Chapter Overview***

Next, I explore each of the themes that emerged from the coding scheme: classism depicted through language and imagery, the importance of class distinction and consumption, and the intersection of class, age, and race. Classism was evident through the issues analyzed. Each of these themes expands on how the beauty standard portrays and perpetuates classism. The major components of the magazine, text and imagery, allowed me to develop a multi-faceted understanding of classism in the beauty standard. The organization of the remainder of this work focuses on each of these themes.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the most salient concept: the importance of language and imagery in the magazine issues. Language is the main vehicle in which classism is portrayed within these magazine issues. The style of writing served as a way to boost, or increase, the prestige associated with a particular brand or product. I discuss how both superiority language and luxury language are tactics used to increase the prestige of products and brands. I focus on the distribution of superiority and luxury language presented in these issues, reflecting on how each of the magazines is using language. Within this chapter, I also discuss how the language and imagery of high-end designer goods contrasts with the language and imagery of moderately priced goods. High-end designer and luxury goods do not use prestige-boosting tactics. I include comparative images of advertisements, as I demonstrate how the two types of advertisements are fundamentally different.

Chapter Three builds on an important theme introduced in Chapter Two: the presentation of high-end designer goods. Taking a closer look at how these luxury brands are portrayed, I am able to develop a better understanding of classism in the beauty standard. These advertisements and features seek to reflect the prestige of the products, not boost the prestige levels. I reflect on the placement of text and the imagery included in these advertisements. I also include other regular features in my analysis, like the shopping guides and fashion editorial pieces. These elements rely more on the language to reflect prestige, rather than the imagery. In this third chapter, I also discuss the constant reinforcement of consumption. Readers are encouraged at every page to consume products, with the underlying assumption that these products will afford them the title of beautiful.

Chapter Four focuses on the intersection of class, age, and race-based inequalities. I examine *Redbook* and *Essence* magazines as sites of alternative beauty standards. Specifically, I analyze *Redbook* for its portrayal of age in the beauty standard and *Essence* for its portrayal of race in the beauty standard. I also compare the beauty standard presented in *Redbook* and *Essence* with the beauty standard presented in *Glamour* and *Vogue*.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, summarizes the major findings of this work. I review each of the major themes presented in this thesis, highlighting what I contribute to this area of research. I revisit how each of the themes builds off one another, focusing on how classism is portrayed within the issues. I also discuss some unanswered questions and new directions for future research in this last chapter.

## 2 LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

### 2.1 Classism Depicted through Language

Language is a crucial element of a magazine issue, both in advertisements and in the regular features of the magazine. Language served to educate the reader about products, introducing the name of the product and giving a short description of said product. Essentially, the language can be considered a highlight reel of the most attractive features of each product. The language within the magazines served a two-fold purpose: to highlight the superiority of the product featured and to allude to a luxurious lifestyle.

The language used throughout the issues is a major element that carries a large amount of weight in the portrayal of beauty. Language informs readers of the brand or product. Without language, a magazine would simply be a collection of photographs. Language has a transformative power. In the advertisements and regular features of the magazines, the language evoked a luxurious lifestyle. Drugstore brands used language to boost the prestige of their products, either through the boasting of the superiority of the product and the scientific innovation of the product, using decadence-based vocabulary, and using exotic phrases and spellings to describe the mundane.

#### 2.1.1 *We're number one!*

Language served as a way to boost the prestige of products. Brands and companies wanted to ensure their product would interest or entice readers, and a common practice to interest readers was to display how their product was the best. The superiority language aided lower priced goods and new goods in their quest for prestige. This type of language was more informative- educating women why a certain product should be consumed or desired. The

superiority of products was indicated by the boasting of number 1 in sales, testimonies by customers and experts, and scientific innovation involved in the creation of the product.

Table 1 demonstrates how prevalent the superiority language was throughout the issues. Out of every element analyzed in each issue, including advertisements, shopping guides, articles, pictorials, and features, this superiority language was a common feature. The table below includes counts of superiority language featured in advertisements. This table illustrates how common superiority language is in each magazine and issue. The higher numbers in Vogue and Glamour are due to the higher volume of content<sup>9</sup>. Redbook and Essence magazines were much smaller in each issue, and these magazines also included more than just fashion and beauty topics.

*Table 1 Superiority Language Counts<sup>10</sup> in Advertisements by Magazine and Issue<sup>11</sup>*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Glamour</i></b>	<b><i>Vogue</i></b>	<b><i>Redbook</i></b>	<b><i>Essence</i></b>
<b>1</b>	17 (62.96%)	17 (48.57%)	7 (77.78%)	15 (65.21%)
<b>2</b>	23 (62.16%)	22 (40.00%)	11 (68.75%)	13 (65.00%)
<b>3</b>	41 (46.59%)	32 (20.25%)	17 (77.27%)	9 (64.28%)
<b>4</b>	27 (46.55%)	28 (25.68%)	18 (78.26%)	9 (50.00%)
<b>5</b>	23 (44.23%)	23 (30.26%)	27 (87.09%)	8 (57.4%)
<b>6</b>	24 (35.82%)	6 (12.76%)	16 (66.67%)	13 (76.47%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>155 (47.11%)</b>	<b>128 (26.67%)</b>	<b>96 (76.80%)</b>	<b>67 (63.21%)</b>

<sup>9</sup> On average, an issue of these magazines could be 300-400 pages, with the September issues being 700 or more pages.

<sup>10</sup> Some of the advertisements contained both types of language and therefore the percentages in Tables 1 and 2 may equal more than 100 percent.

<sup>11</sup> Issues analyzed for *Vogue* and *Glamour* were July 2014-December 2014. Issues analyzed for *Essence* were February 2015-July 2015. Issues analyzed for *Redbook* were January 2015-June 2015. Each of these corresponds to the numerical order listed in the table.

The table above illustrates superiority language in advertisements with text. A majority of the beauty and fashion related advertisements did have instances of superiority language, as demonstrated by this table. *Redbook* magazine had the highest occurrence of advertisements with superiority language. Interestingly, *Redbook* also had a high concentration of drugstore advertisements. It was more common for the drugstore brand advertisements to feature this type of language, as this language served as a prestige booster. The frequency of superiority language, coupled with the frequency of drugstore advertisements, in both *Redbook* and *Essence* reflects the prestige boosting power of language. It is also interesting to note that both *Redbook* and *Essence* are smaller publications, in terms of size. On the other hand, *Vogue* and *Glamour* are larger in size, yet they had a lower frequency of superiority language. The counts featured in Table 1 might seem abnormally low if the average page length of a *Vogue* issue is considered. A majority of the advertisements are considered luxury or prestige goods, given without any text. However, in a majority of the advertisements with text- a feature not common in luxury advertisements- superiority language is common.

The boastful superiority language was more common in advertisements. With only a few key phrases and a limited allotted space for text, advertisers used language that would most clearly indicate the superiority of the products. The text was carefully crafted to demonstrate why a certain product should be consumed. Advertisers appeals to readers by giving some form of validation or accreditation of the product. That validation and accreditation came in the form of illustrating the brand's scientific advances, user testimonies, and sales statistics.

Sales statistics were one form of superiority language. Advertisements would prominently display the #1 logo or a logo depicting that the product was voted best of the best by readers. Small print towards the bottom of the advertisement would explain the particular method

in determining the highest sales or recommendations, citing the date and organization. The logo of #1 grabs readers' attention; they recognize that a particular product is highly rated. The methodology for determining the number one status is often ignored- that is precisely why advertisers leave the details in small print, often at the bottom corner of the advertisement.

Every advertisement for Neutrogena products included the slogan “#1 Dermatologist Recommended Skincare”. A common claim made by Revlon advertisements is that Revlon is the “leader in lips”, meaning that Revlon is responsible for the most popular and highly rated lip products. These examples are indicative of the boasting practice in advertisements. The goal of the advertisement is to educate the readers on the prestige of the product; the product is best of all similar products available. By claiming to be highly recommended by experts, the language is aligning Neutrogena products as the best choice. If other consumers and experts promote or consume a product, readers' curiosity may be peaked. These claims of superiority are driving consumption through the boosting of prestige.

The superiority language also demonstrated high ratings and reviews by customers and experts alike. In this aspect, advertisers used language to educate readers on the positive reviews of the products. To prove the effectiveness and popularity of the product, advertisers relied on these customer testimonies, surveys, and clinical panel studies. Each of these elements helped boost the quality and reputation of the product. By connecting a product to its consumers, readers may feel that claims made in the advertisements have some legitimacy.

