# SKIN DEEP: RACE, BEAUTY, AND SKIN COLOUR IN BRITAIN, 1930-1980

by

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## Abstract

This thesis interrogates the history of British racism and skin tone through the lens of skin modification practices from 1930-80. It uses suntanning and skin bleaching as case studies to illustrate the permanence of systemic racism in British society, probing the intersections between race, gender, skin, and beauty. In so doing it situates studies of bleaching and tanning within constructions of race and whiteness, illustrating the ways in which these modification techniques shaped the ways that racism was experienced in Britain. It juxtaposes dermatological and cultural histories and sources to illustrate attitudes toward skin tone and the permanence of systemic racism in Britain.

Both case studies trace the rise of skin bleaching and suntanning, respectively, using a wide range of sources from science and dermatology, alongside sources from popular culture outlets. This exposes the juxtaposing discourses of science and culture surrounding skin modification, and change over time with regard to medical advice and cultural fashions, embedded within systems of race. This thesis furthers historiographical debates within a wide range of fields in modern British history, print culture, histories of race, and histories of women, gender, and feminism.

## Dedication

*To my Pops, this is for you.*

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Last but not least, my lovely Barnaby. For the endless love, laughs, and for always being happy to see me. I don't know where I'd be without him.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ADA | American Dermatological Association |
| AM | Ammoniated Mercury |
| BMA | British Medical Association |
| BMJ | British Medical Journal |
| BNA | British Nationality Act |
| BUFP | Black Union and Freedom Party |
| BWG | Brixton Black Women's Group |
| CARD | Campaign Against Racial Discrimination |
| D&D | Dyke and Dryden |
| EO | Exogenous Ochronosis |
| FDA | Food and Drug Administration |
| FTC | Federal Trade Commission |
| HQ | Hydroquinone |
| LCP | League of Coloured Peoples |
| MBEH | Monobenzyl Ether of Hydroquinone |
| MMEH | Monomethyl Ether of Hydroquinone |
| NYT | New York Times |
| OWAAD | Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent |
| PAC | Pan African Congress |
| PPP | Polynesian Panther Party |
| RRA | Race Relations Act |
| SPF | Sun Protection Factor |

| | |
|---|---|
| UCPA | United Coloured People's Association |
| U.S.A | United States of America |
| UV | Ultraviolet |
| WASU | West African Students Union |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WIW | West Indian World |

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# INTRODUCTION

*I know that*
*Beauty's only skin deep, yeah, yeah, yeah*
*And I believe that*
*Beauty's only skin deep, oh yeah*

*So if you're lookin' for a lover*
*Don't judge a book by its cover*
*She may be fine on the outside*
*But so untrue on the inside*

The Temptations, *Beauty is Only Skin Deep*, 1967

*I've been around a while*
*I know wrong from right*
*And since a long time ago*
*Things been always black and white*
*Just like you can't judge a book by the cover*
*We all gotta be careful*
*How we treat one another*

*Skin Deep*
*Skin Deep*
*Underneath we're all the same*
*Skin Deep*
*Skin Deep*
*Underneath we're all the same*
*We're all of the same*

Buddy Guy, *Skin Deep*, 2008

Skin is manifest, material, and pressing in contemporary life. As a social, cultural and historic concept, attitudes toward skin have fuelled debates, ruptured communities, and facilitated the continuation of racism. This is a thesis about race and skin, and how, through various influences, Black and white women have modified their skin to achieve different ideals of beauty. I use suntanning and skin bleaching as case studies to illustrate the permanence of systemic racism in British society from 1930-80. While the literature on British histories of race, activism, Blackness, and beauty are vast, this thesis presents a specific intervention within these fields of historical research. It tells a particular story of British racism through the lens of skin modification practices. Attitudes toward skin tone, through both dermatological and cultural histories of suntanning and skin bleaching, shaped the ways in which racism was experienced in Britain.

The intersections between race, gender, skin, and beauty are exemplified when viewed through the desires for lightening skin tones through bleaching, and darkening skin tones via tanning. Both of these practices tell the story of the marginalisation and exclusion of Black women in British society. The contribution of this thesis is to bring together the study of bleaching and tanning in current historical literature. While various studies on bleaching and tanning have separately analysed their various impacts upon societies around the globe, this thesis considers both kinds of skin modification as inextricably linked in order to illustrate the permanence of systemic racism. By considering these modification practices together, and analysing within constructions of race and whiteness, this thesis allows for a fuller, more cohesive, and original story of British racism and the impact of such upon skin from 1930-80. Whereas the meanings and experiences of racism change over time – including during the period under consideration here – skin acts as a continuously useful concept through which to illustrate such racism. This thesis explains these complex and intricate changes in the ideal skin tone amongst Black and white British women, alongside its intertwined links to class, gender, health, and beauty.

Using skin as a concept to write these histories, relies on the notion that the relationship between race and racialised attitudes are not only a philosophical matter.[1] Among many other conceptualisations, skin is one of many visual markers which has determined attitudes toward identity, ethnicity, and thus, race and differentiation.[2] Other features such hair, nose, and lips, alongside skin, act as signifiers of racial discrimination. Longstanding histories of race, colonial conquest, notions of beauty (and who can achieve this beauty), tie together to make skin tone historically and culturally significant, not only during 1930-80, but

[1] See: C. Fusco and B. Wallis, (eds.) *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (New York, 2003); E. N. Glenn, *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Colour Matters* (Stanford, 2009); A. Montagu., *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (New York, 1978)
[2] See: S. Ahmed and J. Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin* (London, 2001)

for centuries prior. Exploring these different functions of the skin, considering how skin changes through modification, for whom, and why, provides the ability to write a different material history of the complexities of skin. By examining skin bleaching and suntanning, this thesis reveals the commodification and aestheticization of skin as a signifier of beauty, and the cultural and political act of constructing racial 'Others'.

The specific acts of skin modification: tanning, by exposing the skin to sunlight to purposefully change the skin to a darker tone, and bleaching, by applying creams on the face and body to achieve a lighter skin tone, illustrate the relationship of skin to personal identity and beauty. Suntanning and skin bleaching illustrate the permanence of race in British society. Judgements, attitudes, and real-life consequences based on skin tone, which is often seen as a marker of race, and by extension identity, has continued to marginalise members of society. Using skin to trace attitudes of race through a focus on complexion modification allows for the understanding of how racism has been practiced in various ways. This thesis complicates the notion of whiteness and the meanings of various skin tones as different facets of British racism and beauty politics appeared throughout this period.

## Skin and the Signification of Beauty

The practice of skin bleaching and whitening is a global one. The beauty ideal of white skin in Asia, for instance, predates colonialism and 'western' notions of beauty. Since the Gojoseon era, the first dynasty in Korea from 2333-108 BCE, women applied Miansoo lotion to achieve a white skin tone due to its valorisation and idealised requirement for beauty.[3] In Japan, using white powder to accentuate women's beauty has been viewed as a

[3] E.P.H. Li, H. J. Min, R.W. Belk, 'Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Cultures', in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research*, 35 (2008), pp.444-449, p.444

moral duty since the Edo period (1603-1868). This is further illustrated by a proverb translated to "white skin makes up for seven defects," implying both a beauty hierarchy in which skin is superior to other forms of appearance, and the power of white skin in wider social and cultural practices.[4] Another popular idiom in China, "one white covers up three uglinesses," illustrates the cultural importance of whiteness, and women tried to achieve this by swallowing powdered pearls.[5] In India, white skin is a mark of caste and many women bathed in turmeric to achieve whiteness as early as the sixteenth century, alongside many other painful processes.[6]

Whiteness as a superior identity, rooted in histories of imperialism, colonialism, and slavery, has led to the idealisation and privilege of white skin in social, cultural, political, and economic life. The privilege of white skin informed the racialisation of beauty aesthetics, and the 'perfect' idea of beauty assumed and presumed white skin as the 'norm'. Detrimental and long lasting colonial attitudes permeated societies across the globe, with the privilege of white identity embedding the superiority of white aesthetics in colonial and postcolonial societies. Indigenous women in Suriname, bleached their skin in order to be seen as more attractive to white male colonisers. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stemming from these colonial notions of white superiority, the prevalence of 'Blanqueamiento' or 'Branqueamento' - marrying people with lighter or white skin tones in order to produce children with lighter skin tones - has led to the increasing use of skin lightening products in Latin and South American countries.[7] In the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, before skin bleaching products were manufactured, many women used cashew nut oil to burn the top layers of the skin. The

[4] H. Wagatsuma, 'The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan' *Daedalus*, 96 (1967), pp. 407-443, p.407
[5] P. A. Robinson, 'Perceptions of Beauty and Identity: The Skin Bleaching Phenomenon in Jamaica', Adult Education Research Conference (2011) https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2011/papers/85
[6] E.P.H. Li, [et.al], Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Cultures, p.444
[7] Robinson, Perceptions of Beauty and Identity

sale of skin bleaches soared in the twentieth century, partly due to the popularity of the 'brownin' skin tone (light-skinned Black person) being seen as a way to improve social, economic, and beauty prospects.[8] In various African countries - Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Nigeria in particular - bleaching products were advertised as a way to "disable African features" and achieve beauty, with these products reaching their peak in the twentieth century.[9]

Whiteness as a power dynamic, and a beauty ideal, has been (and still is) global and local in its influence and impact on society. From education, housing, healthcare, incarceration, and employment, skin impacts every aspect of life. While there are a multitude of influences stemming from colonisation, capitalism, globalisation, and cultural traditions, both global and local politics of race and the embeddedness of white superiority meant that bleaching creams became more than just creams. They became methods to achieve a superior status, or an attempt to reach an unachievable beauty ideal and lifestyle. Within the narrative of white superiority, this thesis intersects with scholarship relating to whiteness studies. It both contributes to the intellectual potential of this discourse, and also queries the some of the existing literature, and the implications of such, within the historical discipline.

Critical whiteness studies emerged in the late 1990s within the dramatic development of race as a historical concept, alongside the importance of cultural studies as a discipline.[10]

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[8] K. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Duke, 2015), p.138. Also see: D. Hope, 'From Browning to Cake Soap: Popular Debates on Skin Bleaching in the Jamaican Dancehall', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4 (2011), pp.165-195

[9] J. Pierre, '"I Like Your Colour!" Skin Bleaching and Geographies of Race in Urban Ghana', *Feminist Review*, 90 (2008), pp.9-29, p.19

[10] Significant works on whiteness studies are as follows: W. E. B., Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (New York, 1935; reprint, New York, 1995); A. Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-century America* (London, 1990); D. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991)
P. Kolchin, 'Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America', *Journal of American History*, 89 (2002), pp.154-173; M. F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, 1999); N. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); E. Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historian's Imagination', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), pp.3-32; B. J.

The work of David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (1991), catapulted whiteness studies into the theoretical limelight, drawing considerable attention – positive and critical – to discourses of whiteness. As espoused by many scholars, whiteness studies has been used to explain constructions of racism, white supremacy, and to "explore the various social, political, and material conditions that inform its meanings."[11]

The main contribution of whiteness studies to the historical discipline was the concept of whiteness being malleable. However, the supposed malleability of whiteness has since been criticised, due to the reinforcement that People of Colour constantly experienced racism on a daily basis, as opposed to whiteness being malleable, changeable, and fluid, dependent on the socio-cultural condition. The theoretical underpinnings of whiteness have been criticised most notably by Eric Arnesen and Barbara Fields. The main flaws of whiteness studies are presented as having a considerable lack of empirical and archival evidence from the work of key scholars, conceptual imprecisions and inconsistent definitions of whiteness and race, and using creative wordplay to make vast historiographical claims.[12]

Complexion can be malleable - and modified - via complexion modification practices such as tanning, bleaching, and using make-up. However, whereas aesthetics and beauty can change, identity cannot. People's perception of skin colour can change, and has changed over time, yet skin tone means that racism always exists. Even if skin bleaching creams successfully lightened Black skin considerably, women may have seen themselves as more beautiful due to lighter skin aesthetics, but could not achieve the racial whiteness (or whiteness-as-identity), that afforded white superiority. Ultimately, Black women were

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Fields, 'Racism, Whiteness, and Identity', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 60 (2001), pp.48-56; J. Munro, 'Roots of 'Whiteness'', *Labour/Le Travail*, 54 (2004), pp.175–92.

[11] M. Chresfield, 'Creoles of the Mountains: Race, Regionalism, and Modernity in Progressive Era Appalachia', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 21 (2022), pp.19-39, p.36

[12] E. Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historian's Imagination', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), pp.3-32, p.3

excluded as potential consumers of beauty products due to their identity and skin tone. Further, light skinned Black women with a golden skin tone were marginalised only because of their Blackness-as-identity. As such, flaws within discourses of malleability, have rendered whiteness studies among some scholars as an inadequate tool of historical analysis.

Before the rise of the cosmetics industry during the early twentieth century, women in the UK and USA had been concocting their own recipes for bleaching creams, strongly influenced by discourses of whiteness and race, to achieve the 'perfect' milky white complexion. The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) was a huge catalyst in the commodification of whitening cosmetics among white European women. Elizabeth I used a white powder as the base of her makeup which produced a porcelain complexion.[13] This "Elizabethan ideal of beauty" saw many women cover their faces in bleaching creams, lightening lotions, and thick white powders, often created from extremely toxic substances such as ammonia, ceruse, and lye.[14]

At the height of colonial exploitation and English immigration to the U.S., many American women "inherited this European tradition of whitening," which consisted of home remedies, recipes, and formulas.[15] As Historian Kathy Peiss reinforces, white British and American women used whitening cosmetics to achieve their "ideal face" – to remove freckles, blotches, and gain a whiter tone - which signified racial privilege, bourgeois ideologies, and feminine beauty.[16] As the popularity and availability of such products increased, the profitability of these commodities rose rapidly. As the primary users of cosmetics in the private and public sphere, upper-class society women in the early modern period helped to

[13] Y. A. Blay, 'Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy: By Way of Introduction' *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4 (2011), pp.4-46, p.21
[14] *Ibid*., p.21
[15] *Ibid*., p.21
[16] K. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Pennsylvania, 2008), p.40

embed the notion of whiteness as an English trait, alongside other specific features illustrating wealth such as hair and clothing.

Whiteface cosmetics, bleaching, and the overall desire for whiter skin, contributed to the entrenchment of whiteness as a primary signifier of Englishness.[17] In the consumption of such whitening products, women "contributed to the formation of cultural identity within a burgeoning global economy in the early modern period."[18] Attaching whiteness to *the* identity of Englishness, facilitated the 'Othering' of People of Colour. For those viewed or designated as 'Other' in society, meant exclusion through skin tone in many aspects of life, not cosmetics alone. As such, the notion of white normativity as both fundamental and assumed, positioned any divergence to white skin and white beauty ideals on the borders of normative, and thus, 'Othered' and marginalised. The constant positioning of Blackness as "the unspoken and invisible Other of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses" underpinned and justified a marginalising and exclusionary society.[19] Upon increasing colonial contact with individuals from other parts of the world, whiteface cosmetics arose as one answer to the pressing concern of accentuating difference by defining themselves as white racial subjects.[20] However, in the strive for differentiation, or accentuation of privilege, using temporary and removable cosmetics revealed the ability to use skin as a signification of difference, and to complicate the boundaries of whiteness and lightness with regard to beauty standards.

In Britain, there is a considerably more public story to suntanning as opposed to skin bleaching, with there being much more coverage in magazines, television commercials, scientific and dermatological research, market research, and becoming popular among a wide

[17] K. Poitevin, 'Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 11 (2011), pp.59-89, p.62
[18] *Ibid.*, p.62
[19] S. Hall, "New Ethnicities" in H-K, Chen and D. Morley (eds.) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, (London, 1996), pp.442-452, p.441
[20] Poitevin, Inventing Whiteness, p.62

range of people. This could be due to its prevalence among white populations, as companies, health professionals and magazines - which marginalised Black women - placed a much greater emphasis on the importance of suntanned beauty, and its detrimental impacts on *white* skin. Though tanning has had devastating consequences on the skin, many people were not aware of the these dangers until the late 1970s. Companies such as *Ambre Solaire*, *Cooltan*, *Charles of the Ritz*, *Elizabeth Arden*, *Delial*, and a huge range of other companies – bought out by even larger firms such as Unilever and *L'Oreal* post-1980 – have profited hugely from this trend, and continue to do so to this day. This is not to say that those who profited from the practice of skin bleaching were silent. *Ambi*, *Palmers*, *Artra*, *Esoterica*, and *Venus de Milo*, made huge profits from their skin bleaches (also bought out by larger firms), and appeared in a wide range of magazines targeted toward the Black population. However, the stories among their users are much less publicly prominent. Histories of these products and their users, then, tell a unique story of marginalisation and racism through skin modification practices, and more broadly, British racism in the twentieth century.

## Skin As a Lens for British Racism

Broadly speaking, both skin tanning and bleaching have centuries-old, global histories, practiced by different societies, for different reasons, which change over time and place. In a British context, desires for white skin were shaped by imperial conquests and white superiority, which were, by the twentieth century, surpassed by a suntan's signalling of beauty and fashion. Within this context, however, older logics of white superiority did not disappear. During 1930-80, the ways in which race was interpreted changed drastically. Skin has consistently impacted and driven British racism through this period of change, in governmental policy-making and socio-cultural life. Writing in 1987, shortly after the period

studied here, Paul Gilroy described race as a "discontinuous and unevenly developed process. It can change, assuming different shapes and articulating different political relations. Racist ideologies and practices have different meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle."[21] At every stage, skin and the meaning we ascribe to it, has supported shifts in racial thinking.

It is impossible to discuss the importance and impact of skin on histories of British racism without first considering the legacies of imperialism. "For almost half a millennium, Europe had ravaged the countries of Africa, Asia, and America (North and South), imposed her religions and cultures on their peoples, and…in the wake of that 'civilising mission', one thousand five hundred million natives lay torn and rootless."[22] Alongside imperialism, Christian semiotics played a huge role in the development of attitudes toward race. Whiteness and Blackness (alongside beauty and ugliness), have been treated as opposing binary categories. Whiteness (and white skin) has been equated with clarity, innocence, purity, and morality, as opposed to Blackness (and Black skin) with violence, evil, malice, and deceit.[23] According to J.J. Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), "a beautiful body will be all the more beautiful the whiter it is."[24] In this sense, goodness, beauty, and dominance is equated with whiteness, and is set against Blackness, which carried connotations of inferiority, evil, and ugliness. Over time, these meanings were deployed and inflicted upon individuals in society based on skin colour by those with white skin, to reinforce the supposed superiority of white identity and aesthetics.

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[21] P. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London, 1992), p.42
[22] A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London, 1982), p.116
[23] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) trans. H. B. Samuel (London, 1913), p.25. Nietzsche juxtaposed the Latin word *malus* (bad/evil) with dark/black (*me/lav*). This was characterised as '*hic niger est*', which translated into 'that man is a dangerous character/He is black.' In this sense, goodness, beauty, and dominance is equated with the Aryan race or whiteness, and is set against blackness, which carried connotations of inferiority, evil, and ugliness.
[24] J.J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), trans. H. S. Mallgrave (Los Angeles, 2006), p.195

Continuing with the ways in which skin colour served as a rationalisation for racism, the development of eighteenth century racial theories, profoundly based in 'science', saw skin become the "overwhelming discriminating factor in theories of racial difference."[25] As Michael Banton has argued, race took on a new phase of meaning, this being, race "signifying a permanent category of humans [and thus]…the notion that differences between human groups were natural and permanent."[26] As such, this saw the development of biological justifications regarding the superiority of certain skin tones, i.e., whiteness, and the inferiority of skin that was not white. Part of the growing interest in "raciology" (the scientific study of race), was due to imperial expansion: the slave trade and economic reliance on colonised countries and their populations, led to a deepening desire to explain this 'difference'.[27] During the first half of the nineteenth century, physical differences such as skin tone were "correlated with cultural and social status through biological justification."[28] Part of the eminence of race science owed to the aftermath of Charles Darwin's *Origins of the Species* (1859), in which, continued social, political, and economic domination of white elites in Britain, was reinforced by the biological rationalisation white identity and aesthetics as superior.[29] Due to scientific theories of race, skin tone and other supposed physical distinctions served as a signifier for superiority or inferiority. It was these physical distinctions – skin tone or complexion in particular – that helped to lay the foundations for the systematic exploitation of Black skin tones in Britain.

Also intimately linked with the enduring ideas of imperialism and scientific theories of race, was the development of Social Darwinism and the Eugenics movement. Many of the

[25] S. O'Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London, 2003), p.147
[26] G. Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930-62* (London, 2008), p.6
[27] E. Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge, 1991), p.15
[28] *Ibid.*, p.15-16
[29] *Ibid.,* p.16

scientists involved in the biological 'investigations' of race, were interested and invested in eugenic ideas. Eugenics played a major role in shaping ideas of racial difference in British (and American) society. The Eugenics Society, which first met in 1907 under the leadership of scientist Francis Galton, "aimed to promote the importance of good breeding as a vital national issue."[30] More broadly, many Social Darwinists postulated that racial struggle was "fundamental to a scientific understanding of history and culture."[31] As such, these discourses made explicit that "race was an intrinsically hierarchical and evaluative term" seen the mixing together of skin tone and physical descriptors with moral judgement and attitudes.[32] The influence of Social Darwinism expanded through the justification of imperialist policies, such as imperial violence, reaching moral supremacy, the importance of a healthy nation-state, alongside reiterating the consequences of a morally degenerative nation with unhealthy citizens.[33] This, combined with Eugenicist notions of "altering the proportion of good and bad stock" in a diverse population, meant that physical and psychological ideas of difference became "powerful and potent [ways of] generating racial conflict and feeding racial politics."[34] The characterisation of Black citizens (and thus, skin) as primitive, exotic, and barbaric, alongside the physical difference of skin as a signifier, continued to perpetuate the existence of racism in British society.[35] Though the motivations of eugenics relied on a wide range of prejudices including class, gender, and disability, racism via the differentiation of skin colour permeated the thinking of many. Within the eugenic mind-frame, skin could be a

[30] Schaffer, *Racial Science*, p.9
[31] M. Hawkins., *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge, 1997), p.185
[32] *Ibid.*, p.185
[33] *Ibid*., p.231
[34] Schaffer, *Racial Science*, p.7
[35] *Ibid.*, p.7

constantly marginalising or privileging shorthand, and was employed as such by a wide range of scientists and theorists.

Over time, owing to wider progressions in science and changing cultural and political environments, scientific theories of race became a "vanishing vocation." [36] Scholars across disciplines, especially within social sciences, began to unpick the epistemological foundations of scientific theories of race, highlighting the intellectual fragility of racial classifications.[37] Though the scientific legitimacy of biological justifications of race began to dwindle, scientific thinking on race was not static from the 1930s onward. While Hitler's genocidal extremism (and the anti-racist indignation that arose in opposition to his regime), shook the foundations of racial science, it was not enough to destroy the belief among many that racism was rooted in physical and psychological reality.[38] By the end of the Second World War, among intellectual and academic elites "a consensus firmly opposed to racial differences grounded in biology emerged."[39] However, this did not mean that racism ended or disappeared, but lasting legacies of racial thinking changed the ways in which race was defined, justified, and practiced. As such, "scientists and politicians alike, still believed that questions of racial difference and racial mixing were of considerable importance."[40]

In the aftermath of the Second World War, while the colonial empire receded, colonial mentalities formed over generations did not "punctually terminate at the preordained moment when the Empire itself disappear[ed]."[41] Race and anti-Black racism, was conditioned by centuries of "imperial ideologies of white supremacy" which impacted every facet of life,

[36] Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism,* p.4
[37] *Ibid.,* p.4
[38] Schaffer, *Racial Science*, p.5
[39] *Ibid., p.5*
[40] *Ibid.,* p.114
[41] B. Schwarz, 'Claudia Jones and the West Indian Gazette', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (2003), pp.264-285, p.264

including violence, education, housing, policing, employment, and social life.[42] Among many intellectuals and cultural theorists, the twentieth century saw race become more widely recognised as rooted in culture and systems of power. As an ideological construction rooted in power structures which have consistently privileged white skin, hetero-normative masculinity, and the upper-classes, race goes beyond a definition since it "affects the ways in which identities are formed and the social interaction experienced on a day to day basis."[43]

As historian Gavin Schaffer has argued, during 1930-80 there witnessed an "international crescendo of racial politics. [There saw] the rise and fall of Nazism and the Holocaust, the struggle for an end to Southern segregation in the United States, the formal birth of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the final collapse of the European colonial empires."[44] This ensured that race was a continuous presence in British socio-political life.[45] Politics proved to be the key turning point in the transition into a new cultural phase of race, yet physical differences such as skin tone continued to permeate racial thinking.[46] Skin tone was used as a logical marker of Britishness, which meant that Black British subjects were 'Othered' simply due to their skin tone. Discrimination lay within white supremacy and white skin aesthetics, and as such, boundaries of race were decided and implemented through skin colour, alongside institutionalised systems of power.[47]

This 'new racism' as termed by Gilroy, was rooted within "mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion – [it] specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose origin,

[42] K .H. Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (Oxford, 2016), p.5
[43] L. Young, *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London, 1996), p.39
[44] Schaffer, *Racial Science*, p.4-5
[45] *Ibid.,* p.4-5
[46] *Ibid.*, p.7
[47] L. Tabili, 'The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp.54-98, p.60

sentiment, or citizenship assigns them elsewhere."[48] The docking of the Empire Windrush in June 1948 signalled the arrival of a generation of new Black British citizens from (previously colonised) Commonwealth countries. The post-Windrush era, saw the Black population in Britain triple between 1961-64 from around 300,000 to 1 million.[49] West Indians, according to Gilroy, were seen as a "people occupying an indeterminate space between the Britishness which is their colonial legacy and an amorphous, ahistorical relationship with the dark continent."[50] These cultural and physical differences argued Gilroy, led to the need to develop effective controls over who would be allowed to enter Britain.[51] Britishness, or more specifically, the idea of white-Britishness, became the norm against which any difference in ethnicity was measured.[52] In this instance skin was used as a signifier of the politics of race in Britain, and in turn, directly impacted Black British citizens. Built upon these complex and intersecting histories of race and racial difference, there were a wide range of instances which exemplified the superiority of white skin tones as an identity and aesthetic, that perpetuated and continued racism toward Black Britons.

While the British Nationality Act (BNA) in 1948 confirmed the inflow of members of the commonwealth by conferring a status with residence benefits in line with those who were born in Britain. However, the BNA and the citizenship privileges it granted, was immediately perceived as a problem which needed to be controlled.[53] This saw the continuation of political actions motivated by skin colour to discriminate against Black British citizens. The Commonwealth Immigrants Acts in 1962 and 1968, and the Immigrants Act of 1971, were

[48] P. Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London, 1993), p.45
[49] A. Angelo, 'The Black Panthers in London, 1967–1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic', *Radical History Review*, 103 (2009), pp.17-35, p.21.
[50] Gilroy, *Small Acts*, p.45
[51] *Ibid.*, p.45
[52] S. Hall, 'The Multicultural Question' in D. Morley (ed.), Stuart Hall Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora (Durham, 2019), pp.95-133, p.109
[53] J. Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging: Immigration and the Politics of Demographic Governance in Post-war Britain* (London, 2005), p.10-11

passed by both Labour and Conservative governments to control and limit immigration into the United Kingdom from Commonwealth countries. These acts were "determined to be perceived as anti-racist" yet while they did not mention skin colour specifically, they in effect, limited the number of Black people able to enter Britain each year.[54]

The 1962 Bill's intent to "limit the entry of non-white Commonwealth citizens" saw Black and Asian members of society relegated to second class citizens.[55] Despite the Conservative government having denied that race (or skin) was a factor in these policy measures, in reality, there was a deliberate targeting of Black and Asian migrants, while its "impacts on the 'white' commonwealth were deliberately minimised."[56] The active privileging of white immigrants illustrated that skin colour was a major cause of concern among those who were viewed as 'wanted' versus 'unwanted' future citizens of Britain. High profile political figures helped to perpetuate structural racism through skin tone, by expressing and inculcating their own racial hatred for political gains. Peter Griffiths - the Conservative candidate for Smethwick - campaigned on the basis of "ending immigration and repatriating 'the coloureds'."[57] While denying all knowledge of this, his 1964 campaign slogan read 'If you want a n***** neighbour, vote Labour', and subsequently, won a seat as MP for Smethwick against Labour's Patrick Gordon Walker, an outspoken opponent of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.[58] Five years after the 1962 Act, the Labour government continued to perpetuate racist policy measures based on skin colour. The main focus of this "nakedly discriminatory legislation" was to prevent Kenyan Asians fleeing the

[54] Schaffer, *Racial Science,* p.108
[55] Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, p.192.
[56] G. Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (Basingstoke, 2014), p.9
[57] Sivanandan, *Hunger*, p.41
[58] *Ibid.*, p.41

Kenyatta regime from entering Britain.[59] The 1968 act restricted certain citizens from holding British passports, of whom prior, had a legal right to settle in Britain due to the BNA in 1948. Discrimination based on skin through this overt political act, was perpetuated by a special clause which "gave ex-colonials with white skin the continued right of free entry."[60] This clause illustrated the significance of skin in the privileging of whiteness and discrimination of Blackness.

In 1968, Enoch Powell's (another Conservative MP) Rivers of Blood speech, called for an end to racial integration, underpinned by his belief that "the loyalty of Black Britons would always be problematic;" the Black Briton, according to Powell, would "always carry the problem of a failure of allegiance – or deference – to the nation."[61] While Griffiths and Powell garnered support by publicly expressing racist agendas, skin tone continued to set the parameters of post-war immigration policy within sitting governments. The 1971 Immigrants Act only permitted those who had a specific work contract to enter Britain, which essentially ended most forms of immigration and settlement in Britain.[62] With the motivation of removing all possible statutory rights afforded to Commonwealth citizens under the BNA, the Act required future immigrants to have a work permit, detailing time, place, and duration.[63] This limited the time certain Commonwealth citizens could stay in Britain, alongside making it increasingly difficult to find a job and settle. The significance of skin comes to the forefront when considering the concept of partiality. This manifested as "an exemption from immigration controls for those with a parent or grandparent born or naturalised in the United Kingdom," which allowed entry for many 'Old Commonwealth' members.[64] In other words,

[59] P. Fryer, *Staying Power: Black People in Britain Since 1504* (London, 1984), p.390
[60] *Ibid.*, p.390
[61] C. Schofield, '*Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*', (Cambridge, 2013), p.4
[62] Sivanandan, *Hunger*, p.59
[63] Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging,* p.39-40
[64] *Ibid.*, p.39-40

white citizens from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada would be permitted, whilst still effectively blocking the immigration from 'New Commonwealth' countries, of which, saw immigration from mainly People of Colour. Again, skin colour functioned as a motivation and vehicle for (both covert and overt) discriminatory governmental controls.

The British Nationality Act in 1981 saw 'belonging' and rights to citizenship defined in terms of lineage and descendance, so that citizenship was no longer open on the basis of having been a 'colonial subject'. Instead, people with no direct relation in the British Isles would have to apply for 'naturalisation' if they wanted to hold British citizenship.[65] This changing conception of citizenship, saw an "exclusive and racialised" notion of belonging and national identity solidify in the minds of many, furthering the schism between those who accepted that People of Colour were legitimate members of society, and those who did not.[66] These acts, and the responses and consequences they initiated in the rest of society, meant that "step by step, racism was institutionalised, legitimised, and nationalised."[67] Skin colour served as a deliberate signifier of difference, which influenced and impacted governmental decisions and policy making. While the explicit racially motivated elements of this official legislation were not immediately obvious in wording, in practice, these acts exemplify the politics of race based upon skin colour, which subsequently affected individual rights as British citizens.

