Impact and Ethics of Skin Lightening Product Marketing to African Women

Research Report

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact and ethical dilemmas of skin lightening product marketing to black South African women, in the context of luxury brands such as Pond’s meeting an emerging black middle class market. It is hypothesised that the primary mechanism of marketing this particular product is through activation and manipulation of specific social identities related to race, gender and class. A specific series of advertisements - the Pond’s Flawless Radiance “7 Days 2 Love” campaign of 2009 – is studied as an example. It is hypothesised that these advertisements play upon the social self-concept of the consumer, and activate high-level cognitive processes linked to deeply-held personal values regarding race, gender and self-esteem. The research hypotheses are tested by way of laddering theory (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988), consisting of lengthy interviews with target consumers about the product, following a ladder of inference to explore the high level, partially conscious motivations and cognitive processes behind their relationship with the product. The primary output of this study is a Hierarchical Values Map showing the consumer’s links between product attributes and high-level personal values, as well as commentary on the research hypotheses.

Keywords: Social identity, marketing, skin-lightening cream

Christiane, Market Trader, 15: My dream is to become a nurse, or if not, go to Europe. I’d like to marry a white man and become white myself. I couldn’t be completely white, that’s not possible, but cream is good for whitening the skin. (Vanfleteren, 2010)
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I. Introduction

Background of the Study

Skin lightening creams are not a new product concept in South Africa by any means, however their high profile in mainstream media is unprecedented. The birth of the South African black middle class, in the wake of democracy and greater opportunities for black people in business, has lead to a significant market of black women as consumers of luxury goods. Global luxury skin care brands, seeking their share of the spending power these women now wield, are navigating new territories in producing and promoting products to appeal to these women. Skin lightening products within these global brands’ product portfolios now enjoy big-budget mainstream media marketing, however the messages conveyed within these advertisements can be startling.

Existing literature exploring the ethical hazards of marketing skin whitening products comes mainly from India and Pakistan, where these products are widely in use, and lighter skin is associated with beauty and higher castes. The social dynamics of these caste systems are well documented. In the United States, academics have explored and commented on the social preference for paler skin and European features among African Americans - termed “colourism”. However neither of these branches of literature has been explored in Southern Africa. While the widespread use of skin lightening creams in sub-Saharan Africa has been documented in clinical papers, however these have focused on the dermatological side-effects, rather than the social dynamics at play.

The dynamics of preference for lighter skin, as well as the marketing of skin lightening products to South African women is an underexplored but important topic. South Africa’s Apartheid heritage adds a layer of complexity and significance to any discussions of skin colour and identity. It is especially timely as we now stand at the moment where luxury skin care brands reach out and will set the tone of their future relationship with empowered black women.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a synthesised view on the social self-concept dynamics of skin lightening products and marketing in South Africa. Firstly it aims to investigate the existing literature on attractiveness, social self-concept, racial identity in South Africa and transformational consumption. Secondly, once armed with the literature, the advertisement content will be analysed, and a series of expectations and hypotheses will be
drafted as to the expected effects and dynamics at play within the product and the marketing. Thirdly, target consumers will be interviewed in depth about the product and advertising, and their insights, values and cognitive approach to the product will be documented. Finally, these results will be analysed to form a generalised view of the impact and ethical implications of the product and marketing strategies on these women.

Scope and Limitations

Due to time constraints, only 25 interviews were conducted. Interview subjects were African women between the ages of 18 and 44, drawn from the Western Cape and Gauteng regions only. Women from other racial groups such as Indian, Asian, Caucasian, Malay or coloured were not approached for interviews – although these groups undoubtedly share similar concerns about skin and beauty, the advertisement in question features only African actors and is (arguably) targeted mainly at that audience.

One potential limitation was the ethnicity and linguistic limitations of the researcher. As this researcher is a white female it is possible that the views expressed by the interview subjects were limited or affected by social dynamics triggered by the researcher’s own social identity. Subtle meanings may also be lost in translation: interviews were conducted in English, which is usually not the mother tongue of the demographic in question, and interviewees’ abilities to express themselves well in English may be variable.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the term skin lightening cream refers to any facial product which is a) targeted at women with darker complexions and b) promises “brighter”, “lighter”, “more radiant” or “paler” skin with “fewer dark spots” or any similar claim.

The true definition of the term African is the subject of lengthy academic debate, however, for the purposes of this study, “Black” or “African” women will mean Southern African women who are of black African extraction i.e.: linguistically Zulu, Sotho, Venda, Tswana, Ndebele, Tsonga, Xhosa and Swazi.
The Advertisement

The advertisement under study is a four-part television series promoting Pond’s Flawless Radiance, a premium-brand facial cream targeted at the emerging black middle class in South Africa. The campaign is structured like a soap opera, and makes use of an ongoing narrative: a young woman is separated from the man she loves, but as he leaves, he presents her with half of a heart-shaped locket, symbolising their connection.

After an interval of five years (as we are told by the subtitles – the entire series is devoid of spoken dialogue) the protagonist encounters her lost love, but finds he is involved with another woman. In a key scene (which occurs in slow motion, and is repeated at the end of the advertisement), our heroine walks past the couple and he fails to recognise her. The young woman then discovers that the couple are to be married in seven days.
Distraught, she pauses in front of a bank of televisions showing images of the product. The advertisement proceeds with a voiceover describing the product – promising to “help remove dark spots” – here, a zoom-in animation where dark marks on the woman’s face (which were not apparent in previous scenes) disappear (Figure 3) and “gives flawlessly radiant and even skin in just seven days” (here, the woman fingers the locket around her neck). The key scene is repeated, with the voiceover “Pond’s Flawless Radiance: Love’s Helping Hand” and a subtitle “to be continued”.

The storyline unfolds over the next three ‘episodes’: the heroine encounters her love once more (this time he recognises her), he is charmed by her, but his wicked fiancée, shown to be demanding and spiteful) seeks to sabotage their feelings for each other. Our heroine’s dejected face and the tragic musical soundtrack trigger the emotions of any woman who has felt “invisible” to the opposite sex due to physical unattractiveness. Every episode features the animated zoom-in showing dark marks vanishing from the heroine’s face, and every episode concludes with the voiceover slogan “Pond’s Flawless Radiance: Love’s Helping Hand”.

Figure 3 - The animation showing the product's effect (SOURCE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs4JRKpOX3E)
In the final episode, seven days have passed. Deceived by the wicked fiancé, the protagonist feels rejected by her love and has decided to leave for Paris. Once again the animation is shown, and the voice describes the seven-day promise of the product. As she passes her love and his fiancée bickering in the street, there is a re-enactment of the key scene from the first episode. The shot is once again shown in slow motion, and as she passes, instead of failing to recognise her, he is transfixed by her face. He abruptly abandons his fiancée, and chases out heroine to the airport, where he catches her and proves his undying love by revealing his own half of the locket. For the final time, as the image of the happy pair fades out, we see the two halves of the heart locked uniting, and we are reminded of “Love’s Helping Hand”.

Figure 4 - Scenes from episodes 2 and 3 (SOURCE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs4JRKpOX3E)
The advertisement raised several potential research questions. Its efficacy can be tested in terms of its impact on the purchase intentions of the women it targets. One could also test its efficacy in triggering social identity salience, and which identities are triggered. One could even measure the self-esteem impacts on the women who view these advertisements. It would also be useful to interrogate some of the existing beliefs that the target audience has about female beauty, and why that is so important. Ultimately these research questions point to the primary question: should Unilever be pursuing this sort of advertising strategy with these women: is it ethical, and is it sustainable?
II. Literature Review

The themes raised in these advertisements touch upon a diverse range of academic literature. The science of attractiveness and skin colour provides a firm theoretical grounding for our obsession with appearance and worship of “ideal” physical features. Theories of social concept explain why membership of groups forms such an important, deeply personal part of our self-perception, illuminating the roots of our drive to “belong”. Fundamentally this drive is an ongoing, universal quest for positive social identity, which is discussed and defined in more detail. Finally, we explore the effects and outcomes of identity threats.