In an advertisement for Nexxus Salon Haircare, several user testimonies are included in the middle of a two-page spread, giving them prime attention. Most of the advertisement is dedicated to these testimonies. Statements like “It smells amazing and it's so easy to apply! I

love how it leaves my hair super soft and shiny afterward!” and “This system helps me maintain my color longer, keeping it looking fresh and rich!” A Maybelline advertisement uses an expert testimony, demonstrating that renowned makeup artists support a drugstore beauty brand. This tact increases the popularity and prestige of the product- Maybelline even cites the title of “global brow expert” underneath the testimony and name of the makeup artist. The artist explains, “You’d be surprised what a difference your brows make! This brilliant new tool will add drama to your entire look!” User testimonies are also included in an advertisement for Aveda, with the customer raving about the haircare product: “This product is AMAZING!... The time is cut in half and my hair looks naturally straight vs. the obvious straightened-with-a-hot-tool look...It has seriously changed my life!”

These testimonies are usually accompanied by a consumer’s name or username. This practice is a calculated move by advertisers and writers. Readers can feel a connection to the product and trust the testimonies through the inclusion of these names and usernames. Essentially, this act humanizes the advertisements and claims. The testimonies are a way to manipulate readers’ trust. The testimonies reinforce the claims of superiority by adding a personalized touch.

The results of clinical trials and panel studies cite consumer feedback incorporated with statistics and numerical values. An advertisement for L’Oréal Paris explains how a particular shampoo leaves hair feeling “2x thicker with every application.” In small print, they explain these findings to be part of a “consumer study after using the product over time.” A two-page advertisement for Olay Pro X line displays the highlights of a clinical study, with the ad hinging on the theme of “designed by dermatologists, proven by twins.” They include pictures of one set of twins, along with the results of the clinical trial, demonstrating how effective the product is in

reducing signs of aging. In an advertisement for Bare Minerals, readers are given the statistic of “95% of women experienced a measureable improvement in the appearance of dark spots.” In an advertisement for Neutrogena cleansing towelettes, the company claims, “29 brands, including department store brands, were tested and we came out best at thoroughly removing stubborn waterproof eye makeup.” Once again, this scientific information is used as leverage. This type of language substantiates advertisers’ claims and convinces readers to purchase the product.

When writers and advertisements discuss the scientific innovations of a product, they rely on statistics and key phrases to mesmerize the readers. These statistics were a common feature to illustrate the innovation of the products, citing high numbers and statistical values that speak to the effectiveness of the products. In an advertisement for a skincare product, Garnier promises to have “light-reflecting technology” that will “blur flaws in five seconds.” They cited that “98% saw smoother skin, 86% saw less visible pores, 73% saw reduced fine lines.” An advertisement for Maybelline mascara promises “16x bolder volume without clumps!” In an advertisement for a Lancôme Paris skincare product, writers cite that “in just one application, 73% of women saw softer skin. In just one week, 85% of women saw more luminous skin.” These numbers are intended to impress readers, to demonstrate that the product advertised is deserving of praise and consumption.

The superiority language emphasizes how advanced a particular product is. Often, writers focused on the formula of the product- illustrating to readers that creating the cosmetic or hair product required advanced scientific knowledge. It was a common practice for advertisers to focus on how their formula was exclusive, different, or more potent than other brands. A clear majority of advertisements included some form of this scientific language. It was a driving force in appealing to consumers. A Clarins advertisement boasts of the “exclusive new organic

Hargunana Leaf” as a major ingredient in the Super Restorative Day Moisturizer. An advertisement for Simple Skincare points to their inclusion of “only our purest ingredients, no artificial perfume or dyes, and no harsh chemicals that can upset your skin.” This statement is intended to set the skincare brand apart from all other brands, by including only the finest and purest ingredients.

Sometimes, advertisements focused on the unique combination of ingredients. They often referred to the ingredients combination as a formula, linking cosmetics to science. An ad for a lip product explains how their “exclusive triple butter complex of shea, coconut, and mango butters nourishes lips.” In a Lancome advertisement, the product is described as a “2<sup>nd</sup> generation serum with reinforced LR2412 complex and new texture-refining ingredients.” An ad for Bare Minerals lists two major ingredients, “supercharged Lilac Plant Stem Cells and vitamin C” to explain how the formula will brighten and even out one’s skin complexion. Clarins describes how their unique formula of “twenty pure plant extracts and potent high-tech molecules” is a “groundbreaking serum.” By giving ingredient details, these companies are revealing the complicated process of manufacturing. These companies and brands use scientific knowledge to demonstrate how exclusive and prestigious the product is, even if the product is a drugstore product.

Even the design of a product warranted scientific praise. The applicator of a cosmetic product, like a mascara wand, could be framed as a scientific advancement. In an ad for Lancome, they include the label “1<sup>st</sup> “Swan Neck” Wand, patent pending- access to all lashes from corner to corner and root to tip.” An ad for Clairsonic, a skin-cleansing device has “patented technology that works with skin’s natural elasticity.” Sally Hansen describes how they are “leading the revolution in gel technology” because they have created a gel nail polish that

needs no UV light to set. By focusing on the design as scientific innovation, advertisers are illustrating the craftsmanship that goes into each product. This type of language transforms an ordinary mascara wand into patented technology; it is boosting the prestige of the product. What woman would buy a mediocre mascara when she could purchase a uniquely formulated product, hinging on new scientific-driven manufacturing?

### 2.1.2 *Luxury language: decadence and the exotic*

In order to portray a luxurious lifestyle, writers and advertisers used luxury language. Luxury language came in two different forms: the use of decadence and exotic spellings and phrases to describe the mundane. More often than not, the luxury language was used in descriptions of drug stores brands. Just like the superiority language, the luxury language was used in these advertisements in order to boost the image of the brand. Women want beauty that is associated with luxury; therefore, drug store brands must boost the prestige of their products in order to sell them.

*Table 2 Luxury Language Counts in Advertisements by Magazine and Issue<sup>12</sup>*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Glamour</i></b>	<b><i>Vogue</i></b>	<b><i>Redbook</i></b>	<b><i>Essence</i></b>
<b>1</b>	12 (44.44%)	12 (34.28%)	4 (44.44%)	14 (60.86%)
<b>2</b>	18 (48.64%)	17 (30.91%)	7 (43.75%)	8 (40.00%)
<b>3</b>	33 (37.50%)	42 (26.58%)	9 (40.91%)	8 (57.14%)
<b>4</b>	21 (36.21%)	33 (30.27%)	9 (39.13%)	7 (38.89%)
<b>5</b>	18 (34.61%)	25 (32.89%)	13 (41.93%)	5 (35.71%)
<b>6</b>	24 (35.82%)	12 (25.53%)	9 (37.50%)	7 (41.17%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>126 (38.29%)</b>	<b>141 (29.37%)</b>	<b>51 (40.80%)</b>	<b>49 (46.27%)</b>

<sup>12</sup> Some of the advertisements contained both types of language and therefore the percentages in Tables 1 and 2 may equal more than 100 percent.

Table 2 illustrates the prevalence of luxury language in each magazine and issue. Counts of luxury language are established by analyzing advertisements with text; a majority of these advertisements includes luxury language, making it a dominant theme within this analysis. Luxury language is the most common in *Essence* magazine and the least common in *Vogue* magazine. Again, language is a tool used for increasing a brand's prestige; it serves as an implicit way of classing a good or brand. It is more common to find language, or text, of any kind in advertisements for new or unknown products, as well as drugstore products. Therefore, the higher frequency of luxury language in *Essence* is expected.

Perhaps the most interesting finding related to luxury language is the presence of luxury language found in the *Redbook* issues. *Redbook* rarely features luxury or prestige brand advertisements, yet luxury language is still present. This illustrates how luxury language serves as a prestige booster for drugstore brand products. In a magazine with virtually no luxury brand advertisements, luxury-inducing language is still present.

The use of decadence in the language helped paint an image of luxury. This decadence could be included in the name of the product, like the Collection Exclusive lipstick by L'Oréal Paris, the Superior Preference Mousse Absolue by L'Oréal Paris, Chanel Les 4 Ombres eyeshadow, or the Satin Luxe lip color by Sonia Kashuk. All of these product names emphasize that the product should be associated with luxury. By claiming exclusivity, these product names are igniting a demand for the products. This exclusivity can be associated with prestige. Readers have the opportunity to learn about these exclusive products through the advertisements, and then are provided with the shopping information to buy these exclusive products.