While post-war immigration controls were passed primarily to deter the arrival of Black migrants, the government did at the same time take measures to try to minimise racial discrimination.[68] The Race Relations Act (RRA) in 1965 (and later in 1968 and 1976), was

[65] *Ibid.*, p.41. This act replaced the tradition of *jus soli* (citizenship by territory) with *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent).
[66] *Ibid.,* p.181.
[67] Fryer, *Staying Power,* p.387
[68] See also: S. Hall, *Familiar Stranger A Life Between Two Islands* (Durham, 2017)*;* K. H. Perry, *London is the Place for Me Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race (Oxford, 2016)*; J. Hampshire, *Citizenship and*

the first legislation in the United Kingdom to outlaw racial discrimination. However, this façade of equality legislation was not wholly designed to support Black people: the RRA in 1965 outlawed discrimination in "places of public resort," which meant that crucial areas of racial discrimination in housing and employment was ignored.[69] Whilst discrimination did not stop in practice, Shamit Saggar has described Labour's policy making as an "immigration-integration equation" when considered alongside the restrictive Commonwealth Immigrants Acts described above.[70] This dualism in legislation with both pro-restriction and pro-equality policies, attempted to address racial discrimination among communities in Britain, alongside restricting immigration in order to "prevent the 'problem' of increased immigrant presence getting any worse."[71] The prompt prosecution of revolutionary Black activist, Michael X, for incitement to racial hatred against white people made in a speech, illustrated that as opposed to assisting or achieving equality on the grounds of race, colour, ethnicity or national origin – and thus, skin colour discrimination - the RRA was rooted in a more complex set of motivations. Both Labour and Conservative governments passed restrictive immigration policies motivated by skin colour, but refused to prioritise skin colour within Race Relations Acts. The constant reinforcement of skin as a signifying element of race politics, through the blaming and targeting of Black skin, and conversely, the representation of white skin as a

*Belonging, Immigration and the Politics of Demographic Governance in Post-war Britain* (London, 2005)*;* R. Waters, *Thinking Black* (Oakland, 2019); P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London, 1992); W. James and C. Harris, *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London,1993); K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (New York, 1997); C. Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013); Z. Layton-Henry and P. B. Rich, *Race, Government and Politics in Britain* (London, 1986)

[69] Perry, *London is the Place For Me*, p.192. Also see: Hampshire and Zig Layton-Henry, *Citizenship and Belonging,* p.33

[70] G. Schaffer, '"Till Death Us Do Part" and the BBC: Racial Politics and the British Working Classes 1965-75' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (2010), pp.454-477, p.455

[71] *Ibid.,* p.455

signifier of superior identity and aesthetics, highlights the relevance of skin modification practices as lens through which to explore the persistence of racism in British society.

## Skin as a Lens for Activism

Driven by the prevalence of racism based on skin colour in governmental policies and actions, the 1920s onward saw the founding of many anti-colonial national and community-based political groups. These made a huge contribution to the ability to organise, exchange ideas, criticise British colonial rule, influence other Caribbean countries and movements, and share experiences of discrimination suffered in Britain and worldwide. This overtly political response, seen in the founding of many organisations, attracted increasing numbers of Black Britons into activism and organising.[72] Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, "there was hardly an Afro-Caribbean association in Britain which did not espouse the cause of colonial independence and of black struggle generally."[73] With this, alongside the development of activist movements abroad, there saw an increasingly prominent message of decolonisation, anti-discrimination, and as Rob Waters notes, the desire for members of such groups to begin "thinking Black."[74] Disseminating from a reservoir of international Black activism, these transnational groups transformed the thinking of Black Britons. While the British Black

[72] A few of these are as follows: Ladipo Solanke's West African Students Union (WASU) was formed on August 7th 1925; Dr Harold Moody and Stella Thomas' founding of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) in 1931; 1944 saw the birth of the British section of the PAC; the wake of the 1962 Immigration Act and worsening attacks on Black Britons saw the founding of a greater mass organisation in the creation of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD); 1967 saw the founding of the United Coloured Peoples Association (UCPA) and the Black Union and Freedom Party (BUFP); the formation of the British Black Panther Party in 1968 by Obi Egbuna, followed by Althea Jones-Lecointe's renowned leadership three months later; the pathbreaking Brixton Black Women's Group (BWG) began in 1973; The Liverpool Black Sisters and the Manchester Black Women's Co-operative both also in 1973; and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) in 1978. While the specific aims and goals of these various groups changed over time, they all existed for the pursuit of racial equality, and the end of discrimination and social injustice in Britain.

[73] Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger,* p.26

[74] R. Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1965-85* (Oakland, 2019), p.2

Power movement and its political responses tell a considerably different story than that of the often prioritised U.S Black Power movement, and often understated Caribbean Black Power movements (alongside anti-colonial and Black Power movements worldwide), these movements were truly transnational in scope.[75] Black Power began its rise as a transnational political organisation in the mid-1960s, and as such, the rise of a "radical politics of Blackness" as the key element of many activist movements among Black Britons "marked a new turn in the history of decolonization and Black liberation."[76]

Facing intense discrimination alongside their male counterparts, Black women "began to look for a collective means to make life more bearable."[77] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scaffe lived in Britain from the 1960s onwards and published *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain,* in 1985. They explained, "the Britain which black women entered in the late 1940s and 50s was a hostile, unwelcoming environment."[78] In order to help women survive and thrive in such conditions, building upon long traditions of resistance practiced by Black women for centuries, women began to collectively organise places of support and activism. Skin here denoted a signpost of solidarity. The reclaiming of Black skin as beautiful in response to the unwavering racism and discrimination of their joint lived experience, became a significant terrain of anti-racist struggle.

One site of resistance was the hair salon. While there were virtually no Black hairdressing salons in Britain prior to the 1960s, women would meet in one another's homes

[75] Some examples of global Black Power movements, or those influenced by or relating to, elements of Black Power are as follows: The Black Power Movement in Jamaica, beginning in 1960; Black Power in Guyana (in the formation of the African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa), 1964; Black Power in Bermuda, 1968; Black Panthers in Algiers, 1969; The Black Power 'Moment' in Barbados, 1970; The Black Power revolution in Trinidad and Tobago, 1970; The Polynesian Panther Party (PPP) in New Zealand founded in 1971; The Israeli Black Panthers, 1971; The Dalit Panthers in India, 1972, and many more worldwide.
[76] Waters, *Thinking Black,* p.5
[77] B. Bryan, S. Dadzie, S. Scaffe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London, 1985), p.131. Other sources of community help and refuge was provided through church groups. These religious communities provided assistance and support for newly arriving immigrants which the government had refused to help.
[78] *Ibid.*, p.129

to style hair, socialise, and exchange news.[79] Both women's kitchens and later, beauty salons, became a fundamental feature of everyday lives, providing not only beauty treatments, but a sense of community, "refuge and sisterhood,…and a place in which they could organise and mobilise other women."[80] Skin, hair, and beauty more broadly, provided a means to escape the realities of life in Britain and offered continuity and familiarity with the social lifestyle many had left behind in the Caribbean.[81] Following these social organisations and emerging communities, the "increasing ferocity of racist attacks, galvanised us [women] into organising in a more overtly political way."[82] It is important not to underestimate the lasting impact that colonial attitudes toward whiteness and race had on the development of beauty politics in Britain. Writing a history of skin (which includes skin bleaching) relies on the intersectional realities of racism, and the necessity of Black feminisms as intersecting with gender, class, sexuality, age, and disability. In order to understand the extent of racialised beauty politics, it is necessary to recognise the importance of Black British feminism, the skin discrimination via beauty that Black women faced, and the inroads made by women to fight back.

I posit Black feminism as a politics of liberation and affirmation, and Black feminists as agents of change and disruption to a world which diminishes, plunders, and exploits Black women's thoughts and livelihoods which exist as the "bedrock of liberal democracies."[83] Black feminism is a necessity, a movement and politics that "radically dissents from and subverts the hegemonic constructions of Black women as either irrelevant and invisible objects or alien Others."[84] These knowledge productions, creative spaces, and community

[79] Tony Wade, *The Black Cosmetic Kings* (London, Hansib, 2017), p.129
[80] Tanisha Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (North Carolina, 2015), p.23
[81] Bryan [et.al], *Heart of the Race,* p.131-132
[82] *Ibid.*, p.132
[83] A. Emejulu and F. Sobande (eds.), *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe* (London, 2019), p.3
[84] *Ibid.,* p.3

allegiances, fostered alternative ways of viewing, resisting, and living, and disrupted the invisibility of Black women's histories, previously suppressed by systems and politics of oppression. These movements nuanced and developed what it meant to *be* Black and 'think Black', illustrating a shared collectivity surrounding skin tone, yet also the intense political nature of Black feminisms and beauty politics. It is important to express that both the forms of Black beauty and beauty practices discussed here were not born in reaction to white beauty or white women's beauty practices, but often pre-existed them. Rather, exploring newly emerging practices of Black beauty serves to question why such practices were not considered in mainstream beauty ideals. Popular culture outlets such as best-selling newspapers and women's magazines excluded Black women in normalised images of beauty. The aim here is to show how Black women reclaimed their skin tone, campaigned for their visibility outside of Black communities in Britain, and inclusion in broader society; a direct challenge to the exclusion experienced in white feminism.

Alongside institutionalised, politicised, and socio-cultural racism experienced in everyday settings, women faced marginalisation based upon skin in racialised beauty practices. Dadzie [et al.] explained that:

> "in a culture which valued only a woman's physical appearance…there was no room for any appreciation of African beauty. The very term implied a contradiction. The only images of women we were exposed to…were those depicting white, female perfection."[85]

Similarly, bell hooks, explained that "within white-supremacist patriarchal society, it is very difficult to find affirming images of black femaleness."[86] Thus, Women of Colour, and by extension, the Black British community, had to find ways to create and reaffirm their cultures, and skin became a terrain of this struggle.[87]

[85] Bryan [et.al.], *Heart of the Race*, p.191
[86] b. hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston, 1993), p.84
[87] Bryan [et al.], *The Heart of the Race,* p.192.

Whilst Blackness is treated here as a political, social, and cultural construction, the boundaries of what counts as Blackness, and how these are policed in relation to beauty ideals, have had far reaching consequences for Black women. Notions of 'acceptable' or 'authentic' Blackness have been framed by both Black communities and dominant ideas of white 'normalcy' in terms of an "essentialist construction of Black womanhood."[88] These are determined by length and texture of hair, shade of skin, and parentage.[89] Colourism emerged here as another system of privilege and power within Black British communities (and worldwide). The system of colourism - as deeply interconnected with racism – privileges lighter toned Black skin over darker skin tones within Black communities (and communities of colour).[90] This relates not only to aesthetics and beauty through privileging lighter complexions, but also to the impact on people's social and economic opportunities. Though colourism could not exist without racism, as colourism rests on the premise of white privilege and power relationships in cultural and social systems, it is important to consider colourism within the context of skin tone and the racialised politics of beauty.[91] The authenticity of 'Black womanhood' through these measures, assumes an ideal and essential Black identity, and places upon women certain expectations and social pressures to conform to 'authentic' features. Thus, within already racialised beauty politics, colourism existed (and exists), as another significant boundary Black women had to grapple with when navigating what it meant to be 'beautiful.'

Criticism toward Black women via skin colour politics existed in many forms. Many women were accused of "attempting to move away from their racial identity" by altering their

[88] D. Weekes, 'Shades of Blackness', in H. S. Mirza, *Black British Feminism* (London, 1997), p.114
[89] *Ibid.*, p.114
[90] M. L. Hunter, ''If You're Light You're Alright' Light Skin Colour as Social Capital for Women of Colour', *Gender and Society*,16 (2002), pp.175-193, p.176
[91] *Ibid.*, p.176

complexion and physical appearance with skin bleaching, and criticism via colourism was directed toward those who were "constructed (by others) as closer to whiteness by virtue of such signifiers of straight hair and light skins."[92] According to historian Debbie Weekes, "hair and skin are used as physical signifiers for the purpose of judging how 'Black' a person is…and how far or near a Black person is from whiteness."[93] This emphasises the importance of skin when writing a history of Black Britain in an age of racism.

Notions of Blackness, and the ways in which Black women are defined by certain beauty standards is fundamentally important here. Each locale had "deep histories of darkening and lightening…[with] densely embedded aesthetic regimes and racialised politics of skin colour."[94] However, what is important, and will be expressed here, is that "whitening, colouring, and tanning are in most locales neither equivalent nor opposed processes but are intimately interlinked ones."[95] Deciphering what 'counts' as beautiful when beauty standards were constantly changing and deeply impacted by colourism and racism, meant that such ideals were not only contradictory but increasingly difficult to achieve. While 'mainstream' (white) society continued to privilege and value the necessity of whiteness in visions of beauty, Black activist movements explicitly addressed these issues through the notion of 'Black is Beautiful'. This became a significant moment for many, alongside being capitalised upon by beauty companies.

The Black is Beautiful slogan and its prevalence among a wide range of women, had a different meaning, varied in significance, and had contrasting levels of importance for Black women during this time. While the slogan itself cannot claim to tell a complete story of Black

[92] Weekes, *Shades of Blackness,* p.114
[93] *Ibid.*, p.114
[94] T. Barlow, M. Yue Dong, U. G. Poiger, P. Ramamurthy, L. M. Thomas, A. E. Weinbaum (eds.), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalisation* (Duke, 2008), p.38
[95] *Ibid*., p.38

Power and women's feelings toward beauty, it is used here as a specific vehicle to illustrate some aspects of the impact of beauty and Black Power on women in Britain. Before Black is Beautiful became a "rallying cry in the late 1960s" for Black women to embrace their natural beauty, the message that "dark skin and tightly curled hair were beautiful was promoted by the Nation of Islam" in the 1930s.[96] Malcom X also spoke out about Black beauty, following the lead of Elijah Muhammad and Marcus Garvey, and continued to reinforce that Black women had to suffer through "humiliating and detested images of [them]selves imposed by other people," alongside a constant barrage of hair straightening and skin bleaching creams in Black publications.[97] As Black Power movements took hold, by 1966, imagery denoting and emphasising 'Black is Beautiful' increasingly appeared in mainstream Black publications such as *Ebony*.[98]

In Britain, the importance of the Black is Beautiful movement became evident throughout personal testimony recorded in oral interviews. 'Sisterhood and After' was an oral history project conducted by members of the Women's Liberation Group during the 1970s and 80s, which interviewed women on a wide range of issues. Gail Lewis explained how the emergence of Black Power was "absolutely crucial for reconfiguring the space and relationship that a Black woman could have with her body…the idea that Black is beautiful, is hard to convey just how profound a statement that was at that time."[99] Gail described the ability to be seen as beautiful with natural features such as skin and hair as "staggering…intense, and did change things."[100] Jan McKenley also expressed the personal

[96] M. Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford, 2002), p.79
[97] B. Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, *Sisters In the Struggle: African-American Women In the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements* (New York, 2001), p.220
[98] Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, p.93
[99] Sisterhood and After: Women's Liberation Oral History Project, Gail Lewis interviewed by Rachel Cohen, The British Library (2011)
[100] *Ibid.*

importance of the Black is Beautiful narrative: "In the 60s, there was quite a lot of tacit, hostile racism and everyday racism from your own friends, they commented on your lips and your nose, so that whole Black is Beautiful movement was absolutely beyond describable as liberating."[101] Thus, for many women, embracing the mantra of Black is Beautiful, when many advertisements, products, and popular narratives suggested otherwise, proves important to consider when analysing skin alongside Black beauty practices and the spaces of reclamation women created during this time.

The terminology and emphasis on the importance of Black Power and Black is Beautiful was also illustrated throughout Black-owned magazines and newspapers. Janet Johnson writing in *Grassroots* in 1976, penned an article criticising misleading concepts of womanhood and beauty frequently "projected by the white media… that is always the one standard – white [skin] – or as near as possible."[102] Dyke and Dryden, one of the most successful Black owned hair and beauty companies, adopted the slogan Black is Beautiful on their advertisements in 1978. In the same year, *Africa Woman* magazine published a reader's comment which praised the magazine for "really supporting the popular saying that BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL [sic.]."[103] Thus, when discussing Black women's beauty, while the mainstream of beauty practices advocated for white beauty and mostly failed to expand their vision, there were also narratives advocating the beauty of Blackness, and attempts to change and impact such exclusionary skin colour politics.

[101] Sisterhood and After: Women's Liberation Oral History Project, Jan McKenley interviewed by Margaretta Jolly, The British Library (2011)
[102] Goerge Padmore Institute, GB 2904/ NEW/9/18, Grassroots Newspaper, May/June 1976. Janet Johnson, 'Damn Your Concept of Womanhood - Mine is Better!', p.3
[103] The British Library, West Indian World, Dyke and Dryden Flies the Flag, 12 October 1978, and Black Cultural Archives, Periodicals/74 , Africa Woman, January-February 1978. The prominence of Black is Beautiful also stretched to magazines such as Black Women Speak Out, Flamingo, ROOT, FOWAAD, and many more.

However, while this brought many women confidence and feelings of attractiveness, this was either short lived, or its reach did not impact all women. Crucially, the dominance of Eurocentric visions of femininity (white aesthetics) prevailed, which left many women reverting back to straightened hair and/or bleaching creams, or did not change many women's minds in the first place.[104] Skin was consistently used as a tool to exploit, discriminate, differentiate, but also empower, liberate, and organize Black people in Britain. Having situated these complexities of skin, race, beauty, and social 'norms' through beauty companies and magazine publishing in the context of 1930-80, I use these themes to address suntanning and skin bleaching as issues of racialised complexion modification processes.

## Chapter Overviews, Methodology, and Terminology

The dissertation proceeds in two parts, each including three chapters and based around a separate case study. The first case study traces the rise and use of skin bleaching among women in Britain from 1930-80. The first chapter begins by tracing the dermatological and scientific developments of chemicals used to bleach the skin, most notably, ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone. The minimal scientific research conducted into the dangers of these chemicals to lighten skin was impacted by a much broader issue of racism within scientific practice during this time. Ultimately, these skin bleaches were – at their peak – primarily used by Black women. As such, little attention was given to the consequences of skin bleaching because white women eventually turned away from using these products.

The second chapter considers the rise of skin bleaching among white British women during the 1930s, before suntanning became popular. It also examines the advertisements for these creams, and ultimately, reinforces that white women bleached their skin to conform to

[104] Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, p.128

popular beauty standards during this time. These were heavily influenced by the entrenched notion of white superiority. As these ideals changed, and a suntan became *the* ideal beauty, Black women became the primary users of skin bleaches.

Chapter three traces the use of bleaching creams by Black women in British society from 1930-80. Alongside the advertisements for these products, this chapter charts the differing and impossible notions of beauty that some Black women strived to achieve. These existed within deeply racialised discourses of white superiority and whiteness as the 'norm'. Advertisements for these products, and the pressures and methods used to persuade women of the necessity to use bleaching creams to achieve 'normal' beauty, illustrate the pervasiveness of racialised discourses of beauty during this time. These bleaches were presented as a solution for Black women to get 'closer' to whiteness and be seen as beautiful. This chapter also considers Black activist responses to bleaching, thereby highlighting the opposition and prominence of activism within British Black beauty circles, especially during the 1960s and 70s.

In part two, the second case study considers suntanning as a performative body modification process during 1930-80. Chapter four traces the rise of suntanning as a medical practice through heliotherapy during the 1930s, and draws emphasis toward its growing popularity, despite significant warnings of health implications. This delves into the impact of Ultraviolet (UV) rays on the skin following scientific discoveries, alongside the controversiality of suntanning practices promoted by sun lotion companies, despite scientific recommendations. Whilst I argue that the major influence on the popularity of suntanning was due to the practice of heliotherapy, the rise of suntanning was deeply embedded within constructions of racism.

Chapter five illustrates the rise of suntanning in popular social circles, and crucially, the development of terminology surrounding suntanning as an idealised and racialised beauty practice during the 1960s and 1970s. It examines white British women as they ardently suntanned their bodies and consumed the vast range of suntanning products during its rise in popularity as a fashion must-have in the peak decades of the 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, as with the previous case study, chapter six examines advertisements. It places a particular focus on Ambre Solaire and its messaging, as this brand was one of the most popular suntan lotions of the twentieth century. There existed strict boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable beauty with regard to suntanning, which systematically excluded Black women from discourses and practices of suntanned beauty. Suntanning, therefore, as a complexion modification process, illuminates debates surrounding racialised politics of beauty, stemming from deeply ingrained systems of racial oppression in British society.

This methodological approach leans heavily on a wide range of contemporary sources. The elements of print culture and digitised sources used throughout these case studies offer both a broad view of socio-cultural trends during this period, alongside an in-depth window exposing how members of British society were impacted by, and interested in, these kinds of skin modification. Print culture, from both popular national and international newspapers have provided a lens to view and analyse wide-reaching fashion and beauty trends in relation to tanning and bleaching, alongside the various advertisements used by a large number of beauty companies between 1930-80. Yet, these popular magazines, especially women's magazines, provided a platform for many deeply personal questions of every-day women regarding beauty and femininity. Just as important, more niche and less widely circulated medical and scientific journals exposed the ongoing research and discoveries of the time in relation to new products emerging on the market, alongside the dangers of bleaching and

tanning. These medical journals also illustrated that the trajectory of medical knowledge and warnings of the dangers surrounding modification, did not reflect public engagement or attention paid to such dangers, a reality which becomes clear when they are set alongside sources from popular culture.

Women's magazines, newspapers, advertisements, medical journals, and beauty advice books, all provide an insight into skin modification practices in Britain during 1930-80. Alongside the potential of these sources to illuminate the originality of an analysis of these modification practices, this thesis also presents the importance of 'unknowables' within sources used here, and consequentially, the stories of skin modification being told. These print sources illustrate notable silences within the historical record of skin bleaching among Black women. Instances of personal stories of Black women's skin bleaching are few and far between in comparison to explanations of suntanning practices among white women during this time. An unwillingness to speak publicly about such modification practices, and perhaps, the lack of relevant magazines in which to discover and discuss the modification of skin, presents the existence of 'unknowables' within this historical discourse. However, when juxtaposed against the proliferation of advertisements promoting skin bleaching, alongside the huge range of bleaching creams available locally and internationally, the extent of this modification practice comes to light.

As deeply implicated by discourses of beauty and fashion, I argue that while women used cosmetic products to modify and beautify, whether knowingly or unknowingly, they were contributing to, and furthering, racialised and gendered norms which played a part in controlling the fashions of bleaching and suntanning. Deeply entangled in institutionalised and systemic racism, skin modification was an innocent fashion trend for some, but for others, it was a method of trying to 'improve' oneself, trying to be included within society, and an

attempt to be seen as lighter or darker to fit in with socially accepted trends. As intersectional with gender, beauty, fashion, race, and class, I argue that skin modification contributed to institutionalised and systemic racism, alongside the ways women were viewed and consumed, and thus, acted in society. While this thesis remains focussed on illustrating the damaging impact of institutionalised racism in Britain, it is imperative to reinforce the underlying prominence of transnationalism. Skin, racism, beauty ideals, whiteness, and the commodification of women were all impacted by transnational and global cultural structures, affecting women in different ways and in different times and places. Anti-colonial and liberation movements provided Black communities with shared spaces and activist movements which were global in scale. Complex transatlantic commercial networks of beauty products and ideals, travel among fashion capitals such as London and New York, and an expanding range of products and accessibility as the 20th century progressed, not only allowed for greater access to fashion and beauty, but also further embedded ideals implicated by race. With this in mind, I use skin to tell a history of racialised and gendered beauty politics using skin bleaching and suntanning as case studies in Britain from 1930-80.

The terminology used in this thesis, such as complexion, race, and the term 'Black' rely on specific explanations in the context of Britain from 1930-80. From the initial usage of the term, complexion has had a wide variety of meanings. Complexion is understood here as the visible and *natural* appearance of one's skin colour or tone, in which each individual is unique. A persons complexion described throughout this thesis, in close relation to skin-tone, can be a vast range of shades. Make-up and beauty companies often described complexions as light, medium, or dark, or light, 'normal', or dark. As such, the ways in which complexion to signify skin tone was deployed in British society, had politically charged values attached to it. Namely, that a white-but-tanned complexion was considered as a 'normal' complexion or the

'ideal' complexion. In many cases, complexion has the ability to be modified to achieve a different tone – whether through tanning, make-up, or bleaching. The importance here, lies in the idea that while complexion is modifiable, most of the time this is temporary. By contrast, when considering a person's natural skin tone to signify race, ethnicity, or identity, this cannot be changed. However, using makeup or bleaching and tanning products, complexion modification can modify shade, so one can achieve a 'lighter', 'medium' or 'darker' complexion within various skin tone ranges.

Histories of racialised beauty politics and skin modification are global. Yet, the story of British women's complexion modification requires a certain focus and set of meanings. The struggle for Black liberation and the political implications and conditions of which this struggle took place are culturally specific. To use Gilroy's phrase, histories of Blackness in Britain has its own "peculiarities."[105] Uniquely developing communities, specific to British histories and events, carried with it various terminological changes when using terms such as 'Black'. Claire Alexander has detailed the changing meanings of the word 'Black' in British culture when signifying race. The term can be broadly divided into two phases, from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, and the latter from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s.[106]

The first phase, saw the dominant story of British Black identity signalling political mobilisation for "migrants from the former British colonies in South Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, and their British-born descendants, based on a shared experience of oppression and discrimination, and a dominant discourse."[107] It is within this context that this thesis is based. A powerful moment of anti-colonial and liberational politics, the 1960s-1980s witnessed intellectual and activist exchange on a transnational scale, and the migration of People of

[105] Gilroy, *Small Acts,* p.49
[106] C. Alexander, 'Breaking Black: The Death of Ethnic and Racial Studies in Britain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (2018), pp.1034-1054, p.1038
[107] *Ibid.,* p.1038

Colour increased across Britain. According to Stuart Hall, this is the moment in which "black became politicised."[108] It is within this politicisation of Blackness, and skin colour becoming a signifier of this politicisation, that contributed to the British Black population to begin "thinking Black."[109] It witnessed an identification of Blackness as a pushback against phrases such as "coloured" used by Enoch Powell and others, which positioned British Black citizens as unwelcome.[110]

Meanwhile, the second phase witnessed a splintering of the term 'Black'. As opposed to signifying all migrants from former British colonies, it became a descriptor of those of African-Caribbean-British descent. The obscuration of cultural differences by using an umbrella term of 'Black' or 'Blackness' to signify all People of Colour, differences between African-Caribbean and Asian communities, and "emergent forms of 'cultural racism', especially in relation to Islam and Islamophobia…[meant that] many Asians have simply never been seen, or have ever seen themselves, as 'black'."[111] When using the term 'Black', this thesis refers to the latter definition of the term Blackness: those of African-Caribbean-British descent whom, define themselves as having a Black skin tone. As to not ignore or fail to recognise other complex and culturally specific histories of a wide range of People of Colour, this thesis focusses on the Black British population. However, this does not discount the wide-reaching impacts of imperialism and skin colour politics on all People of Colour. Defining 'Black' more narrowly than what was being used during this period, means that there is a specific focus on Black skin, rather than a political definition. To give an in-depth history of Black beauty politics and skin, as opposed to generalising across wider skin politics

[108] S. Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (Durham, 2017), p.14
[109] R. Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1965-85* (Oakland, 2019), p.3
[110] Alexander, *Breaking Black*, p.1038
[111] C. Alexander, 'Beyond Black: Re-thinking the Colour/Culture Divide', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25 (2002), pp.552-571, p.562

for People of Colour, this narrow focus on British Black women as presently defined, allows for a fuller and more intricate history of skin modification to be told.

I capitalise Black to recognise the political nature of the term and to signify a collective racial identity with a specific history.[112] While these labels and meanings of Blackness as an identity change over time, in the present moment, capitalisation emphasises the centrality of race in the making and shaping of modern Britain (and global histories). Capitalisation also emphasises the enduring histories and ideas of imperialism that contributed to the necessity of this thesis being written. An intervention in these histories of liberational and anti-colonial politics of Blackness is rooted in the use of skin as a lens of body modification. The practice of complexion modification, whether through skin bleaching or tanning, is intimately linked to whiteness. White women desiring a whiter complexion or a tanned complexion, implied a racially white identity. Black women's use of skin bleach to achieve beauty (for many), was rooted in a beauty ideal which assumed and necessitated whiteness. As such, cosmetic histories of tanning and bleaching creams, both their emergence and global development, and the whiteness they implied, were intimately linked with complexion and the signification of race.

[112] Lowercase 'black' is used when referenced as such in a quotation.

# CASE STUDY ONE: SKIN BLEACHING

*Haven't you heard or been informed*
*That an afro has meaning and is not*
*just to be worn?*

*And for those of you who think it's a fad*
*You'll soon find out its definition is*
*black and bad*

*Say there you with the lye in your head*
*Aren't you aware that the wethead is dead?*

*Put that bleaching cream away!!!*
*Black you are and black you'll stay.*

*Take pride in your blackness don't be*
*ashamed*
*Remember being black and beautiful*
*is not a game*

*Power my sister*
*Right on my flame!!!!*

About the Afro, *Grassroots,* April 1974[113]

*Why process your hair,*
*And bleach your skin?*
*Why try to be*
*What you are not?*
*Who needs an excuse*
*For being Black!*
*When I see you*
*Through white mens eyes*
*I seem to hear you say*
*'Its not my fault, Master,*
*For being black and ugly.*
*I slick my hair*
*Bleach my skin*
*And dye my nappy head*
*Because I want to be like you'*
*When I hear these things*
*My soul boils*
*And then, Negro,*
*I hate you.*
*For I am Black*
*And proud to be.*
*So negro, negro,*
*Awake! Awake,*
*And claim your identity*

Identity, *Liberator*, 1963

## Introduction

The desire for lighter, whiter, or brighter skin has been engrained in some societies for centuries worldwide. Through variations in cultural meanings, the desire for lighter skin has

[113] George Padmore Institute, *Grassroots*, GB 2904/ NEW/9/2, About the Afro, 1974, p.5. Condensed version of the poem. Second poem: Carlos E. Russell, Identity, *Liberator*, Vol 3, No.9, September 1963, p.17

changed over time and space, but whiteness as a symbol of beauty, power, wealth, success, and a higher class, has persisted in social and cultural practices around the globe. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the skin bleaching market among women worldwide grew immeasurably quick. From 1930-80, a large number of bleaching creams were manufactured in the U.S. and Britain and shipped globally, a passage of goods rooted in British colonial dominance and influence. The three chapters that follow, emphasise the importance of investigating the prevalence of skin bleaching in Britain, and the racialised discourses that permeated these practices via scientific and cultural discourse.

As a commodity, skin bleaches were first marketed and advertised in the U.S. and Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to this, women were encouraged to obtain ingredients from local pharmacies and make their own.[114] At the beginning of this period, home remedies for skin lightening were marketed predominantly to white women. These were seen in newspapers and women's magazines before the development of new visual technologies in 1955. As women's appearances standardised, the mass marketing of campaigns saw professional actresses and socialites endorse the bleaching creams.[115]

From the 1940s onward, due to the rising popularity of the suntan amongst white women, skin bleaches were advertised primarily for Black consumers. Due to the apparent health-giving qualities of the suntan and its rise in fashion and beauty circles, Black women became a targeted audience for bleaching cream companies. The aesthetic dimension of racism seen in the promotion of lighter gradations of skin tone, took the forefront of advertising campaigns. These often focussed on a natural and easy way to lighten the skin tone, and at the same time, become more beautiful. These creams were advertised as a natural

[114] K. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Pennsylvania, 2008), p.18
[115] *Ibid.*, p.48

way to lighten (or sometimes remove) Black skin, which "reinforced a racialised aesthetic through a makeover that appeared anything but natural."[116] This 'racialised aesthetic' of a desired appearance, was a very specific and unachievable beauty ideal, yet was portrayed as achievable through the use of creams.