Attractiveness and Skin Colour

“Humans in societies around the world discriminate between potential mates on the basis of attractiveness in ways that can dramatically affect their lives” (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999, p. 452). Attractiveness in this context relates to the physical attributes of the person, rather than any similarity of values or ideology (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). One of the main schools of thought regarding human attractiveness is that the psychological preference for particular features has evolved from judgements of an individual’s overall health (and thus, reproductive viability). Smooth, pliant, evenly coloured skin is universally appreciated across cultures and ethnicity (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999) (Fink, Grammer, & Thornhill, 2001).

The unique dynamics of African skin colour are highly complex. Studies have shown that lighter-skinned African Americans are more likely to have higher-status occupations, higher incomes, and more years of schooling than their darker-skinned counterparts” (Hill, 2002, p. 77) even after accounting for the status of their parents. This differential social standing is referred to as colour stratification an Hill (2002) attributes this partially to the legacy of the slave trade, where mulatto or mixed race individuals were accorded greater privileges and opportunities than their darker fellow slaves. Hill (2002)’s own study clearly shows that black women are especially judged on attractiveness according the lightness of their skin, in line with what he calls “Eurocentric colour biases”.

Tate (2007) recounts the strategies of black women in the Caribbean: those already rendered more desirable by lighter skin would seek out relationships with white men to guarantee their children paler complexions and more European facial features. Even now, parents in the Caribbean place an emphasis on having European-style “good hair”, a “good
“nose” and “good complexion” in their children. (Tate, 2007, p. 301). Girls born with darker skin are pitied.

Hunter (2002) prefers to use the term “colourism” to denote a preferential bias towards women with lighter coloured skin within the African American and Mexican American communities. She argues that, while it is not quite the same as racism, it is also a social construct which “privileges whiteness in terms of phenotype, aesthetics and culture” – as a form of “internalised colonialism” (Hunter, 2002, p. 176).

Beauty has long been for women a source of social capital, and here, lighter skin equates with beauty (Hunter, 2002). The link between this preferred physical attribute and real socioeconomic benefits is the mechanism of spousal status. Spouses confer shared resources and prestige (Hunter, 2002). This results in statistically significant advantages in education and income. In concert, this amounts to what Leeds (1994) referred to as “pigmentocracy” where “status, life chances and very often freedom were based on skin colour” (Tate, 2007, p. 318).

Identity, Race and Apartheid in South Africa

The links between identity and skin colour remain as an important legacy of Apartheid-era racial group classification and identification. Apartheid social engineering had the objective of defining ethnic group identities and imposing these on South Africans in every aspect of daily life (Burgess S. M., 2002; Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002).

Individuals were classified according to race under the Population Registration Act of 1950. The “White” group held a significant superior social status and high favouritism, whereas other individuals were attached to negatively distinctive groups such as “black” or “coloured”. The stakes were high: classified race determined whether a person could vote (Separate Representation of Voters Act, 1951), where they could live (The Group Areas Act, 1950), whether they could be forcibly removed from their property (The Natives Resettlement Act, 1954) and what level of education they could reach (Bantu Education, 1953) (South African History Online).

The implementation of Apartheid classification employed three main principles: appearance, descent and acceptance. Tests of appearance included comparative skin colour and the infamous pencil test, in which a pencil was placed in a person’s hair to ascertain whether it could freely fall out, in order to establish whether the subject had straight enough
hair to be considered White. In short, “race was whatever people understood or wanted it to be, and racial classification could be attained through ‘performing’ an identity with sufficient proficiency to ‘get away with it’” (Erasmus & Ellison, 2008, p. 450). The absurdity of this “perverted sociology” (Erasmus & Ellison, 2008, p. 451) was captured in newspaper summaries recording the statistics of people officially changing race that week.

Within the negatively distinctive “Non-White” groups, some possessed ethnic features (hair, skin colour) which could be considered “borderline White”. For these individuals, provided that their “descent” - the documented race of their parents – was not a problem, the boundary between their own group and the positively distinctive in-group (Whites) was permeable. transition into the “White” class was possible via the Race Classification Appeal Boards.

Post-Apartheid South Africa is a place where racial, political and social identities are more fluid, but no less potent. “Whiteness and Blackness as constructed categories of identity developed and evolved together throughout the centuries of colonialism and apartheid, constituting imagined notions of ‘selfhood’ and ‘other’. Today these notions are changing, as Whiteness and Blackness no longer refer to the same meanings as under apartheid, creating ‘dilemmas of selfhood’ as identities become dislocated and reconstituted in a new context” (Nuttal, 2001) cited in (Ansell, 2004, p. 6)

Race as a form of social identification is a pure social construct: there is no biological basis for this categorisation, but it is nonetheless seen as an absolute attribute, where individuals are either “Black” or “White” or “Coloured” (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002). Another source of social identity is ethnicity or tribalism – the belief in shared history, customs and culture, which is also a social construct (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002). The ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences amongst black South Africans were also emphasised by the Apartheid government, by way of tribal Bantustans and homelands where ethnic groups could live separately (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002).

The Apartheid government systematically enforced the view that the differences between groups of people were attributable to their race, and the most visible biological marker of difference between these races is the colour of their skin. This lasted for decades, and so many people in South Africa can be expected to still find meaning in their old
constructed identities of “White”, “Black”, “Coloured and “Indian” (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002).

Cornelissen and Horstmeiers’ (2002) study of social and political identity construction in the new South Africa showed that the majority of South Africans still describe themselves in the same terms as they were classified under Apartheid. Surveys of South Africans in 2008 (Afrobarometer Online) show that 38.6% of South Africans still consider their ethnic identity to be as important as their national identity, or more so.

While the participants of these studies do acknowledge that the country has changed, they still attribute many negative experiences, such as the inability to find employment, to a social and economic system that is prejudiced against the colour of their skin – either by the legacy of Apartheid, or by the system of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) installed to redress that legacy. One coloured research participant even exclaimed “One time I was too brown to be White, now I'm again too white to be Black” (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002, p. 76).

**Theories on Social Self-Concept**

**Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory.** French psychologist Henri Tajfel proposed social identity theory to account for the dynamics of interpersonal behaviour (between individuals) and the dynamics of the behaviour between social groups – intergroup behaviour. When acting as an individual (without social identification), a person will pursue their own goals and desires rather than those of a group (Stets & Burke, 2000). However, when the social level of identity is activated, the values and norms of the social group to which an individual belongs will become internalised, and will influence the individual’s behaviour (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Thus intergroup dynamics permeate the behaviour between individuals (provided that they are in some way primed for social identity). This leads to “uniformity in perception and action among individuals when they take on a group-based identity” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226).

In social identity theory, “a social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). The individual will identify the social groups around them through their own lens of social comparison and will identify themselves as part of a group whose members are similar to themselves – the in-group. Social identity theory hinges on the core
assumption that all individuals will pursue a positive social identity – as members of a favourably evaluated group (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1996). Early research on these groups of people arising as “social entities” was conducted by Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio (1989), who found that significant factors leading in-group identification included physical proximity, attribute similarity and the probability of common fate – “perceived common outcomes as a function of category membership” (Brewer & Brown, 1998, p. 563). Distinctive shared experiences and attributes as arbitrary as sharing the same birth date have been argued to be basis of identification (Brewer & Brown, 1998). When these variables are manipulated into alignment, a strong collective entity is likely to arise, in spite of other potential categorisation factors which would divide the group differently.

**Turner’s Self-Categorisation Theory.** This theory extends social identity theory by recognising that individuals construe identity at multiple levels of inclusion (Brewer & Weber, 1994). According to the theory (Turner J. C., 1984) the social self-concept develops as the product of self-categorisation along personal and social dimensions (Turner J. C., 1984; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Reicher, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). The theory distinguishes three levels along a continuum from social to personal identity. The *superordinate* level is the most social level on which individuals categorise themselves as human beings that differ from other species. At the *intermediate* level, individuals categorise themselves as members of in-groups and out-groups. At the *subordinate* level, individuals categorise themselves as unique persons who differ from other persons. Any individual simultaneously belongs to multiple categories and thus has a different self-perception depending on the categorisation level active at the time. “A shift toward social identity entails a depersonalisation of individual self perception” (Brewer & Brown, 1998, p. 563) and this depersonalisation leads to the group norms and values, emotional contagion and behavioural conformity that one observes in intergroup behaviour (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Reicher, 1987).