The use of decadence in language also came in the descriptions of the products. One brand of lipstick was described as being “custom-made”, boasting the “most refined look for your lips in six luxurious shades”. In an advertisement for Revlon Colorstay Lip Stain, the lip product is “saturated with brilliant shine and vivid color, available in twelve luscious shades”. Revlon Colorburst Matte Balm is described as a “velvety-matte look, moisture rich balm.” Another advertisement for hair dye boasts of “rare dyes, rich with light, create incredibly luminous color”. A drugstore eyeshadow palette, following the trend of prestige products, is described as the “first twelve-shade collection, curated to create infinite looks.” An advertisement for L’Oréal Paris Extraordinaire by Colour Riche describes the lipstick to contain “a fusion of precious oils and our most intense pigments.”

These examples are illustrative of the trend in advertisements to rely on luxury language to sell their products. By claiming to be a carefully curated selection of eyeshadows or having rare dyeing agents, these products are not only promoting their product, but also a luxurious lifestyle. This luxurious lifestyle is obtainable through these products. Instead of framing an eyeshadow palette as being mass-produced in a factory, the curation rhetoric exclaims “This is custom for you. You are deserving of this personally catered treatment!” When a lipstick is described as being the most refined for your lips, it sends the message that this product is the best, most luxurious product for your lips. Even the practice of comparing the textures of products to expensive or luxurious fabrics, like velvet, silk, and satin, links beauty products to luxury.

Another interesting application of language is the use of exotic spellings and phrases for the mundane. By transforming mundane words into the exotic, these advertisements are once again boosting the prestige of their products. L’Oréal Paris includes the tag “Makeup Designer”

as part of their name; by aligning the company as a designer, it shifts from the label of manufacturer to artist. This practice is similar to that of the high-end goods, focusing on the artistry involved in the creation process. An advertisement for Maybelline exclaims, “introducing our first creamy lip lacquer!”

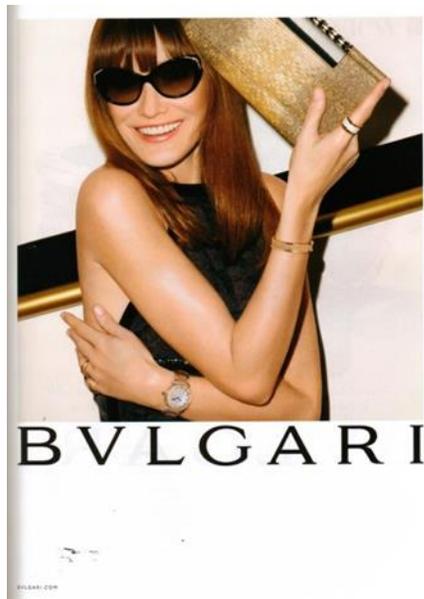
Product names also included these exotic rewordings, names like Aveda Smooth Infusion Naturally Straight Styling Crème, Revlon Nail Enamel, Lancôme Paris Bright Eyes Grandiose Mascara, OPI Infinite Shine Gel Effects Lacquer System, Maybelline Master Kajal Kohl Liner, Dark and Lovely Au Naturelle Hair Treatments, Revlon Photoready Eye Art, and L’Oréal Paris Extraordinaire by Colour Riche. The inclusion of these exotic spellings alluded to more prestige. These labels allowed the products to go beyond the title of nail polish, eyeshadow, or lipstick. Suddenly, these products are transformed into sophisticated, artistic representations of cosmetics.

## **2.2 The Contrast of Prestige and Luxury Goods**

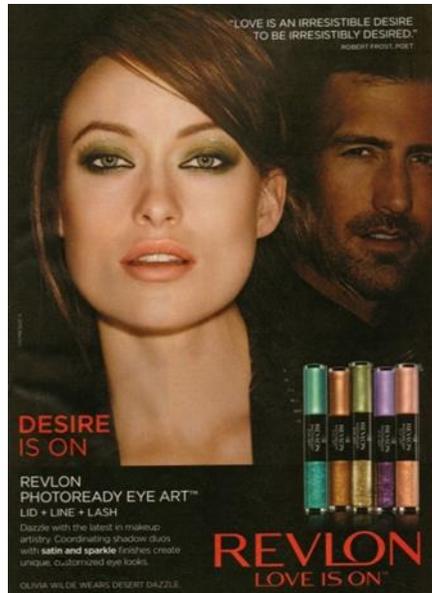
On the other hand, couture or high-end designers did not employ this type of language in their advertisements. Typically couture or high-end designers would employ images of luxury, with the implication that no wording or actual explanation of luxury was needed. These images would depict models in couture evening gowns not appropriate to their surroundings, expensive jewelry and accessories, expertly applied cosmetics, and images of gold and silver to allude to wealth.

To this point, in luxury advertisements, it is not clear to readers what is actually being promoted or sold. Readers are only given a designer’s name, with the possibility of a website or physical address in small print. In these luxury advertisements, readers are being sold a luxurious

lifestyle, not a single item. Designers are relying on readers' knowledge of the brand to know what is advertised; the brand's prestige, and reputation, is already well established. No prestige boosting tactics are needed. This is a stark contrast to the advertisements of lower priced items, where advertisers specify what item they are selling, with the information and claims needed to promote the item- the prestige boosting writing style previously discussed. Figures 1 and 2 (on the following page) demonstrate the difference between the advertisement layouts for luxury goods and drugstore goods.



*Figure 1 Bulgari Advertisement*



*Figure 2 Revlon Advertisement.*

Similar to the luxury advertisements, the featuring of luxury goods in shopping guides and fashion features is done so in an artistic way. The language used to depict high-end and designer goods did not have to serve as a prestige boost, but instead writers used these phrases, blurbs, and descriptions to reflect the prestige of those high-end goods. Writers strung together carefully crafted sentences, filled with poetic analogies and lengthy descriptions. These captions and descriptions strayed away from simple credits to the designers and short explanations of the products. It seems as if the descriptions of the high-end and designer goods mirrored the prestige and artisanship of the actual products, like a mere direct blurb would not be sufficient enough for these designer goods.

Through the presentation of the prestige and luxury goods, both in advertisements and other features, an implicit understanding, or a hidden knowledge, is needed to fully appreciate these goods. This hidden knowledge, or hidden cultural capital needed to appreciate and consume these images and words as they are meant to, perpetuates classism. Readers without this

knowledge or capital are disadvantaged. This hidden capital is explored in the next chapter, as I dissect how prestige and luxury goods are presented in the magazine issues.

### **3 PAYING THE PRICE FOR BEAUTY: CLASS AND CONSUMPTION**

The price of beauty work was a high price through the presentation of the beauty standard in the issues analyzed. In fact, these magazines have been criticized in the popular press for the inclusion of such extraordinarily high priced items. Through the inclusion of prestige and luxury goods, women were taught that beauty work is a very expensive process. Consumption was pushed on practically every page, with the inclusion of shopping information given for a majority of the goods and products presented.

The stark contrast of drugstore goods and prestige/luxury goods leads to the first major theme in this section. Clearly, prestige and luxury goods rely on different methods for informing and enticing readers. Writers and advertisers disregard any prestige boosting language and instead focus on reflecting the prestige of the luxury goods. The imagery of luxury and prestige advertisements also provides a contrast from the imagery of drugstore advertisements. There is an artistic styling in the prestige and luxury advertisements, linking art to beauty products and fashion.

The importance of consumption is the second major theme that I explore in this section. As I have discussed, consumption was a focal point in every issue. By connecting beauty work to the constant consumption of goods, it instills the idea that beauty work is a costly process in readers' minds. This same sentiment is echoed throughout the interview-based research discussed earlier in this thesis.

With the focus of these magazines being consumption and class distinction, there seems to be little space for women with less disposable income to engage in beauty work. How do these magazines include these less privileged women? This question leads to the third theme: passing as beautiful. Through the practice of conspicuous consumption, women with less financial resources are able to engage in beauty work and pass as a higher class status.