The "race performativity of gendered cosmetics" meant that advertisements did not always need to explicitly mention the need for Black women to use bleaching creams.[117] The racialised dynamics embedded within the beauty ideals, meant that whiteness or lightness was assumed and engrained within a popular notion of beauty, and the simple act of buying and applying the cream was enough. Though companies did not explicitly mention bleaching, their lightening properties functioned as a secret language as the primary reason to buy these creams, but was not explicitly popularised as such. Rather, creams emphasised their beautifying and brightening abilities, with bleaching or lightening the most important method for this beautifying process. This secret language illustrates the deeply ingrained socially constructed racialised and hegemonic ideals. These creams allowed, or in some cases, pressured Black women, guided by unequal power relations, to feel that complexion modification was necessary to achieve beauty. As Shirley Tate emphasises, though these ideals are performative and habitual among many, this does not stop women's agency.[118] While adverts were suggestive and persuasive, some women bought these creams as an act of self-agency, in a desire to beautify themselves, for themselves, not from the pressures of society.[119] They were performing aesthetic enhancement through personal choice. However, these expressions of agency to achieve beauty were deeply embedded with racialised tropes.

[116] *Ibid.*, p.43
[117] S. A. Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones* (London, 2015), p.94
[118] *Ibid.*, p.94
[119] *Ibid*., p.94

Companies manufacturing and advertising bleaching creams played on whiteness by promising something so seemingly attainable to Black women, which was in fact, impossible to achieve.[120] The importance here lies in the fact that to achieve the white beauty ideal, women had to be racially white, not just aesthetically white. Thus, when Black women attempted to get closer to whiteness by using creams and/or lighter shades of makeup, they were buying into an impossible ideal – an ideal that bleaching companies sold as completely achievable if the cream was used enough, and for long enough. The promises of beauty, romance, social benefits, and wellbeing seen in these adverts - or assumed by the women purchasing them due to socially encoded racialised performativity – were dependent on racial whiteness. Whereas white women used these creams to buy into a beauty ideal that was rooted in racial whiteness, Black women, however, understood this beauty ideal in a different way. The act of buying into this aesthetic and using bleaching creams did not mean that Black women wanted to achieve racial or aesthetic whiteness. However, buying these creams suggested a conscious or subconscious desire for lightness, and thus, the social privileges attached to lightness, alongside their personal idea of aesthetic beauty. It just so happened that the most popular images of beauty during this time were steeped in whiteness.

This case study consists of three chapters, which are as follows: scientific and dermatological histories, the users of skin bleaches, and advertisements for products among white and Black women respectively, followed by a discussion of anti-bleaching narratives. Together, they illustrate that the global influence of British imperialism and its racialised ideals of white superiority meant that whiteness and its links to power, medicine, and perceptions of beauty shaped the practice of many societies. Over time, the importance and influence of a beauty ideal which lauded whiteness, only grew more prominent.

[120] *Ibid.*, p.94

The first chapter traces the scientific and medical development of ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone as they became the most popular bleaching agents in Britain. Using the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) and *The Lancet*, it illustrates the various medical warnings and consequences of using bleaching creams for a prolonged time, the cosmetic regulations of these products (or lack thereof), and investigates the discovery of natural alternatives which mirrored the chemical structure of hydroquinone as a skin bleach. The dermatological histories of skin bleaching in Britain were steeped in politics of race, particularly regarding the lack of research and warnings about the damaging consequences on Black skin and Black communities. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the aesthetic and scientific dimensions of race and whiteness, meant that dermatological and medical professionals took little interests in the cosmetic practices of Black women, in this case, the use of dangerous bleaching creams.

The following chapter considers skin bleaching in a cultural context by examining white women as users of skin bleaches, and the advertisements marketed towards them. White women bleached their skin during the early twentieth century (and for centuries prior) to conform to popular beauty standards. The entrenchment of whiteness and a porcelain complexion as an ideal of beauty, established the practice of skin bleaching as an accepted method to make white skin, whiter. Whilst this idea of a porcelain complexion evokes ideals of beauty, it also signifies racial exclusion. Through the ideal complexion of soft white skin, the assumed superiority of whiteness excluded Black women from the ability to be 'beautiful' in the eyes of popular society. Consequently, when tanned skin became the ideal skin tone, white skin was presumed as the natural, normal, and expected pre-modified skin. The proliferation of advertisements, only deepened these social attitudes of whiteness as necessary to be beautiful. As this period progressed, and white women became more beautiful due to

tanned skin, the same did not happen for Black women. Light skinned Black women, with a golden complexion or tone, were not seen as conforming to the 'ideal' vision of beauty, because ultimately, beauty cultures were judged via race and racialisation. As intimately linked to skin tone and complexion, it is impossible to judge, analyse, and discuss beauty ideals without examining skin tone and discourses of race.

Then, the chapters that follow examine Black women as users of skin bleaches during 1930-80 in Britain, and the advertisements which helped further embed this practice. The discourses of Black women's bleaching set differing and impossible expectations upon Black women as opposed to white women. Whilst it can be argued that Black women bleached their skin as an act of agency and beautifying, this existed within a deeply racialised social schema of white superiority. The messages of bleaching companies presented an impossible ideal as entirely possible through the use of bleaching creams. That bleaching could lead to whiteness or lightness, and ultimate beauty, ignored the risk of health implications when applying these creams. Alongside this, some women faced consequences and criticism within their communities, as many women were accused of wanting to move away from one's natural skin tone. Some of this criticism is evidenced in the final section, which illustrates responses to Black women's skin bleaching, alongside a criticism of the companies and newspapers promoting such creams.

## Chapter One: Dermatological and Scientific Histories

Understanding the process of skin modification, whether through UV rays (tanning) or preventing melanin formation (bleaching), relies on a scientific explanation of skin structure. The external surface, the epidermis, acts as a barrier for unwanted and harmful chemicals, as an absorption for wanted chemicals, and contains the cells responsible for producing pigment in the skin. The epidermis is also responsible for sensory functions, as it is a receptacle for touch, pain, pressure and temperature. Below this, the second layer of skin is called the dermis, an elastic connective tissue responsible for thermoregulation, immune responses, nerve ending responses, sweat glands, hair follicles, and sensory receptors, which support the epidermis.[121] The final layer is the hypodermis or subcutaneous tissue, which is a heat insulator and place for energy storage. This fatty layer consists of tissue and blood vessels, and attaches the skin to the underlying muscle.[122]

Skin tone is determined by four biochromes: oxyhaemoglobin, reduced haemoglobin, carotenoids, and melanin.[123] In the epidermis, melanocyte cells - also present in the hair and eyes - produce polymers of indole quinone, which subsequently effect pigmentation of the skin, hair, and eyes.[124] Melanin is then produced by the melanosomes, and melanocytes transport melanosomes to keratinocytes (other cells in the skin), to provide a uniform distribution of pigmentation in the skin.[125] Although the number of melanocytes are the same for all humans, the distribution of the melanosomes produced determine a person's skin tone.

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[121] A. Mire, 'Skin Bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power and the Politics of the Colour Line', *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28 (2001), pp.13-38, p.18
[122] K. Walters and M. Roberts, 'The Structure and Function of Skin' in Kenneth Walters (ed.), *Dermatological and Transdermal Formulations* (New York, 2002), p.9
[123] B. Desmedt, P. Courselle, J.O. De Beer, V. Rogiers, M. Grosber, E. Deconinck,1, K. De Paepe, 'Overview of Skin Whitening Agents with an Insight into the Illegal Cosmetic Market in Europe', *JEADV*, 30 (2016), pp.943–950, p.944
[124] Walters, *The Structure and Function of Skin*, p.9
[125] *Ibid.,* p.9

Melanocytes and the process of producing pigmentation is also linked to genetics, put simply, when these genes mutate, it produces conditions such as albinism and vitiligo. Most commonly, this is a reaction with tyrosine.[126] Tyrosine is the "key enzyme in melanin synthesis" and when bleaching products are used, it prevents the production of tyrosine and the ability for melanocytes to function and produce pigmentation, causing skin to appear lighter.[127] Over time, with continued use of bleaching products (depending on the bleaching agent), this severely damages the skin and in many cases, causes irreversible damage to all three layers of the skin and pigment production.

While there were many ingredients used in home-made and mass-marketed skin bleaches, over time, two main bleaching agents emerged: ammoniated mercury (AM) and hydroquinone (HQ). One of the most infamous substances used for skin bleaching is mercury, most commonly, ammoniated mercury. Mercury became a popular bleaching agent in the earlier decades of the 20th century, perhaps through its abundance and availability as a cheap substance, and most likely, due to its ability to lighten the skin both quickly and visibly. Mercury based skin bleaching creams contain mercury in varied forms including mercury chloride, calomel, and ammoniated mercury chloride, which are inorganic salts that impede the function of tyrosine, and thus, melanin production.[128] As mass produced bleaching creams containing mercury became more commonplace, the amount of mercury substance present in the creams became worryingly unclear.

A scientific history of skin bleaching substances illustrates that ample evidence existed to suggest the danger of skin bleaching products, especially concerning the wide-spread use of such products by People/Communities of Colour in British society. However,

[126] *Ibid.,* p.9
[127] Desmedt, *Overview of Skin Whitening*, p.944
[128] Mire, *Skin Bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power*, p.17. Mercury exists in three forms: organic, inorganic, and elemental.

medical professionals and regulators failed to conduct ample research on the dangers of these cosmetic creams, especially considering their prevalence among Black communities. While these products were also used by white women for many centuries until around the 1930s, the peak use of skin bleaching by Black women from the 1940s-1970s, saw these dangers ignored in order to sell products that claimed to lighten, whiten, and brighten skin.

Writing in *The Lancet* in 1937, Dr Arthur Burrows claimed that the number of cosmetic formulations on the market was enormous, but many contained harmful substances. Included on his list of substances added to cosmetics that caused "general poisoning (and irritation) from local applications…[were] perchloride of mercury in freckle salves and lotions."[129] In 1943, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigated the effects of using an external application of ammoniated mercury to the body, and produced the following results in regard to local and systemic effects. In terms of local effects, it was agreed by both medical and scientific investigations that the principal property of AM was that of an irritant. The commission also noted that, "it's tendency is to break down and separate the tissues of the outer layer of the skin, and in consequence, it promotes or hastens the exfoliation or peeling off of the outer layer."[130] Hence, for short periods of time and under controlled conditions, it was approved for dermatological use for some skin conditions, such as vitiligo. Important to emphasise here, is that though this was an American investigation, the knowledge crossover to Britain was hugely influential. British dermatologists by this point would have been aware of the dangerous consequences of AM as an active substance in skin bleaching creams. While these creams could have been prescribed for specific skin conditions

[129] Dr. A. Burrows, 'Cosmetics', *The Lancet*, 13 November 1937, pp.1154-1155, p.1155
[130] Federal Trade Commission of the United States, 'Federal Trade Commission Decision: Findings, Orders and Stipulations, 1 July 1943 - 31December 1943', Part 3 (1944), p.82

by British dermatologists, no actions were taken to prevent the production, marketing, or selling of these products to the masses in the immediate aftermath of this investigation.

In terms of systemic effects, the damage caused by AM depends on many factors; including the amount of cream used, the frequency of application, the percentage of mercury in the cream, the duration of rest between treatments, and the sensitivity/condition of the users' skin (the same factors also apply when considering the dangers and side effects of hydroquinone).[131] The FTC concluded that where the amount of mercury was excessive, the application frequent, the period of use extended, and the area of application large, "the use of ammoniated mercury is likely to result in erythema, oedema, inflammation, irritation, or other manifestations of dermatitis."[132] These are serious skin conditions, and upon continued use, some users of ammoniated mercury experienced chronic mercury poisoning, in which more serious health instances occurred. Some of these symptoms included proteinuria (kidney disease or failure), a metallic taste, nerve damage, memory loss, pain and weakness in limbs, depression, and anxiety.[133] It has since been scientifically proven that even a cream containing just 2% ammoniated mercury can cause life-long renal and skin complications.[134] This illustrates the consequences of a lack of regulation, the choice of profiteering over safety, and the racialised aspects of scientific research and dermatology.

In many cases concerning the continued use of skin bleaches containing AM, the FTC also found that patients experienced some type of dermatitis on their skin or the development of a "condition of [skin] sensitivity where none existed previously."[135] Whether home

[131] *Ibid.*, p.83
[132] *Ibid.,* p.83
[133] G-F. Sun., W. T. Hu, Z-H. Yuan, B.A Zhang , H. Lu, 'Characteristics of Mercury Intoxication Induced by Skin-lightening Products' *Chinese Medical Journal,* 130 (2017), pp.3003-3004, p.3003.Whilst this study was conducted recently, the effects of AM overuse was the same in the past.
[134] A. Chakera, D. Lasserson, L.H. Beck Jr, I.S.D. Roberts, C.G. Winearls, 'Membranous Nephropathy After Use of UK-manufactured Skin Creams Containing Mercury', *Q J Med*, 104 (2011), p.893-896, p.893
[135] FTC Commission of the United States, p.83

remedies or mass produced creams, there were clear dangers of using creams containing AM, especially when users were unaware of such. Without proper regulation, investigation, or instruction, women were applying these creams all over their bodies, and were damaging their skin to reach an ideal of beauty that many could not achieve. While providing supposed solutions for women's skin and helping to achieve ideals of beauty, these creams posed serious health risks. However, while mercury proved popular in the early twentieth century, as decades passed, a new, highly effective, and seemingly less noxious product appeared on the skin bleaching mass market: hydroquinone.

Hydroquinone became the most popular bleaching chemical worldwide throughout the second half of the twentieth century.[136] HQ is a hydroxyphenol, a naturally occurring compound in plants and foods such as coffee, cranberries, and blueberries, alongside being used as a chemical to develop black and white photographs, and as a stabilizer in paints, varnishes, motor fuels, and oils. [137] It is also used in dermatology as a chemical lightener for skin. It is important to consider other chemical variations of HQ, such as the monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone (MBEH) and monomethyl ether of hydroquinone (MMEH), which are synthetically produced forms of hydroquinone. These variations in skin bleaching creams are powerful inhibitors of the melanocytes and tyrosine, meaning that they target melanocytes in non-exposed sites (places where depigmentation doesn't need to be treated). As such, they should only be used under medical supervision by severely affected vitiligo patients, of whom, have been unresponsive to other treatments.[138] Thus, due to the level of

[136] J. L. O'Donoghue, 'Hydroquinone and its Analogues in Dermatology - A Risk-Benefit Viewpoint', *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology,* 5 (2006), pp.196-203, p.196. According to O'Donoghue, in 2006 it was **"**estimated that 30 million tubes of 2% HQ formulations may be produced worldwide, one-third to one-half of which are sold in the USA" (p.197).
[137] J. J. Nordlund, P. E. Grimes, J. P. Ortonne, 'The Safety of Hydroquinone', *European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, 20 (2006), pp.781–787, p.783
[138] Desmedt, *Overview of Skin Whitening*, p.945-946

depigmentation and inhibition of tyrosine, the depigmentation from these substances is mostly irreversible, and cannot be "safely used in cosmetics."[139] However, due to non-existent or inconsistent labelling, MBEH and MMEH have frequently been present in skin bleaching creams available to purchase over the counter in various shops, both historically and in the present day.

One of the first medical reports of HQ's capacity to lighten was seen in the research of H. Ottel in 1936, of which the fur of black cats turned grey after ingesting hydroquinone daily for 6-8weeks.[140] However, the most well-known accidental origin of HQ's effectiveness to depigment skin was discovered at a tannery near Chicago in 1938. As published in the *BMJ* and *The Lancet*, Black American and Mexican tannery workers noticed that since wearing protective gloves, the skin on their hands and forearms had turned white. It was soon found that the gloves were treated with HQ to prevent the rubber from ageing, but subsequently, the HQ dissolved out of the rubber, perhaps due to the materials they were handling or perspiration.[141] Following an investigation into the gloves by medical professionals, researchers found that the HQ prevented the formation of melanin in the skin, though re-pigmentation occurred once subjects ceased using the gloves.[142] The doctors who conducted the research into the HQ in gloves "quickly recognised its therapeutic and commercial potential" inasmuch that, by 1940, the American Dermatological Association (ADA) recommended its use in pigmentation treatments, as well as in "bleaching or anti-freckle creams."[143] While the initial use of this substance in therapeutic sessions proved ineffective, it

[139] *Ibid.*, p.945-946
[140] H. Oettel, 'Hydroquinone Poisoning' *Archives of Pharmacology*, 183 (1956), pp.319-362. Research conducted by scientists in 1941 also illustrated the lightening properties of hydroquinone in the greying of hairs on mice after ingestion. See: G. L, Martin, S, Ansbacher, 'Confirmatory Evidence of the Chromotrichal Activity of P-Aminobenzoic Acid', *Journal of Biology and Chemistry*, 441 (1941)
[141]'Letters to the Editor: Depigmentation of Skin by Quinol and its Monobenzyl Ether', *The Lancet*, 7 June 1952, p.1164
[142] 'Any Questions?: Occupational Leucoderma', *The British Medical Journal*, 3rd January 1948, pp.33-34
[143] L. Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (Durham, 2020), p.150

was soon discovered that, just as ammoniated mercury did, hydroquinone prevented the production of melanin by interfering with the oxidation of tyrosine to melanin, meaning that no melanocytes were produced.[144] As the effectiveness of hydroquinone found its way into the mass media by 1955, and dermatologists began to capitalise on the new potential for bleaching creams, cosmetic companies also saw a huge commercial opportunity.

Mass produced bleaching creams were an ever growing industry in the U.S and U.K. (and worldwide), and prominent dermatologists also noted its potential to cater not only to people with notable skin conditions, but to capitalise upon racialised beauty politics: women with darker complexions who wanted to appear lighter. Following a similar pattern to the proliferation of products containing mercury, mass production led dermatologists and medical practitioners to realise the damaging effect of HQ on the skin, due to its increased use by a larger number of people as these creams became more widely available. In 1952, an article in *The Lancet* explained that cosmetic dermatitis was becoming increasingly popular due to the rise in cosmetic products, noting specifically that "synthetic organic compounds can be responsible for dermatitis…one of them, an anti-oxidant - the monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone, may also cause depigmentation of the skin."[145] The true seriousness of this, however, was not realised until 1975, when South African dermatologist G. H. Findlay (and others) discovered that skin bleaches containing HQ caused exogenous ochronosis (EO). Coinciding with a rapid increase in the sales and use of bleaching creams in South Africa, Findlay explained that "before 12 years ago, none of us [dermatologists] had taken much

[144] 'Rubber Hazards for the Skin', *The Lancet*, 4th October 1952, p.672. Troubling and ineffective due to the early incarnations of the substances including HQ and the concentration of other components in the formulations. As more research was conducted, HQ creams became stronger and more effective at preventing melanin production. A lot of the time, upon cessation of use pigmentation re-occurred.
[145] 'Cosmetics and the Skin', *The Lancet,* 27th September 1952, p.619

interest in the cosmetic habits of black Africans."[146] Only the emergence of "a new dermatosis in the face" provoked the curiosity of the dermatologists to investigate the cosmetics used by Black women.[147] In the years that followed (the late 1960s), the dermatosis became "more frequent and the cases began to crowd in the clinics," illustrating the increasing use of HQ bleaching creams. This statement proves revealing when considering the lack of research on the cosmetic habits of Black African women – as this was not just an issue in South Africa, but a transnational instance of ignorance and unimportance. This lack of interest from Britain, the U.S., in the Caribbean and African countries, on what Black women were applying to their bodies, alongside poorly regulated dangerous cosmetics, points to the embedded structural racism and racialised politics of beauty, not only in Britain, but globally.

Findlay examined Black African women who had experienced a dermatosis of the face and neck which presented as a blue-black hyperpigmentation. Upon investigation, Findlay discovered that all of the women had used skin bleaching creams which contained HQ, and while it had initially made their skin lighter, over time with continued use, it had caused exogenous ochronosis.[148] An irreversible skin condition, the blue-black hyperpigmentation of EO impacted all three layers of the skin, damaging the collagen and cartilage tissues, and making the skin extremely sensitive to UV radiation.[149] As such, women applying these creams needed UV protection, as the use of skin bleach without this not only caused EO in extreme cases, but damaged the skin and made it extremely sensitive. Consequently, creams produced toward the end of this period contained UV protection and many women avidly

[146] G. H. Findlay, 'Ochronosis Following Skin Bleaching with Hydroquinone', *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 6 (1982), p.1092-1093, p.1092. Research was also undertaken in Nairobi and published in the BMJ regarding the prevalence of 'Nephrotic Syndrome in Adult Africans', a large part of the diagnoses were due to the use of mercury based skin lightening creams, see: R. D. Barr [et. al.], 'Nephrotic Syndrome In Adult Africans In Nairobi', *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1972), pp.131-134. After use of the cream, users also experienced swelling of the legs and face.
[147] *Ibid.*, p.1092
[148] *Ibid.*, p.1092
[149] *Ibid*., p.1092

avoided the sun in the attempts to minimise these issues. Once they had completed their research, in 1975, Findlay and De Beer (another South African dermatologist), travelled to Britain to present their research at a conference held by the British Association of Dermatologists, and published their findings in the *British Journal of Dermatology* that same year.[150] Nevertheless, they noted, "our efforts provoked tangible interest in the UK, Europe and the USA," – yet there appears to be little change in attitude toward skin lightening regulation or scientific investigation after this.[151]

Following Findlay's study, medical professionals Dogliotti and Leibowitz, again in South Africa, published their research on exogenous ochronosis caused by HQ in skin bleaching creams in 1979. However, interestingly, they noted that "no additional papers have been published either locally or abroad" and as such, their research on 43 Black women affected by this condition was particularly important.[152] With their results, Dogliotti and Leibowitz provided recommendations for usage including that:

> "(i) cosmetic products should be tested for harmful properties before they are released for public use; (ii) a list of all the ingredients must be provided; (iii) an additional tag must provide an impressive warning of possible adverse effects, clear instructions for usage, and the duration and sites of application."[153]

Considering the prevalence of skin bleaching in Britain (and the U.S.), there was a clear under acknowledgement or ignorance among medical professionals of the dermatological research conducted by South African dermatologists, alongside the earlier investigations of British dermatologists. While practitioners were discovering both the apparent usefulness, and the

[150] G. H. Findlay., J. Morrison., and I. Simson, 'Exogenous Ochronosis and Pigmented Colloid Milium from Hydroquinone Bleaching Creams', *British Journal of Dermatology*, 93 (1975), pp.613-622.
[151] G. H. Findlay, H. A. De Beer, 'Chronic Hydroquinone Poisoning of the Skin from Skin-Lightening Cosmetics: A South African Epidemic of Ochronosis of the Face in Dark-Skinned Individuals', *South African Medical Journal* (1980), pp.187-190, p.187
[152] M. Dogliotti and M. Leibowitz, 'Granulomatous Ochronosis a Cosmetic-Induced Skin Disorder in Blacks', *SA Medical Journal*, 56 (1979), pp.757-760, p.758
[153] *Ibid.,* p.760

side effects of ammoniated mercury and later hydroquinone, there existed no official regulations on the use of chemicals until Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC, now EU) in 1973. By consequence, no official cosmetic guidance was published until 1976. While these requirements were mandatory by law in Britain by 1979, South Africa did not enact specific laws regarding skin bleaching creams until 1980. It is important to question why such regulation did not happen earlier in Britain, regardless of its joining of the EU, a reticence that could be seen as a consequence of deeply embedded systems of racial inequality, which subsequently fed into scientific and medical research and practice. Ultimately, because this skin condition impacted Black women and not white women, legislation and guidance came slowly and inconsistently.

Prior to these regulations becoming law in Britain, regulation published in 1972 by the EU stated that cosmetic products must be categorised, and labelled with a list of ingredients and directions for use.[154] The 1976 directive stated that "cosmetic products must not be harmful under normal or foreseeable conditions of use."[155] The directive provided a list of cosmetic categories, these included: creams; sunbathing products; products for tanning without sun; skin-whitening products; anti-wrinkle products. In the list of ingredients which cosmetic products must not contain, mercury and its compounds were listed.[156] Hydroquinone was regulated as a substance which cosmetics should not contain, except when in compliance with certain restrictions. In this instance, the maximum concentration was 2%, and it was specified that the label must state that the product contained HQ, and not to use the product to dye eyelashes.[157] Although the danger of using hydroquinone was well known, apart from

[154] Official Journal of the European Communities, Council Directive of 27 July 1976 on the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States Relating to Cosmetic Products, (76/768/EEC), 27th September 1976, No L 262/169
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*
[157] *Ibid.*

these warnings, HQ use was still permitted. However, in 1989 researchers discovered that even with a percentage of 2% hydroquinone, EO still occurred among users of skin creams.[158] This finding was repeated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1994, alongside the recommendations produced twenty years prior.[159] This final point demonstrates that these regulatory requirements for safeguarding specific cosmetics were still being ignored, even with evidence of serious and permanent harm to skin.

Understandably, if the medical profession used HQ creams professionally and these were available only by medical recommendation and under medical supervision, this perhaps would not have presented such an issue. However, women could and did access these treatments without medical supervision, and were impacted very differently—both personally and in society – by their use of bleaching creams. Black (and other Women of Colour) were assumed to be desiring lightness or to be closer to whiteness, while white women's use was attributed to their desire to remove blemishes, freckles and make their own complexion whiter.[160] It could also be argued that all women using these creams were seeking a form of whiteness: aesthetic whiteness. Yet, even if these creams successfully lightened Black skin considerably, women could not achieve the racial whiteness (or whiteness-as-identity), that afforded white superiority. Many women used mass produced skin lightening products containing HQ all over their bodies, multiple times a day, and for a prolonged period of time. For many, it resulted in serious skin and health damage. However, for a long time many medical officials gave bleaching and its consequences a low priority, due to western medical

[158] N. Hardwick, L.W. Van Gelder, C.A. Van Der Merwe, M.P. Van Der Merwe, 'Exogenous Ochronosis: An Epidemiological Study', *British Journal of Dermatology*, 120 (1989), pp.229-238. For further research on this, see: J. Levitt., 'The Safety of Hydroquinone: A Dermatologist's Response to the 2006 Federal Register', *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 5 (2007), pp.854-72

[159] International Programme On Chemical Safety, Environmental Health Criteria, 157: Hydroquinone, World Health Organisation, 1994.

[160] Mire, *Skin Bleaching*, p.13

authorities not seeing the dangers of Black women's bleaching as a pressing or important issue.[161] Bleaching to achieve whiteness, respectability, and beauty, then, meant that Black women's skin bleaching was deeply impacted by the "politics of whiteness…in the context of a worldwide dominating culture of white supremacy and colonial representations of race."[162] Thus, this makes the use of ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone impossible to be seen as just a medical issue, as its use highlights the "racist culture within which racialised bodies are created, constrained, exploited, and silenced" to understand the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of skin bleaching.[163]

Since regulation, HQ has unsurprisingly continued to cause dermatological issues among users of skin lightening creams, including the synthetic productions of HQ and its natural derivatives. An article in the *BMJ* in May 1984, evidenced that the British cosmetic regulations were inadequate with regard to HQ in not acting in the interest of the consumer. While the regulations stated that HQ must be named on the product, there are chemical variations of HQ which can make the product more noxious, and the regulations did not state that these should be specified. Upon investigation, products such Drula Bleaching Wax, while labelled to contain hydroquinone did not specify the presence of the much stronger and more dangerous derivative, MMEH. As a result, they subsequently suggested that manufacturers need not only to name the constituent product (HQ) but also the variation (MMEH) and its specific function.[164] They also argued that "neither the 1978 cosmetic regulations nor the new cosmetic regulations deal adequately with this point" and as such, regulations should change so the dangers of such constituents become apparent.[165] This suggests that if women knew

[161] *Ibid.*, p.14
[162] *Ibid*., p.14
[163] *Ibid*., p.14
[164] C. M. Ridley, S. J. Adams and I. Leigh, 'British Cosmetic Regulations Inadequate', *British Medical Journal*, 288 (1984), p.1537
[165] *Ibid.,*p.1537

about the more dangerous variation of HQ and its potential side effects, they would be less inclined to use such products. Whether women would have bought less noxious bleaches with this knowledge remains unknown, but the issue lay here in the lack of explicit clarity surrounding the dangers of these products being presented to consumers.

In response, dermatologists Boyle and Kennedy provided the details of their own patient:

> "a 19 year old West Indian girl applied Drula Bleaching Wax for two or three months in order to lighten the colour of her skin. She subsequently developed severe irregular hypo-pigmentation of her hands, arms, neck, and legs. Despite discontinuing the use of the cream hypopigmentation continued for some weeks."[166]

While the Drula Bleaching Wax may have had a 2% concentration and was labelled as HQ, the specific active constituent of the chemical was not labelled, and the safety of the consumer was compromised. This speaks to the increased danger of MMEH: with HQ alone, re-pigmentation would have occurred much sooner, as seen in the case of the tannery workers in 1938. Thus, practical implications of the "disfiguring…severe and irregular depigmenting qualities" of MMEH was not an isolated phenomenon when dealing with the inaccuracies and secrecies of skin bleaching creams, and the lengths companies would take to get products on shelves, whether legal or not.[167]

Medical and legislative negligence due to racialised attitudes toward bleaching creams was not the only consequence of dangerous HQ derivatives. There are many natural derivatives to HQ, and the collection and processing of such, has since damaged the

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[166] *Ibid.,*pp.1537

[167] *Ibid.,* p.1357. Published in 1994, the World Health Organisation conducted an investigation into Hydroquinone and recommended that: "In view of the widespread inappropriate use of skin-lightening creams, it is recommended that over-the-counter sales of creams containing hydroquinone be restricted. Health Education Programmes should be developed to discourage the use of hydroquinone-containing creams for whole body skin lightening. b)Further investigations into the safety of long-term use of creams containing 1-2% hydroquinone is needed." Thus, by 1994, the same recommendations were being made, and nothing was being done by cosmetic regulators. See: International Programme On Chemical Safety, Environmental Health Criteria, 157: Hydroquinone, World Health Organisation, 1994.

vegetation in Indigenous Communities. Consequently, this provided further compounds and creams to cause damage to Black skin. HQ has similar chemical structures to other naturally occurring substances such as arbutin and tree bark. These derivatives often cause similar lightening effects and damage to the skin as HQ, yet had lasting impacts on Indigenous communities. Due to the growing population of skin bleaching, collecting the naturally occurring substances for bleaching creams caused Indigenous plants to become endangered. Thus, the practice of skin bleaching – and the desire for white skin - is embedded in racialised aesthetics of beauty which had much wider consequences in addition to skin damage.

Arbutin, often used by Indigenous communities in North America, and bark from *Cassipourea* trees in Southern Africa are autochthonous substances, made into home remedies from life-long traditions. These have since been exploited by modern scientists, medical professionals, and capitalistic ventures. *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* is a species of plant which is most frequently located in the northern hemisphere – in Canada and the United States in particular - and is one of several plant species related to the bearberry, or Kinnikinnick (smoking mixture) as referred to by Algonquin Indigenous peoples.[168] The leaves of the bearberry contain naturally occurring arbutin, which metabolises and breaks down in the body to form hydroquinone. Though arbutin is now widely regarded as one of the most popular depigmenting agents in cosmetic creams, it was traditionally used as a treatment for urinary tract infections and in herbal tea remedies among Indigenous communities.[169] While the exact story of how arbutin came to be discovered as an effective skin lightener remains scarce, it has since been reported by various scientists that the arbutin from the bearberry leaves were first converted to hydroquinone via bioconversion in a laboratory in Japan around the late

[168] Desmedt, *Overview of Skin Whitening*, p.943
[169] D-H, Seo [et.al.], 'High-yield Enzymatic Bioconversion of Hydroquinone to α-arbutin, A Powerful Skin Lightening Agent', *Applied Microbiology and Biotechnology*, 94 (2012), pp.1189–1197, p.1190.