The self categories at group and personal levels compete for dominance, such that resultant self-perception “varies along a continuum” (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994, p. 456) depending on which categories are strengthened by identity salience and the available and accessible categorisation variables. The categories used are highly context-specific: the relevant social context determines which categorization seems most suitable to provide a meaningful organization of social stimuli, and hence which identity aspects become
salient as guidelines for the perceptions and behaviour of those who operate within that context” (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002, p. 165)

**Brewer’s Synthesis of Social Self-Concept Theories.** Self definition occurs on three different levels. At the superordinate level, one is self-categorised as a human being. At the personal identity level, one is self-categorised as a unique individual relative to other individuals. At a relational identity level, identity is conferred on the individual according to their responsibilities, social requirements and the relationships they have with the people around them – girlfriend, sister, teacher, fellow student (Burgess, 2002, p. 11).

At a social identity level, one is identified by one’s membership of distinct in-and out-groups. (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Brewer & Brown, 1998). These group identities generate a self-concept which is “expandable and contractible across different levels of social identity with associated transformations in the definition of self and the basis for self-evaluation” (Brewer, 1991, p. 476). Depending on which group identities are salient, one might define oneself broadly, as a “South African” or more specifically “a female business school student”. We select our identity from a “digest of selves… in response to situational cues and often without conscious thought” (Burgess, 2002, p. 6).

Personal identity and social identity differ in that in personal identity, the basis of social comparison is relative performance compared to other individuals. When social identity is salient, the individual evaluates him or herself according to their in-group (to which they belong) performance compared to other groups (Brewer & Weber, 1994).

Brewer (1991) emphasises the distinction between social identity and membership of social categories. An individual will choose and inhabit their social identity based on their own self-categorisation bases available at the time. Accordingly, this means that any individual may hold multiple social identities which may or may not be activated at any particular time. But membership alone does not deliver meaning: the individual might not feel any emotional identification with involuntary group membership or externally imposed categories, even though they may be aware of that membership (Brewer, 1991).

**Situational Context Triggers Identity Salience.** Identities are salient when they have been activated in the consciousness of the individual. The salient social identity is "one which is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behaviour" (Oakes, 1987, p. 118) cited in (Stets & Burke, 2000). In
short, salience is a state of enhanced sensitivity to identity-specific stimuli (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002), and determines which identities are most likely to be activated. Some identities are more likely to be activated because they are more accessible to the individual – either because they have been more recently or frequently accessed (Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998), or of immense emotional importance to the individual. A group identity may even become _chronically salient_ to an individual to whom it is deeply significant (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Specific identities may become activated because of the individual’s expectations of the situation they are in, or the social requirements of that situation (Oakes, 1987).

**Categorisation Choices.** Individuals use salient characteristics to understand the social world: the people observed by the individual are categorised into discrete classes (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Common features used for categorisation include age, skin colour and gender (Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2003) as well as dialect, accent and language (Giles & Johnson, 1987). The attributes of the perceiver have an effect on which categories they find most accessible when observing others (Brewer & Brown, 1998).

The categories most likely to be used are those which best fit the social category stimuli within the available information: a telephone conversation would not supply information about the skin colour of another individual, but would probably identify the gender of the person, and would be rich in verbal cues.

The power of categorisation lies in its ability to sway individual opinions and values towards perceived group norms: “Intergroup behaviour is typically more uniform than interpersonal behaviour” (Brewer & Brown, 1998, p. 555). The mere allocation of categories, or priming of individuals has been shown to cause increased conformity of individual opinions and values within the category: in laboratory conditions, individuals were more inclined to accept the opinions provided by other individuals defined as belonging to their own category than the opinions provided by individuals from other categories (Hogg & Turner, 1987).

**Category Inclusiveness.** Self-categorisation, which usually serves to establish boundaries between “us” and “them” is observed to become broader and more inclusive as successively more distinct “others” are added to the fray (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). For example, two students will distinguish themselves and “me” and “you”,
but when joined by many other students, the group of sciences and arts students may
instinctively self-categorise into distinct and opposing groups. Still further, the arrival of a
group of mine workers will cause the arts and sciences students to form a larger more
inclusive group category of “students” in relation to the group of mine workers. This also
demonstrates that individuals hold multiple self-categories – any individual in this group may
categorise themselves in any combination of salient identities: male, student, science student,
to name but a few possibilities. These categories are held simultaneously within the
individual, however one category may be dominant at a given time, depending on the social
stimuli available (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

**Social Belief Structures and Permeability**

Burke (2006) names five key components of social belief structures, which lead to a
wide range of differing intergroup behaviours:

- The social status of the in-group relative to the out-group
- Belief that this status will remain stable in the future
- Belief that the status is legitimate
- Perceptions of how permeable the boundary is – whether it is possible for
  an out-group member to become an in-group member.
- Degree of acceptance of the status quo – belief that “no alternative status
  quo is conceivable and achievable.” (Burke, 2006, pp. 123 - 124)

The use of collective or individualist strategies is determined by the perceived
permeability of the boundaries between the in- and out-group (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge,
1996). Permeability is likely to lead to individual social enhancement strategies (Wright,
Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990) whereas perceived impermeability will more likely lead to
collective (negatively-distinguished) group social enhancement strategies.

**Internalised Social Perceptions and Precognitive Cues**

The process by which individuals categorise others may take place without conscious
intervention. Stereotypical beliefs about other individuals based on their group membership
may be activated automatically by the mere presence of the group member (Bargh &
Williams, 2006), on the basis of easily identified physical characteristics such as “skin colour
or gender features, or by accent, dress and so on” (Bargh, 1994, p. 21).
In experiments on preconscious monitoring of non-verbal cues, (Warnecke, Masters, & Kempter, 1992) found that American adults were more likely to have strong negative reactions to video footage (without sound) of foreigners making a speech than they were to similar silent footage of Americans making a speech. However, when the videos were shown with sound, these negative reactions (now that the nationality of the target was clear) ceased. This suggests that prejudice and mistrust was triggered by “preconscious monitoring of non-verbal cues” (McEvoy, 2002, p. 46). The automatic activation of these stereotypes and the precognitive alteration of personal perception as a result is referred to as automaticity (Bargh, 1994).

Bargh and Williams summarised it best:

The automatic influences on social life are many and diverse. Other people, their characteristic features, the groups they belong to, the social roles they fill, and whether or not one has a close relationship with them have all been found to be automatic triggers of important psychological and behavioural processes. (p. 3)

**Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging.** Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) has assisted scientists in understanding how the human brain encodes visual information into social identity - determining things such as “age, sex, ethnicity, emotional state and attractiveness” (Allison, Puce, & McCarthy, 2000, p. 268). Humans are able to make judgements about such aspects within 100 milliseconds (Adolphs, 2003) – four times as long as it takes an average person to blink.

Reactions to gaze direction, head and hand movements have been recorded in the parts of the brain which are involved in social perception: “the early stages of the analysis of actual or implied bodily movements and related cues that provide socially relevant information” (Allison, Puce, & McCarthy, 2000, p. 275). This forms part of social attention and social cognition, which are the “processing of information with culminates in the accurate perception of the dispositions and intentions of other individuals” (Brothers, 2002, p. 367).

The question of what exactly the observer is reacting to has been somewhat unclear in the literature. Livingston and Brewer (2002) studied the difference between responding to cues – distinctive facial features which are sometimes (but not always) associated with racial groups, and responding to social categories – the abstract group definition, such as “Zulu” or
“Cape Coloured”, where social category stereotypes may be active. In short, the latter judgements are conceptual, and the former, perceptual. (Livingston & Brewer, 2002)’s findings were quite clear: it is the perceptual, cue-based prejudice that forms the core of our knee-jerk evaluations of others. This places even more importance on facial features such as skin colour in the pursuit of positive judgement from others.