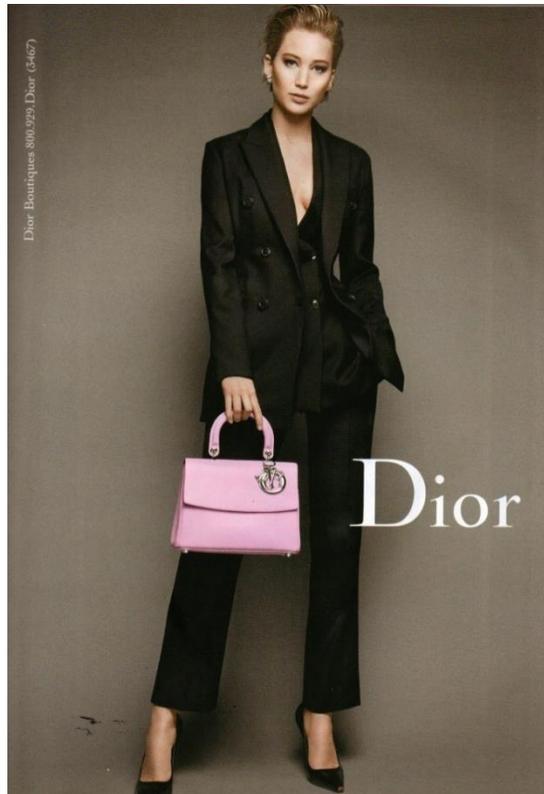
### **3.1 Classism: A Link between High Culture, the Upper-class, and Beauty**

Throughout the issues, there was a clear link between high culture and beauty. The magazine issues portrayed a class-based beauty not only through language and the pressure to consume, but also by associating beauty and fashion with the activities of the upper class. Fashion features were intertwined with artwork and luxury leisure activities, reinforcing the association between class status and beauty work. In *Vogue* fashion features, writers pair fashion with upper-class leisure activities: “Catch the sun in subtle sequins and radiant necklines while taking in a few high-goal chukkers at Bridgehampton Polo Club”, “If you’re headed to London, be sure to check out “Colour, Light, Texture,” an exhibition featuring the works of Matthew Smith and Frank Dobson at the National Portrait Gallery, and pack a textured knit for cloudy-day warmth”, and “... an elongated canary-yellow vest invokes the sun-washed daytime of warm weather climes. It’s a perfectly eclectic mix for the Brazil Foundation’s Annual Gala.” By linking the fashion to high-class leisure activity, the privilege needed for beauty work is further established.

The advertisements for high-end designers and goods were markedly different from those of the lower-priced goods. Advertisements for prestige products and high-end fashion likened the product photography to art. It was common for the only text in these ads to be the name of the

designer or company, with some piece of shopping information, like a website, placed in the corner bottom of the page. The placement of the shopping information was meant to not distract readers from the exquisite photography. Models were featured wearing high-end goods, but the goods were never specified. Instead, these ads seemed to sell a luxurious or glamorous lifestyle, not a particular product.

These advertisements were meant to be interpreted as beautiful art installments, not propaganda. The sets were highly stylized. The models were conventionally beautiful- often thin, white, and blonde, with artistic poses and looks. Readers were expected to soak the entire artistic representation of the brand or designer in, not just pick out one particular piece or product to buy. To this effect, the items for sale are never specified. Doing so would take away from the art form presented. Figure 3, the Dior advertisement, demonstrates this stylized version of advertising; essentially, the woman's entire look is to be desired and sought after. Readers are not shown what pieces of her ensemble are for sale, and the shopping information is in small text in the corner of the photograph.



*Figure 3 Dior Advertisement*

An advertisement for Chanel has two models dressed in couture clothes and tennis shoes, running down a sidewalk, with the cityscape blurred in the background. The only text is “CHANEL.” Readers have to assume that the advertisement is for one of the pieces, or all the pieces, worn by the models. An ad for Miu Miu includes a photography of a white woman with the dates for an art exhibit for Steven Meisel in New York City. There is no clear indication whether the photograph is one piece in the art exhibit or if the fashion pieces worn by the woman are for sale. An ad for Saint Laurent Paris includes the name of the designer on one page and a full page photograph of a model sitting on the second page. Only upon closer inspection will a reader notice the very small website given in the binding of the magazine.

This type of arrangement was present in all advertisements for high-end goods, particularly for fashion. Because these ads do not specify what is being sold, readers have to rely

on their knowledge of the brand or designer to assume what is being advertised and sold. Essentially, these types of advertisements rely on the prestige associated with a particular designer. There is a hidden capital needed to consume these images and advertisements. Without a familiarity of the designer, readers only skim past a beautiful picture. With the knowledge of the reputation and prestige of the designer, the images take on a new nuanced meaning. The images shift from beautiful photos to a promotion of a high-end handbag or shoe designer, with the understanding that the items in the photo can be purchased as part of the newest spring or fall collection.

Writers also embellished on the artful construction or nature of products in articles, shopping guides, features, and captions. For example, in an issue of *Vogue*, a pair of designer tennis shoes could not be sold simply as athletic wear. Instead, the writer described the shoes as “couture level sneakers” with “artful output”, noting that the shoes were “at once sculptural (those all-terrain soles!), feminine (those floral paillette embroideries!), and sportive (the mesh like fabric evocative of water shoes!)”. In a description of Hermes earrings, the writer gives readers the following imagery: “pastel sapphires, shoal-blue like an Antibes tidal pool, form their focal point alongside warm oranges glowing like streetlamps in a Parisian fog, while diamonds perform spectacular acrobatics around the stones.” It is important to note that this way of describing products was reserved for high-end and designer products; the pair of shoes described above had a price tag of twelve hundred dollars.

This linking between art and fashion was more prevalent in the *Vogue* issues. Writers frequently relied on their words to cast an artful take on the products. Writers wanted to educate readers on styling through this language: “A lesson in colorblocking: the higher the contrast, the better. Especially in rich silk chiffon. It’s a chic and sophisticated dress fit.” This styling

education could not be reduced to simple directions; the writer intended to educate the readers on why this garment would be the best choice for colorblocking, emphasizing its luxurious fabric and the tailored construction.

Writers described the newest fashion and beauty trends with poetic writing, like “the new bohemians have fallen hard for similarly romantic, ethereal fabrics, grounded by solid leather accessories.” In a description of boots, the writer provides readers with this artful wording, “The clean lines and structured shape nod to Cristobal’s classic and architectural forms, while rubber capped toes and a texturized sole lend them a concrete jungle prance.” Another writer tells us about receiving a box of scarves, “filled with a bounty of sumptuous silk prints and gleaming metallics.” These products cannot be reduced down to a simple or direct description, like “a box of designer scarves.” The writers have to go beyond efficiency and directness, providing readers with wonderfully crafted analogies, painting a picture of luxury and decadence in each reader’s mind.

A phrase like “A dash of metallic flash renders broderie anglaise for the modern moment” evokes privilege. One has to have the social capital to know what “broderie anglaise” means and the education to comprehend what the description is actually telling us. The use of high-culture phrases and poetic language is pervasive throughout the descriptions of high-end products. This style of writing goes beyond a kitschy description; the writers are not using their writing to amuse readers, but to reflect the thoughtfulness and artisanship of each item. Statements like “striped ankle details lend a refined energy to wide leg trousers; a cropped dyed sable jacket, meanwhile, is pure luxury” illuminate the designer’s intentions in the craftsmanship of each item.

It is important to note that this poetic and artistic style of writing of high-end products is different from the ways that writers describe more moderately priced goods. A description of a well-known drugstore brand of eyeshadow reads, “they’re the Legos of eyeshadow: 30 shades that snap together to build your ideal palette.” Instead of highlighting the artistry or thoughtful construction of the eyeshadow, it is likened to a popular child’s toy. Yet, these type of analogies are not drawn to high-end goods. More examples of the cheapening descriptions of moderately priced goods are “Ahoy, there, cutest sweater ever!” and “Velvet loafers are a comfy way to get fancy feet!” In these descriptions, there is no architectural value, no poetic writing style. These lower priced goods do not warrant the elegant craftsmanship style of writing that the luxury goods deserved.

These descriptions also tend to boast of the bargain: “a deal you won’t be able to stop bragging about: these five luxe rings are less than seven bucks”, “yes, our facts are straight: these booties are \$12 with our discount!”, and “shimmer like a queen on a commoner’s paycheck.” Not once in the description of high-end or designer goods was the word “bucks” used, nor was a price mentioned explicitly in the writer’s own words. Prices could either be listed in the index or beside the caption in italics and presented as a matter of fact.