1950s, and another scientific article reported that arbutin is "traditionally used in Japan to treat pigmentary disorders."[170] It is suspected that scientists and dermatologists studied the compounds closely, and discovered the similarity of arbutin and hydroquinone, and thus the ability for it to inhibit tyronaise and impede melanin formation. Yet, the jump from the use of this plant among Indigenous communities to its appearance in laboratories for investigation remains unknown. There are now widespread scientific tests and experiments being conducted to discover how to get the maximum volume of arbutin out of the leaves to produce HQ, and as research in Southern Africa has shown, the growing prominence of skin lightening creams could put these plants at risk.

One plant which has been proven to be at risk of extinction or environmental harm since its discovery for the ability to lighten skin is that of the bark of Indigenous trees.[171] Taking the example of the Nguni people, located in Southern Africa, among Xhosa speakers, the method of skin lightening is called umMemezi. Similar to arbutin, it has been discovered as an effective lightening agent due to the structure of the main chemical components being similar to that of hydroquinone, stemming mainly from the *Cassipourea* extracts of the bark.[172] umMemezi is traditionally prepared by "pouring a small amount of water onto a concave-shaped stone and rubbing the pre-soaked bark onto the stone until a thick mixture forms. After cleansing the face, the mixture is gently and evenly applied to the face and neck."[173] Women often used this multiple times a day, using it not only for skin lightening but

[170] *Ibid.*, p.1190 and Desmedt, *Overview of Skin Whitening* p.943. Also see: W. Zhu and J. Gao, 'The Use of Botanical Extracts as Topical Skin-Lightening Agents for the Improvement of Skin Pigmentation Disorders', *Journal of Investigative Dermatology Symposium Proceedings*, 13 (2008), pp.20-24
[171] F. Khan, 'Beauty, Myths and Trees', *Women and the Environment,* 29 (1996), pp. 37-42, p.38. The names of these indigenous trees are as follows: *Cassipourea flanaganii, Cassipourea gerrardii, Sideroxylon inerme, Olea capensis, Curtisia dentata, Rapanea melanophloeos*. Also see: S. Garcia de Arriba, Na. Belal, and K-U. Nolte, 'Risk Assessment of Free Hydroquinone Derived from Arctostaphylos Uva-Ursi Folium Herbal Preparations', *International Journal of Toxicology,* 32 (2013), pp. 442–53
[172] Khan, *Beauty, Myths and Trees*, p.38
[173] *Ibid.,* p.38

as a spot cream and sun cream, yet its primary use has since emerged as a skin lightener.[174] However, due to the growing realisation of its effectiveness as a bleaching agent, in combination with the growing social prominence of skin bleaching creams by Black women in broader society, has led to a threat to already endangered indigenous vegetation.[175] Indeed, the 1960s in South Africa saw a widespread increase in demand for tree bark for medicinal uses, and alongside growing urbanisation, had devastating results for vulnerable tree species.[176] The growing prominence and significance of skin lightening, caused by racialised notions of "inferiority and superiority, and consequently perceptions of beauty" posed a threat not only in the form of skin damage, but to Indigenous populations and vegetation. The capitalistic intentions and exploitations of beauty companies and dermatologists continues to this day.[177]

A dermatological history of ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone highlights the importance of considering skin as a lens for the prevalence of racism. The lack of dermatological investigation into the dangers of bleaching creams was a racialised one, as the consequences impacted Black women and not white women. Through the racialised notions of beauty in the strive for whiteness or lightness, skin has proven to be a continually significant lens for which to examine the prevalence of race in Britain. While this does not mean that women were unaware of such dangers, especially as this period progressed, many women frequently ignored such warnings due to personal and social pressures of being 'lighter' and the prevalence of whiteness. This can partly be attributed to the influence of

[174] *Ibid.,* p.38
[175] *Ibid.,* p.39
[176] A. Cunningham, 'Herbal Medicine Trade: A Hidden Economy', *Indicator SA*, 6 (1989), pp.51-54, p.51. Also see: A. Cunningham 'An Investigation of the Herbal Medicine Trade in Natal/KwaZulu', Investigational Report no 29, Institute of Natural Resources, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (1988); and A. Cunningham, 'People and Medicines: The Exploitation and Conservation of Traditional Zulu Medicinal Plants', Paper Presented at the Twelfth Plenary Meeting of AETFAT, Hamburg, Germany (1990)
[177] Khan, *Beauty, Myths and Trees*, p.39

women's magazines, beauty editors, and advertisements promising beauty through the use of these creams. The cultural history of these creams and their users will now be examined to highlight the importance of skin modification as a lens for which to view histories of race in Britain.

## Chapter Two: White women as Consumers and as Targeted by Advertising

This chapter examines skin bleaching among white women in Britain at the beginning of this period. White women's skin was racialised via the use of skin bleaches with the goal of making their white skin, whiter. White women also possessed a duality of privilege, which afforded women the ability to bleach and tan their skin. Both the desire to bleach skin whiter and tan white skin, indicates that both white skin aesthetics and whiteness itself had gradations and hierarchies of idealism. Illustrated by providing a context of the motivation to bleach skin through advice columns in women's magazines, this chapter examines the users of skin bleaching preparations and the advertisements for these products.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a porcelain complexion weighed heavily on the upper and middle classes, and among some, always prevailed. An examination of popular newspapers and magazines from the early 20th century, show that the idea of white or porcelain skin was widely sought after. In 1908, John C. Kirkwood writing for the *Daily Mail*, provided an explanation of 'important accessories which go into the making of a well-dressed woman'. Kirkwood noted that men demanded womanliness, that all women should please men, and should fulfil every male conception of womanhood. Before discussing the ideal weight and hair of the perfect woman, he discussed complexion. His instructions were as follows: "It should have its clearness maintained, its softness preserved. It should be free from blemishes, from sallowness, from ruddiness, from unhealthy pallor."[178] Here, it is made clear that the only permitted complexion is a white one. That the skin must be free from sallowness (an unhealthy yellowish/brownish tone) and ruddiness (a red/rosy tone on the skin or cheeks), suggests that a pure white complexion illustrates health, youthfulness, vitality, and most

[178] John C. Kirkwood, 'My Lady's Toilet: Small but Important Accessories which go into the Making of a Well-dressed Woman', *Daily Mail*, 25th May 1908, p.10

importantly, the ideal form of beauty for women. Further, he emphasised that during the summer the skin requires the most meticulous care due to sun exposure. Avoiding the sun to "preserve ones complexion" is the most important duty of a woman's beauty routine, because "a good complexion is too delicate a thing, too precious a possession… a perfect complexion is in itself a sufficient beauty to cover a multitude of shortcomings."[179] The importance of complexion here, lies in the attachment of skin tone to beauty. It implies the notion of a beauty hierarchy, with complexion in this instance being the most important. Thus, for those who could not achieve a white complexion, the hope of achieving beauty was slim in the eyes of Kirkwood and many others during this time. However, questions remain over whether he and others would have considered the beauty and appearance of Black women in the British population during this time. In both instances, this illustrated a marginalisation of Black women's beauty due to the prevalence and prominence of whiteness.

The idea of a perfect complexion was also promoted by film stars appearing in advertisements for soap. According to Lux Toilet Soap in 1930, "film directors say that a flawless skin is the most important asset any girl can have."[180] Hollywood stars often featured in Lux advertisements throughout this period to emphasise the importance of a 'pure' complexion. The advert continued, even if women are "lacking great beauty but possess lovely skin" they are on the road to becoming great stars, due to the importance placed upon complexion and clear skin. Thus, if women can achieve this perfect idea of complexion, they also achieve benefits that come with it: youthfulness, vitality, beauty, whiteness, and ultimately, unspoken but implicit, racial superiority. Most adverts for soaps, creams, and lotions during this time promoted and promised youthfulness and beauty. The development of

[179] *Ibid.,* p.10
[180] The Bodleian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Lux Toilet Soap', *Modern Weekly*, July 1930, p.611

anti-ageing as a key factor in remaining beautiful, alongside a clear and blemish-free skin, permeated many advertisements, and consequently, offered false promises for women based on the legitimacy of such products.

For many decades before suntanning became popular in the late 1950s, whilst many social commentators wrote about the importance of maintaining a white complexion, for those who did not possess a 'naturally' porcelain complexion, there saw the development of products to supposedly aid the attainment of white skin. These preparations and creams were predominantly marketed toward white women in the early twentieth century to make a white complexion, whiter. Later, huge commodification and market growth during the 1950s saw these produced and marketed toward Black women, promising a lighter skin tone. Advertisements for these treatments appeared in newspapers in the US and UK during this time.

In 1901, the *LA Times* ran an advertisement for Madame Ribault's Complexion Beautifier: this apparently harmless treatment promised to "permanently remove all tan, freckles, moth patches, pimples, sunburn, and any skin imperfections, whatever they may be."[181] A seemingly bold claim for an over-the-counter product. Whilst no ingredients were listed here, in the *Daily Mail* in 1902, Lady Constance Howard explained that the use of Albion milk and sulphur soap would whiten and soften the skin.[182] Mrs. Henry Symes, another social commentator, wrote extensively in the *LA Times*, providing women with specific methods for whitening the skin, because when the "suns ravages show soonest [on the face]…if she comes home at night with a coat of tan her lily skin is gone."[183] To remedy this, in 1903, Mrs Symes recommended an "efficacious but powerful… liquid powder and

[181] 'Made her beautiful', *LA Times*, 13th Jan 1901, p.5
[182] 'Multiple display advertising items', *Daily Mail,* 9th April 1902, p.7
[183] Mrs Henry Symes, 'How to be Healthy and Beautiful', *LA times*, 1902, p.C7

antiphelic lotion for removing tan and freckles."[184] Antiphelic lotion or milk, was a solution used as a bleach to lighten the skin, not only used in the U.S., but also used as a home remedy in the U.K.[185] In this instance, as Historian Kerry Segrave has also noted, the antiphelic lotion recommended by Symes contained mercury bichloride (extremely toxic to humans), zinc sulphate (in excess can cause side effects of vomiting and headaches), and lead acetate (can cause skin irritation and poisoning), leaving no wonder as to why this short term remedy was both effective *and* painful.[186] These articles recommending the use of antiphelic lotions printed in the *LA Times* and other bleaching remedies in more niche books, suggests that a large number of the white population in the U.S. would have had access to these recipes. While the magazine writers and publishing houses may have assumed a white readership, Black American women would also have had the opportunity to consume such messages. However, considering the prevalence of discourses surrounding beauty and health being the image of a white, upper-middle class, respectable woman, while Black women may not have seen relevance in reading these papers, white women had a vast range of bleaching options from which to choose.

In Britain, Anna Kingsford, one of the first women to obtain a degree in medicine, also provided a recipe for antiphelic milk. This could be "bought everywhere pretty cheaply for tan and freckles," but nevertheless, she provided her own formula.[187] The wide-availability of such products for a low price suggests the popularity of bleaching among women in society, and the ability to do this for a small price, would have made it accessible

[184] Mrs Henry Symes 'Chats with Correspondents on Health and Beauty Topics, *LA times*, 20th September 1903, p.E10
[185] See: Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy* (New York, 2009), originally published in 1968. Stretching back further, see Harriet Hubbart Ayers', *A Complete and Authentic Treatise on Health and Beauty* (New York, 1899), in which Antiphelic milk is recommended for removing freckles.
[186] Kerry Segrave, *Suntanning in Twentieth Century America* (North Carolina, 2005), p.8
[187] Anna Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor* (London, 1886), p.48

for many more women. This is especially important when it is not possible to obtain sales records from local shops, or a large number of first-hand accounts of bleaching. For a recipe "which is decided in its action" Kingsford suggested:

> "Bichloride of mercury - 6 grains.
>
> Hydrochloric acid (pure) - 1 fluid drachm.
>
> Distilled water - ¼ pint
>
> Mix and add:
>
> Rectified spirit - 2 fluid ounces.
>
> Rose spirit - 2 fluid ounces.
>
> Glycerine - 1 ounce."[188]

Many of the remedies from this period would now be understood as extremely dangerous, of which, describing the mixture as 'decided' shrouds the potential side effects of using this product. Explaining that these whitening lotions are 'decided' and 'powerful', suggests an undeniably successful product, but hides the potential for pain, injury, and severe side effects. Mercury is a caustic poison, hydrochloric acid is extremely corrosive, especially upon contact with the eyes and skin, and rectified spirits can contain up to 94% ethanol, which causes dryness and irritation upon contact with the skin. These chemicals could be partially counteracted by the use of water and glycerine, however, after prolonged use, this could cause serious damage to the skin. The apparent ease of being able to obtain the toxic ingredients used in whitening lotions had a huge bearing on the widespread popularity of bleaching skin, and thus, the popularity of bleaching in British society, alongside the damage it was potentially causing to women's skin.

[188] *Ibid.,* p.48

## White Women as Consumers of Skin Bleaching Products

Alongside being intertwined with race and beauty, a white skin tone as the perfect definition of beauty took a long time to change. The late 1920s and early 1930s in Britain presented a complex picture with regard to women's complexion modification practices. While there saw the beginnings of change toward the desirability of tanned skin, the notion of a white, porcelain, 'English' complexion, still prevailed as the ideal at the beginning of this period. From 1930 onward, there were many instances of beauty advice columns responding to women's help on how to most effectively whiten or bleach their skin. This section examines white women as users of skin bleaches, specifically, as a method of preservation of white skin and to remove suntan or sunburn. White female bodies were racialised via the assumption of racial neutrality and white invisibility within the aim for white skin. While many white women bleached their skin to conform with notions of fashion and popular beauty trends of the time, these trends were deeply embedded in racialised beauty politics, and ultimately, white supremacist notions of whiteness as perfection.

In August 1930, a *Daily Mail* special edition 'by a woman correspondent', explained the latest beauty and fashion trends. As Paris designers set the fashion trends, beauty specialists were reported to be creating new make-up shades to match. It emphasised that "women are crazy to acquire alabaster skin… [they are] flocking to the beauty salons to be bleached. We are doing skin bleaching more than anything else at the moment."[189] To do this, a plaster mould was taken of the face, and then in this mask, women would sit for thirty minutes with a very hot treatment on their face to bleach the skin. According to the correspondent, women would do anything and pay anything to be white. *Modern Weekly and Women and Beauty*, two popular women's magazines during this time, shed light on the

[189] 'Pink and White Women Again Rush to get Bleached', *Daily Mail*, 20th August 1930, p.9

significance of a smooth, white, and ageless complexion in discourses of beauty. These magazines provided a vast array of tips and articles instructing women on how to achieve this. One useful feature of these magazines to illustrate such, was the option for readers to write to the magazine and ask for advice from beauty columnists. *Modern Weekly* was published by Amalgamated Press from 1926-36. Previously titled *Charm* when it began in 1925, and *Woman's Illustrated* after 1936, it had family, fashion, fictional stories, and beauty features, with advice columns answering a vast array of questions from their readers.

In 1930, Phyllis Digby Morton was appointed editor of *Woman and Beauty*, a new monthly magazine also published by Amalgamated Press. Writing under the pseudonym Ann Seymour, Morton answered letters from readers directly on so-called 'taboo' subjects for the 1930s – most of these included advice on beauty, fashion, and sex, as opposed to advice about home-making and traditionally gendered subjects. During the first five months of 1935, Morton received 38,260 letters, an average of 7,652 a month, which suggests a huge hunger for knowledge about feminised ideals, and demonstrates agency among women to inquire about their desires and problems. Simultaneous to women's agency, these magazines existed within powerful privately owned publishing apparatuses, producing a large number of magazines and newspapers which conformed to the functions of a capitalist society.[190] While they wanted to assist women, these large publishing corporations also wanted to achieve market dominance, and inasmuch, to publish the most relevant content and create profit.

The direct discussion between reader to magazine in answering personal queries requires a level of intimacy and mutual identification between the reader and columnist, which signified the primary tone of most women's advice columns.[191] However, the direct

[190] A. McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (London, 1991), p.73
[191] J. Leman, 'The Advice of a Real Friend' Codes of intimacy and oppression in women's magazines 1937-1955', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3 (1980), pp. 63-78, p.63. Also see: L. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900-1950* (London, 1991) and P. Boynton '"Enough With Tips and Advice and Thangs'': The

address and "discourse of intimacy adopted by women's magazines" were carefully constructed to deny the existence of these magazines within a capitalist structure, and rather, to convince the reader of their importance within social structures and the ways in which magazines existed to help women in their everyday lives.[192] In this sense, women's personal lives became political within the intimate discussions of women's needs, not only assisting in personal troubles, but existing within the political and economic structures which were "required by capitalism to maintain itself."[193] These beauty columns, alongside being influenced by capitalist motives, contained themes of competitiveness of female appearance, seen in the pleads for assistance for remedies to whiten skin. The prevalence various beauty practices – and advice for such – are inherent elements of women's magazines, which are "deeply rooted in the ideology of femininity."[194] Consequently, magazines keeping up with the latest fashion and beauty trends required the reinforcement of certain racialised beauty trends (bleaching and later tanning), to ensure a constant popularity among women, and the continual re-purchase of magazines.

When it came to whiteness and complexion, there included a plethora of remedies and advice columns to achieve the 'key-look' of the time. Home remedies for bleaches featured frequently throughout the advice columns, making it easier for women to bleach and lighten their skin with ingredients found in the home or readily available to buy in pharmacies. The accessibility of ingredients with low prices, enabled more women to achieve a desirable white skin, yet these would now be considered as dangerous and their success, questionable. In January 1930, a *Modern Weekly* reader asked: "would a mixture of equal parts of sulphur and

Experience of a Critically Reflexive, Evidence-based Agony Aunt', *Feminist Media Studies*, 6 (2006), pp.539-556

[192] J. Leman, 'The Advice of a Real Friend' Codes of Intimacy and Oppression in Women's Magazines 1937-1955', *Women's Studies Int. Quart*., 3 (1980), pp. 63-78, p.63.

[193] *Ibid.*, p.63

[194] *Ibid.*, p.73

milk remove freckles?"[195] The beauty columnist replied, "sulphur and milk would certainly make your freckles fainter, but a chemical bleach would bring about the desired effect more quickly. Mix carbonate of potash 25 grains; borax 40 grains; eu de cologne 1/4 ounce; water up to 4 ounces. Apply with a soft cloth twice a day."[196] While many women asked how to remove freckles from their skin to achieve a white complexion, these bleaches were used all over the face and body by many women in the attempts to achieve whiteness. The focus on freckle removal illustrated the desire for clear and perfect skin, untainted by marks, blotches, and thus, freckles, which 'contaminated' the whiteness of the skin. Thus, while freckles seem a specific target for removal of colour from the skin, they more accurately illustrate the idea of perfection seen in a white complexion. Another reader asked "I want your help badly on two points: How can I bleach my neck and arms? And rid my skin of blotches?"[197] This time, the columnist suggested two applications per day of "acid nitric dilute, 15 drops; peroxide, 2 drachms; spirits of wine, 3 drachms; distilled water."[198] According to the columnist, this would make the users arms and neck 'better' in colour over time, in this case, 'better' meant whiter. This further engrained the idea to both the woman seeking help and the other readers of the magazine that striving for a 'better' and whiter skin was both fashionable and desirable, whilst also racializing white skin through modification as the ideal beauty.

In August 1930, columnist Elizabeth Ann also suggested peroxide as a "good, cheap bleach", but advised to use some cold cream "if the skin should feel a little sore."[199] Two years later, in the women's beauty section of the *Daily Mail,* a reader asked for help to

[195] Bodleian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Clock on for Beauty - Freckles and Fat', *Modern Weekly*, January 1930. Note, the title of 'Freckles and Fat' which accentuates the intersectionality of skin and whiteness with other elements of beauty such as weight.
[196] *Ibid.*
[197] Bodleian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'A bleach indicated', *Modern Weekly*, April 1930
[198] *Ibid.*
[199] Bodleian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, Elizabeth Ann, 'She Should Have Beauty Wherever She Goes!', *Modern Weekly*, August 1930

remove a heavy sunburn (suntan was also referred to as sunburn until the post-war period) from the neck and chest. Beauty columnist Joan Beringer suggested a "tan remover specially prepared to bleach slowly", and unlike many other columnists, warned that skin bleaching at home was sometimes a dangerous process.[200] As these products were not yet regulated or mass produced, it was unusual that instructions for bleaching included warnings of pain and soreness. Whether it was assumed that readers knew the risks of using chemicals such as these, or women were unaware of the damage these bleaches could cause, remains unknown. As these goods had not yet been commodified as cosmetic bleaching products, nor had wider society yet recognised the profitability of such creams, there were no regulations on the dangers of the home-remedies being provided, nor on the specific ingredients of bleaching products that were available over the counter. However, warnings of painful symptoms and instructions to use bleach on certain areas and for certain lengths of time, was an indication that some beauticians were aware of the potential strength of the ingredients they were recommending. Arguably, this normalisation of bleaching to achieve whiteness made mass produced bleaches with ingredients such as ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone more dangerous when they were commercialised and marketed to women.

In 1934, Beringer explained that as soon as women got home from their holiday and the summer season had ended, women would "rush to their favourite beauty parlour for bleaching treatment…[and to their own] bleach and freckle cream."[201] This not only illustrates the popularity of bleaching among many women during this time, but also that bleaching was readily available as home treatments and in beauty salons. This suggests that bleaching was more popular among women than one would initially think. Again, unlike

[200] Joan Beringer 'Daily Mail Women's Bureau', *Daily Mail*, 19th October 1932, p.19
[201] 'Treat your Suntan Tactfully! Joan Beringer shows you the way', *Daily Mail*, 30 August 1934, p19

many other articles, Beringer stressed the importance of patience when bleaching due to the danger of such substances. Beringer explained that the ideal treatment was 6-12 bleaching packs given twice weekly by a beautician, which were gradually left on for longer each time, totalling 25 minutes. Yet, Beringer recognised that this was financially "out of reach" for many women, so for home bleaching, she suggested spreading the bleach all over the skin for only 2-3 minutes for the first time, gradually increasing exposure time, whilst being careful to avoid the eyes and lips.[202] Further, for sensitive skin, one minute may be sufficient, as "your individual reaction will quickly tell you. If the skin feels resentful and sore, mix your bleach cream with a little almond oil."[203] While it remains unknown which bleaching cream Beringer was referring to, there were many bleaching creams on the market at this time, many containing ammoniated mercury. Thus, Beringer's only concern with women bleaching off their suntan was that "women restrain our impatience to return to cream and roses" and use the creams carefully.[204] This speaks to both the danger of creams, and thus, the lengths women went to return to the white complexion which was entrenched as the beauty ideal of the time.

*Women and Beauty* also published similar bleaching advice, as one reader asked Ann Seymour: "My face looks so dirty and sallow, can you suggest a simple treatment for me please?"[205] The terminology used by the reader suggests that a sallow complexion can look unhealthy, yellow, or even brown in tone, and the use of 'dirty' corresponded with racialised notions of skin and complexion that was not 'pure' white. The notion of skin being 'dirty' if the complexion did not resemble ideal porcelain whiteness, reinforced not only the

[202] *Ibid.*
[203] *Ibid.*
[204] *Ibid.*
[205] British Library, LOU.LON 306, Ann Seymour, 'Help you to Achieve Beauty: A Face Pack', *Woman and Beauty*, March 1932

importance of skin bleaching for white women, but that bleaching was also necessary for any woman whose skin was not porcelain white to achieve lightness and clear skin. However, for most, it was impossible to reach an ideal white beauty. This could refer to Women of Colour, or white women with rosy, sallow, or freckled complexions, as any deviation from porcelain whiteness during this time was seen as imperfect. In response to the reader, Seymour explained that women could purchase bleaching face-packs, again reinforcing the wider availability of such products, or create their own. The ingredients Seymour suggested for a home-made bleaching face pack, used three times a week to whiten and cleanse the skin, was as follows: "one spoonful of carbonate of magnesia, one tbsp of fullers earth, one tbsp of peroxide. Thin with witch-hazel."[206] Seymour also included many other recipes for "splendid softener and whiteners," with peroxide, lemon juice, and milk being the most common home-bleaching ingredients and the easiest to find in local shops.[207] More important, however, was the terminology for these recipes and what they promised.

In 1933, Ann Seymour's beauty course on saying 'farewell summer tan' provided a "splendid" bleaching treatment to get rid of a tan that looks "very dirty…in the quickest possible time."[208] As seen in earlier articles, this home remedy for bleaching which included peroxide of hydrogen and lemon juice was intended for use over the entire body, not just the face. Indeed, any leftovers could be dabbed on the skin at night for "additional whiteness."[209] The instruction that bleaching should be for the whole body, rather than just the face, suggests that the pressure of bleaching consumed beauty trends not only in terms of make-up and facial beauty, but that the whole body should comply with perfect whiteness. This not only

[206] *Ibid.*
[207] The British Library, LOU.LON 306, Ann Seymour, 'Ann Seymour's Beauty Course: Treatments as simple as ABC!', *Woman and Beauty*, March 1932
[208] The British Library, LOU.LON.523, 'Ann Seymour's Beauty Course: Farewell Summer Tan', *Woman and Beauty*, October 1933
[209] *Ibid.*

increased the social pressure of perfectionism, but also the health risks when using such creams across the entire body, especially if ammoniated mercury, hydroquinone, or other toxic substances such as peroxide were used. Also, the suggestion tanned skin looked dirty when summer had ended or when wearing the wrong clothes, corresponded to centuries old degrading and racialised terminology which designated Blackness and darkness with negativity, and whiteness with purity. This internalisation of darkness as dirty, whether innocently deployed or not, furthered racially charged attitudes among women during this time. It promoted the permanence of racial and aesthetic whiteness as beautiful, and consequently, served to further the exclusion and degradation of Black women's beauty.

It was not just women's magazines which took this line of terminology. An article in *Picture Show* called 'Bleaching Summers Tan' in September 1951, expressed how suntanned skin "appears sallow against autumns darker garments, and positively dirty against evening dresses."[210] This language, as late as 1951 when tanning was increasing in popularity, illustrated the necessity of being white whereby female beauty was concerned. While this may seem innocent and fashionable in relation to clothing, such discourses were indebted to attitudes of racial exclusion. Indeed, why else would the "suntanned lovely make every endeavour to get her skin back to its normal pink and white"?[211]

These bleaches, if made correctly and used regularly, promised to provide a 'clear complexion with healthy colour', 'whiten without harming', 'bleach and soften skin', and 'make skin fresh, clean and beautiful'. While promising better skin and encouraging the use of bleach, it perpetuated the notion of whiteness as both an ideal and as a necessity to be seen as beautiful. With so much emphasis being placed upon the importance of a clear, smooth,

[210] G. Sande, 'Bleaching Summer's Tan', *Picture Show*, 22 September 1951, p.14
[211] *Ibid.*, p.14

and ultimately, white complexion, its ties and association with the racialisation of skin implicate these suggestions of white beauty in excluding Black women from narratives of beauty. None of the beauty questions, suggestions, or articles in the issues of *Woman and Beauty* or *Modern Weekly* studied here, included questions from Black women, addressed beauty questions of Black skin, or included examples of products for Black skin. If Black women were not represented or considered within the pages of these magazines, they more than likely would not see the relevance in buying or reading the magazines, and thus, there would not be beauty questions relating to Black skin. However, this is not to suggest that Black women did not need or want representation, their voices to be heard in beauty columns, or their questions answered. The lack of awareness or ignorance of publishing companies and beauty specialists, meant that magazines placed little or no importance on the beauty habits of Black women. Ultimately, in this instance, and throughout this period, bleaching skin for whiteness was popularised and encouraged, and subsequently, white skin was the only beauty ideal with any importance.

Another theme of white women's bleaching before tanned skin became much more popular among white women, was tanning for a fashionable complexion during summer and bleaching off their tan as soon as summer ended. This duality in ability to modify skin, by tanning and un-tanning (bleaching), gave white women the privilege to pass between two fashionable complexions. Many women wanted to achieve a suntan during the summer so their tanned complexions could complement summer clothing. Just the same, many women also strived to bleach their skin during the winter, so that their white complexions matched their winter outfits. As film star and beauty editor Gillian Sande explained in *Picture Show* (unusually late for this opinion in 1949), as signs of autumn emerge, "the summer tan…looks out of place…sallow and dirty. [We now need a] natural creamy tint that looks fresh and clear

for winter."[212] While this hints toward the popularity of the suntan, the efforts made by women to bleach their skin after tanning illustrates the pervasiveness of whiteness as an ideal and the lengths to which some women followed trends in the hope of being more beautiful. This desire of tanning to look fashionable on holiday and bleaching at the end of summer was present in a wide range of print media during this time, and points significantly toward the intersection of complexion and social class. The ability of some women to travel for holidays, have the leisure time to sunbathe, the ability to buy these magazines frequently, afford the clothing, and follow the instructions for bleaching treatments afterward, suggests a considerable amount of disposable income. However, this does not rule out all white women, as the home remedies remained available to make for lower prices.

Printed in 1930, *Picture Show*, Britain's longest running entertainment and film magazine published by Amalgamated Press, published 'Beach-then-Bleach!', which enthused:

> "When she looks fair she craves a tan;
> When she's tanned she would be white.
> It makes beauticians rich overnight."[213]

This light-hearted narrative hints at the desire of many women to possess the opposite looks to which they had, desires that were partly the fault of socially-inscribed beauty ideals dictating specific notions of beauty. As a film and entertainment magazine, this article documented actresses returning from their holidays needing a 'peaches and cream' skin tone before they began filming. Though the article suggested it was unwise to bake the skin, this was not due to the dangers of UV radiation, but the difficulty of restoring a 'pure' white complexion from a heavy tan. According to the cosmeticians on set, it was difficult to "devise a whitewash thin enough to cover the bronzed skin effectively."[214] It continued:

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[212] Gillian Sande, 'Summer Tan to Winter White', *Picture Show*, 24 September 1949, p.13
[213] 'Beach-then Bleach!: Unwise to Bake the Skin', *Picture Show*, August 16, 1930, p.22
[214] *Ibid.*

> "Girls browned to the shade of toast must now use a bleach. The various tones, transformed from the pink and white to… the desert tan, the sunburn, the creole, the burnt almond, all create not only the problem of becomingness but the difficulty of dressing to meet the complexion."[215]

This suggested that all women who needed to consider their skin tone for work as actresses were white women, or at least, those who read *Picture Show*. In listing descriptions of tanned skin which needed to be bleached back to whiteness, they list 'the creole'. This term has a vast array of meanings, but according to references in British newspapers during the 1930s, 'creole' appears to denote "a person born in a tropical country of white parentage…not a coloured."[216] Yet, the author of article also noted that "most Europeans have a wrong conception of the meaning of the word creole."[217] Another article suggested that "a creole is a person of European descent born in the West Indies, Mexico, Central America, or South America."[218] While these definitions were themselves products of highly racialised imaginations, it is important to consider a generalised idea of what this word meant to some people during this time. Whether this phrase represented an idea of skin colour (as a popularly understood or misunderstood idea) as opposed to an actual skin tone, these definitions were steeped in colonialism. People of white parentage born in the Caribbean for example, spoke directly about, and to, imperialist communities. Skin therefore, and the description of white women's tanned skin as creole, signified not a stable identity or skin tone, but the racialisation of white skin, and unstable meanings and deployments of racial identities. In this case, the author was trying to suggest that a tanned skin tone was too dark in the context of beauty and film, yet also implicated these racialised aesthetics of skin tone within imperialist discourses.