This automaticity is described as “efficient” because it requires minimal mental resources – people are able to make automatic judgements based on identity cues while distracted by other stimuli or performing many other tasks. This shows that these judgements are totally routine and always online where other processes might be sidelined by distractions and tasks (Bargh, 1994).

These processes occur entirely beyond our control, but the activation of stereotypes does not condemn the perceiver to making biased judgements – awareness of the tendency to stereotype gives people the option to exercise additional mental effort to avoid falling into the trap (Bargh, 1994) and so does priming the individual for their self-concept as a fair-minded and careful person (Fiske, 1993). These two stages can be loosely categorised as “automatic anchoring” followed by “deliberate adjustment” (Mason & Morris, 2010). This deliberation over automatic reactions has been traced to the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) which shows activity on the fMRI when subjects are faced with inconsistencies. In effect, this area is supposed to alert the perceiver to situations where the automatic reaction may be inappropriate – this prevents our automatic responses from having “free reign over our social sensemaking” (Mason & Morris, 2010, p. 7/15).

**Inter-category Accentuation and Polarisation**

At the same time, the individual will perceive exaggerated differences between the discrete categories. (Brewer, 2007; Brewer & Brown, 1998). This exaggeration of differences between groups has been documented as the intercategory accentuation effect. “This accentuation occurs for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225).

Where group identities are salient, group discussions can quickly become polarised as participants shift their attitudes towards their group’s perceived values and norms, resulting in even more distinct group boundaries. This gravitational drift towards group ideals serves a
reduction of uncertainty: individuals seek to have their own beliefs affirmed by their peers in what Festinger (1954) called “social reality testing. Individuals moderate their beliefs so that they are more likely to be accepted by the reference group. The greater perceived distinctiveness of the group identities leads to more extreme views expressed by individuals identifying with those groups within the discussion. In South Africa, ethnic and cultural categories were the subject of governmental obsession, which has left its people with accentuated social identities, much like former colonies and members of the Eastern Bloc (Burgess, 1999).

**Out group Homogeneity**

Within the boundaries a group category (to which an individual does not feel they belong) that individual will perceive minimal variation between individuals in the group – they will be “lumped together”. This is the *out-group homogeneity effect* (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Brauer, 2001). However, when not primed for social identities, interpersonal interaction will result in perceived heterogeneity: between individuals activated for personal identity, the subtleties and differences inconsistent with group identities are uncovered and appreciated.

**Ethnocentrism and the Sociobiology Argument**

Group identification and categorisation are arguably the result of mankind’s long history as a social animal, hunting and gathering and cohabiting in groups. The effect of ethnocentrism is to favour members of the in-group and derogate members of the out-group based on ethnic identity cues (Brauer, 2001). Ethnocentrism and even racism could be “‘sentimental structures’ that are, at least partially, the progeny of adaptive genetic bias” (McEvoy, 2002, p. 40). The survival of the group requires a level of “inclusive fitness” – but the pursuit of survival is at its core a pursuit of the survival of one’s genes: “cooperation between individuals will occur only to the extent that they have a high proportion of shared genes, since helping close relatives perpetuates one’s own genes” (Brewer & Brown, 1998, p. 561). Taken to the extreme, this heavy bias towards one’s own group (be it a community, a culture or a race) leads to what Reynolds, Falger and Vine (1987) called the “chosen people complex”. Logically, xenophobia, too, is part of ethnocentrism (McEvoy, 2002).

History though has not always provided physical, visible cues for distinguishing between ethnic groups. Other cues such as language, dress and mannerisms served as a culturally specific means of delineating groups (McEvoy, 2002). It is universally human to
want to belong to a group and to define that group in contrast with others by visual and
behavioural style – in a modern urban world, distinct social “tribes” can still be observed
whose members “often have elaborate in-group altruistic ethics and hold disdainful attitudes
towards out-groups that can only be defined as ethnocentric in nature” (McEvoy, 2002, p.
47).

**Implicit Self Stereotyping.** “Stereotypes may enter a person's mind as information or
generalizations that initially seem irrelevant” (Langer, 1989) cited in (Levy, 1996, p. 1093). Salient social identities lead to self stereotyping in that “individuals are likely to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that social category” (Brewer & Brown, 1998, p. 560). When individuals are primed for stereotypes, they may unintentionally act in accordance with the characteristics of that stereotype of the group to which they feel they belong. In interactions with others, they will unconsciously alter their behaviour towards persons they see as belonging to a stereotyped group. (Schubert & Hafner, 2003).

The stereotype threat is “a psychological predicament in which individuals are inhibited from performing to their potential by the recognition that possible failure could confirm a negative stereotype that applies to their in-group and, by extension, to themselves” (Schmader, 2002, p. 194). In testing situations, the stereotypical expectations become realised: in a self-fulfilling prophecy, individuals will underperform when reminded – through situational cues - of their negatively-distinctive group membership. Experimental studies have shown that where a group is stereotypically perceived to be weaker than another group, individuals in the “weak” group with high group identification have performed poorly compared to control groups where relative group identities were not primed. Reminders of group stereotypes in experimental situations (Schmader, 2002) have caused women to underperform in mathematical tests (when compared to men).

The extent to which this stereotype threat will impact on the individual’s performance is determined in part by how important the ability being measured is to the individual’s self-perception. The abilities that are not important to the individual will not be affected by negative stereotype priming – if the individual does not care about performing well, they are not threatened by the prospect of confirming a negative stereotype about their group (Schmader, 2002). Another determinant of the strength of stereotype threat is the individual’s strength of commitment to the social identity that is primed for the negative stereotype – the
strength of people’s with that particular group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002, p. 164). A woman who does not feel strongly identified with the her social identity as a woman is less likely to be affected by primed stereotypes about women’s mathematical abilities

Schmader’s own findings (2002) are consistent with the hypothesis: “When that social identity is subject to scrutiny through the lens of a negative stereotype, those who are highly identified with their social group… experience the greatest degree of stereotype threat and resulting impairments to their performance” (Schmader, 2002, p. 199). Likewise Levy (1996) shows that non-association with the primed identity removes stereotype threat: young people are not affected by priming for negative attributes that would usually be associated with old age – they do not associate memory loss with their own social identity and so they are immune to attempts to raise negative stereotypes.

**Prototypes and Exemplars**

The basis of any stereotype is its prototype – the summary of the features that are characteristic of the social category (Bar-tal, 1996). This is not to be confused with an exemplar, which is a specific person belonging to that category, who is thought to be typical of that category (Bar-tal, 1996) – in short, a person who bears great resemblance to the prototype. It is argued that individuals may adapt their own social identity based on their own resemblance to a prototype or exemplar of a particular identity (Huddy, 2001). It is worth noting that the social judgement of a category is wholly dependent on the context in which that judgement is made – the perceived stereotypical member or “prototype” of a category is likely to morph spontaneously as the members of that category (and their attributes) grow and change (Huddy, 2001).

**Social Comparison**

The Selective Accessibility Model (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000) predicts that an “initial similarity assessment” calculates the social comparison between the self and the target of comparison. The individual will focus on differential characteristics or dissimilarity testing if they have been primed for differences between the self and the target. This focus becomes the anchor of subsequent judgements (Schubert & Hafner, 2003). Social comparison differs from social categorisation in that the latter results in accentuated perceived differences between groups – inter-category accentuation - and the perceived similarities within groups – homogeneity. Social comparison, on the other hand, is the means by which the accentuation
effect is selectively applied, usually towards those variables which result in relatively favourable comparisons of the self to others (Stets & Burke, 2000).