### **3.2 Importance of Consumption**

The findings illustrate that beauty and beauty work is dependent on the regular consumption of prestige products and high-end fashion. The magazines used language and imagery to boost and even reflect the prestige of the goods featured. Every aspect of these magazine issues asserted that beauty required the consumption of these goods. The link between consumption and attainment of beauty was apparent throughout every page and issue analyzed.

Overall, the beauty products and fashion items were construed as luxuries that women should treat themselves to. The goods were pushed as indulgences rather than being necessary. This is evident in the language used by the writers and advertisers. One frequently reoccurring example is the slogan of L'Oréal Paris. The slogan states, "Because You're Worth It." Women are told they deserve the indulgences or treats of beauty products. They deserve the delight of consumption, an ideology not uncommon in our consumer culture.

This sentiment of treating oneself echoes the findings of Gagné and McGaughey (2002). Just as the women engaging in cosmetic surgery view that consumption as a treat, these magazines are framing consumption of beauty products and fashion as pampering or treating oneself. In a feature about lip-gloss, readers are urged, "Restock your purse with a few new ones curated for your skin tone." By framing the lip-gloss selections as curated items, this invokes the meaning of a specialized or catered shopping process for the readers, a treat in the midst of their consumption. In a *Redbook* shopping guide, readers are encouraged to purchase moderately priced fashion because doing so "lets you feel exotic without leaving your zip code or budget behind!" Another *Redbook* feature encourages readers to "make everyday a red-carpet day with the latest and greatest products from your favorite beauty brands!" Readers are directed to purchase a necklace "because you deserve bejeweled flowers to drape around your neck!" These statements are indicative of how consumption is framed. Consuming products and services should feel special to readers; consumption should make women feel special, luxurious, or exotic. Consumption is framed as a special treat that readers deserve.

Despite the fact that the goods are featured in the magazines were not construed as necessary, advertisers and writers still are encouraging consumption. As I just demonstrated, writers frame the consumption as a treat. This promotes the idea that the luxury of beauty

products and fashion should be desired; fashion and beauty goods bring the promise of happiness and fulfillment when framed as treats. Consumption is still encouraged, and readers are still given the means, the information, to consume.

Many different forms of shopping information are given throughout the magazine issues, so that every reader can treat herself. Readers can go shopping at the retailer's physical store, given the city and sometimes even the address of a retailer. They can shop online, given the website or social media forum for the brand or company. Even the outdated version of shopping, known as phone orders or catalogue shopping can be achieved; phone numbers and product code numbers are given. Every piece of shopping information encourages readers to consume these products, even without putting the magazine issue down.

Throughout the magazines, readers were constantly urged to buy products. Consumption was encouraged by every aspect of the magazine issues, from the advertisements, to shopping guides, to credits given in articles, and lastly shopping indexes. Readers were bombarded with designers' names or brands, websites, retail locations, and prices of products. Each issue had some form of shopping information as a staple in each feature. By including the shopping information, these magazines provided their readers with the means to engage in consumption, therefore tying the consumption of beauty products to achieving the title of beauty.

Every issue had multiple shopping guides, featuring the newest beauty products or fashion. Several of the shopping guides were regular features in each issue. *Redbook* Magazine had a regular "Beauty Under \$25" shopping guide and a "Fashion Under \$50" shopping guide. *Essence* Magazine included a regular shopping guide entitled "31 Days of Black Beauty", with alternating themes of hair care products, cosmetic products, and nail care products, as well as

shopping features based on themes like “That 70’s Thing”. *Glamour* Magazine featured shopping guides based on various themes, like “The New Nauticals”, “Florals for Fall”, “Leather Weather”, “Prints, Prints, Prints”, “Workaholic Chic”, “Weekend Warrior”, “Farm Fresh” and “Color Pop!” *Vogue* Magazine strayed away from shopping guides in favor of fashion and beauty features. Essentially, these features were an artistic collection of photographs with small printed captions including shopping information. These artistic and creative features centered on themes, just like *Glamour*. Some of these fashion features were “Blanc State”, “Performance Pieces”, and “Clash Mob.”

Following the encouragement of consumption, the magazines supplied readers with all the information necessary to make purchases: designer brands, prices, websites, and retail locations, among others. Oftentimes, products would be pictured alongside a caption with the specific product name, designer or brand name, where the product was sold, the website and/or phone number of the retailer, and the price of the product. Readers could easily call the retailer or visit their website to make a purchase without even putting the magazine down.

In *Glamour*, a regular feature was entitled “Impulse Buy”, giving the indication that readers should buy the products without any delay. Even in articles where the focus was not on beauty work or fashion, credits were consistently given to fashion designers for the clothes and accessories worn by women in the articles. If a reader is skimming an article and her interest is piqued by the outfit of a featured woman, the information in the caption will supply her with the means to search out those products. Because of this, consumption is pursued on practically every page. This further supports the connection between beauty work and financial resources and privilege.

It is imperative to note that this consumption is geared toward expensive, prestige brand products. In *Vogue* Magazine, a majority of the advertisements and shopping features are featuring prestige brands and high-end designers. Only one feature in *Vogue* revolved around a bargain buy: a feature entitled “Steal of the Month.” It should be noted that the inclusion of a monthly steal should be taken with the proper context. *Vogue* writers might consider something to be a steal, whereas others would disagree. For example, a designer dress costing \$468, designer shoes costing \$398, and a designer cuff costing \$165 were considered “Steals of the Month.” As this piece of evidence indicates, women were urged to buy prestige brand products throughout the magazine. Even in the bargain buys, *Vogue* informs women that \$500 for one piece of clothing is a steal, a steal that should be bought immediately. However, many women lack the financial resources to engage in constant consumption of designer goods.

### **3.3 Passing as Beautiful**

Despite the emphasis on consuming luxury goods, there were avenues that highlighted cheaper alternatives to beauty. Yet, these alternatives were framed in a way that emphasized how comparable these goods were to higher-end goods. Once again, the language assisted in this process. Advertisements would boast of how a product had a higher, or salon-like, quality to it, essentially in an attempt to increase the prestige of the product.

Throughout the analysis, it was evident that a higher class status was embedded in beauty work. In order for more moderately priced goods to achieve a similar level of prestige, advertisers and writers relied on language. As discussed earlier, this language reflected a luxurious lifestyle. This language could also make direct comparisons between professional

quality goods or high-end goods. This next theme explores these comparisons as a way to pass as beautiful, even without the financial resources or freedom to do so.

Many drugstore beauty products relied on their claims of “salon quality” or “expert/professional quality” to sell their products to readers. This salon-like quality would make it difficult for any outsiders to determine the class status of the women using the drugstore products. A nail polish is described as having “insta-hi shine that makes salon nails gelous.” An advertisement for a hair product explains “professionally selected tones deliver flawless, salon quality color that will flatter your complexion and feel as if a professional colourist paid you a home visit!” Another advertisement for John Frieda hair product exclaims, “Create your own salon at home!” linking the personal use of their product to a salon experience. By making the class status involved in beauty work indistinguishable, these sentiments are promising that lower-class women can pass as the upper-class ideal of beautiful.

Another way of passing as beautiful was presented in the budget-shopping guides. Three out of four of the magazines had budget friendly beauty shopping guides as regular features. *Essence* Magazine featured a “10 Under \$10 Shopping Guide” in every issue, including ten of the most raved about and inexpensive beauty products. *Redbook* Magazine had a similar staple feature: the “Beauty Under \$25 Shopping Guide”. Even *Vogue* Magazine occasionally included bargain beauty buys in their features, creating a strange juxtaposition between the high-end fashion and drugstore beauty products. A drugstore beauty product would help enhance a woman’s beauty. Overwhelming, though, *Vogue* tended to rely on prestige beauty brands for their features. As mentioned earlier, *Vogue* also framed certain designer pieces as being “Steals of the Month”, even when these designer pieces are very costly in comparison to the more moderately priced goods featured in other magazines.

In these shopping guides, the costs of the featured items are framed as a deal too good to pass up. Phrases like “These gorgeous items work hard for your money” and “Attention smart shoppers: these scores will make you feel pretty and satisfied” direct readers’ attention to the savviness in these shopping guides. These shopping guides are presented as a means to save, a benefit for the readers, and as a means to consume, a benefit for the publication. Arguably, these savvy shopping guides are an important indicator of the pressure to consume, reinforcing that beauty work requires consumption.

A third way of passing as beautiful was the inclusion of discount codes and coupons in the magazines. This was a common practice in both *Redbook* and *Glamour*, giving their readers a coupon code to use in the purchasing of various fashion pieces and beauty products. The inclusion of discount or coupon codes enables readers to consume more; it has been established that consumption of beauty products is linked to achieving the status of beautiful.