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[215] *Ibid.*
[216] 'What is a Creole?', *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 10th November 1932. Further to explaining the term 'creole', using the term 'coloured' in this context requires explanation. It is assumed that in a British context it was a euphemism or pejorative term for Blackness or a Black person, whereas in other countries such as South Africa, it takes on a totally different meaning, i.e., a person of mixed race or heritage.
[217] *Ibid.*
[218] 'Creoles', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 2nd June 1931

The ability to transform from a white skin tone, to a tanned complexion, and then back to a white complexion using bleaching creams, was a privilege of duality only white women held. While the article justified the use of skin bleaching for fashion and film purposes, the context of this article lies within the social attitudes of the 1930s regarding a darker, not purely white, complexion. Tied in with the idea of 'becomingness', this term was used frequently when referring to women's fashion and beauty. In the 1930s, women's beauty and clothing items were often described as 'becoming' to denote importance and respectability. The 'becomingness' of a woman or the 'becomingness' of a clothing item such as a beret, signified class privilege and status. Women being tanned in this sense, illustrated a "problem of becomingness" – which translated into a lack of decorum, morality, and respectability valued by privileged upper and middle-class white women during this time. [219] Without whiteness, they could not evoke becomingness due to the intersections of class when considering the racialisation of skin tone. Conforming to the relevant fashion trends and possessing the perfect complexion to match such clothing, was yet another marketing strategy of clothing, beauty, and magazine companies for increased profits. It highlights the privilege of white women's duality of complexion in being able to achieve becomingness in all seasons.

As Gillian Sande explained in the same *Picture Show* article, the only way to "regain a normal complexion" quickly, was applying various vanishing creams with lemon juice onto tanned skin.[220] This terminology of 'normal' complexion, accentuates and reiterates the normalisation of white skin. While there was no explanation of what constituted a normal complexion, it was expected and assumed here to be white. This speaks to the permanence of

[219] 'Talk-Films Make More Cinema-Goers', *Daily Mail*, 13th January 1930, p.5
[220] 'Beach-then Bleach!: Unwise to Bake the Skin', *Picture Show*, August 16, 1930, p.22

white skin being the normal, given, complexion, and any deviance from this (before tanning became a year-round fashion), was inappropriate. Despite this, due to the social power whiteness held, if women did lose their 'peaches and cream' complexion through tanning, they could bleach themselves back to an 'acceptable' white complexion, because the idea of normality always implied whiteness. When Black women are considered, the goal of 'becomingness', and the ability to achieve it, was a façade. While white women possessed a duality with regard to complexion being changeable and fixable, Black women were unable to possess racial whiteness, which excluded these women from being able to achieve becomingness or beauty whereby complexion was concerned.

Another element of duality available to white women was not bleaching per-se, but the ability to create and remove a tanned look. Within this duality, women could avoid both tanning and bleaching by using artificial tan, darker make-up, skin protection creams, and lightening make-up, depending on the kind of look they desired. This ability to 'pass' between both looks and achieve their ideal complexion was reinforced in by Muriel Cox, a writer for *Harper's Bazaar,* in 1931. The article, titled 'Sun-bronze or Camellia-white? Complexion as you Like It', reiterated the ease in choice for many white women as to whether they decided to be tanned or camellia – a delicate flower which blooms a pure white colour in the summer. Having a camelia complexion implied that a white complexion was beautiful, and as some women avidly protected their skin throughout the winter, they should strive to preserve it in the summer, too. As Cox stated, the desired complexion seemed to be "weighted in favour of the camellias."[221]

[221] The British Library, HIU.LON 249, Muriel Cox, 'Sun-bronze or Camellia-white? This Summer's Beauty Edict is 'Complexion as you Like It'', *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1931

This supposed choice over a complexion seemed an easy one, and one within reach of all white women, especially if the instructions in the article were followed. It then moved to explain certain products which *all* women should take on their holidays, such as makeup, oils, creams, and various cosmetic products, to allow for the choice of desired complexion. The article, suggesting that women are fickle for wanting to switch between different looks, continued, when it comes to the evenings she:

> "immediately wants to be something entirely different from the creature she has been all day…If she has been fair and fragile during the sunny hours carefully guarding her complexion, she will assuredly…and immediately insist on looking sun-bronzed. …If, however, she has been brown all day…out come her make-up removers, and off comes the bronze - or as much of it as is amenable to such lightning treatment.[222]

This illustrates the privilege of duality afforded to white women in their ability to create the complexion they desired. The simplicity of this duality of complexion was reiterated in the article supposedly including *all* women, but in reality, few white women would have had the resources to achieve this, while systematically excluding Black women altogether. Cox explained how artificial tanning lotions and darker make-up shades "create a suntan" if the women feel like it.[223] At the same time, women were reminded that the whiteness of their skin remained under this façade of colour.

Once the artificial tan was removed, the skin underwent its "transfiguration" back to whiteness.[224] This removal of artificial tan being described as a transfiguration, meaning a change of appearance into a more beautiful state, in reality, meant to a whiter and more beautiful complexion. This insinuated a transformation into whiteness being an almost biblical or spiritual process, furthering the embeddedness that whiteness is not only the 'normal' and accepted skin tone during this time, but the image of perfect beauty. Removal of

[222] *Ibid.*
[223] *Ibid.*
[224] *Ibid.*

artificial tan and the application of lighter or whitening makeup, had the "most marvellous effect in creating whiteness where there was none before."[225] Stating that make-up created whiteness where there was none before was inaccurate in the implicitness that the women addressed in the article were already assumed to be racially white. This not only afforded women a duality of choice in terms of their desired complexion but created in the minds of the users of these products, a purer, clearer, aesthetic whiteness in the application of lightening make-up. Ultimately, this reinforced the notion of ideal beauty in society.

The ability of white women to switch between both, and potentially have a lighter skin tone than before, bestowed privilege upon white women in their attainment of beauty. That lighter make-up gave women an "ethereal, almost transparent look which makes them look very lovely" attests to an almost imaginary, delicate, and untouchable whiteness that all women could achieve.[226] When this is considered in relation to Black skin and the exclusionary aspects of beauty, while white women 'passed' between different shades of whiteness and tanned skin aided by beauty products, this left no space for a consideration of Black complexion, or the difficulty Black women faced in acquiring make-up and products to protect their skin. As will be seen, while certain products marketed toward Black women claimed to lighten and beautify skin, this article exemplified the privilege bestowed upon white skin when it is racialised through both bleaching and tanning, and the necessity of whiteness to achieve beauty. At the beginning of this period, until suntanning became a year-round fashion for white women, notions of ideal beauty were perpetuated by beauty columnists and advice in women's magazines. These magazines included copious advertisements which reinforced notions of whiteness as beautiful, while also incorporating

[225] *Ibid.*
[226] *Ibid.*

themes of youthfulness and romance. Ultimately, these images perpetuated racialised aesthetics of beauty in Britain by presenting an extremely narrow, racially exclusive beauty ideal, while simultaneously excluding a large percentage of a diverse population.

## Advertisements for Skin Bleaching Products

Magazines and newspapers printed a vast range of advertisements for beauty products, with bleaching products targeted at white women becoming exceedingly popular during the 1930s. 'Crème Tolkalon Skinfood White Colour', seen multiple times in both *Woman and Beauty* and *Modern Weekly*, boasted that "any woman can now easily whiten, soften and beautify her skin simply."[227] The advert was marketed to provide a new, soft, white and smooth skin in just three days with their specialist recipe, yet did not specify the active "whitening ingredients."[228] The illustration for the advert (see Figure 1 and 2), has three faces representing three days of treatment with each face representing the progression of one day. The woman's face changes from a wrinkled, dark skin tone, to a smooth, younger, white skin tone. This echoes the use of beauty products as tools of civilisation in the Victorian era. As soap "burgeoned into an imperial commerce; Victorian cleaning rituals were peddled globally as the God-given sign of Britain's evolutionary superiority."[229] Pears' Soap advertisements frequently depicted a white and a Black child bathing in soap. The formerly Black child appeared white because bathing made him clean, civilised, and pure, with all racially inferior impurities washed away.[230] In a similar vein, this imagery suggested that Black or darkened

[227] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'New White Skin in Three Days – Crème of Tolkalon', *Modern Weekly*, June 1932
[228] *Ibid.*
[229] A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Contest* (New York, 1995), p.207. Also, Unilever's company slogan was 'Soap is Civilisation'.
[230] *Ibid.*, p.214

skin should be bleached and removed to reach a positive, beautiful, and ideal white complexion.

Further, the Crème of Tolkalon advert claimed to "instantly whiten and soften [the] darkest rough skin."[231] Dark skin was correlated with roughness, acting as further negative terminology to suggest skin was imperfect if it was not smooth and white. If skin was rough and darkened, in could not be young, soft, smooth, and white, and thus, nor could it be beautiful. 'Crème of Tolkalon', suggested that women who did not have pure white skin needed to, and could, achieve this skin tone with an easy application of cream. The women's expressions in these images change from sad and disappointed to smiling upon their complexion becoming whiter. Arguably, this suggested to women that not only would their skin change, but so would their mood and wellbeing upon achieving whiter skin. In the advertisement seen here, white skin was not only presented as the most important way to achieve beauty, but also as a lifestyle. Youthfulness, softness, and beauty were presented as a way to achieve happiness and wellbeing through possession of white skin. It suggested that women were only seen as beautiful if their skin is soft and white, implying that those with a darker skin tone should take action to achieve the ideal.

This was not the only advertisement of its kind: there was a plethora of images for bleaching creams, skin products, soap, and make-up products that followed this narrative of a 'dark to light' improvement to achieve whiteness. Othine Double Strength face bleach (Figure 3), published in 1928 but sold throughout the period, suggested that women should "remove this ugly mask", which saw a dark/black mask being lifted away from a woman's face to reveal a white face.[232] Though this was marketed as a freckle cream, it perpetuated the

[231] British Library, LOU.LON 883, 'New Skin in Three Days - Soft, White, Smooth', *Woman and Beauty*, March 1931
[232] Othine Freckle Cream Double Strength, 1928. Image taken from Cosmetics and Skin Blog: https://www.cosmeticsandskin.com/aba/mercolized-wax.php [Accessed: 04.06.2022]

racialised narratives promoting white skin as the normalised beauty ideal. Adverts such as these diminished the potential for a narrative of Black women's beauty in the popular press by placing the boundaries of beauty only within the parameters of having white skin: in particular, white skin that could be made whiter by using bleaching creams. Arguably, this not only perpetuated white women's skin bleaching practices, but encouraged the use of such creams by Black women to achieve 'beauty'. However, as has been established, the beauty of whiteness lay in women being both aesthetically and racially white, leaving many Black women both excluded from being seen as beautiful, but at the same time consuming messages which encouraged them to buy such products.

Florence Nightingale Graham (1881-1966), was a Canadian-American businesswoman and entrepreneur, otherwise known as Elizabeth Arden, who started her beauty business in 1910. Selling cosmetics and fragrances in her first store on 5th Avenue in New York, Arden soon became one of the most successful female entrepreneurs of her time, and her skin care range, one of the most successful worldwide. This considered, it is unsurprising that Arden's products both featured in these magazines and the trend for bleaching (and later suntanning) was capitalised upon by Arden. One product, the Ardena Skin Tonic, claimed to "tone, firm, and whiten the skin."[233] Having provided instructions on how to use the tonic, the advert stated, "you will feel your face tingling in less than a minute, and [in] 5-10 minutes you will feel a fine fresh glow."[234] This terminology of 'glowing', similar to that of radiant and nourishing, hides the whitening properties of the skin tonic in flowery, positive, and idealised language denoting the perfect complexion. In reality, these terms implied whiteness, and strove for an ideal white skin tone. Other companies such as

[233] British Library, LOU.LON 883, 'Tone your Skin says Elizabeth Arden', *Woman and Beauty*, April 1931
[234] *Ibid.*

Cucumel and Innoxa advertised their creams, with Cucumel claiming to "clear and lighten the skin…with the soothing, whitening effect of cucumber" and Innoxa complexion milk would "nourish, whiten, and soften the skin."[235] This language was important as it not only formed a key component of company marketing strategies to sell a wide range of products, but also sold a deeply gendered and racialised ideal of beauty.

Another famous businesswoman, Helena Rubinstein, was one of the most important female beauty entrepreneurs in the rise of the white beauty businesses in the 20th century. Rubenstein's products and advertisements transformed "gendered perceptions of beauty consumption, ushering in the new woman of the 1920s: young, independent and in every way equal to men."[236] A similar advert to Crème of Tolkalon's (a woman's face gradually turning whiter by each day of use ), was used by Rubinstein's adverts for her bleaching routine. Figure 4 illustrates Rubinstein's advertisement for women to unmask their beauty, the advert asked, "is your beauty hidden under a mask of fading tan? You must bleach, nourish and refine your skin….At night, cleanse and massage with a bleaching cream, in the morning, apply freckle cream."[237] By following these instructions, Rubinstein suggested that women could remove the mask of darkness – darker skin on their face caused by a tan – and return to their ideal white complexion. This explicitly suggested to potential consumers that darker skin should be removed to reveal a more beautiful, white skin underneath. For Black women who might have seen this advert, it also suggested that their skin was unwanted and removable, and that perfect whiteness was somehow achievable.

These adverts engage with wider themes linking to beauty practices presented in women's magazines, most notably, notions of youth (or anti-ageing) and romance. Linking

[235] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Cucumel', *Modern Weekly*, July 1932, and British Library, LOU.LON 883, 'Innoxa Beauticia', *Woman and Beauty*, June 1931
[236] J. P. Clark., *The Business of Beauty: Gender and the Body in Modern London* (London, 2020), p.167
[237] 'Helena Rubinstein: Unmask your Beauty', *Tatler and Bystander*, 2 October 1935

youthful white skin with the possibilities of achieving romance allowed beauty companies to capitalise on elements of competitiveness and engrained feminised ideals inherent in the structure of the majority of women's magazines during this time. *Modern Weekly* consistently advertised Mercolised Wax bleaching cream, of which, the adverts engaged with the intersection of bleaching, youthfulness, and romance. Though the adverts often did not contain a company name, Mercolised Wax was not a medical or chemical term, but a product trademark taken out by Dearborne Supply Company in 1911. Based in Chicago, Dearborne manufactured and sold Mercolised Wax in the US, UK, Australia (and potentially many more countries), during the first half of the twentieth century.

Often a long winded chunk of text, unlike other adverts for creams which had images of white women smoothing cream over their face, the advert linked a white complexion with youthfulness and beauty. One advert suggested that women could achieve a totally new complexion after using the cream:

> "If you are dissatisfied with your complexion, it is quite easy to get a new one nowadays! Expensive? Not a bit. You shed the old, discoloured skin that makes you discontented with the reflection in the mirror and there is a new youthful complexion underneath… After a ten day treatment you will find your complexion has acquired [a] new young, beautiful skin that is concealed beneath."[238]

While the advert did not mention that the product contained a mercury bleaching agent, implying that users could obtain a new, more beautiful complexion by shedding their old and discoloured skin, suggested that any skin could and should be changed to a white complexion. The subtleties in language here, by encouraging users to alter their complexion to be seen as young and beautiful with white skin, conformed to racialised tropes of white superiority and exclusion of Black skin. It suggested that all women could use these products to obtain a new

[238] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Share These Beauty Secrets, Get a New Complexion', *Modern Weekly*, July 1934

complexion, and thus, improve their chances of achieving the beauty ideal. In terms of both financial considerations (as not all women could afford such products), and the scientific legitimacy of this cream, it becomes obvious that these claims were unrealistic. These companies advertising bleaching creams were producing creams containing dangerous chemical components, and made such claims to sell products due to the lack of cosmetic regulation. Without having to list ingredients or being limited on the chemicals they could put into creams, these companies were not only making false promises about the effectiveness of their products, but also misleading consumers about the danger and potential skin damage these creams could inflict. Mercury did not make women 'shed their skin', but prevented the formation of melanin. In other words, it was physically and medically impossible for women to obtain a brand new complexion after using a cream for ten days, let alone one that looks significantly younger.

Another advert in 1934, linked romance to the use of the cream:

> "When youth fades, romance says goodbye. You want to keep young and beautiful, you want to be loved. For a petal smooth skin glowing with youthful radiance… Just get an ounce or two of Mercolised Wax from your chemist and smooth a little over your face and neck nightly."[239]

The importance of reaching a perfectly white complexion was closely related to the possibility or ability to be loved as a motivation for beauty. As Angela McRobbie reiterates, "the whole fashion and beauty enterprise is predicated upon the romantic possibilities it precipitates."[240] Many readers sought not just to achieve the beautiful, perfect, and white ideal, but also the ability to attract romance and be loveable. This highlights the gendered and racialised tropes presented within these magazines, as arguably, the same exacting standards of beauty would not be directed at young men. When women became visible in media during

[239] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Keep Young and Beautiful if you Want to be Loved', *Modern Weekly*, July 1934
[240] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.101

this time, it often reflected the media agenda and the assumptions and normalised social roles of women which existed in contemporary society.[241] Though this changed over time, particularly impacted by the Second World War and the encouragement of women to join the workforce, there always remained space for beauty in the context of women's magazines, as both domestic beings and working women.[242] Even as the sizes of pages changed from A4 to A5 during wartime, publishing space was consistently devoted to inculcate the necessity of a female duty to beautify. As will be illustrated with regard to white women's suntanning later on, middle-class white women with the desire of being beautiful and ageless, were at the epicentre of globalising capitalism, a huge increase in consumer modernity, and continuously exclusionary notions of perfection.[243]

The explicit link of ageing and the threat of the inability to find a partner or romance was saturated in anxieties projected throughout early twentieth century cultural practices.[244] Cultural and social emphasis on being young, and the best years of one's life to be in their youth, reflects a "long historical aesthetic and philosophical tradition," capitalised upon by commodification of beauty products, and exemplified through advertisements.[245] The obsession for young women to remain at their 'best age' or for older women to be transported back to their best age, was not only reinforced by companies producing bleaching creams, but by the majority of beauty businesses during this time. Terminology such as 'youthful', 'radiance', and 'petal smooth', whilst not specifically referring to whitening skin, did suggest that any type of skin failing to correspond to such features was not beautiful. The notion of

[241] M. Gallagher, 'Media and the Representation of Gender', in C. Carter, L. Steiner, and L. McLaughlin (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Gender and the Media* (New York, 2014), pp.23-31, p.23
[242] Leman, *The Advice of a Real Friend*, p,72
[243] Gallagher, *Media and the Representation of Gender*, p.23
[244] C. Port, 'Ages are the Stuff!: The Traffic in Ages in Interwar Britain' *NWSA Journal*, 18 (2006), pp.138-161, p.149
[245] M. Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London, 1983), p.57

"triumph over tragedy" was presented throughout magazines and adverts as a method providing products needed for self-help, anti-ageing, and achieving perfection.[246] Additionally, many bleaching companies during this time masked their products with language such as radiant and glowing, as opposed to explicitly mentioning bleaching, as it seemed a more pleasant and positive treatment. The idea of using these products as part of a female duty to beautify and preserve youthfulness through a secret language of bleaching, presented the "desirable as though it were the possible." [247] Advertising these products as successful and easy to use, only heightened the expectation to reach levels of perfect beauty, even if in reality, these were impossible to reach. As such, these products, and the advertisements that followed, had a much more powerful existence and reach outside of the magazines in which they were published.

Adverts for Mercolised Wax also stated that the product was "sold only by registered chemists, so be on your guard against the many spurious imitations on the market."[248] Blanketed in medical legitimacy through the emphasis on purchasing from chemists suggested safety and efficacy, and further hid the danger of the product containing ammoniated mercury. However, Dearbourn's bold claims of medical legitimacy, youthfulness, whiteness, and beauty, flowery, and promising language in advertisements, and failure to provide adequate detail of the ingredients in the Mercolised Wax, was discovered by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 1938. This report revealed a line of products by Dearborne Supply Company, such as facemasks, hair removal cream, and a Parker Belmont Beauty Cream, which claimed to "whiten skin quickly…dark skin is lightened and whitened

[246] *Ibid.,* p.51
[247] *Ibid.,* p.58
[248] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Keep Young and Beautiful if you Want to be Loved', *Modern Weekly*, July 1934

by two or three shades…[and] beautifies any skin."[249] Also, illustrating the company's transnational reach, as seen in *Modern Weekly* and *Woman and Beauty*, the box of one of the products stated: "Made in the United States from the Original Formula as used in Great Britain and the Colonies," with offices in Chicago and London.[250]

Upon investigation, the FTC found that the descriptions in adverts regarding the value and usefulness of these products were "false or grossly exaggerated," and thus, constituted "unfair and deceptive acts and practices in commerce."[251] In truth, continued the report, while Mercolised Wax may remove the surface of the skin, upon continued use, it "not only accentuates blemishes but may, under certain conditions, be harmful to the user" due to the presence of a high percentage of ammoniated mercury.[252] The FTC found that in 1926, Mercolised Wax contained 8.75% ammoniated mercury. Other investigations conducted, in particular by the AMA, in 1912 found that Mercolised Wax contained up to "10% ammoniated mercury…[of which] is a caustic poison" and recommended that the product should be labelled as such.[253] By January 1940, the concentration of AM had been reduced to approximately 3%, almost thirty years after it was advised by the AMA.[254] As illustrated in the previous chapter, this level of AM was still dangerously high, and had since been found to cause dermatitis, and in some cases, mercury poisoning. Consequently, the FTC ordered a cease and desist from dissemination of any of Dearborne's products which did not state the appropriate caution of the cream, the danger of the side effects, and comprehensive instructions of how to use the product, and how long for.

[249] FTC: Findings, Orders and Stipulations, 1943, p.77
[250] *Ibid*., p.77
[251] *Ibid.*, p.77-80
[252] *Ibid.*, p.80
[253] 'American Medical Association, Nostrums and Quackery', *American Medical Associated Press* (2012), p.603
[254] FTC: Findings, Orders and Stipulations, 1943, p.82

As the dangers of Mercolised Wax were discovered by U.S. regulatory bodies, these products were still shipped to, manufactured, and sold in the UK. While there is no indication as to whether British regulatory authorities enforced similar regulations as the FDA, these products presented considerable dangers to consumers in the absence of detailed warnings on labels. In Britain, cosmetic regulations required by law were not enforced until Britain joined the EEC in 1973, even in the presence of scientific evidence illustrating the danger of such products. As the popularity of suntanning among white women began to take hold in the late 1940s-early 1950s, white skin became less likely to be damaged by unregulated bleaching creams. Over time, as tanned skin became more desirable among white women, the prevalence of racialised beauty politics presented a different story for Black women. The growing use of bleaching products, many of these being harmful for the skin, alongside the lack of importance placed on the cosmetic habits of Black women, meant that Black women were using dangerous bleaching creams which had a considerable impact on health and skin conditions throughout this period. Given the privileging of white lives in this period, it seems arguable that had white women continued using bleaching products in Britain at the rate of Black women, more research would have been undertaken, and regulations implemented sooner.

Undoubtedly, it was not just Dearborne that capitalised on terminology which emphasised the importance of youthfulness, whiteness, and beauty. There were a huge range of products which propagated such messages, not only bleaches, but make-up, moisturisers, lotions, cold creams, toners, face-packs, and many more. Iclima cream claimed to revitalise women's skin tissues to keep complexion young and preserve youth and beauty. Each day of use saw "rough skin become smoother, red skin become whiter, coarse skin become softer,

the faded complexion becomes brighter, fresher, lovelier each day."[255] These miracle working substances to make skin whiter and brighten faded complexions, masked the reality of these products, and instead, constituted misleading and deceptive promises in their advertisements. These were products of their time, in essence, a time that placed huge cultural value on whiteness and white beauty ideals, intwined with an ever-growing focus on youthfulness and anti-ageing as a specifically gendered method to find and keep romance, and achieve social belonging as a beautiful woman. Over time, beauty ideals changed, and the boundaries of how women viewed beauty and methods in which they achieved beauty, changed with it. Ultimately, whether women decided to bleach their skin to appear whiter or tanned to a golden brown, these methods of complexion modification necessitated racial whiteness from the onset, and excluded Blackness in its path. Suntanning became a fashionable complexion among white women, partly through desires to suntan during the summer to match shades of summer clothing, but overwhelmingly, this was influenced by racialised notions of complexion. The racialisation of white skin seen in the duality and privilege of complexion modification for white women, played a huge role in beauty practices being deeply implicated by race throughout this period. As fashions and notions of ideal beauty changed, and suntanning became increasingly popular among white women, at the same time, evidence of the predominance of skin bleaching among Black women began to appear in social and cultural practices and popular culture outlets. The following chapter, then, traces the users and advertisements for skin bleaches among Black women in British society, alongside the opposition to such creams. This chapter further emphasises the usefulness of skin to tell a history of racialised beauty politics in Britain.

[255] Bodelian Library, Per. 2474 d.352, 'Iclima: Beauty and Youthfulness for your Complexion', *Modern Weekly*, July 1930

## Chapter Three: Black women: As Consumers and as Targeted by Advertising

White women's skin bleaching was, for the most part, seen as a normal beauty practice during the 1930s as a way for women to look more beautiful, improve their complexion, look younger, and ultimately, be whiter. Skin bleaching was engrained as a beauty practice long before this period began, yet, stemming from colonial discourses, the explosion in home remedy beauty practices, alongside the proliferation of print media, the commodification of women's bodies to sell beauty products for, and thus, the ability to advertise, all conspired to reinforce the need for white women to perfect their complexion by bleaching their skin. As suntanning began to take hold among white women as a key element of white beauty, it is also important to chart the complex rise of bleaching practices among Black women. Many Black women bleached their skin for personal reasons, to achieve particular beauty ideals, and to follow trends, all owing to different influences and reasons implicated by race and racism.

This chapter considers Black women as users of skin bleaching products, embedded within a discourse of racialised beauty politics during this time. Then, this chapter examines the advertisements for skin bleaches, emphasising the noticeably different sales techniques when these bleaching products targeted Black women as consumers. There is a notable imbalance in evidence of bleaching cream use in comparison to white women, illustrating a silence in the historical record with regard to this complexion modification practice among Black women. There are less instances of personal stories of bleaching and advice columns suggesting that Black women should bleach their skin, perhaps due to the lack of relevant magazines and advice columns to write into, or unwillingness to speak in public about personal bleaching practices. In turn, there are a proliferation of advertisements which targeted Black women as consumers of skin bleaching, evoking a more overtly political tone

in comparison to white women, making this practice explicitly gendered and racialised. It argues, where Black female users are concerned, that bleaching becomes a secret language within this discourse, with many women perhaps not wanting to publicly discuss bleaching practices due to the potential for political and familial discontent. This backlash among Black communities and media outlets in Britain is also considered here, to not only highlight instances of activism, but as another method of illustrating the existence of skin bleaching as a method of complexion modification among Black women in Britain.

Per the previous chapter, many of the advertisements for white women's bleaching products illustrated a woman either removing a dark 'mask' of skin to reveal whiteness, or a white woman changing from a darker (white) complexion to a whiter complexion. The racialised dimension of this from the position of Black women has to be considered, because these racialised images of removing a darker mask suggests that darker skin or Black skin tones are negative and unwanted, and as such, potentially posed as a justification for some Black women to use bleaching creams. If the same 'mask' scenario is used, in the sense of preventing melanin production to create a 'white mask' over dark skin, this would always be a mask, due to the presence of Blackness and the necessity of whiteness in white beauty practices and ideals. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1969), explained that:

> "for several years certain laboratories have been trying to produce a serum for 'denegrification'; with all the earnestness in the world, [have] embarked on researches that might make it possible for the miserable Negro to whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction."[256]

The potential lure of skin bleaching to prevent the formation of melanin and produce a lighter complexion is understandable, but what Fanon calls the corporal malediction, was not just as simple as being seen as Black. As the racist white Other judges a person based purely on the

[256] F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, 2008), p.83-84

colour of their skin, in reality, the trap of racism is to "allow appearance to stand in the place of what is in fact one of the most profound and deeply complex of the cultural systems."[257] This theoretical standpoint provides the basis for analysing Black women's bleaching, as it is not just appearance that needs to be considered, but the complex cultural systems of race and beauty which allow for the embeddedness of these practices in socio-cultural life.

## Black Women as Consumers of Skin Bleaching Products

In 1933, an article published by the *Manchester Guardian* called 'Whitening the Negro' provided instructions for how women could bleach their skin. Taken from an "American book of recipes" aimed at Black women, the bleach was described as innocuous, yet contained mercury bichloride among other mixing substances, which users were told to put on overnight. The journalist continued, "it contains corrosive sublimate, but what of that, one must suffer to be beautiful."[258] This introduces different terminology in relation to skin bleaching where Black women were concerned. While advertisements did not mention the potential harm from ingredients such as mercury, this article illuminates the idea that Black women had to accept suffering and pain from bleaching products in order to be beautiful. This book of recipes also contained a "wonderful selection of hair straighteners and anti-kink recipes" which illustrates that not only skin bleaching was popular among women during this time, but hair straightening too.[259] As early as 1933, the circulation of recipes for bleaching creams specifically targeted at Black women, with the emphasis on suffering for beauty being normalised and assumed, presents a considerably different story of expectations when trying

[257] S. Hall, Transcript of Talk, Race: The Floating Signifier, Media Education Foundation, https://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Race-the-Floating-Signifier-Transcript.pdf [Accessed: 20th January 2021], p.16
[258] 'Miscellany: Whitening the Negro', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1933, p.7
[259] *Ibid.*

to achieve beauty in comparison to white women. Though the proliferation of advertisements will show that bleaching increased in popularity during this time, there remains little personal testimony in the form of descriptions of use or recipes in popular magazines targeted at Black women, in comparison to white women.