**The Motivation of Self Esteem**

Individuals enjoy the victories and achievements of their when those individuals were not directly involved in those accomplishments (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Team sports produce ecstatic supporters who have no hand in the outcome of the game, but whose strong identification with their team means that they share in the victory of the team – basking in reflected glory (Cialdini, Borden, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Thus, the individual’s self worth can be enhanced by the positive distinctiveness of their in-group (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Individuals will therefore seek to make social inter-group comparisons on those dimensions which are most likely to result in positive outcomes for their in-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). The study of the self-esteem hypothesis is, however, plagued with inconsistent results and empirical difficulties, not least the issue of appropriate, reliable measurement of self-esteem, and the resultant self-esteem effects are also heavily context-specific (Abrams & Hogg, 1988).

**Striving for Positive Social Identity**

*In-Group Favouritism and Out-Group Prejudice.* The terms “in-group” and “out-group” were originally coined by (Sumner, 1906) who argued that in-group members would be preferred to individuals in an out-group. Membership and attachment to an in-group is therefore emotionally significant and a fundamental characteristic of human social functioning.

These attachments and significance have been shown to arise even in conditions where they are not rational in the least. Tajfel’s early 1970’s experimentation with the minimal intergroup situation paradigm has demonstrated that even the most arbitrary allocations to groups that are not in any other way homogenous (classically, labelling random individuals as blue or green), leads to positive in-group bias such as favouritism in reward allocation (Brewer, 2007; Burgess, 2002).

Individuals enjoy positive self-evaluation when social comparison favours the in-group above the out-group. Therefore individuals will tend to focus on in-group characteristics which are positive and out-group characteristics that are negative (Brauer, 2001). Preferential treatment of in-group members is well documented in empirical research
– differential responses have shown that members of in-groups enjoy more positive evaluation than members of out-groups (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Brewer, 2007) as well as indication of liking and favouritism in allocation of scarce resources (Brauer, 2001). Individuals will rate their fellow in-group members as being more honest and cooperative than members of the out-group, which means greater trust and cooperation, and less fear of being exploited, in social dilemmas (Jackson, 2008).

In-group favouritism raises the question of out-group prejudice: much attention has been devoted to assessing whether “in-group love” equates to “out-group hate” (Brewer, 1999). While it has been widely accepted that in-group preference has a reciprocal relationship with out-group negativity, (Brewer, 1999) showed that the majority of group discrimination behaviour was motivated more by the individual’s desire to nurture positive connections with and promotion of the in-group than any inclination to punish the out-group. Empirically, while in-group members show clear favouritism in allocating benefits to members of their in-group, they are less willing to show favouritism in allocating negative or harmful outcomes (Brewer, 2007).

In situations of failure or unacceptable behaviour, a member of the out-group will likely be judged as deficient in character or having poor judgement. The same failures or unacceptable behaviours in an in-group member will likely be attributed to unavoidable external factors affecting that individual. By contrast, positive achievements are likely to be attributed to the personal characteristics of the in-group member, but to the environmental elements of the out-group member. As an all too common illustration, a member of the male group is applauded for their personal attributes when they achieve a promotion, but a member of the female out-group member is judged to have benefited from a preferential system (and not their own abilities) given the same achievement. This has been described as “the ultimate attribution error” (Pettigrew, 1979).

**Ethnic Identity and Prejudice.** Ethnic categorisation is more likely to be used by individuals given to greater racial prejudice: (Allport & Kramer, 1946) found that individuals with anti-Semitic views tended to classify more individuals as members of the out-group (i.e.: Jewish) than others, with greater accuracy. Pre-existing prejudice inclines a person to classify others as part of an out-group more readily (Brewer & Brown, 1998). South Africans in particular are more likely to be sensitive to cultural, tribal and ethnically-based social
identities as a result of a highly race-conscious left over from the shared history of Apartheid (Burgess, 2002).

Ethnolinguistic Identity.

Threats to ethnolinguistic identity, where groups regard their language and accent as distinctive of their group identity, can cause group identities to become salient. In interaction between individuals of different social groups, this may cause their speech to diverge in accent, dialect or language (Giles & Johnson, 1987; Bourhis, 1979). However, when group memberships are not emphasised, the speech tends to converge (Giles & Smith, 1979). Experiments showed that bilingual Welsh / English speakers were inclined to speak in Welsh when interacting with monolingual English speakers (Williams, 1978). Furthermore, it is suggested that individuals who are members of multiple possible ethnolinguistic categories possess a “more diffuse social identity” (Giles & Johnson, 1987, p. 72) and are therefore less attached to their ethnolinguistic identity than individuals with fewer category memberships. In short, a person able to speak many languages, or to modify their regional accents at will be less likely to identify themselves strongly with a distinct ethnolinguistic group.

Reactions to Negative Social Identity and Identity Threats

Individual Strategies and Social Mobility.

Social mobility is a personal identity response to negative in-group membership (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1996). It is likely to be triggered where individuals perceive a group-directed threat, but feel low commitment to their in-group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). An individual who believes in the positively-distinctive group’s superiority, validity and stability assess the permeability of the boundary between themselves and that target social group. If they perceive any feasible strategy whereby they could, as an individual, transcend this boundary, they are sure to pursue it – social mobility theory states that they will try to dissociate themselves from their negatively distinctive in-group.

Jackson, Sullivan and Hodge (1996) experimented with laboratory groups where individuals were members of “negatively-distinctive in-groups”. The expectation, under social mobility theory, was that individuals would prefer to distance themselves (psychologically or physically) from their negative in-group. This is cutting off reflected failure (Cialdini, Borden, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976) is the opposite of the basking in reflected glory mentioned above. Interestingly, they found that individuals faced with
permeable boundaries made less of an attempt to distinguish themselves from their negatively-distinguished in-group than those faced with impermeable boundaries (i.e.: permanent group membership) – they chose not to exercise mobility strategies. Jackson, Sullivan and Hodge (1996) attributes this (partly) to the low emotional significance and salience of laboratory-created group identities.

Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) add that a permanent, negatively distinctive group member may choose to emphasise heterogeneity within the group in order to distance themselves from the particular negative attribute. They may also work to manage the negative social impacts of this membership by conspicuously lowering their commitment to the group. However, “unless they can hide their group membership, members of stigmatized groups are likely to be chronically treated in terms of their devalued group membership, regardless of their group commitment” (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002, p. 174).

In pure mobility theory, these individuals split their identity from the group (Burke, 2006) and will engage in *passing behaviour* to gain physical or psychological access to the target group. Strategies such as these were visible under the South African Apartheid regime: some individuals classified as “non-white”, whose physical characteristics were potentially racially ambiguous, would employ individual social mobility strategies (such as modification of speech, language, accent, dress and appearance) to pass into the white in-group and therefore achieve a more positive social identity.

**Group Loyalty: Collective Strategies.**

Group loyalty stems from the fact that people will make positive evaluations of the groups to which they belong, and to feel attachment to the whole group regardless of their interpersonal relationships with individuals within the group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Unlike social mobility, social creativity and social change (also referred to as social conflict) are collective strategies (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The fundamental tenet of social identity is that individuals and groups will pursue positive identity, however their behaviour often does not appear to support this principle. When the value of the social group is under threat, the individuals who belong to that group are at risk of negative identity effects and poor self esteem, however the degree of the individual’s commitment to the group means that “people may feel strongly committed to groups that confer a negative identity upon them” (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002, p. 164).
These high-commitment individuals might reaffirm their loyalty and stress homogeneity within their devalued group as a means of collectively coping with the threat against the group. By way of example, employees at Baan, an IT company in the Netherlands, stayed with their company even when it faced bankruptcy. The group of employees was strongly identified: they all came from a small, highly religious community. Instead of pursuing individual mobility strategies (other jobs at other companies) they started daily prayer meetings and stayed at Baan, hoping that the company situation would improve (Baltesen, 2000) cited in (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

**Social Creativity.**

Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, and Dolnik (2000) found that negatively-distinctive groups, when faced with open boundaries to other, more positively-distinctive groups, exhibited acceptance. However, when the boundaries were closed – that is, group membership was permanent – the groups exhibited a preference for collective protest that represented a strong challenge to the existing status relationship, and this was backed up by creative negative stereotyping of the out-group” (Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000, p. 284). This creative negative stereotyping of the group of “others” is a form of social creativity.