Writers sought to remind readers of the advantages of the discount codes, with sentiments like “with our discount, this (hat) is \$17!”, “a silky blouse under \$20” and “at less than \$100 before our 20% discount, they’re a steal!” In a regular feature of *Redbook*, the “Mall Manual” introduced a chain mall-based fashion company, with a rundown of some of the store’s newest arrivals and discount code. Writers strategically reminded readers of the discount codes by including the original price of each item and the discounted price of said item.

A fourth and final way of passing is the encouragement to copy runway looks. In these magazines, readers are instructed to imitate looks from the runway, from hairstyles, manicures, makeup, to clothes. Sometimes, entire features of the issues are dedicated to this copying, like *Glamour’s* Fashion Insider, where women who regularly attend fashion shows break down the

newest trends for readers to copy from the runway. The insiders give some context to the trends, by providing the designer's name in the description of the trend. While authors behind these pieces give readers suggested items to aid in their recreation of the runway trend, complete with shopping information to purchase those suggested items. In these pieces, readers are given either tips to achieve a similar beauty look or product information so they can purchase a copy-cat look. This type of passing is a strong indicator of Simmel's work. Georg Simmel (1957) argued that fashion only persists because of the class-based need for distinction. Part of the fashion cycle includes the imitation of upper class status by lower income individuals. These issues are perpetuating Simmel's (1957) trickle down effect by giving readers cheaper alternatives to achieve haute fashion and beauty looks.

The inclusion of alternatives to beauty leaves us with a strange paradox: yes, there are cheaper ways to achieve beauty, but these goods should make your appearance comparable to that of the upper class, or more privileged, women. In other words, these alternatives give women a way to pass as beautiful and as having more privilege. This does not negate the classism depicted in the portrayals of beauty. The inclusion of the cheaper alternatives, framed in the way that they are, actually reinforces the association between class status and beauty.

In a way, the efforts of passing imply that these women must engage in a form of conspicuous consumption. Just as the women described in past research, conspicuous consumption allows for women with lower incomes to gain power or status from beauty work (Hopkins 2007; Luo 2013). By aligning certain products with power and prestige, these women are able to reap the benefits from their beauty work. In passing, women must provide evidence of a higher-class status through beauty work, and the route to achieve this is through conspicuous consumption of goods that promote an upper-class status.

### 3.4 Conclusion

By linking consumption of products to the achievement of beautiful, these magazines sent the implicit message that beauty requires the constant buying of products. Readers were pressured to consume products on almost every page, from the latest trends in beauty and fashion to the major investment pieces framed as classics.

Every magazine issue had regular shopping guides and features, listing all the information necessary to make a purchase. The practice of including shopping information allowed readers to buy products without ever putting down the magazine issue. Readers could find the designer or brand name, the website or physical retail location, the phone number of the company, and even the price of the item. All the convenience enabled more consumption.

The association between class status and beauty was demonstrated by a third theme: linking art and upper class leisure to beauty. This linkage was evident through the use of high-end photography and artwork in advertisements and connecting expensive leisure activities in the fashion features. This theme was the most prominent in *Vogue Magazine*.

In addition to establishing that classism is embedded in the portrayal of the beauty standard, this study also examined how lower class women, or women with less privilege, could pass as beautiful. This theme emerged from the practice of advertisers and writers boasting of bargain beauty buys, framing these products as smart choices that will be comparable to salon quality materials. This practice further cemented the argument that classism was embedded in the beauty standard. Why align lower priced beauty products and fashion with any claim of salon quality or superiority?

Essentially, the passing of beautiful requires the acknowledgement that adhering to the beauty standard is reflective of your class status. By likening drug store products and moderately priced goods to those high-end or prestige products, the writers and advertisers are reinforcing the link between class status and beauty work. If beauty work was not aligned so closely with class status, we would not see the prestige building propaganda.

Throughout the issues, the requirement of privilege is apparent, as this chapter demonstrates. Readers need both knowledge, or cultural capital, of the luxury brands and the financial means to consume the products presented in the magazines. Privilege is also evident in two other forms- race and age. The next chapter explores how the beauty ideal is presented in *Redbook* and *Essence* magazine. Through these two publications, I illustrate how issues of race and age are presented both in the mainstream beauty standard, as well as these two prominent publications targeting subpopulations of women.

#### **4 AN INTERSECTION OF CLASS, AGE, AND RACE**

The selection of magazines allowed me to develop a multi-faceted understanding of the portrayal of the beauty standard, taking into consideration not only class-based inequalities, but age-based and race-based inequalities as well. This intersectionality has not been explored in past scholarly work on the beauty standard; typically, researchers focus on a single cite of inequality in the beauty standard. In this sense, the current study is unique in analyzing how age, race, and class status all affects the portrayal of the beauty standard.

##### **4.1 Ageism in the Beauty Standard: A Look at *Redbook* Magazine**

Targeted at older women, *Redbook* Magazine is a lifestyle magazine, with an emphasis on beauty, fashion, dieting, exercise, and home décor. Despite its multi-faceted interests,

Redbook dedicates a majority of its issues to fashion and beauty. Therefore, *Redbook* makes an excellent site for examining the beauty standard for older women. Comparing *Redbook* to the other magazines, there were two major differences in the issues: a concern for the aging process and cheaper alternatives given for beauty and fashion.

The concern for the aging process was demonstrated by an overwhelming amount of anti-aging products, the language used in the advertisements and features about anti-aging, and the product names of anti-aging products. The *Redbook* issues included many different cosmetic and hair products that promised anti-aging results, from hair dyes, moisturizers, under-eye creams, firming makeup, and other skin treatments. Advertisements for these products focused on the promise of quick results, rejuvenation, and youth.

Like the other advertisements discussed earlier, the language used hinges on innovation and scientific advances for their promise of quick results. An advertisement for “90% of women said skin looked fuller and more plumped.” While another advertisement for Hada Loba boasts “Only Hada Loba has super hyaluronic acid, a unique and powerful complex that anchors 3 types of hyaluronic acid... for dramatically smoother, younger-looking skin.” A hair-coloring product is claimed as having “Clairol’s most advanced gray coverage technology.” All of these claims are demonstrating the innovative technology used by the companies in offering the most promising anti-aging products. By backing up these claims with statistics and scientific language, the claims come across as justified and believable.

A large portion of the language used in the *Redbook* issues centers about achieving youth. Youth is construed as desirable and achievable by cosmetic products. Phrases like “youth in a bottle”, “get energized, younger-looking skin”, “deeply hydrates and locks in moisture for

smoother, younger skin”, “get hair that looks 10 years younger”, and “delivers younger-looking, gorgeous hair.” Corresponding with the achievement of youth is the avoidance of any age-related flaw: deep lines, wrinkles, crow’s feet, and age spots. Products are promising to “relax the look of expression lines, give skin a smooth, tightened feel.” Any sign of aging should be minimized or corrected; “fine lines will no longer see the light of day.” An advertisement for an eye treatment states, “Every woman wants big beautiful eyes that make her look younger and more rested.” A beauty tutorial claims, “With groomed brows and a little lip gloss, she looks polished and very doe-eyed.” All these sentiments emphasize that the readers should strive for youth; they should alter their appearance to correct any signs of aging and highlight any feature that is construed as youthful or young looking. Being polished or put together requires youth; being beautiful requires youth.

The second defining feature of the *Redbook* issues is the inclusion of lower and moderately priced goods. As discussed earlier, two regular shopping guides in every *Redbook* issue are the “Beauty Under \$25” and “Fashion Under \$50”. *Redbook* also does not include many high-end fashion or beauty products, which makes the magazine different from the other three magazines. Table 3 illustrates this point. The *Redbook* issues focused on bargain beauty buys and moderately priced goods, making the idea of beauty seem more accessible to its readers. No sneakers for \$1200 will found in the pages of a *Redbook* issue.

Table 3 Typology of Redbook Magazine Advertisements.