Across the Atlantic then, a more public and prominent story of beauty and bleaching has been told, as opposed to a somewhat more discreet story in Britain. For many decades, the U.S. played a significant role in the creation of hair and beauty products, including skin bleaches and hair straighteners. The popularity of these transnational beauty networks existent within the Black Atlantic, further entrenched racialised beauty ideals for the entirety of this period in Britain, the U.S., the Caribbean, and in many African countries. Skin bleaching and hair straightening products advertised in Black magazines, the exponential growth in production and consumption of such products, and social expectations of beauty embedded within racism toward Black women, led the U.S. to acquire a significant role in these narratives within the Black Atlantic. Sociologist Maxine Craig has explained that hair straightening was an overwhelmingly popular practice among Black women during the 1920s and 1930s, and although styles and practices evolved over time, it remained a symbol of pride and modernity for women up until the mid-1960s.[260] This trend for skin lightening, wearing wigs, and straightening hair, was deeply impacted by fashion and beauty industries across the globe. As Tanisha Ford argues, "in most cases, Black women who wore wigs did not do so to be white; rather, they were trying to be on trend… The problem was that most of the trends were set by a beauty and fashion industry that lauded whiteness."[261] Indeed, as Donna Hope has illustrated in Jamaican beauty cultures, "many view bleaching as the same as tanning, [as

[260] Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, p.15
[261] Ford, *Liberated Threads*, p.44

a] strive towards an idolised ideal that has positive connotations for a particular group of people."[262] However, these idolised ideals and beauty trends across the Black Atlantic and African diaspora were steeped in whiteness, and as such, permeated Black women's everyday lives, and influenced their choices (or lack thereof) of clothing, makeup, hair style, and the ways in which these women imagined their ideal selves. Companies capitalised on such social conditions, illustrated by the "multi-million dollar 'hair empire' of Madame C.J. Walker" in the late 19th and early 20th century.[263]

By 1920, most magazines and periodicals featured sections for women, offering advice on beauty, health, home, and fashion. This, combined with the surge in popularity of beauty pageants, of which, were both reported in and sponsored by such magazines, illustrates the increasing popularity of women's beauty in mainstream media.[264] During the 1920s and 1930s, advertisements for hair products and bleaching creams focussed on "race pride and the universality of female desire…downplaying the impact of white supremacy on black women's every day cosmetics."[265] The promotion and idea of 'race pride' became important in order to counter the devaluation of Black beauty and appearance in mainstream white dominated media. "Photographs of beautiful female performers, celebrities and fashion models - generally with light skin and European features - ran in Black newspapers and magazines as icons of race pride."[266] According to historian Kathy Peiss, "cosmetics firms did much to promote the centrality of beauty in Black women's racial identity."[267] Promoting idealised beauty through advertisements of specific skin and hair treatments, these images

[262] D. P. Hope, 'Fashion Ova Style: Contemporary Notions of Skin Bleaching in Jamaican Dancehall Culture', Journal of Culture and African Women Studies, 14 (2009), pp.101-126, p.103
[263] A. Norman, 'Needed: Education for Rediscovery', *Liberator*, 4 (1964)
[264] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.214
[265] *Ibid.,* p.224
[266] *Ibid*., p.213
[267] *Ibid*., p.215

portrayed "women with straight or wavy hair, light brown skin, and features more European than African."[268] By manufacturing these products, and having the ability to fund mass advertisements, these companies created a false sense of desire and need for these products among Black women. This, combined with social expectations of beauty and the compliance of magazines such as *Ebony*, "preyed upon the [supposed] inferiorities of African American women" by both promising beauty and greater economic independence, and allowing women to feel good about themselves.[269]

These particular debates are highlighted in *Liberator* magazine, a New York based periodical which ran from 1961 until the early 1970s. Written by a collective of activists, intellectuals, writers, and artists, it was a significant platform for female activists to voice their opinions against mainstream politics, society, and culture before the 'official' Black Power movement toward the end of the 1960s.[270] As such, they successfully asserted themselves and their ideas into spaces of radical public discourse long before the Black feminist movement achieved its height in 1968.[271] In terms of beauty and skin, perhaps the most interesting of debates in *Liberator* during this decade was its critique of *Ebony* magazine. Founded by John H. Johnson in Chicago in 1945, it became one of the most popular Black periodicals in the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequent to its success, *Ebony* and other magazines such as *Jet* and *Essence* were frequently sold in Britain, too. On more than one occasion, writers in *Liberator* critiqued and analysed *Ebony* magazine.

While Black-owned magazines printed articles affirming Black is Beautiful, they also printed and profited from, a plethora of advertisements for skin bleaching and hair straightening products. Many of the adverts presented in these magazines portrayed a nuanced

[268] *Ibid.*, p.218
[269] N. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture and African American Women* (New Jersey, 1996), p.51
[270] C. Tinson, *Radical Intellect: Liberator Magazine and Black Activism in 1960s* (Chapel Hill, 2017), p.74
[271] *Ibid.*, p.74

language about the importance of a consistently smooth skin tone, as opposed to using the product to become 'white' or 'whiter', which arguably, allowed for a 'guilt free' engagement with the products. In October 1965, Eddie Ellis asked 'Is Ebony a Negro Magazine?'. Rooted in the analysis of E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), Ellis argued that, as a magazine supposedly published to empower Black Americans in society, *Ebony*'s loyalties "are unquestionably not to Black people", rather, they lie with the current economic power structure which sees Black Americans as consumers.[272] He provoked readers to question who owned and operated these publications, and who was exploited by them. This led him to ultimately argue that rather than publishing magazines for the betterment and needs of Black Americans, *Ebony* "seeks recognition of the white class with whom they seek identification."[273]

The basis of this criticism lay in the questionable motives of the Black press, evidenced by their constant advertisements of "products which will remove or modify negroid characteristics."[274] Frazier argued that though the Black American press claimed to represent all Black Americans in society, in reality, it represented only the interests of the Black bourgeoise. Its "demand for equality for the Negro in American life" Frasier argued, provided economic benefits only to the Black bourgeoisie.[275] This is mirrored in *Ebony*: in its quest for higher profits, it included advertisements for skin bleaches and hair straighteners, as illustrated by Ellis' analysis of an issue from October 1964. Ellis found that of 180 pages, 95 and a half of these pages were advertisements, with twenty percent of these ads being those that "tell a negro how to rid himself of his black or dark complexion or straighten hair."[276]

[272] Eddie Ellis, 'Is Ebony a Negro Magazine', *Liberator*, 5 (1965), p.4
[273] *Ibid.*, p.4
[274] *Ibid.*, p.4
[275] *Ibid.*, p.4
[276] *Ibid.*, p.4

Further, in terms of financial benefits, in 1964, *Ebony*'s advertising rate for a full page advertisement was $4,000, which totalled $382,000. From just one issue in October 1964, *Ebony* made $74,000 from advertising skin bleaching and hair straightening, even though it claimed to cater for, and represent, all Black Americans. Much of the same happened in Britain with regard to publishing skin bleaching products: these complex relationships between Black-owned magazines promoting liberation and Black Power coinciding with, and at times, commoditising, movements such as Black is Beautiful and profiting from skin bleaching products, illustrates the depth and importance of the many interlocking themes in this thesis.

In March 1966, Evelyn Rogers asked 'Is *Ebony* Killing Black Women?'. Already established by many readers that *Ebony*'s claims to cater for the entirety of Black Americans in society did not ring true, and rather, saw the privileging of light skinned middle class elites, many more readers, activists, intellectuals, and artists began to criticise and question the motives of *Ebony*. Rogers added to this conversation, in arguing that "*Ebony* has been a highly successful magazine because it has mirrored the standards of the larger dominant white society."[277] This convergence of criticism led to a group of Black feminist activists and intellectuals to form the 'Concerned Black Women' group. All wearing afros and supporting natural Black beauty, they protested outside *Ebony*'s Rockefeller central offices, against *Ebony*'s privileging of class and light skin.[278] One of the pickets asked: "Has Ebony Murdered the Black Woman?", and was displayed next to light-skinned Black women on the front pages of *Ebony*.[279] Rogers thus argued, "aping white standards of beauty, with advertisements for skin lightening creams and hair straighteners, *Ebony* seemed to eschew the

[277] Evelyn Rogers, 'Is Ebony Killing Black Women?', *Liberator*, March 1966
[278] Tinson, *Radical Intellect*, p.96
[279] *Ibid.*, p.96

diversity of Black people and culture."[280] This criticism of *Ebony* by writers in *Liberator* illustrates community organised and local instances of activism against corporations which supported and upheld white beauty standards for financial benefit. This open disagreement with wider social expectations of female beauty echoed calls for Black unity and self-pride seen in Black Power movements in Britain (and worldwide) and the Black is Beautiful mantra. *Liberator* presented a discussion of skin bleaching, both as criticism and as a form of analysis, illustrating both the prominence of women practicing skin lightening, and its entrenchment in society during this time.

Back in Britain, there was a significantly quieter story of women publicly voicing their use of skin bleaching products, as opposed to in the U.S., and in comparison to white women's bleaching. Notions of the need for Black women to bleach was evident in newspapers and magazines, but spoken of less so by women who used the creams. However, the sales of bleaching creams in local shops and salons and the extent to which women visited salons during the 1960s onward, suggests that a significant number of creams were bought and used by women during this time. Tony Wade, one of three owners of the first Black British beauty store, Dyke and Dryden (D&D), proclaimed that, "prior to the 60s, there were virtually no Black hairdressing salons to be found anywhere in the UK."[281] This seeming backdrop of nothingness, though, did not signal absence. In her memoir, Barbara Blake Hannah, the first Black television reporter in Britain, noted how important skin tone and hair was during the late 1950s and 1960s. Even though beauty salons were limited, Black British teenagers were trained at school to "copy white norms of beauty…[because] confidence and beauty came from being almost white."[282] In many cases, Black British, Caribbean, and

[280] Evelyn Rogers, 'Is Ebony Killing Black Women?', *Liberator*, March 1966
[281] T. Wade, *The Black Cosmetic Kings* (London, 2017), p.129
[282] B. B. Hannah, *Growing Out* (London, 2010), p.13. This memoir detailed her experience of growing up in Britain as a Black citizen, becoming Britain's first black television journalist in 1968, and being influenced by

African women met in one another's homes to style hair, socialise, and exchange news.[283] Both women's kitchens and later, beauty salons, became a fundamental feature of everyday lives, providing not only beauty treatments, but a sense of community, "refuge and sisterhood,…and a place in which they could organise and mobilise other women."[284]

Founding their business in 1965, Tony Wade, Len Dyke, and Dudley Dryden's beauty store, stocked hair and beauty products for Black women and men in the UK. This store paved the way for other Black businesses to enter the beauty industry and provided a crucial place for Black people to purchase hair and beauty products specific to their needs which were previously inaccessible.[285] Also central to Dyke and Dryden's success, especially for marketing products and increasing consumer awareness, were beauty pageants. 'Miss Dyke and Dryden' and other hair and beauty events, were advertised throughout the Black press and widely attended. This informed a huge number of Black women in Britain of available products unknown to them previously, and opened further avenues for businesses which catered "specifically for the needs of Black hair and skin types."[286] By the late 1960s, D&D became "nationally and internationally known for the widest possible collection of ethnic hair and cosmetics available in the UK…,[leaving] an indelible mark in the history of Black enterprise."[287] D&D imported many of their products from the U.S., which further speaks to the extent both its influence and the importance of the transnational exchange of products and ideas. D&D also manufactured their own line of products under the name of Natural Beauty, sold in Britain, the Caribbean, and later in Nigeria and Ghana, and within this wide range of products for hair and skin, they sold a skin bleach labelled as a complexion cream.

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Rastafarianism when 'growing out' her hair.
[283] Wade, *Black Cosmetic Kings*, p.129
[284] Ford, *Liberated Threads*, p.23
[285] Wade, *Black Cosmetic Kings*, p.19
[286] *Ibid.*, p.119
[287] *Ibid.*, p.19 and p.10

The practice of skin bleaching was picked up by *The Guardian* in 1969. Journalist Pat Taylor claimed that people using skin bleach were mimicking the cosmetic practices of the Romans, and insisted that "skin lightening and bleaching creams have always been in demand" stretching back to Roman cosmetic remedies.[288] Taylor explained that bleaching products such as *Esoterica* , which have "sold successfully in America for many years, are being manufactured here and sold through chemists."[289] Particularly significant here is that while the U.S. was a major producer of skin bleaches, it was now recognised by writers in *The Guardian* that companies were manufacturing and selling creams specifically in Britain. It was explicitly stated that these products contained ingredients such as ammoniated mercury, which had been used as a bleach for "some centuries," yet did not stress the controversiality or danger of using such noxious chemicals. [290]

The focus here, was mainly upon the dermatological use of skin bleaches, in citing a research study that found some women having lightened their skin by up to "15.71% of the human white range."[291] However, the only slight hint of the dangers of skin bleaches, which was not explained in detail, was Taylor's stress that "the firm marketing Esoterica do not stress the bleaching angle except in relation to…pigmented patches."[292] This suggests that bleaching was popular, yet shrouds the practice of bleaching in this secret language. Women understood the purpose of the cream without having to be told that it was a bleach. Even after U.S. regulations limited the percentage of AM to 3%, rather than just being used on age spots and pigments, it was frequently used all over the body in large amounts in attempts to achieve lighter skin. Subsequently, this increased the risk of skin damage and side effects. British

[288] P. Taylor, 'Doing as the Romans did: Cosmetics', *The Guardian*, 20 May 1969, p.9
[289] *Ibid.*, p.9
[290] *Ibid.*, p.9
[291] *Ibid.*, p.9
[292] *Ibid.*, p.9

cosmetics had not yet any regulations on the amount of AM or HQ allowed in products. However, as many products were imported from the U.S., these specific products should have complied with FDA regulations.

While presenting less of an outward and public history of skin bleaching, many Black women bought and used bleaching creams in Britain. Evidence for this usage was seen in adverts for the creams, but there was less evidence of personal testimony or newspaper coverage which explicitly expressed women using the creams and why. Though there is an imbalance here in the comparison to white women as users of bleaches, the plethora of adverts used to sell these products will now be examined. Considerably more adverts for bleaches were targeted at Black women than was seen for white women, suggesting that both society pressured Black women to conform to idealised beauty, and that some women bought such creams for a range of personal reasons, to lighten their skin.

## Advertisements for Skin Bleaching Products

From the 1960s onwards, a huge increase in the publication and circulation of magazines and newspapers, published by and for Black Britons, saw the emergence of a plethora of advertisements for skin bleaching products. These weekly newspapers and magazines, such as *WIW*, the *Weekly Gleaner*, *The Voice*, *The New Nation*, *ROOT*, and *Flamingo*, and publishing houses such as New Beacon Books and Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, played a crucial role in "keeping people informed about events 'back home'," introduced readers to wider perspectives across the Black Atlantic, and shared current problems and concerns facing Black British communities.[293] The coverage of these

[293] H. Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (London, 2002), p.136. New Beacon Books was founded in 1966 by John La Rose and Sarah White, and was the first Caribbean publishing house in England. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications was founded in 1969 by Guyanese activists Jessica and Eric Huntley.

newspapers and magazines circulated information and news that mainstream and local newspapers did not, providing pressing information on crime, education, and racial injustice which was overlooked by the mainstream press.[294] They also carried adverts for food and recipes, beauty, hair, holidays in the Caribbean, and local pieces of information relevant to the Black community. Ultimately, they reflected the "varied needs of members who live within a transnational Atlantic world…providing [news] for the Caribbean communities…where the majority of national and local newspapers do not."[295]

Despite the advocation of Black pride and demand for the recognition of Black beauty in the majority of issues, throughout this period there were a plethora of advertisements for skin bleaches and complexion creams. While this is contradictory to the majority of the messages presented in the magazines advocating for Black beauty and the importance of transnational anti-colonial and liberationist politics, beauty companies selling such products, and publications running advertisements, were aligned with the beauty trends of the time. These being, beauty ideals which remained deeply embedded in the politics of race and whiteness. As will be illustrated, advertisements for altering skin complexion was perpetuated by many publishers. Although these publications had a liberationist agenda, they were still mired in the broader racial imagination and acceptability of the 'western gaze', as beauty practices such as hair straightening and skin bleaching were entrenched as methods of obtaining 'beauty' for Black women.

Dyke and Dryden's Natural Beauty product line was advertised in many of the above magazines and newspapers. Frequently featured in these adverts was their complexion cream. *WIW* was possibly the biggest advertiser of Natural Beauty Complexion Cream, printing

[294] *Ibid*., p.137
[295] *Ibid.,* p.138

continuous adverts over many months and years. In May 1976, the complexion cream was advertised as a way to "help fade dark spots, brighten skin to a youthful radiant glow…and even out the skin tone."[296] This terminology suggests the need for Black women to lighten their complexion, promising brightening, glowing, and even skin: all words to evoke the idea of lightening and bleaching, without explicitly telling women to bleach. This became a secret language or discourse surrounding skin bleaching; the specific lightening properties of the cream are not mentioned, nor are women instructed to bleach, but consumers bought these creams to use as a bleach. This was a common theme throughout many advertisements for bleaching creams in British newspapers, in contrast to those published in the U.S. Rather than a hostility to specific ingredients or dangerous products in the cream, the secrecy surrounding discourses of skin bleaching was more than likely due to an increasing idea of shame about the desire to lighten skin in the context of Black Power.

With consumers assumed to know the true purpose of the cream – to lighten – it also evoked the anti-ageing properties of the cream, another important factor of idealised beauty. When promoted alongside whitening in particular, anti-ageing presented a construction of ageing as a problem, and pigmented skin as unhealthy and aesthetically undesirable, and thus, marginalised bodies became sites of racialised and gendered vulnerabilities.[297] Through both beauty aesthetics and dermatological or medical realities, positing the anti-ageing and whitening properties of the cream alongside one another, portrayed these products as a legitimate method of 'solving' their skin problems and achieving beauty.[298]

Dyke and Dryden's Natural Beauty cream was not the only complexion cream available to buy over the counter in local shops. *Tropic*, founded in 1960 by Edward Scobie,

[296] The British Library, LOU.2926, *West Indian World*, Natural Beauty Advert, 21-27 May 1976, p.9
[297] A. Mire, *Wellness in Whiteness: Biomedicalisation and the Promotion of Whiteness and Youth among Women* (London, 2020), p.2
[298] *Ibid.,* p.2

Charles I. Ross, and Patrick Williams, was a monthly magazine which published contemporary news and issues from around the Black Atlantic with the aim of providing a voice for the Black population in Britain. Edward Scobie, a Dominican born journalist, historian, and publisher, played a significant role in the early years of Black British activism, in his publication of magazines (albeit short lived) such as *Tropic* and *Flamingo*. As aforementioned, whilst these magazines and newspapers reported on progressive beauty companies, activist movements, and strived to illuminate discriminatory beauty contests, these publications also published advertisements for skin bleaches.

Despite the advocacy of Black pride and demand for the recognition of Black beauty, in April 1960, *Tropic* ran an article advising women on how they could achieve beautiful eyes. While Dorothy Gray's bleaching cream was recommended to banish dark shadows from underneath women's eyes, this article speaks to the wider availability and popularity of bleaching products on the market at this time. "There are a number of bleaching creams on the market… and these will banish dark shadows. Dorothy Gray makes a good whitening cream."[299] Whilst this might be just a bleach for dark circles under the eyes, there are a huge number of creams advertised as face creams, which women used all over their bodies. The fact that "great care should be taken" when using the cream, illustrates the toxicity of the product.[300] This seemingly innocent advice on beauty is deeply embedded with racialised undertones of such beauty standards.

Upon the cessation of *Tropic*'s publication in 1960, Scobie then began publishing the better known magazine, *Flamingo,* in 1961. *Flamingo* did a lot to advance self-confidence and emphasise the importance of beauty for its female readers in the early 1960s, but it also

[299] The British Library, P.P.7615.kf., *Tropic*, 'Eyes Right: Dorothy Gray Bleaching Cream', April 1960, p.35
[300] *Ibid.*

had its limitations. There are multiple instances through which *Flamingo* illustrated the importance of beauty for Black women in society during this time. The first issue in September 1961, explained that the 'Women's Issues' column would "devote several pages to features of women's interests…articles on cookery, fashion, beauty and home hints."[301] Whilst these are explicitly gendered and a narrow visioned themes for 'women's issues', and by no means as progressive or radical as other publications discussed in this chapter, the inclusion of articles on female beauty remain significant.

While providing progressive beauty and make up advice for women, *Flamingo* also published advertisements by bleaching companies and beauty shops which stocked branded bleach creams. In 1965, an advertisement for Dorôt cream, told readers to "Lighten and soften your skin with Dorôt…[the] beautifying skin lightening cream containing the wonderful hydroquinone."[302] While the other advertisements in this issue listed the existence of branded bleaching creams and made women aware of their availability to purchase, this advertisement explicitly encouraged women to bleach their skin to make it lighter. Lightening the skin was correlated with beautifying the skin, which immediately suggested to women that these creams should be used to conform to popularised social ideals of white beauty. The idea that a 'wonderful' complexion can be experienced by all women through the use of HQ, reinforced both the unreachable beauty standards set by corporations and global ideologies of beauty, and the damaging social conditions for which Black women had to navigate in their day-to-day lives. Listing the active ingredient as HQ could have appealed to those who were more experienced users of creams, as HQ was well known by this point as highly effective at lightening the skin, as well as being dangerous. As Shirley Tate explains, during the 1950s

[301] The British Library, P.P.5109.bq., *Flamingo*, 'Women's Features', September 1961, p.29-30
[302] The British Library, P.P.5109.bq., *Flamingo*, 'Bush Stores Chemist Ltd – Dorôt', May 1965, p.62

and early 1960s, "bleaching creams were a way into modernity, civility and glamour", as these creams acted as a method for Black women to distance themselves away from the "inherent flaw [of dark skin] within a white supremacist framework in which a Black woman lacks privilege."[303]

*Flamingo*'s issues in August 1963 and May 1965 included advertisements and images of skin bleaches targeted toward Black women. Bush's Chemist and Phil's Drug Stores (both in Shepherds Bush, London), listed the wide range of products that were available in their beauty shops. Bush's Chemist advertised that they had "All American cosmetics in stock, including: Artra, Nadinola, and Palmers' Skin Success."[304] Phil's Drug Stores also placed emphasis on their American imports "at reasonable prices: Poseners, Black and White, Artra, and Palmers."[305] This emphasis on American products is significant here, as many of the products available during this time were produced in the United States. While bleaching was prominent in Britain, there remains far less evidence in the form of advertisements and explicit discussions of bleaching until the 1970s in newspapers such as *West Indian World*. Bleaching creams were sold in a wide range of British shops and beauty salons, yet, the prevalence of 'American imports' are important here. As seen in Dyke and Dryden adverts, and for smaller high street shops around London selling bleaching creams, the evidence of bleaching advertisements illustrates the popularity of bleaching for the entirety of the Black Atlantic, as U.S. products (and beauty standards) were shipped to both Britain, the Caribbean, and beyond. This is more than likely due to the Black population in the U.S. being much bigger, with domestic sales and the opportunity for international sales increasing the production of these creams.

[303] Tate, *Black Atlantic Zones*, p.98
[304] The Black Cultural Archives, Periodicals 36, *Flamingo*, 'Bush stores Ltd', 2nd August 1965, p.47
[305] *Ibid.*

Another skin bleach, Symba, manufactured and sold in Britain, featured in many issues of *WIW* in the 1970s. These advertisements made bold claims to its effectiveness, similar to the claims made by Dearbourne's Mercolised Wax, which provided women with an illusion of its efficiency. These adverts incorporated the normalised terminology with regard to Black women's bleaching: the promise that it "smooths, freshens, lightens, nourishes and beautifies the complexion."[306] Yet, alongside this, Symba promised its users a delicate skin protected against sunburn. The notion of a delicate skin implies softness, youthfulness and naturalness of skin evoking earlier notions of white women's potential to achieve a 'delicate camellia' complexion. However, in this case, while attaching positive terminology and naturalness to the process of bleaching, alongside the possibility of whiteness, Symba was promising an impossible ideal. Whereas white women possessed a duality of privilege in the ability to choose white or tanned skin, Black women were being sold an ideal of whiteness or lightness that they were unable to reach. Supposedly "the greatest vanishing cream" (Figure 5), in the advertisement half of the woman's face has been darkened to the point where only her eye is visible, and the other half has been lightened – supposedly by the cream - which reveals the rest of her facial features and allows her to be seen as beautiful. [307] The advert suggests: "Try Symba on half your face, the difference will amaze you."[308] In this sense, suggesting Black women could change their skin tone completely is a marketing ploy that was not only misleading, but embedded within deeply racialised narratives of beauty for Black women to consume.

These adverts also intersect with notions of romance and social popularity (Figure 5). Symba provided women with that "film star look… to make your complexion beautiful, to be

[306] The British Library, LOU.1354-1355, *West Indian World*, Symba, 1977
[307] *Ibid.*
[308] *Ibid.*

envied and admired."[309] The ability to achieve the look of a film star suggests social uplift, popularity, and increased beauty, which if believed, could have been a significant motivation for many women to buy this cream and bleach their skin. While there were many Black film stars, entertainers and social figures during this time, Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson in particular, the film industry in Britain and the influence of Hollywood, was still saturated with whiteness and images of white beauty. Indeed, Josephine Baker in particular, was an American-born French actress and activist, of whom launched her own range of beauty products to achieve the 'Baker look' in the 1930s.[310] These were skin darkening (or an earlier version of false tanning) products which were "marketed to and subsequently snapped up by wealthy white Parisian women desperate to achieve the famous Baker look."[311] By contrast, it is somewhat ironic, that "much of Baker's personal beauty regime was centred around skin lightening through milk baths and lemon rubs."[312] Thus, this promise of whiteness or lightness with this particular bleach, alongside the looks of a film star, and younger, fresher and radiant skin, all feeds into a deeply problematic idea of what was seen to be beautiful during this time, alongside the extreme lengths and pain, some women went through to achieve this.

More widely, magazines such as *ROOT*, *Black Hair and Beauty*, *Black Beauty Professional*, *West Indian Digest* (and many more), also printed and endorsed such products. Supported by the salon and beauty industry, these publications profited from printing advertisements, alongside increasing patronage and awareness of hair and beauty salons.[313] This trend of business partnership continued throughout the 1970s (and into the 1980s),

[309] The British Library, LOU.3453, *West Indian World*, Symba, 1978
[310] E. Dabiri, *Don't Touch My Hair* (London, 2019), p.135
[311] *Ibid.*, p.135
[312] *Ibid.*, p.135
[313] Wade, *Black Cosmetic Kings*, p.132

particularly targeting "upwardly mobile and fashion conscious young ladies."[314] Hope's shop in Handsworth, Birmingham featured frequently, and listed their supplies for consumers in these magazines and newspapers. They "supplied all well-known names such as: Palmers, Artra, La India, Natural Beauty, Nadinola, Ultra, and Ambi" – all popular skin bleaches from this time. [315] Nadinola and Ambi were especially popular, and were manufactured in the U.S. by big corporations. Hope's manufactured their own bleaching cream which featured frequently throughout *WIW*. It was a "double strength" cream, and consequently, came with instructions not to massage or rub into the skin, which suggests that along with being noted as double strength, was strong and dangerous. [316] However, the bleaching agent was not listed. When used once a day for 30 days, Hope's bleach promised to "work very fast…lighten and brighten dark spots [to look] your radiant best,… and feeling softer and smoother."[317]

Consequently, the wide range of creams seen here featured frequently throughout these magazines and newspapers, attested to the popularity and visibility of bleaching creams widely available to Black women in Britain during this time. Alongside publishing partnerships, another factor which increased the availability of products was the exchange of ideas and movements within the Black Atlantic. The end of the 1960s, pushing into the 1970s, saw the continued rise in popularity of Black liberation and activist groups, alongside the increasing prominence of the Black is Beautiful narrative among many Black feminists. Here, it is important to emphasise the global framework in the politics of radical Blackness, as "Black Power was not just America's global export, it was a Black Power forged globally."[318] Indeed, the embedded systems of race present in Britain, alongside movements to revolt and

[314] *Ibid.*, p.132
[315] The British Library, Periodical P.803/1577, *ROOT*, 'Hope's Beauty Products', August 1980, p.14
[316] The British Library, LOU.4448, *West Indian World*, 'Hopes Beauty Products of Handsworth Birmingham', 18th-24th October 1974, p.15
[317] *Ibid.*
[318] Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.15

resist against such, were present in global locations. As Rob Waters argues, "the Caribbean politics of decolonisation played a formative part in reconfiguring blackness in Britain."[319] This reorientation of thinking about race in Britain, then, was deeply impacted by the U.S. and the Caribbean. When this is linked to skin bleaching, the popularisation of ideas and publications crossing national boundaries, also assisted skin bleaching companies. Though the Black is Beautiful mantra challenged white standards of beauty, Black Power movements did not permanently alter longstanding Eurocentric beauty ideals, nor did "skin colour discrimination disappear in the Black community."[320] Though these movements were prominent among many women, these advertisements did not stop, and bleaching was still popular, even if radical political narratives of the time suggested the opposite.

Within a transnational context of skin bleaching, discourses of the ideal white beauty crossed national boundaries through various influences. Magazines and newspapers, social commentary, the growing popularity of international travel, and the outpouring of popular mass media, all acted as influential conveyors of these ideals during the twentieth century. Many of the following adverts are taken from major Black American magazines such as *Ebony*, *Essence,* and *Jet.* While these were printed and sold in the U.S., these magazines, the products they advertised, and ultimately, the image of beauty they portrayed, were readily available to purchase and consume in Britain. As the U.S. had a proliferation of media outlets targeting Black consumers, and arguably, a larger Black population and consumption of creams, examining these adverts illustrates the messages women were reading both across the Atlantic as an influence, and as they were sold in Britain.

[319] *Ibid.*, p.15
[320] M. R. Jha, *The Global Beauty Industry: Colourism, Racism and the National Body* (New York, 2016), p.44

Larger corporations capitalised upon Black women's beauty practices within transnational racialised beauty politics. Ambi was produced and manufactured by Nicholas Laboratories, based in Wisconsin, and still sells bleaching creams today containing 2% HQ. Ambi exported products to Britain, Jamaica, and many countries worldwide. There are three instances of Ambi skin bleaches examined here, advertised in *WIW*, *Ebony*, and *Black Beauty and Hair*. These adverts all illustrate interlocking themes of ideal beauty: youthfulness, lightness, and romance as a benefit of using their bleaching cream. In 1976, *WIW* published an advert for Ambi, promising a brighter, clearer, and more even skin tone. Women could achieve "the natural look people want today" by using the cream and following the instructions carefully.[321] It is immediately obvious from the imagery on the advertisement that this is a bleaching cream, yet the advert stresses the 'naturalness' of using the cream, when in reality, it was promoting an ideal complexion which was unnatural for the consumers it targeted (Figure 6). Again, there is no direction for women to bleach skin, or explicit description of the cream as a bleach, but it is assumed that women know the true purpose of the cream. There is a woman positioned next to a man looking down at her, and the woman looking up lovingly, but her face has purposefully had white light reflected onto it to give the effect of lightness upon the skin. Next to the couple, the advert says "how to get what you want from Ambi" which suggests, as the woman is smiling, women should want light skin, happiness, and romance.[322]

Emphasis was placed upon the correct use of the cream to achieve the best results, perhaps for both customer satisfaction and safety. Ambi recommended that women start by using the cream over darker areas of the face, and once these areas had lightened, "use Ambi

[321] The British Library, LOU.2926, *West Indian World*, 'Ambi Skin Toning Cream', 17-23 September 1976, p.14
[322] *Ibid.*

over the entire face, twice daily."[323] This would first achieve the even skin tone that was promised, and then, the lightening of the complexion over the whole face in the use of the bleaching cream multiple times daily. Also, the advert warned not to put the cream on too heavily or like a facemask. While it did not state why, this is due to the hydroquinone bleaching ingredient which would have damaged the skin. Though it was causing damage to skin when only a thin layer was applied, the damage would have been much greater and viscous in thicker applications, possibly causing increased sensitivity. As Tate emphasises, "bleaching is never used to describe what the cream does," i.e., destroy the melanin production in the skin and damage all three layers of the skin, making it intensely sensitive, particularly to UV rays.[324] Terms such as brighten and lighten were used, because the harsh realities of bleaching are not what the companies want to sell, alongside recognising that as Black Power activism increased, it could be seen as shame inducing for women to want to bleach their skin. Rather, Ambi made false promises to immediately 'improve' complexion, and would lighten skin for all women in the intent of improving their social and personal lives.

In 1979, *Ebony* published an advert for Ambi skin cream. This issue of *Ebony* was part of Stella Dadzie's papers, a Black British feminist and a prominent voice in the Black feminist movement. That this issue, and many others, existed in Dadzie's collection, illustrates that women's magazines such as *Ebony* and *Essence* were in regular circulation in Britain, and thus, Black women both viewed the adverts for bleaching products and were aware of the availability of such creams in Britain. Ambi advertisements featured twice within the same issue of *Ebony* in August 1979, with significant intersecting issues. One,

[323] *Ibid.*
[324] Tate, *Black Atlantic Zones,* p.101

emphasising the youth which comes with lighter skin, and second, a before and after complexion 'improvement' upon using Ambi.