Negatively-distinctive social groups use social creativity strategies to improve the social perception of the out-group, thereby improving their own individual social identities (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1996). Lalonde (1992) proposes that three tactics are available, members of the negatively distinct group (for example, darker-skinned South African women) might use a new dimension of social comparison (having more friends), they might change the out-group of social comparison (having lighter skin tone than Congolese women) or try to change the relative importance of existing social comparison dimensions (beautiful hair is more important than light skin). Members of the negatively-distinctive in-group in “changed the valence of the negatively distinguishing dimension to make it less disparaging to the in-group” (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1996, p. 246)

The “black is beautiful” movement – also referred to as “black anti-racist aesthetics” in the literature (Tate, 2007) - exemplifies a social creativity strategy, where members of a negatively distinct group (black women) challenged the prevailing view that they were not as beautiful as women with more European features (such as pale skin, straight hair and so forth). They attempted to do so by creatively redefining the concept of beauty.
Lalonde’s own study (1992) of a losing hockey team found that, while they had to acknowledge the out-group (winners) as being more skilled, motivated and aggressive than themselves, they also derided the winners as being “dirty” in their play. The negatively-distinct in-group was able to find other social comparisons with which they could deride the out-group, and achieve more positive social identity for their in-group (Lalonde, 1992).

**Social Conflict / Social Change.**

Social conflict is highly collective and demands conflict with the advantaged social out-group to bring about a fundamental change in the relative status of the groups – even a reversal of that status (Lalonde, 1992). This conflict tends to highlight and strengthen social category differences, as a result of “sharp intergroup discontinuities and strong within-group uniformities” (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994, p. 456). Lalonde’s losing hockey team would have to overthrow the winning team, not only by playing better or more brutal hockey, but by attacking the referee decisions and even taking on the organisers of the game. Essentially they would, under social conflict strategies, attack the very system that branded them as “losers”, disrupting the status quo.

**Marketing Appeals to Social Identity**

The individual or group’s drive to pursue positive social identity will influence their behaviour and choices and can become visible in consumption patterns. Negatively distinguished groups may employ strategies in their choices, acquisition, consumption, and disposal of consumer products in pursuit of positive social identity (Burgess, 1999). Thus social identity is a tool to understand why consumers make the purchases they do, and why they may change those purchase and consumption patterns over time as their identities change and evolve (Burgess, 2003). Marketers who are able to understand these social motivations behind brand choice and product usage are able to tap into a powerful group psyche.

**Who You Are.**

“Social influences, including marketing communications and selling messages, draw prospects into a socialization process through which they come to see themselves as a particular type of person” (Kleine et al., 1993) in (Kleine, Kleine, & Brunswick, 2009, p. 53). That “particular type of person” is a function of their social identity. The advertising content plays a powerful role in determining which social identity is active at the time the target consumer receives the message. In specific, Forehand and Deshpande (2001) refer to “ethnic
self-awareness” where the advertisement content – using verbal and visual ethnic cues - triggers the consumer’s unconscious self-categorisation in ethnic dimensions. While this awareness can be triggered by outside stimuli such as the advertisement, that is a momentary activation, and cannot determine the strength of the individual’s association with that identity – that is still a function of their individual valence and sense of self (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002).

The value to the marketer is that, when an ethnically-primed consumer views a product spokesperson of the same ethnicity, they are likely to consider that spokesperson or actor as a member of their social in-group. Once this happens, “a host of positive biases should follow” (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002, p. 1088) – see “In-group Favouritism” above. These consumers are likely to be more credulous and responsive to the product offering, and more likely to identify the product as being “for me” (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001). The consumer may then see the brand as a signal of affiliation with the social group to which they would be proud to belong (Burgess, 2003) or they may see the product itself as a means of transforming themselves, allowing them to pass into that desired group.

Who You Want to Become.
Kleine, Kleine and Brunswick (2009) investigated the transformational services market - namely universities, travel, leisure and healthcare providers whose services have the potential to change the consumer (for the better) in a lasting way. “The decision to make a transformational product purchase is effectively an act of social identity adoption, asking “is this a type of person I want to become” (Kleine, Kleine, & Brunswick, 2009, p. 55). They describe the “transformational marketer” as “a guide who designs situations that assist the customer in diagnosing desired self-change, and then developing and delivering a transformational program” (Kleine, Kleine, & Brunswick, 2009, p. 55). Theoretically I would hypothesise that the Pond’s Flawless Radiance product would touch on both these motivations: the premium brand (and associated premium price) might be a means of signalling the affluent middle class identity of the consumer, and the product itself would promise a transformation: to make a lasting improvement to their skin colour, where lighter skin is associated with a more successful more desirable social group.
III. Methodology

Laddering Theory

The methodology employed is heavily based on Reynolds and Gutman’s (1988) laddering theory. This methodology was chosen as it serves well to link what would at first appear to be mundane product attributes to high-level personal values and beliefs. It is a qualitative method, however “it is an approach that takes consumers’ individuality seriously but, nevertheless, comes up with quantitative results” (Grunert, Beckmann, & Sorensen, 2001, p. 63). This process demands lengthy one-on-one interviews with members of the target market of the product. These interviews are then encoded according to emergent categories and themes, and finally these are used to construct a hierarchical values map.

The Sample

The target group of this research can loosely be defined as black women over the age of 18. Interview subjects consisted of 25 women between the ages of 18 and 47, drawn from the Western Cape and Gauteng regions.

![Figure 6 - Marital status of sample](image)

Due to the fairly intimate nature of the subjects under discussion, participants were selected through networks of friends and colleagues: a personal recommendation of the researcher from a trusted friend created greater trust and openness on the part of the participants. Participants were also selected across as broad a range of incomes as possible.

As many of the perceptions and discourse around beauty and values are informed by one’s culture and upbringing, it was important to capture as wide a spectrum as possible of South Africa’s highly diverse cultures, although no comparative analyses were conducted on the basis of this information. The broad array of cultural backgrounds has been used to create an aggregated theory, which should be appropriate as the advertisement itself does not target a particular heritage or culture among black women.
Levels of education, occupation and income were diverse within the sample, ranging from a hotel housekeeping worker with a junior school (Grade 7), to practicing attorneys, to medical students with three bachelor’s degrees. While incomes were well-spread across a range of zero to ZAR 60 000 per month, the fact that 60% were enrolled in, or had completed, some form of university qualification means that this sample is not fully representative of South African black women as a whole.

Coding Interview Content.

Key interview phrases are flagged and then coded as attributes (A), consequences (C) or values (V). Similar responses may be grouped together in broader categories so that replication can occur across respondents, but this is subject to a trade-off as broad categories necessarily result in a loss of richness in the data.

Once groups of A, C and V categories are established these are numbered, and a matrix of standardised chains is constructed. Reynolds and Gutman (1988) especially
emphasise that the object of interest here is not the values and consequences that arise (even though in this study they may be intriguing) but the relationships between the variables. Individuals’ ladders – and two to three ladders can be expected to be generated from about three-quarters of the interviews (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) – are then marked on the matrix, creating “scores” for each ladder. It is important to distinguish that a ladder is the response from a single interviewee, whereas a chain is a sequence of elements that arises on the aggregate implication matrix (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

The sum of all these chains will ultimately form a hierarchical value map. On this map, each product attribute is linked – through consequences – to values. This map is the main research output of this methodology. The ultimate value of the map is the ability to account for the relations that arose in the interviews (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Discussions of the results and any conclusions will rest heavily on this output.

The Interviews

Interviews ranged between 35 minutes and 75 minutes: well within the expected range suggested by Reynolds and Gutman (1988). Due to the lengthy and fairly personal nature of the interview, participants were paid a sum of R 100.00 on completion of the interview as compensation for their time, attention and willingness to participate in what can be an exhausting process. Participants will had the option to waive their payment in favour of donating it to a charity of their choosing.