Issue	Drugstore	Prestige and Luxury	TOTAL
January 2015	6 (66.67%)	1 (11.11%)	<b>7</b>
February 2015	12 (75.00%)	4 (25.00%)	<b>16</b>
March 2015	12 (54.54%)	4 (18.18%)	<b>16</b>
April 2015	18 (78.26%)	5 (21.73%)	<b>23</b>
May 2015	22 (70.96%)	7 (22.58%)	<b>29</b>
June 2015	13 (54.16%)	8 (33.33%)	<b>21</b>

The writers seemed to be aware of budget constraints of their readers, remarking on and highlighting the best deal for the readers. Statements like “you get all these rings for a mere \$25- that works out to five bucks a ring!”, “super-chic shoes for less than \$18!”, “a silky blouse under \$20!”, and “such lovely loot, such fabulously low prices!” are indicative of seemingly smart deals on beauty products and fashion, deals that should not be passed up on. This last sentiment, finding a deal too good to pass up on, may be another way of encouraging consumption. The inclusion of the lower priced goods, drugstore buys, and moderately priced goods could have a nuanced meaning: a more accessible beauty standard that pushes consumption, just as the beauty standard presented in the other magazines does.

In addition to the emphasis of beauty work, the *Redbook* issues focus more on dieting and exercise than the other magazines<sup>13</sup>. *Glamour* is the only other magazine that devotes any space in their issues for dieting and exercise tips and tutorials. This emphasis is odd when we consider past research. Scholars have noted that older women feel less pressure to be thin, or in fit the societal standard of thinness (Liechty and Yarnal 2010; Tiggeman and Lynch 2001). As women

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<sup>13</sup> Dieting and exercise is considered a form of beauty work, as the Western beauty standard focuses on the body as much as it does facial beauty.

age, they feel further removed from the societal beauty ideal and their sexual prime (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). As they feel separated from the judgment that stems from the beauty ideal, they are able to objectify themselves less (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). With the past research in mind, why is there an emphasis on dieting and exercise in *Redbook* magazine?

Overall, the *Redbook* issues paint the beauty standard in a different way for older women. The issues were portraying beauty in a more affordable light. This portrayal of the beauty standard could be confounded by the overarching theme of content in *Redbook*. The magazine takes a broad approach in reaching out to older women, focusing not only on beauty and fashion, but also home décor and finances. The issues also placed an emphasis on being thin for older women. It seems that readers of *Redbook* magazine need to be instructed on how to control their eating habits and be taught easy or simplistic exercise practices for the sake of losing weight and being thin or toned.

#### **4.2 Racism in the Beauty Standard: A Look at *Essence* Magazine**

*Essence* Magazine is similar to *Redbook*, in the sense that both are lifestyle magazines, with an emphasis on fashion and beauty, directed to a specific subpopulation of women. *Essence* is targeted towards women of color, specifically Black women. Over half of each issue is dedicated to beauty and fashion trends, focusing on cosmetics, hair trends, and high-end fashion. The issues include advertisements, shopping guides, and features related to each of these subjects.

*Essence* Magazine provides an interesting contrast to *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and even *Redbook*. An overwhelming majority of the latter three magazines focus on white women. When comparing *Essence* to the other magazines, it is clear that women of color are marginalized,

ignored, and not catered to in the majority of the magazines. In *Essence*, women of color are the focus. There is a space for products specifically geared towards women of color. Whereas, there is not this same inclusion in *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Redbook*. In a similar trend, models of color are included at a higher rate in *Essence*. Suddenly, the inclusion of white models is a rarity. Yet, it is important to note that even in a forum dedicated to the representation of women of color, white models are still used.

A closer examination of the *Essence* issues paints a different understanding of beauty. Hair takes center stage; hair is a centrally important feature of beauty. This is evidenced by the sheer numbers of hair care products featured in *Essence*. Products for straightening, smoothing, moisturizing, cleaning, dyeing, and maintaining healthy hair are all included. The majority of these products are not featured in other magazines, making it clear that these goods are geared towards women of color. There are more advertisements for hair products than any other type of beauty product.

Another interesting difference emerged from taking a closer look at the type of advertisements included in the *Essence* issues. There were moderately priced goods and drugstore goods being advertised, compared to luxury and prestige advertisements. Is *Essence* magazine promoting an alternative beauty standard, one based less on class-status and consumption? The results given in Table 4 paint an interesting picture of *Essence*'s beauty standard. Yet, it is important to note that these results exclude other elements of the magazine. When taking a nuanced look at the remaining elements, shopping guides, features, pictorials, and articles, it is clear that luxury and prestige goods are still promoted. In fact, a majority of the goods in the shopping guides and features were luxury and prestige goods.

*Table 4 Typology of Essence Magazine Advertisements*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Drugstore</b>	<b>Prestige and Luxury</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
February 2015	18 (78.26%)	5 (21.73%)	<b>23</b>
March 2015	14 (70.00%)	6 (30.00%)	<b>20</b>
April 2015	8 (57.14%)	5 (35.71%)	<b>13</b>
May 2015	10 (55.56%)	8 (44.44%)	<b>18</b>
June 2015	9 (64.28%)	5 (35.71%)	<b>14</b>
July 2015	14 (82.35%)	3 (17.64%)	<b>17</b>

The final difference between the *Essence* issues and the other magazines is the decreased emphasis on aging. It was rare to find an advertisement or other element to focus on aging concerns in *Essence* magazine. This is very different from *Redbook's* portrayal of the beauty standard. The only aging concerns found in *Essence* were related to hair: hair-dyeing agents to combat graying hair. This once again reaffirms the importance of hair in the beauty standard for women of color.

### **4.3 An Intersection of Age, Race, and Class**

The analysis would not be complete without understanding how the intersection of class, age, and race all affect the portrayal of the beauty standard in print media. Taking each of the magazines into consideration, it is evident that class-based inequalities are embedded in the beauty standard through the inclusion of high priced, luxury goods and the encouragement of consumption. In these magazines, women are taught that beauty work requires regular and constant consumption of goods. This sentiment was even apparent in the *Redbook* issues, where a focus was placed on moderately priced goods instead of luxury goods.

Comparing *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Redbook* to *Essence*, there is a whitewashing effect on the models used. All three magazines include more white models than models of color, whereas *Essence* tends to rely on models of color. There is little variation in the models used in *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Redbook*: white, thin, and blonde. The whitewashing in *Glamour* and *Vogue* combined with the high-end fashion and prestige cosmetics, aligns racial identity with class status.

With the alignment of privilege, it reinforces the overall argument of this piece. Beauty is a reflection of privilege. Even in the outlets that appeal to less privileged groups of women, those older cohorts and women of color, there are still deep levels of inequality embedded in the beauty standard. Granted, *Redbook* and *Essence* magazines portray different types of inequality. *Redbook* magazine portrays the conventional beauty standard of being thin and white, providing alternatives to achieve beauty. Yet, readers still have to consume beauty products to achieve the title of beauty. This consumption reinforces classism in the beauty standard. *Essence* magazine focuses less on aging and white privilege in its portrayal of the beauty standard; yet, *Essence* magazine still focuses on luxury goods in the shopping guides and features and pushes the constant consumption of goods to its readers. These two magazines, *Redbook* and *Essence*, are promising their readers an alternative outlet for beauty and fashion, compared to *Glamour* and *Vogue*, but all four magazines perpetuate the same types of inequality.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Beauty is associated with upper class status and privilege; both the literature in the field and the results of this study highlight this fact. Taken together, the encouragement of consumption and the education about beauty received create a suitable climate for the beauty hierarchy. Women learn that beauty requires regular consumption of high prestige products

through print media. In turn, they associate a high-class standing with regular beauty maintenance. The identified association between high socioeconomic status and beauty allows us to determine that the beauty standard is based on classism.

Beauty is recognized for its social rewards (Kwan and Trautner 2009; Luo 2013). Scholars from many different fields can attest to how beauty provides rewards for those considered to be beautiful (Kwan and Trautner 2009). Despite our acknowledgement that beauty brings rewards, we oftentimes fail to consider how the beauty standard is designed to privilege the privileged. The theoretical work explored in this thesis points to how beauty, as self-presentation, enables those economically privileged women to adhere closely to the beauty standard. Historically, the beauty standard has reflected the attributes of those in the highest sections of our social ladders, all while excluding marginalized women from the societal definition of beauty. Today's beauty standard continues to follow this tradition.

Within this study, I have established the discriminatory and classist nature of the beauty standard within popular women's fashion and beauty magazines. Whereas past work has highlighted how women can recognize the beauty hierarchy through appraisals of themselves and other women, no empirical work has focused on how the classist beauty standard is taught to these women. I am following in the classical tradition of past beauty scholars by examining examined women's magazines in order to understand the attributes known as beautiful. I argue that a content analysis of current beauty and fashion magazines would reveal how classism is embedded in the modern beauty standard. The depiction of beauty within print media takes on the performance of class and projects an upper-class lifestyle as the sole image of beauty.