Ambi emphasised that "this grandma doesn't lie about her age…Ambi does…her glowing skin makes her look years younger…Ambi's active ingredients…fades the darkness."[325] This has many significant connotations, most notably, that Ambi provided not only lighter skin, but this lighter skin also meant younger looking skin. This feeds into discourses of anti-ageing which presented youthfulness alongside a necessity to whiten or lighten skin as a method of ameliorating the problems of both darker and ageing skin. Within this, there existed a "global diffusion of whiteness:" the consumable whiteness through the purchase of these creams, was "proposed as the ideal means of countering unwanted pigment accumulation and reversing the process of ageing."[326] By using the cream with 'active ingredients' women – and older women – can appear younger within 3-5 weeks, just by virtue of having lighter, glowing skin. The imagery here shows a young boy with his grandmother, she has no grey hairs or wrinkles, and her complexion looks lighter than the child's (Figure 7). This cream is sold as 'Ambi with moisturisers', thus, it is expected that the moisturising element is meant to suggest anti-ageing, but rather, accentuating terminology relating to bleaching (such as glowing and fading), the lightening aspect of the cream was the selling point.

The second Ambi advert in this issue had before and after images of three different women, each having applied the cream for seven weeks, even though instructions stated to apply it for 3-5 weeks. It stated, "uneven tones, dark spots, colour blotches…don't hide them, get rid of them! Like these women did."[327] When taking a closer look at the advert (Figure 8),

[325] Black Cultural Archives, DADZIE 5/2 Stella Dadzie Papers, Ebony, 'Ambi Cream', August 1979, p.55
[326] Mire, *Wellness in Whiteness,* p.8
[327] Black Cultural Archives, DADZIE 5/2 Stella Dadzie Papers, Ebony, 'Ambi Cream', August 1979, p.97

all women have noticeably lighter complexions over their entire face on the 'after' photos, which suggests that the cream should and can, be used all over the face, as well as for specific skin spots or uneven tones. The three women's faces look lighter and more glowing, and Ambi suggested that the cream had balanced and softened their skin tone dramatically. Thus, as an extremely popular bleaching product during this time, Ambi's advertisements fed into popular and expected notions of beauty, which were deeply implicated in notions of gendered and racialised beauty politics.

Different companies deployed varied sales techniques with regard to becoming the most well-known and supposedly effective skin bleach. While some adverts - especially those appearing in British newspapers and magazines – did not explicitly instruct women to bleach their skin per-se, but to brighten it, lighten it, and look more radiant, there became a secret language around such bleaching creams. Ultimately, women buying such creams, bought these for their lightening or bleaching properties. Some companies, however, emphasised their specific active bleaching ingredients: ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone, as a way of selling their product as the most effective and appealing to consumers who sought the strongest or more powerful cream for their skin.

In 1962, Artra published an advertisement for their skin tone cream in *Ebony's* February issue, promising "lighter, lovelier, skin beauty for YOU!"[328] According to Artra, the cream contained "the new miracle beauty bleach, hydroquinone…see how radiant, soft, how clear and light and lovely your skin can be."[329] Another example from *Ebony* in 1963, for Palmers bleaching cream, suggested to readers that by using the bleaching cream they can,

[328] Ebony Magazine, Artra, February 1962, p.69, [Accessed: 2nd June 2022: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=LNcDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=skin+bleach&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_ta_o1sbkAhWIiVwKHXKyDMwQ6AEIUjAI#v=onepage&q=skin%20bleach&f=false]
[329] Ebony, Artra, February 1962 p.69 [Accessed: 2nd June 2022: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=LNcDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=skin+bleach&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_ta_o1sbkAhWIiVwKHXKyDMwQ6AEIUjAI#v=onepage&q=skin%20bleach&f=false]

"Enjoy the light side of life…new improved Palmers skin success bleach cream [allows you to] enjoy the popularity and admiration that goes with a lighter, fairer, more radiant complexion."[330] Not only is lighter skin correlated with positive terminology such as radiant, beautiful, and soft, advertisements for bleaching creams also promised women a better chance of romance, popularity, and a better life with lighter skin. Both advertisements here emphasised shamefulness with regard to imperfections of dark and dull skin tone, interpellated as a problem which only the bleaching cream could solve. This linked lighter, lovelier, and clearer skin with personality, creating a new version of oneself, and changing one's life through this re-birth of the skin to a lighter tone after bleaching.[331] This contributed to a beauty standard for Black women by "performatively bringing the Black woman's bleached skin as beautiful, and its wearer as successful and modern, into being in the space of the ad."[332] In addition, Palmers reiterated to consumers: "don't let a darkened complexion cloud your enjoyment of life. Step out on the light side with a creamy, dreamy, fairer look."[333] In the strive to achieve beauty, this impossibility of lightness for many darker complexioned Black women became a problem that only these bleaching creams could solve within this framework of whiteness or lightness.

Also, in the same advertisements, there was a clear emphasis from both companies competing to win consumers by appealing to the type of bleach used and the strength of the cream. Whilst corresponding with the constant narrative of lightness equalling beauty and personal success, they compete with fellow bleaching competitors by reiterating that their bleaching formula was the best beauty choice for women to achieve lighter skin. Artra

[330]Ebony, Palmers, May 1963, p.99-100, [Accessed: 2nd June 2022: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Btax3H7LNxoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=skin+bleach&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiWqpHaycjkAhUjRRUIHcz-BygQ6AEIVzAJ#v=onepage&q=skin%20bleach&f=false]
[331] Tate, *Black Atlantic Zones,* p.100
[332] *Ibid.,* p.97
[333] Ebony, Palmers, May 1963, p.99-100

emphasised its use of the "new miracle beauty bleach, Hydroquinone. Now away with old-fashioned creams often so harsh and ineffective…[try] Artra with thorough, deep-down action for normal skin."[334] Hydroquinone was described as a miracle solution to lightness, loaded with positive terminology and presented as almost magical in its effectiveness. This emphasis on HQ was perhaps because it was a newer and more effective chemical than ammoniated mercury, which made Artra seem ahead of the latest beauty trends. The American advertisements emphasised bleaching ingredients and explicitly told women to bleach their skin, as opposed to those printed in British newspapers and magazines, in which it was much more secretive in language. Despite this, women in Britain would have seen both kinds of advertisements.

Whilst the Palmers formula still contained ammoniated mercury, it emphasised the strength of the cream in comparison to other brands, with this supposedly superior strength and ability to whiten the skin as its main selling point. It contained "*more* of that dependable bleaching ingredient, ammoniated mercury."[335] Ammoniated mercury was used by a wide range of companies (Palmers and Nadinola in particular) during this period, and the use and percentage amount of AM in creams caused considerable controversy. During the 1920s and 1930s, Nadinola bleaching cream (produced by the National Toilet Company), "contained 10% ammoniated mercury, a concentration high enough to cause serious skin damage."[336] Under pressure and close scrutiny from the AMA and FDA, the National Toilet Company decreased the percentage of AM to 6% and finally reduced it to 1.5% in 1941.[337] Thus, Nadinola could market their creams as equally as effective as earlier versions to their

[334] Ebony, Artra, February 1962, p.69, [Accessed: 2nd June 2022: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=LNcDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=skin+bleach&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_ta_o1sbkAhWIiVwKHXKyDMwQ6AEIUjAI#v=onepage&q=skin%20bleach&f=false]
[335] Ebony, Palmers, May 1963, p.99-100
[336] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.212
[337] *Ibid.*, p.212

customers, and simultaneously, not receive complaints or investigation from the AMA or FDA. Nadinola was mass produced in the U.S. and exported to Britain and Jamaica, reaching masses of retailers in all three countries. Before investigation and regulation of this cream in Britain much later, large numbers of women had access to these creams as over the counter products, and were damaging their skin due to being promised greater beauty from the adverts. Consequently, in the 1970s, this saw ammoniated mercury being banned in cosmetics due to its danger to the skin. These bleaching advertisements, then, provided consumers with both a false promise that this cream would work for all, and that individuals would no longer experience exclusion or marginalisation in society simply due to using their cream. The social pressure to be light, fair, and beautiful, set a standard of beauty which could not be achieved for nearly all of the women reading such advertisements.

Continuing into the 1980s, not only was the desire for lighter skin and the use of bleaching creams constant, but the controversy over concentration of ingredients, the complex and confusing notion of medical legitimacy claimed by the adverts, and actual dermatological impacts of the creams also persisted. *Africa Woman*, was a women's magazine published in Britain which focussed on the hair and beauty of Black women. The 1982 March/April issue, carried adverts for Venus de Milo products, advertised as "cosmetics to make you beautiful."[338] Venus de Milo and other creams such as Esoterica, claimed to be 'dermatologically tested' or formulated by dermatologists, yet this was often taken out of context and capitalised upon by companies. This supposed medical legitimacy went a long way toward justifying the use of bleaches by implying they were safe and appropriate to use, but oftentimes this led to harmful side effects.

[338] Black Cultural Archives, Periodicals/74, *Africa Woman*, 'Venus de Milo', March/April 1982

The woman presented on the advert had a light complexion, especially on her cheeks and forehead, and was sat in front of the various products provided by Venus de Milo, with the complexion cream at front and centre of the advertisement (Figure 9). Upon a closer look, the instructions on the box tells users to:

> "Apply a small amount of cream by smoothing evenly with the fingertips on the face, neck, or arms and legs. Allow the cream to penetrate the skin and after, apply again rubbing well in until the cream vanishes. Repeat the application once or twice daily for best results. See enclosed leaflet before use."[339]

In terms of medical and social implications, it illustrates that bleaching creams instructed (or encouraged) women to apply the creams over their entire bodies. Normalising the spreading of this cream over the entirety of one's arms and legs, alongside the face and neck, suggested that all large visible areas of skin should be lightened. Bleaching going beyond the face reinforced the prominence of bleaching as a symptom of white supremacy and racialisation of the skin and beauty. Bleaching was not just to achieve good facial looks, but the desire was engrained in society to actually *be* whiter or lighter. The size of the tube here suggests that if women were applying the cream all over their bodies, it would not contain many applications. This could have been an encouragement for women to buy creams in bigger volumes, especially if they had seen quick results from the cream in a short period of time.

Venus de Milo suggested that women apply the cream twice per use and twice daily, rubbing in the second layer. Thus, if women followed such instructions, they would have applied four doses of bleaching cream containing HQ or AM, these could have had serious health implications for the skin and body. While most bleaching creams instructed women not to rub in the cream, but to leave it to soak in gently, Venus de Milo suggested rubbing in the cream, which could have caused further dermatological harm. Even though cosmetic

[339] *Ibid.*

bleaching products were regulated in Britain by 1984, this was the same cream implicated in the *BMJ* article seen in chapter one. The patient had used Venus de Milo cream, produced by Cussons Ltd., and had noticed patchy depigmentation on her hands and the base of her neck. The tube mentioned that it contained HQ, and promised a "healthy bright and lovely appearance following continued use…[but] no mention of hypopigmentation was made."[340] Whilst this cream conformed to regulations, it still caused skin damage, and this is just one instance of the potential damage of bleaching creams, even post-regulation.

Toward the 1970s and beyond, as Black Power activist movements continued to traverse the Black Atlantic, the anticolonial cultural politics of liberation continued to redefine the politics of Blackness in Britain. The Black is Beautiful mantra did much to increase the awareness of the prevalence of whiteness in beauty aesthetics and the importance of inculcating race pride and natural Black beauty. However, racialised politics of beauty, and thus, the racialisation of both Black and white skin embedded in discourses of whiteness as the ideal beauty, continued. Partnerships between beauty salons and newspaper advertisements reached their peak in the mid-1980s, and the sale and production of women's make-up continued to soar, with more inclusive ranges of shades being produced for a greater range of complexions. However, the prevalence of Eurocentric ideals still permeated advertisements for bleaches.

Esoterica was another bleaching cream advertised and sold in Britain during the 1960s-1980s. This particular advert is from a magazine called *Black Hair and Beauty,* in its first issue in Summer 1982. Esoterica was listed on the many supply lists of the smaller shops which sold hair products and bleach creams for Black women. Alongside the terminology

[340] C. M. Ridley, S. J. Adams and I. Leigh, 'British Cosmetic Regulations Inadequate', *British Medical Journal*, 288 (1984), p.1537

illustrated previously with many other bleaches promising lightness and beauty, Esoterica's advert portrays a particularly interesting slogan (Figure 10). Next to the model, who has had a white light shined upon her face to show the effect and benefits of the cream, the slogan reads "Esoterica makes black even more beautiful."[341] A clear intersection with the Black is Beautiful movement which was prominent in the previous decade, rather than building upon the work that this movement did – to give power to Black women in the belief that their natural hair and skin tone was beautiful – it contradicted the whole phraseology and purpose of the movement.

How can women's Blackness become *more* beautiful if the purpose of using the bleaching cream is to 'remove' Blackness and prevent melanin formation? It is indisputable that this cream was marketed to bleach and lighten skin because the white jar has a gradation colour chart. It started with a supposedly Black skin tone, which gradually changed to lighter tones through various brown and tan colours, to pure white on the right hand side, signalling the tone of whiteness that could be achieved by using the cream (Figure 11). Not only was this misleading, but suggested that women could be more beautiful by using the cream by virtue of having lighter skin. The engagement of Esoterica with beauty and the contemporary politics of liberation, illustrates that bleaching was not just a niche, blasé act that Black women practiced. While it could be argued that Esoterica were trying to offer a pathway by which one can be empowered by Black Power and keep using their product, these creams were implicated by racialised beauty politics that lauded whiteness, and were engrained in people's daily practices.

At the beginning of this period, white women's skin bleaching was prominent in the popular press, which meant that there were a wide range of instructions for home-made

[341] Black Cultural Archives, Periodical P.443/451, *Black Beauty and Hair*, 'Esoterica', Summer 1982

bleaching creams in circulation. While these would have also been available to Black women to purchase, this does not diminish the possibility that Black women created their own bleaching creams among their own social groups. Just because these were not immediately visible in the popular or Black press, does not therefore imply that Black women were not bleaching their skin at this time. Rather, there was a silence, especially in Britain, in the historical record of detailed descriptions of bleaching among Black women. However, *The Guardian* articles in 1930 and 1969, evidenced some instances of skin bleaching among Black women. After the Second World War, the explosion of production and marketing of bleaches toward Black women meant that most Black newspapers and magazines could publish adverts for these bleaches. American women's magazines such as *Ebony* and *Essence*, which were popular in Britain, carried huge adverts for these campaigns (and made a lot of money from them). Alongside this, marketing from various bleaching companies and a plethora of Black owned beauty shops meant that skin bleaches, often with high percentages of ammoniated mercury or hydroquinone, were popular, cheap, and readily available for Black women to purchase in Britain. While there remained an imbalance of personal testimony from Black women themselves in comparison to advertisements for these products, there is no denying the prevalence and perpetuation of racialised beauty trends idealising whiteness and lightness in women's complexions. Another method of illustrating the prevalence of bleaching among Black women, is to examine the opposition to bleaching. The staunch opposition to bleaching, especially during the time of Black Power and the Black is Beautiful mantra, is a converse way of illustrating the practice of bleaching by some women.

## Anti-Skin Bleaching Narratives

Skin bleaching among Black women during this time did not go unnoticed by members of the Black community who opposed complexion modification, and held different views as to the reasons why some women chose to bleach their skin. One instance of such opposition to bleaching arose in the form of an oral history interview conducted in 2020, of which, the participant was asked about their views on Black beauty politics and its links to Black Power and Black is Beautiful. Part of this interview covered potentially controversial and politically charged aspects of Black hair and beauty, such as skin tone creams and bleaches. They responded:

> "Oh gosh! I don't agree with the bleaching creams. Maybe some people feel they need to use it, I don't understand why. … There's an argument that they shouldn't be on the market to encourage people to think less of themselves. I think the main reason people use it is because of the pressures on them in society to look like somebody else. If people are using it because they want to look like somebody else then I will say no. Appreciate what you look like. It's the type of thing that I read about in a magazine or newspaper."[342]

This response provides a key insight into anti-bleaching narratives in its encapsulation of the pressures of society, the desires to look different or like another person, and the prevalence of these advertisements in magazines and newspapers. It is important to emphasise that while sales of such creams increased exponentially during 1960-80, there were still many instances of disagreement with skin bleaching.

The rise in Black Power movements, the politics of liberation, and Black feminist movements, led to a rising awareness of the extent and use of bleaching products among Black British women. Alongside this, there saw a more vocal expression of distain for the use

[342] Personal Oral History Interview, conducted on 12.02.2020, Central London. More oral history interviews had been planned, but due to COVID-19, these were not possible within the time-frame of the thesis.

of such products. Beauty culture was explicitly a "political issue, long before the contemporary feminist movement made it so, [and] skin whiteners and hair straighteners were the tokens in [this] heated debate."[343] Vocal activism and protest against skin bleaching came in two forms, firstly, a more general anti-bleaching narrative published in various Black magazines in response to previous articles or letters from readers about the local and international practice and problem of bleaching. Second, a specific attack on the manufacture and sale of bleaching products by major companies, and the media outlets which endorsed and printed advertisements for the products, and thus, profited from them.

*Grassroots: Black Community News*, was a newspaper formed by the Black Liberation Front (BLF) in 1971. The BLF, comprised of many Black Panther members, which had close ties to the U.S. Black Panther movement, achieved media spotlight most notably through its reprint of the American Black Panther article which described how to make a Molotov Cocktail. Published in *Grassroots*, this subsequently saw BLF leader Tony Soares charged with incitement to bomb, endanger life, and commit arson, in 1972. This wider engagement and publicity saw *Grassroot*s' distribution rise in the UK, with many more Black British people purchasing the newspaper. *Grassroots*, then, published a wide range of Black activist materials, places for organising, revolutionary ideas, poems, letters from readers, specific articles regarding Black feminist activities, alongside engaging with Black beauty discourses.

In a poem entitled, 'About the Afro', skin bleaching was mentioned in relation to Black pride, realising the importance of taking pride in an Afro as opposed to following a trend, and embracing one's natural skin tone as a way of affirming the importance of Blackness and the Black is Beautiful message:

> *"Put that bleaching cream away!!!*
> *Black you are and black you'll stay.*

[343] Piess, *Hope in a Jar,* p.7

*Take pride in your blackness don't be ashamed*
*Remember being black and beautiful is not a game*."[344]

It is interesting to compare this emphasis on Black is Beautiful to the advert for Esoterica above. While that particular advert was published in 1983, there were many more instances of bleaching creams which suggested that Black skin could be made *more* beautiful upon using the creams. Whereas bleaching companies wanted to sell as many products as possible, some women wanted to emphasise both the dangers of the creams and for women to find beauty within their own natural skin, without turning to complexion modification. While Esoterica wanted women to achieve *more* beauty than they already had, women who emphasised Black is Beautiful stressed naturalness and acceptance. The former, seemed to be driven by profit and white beauty ideals but cushioned this message in the rhetoric of Black female agency, and the latter, stressed the importance of natural Blackness.

An article addressed to the editor from a reader of *Africa Woman*, offered a harsher critique of skin bleaching among women and girls. Fatou Mannen, in 1978, expressed how she had read about skin bleaching. Mannen suggested that these discussions had taken place in other issues and print media, and that the girls that used such products had no self-control by such "hateful cosmetics to change their beautiful colour."[345] Mannen reiterated the importance of Black is Beautiful, and that Black people should be proud of their complexion, illustrating a clear engagement with discourses of beauty politics during this time. This shows that Black beauty politics was impacting many women in Britain, and in this instance, younger women, as the author refers to 'girls' using the products frequently. This is important for both the impact of the Black is Beautiful movement and embeddedness of the explicitly

[344] George Padmore Institute, GB 2904/ NEW/9/2, *Grassroots*, 'About the Afro', 1974, p.5
[345] Black Cultural Archive, Periodicals/74, *Africa Woman*, 'Skin Bleaching: Dear Editor', 1978, p.7

British formation of Black beauty and liberational politics being vocal at this time. Mannen continued: women bleaching their skin "look like leprosy itself… Some look like lizards and they become ugly. They make a mixture of several products and use it for bleaching their skins. In fact, they exude such a nasty colour that it is unhealthy to sit near them."[346] While extreme in tone, this piece reiterates side effects of using bleaching creams, with HQ, as it caused exogenous ochronosis, a blue-black pigmentation which leaves the skin scaly. This awareness of the risks and problems of bleaching is significant, as many young women ignored these risks. The language of ugliness and resentment toward users of these creams reiterated both the damaging effects of skin bleaching, in many cases, and a strong anti-bleaching opinion held by some in British society at this time. However, many women who bleached their skin felt they were more beautiful with lighter skin, and as such, it is important not to deny women the agency they expressed in the personal choice and use of beauty products.

Similarly, another individual writing into *Candace International* (a magazine written for Black British women), tried to explain the harsh medical effects of skin bleaching when practiced over a long period of time. This could have been to raise awareness among other readers and question the motivations and agency of women participating in this practice. They reiterated that the effects of prolonged use of skin bleaches can rarely, if ever, be reversed, and thus, "we need to let go of the idea that lightness is superior to darkness, after all, we are black people in the final analysis. Hydroquinone, the substance that causes the bleaching of the skin is an ENEMY to black skin."[347] This offered a more nuanced explanation of why women might want to bleach their skin, yet still provided a harsh critique of women who did

[346] *Ibid.*
[347] Black Cultural Archives, Periodicals/34, *Candace International*, Issue 8, p.33-34

so. This enemy of the Black skin, is presented in a similar way to which the writer above criticised women for using such creams. The reiteration that the damage caused by bleaching creams could never be reversed, illustrated the awareness and knowledge of the dangers of using skin bleach, that ultimately, some women chose to ignore and others chose to listen to. Women were trying to help, warn, and empower one another, yet some women still chose to bleach their bodies despite the warnings of the dangers. This illustrated agency in both senses, the agency to engage in activist movements against bleaching, and to engage in bleaching for personal or beautification despite the warnings. That they are "black people in the final analysis" reinforced that, Black skin can never not be Black, and as such, using a bleaching cream is a façade to an unobtainable whiteness. [348] This ties in neatly to the necessity of whiteness in popular beauty ideals, and thus, the impossibility of women to remove Blackness, even when using creams.

Another letter written to the editor of *Africa Woman* by Ian St. Andy in London, asked, "Is there something wrong with some of our women when they leave the African soil? Why do they bleach their skins? Are they not proud of the great Black skin?"[349] He went on to suggest that Black people should be proud of their skin, and traditional love for Black skin should not be affected by these "alienated individuals."[350] This suggests an inability to understand why women would want to bleach their skin and a worry about this permeating other people's minds, having a huge impact on discourses of beauty and appearance.

Other instances of activism in opposition to bleaching creams were those criticising specific bleaching companies for the damage they were inflicting upon the Black community. Going back to *Grassroots*, a reader sent in an advertisement for Symba bleaching cream that

[348] *Ibid.*
[349] Black Cultural Archive, Periodicals/74, *Africa Woman*, 'Skin Bleaching: Dear Editor', 1978, p.7
[350] *Ibid.*

had been seen in *WIW* and the *Jamaica Gleaner*, and *Grassroots* openly criticised both Symba as a company and *WIW* for publishing the advert. In this instance, it was the Symba advert seen in earlier in the May 1977 issue of *WIW*. The advert promised a sensationally lighter and brighter complexion, illustrated by a before and after image of a woman's face, one half completely black and lacking features, the other with lightened skin and the woman's facial features able to be seen (Figure 5). The *Grassroots* writer criticises Symba cream, *WIW*, and Dyke and Dryden in this piece, accusing all three entities of reinforcing white superiority and Black self-hate for their own monetary gains, or as *Grassroots* called it "portraying the sickness of the nasty little capitalists who produce the so called cosmetic and the degenerates who promote and sell it."[351] In relation to the image accompanied by promises to clear the skin of impurities, *Grassroots* reinforced that the "instant Aryan Lotion" presented natural Blackness as "an impurity which must be cleared."[352] The article relates this to the constant "white propaganda" in a society which exalted whiteness and constantly fed society with white superiority.[353]

The article also suggested that it was unsurprising that these bleaching creams were so popular, due to being constantly taught that the "nearer to white you are, the better."[354] Thus, it was not only bleaching companies at fault according to *Grassroots*, but newspapers such as *WIW* for printing these adverts because they "claim to be a voice in the community and are encouraging us to forget our history and heritage and turn white."[355] Further, in regard to D&D, they suggested that Black businessmen trying to improve the ability of Black Britons' access to beauty products, should "know better than to peddle this crap, but they're not

[351] George Padmore Archives, GB 2904/ NEW/9/24, *Grassroots*. 'Symba Cream', June-July 1977
[352] *Ibid.*
[353] *Ibid.*
[354] *Ibid.*
[355] *Ibid.*

interested in Blackness…only the greenness of crisp pound notes."[356] As activists, deeply impacted by the Black Power movement, with very strong views on natural Black beauty, and opposition to complexion modification, the critique of *WIW* and D&D is unsurprising.

The second instance of opposition to the use of bleaching creams is, interestingly, published in *WIW*, even though this newspaper also published a plethora of adverts for skin bleaching. The article, titled 'Pitts Daughter: Rub-Dung Lotion', is an advert for NKU bleaching cream, modelled by Amanda Pitt, daughter of Baron David Pitt of Hampstead, a doctor, politician, and activist.[357] Born in Grenada, Pitt was the second man of African descent to sit in the House of Lords and receive a life peerage in 1975. Pitt was also one of the longest serving Black parliamentarians sitting for the Labour party, and due to the racism he faced during his career in politics, he played an influential role in the Race Relations Act of 1976. Alongside his own experiences of racism in his career, Pitt used his position to emphasise the contribution of West Indian workers to British society and thus, the importance of upholding the right of Commonwealth citizens to migrate to Britain.[358] His contribution to the RRA, and racial equality more broadly, rested on "denouncing the institutions of law and order that empowered ideologies of White supremacy." [359] However, the skin bleaches his daughter was promoting, often rested on historical ideologies of such white supremacy.

Having explained that this is a bleaching cream, the author of the article, who was unnamed but referred to themselves as 'The Gaffer', explained that some women chose to use the bleaching cream because "De whole idea is if you feel a little too black fe comfort you just dip in NKU [sic]."[360] This reinforces the arguments of the previous articles in referencing

[356] *Ibid.*
[357] Rub-dung lotion refers to a phrase for body lotion or cream, but in this case it was a bleaching cream.
[358] Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, p.173
[359] *Ibid.*, p.173
[360] The British Library, LOU.2926 [1976], *West Indian World*, 'Pitts Daughter: Rub-Dug Lotion - NKU Bleach Cream' 12-18th March 1976, p.3

being too Black for comfort – it was suggesting women were ashamed of their Blackness and used bleaching creams with the aim of being lighter. While this entire article seems light-hearted in its phraseology and speech, it intersected with important arguments for the controversiality of bleaching companies and those who modelled for them. The author then spoke to somebody at 'the mission' which referred to the Nigerian High Commission, and the 'girl' said that she "she dont use it because it burn her skin every time she try it [sic]."[361] Further, continued the author, to get an expert opinion about the cream, he spoke to Dyke and Dryden about the product, of which, responded: "after checking with Dyke and Dryden dem tell me quite frankly dat NKU is just use for fe 'brighten' de skin [sic]."[362] Again, it is unsurprising why D&D faced criticism for their position on bleaching creams. They sold a complexion cream for 'brightening' the skin according to them, but described this as only brightening and not bleaching. In fact, these products contained bleaching ingredients and were actively modifying and damaging the complexions of women's skin.

The author goes on to explain, while Amanda Pitt (the model) is the envy of all girls, assumedly due to her light complexion, ability to use the cream, and position in society as a model. They "is sure dat her father Lord Pitt who is also a very qualified doctor, would never prescribe any kind a bleaching cream fe him young daughter [sic]."[363] This is important, as it refers to the profession of her father being a doctor, and assumes that he knows the true dangers of these creams to the skin. The controversiality here, that during the same time Lord Pitt was campaigning against racism and white supremacy, his daughter appeared in adverts for bleaching creams seen by many as disavowing their Blackness. Pitt would have supposedly been aware of the dangers of skin bleaching, but still benefitted financially from

[361] *Ibid.*
[362] *Ibid.*
[363] *Ibid.*

the modelling job. Another contradiction here is that while *WIW* published this criticism of bleaching, they frequently published adverts for bleaching creams, and thus, profited from them. The newspaper was on one hand moving with the fashion and trends of the time, and on the other, advertising what some Black people saw as disregarding their Blackness and conforming to deeply racialised white beauty standards. As such, anti-bleaching narratives have illustrated that skin bleaching among Black women was a widespread practice, as seen in the backlash by some members of the Black community.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated the existence of skin bleaching as a complexion modification practice among Black women in British society from 1930-85. It also reflects, for a range of personal reasons, silences in the historical record regarding first-hand personal testimonies and public discussions of advice and encouragement directed at Black women to bleach their skin. By contrast, there were a plethora of advertisements for skin bleaches in the Black press which engaged with contemporary beauty ideals, politics of race, and liberational politics, with the aim of encouraging women to buy their products. Alongside this, the outward discontent of some members of the Black community toward the use of skin bleach as a beauty product, is another method of illustrating the prevalence of this practice among some Black women.

All three sections in this case study have aimed to illustrate the use of skin bleaching products as a method of complexion modification, as deeply implicated in racialised beauty politics. Through the lens of bleaching, skin is racialised via both scientific and commercial exploitation of properties that lighten skin and norms of ideal white beauty. The lack of investigation, regulation, and medical care regarding the ingredients women, and specifically

Black women, were using on their skin on a daily basis, led to these creams becoming not only idealised but seen as safe and legitimate products, perpetuated by advertisements promising perfection. White skin was fetishized in the calls for women to be whiter to achieve a porcelain complexion viewed as perfect by many in society at that time. This idealised white beauty was racialised through the association of white skin with superior beauty, a better social life, more romantic opportunities, youthfulness, and implicit links to colonial and imperial histories. Black skin was racialised in the socio-cultural pressures of light skin as the ideal, perpetuated throughout society in popular culture outlets and normalised discourses of beauty in Britain. Using skin, and the modification practice of bleaching, this case study has illustrated the prevalence and permanence of racial injustice and inequality present in social, cultural, and political relations in Britain from 1930-80. The lack of interest in the beauty (and bleaching) practices of Black women by dermatological and medical professionals, the dangerous levels of AM and HQ in creams consistently applied by women, the differing advertising methods and languages over time with regard to white and Black women's bleaching, and the notable silence in the historical record to illustrate personal testimony or encouragement of Black women's bleaching practices, all illustrate how skin can be used as a microcosm of much broader instances of racism in British society.