As with all laddering interviews, these were not highly structured: the interviewer’s challenge is to allow the direction and themes to emerge in discussion without interference. The interview environment must be non-threatening, and the interviewer must not exhibit any signals of aggression or judgement in tone, gesture or wording – this interview style tends to bring up sensitive personal beliefs, and a participant who feels threatened will give superficial responses (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

Each interview followed a particular plan. After introductory demographic questions, the interviewee was shown the advertisement, which was followed by a general discussion around directed probes regarding the attributes of black beauty and the consequences of being attractive. The probes included discussions around the protagonist (before and after using the product), the role of women in society and the importance of beauty, as well as discussions around the attributes of black beauty and their consequences. The results of this part of the
Once this preliminary discussion was exhausted, the interviewer would change the topic, introducing new information. In brief, this additional information is as follows: this exact product (in both packaging and formulation) is marketed slightly differently in other countries such as Thailand, India and Hong Kong, where, firstly, it is branded as Pond’s Flawless White. In addition, while the advertisements in these countries are effectively identical in plot, characterisation, and even gesture, the animation of the product’s effect on the protagonist’s face is different: most do not show the dark mark disappearing from the woman’s cheek, but rather show a progression of her face becoming distinctly lighter in colour. The interviewee was then asked to respond to these facts, specifically the name change and the lightening effect.

![Figure 9 - Ponds Whitening Animation (SOURCE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6sHKyPxnBM)](source)

**Interview Coding**

**Difficulties in Standardisation and Interpretation**

Negative laddering (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) was often needed to provoke responses from interviewees. In coding, negative ladders were forced into positive space, which led to questionable “translations”. Where respondents were asked “What are the consequences of having dark spots” many responded with comments on appearing diseased or unhealthy, leading to social isolation. This was encoded as a positive ladder, whereby NOT having dark spots leads to being perceived as healthy and disease free, which in turn
leads to being well liked and socially included – arguably this reversal might not be a valid means-end chain.

Many participants named the ideal skin as radiant. This was excluded from the list of attributes of good skin as participants may have been primed for this adjective: it is mentioned 12 times in the advertisement. It is also an ambiguous adjective – usually meaning to emit light or heat, often used in conversation to describe pregnant women, smiling women or healthy women, it is difficult to quantify and standardise across respondents.

**Two Distinct Coding Sets**

Each interview was effectively structured in two parts, effectively exploring two different research questions. As such, the contents had to be mapped and analysed separately, to produce two separate Hierarchical Value Maps. Interview content was mapped on two separate implication matrices for each respondent, in the style of (Van Rekom & Wierenga, 2007). One matrix (A) covered the more general themes of good skin and beauty, while the second (B) explored the responses to the skin lightening information. The particular style of implication matrix allows “mutual dyads” (Van Rekom & Wierenga, 2007, p. 403) to appear in the resulting summary implication matrix, indicating network-like (as opposed to hierarchical) relationships, between nodes (concepts). For methodological simplicity, only direct links were accounted for. The concepts (Attributes, Consequences and Values) in the implication matrix were assembled from responses over the course of the first few interviews with the aim of being mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. By the end of the interviewing process, these amounted to 33 different concepts in matrix A.

**Cut-Off Level**

Determining the cut-off level for inclusion in the model involves a trade-off between comprehensiveness and clutter (Pieters, Baumgartner, & Allen, 1995). Logically, nodes with a high “hit rate” are more significant to the model than less popular nodes. As the nodes in the map had been created on a demand basis, no nodes scored zero. These were reduced by critical assessment of the concepts – semantic overlap led to some concepts being amalgamated and the lowest-scoring concepts were excluded (n<5). This left 27 concepts with a minimum score of n=9. Further reduction was carried out on the basis of link scores, and a minimum link strength of n=5 was selected as best representing the results.
Table 1 - Cutoff analysis for matrix A

The link scoring system produced at least one anomaly – the concept “self-esteem” was the 5th most mentioned concept in the interviews (n=41) however no links exceeded 4 occurrences. This probably points to this concept being very diffuse and, though very present in the minds of the respondents, not of great value to the model.

Table 2 - Cutoff analysis for matrix B

Mapping to (Schwartz, 1994)’s Universal Values

The resultant HVM is expressed largely in the words of the participants, subject to logic imposed by the researcher, however “coding should preferably be based on cognitive categories widely shared among both consumers, researchers, and users of research results, and not on the researcher's idiosyncratic cognitive categories” (Grunert & Grunert, 1995, p. 213). To apply an academic validity to these concepts, they were subsequently been linked to universal values identified in (Schwartz, 1994).
Only the highest level values expressed by the respondents were mapped to (Schwartz, 1994)’s values – some lower level attributes and consequences, while often similar to these values, were generally expressed by interviewees as instrumental rather than ultimate. One exception is the consequence “Know what you want / direction / dreams” in HVMA which strongly corresponds to Choosing Own Goals - Self-Direction (Schwartz, 1994). Respondents often struggled to proceed further up the ladder after this point (in-degrees = 22, out-degrees = 12), offering vague and uncertain consequences. This concept was therefore ‘elevated’ to a terminal value.

Children and family values, while mentioned often by interviewees, has no immediate match to (Schwartz, 1994)’s universal values. Interviewees linked this value to love, a meaningful life and God’s will (Benevolence) but also success and respect from the community (Power). Based on the greater number of links to benevolent values, Children was deemed a part of Benevolence.

Identity as a black woman was raised frequently by respondents, linked to an ongoing identity crisis amongst a rapidly urbanised generation of women, separated from their parents’ generation by a gulf of income, geography and education. The tension centres around the conflicting identities as a sophisticated, career-driven urbanite on one hand (often
derided as “trying to be white”) and an obedient daughter, proud of black identity and tradition. One of the respondents referred to “the boxes we have to fit into”, namely that her language, behaviour and even her choice of radio station has to change according to the different social settings she inhabits. Identity was therefore mapped to (Schwartz, 1994)’s values of honouring elders and respect for tradition (tradition and conformity).

IV. Results

Hierarchical Value Map I

The hierarchical value map for the initial parts of the interviews produced some noteworthy relationships as prompted by the advertisement and subsequent discussions around skin and beauty. Note that font size corresponds to number of times the concept was mentioned. Arrow weight corresponds to the number of times that specific link (in that specific direction) was mentioned.

Dark spots, acne and other blemishes quickly emerged as a major concern among many of the women, linking in particular to a perception of disease. One respondent even suggested that others might perceive a woman with dark spots as potentially having AIDs or HIV (this may be a reference to Kaposi’s sarcoma, a visible symptom of AIDs which causes dark spots on the skin). A few participants were nonplussed by the dark spots proposition, suggesting that “perhaps they are saying that WE are the dark spots” and “maybe we are just dark spots walking around waiting for Ponds to make us lighter so that we can lead happier lives”.

Beauty, attractiveness to men, marriage and confidence emerged as the largest themes, with marriage appearing to be an important stepping stone towards even higher values such as life meaning and godliness. Direction, wealth and sophistication arose as important values, and all respondents placed an emphasis on upward mobility at some point during the interview. Some described the protagonist (before she used the product) as “not knowing any better” and perhaps “coming from the location” and that she “might just be using Sunlight for her face”. Using “the right product” was associated with education, class and even wisdom. Sophisticated black women were referred to as “model C” – a reference to the better-quality government schools available in relatively affluent areas. They were also referred to as “cheese girls”, alluding to women who eat cheese and salad, which is considered “white people food” and an impractical choice for nutrition in the townships.
where cheese is an expensive and poor choice of protein, and refrigeration is virtually impossible. These cheese girls were accused of speaking English with an affected accent, “trying to sound white”. Hence eating cheese and salad - and being healthy and slender – and speaking with an English accent are a means of broadcasting wealth and class.

Lightness of skin was noted as an important attribute for a woman, both to appear beautiful (as appreciated by her peers) and to attract a man. Some respondents argued that the “obsession” with lighter skin was the hallmark of an older generation, and that younger women were more comfortable with the complexion they were born with. Other respondents were adamant that the lightness message is as strong as ever, and that black women have been “taught to despise our own blackness, and that the darker we are, the less loveable we are”.