In this thesis, I explore the centrally important themes of my analysis: the role of language and imagery, the emphasis on cultural capital and consumption, and an intersection of class, age, and race issues. I establish how the beauty standard, as presented in these magazines, reflects privilege. Readers need privilege in multiple forms in order to consume these magazines. This privilege can be in the form of knowledge; knowledge of beauty and fashion brands is needed to interpret the content of the magazines. Privilege can also be in the form of expendable financial means. Participating in the beauty standard requires consumption. Privilege is also based on racial identities and age; only certain groups of women are portrayed to be beautiful within the pages of these magazines.

Language is a tool, used by writers and advertisers, to boost the prestige of brands and products. I discovered two different types of language: superiority language and luxury language. Superiority language focused on how a product or brand was the best or most superior, relying on scientific innovations, user testimonies, clinical studies, and consumption rates. Luxury language emphasized the exotic and upscale features of a product. Luxury language is used to describe the texture of a product. It is also found in the exotic rewordings and spellings of certain words and phrases. Both superiority language and luxury language were used more often in drugstore brand advertisements. I argue that this because these types of brands need a boost of prestige, whereas the prestige products rely on a hidden knowledge. High-end designer and luxury goods do not use prestige-boosting tactics because these tactics are not needed. The prestige is much more implied and only received by the readers with the cultural capital to know of these designers and luxury brands.

I also focused on the presentation of high-end designer goods. It was clear that classism is present within these issues by my analysis of the luxury goods. Luxury goods are more prevalent

in both *Vogue* and *Glamour* magazines. This type of goods is the focus for shopping guides and fashion features, as well as advertisements. The presentation of high-end luxury goods, both cosmetics and fashion, is also qualitatively different from the presentation of drug store brands. These advertisements and features seek to reflect the prestige of the products, not boost the prestige levels. Because of the nature of the presentation of luxury goods, readers need a type of cultural capital in order to consume this content.

The overwhelming focus on prestige and luxury goods reiterates the fact that beauty revolves around prestige. Bourdieu (1984) highlighted this relationship in his theoretical work: beauty requires prestige. This relationship is evident throughout these magazines, as the majority of depictions of beauty revolve around prestige, higher-class status, and social power. It is evident in the imagery used: golds and other metallics, satins and silks, exotic backgrounds, haute couture clothing in mundane settings. This all translates into the prestige of the product; by associating a designer or a good with luxurious fabrics or jewels, or fanciful locations and situations, readers are taught about the prestige of that designer. In previous studies, women have identified the relationship between beauty work and social prestige (Lee 2009; Taylor 2012). The current thesis demonstrates how women may be learning about this relationship: through magazine displays of beauty intertwined with prestige.

The focus on language and imagery help answer one of my research questions: How is classism depicted in the representations of the beauty standard? The language used within the issues portrays classism in an explicit way, drawing upon those stated claims of superiority and the analogies of luxury. On the other hand, the imagery used within the issues portrays classism in an implicit way. Readers have to use their cultural capital, their understanding of the images, in order to grasp what is being shown through the images.

I also discuss the constant emphasis of consumption. The magazines give the tools or the information needed to consume, with the underlying assumption that readers must have the financial means to consume. Because beauty work requires consumption, beauty work is tied to financial freedom and therefore privilege. Only those with the status of privilege can freely consume these goods at a regular pace. As mentioned, this consumption is stressed on virtually every page of these magazines. Shopping information is given in advertisements, shopping guides, and features. Even in articles that seem unrelated to fashion and beauty, consumption of fashion and beauty goods is stressed. This is illustrative of how important consumption is to beauty work.

The focus of consumption illustrates my final research question: How does print media perpetuate the idea of beauty as a commodity? At every page, the magazines are instructing readers how to be beautiful, through the purchase of beauty products and fashion. For virtually every item, some piece of shopping information is given. This constant consumption reinforces the idea that beauty is bought through these goods.

In attempting to understand less privileged women's role in beauty work, I illustrate the concept of passing as beautiful. Readers are instructed to engage in beauty work in an attempt to pass as not only beautiful, but also pass as a higher-class position. Research demonstrates how beauty work is associated with a particularly high cost and an upper class status (Gagné and McGaughey 2002). Therefore, any instruction to engage in beauty work is an instruction to pass as a higher-class status. By stressing beauty work through the consumption of goods, these magazines are reinforcing the class-based inequalities.

In his theoretical work on self-presentation, Bourdieu (1984) illustrated how upper class women were more likely to adhere closely to the beauty standard of that time. Because of the resources needed to participate in beauty work, it is difficult for women of lower incomes to participate to the same degree. With the introduction of passing as beautiful, I am able to illustrate how women of lower incomes are motivated to participate in beauty work. The drugstore products and mass produced fashion allows for women to engage in beauty work, promising the benefits of a perceived social boost while limiting the actual financial cost.

Simmel's classical work speaks directly to the phenomenon of passing: through the trickle-down effect. Simmel identified that the lower class will always strive to imitate the upper class through their fashion trends (1957). As fashion trends catch on, there is a shift towards new trends. In these magazines, readers were encouraged to copy looks from the runway, from hairstyles, manicures, makeup, to clothes. This encouraged copying is another form of passing; readers are encouraged buy products that mirror the prestige of runway items and looks.

Beauty work is not only dependent on class-based inequalities, but it is also built around age-based and race-based inequalities. Within these magazines, aging is framed as an undesired process, something that should be avoided at all, and very high, costs. Issues related to aging were especially prominent within *Redbook* magazine, due to the nature of their readers' backgrounds. Anti-aging products are featured to a higher degree in *Redbook*, combined with ways to slim readers' bodies. The aging process is not celebrated as a natural process of life, but instead is viewed as unattractive or ugly. Because of this, the beauty standard is a site of privilege for those younger readers.

Beauty work also involves around the privileged racial identity of whiteness. I explore *Essence* magazine's presentation of the beauty standard and compare it with the mainstream beauty standard presented with the other three magazines. *Essence* magazine presents a beauty ideal that is built upon class privilege, rather than racial privilege. The other magazines present a beauty standard that intertwines class privilege and racial privilege. The beauty standard, as presented in *Essence*, differs from the mainstream beauty standard in one other significant way: the focus of hair. Hair, in *Essence* magazine, is a centrally important characteristic in the beauty standard. This is demonstrated by the sheer prevalence of hair care products, both in advertisements, tutorials, and features. The importance of hair for women of color is not a new discovery; past research has found that hair is a crucial element of beauty for women of color (Gooden 2011).

In conclusion, the analysis has demonstrated that print media serves as a tool for teaching the classist beauty standard. Whereas past studies have demonstrated that general attributes are portrayed as beautiful, the current analysis has demonstrated that there is a clear association between classism and the beauty ideal presented by print media. Through the depiction of consumption, prestige, and beauty secrets, women are taught beauty requires a privileged class standing and the monetary resources that accompany such a position.

Throughout this work, I demonstrate how these magazines are a tool to teach the beauty standard. Research has informed scholars that women cite print media as an educating tool for beauty work (Gagné and McGaughey 2002). Because of these findings, presenting a discriminatory beauty standard in these magazines leads to discriminatory definitions of beauty by readers. Yet, this connection still needs to be explored. Are women skeptical of the heavy focus on expensive goods? Have women resolved to use these magazines as a source of

inspiration, rather than recreation? I was not able to explore these questions in this current study; I would like to stress the importance of digging deeper into this relationship for future research.

The current study is the first of its kind to connect past research on classism within beauty work to print media depictions of beauty. Future research should continue in this direction, examining a wider array of magazines. Extending analysis to include more magazines, both in title and issues, would serve as additional evidence to this thesis. I hope that this current work, along with future research in this area, can demonstrate how monopolized fashion and beauty magazines are, focusing on consumption and driving biased sales, rather than their readers' well-being. In the future, I hope to investigate the pairing of advertisements and featured content more, so that I can develop a better understanding of how certain goods, brands, and designers are placed in these magazines more so than others. The current work demonstrates that luxury and prestige goods are often more frequently placed in both *Glamour* and *Vogue*, while drugstore products and mass produced fashion may appear more in *Redbook* and *Essence*. The discovery of this trend is a strong starting point for shedding light on this problem.

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