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Figure 11 - Hierarchical Value Map I
Hierarchical Value Map II

The results of the second HVM are of great interest. Mention of the lightening effect of the product prompted almost unanimous concerns about harsh chemicals and product safety. Note again that font size corresponds to number of times the concept was mentioned. Arrow weight corresponds to the number of times that specific link (in that specific direction) was mentioned.

Almost every respondent referred to women – usually of an older generation – who had suffered terrible scarring as a result of unsafe skin lightening products. Two were concerned that lightening their skin might make them more vulnerable to the sun. Four worried that using this product on their face might lead to a mismatch of skin tone: “A Fanta face with a Coca-cola body”.

However, many acknowledged that there is a wide-spread desire to have lighter skin (sometimes called “yellow” skin), and that this product would cater to that market. Lighter-skinned women were sometimes referred to as “Fanta girls” – their skin resembling the colour of the soft drink Fanta. At least one respondent mentioned that a particularly light-skinned woman might, as a result of this emotive environment, encounter teasing from her fellow women, such as being called “Leswefe” which means “Albino”, referring to a person suffering from achromatosis, a deficiency of melanin. In a similar negative vein, some referred to the preference for lighter-skinned partners as being “colour-struck” or having “yellow-fever”. It was broadly acknowledged that that desire is rooted in a need to emulate white people. In most cases, this white emulation was related to wealth, respect and sophistication, attributes that seem to be associated with white people. In some cases, respondents argued that, in an integrated society, some women, especially young women, just want to “blend in” with their white friends.

Many respondents were saddened by other women’s desire to lighten their skin. This was linked to a form of “black self-loathing” where the decision to pursue lighter skin is perceived as a decision to reject one’s heritage and black identity in favour of emulating white people. The majority of respondents cited the choice to wear a “weave” – a usually synthetic form of wig made to look like Caucasian hair – as a similar signal of white aspiration.
In response to the alternate name of the product, Pond’s Flawless White, the response was surprisingly more muted. Among the less educated respondents, the response was one of either confusion or indifference. Most of the more educated respondents immediately recognised it as a racial classification term linked with Apartheid, and predicted that it would cause protests in the media if launched under that name. Many felt that this name would reinforce feelings of inferiority amongst women with darker skin, and as such might cause self esteem problems, particularly amongst impressionable children and teenagers. One said “Am I now not a person, because I am black? That hurts my feelings a lot.” In all, they felt it was an irresponsible message to be spreading in the media. One respondent, commenting on the potency of the sometimes worrying cultural and beauty messages in the media, stated “sometimes the media is louder than the humanity of your social space.”
Additional Themes

A few respondents made mention of particular social values surrounding women, as prompted by the advertisement. Some were offended at the implication that “getting a man” was the paramount goal of all women, and that their skin was the tool to achieve this: “she is
reduced to the tone of her skin and a half-heart locket for five years”. They were irritated by the implication her life had been apparently meaningless for the full 5 years that the man had been gone.

Her passive character also came under attack: one described her as “pure, virtuous and submissive” with irritation. Another described her as “pedestrianised” – she is always walking, even when taking her suitcase to the airport, and commented that her representation of the ideal woman was “childlike, able to be led”. Many noticed that patience, gentleness and reticence were implied to be important characteristics in a woman, and that the antagonist’s aggression, ambition and drive was portrayed as unwomanly and justly punished – some expressed irritation with this, while three actually approved of this message.

More took offense at the man’s attitude towards the protagonist, that he did not acknowledge her purely because of her skin – which most identified as being very beautiful, in spite of the animation showing her blemishes. Many noticed that the protagonist was very slim, and decidedly lighter-skinned than the antagonist, boasting a longer, higher quality weave. One went so far as to say “that is not a black woman: that is a tan white woman.”

There were some complaints that this is all too common in mainstream beauty marketing: Eurocentric beauty ideals which lead to unrealistic and unsustainable perceptions of beauty among young black women. As one participant put it, “this ad reinforces a particular view about success, beauty and blackness.”

V. Discussion

Dark spots are shown to be an affliction about which these women are almost neurotic, linking it to grooming, health and thus further to standard of living and sophistication. Good grooming may be a universal aspiration, but this takes on an entirely ominous tone once the link is made between dark skin spots and AIDs: in that dark spots may mark a woman as a member of that heavily stigmatised group.

Lighter skin clearly carries significance in the signalling of social group membership. Labels such as “Fanta girl” or “cheese girl” are the result of a social dynamic whereby these women are considered members of an “almost white” upper class, more sophisticated and respected than their sisters in the locations. Members of the darker-skinned group deride their manner of speaking, fake hair and pretentious mannerisms, taunting them as Leswefe and calling the men who chase them “colour struck”.
This intergroup tension seems to form part of a broader identity crisis, where black African women are confronted with competing identities in a society that their mothers and grandmothers never experienced and could not prepare them for. Economic opportunity and education have created a rift between them and the elders they grew up with and were taught to respect. Participants described the different roles they fill at home, at work and in their social lives, where their language, accent, attitude and dress must change to suit the situation.

Into this somewhat bizarre social scene enters what many of the women described as a fairly hostile, eurocentric media, with relentless images of a whiter sort of black. It promotes a slender figure, smooth synthetic hair and a paler skin, such that many of these women often feel that to be dark is to be unlovable. As one participant put it: “Sometimes it’s really hard for a black woman to just be black”. This is the root of the serious dilemma facing Ponds.

**VI. Conclusion**

It is clear that this advertisement is effective in triggering significant attitudes regarding attraction, marriage and a need to be beautiful, ultimately leading to upliftment and improved quality of life. What is cause for concern is the significant irritation and even offense expressed by many of the participants, especially women who are arguably the target market of this premium product. The additional information – freely available on the internet - about the international marketing strategy was disturbing to an overwhelming majority of respondents.

Ponds needs to consider very seriously whether they want their brand to be associated with this potentially toxic social discourse. While some women were unfazed by the advertisement, the more affluent and educated respondents were largely offended, irritated or even outraged by the messages conveyed. As this latter group may prove to be role models to the former group, and would certainly be more vocal in their opinions and concerns. As black women in South Africa come to access better education and economic opportunity, they may come to regard the Ponds brand with distaste as a direct result of the messages conveyed in this sort of advertisement.
### Appendix I: Matrix A

|   | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
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| 14 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 15 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 16 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 17 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 18 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
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| 20 |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
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**Notes:**

- **In Degrees**: 0 to 33
- **Out Degrees**: 0 to 33

**Columns:***

1. A1: Wealth
2. A2: Independence
3. A3: Status
4. A4: Security
5. A5: Wisdom (Maturity)
6. A6: Sophistication / Class
7. A7: Respect
8. A8: Meaning / Godliness
9. A9: Love & Happiness
10. A10: Children / Family Values
11. A11: Marriage / Wealthy Husband
12. A12: Self-Esteem
13. A13: Career Success / Promotion
14. A14: Self-Direction
15. A15: Glamorous
16. A16: Well-Liked
17. A17: Well Groomed / Care for Self
18. A18: Attractive to Men
19. A19: Confident
20. A20: Health, No Disease
22. A22: Using the Right Product
23. A23: Beautiful
24. A24: Smooth and Young
25. A25: Light or “Yellow”
26. A26: Matt

**Rows:***

1. Health
2. Beauty
3. Children / Family
4. Marriage / Wealthy Husband
5. Self-Esteem
6. Career Success / Promotion
7. Self-Direction
8. Glamorous
9. Well-Liked
10. Well Groomed / Care for Self
11. Attractive to Men
12. Confident
13. Health, No Disease
14. Not Ignored: Attention, Respect
15. Using the Right Product
16. Beautiful
17. Smooth and Young
18. Light or “Yellow”
19. Matt
### Appendix II: Matrix B

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VII. Bibliography


**VIII. Plagiarism Declaration**

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another’s work and pretend that it is one’s own.

2. I have used a recognised convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution and quotation from the works of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced.

3. I certify that this submission is all my own work.

4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy this essay with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.