# CASE STUDY TWO: SUNTANNING

*I was walking down the street one night*
*When I saw her silhouette in her bathroom light*
*Her way of life may be nothing to hide*
*With her frosted glass shattered, curtains open wide*

*Naked woman, naked man*
*Where did you get that nice sun tan?*

The Specials, *Stupid Marriage*, 1979

*Castaways and lovers meet*
*Then kiss in Tropicana's heat*
*Watch the waves break on the bay*
*Oh soft white sands, a blue lagoon*
*Cocktail time, a summer's tune*
*A whole night's holiday*

*Club Tropicana, drinks are free*
*Fun and sunshine, there's enough for everyone*
*All that's missing is the sea*
*But don't worry, you can suntan!*

Wham!, *Club Tropicana*, 1983

## Introduction

Charting the rise of the suntan is complex. Per the quotes above, being referenced by not only a well-known pop-band but a 2-Tone and Ska band, of whom, often wrote about the realities of everyday life in Britain in the 1970s and 80s, suntanning seemed to be present in a wide range of socio-cultural aspects of life. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century, attitudes toward suntanning changed from a skin-tone to avoid due to the prevalence of white skin superiority, toward a growing fashion among the British public due to its links to beauty and health. However, the superiority of white skin did not disappear. As ideal skin tones changed over time, the presence and necessity of white skin remained, but was at times, obscured and complicated by tanned skin. In the post-industrial period, when many moved to urban areas to work in factories, suntanning changed from being a possession of agricultural workers and lower classes, to an upper-middle class desire. As patterns of work changed,

factories built, and industry developed, those working in factories for long hours became pale. For those who could afford to take holidays, spend leisure time outdoors, and afford to buy the latest trends in make-up, having skin with a golden hue became a desirable possession, and a distinctive way to distance oneself from lower classes and accentuate wealth.[364]

The strive for a suntan as a key part of the white beauty ideal was not just due to industrialisation and class-based opportunities. One of the most important factors was the medical practice of heliotherapy. Alongside this, in terms of fashion and beauty, suntanning became a performative act: a specifically gendered process of body modification and beautification, rather than acquired by nature of outdoor working. While Kerry Segrave argued that the trend for suntanning took hold in the US around 1908, in Britain, as late as the 1930s Britons were still expressing competing ideas about the preferred skin tone.[365] Whether porcelain whiteness or tanned white skin, both 'ideal' skin tones were rooted only in whiteness. What was debated, rather, was the 'right' shade or tone of whiteness. Obtaining the 'accepted' skin tone, whether it be porcelain white or a golden tan, was a privilege afforded to white women to achieve beauty. By the mid-1930s, the idea of a suntan in Britain became much more prominent and popular. It was during this time, that the closely related notions of tanned skin as linked to discourses of complexion and race became prominent. As tanned skin became more desirable in the early twentieth century, the normalisation and enforcement of acceptable skin tones became stronger and more unshakeable in the white world.

The popularisation and normalisation of achieving a 'natural tan' and being 'beautifully brown' carry far deeper meanings and cultural complexities than would originally

[364] The Industrial Revolution, especially in the nineteenth century, saw many families move to urban areas and (mainly) men begin work in factories. This meant that their skin tone became pale, as opposed to working outdoors in agricultural jobs. As such, those who could afford to spend leisure time outdoors (and achive a tan) soon became correlated with wealth and fashion.
[365] K. Segrave, *Suntanning in Twentieth Century America* (North Carolina, 2005), p.8

suggest. Achieving a 'natural tan' conflates nature - something possessed by birth - with the active modifying process of tanning. Used to elicit particular toned ideals relating to the perfect complexion, these terms reinforced the ideal skin tone as golden and simultaneously marginalised those for which this was unachievable. Though the production of melanin is a biological defence mechanism against the sun, the notion of a 'natural tan' is a physical attribute acquired in forced, unnatural ways. Portrayed as necessary to enhance beauty, by 'baking' in the sun, burning the skin, using sun lamps, and using artificial tan, somehow, a 'natural tan' can be achieved. Advertisements and advice columns which use language suggesting that women can be 'beautifully brown' or 'brown and beautiful' by performing this act of complexion modification, denotes a boundary by which only a particular shade of brown is beautiful. Surpassing this boundary of beautifulness by becoming too brown led to the inability to be considered as beautiful, yet the privileges of whiteness were still visible in many other ways.[366]

The aesthetic dimensions of racism seen through the lens of suntanning, saw unachievable desires of beauty placed upon Black women. Ultimately, there was no 'perfect' or 'right' shade of tanned skin for Black women that would allow them to escape anti-Black racism. The ability to tan and achieve beauty was mostly based upon racial whiteness, alongside the physiological process of skin changing from a white complexion to a tanned, golden brown complexion. Thus, whilst the visual aesthetic excluded Black women, so did the physiological processes and racial exclusivity of the desirability of tanned skin. Boundaries of suntanned beauty were policed, albeit unclearly and contradictorily, by the normalised images of white-but-tanned bodies in popular culture outlets, and by a seemingly all-encompassing desire in Britain for tanned skin. The perfect golden skin, then, as one part

[366] This is illustrated and explained later, especially with regard to Heliotherapy.

of a complex and intersectional beauty ideal, included both white women (and men) desiring a suntan and Black women (and men) being marginalised due to the social obsession with possessing the 'right' shade of tanned white skin. This 'right' shade being, a tanned golden skin tone, or as the 1970s progressed, a deeply tanned skin tone to conform to popular beauty standards advertised throughout this period.

The first chapter in this case study presents a history of the medical and scientific developments concerning suntanning. It charts the rise of heliotherapy as a medical practice (from around 1890-1935), which in turn contributed to the embeddedness of suntanning as a popular social practice. Then, it turns to the scientific research into suntanning and its dermatological consequences, explaining the impact of UV rays on the skin, the rise of the suntan lotion as a mass-produced commodity, and the subsequent regulations and scientific controversies which ensued during the height of the suntanning phenomenon in the 1970s. The second chapter examines those who practiced suntanning and the 'users' of suntan lotion products throughout this period. Illustrated through readers of popular contemporary periodicals and the influence of celebrities in promoting the suntan, it emphasises the implications of exclusionary beauty conditions, and thus, racialised beauty politics throughout these conversations about suntanning. The final chapter then moves to examine advertisements for suntan lotions in magazines and newspapers as carriers of exclusionary white beauty practices, paying particular attention to Ambre Solaire's adverts, and the specific racialised language presented throughout these adverts.

Suntanning had a wide variety of controversies throughout the twentieth century. From the blurring of medical realities and scientific inaccuracies, to the popularisation of a golden brown skin tone that very few women could actually achieve. These boundaries of beauty were policed by very specific, racially exclusive conditions, which ultimately, exuded

whiteness, bourgeois values, and specific gender norms, all while promoting racial exclusion. Whereas many light-skinned Black women possessed a ‘golden’ skin tone, within the boundaries of beauty, these women were marginalised and ‘Othered’ due to their racial Blackness. White women’s suntanning confused the boundaries of whiteness and beauty by ‘colouring’ or altering the complexion of white skin. Suntanning as a performative body modification process for white women assumed and presumed whiteness, and as such, the continuous presence of whiteness excluded Blackness and the beauty of Black women. From the outset, discussions of skin tone, complexion, skin care regimes, and ideal beauty trends excluded Black skin, and made it impossible for women with Black skin tones - especially dark skinned women - to be considered as beautiful according to popular social images.

## Chapter Four: Dermatological and Scientific Histories

Medical professionals and scientists have been studying the impact of ultraviolet (UV) rays on animal and human skin and the wider environment long before 1930. While the existence of UV rays in the atmosphere was common knowledge among scientists, the practice of sunbathing for health and medical reasons stretched back much further to the Ancient Roman period. Sunlight consists of infrared, visible, and UV radiation, with UV radiation being harmful to human skin.[367] Melanosomes function in the skin to protect DNA from damage caused by UV rays, most commonly from sunlight.[368] The wavelengths of UV rays are divided into three categories, UV-A with a wavelength of 320-400nm and known as longer wavelength rays, UV-B (wavelength 280-320nm), and UV-C (100-180nm), which are blocked by the earth's ozone layer and are thus, not harmful.[369] UV-A rays were not discovered as harmful to the skin until the 1980s and the damage of such rays are not immediately visible, as opposed to UV-B rays causing pigmentation or sunburn. However, UV-A rays deeply penetrate the layers of the dermis, and cause premature ageing and mutagenic actions within the cells.[370] UV rays, UV-A in particular, cause damage to DNA strands, and the failure to repair such DNA strands can lead to xeroderma pigmentosum: mutations in genes which cause cancer.[371]

The presence and production of pigmentation is a reaction by the skin to protect against UV rays. Wavelengths of UV-B rays between 290 and 310nm are strong enough to cause a natural erythemal response (sunburn) from human skin, causing redness and blistering. This particular wavelength in the UV spectrum is also "the most efficient agent for

[367] S. Schalka and V. Manoel S-D. Reis, 'Sun Protection Factor: Meanings and Controversies', *Anais Brasileiros de Dermatologia*, 86 (2011), pp.507-515, p.508
[368] Desmedt, *Overview of Skin Whitening Agents*, p.944
[369] Schalka, *Sun Protection Factor*, p.508
[370] *Ibid.* p.508
[371] 'UV Radiation and Cancer of the Skin', *The Lancet*, 11th March 1978, p.537

the initiation of melanin from the melanocytes in the epidermis," i.e. achieving a suntan.[372] Suntanning products, especially from the late 1950s onward, contained UV-B wavelength blockers, which absorbed rays of 290-310nm. However, these were only effective for a certain duration of time, ultimately causing pigment darkening, skin erythema (sunburn), and elastotic degeneration in ageing skin.[373] At the same time, sunbathers and consumers were unaware that they were not protected from the more dangerous UV-A rays explained above. Thus, classified as a "complete carcinogen…[UV radiation is] both a mutagen and a non-specific damaging agent and has properties of both a tumour initiator and a tumour promoter."[374] While UV radiation has a health benefit in providing vitamin D and endorphins for the skin, overexposure to UV rays carry huge risks for human health, most commonly in the form of "atrophy, pigmentary changes, wrinkling, and malignancy, and is linked to the three most common types of skin cancer."[375] The amount of melanin, then, both determines skin complexion and is impacted by the levels of exposure of UV radiation.

Building upon the above explanation, melanin exists in two main forms: eumelanin and pheomelanin, the former being a darker pigment, and the latter a lighter pigment.[376] Eumelanin is much more effective at blocking UV radiation than pheomelanin, and the "amount of eumelanin determines complexion, UV sensitivity, and cancer risk."[377] Thus, darker skinned individuals possess more eumelanin, granting a darker complexion and a greater protection against UV radiation, as opposed to lighter skinned individuals being more sensitive to radiation and causing a greater likelihood of sunburn. Light skin pigmentation, in

[372] 'Any Questions: Suntan Oils', *The British Medical Journal*, 29 August 1964, pp.555-556, p.555
[373] *Ibid.*, p.556
[374] J. D'Orazio, S. Jarrett, A. Amaro-Ortiz, T. Scott, 'UV Radiation and the Skin', *International Journal of Molecular Sciences,* 14 (2013), pp.12222-12248, p.12222
[375] *Ibid.*, p.12222
[376] *Ibid.,* p.12224
[377] *Ibid.,* p.12224

the absence of an abundance of eumelanin, makes the risk of both minimal and severe skin damage much more likely, as it is easier for "UV rays to penetrate the epidermis to damage both keratinocytes and melanocytes in the deeper layers of the epidermis."[378] However, an abundance of eumelanin and/or darker skin pigmentation does not guarantee natural protection from UV rays, and all complexions must be protected against UV rays to prevent and minimise skin damage. Constant over-exposure to the sun with the aim of modifying the skin to a bronze complexion could cause irreversible damage to all three layers of the skin (just as bleaching could), and posed considerable health risks if DNA strands developed into cancerous mutations.

Using parallel conversations between the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) and *The Lancet*, regarding both heliotherapy and potential health implications of suntanning, this chapter argues that medical advances and discoveries during this period did not reflect the actions and attitudes expressed in popular social practice with regard to suntanning. Consequently, the danger of UV rays on the skin and the true consequences of suntanning were not given sufficient attention by suntan lotion companies, popular culture outlets, and the British public until the 1970s. As such, this chapter explains the development of heliotherapy, using articles from both the *BMJ* and *The Lancet*, and argues that this practice was the most significant influence in the growth in popularity of the suntan, owing to the ideas of health, vitality, national strength, and beauty.

Next, this chapter explains the development of protective suntan creams and the Sun Protection Factor (SPF), alongside misleading claims from suntan creams. Drawing attention to the disparity between this chapter on medical and dermatological realities in comparison to that of skin bleaching explored in chapter one, there is a plethora of scientific research on UV

[378] *Ibid.,* p.12235

rays and suntanning products which far outweighed research into skin bleaching products.[379] This could be due to the wider impacts of UV rays being inescapable as opposed to the active choice of women to apply skin bleaching products, but it remains important to consider racialised dimensions of scientific research. While there did not appear to be a consideration of the health threats to white women from skin bleaching, the level of attention to potential skin damage regarding white women's suntanning was widespread. Many dermatologists and medical professionals openly admitted taking less of an interest in the cosmetic practices of Black women, and alongside this, not realising that Black women were at risk from bleaching. The minimal research into Black skin, illustrates the racialised knowledge about Black bodies being inherently different from the white scientists who influenced these knowledge productions. The permeation of racialised thinking and practice not only impacted attitudes toward skin tone and beauty, but the actual health and safety of the population in terms of their methods of obtaining 'beauty'. The safety of consumption of beauty products, therefore, depended on both the race and skin tone of the consumer, a result of the deeply embedded systems of white privilege in British society during this time.

## Heliotherapy

Heliotherapy is commonly defined as the consumption of light to preserve and improve health and cure illnesses.[380] According to medical professionals during the nineteenth century, those who produced a suntan (pigmentation) when undergoing experiments and tests, were viewed to have a positive prognosis and deemed "on the road to recovery."[381] Whilst it

[379] UV rays being dangerous to humans was first discovered by scientists Fizeau & Foucault in the 1840s due to damage from Arc lamps. However, most of this was popularised only in scientific circles. The publication of scientific articles as related to skin damage rose rapidly from the 1920s onward.
[380] T. Woloshyn, *Soaking Up the Rays: Light Therapy and Visual Culture in Britain, c. 1890–1940* (Manchester, 2017) [Accessed on 2nd June 2022: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK476359/]
[381] *Ibid.*/

was practiced for hundreds of years prior, it did not solidify as a popular practice until the 1890s. The use of light radiation to cure disease was initially popularised by physician and scientist Niels Finsen, of whom, won the Nobel Prize in 1903 for his treatment of diseases such as lupus. Inspired by Finsen, Swiss physician Auguste Rollier pioneered the use of natural sunlight therapy to both use sunlight to achieve a healthier body and mind, and cure diseases such as tuberculosis. This catalysed the movement within medicine and science toward the sun having healing and health giving properties. As such, heliotherapy and phototherapy (outdoor and indoor light therapy), had important influences on attitudes toward complexion, race, and suntanning in the twentieth century. By the start of the First World War, the notion of 'sun as healer' was "pervasive and incessant," and by 1928, it reached its zenith.[382] The popularity of medically induced sunbathing from the beginning of this period, had a significant impact on the popularity of suntanning as it developed into an ideal skin tone.

One of the first of many articles regarding heliotherapy and its emergence as a legitimate health practice appeared in the *BMJ* in October 1922. One of the most well-known practitioners was Auguste Rollier, a Swiss physician who opened his Institute of Heliotherapy in Leysin, in 1903. Though Rollier's research pioneered the practice of heliotherapy for the treatment of tuberculosis (with the medical success of this treatment questionable), Rollier also supported the use of sunbaths as a method of preventative heliotherapy. Preceding the release of his book, *Heliotherapy* (1923), he spoke at a medical conference in 1922 which centred on treating tuberculosis with heliotherapy, which was subsequently published in the *BMJ*.

[382] Segrave, *Suntanning,* p.13

There were many other medical professionals from Britain who specialised in Heliotherapy, including Sir Robert Phillip, one of the first physicians to research treatment into tuberculosis. Alongside Phillip, Sir William Bayliss, Professor Leonard Hill, and Sir Henry Gauvain, all pioneered heliotherapy practices in Britain. In his talk, Rollier not only reinforced the importance of heliotherapy as a medical practice, but also its popularity in Britain, with it "being a great pleasure for me to know that in your country the value of light and sun has been officially recognised" in scientific and medical studies.[383] Praising its success as a treatment in Britain, by Gauvain especially, he reiterated the importance of the skin and body being in its natural surroundings of sunlight, air, and water, to provide both a cure for, and resistance against illness.[384] Rollier finalised his talk by reiterating that the "sun is indeed the incomparable remedy that nature has placed within the reach of everyone."[385] While this may be true in the sense of the outdoors seemingly being accessible to almost everybody, in the context of class and opportunities for leisure time, this becomes considerably more restrictive. Many people had to work long hours and could not afford a holiday, or a light therapy treatment, and therefore missed their opportunity to take advantage of the sun's apparent healing properties.

Somewhat aligned with medical knowledge regarding the dangers of excessive exposure to the sun, Rollier and his peers did not use protective lotions, but they did reinforce that sun baths should be taken gradually, exposing more areas of the body each day, and taking caution regarding the time spent in the sun until "the body becomes pigmented" and can then sustain several hours of sun each day.[386] However, considering the volatile weather

[383] A. Rollier, The Share of the Sun in the Prevention and Treatment of Tuberculosis, *British Medical Journal*, , 21st October 1922, pp.741-745, p.741
[384] *Ibid.,* p.741
[385] *Ibid.,* p.745
[386] *Ibid.,* p.742

conditions throughout the year, sun exposure was not always an achievable or reliable means of medical therapy. Whether or not sunbathing was physically practical in terms of British weather conditions, the specific ideas and advantages of sunbathing for health slowly seeped into the psyche of many Britons as a positive and natural health practice. Popularised and embedded early on in the twentieth century as not just a cure for illnesses but a method of achieving better general health and a better social life, heliotherapy became more popular, and for some, sunbathing developed into social or household activity in British society. The notion of a suntan as a sign of health and wellbeing was gradually embedded using words such as 'radiant', 'glowing', and 'bronzed' to describe tanned skin. Gradually normalised as descriptors of a suntan in early twentieth century advertisements, these phrases "became powerful, highly aestheticized evocations of the irradiated body's emanating health."[387] In turn, these phrases not only relate to tanned skin but beautiful skin in general, of which, many women strived to achieve.

Another leading figure in heliotherapy, Sir Henry Gauvain, a surgeon and tuberculosis expert, gave the Hastings Popular Lecture in 1933, on 'Sun, Air and Sea Bathing'. The Hastings Popular Lecture was a yearly event organised by the British Medical Association (BMA) in tribute to its founder and medical surgeon, Sir Charles Hastings. These lectures were subsequently published in the *BMJ*, and as such, the ability to present at such a prestigious event in the medical community hinted at the popularity of sunlight and sunbathing. Gauvain's speech explained that sunbathing had "recently attracted a great deal of attention, both medical and lay…[and] as in all things human, so in medicine, there are fashions and fancies."[388] While giving credence to the long history of sunbathing as practiced

[387] Woloshyn, *Soaking Up the Rays,* [Accessed on 2nd June 2022: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK476359/]
[388] Sir Henry Gauvain, 'The Hastings Popular Lecture on Sun, Air, and Sea Bathing in Health and Disease', *British Medical Journal*, 1, 25th February 1933, pp.57-61, p.57

by the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, in Britain, the popularity of scientific light treatment was not fully established until 1921, in what Gauvain referred to as "the most wonderful summer in living memory."[389] He noted that while sunbathing has been subject to opposition for being immodest and cult-like, he reinforced that despite negativity, the popularity of sunbathing has continued to rise prolifically.[390]

The opposition to sunbathing arose from the growing phenomenon of nudism in British culture, and as such, this movement embracing suntanning as part of its culture. Concurrent to the use of heliotherapy as a practice for health and vitality, nudism was in its infant stages in Britain in the early 1920s and was heavily influenced by the German belief in Freikorperkultur (free body culture). As illustrated by Nina Morris, it has been widely agreed that the first instances of "organised naturism" occurred in 1922 when a small group of people met to discuss theories behind social nudity.[391] Just as heliotherapy was a practice born out of the belief that sunlight can improve health and wellbeing, naturism and nudism was a way of achieving and maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual health.[392] Many nudists also believed that industrialisation had caused civilisation to "descend into darkness."[393] Thus, being closer to nature and having exposure to natural light and surroundings, was beneficial not only for one's physical looks (tanning), but also spiritual and moral health. However, these movements garnered a lot of negative attention for their supposed promiscuity, lack of respectability, and were "frequently vilified by the press, dismissed as morally ambiguous cranks, and satirised by wider society."[394]

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[389] *Ibid.,* p.57
[390] *Ibid.,* p.57
[391] N. J. Morris, 'Naked in Nature: Naturism, Nature and the Senses in Early 20th Century Britain', *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2009), pp.283-308, p.283.
[392] *Ibid.*, p.283.
[393] *Ibid.,* p.283
[394] *Ibid.,* p.283

According to Gauvain, the rise in sunbathing was owed to "those who practice but do not abuse it, [who] feel and are, all the better for it."[395] Reinforcing the positive health values of tanning, both physically and mentally, continued throughout the 1930s, alongside the emphasis that personal and social sunbathing among the British public was rising in popularity. In terms of the medical impacts and risks of sunbathing, Gauvain made clear that precaution should be taken, similarly to Rollier's advice, and also mentioned that those with light skin tones, ginger hair, and freckles, should take extreme precaution if conducting light therapy or general sunbathing.[396] He noted that while pigmentation builds natural resistance, more exposure due to darker pigmentation is not always beneficial, rather, 2-3 hours daily for a person of any complexion is more than satisfactory.[397] The emphasis that darker pigmentation did not equal more health benefits, implied that the skin tone should only be tanned to a certain extent, and should not cross a boundary into becoming 'too dark'. That being healthier did not arise from darker skin tones, fed into the boundaries of an acceptable skin tone and the permanence of whiteness when discussing skin pigmentation.

The danger of UV rays were not mentioned within this advice, the main warnings were regarding sunburn, blistering of the skin, and sun stroke. At this time, experiments into effective sun lotions were being conducted, yet there was no mention of protective cream from Gauvain. Heliotherapists believed in naturalness, and the application of a lotion created an unnatural barrier between the skin and the sun, air, and water. However, whilst the popularity of such practice grew, the consumption of sunlight in large quantities, during illnesses or for one's general wellbeing, had no legitimate scientific or medically proven evidence of its success, despite the number of tests performed on a wide range of people and

[395] Gauvain, *Hastings Popular Lecture*, p.57
[396] *Ibid.,* p.59
[397] *Ibid.,* p.59

animals.[398] Even Gauvain reiterated that heliotherapy was not always effective, rather, "it is truly more of an art than a science."[399] Despite the lack of medical evidence of its effectiveness, the practice of heliotherapy is significant not only in terms of the rise of suntanning, but it enabled practitioners to discuss national health and skin colour in a medical vein. This discussion arrived at a moment when Britain was experiencing considerable anxieties about a waning imperialist strength. National health became a key factor in discussions of, particularly male, health during this time, stemming from discourses of empire and colonisation.

In 1924, The *BMJ* emphasised the value of sunlight with regard to 'imperial health' in an article that reported on a speech given by King George V at the Wembley Exhibition, in which he spoke of "health as one of the most vital imperial interests."[400] This exhibition was attended by the key practitioners of Heliotherapy during this time: Dr Rollier, Professor Leonard Hill, and Dr Fox in particular. The notion of national health for the protection and preservation of imperial health was pervasive throughout the upper echelons of British society. In 1918, Prime Minister David Lloyd George reinforced that "you cannot maintain an A1 Empire with a C3 nation" (military terms for health and unhealth respectively).[401] These fears were worsened by the losses of the First World War, and by consequence, the public were "encouraged to build up a healthy tan…as a protective measure."[402] He argued that certain African nations no longer posed a threat to white colonisers due to the development of

[398] Woloshyn, *Soaking Up the Rays,* [Accessed on 2nd June 2022: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK476359/]
[399] Gauvain, *The Hastings Popular Lecture*, p.58
[400] 'The Empire and Health', *British Medical Journal*, 7 June 1924, pp.1012-1013. See, Nathan Cardon, *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs* (New York, 2018)
[401] Woloshyn, *Soaking Up the Rays,* [Accessed on 2nd June 2022: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK476359/]
[402] *Ibid.*

certain medicines, or in his words: "West Africa is no longer the white man's grave."[403] However, his speech insisted that protecting "native races" from disease had to be solved before "their existence can cease to be a world danger and become a world asset."[404] King George's speech emphasised the importance of developments in imperial health practices to allow for the "successful commerce and colonisation in many places" for Britain.[405]

The following day, those at the exhibition considered ways to prevent and overcome diseases to achieve and preserve total imperial health, and thus, keep the empire strong and protected for British interests. Dr Rollier, Prof. Hill, and Dr Fox, discussed the value of heliotherapy, of whom, all urged the value of "air, sunlight, and water as health prompting" activities to protect and aid imperial health. [406] This, supposedly, "foretold the growth of a healthier nation when these three agents were employed."[407] The importance of heliotherapy, sunlight, and sunbathing for medicinal and health purposes influenced much more than individual health, it had a significant bearing on reaffirming attitudes of western white superiority and the necessity of whiteness for health purposes.

Another heavy-hitter in the movement for emphasising the importance of sunlight was Caleb Saleeby (1878-1940). An English physician, writer, and key figurehead in the Eugenics movement, Saleeby emphasised the importance of welfare, health, and abolishing alcohol. He was also heavily involved the newly emerging social movements of nudism and naturism, holding the belief that exposure to sunlight and fresh air had huge health benefits. Having previously published on the benefits of sunlight for national health under the pseudonym 'Lens' in the *New Statesman* in 1921, Saleeby wrote the foreword to *Man and Sunlight*. Hans

[403] 'The Empire and Health', *British Medical Journal*, 7 June 1924, p.1013
[404] *Ibid*., p.1012
[405] *Ibid.,* p.1013
[406] *Ibid.,* p.1013
[407] *Ibid.,* p.1013

Suren's *Man and Sunlight* was published in 1927, at the time when the British nudism movement began to take shape and achieve popularity, emphasised the importance of sunlight on the naked body.[408] In this, Saleeby claimed that civilisation was descending into darkness due to industrialisation, urbanisation, and pollution blocking UV rays from sunlight.[409] Industrialisation and urbanisation, to Saleeby, presented a considerable threat to national stock in the lack of natural air and sunlight, which was in turn likened to the dangers of a weakened and deteriorating empire and army. In his own book two years later, he reiterated his belief that the "restoration of sunlight to our malurbanised millions…is the next great task of hygiene in our country."[410]

Racial differences and eugenics played a role in the minds of heliotherapists when discussing the depth of pigmentation and duration of tan upon white-but-suntanned citizens. While there was a concern over the health value of a 'deep tan' alongside its connotations with Black skin, light therapists reiterated that 'deep' tans, i.e. pigmentation being closer to Blackness, did not provide more health benefits. Rather, long periods of time in the sun, "only put more tan onto the skin, not more health into the body."[411] Combined with pre-developed and embedded notions of white superiority, the growing popularity of suntanned skin brought into question the boundaries of acceptable skin tone, and how these are policed to maintain the superiority of whiteness. Tania Woloshyn points out that paradoxically, "'Black skin' the very characteristic that most obviously marked difference between colonizers and

[408] Morris, *Naked in Nature*, p.290. This time period also saw the rise of wandering/hiking clubs in Europe, especially in Germany. These clubs emphasised the importance of nature and sunlight, and often intersected with naturism and nudism.
[409] Morris, *Naked in Nature*, p.290
[410] Caleb Saleeby, *Sunlight and Health* (London, 1923), p.12
[411] Woloshyn, *Soaking Up the Rays,* [Accessed on 2nd June 2022: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK476359/]

colonized…was also the very quality that British men and women sought to imitate while living in the tropical colonies."[412]

Various motivations for suntanning among the British public, and attitudes among scientists, heliotherapists, and eugenicists, created a boundary between a 'desirable' and 'feared' suntan. The suntan was developing into a fashionable aesthetic among white sunbathers to obtain respectable skin tone, and also the ability to 'shed' this skin tone when they no longer wanted a golden complexion. Heliotherapists saw obtaining a suntan as a process of healing, regeneration, and aesthetic desirability, whereas others thought that when white bodies acquired glowing tans, with it they also acquired "the sexual energy of so-called 'primitive' dark bodies."[413] With this, pigmentation came to signify among some, a "newly obtained, borrowed, and primitivized sexuality…indirectly understood as an erotic and hedonistic cultural sign of the savage and the sensual."[414] Connotations of sexual energy and the eroticisation of bodies through tanning, alongside a focus on procreation, fed into pre-existing eugenic ideas. Obtaining a suntan then, among many, was seen as "a troubling act of racial transgression during a period of developing eugenic fervour in Britain and Europe."[415]

The importance of suntanning as related to national health did not rely on men alone, there existed specifically gendered practices of light therapy. Most notably, tanned skin and the use of UV rays were used to ensure female organs were healthy for procreation. By activating the "sexual power of citizens" many heliotherapists centred on women's procreativity, because "irradiating future mothers of the race, namely girls fourteen and under" would provide them with sufficient vitamin D to ensure healthy child birth and

[412] *Ibid.*
[413] *Ibid.*
[414] *Ibid.*
[415] *Ibid*.

rearing.[416] When considered in a deeper context, these attitudes or beliefs fed into racially implicated notions of gendered heath. Perceptions concerning UV rays and procreation were tied into "widely held views that southern, tropical climates accounted for earlier puberty in young girls, especially among Arabic and black African women."[417] This was put down to places such as the Côte d'Azur's "intense luminosity" which provoked early sexual maturity, and thus, ensuring healthy citizens and the ability to procreate for longer in the lifespan.[418] This implicated darker skin or Black skin, with the idea of health, while specifically reinforcing that this practice should be replicated among white citizens of Britain for the health of the nation. During a time of rising fears of depopulation and a weakening nation, using heliotherapy to produce physically strong and fit men, 'race mothers' with the ability to procreate, and healthy, functioning children as the future of the country, became a crucial tool to prevent and cure the ills of national health and a waning empire.

The practice of suntanning for health purposes relied on interlocking themes of gender, class, science, eugenics, empire, and nationalism. All of which, were rooted in whiteness. While white colonisers and the white British public were encouraged to tan for health, it was based upon the building of a temporary, golden skin tone to achieve so-called superior health benefits. The temporary nature of this skin tone is important, as white skin superiority through identity and aesthetics was always present. By contrast, the "ambivalent and aesthetic desirability of 'deep' tans among European and British citizens" later in the twentieth century seemed to outweigh any concerns of health.[419] While the boundaries of the ideal shade of whiteness changed over time, particularly when linked to health and vitality,

[416] *Ibid*.
[417] *Ibid.*
[418] *Ibid*. As will be seen later in the case study, the Côte d'Azur became an extremely popular suntanning destination among the British public for both health and beauty purposes across the period studied here.
[419] *Ibid.*

and as tanning for beauty purposes surpassed the aim of preventative health, the necessity of whiteness remained. However, concurrent to these trends and practices, the notion of 'sun as healer' was dispelled by many other scientists and medical professionals.

## Ultra Violet Rays and Medical Conversations

Simultaneous to the rise in popularity of heliotherapy in some British medical circles was the investigation into the impact of the sun's UV rays on human skin. As suntanning became a key element of a white beauty ideal over the course of this period, the history of science and medicine holds a different line with regard to UV rays and sunbathing. Articles from *The Lancet* and the *BMJ* illustrate that scientists discovered the cancerous consequences of the sun in the late 1920s. However, wider society did not react or respond to this, instead, the desire to suntan only became stronger and more popular. While heliotherapists emphasised and reinforced the health benefits of sunbathing, other medical professionals and scientists discovered, published, and reiterated the dangers of UV rays and sunbathing, especially without protective creams.

Professor A. H. Roffo, published a paper in *The Lancet* in 1936 which explained his research on the role of UV rays in the development of cancer. Building upon initial research conducted in 1928, Roffo's investigations were one of the first experiments to link UV rays to cancer. Observations of 5,000 cancer patients in Buenos Aires, led him to conclude that areas of skin exposed to sunlight while unprotected by clothing or creams, caused the development of malignancy or cancer in many cases.[420] Roffo observed that on areas covered by clothing, no malignancy developed, and interestingly, men were at a much higher risk due to women

[420] A. H. Roffo, 'Role of Ultra-Violet Rays in the Development of Cancer Provoked by the Sun', *The Lancet*, 29 (1936), p.472

being more likely to protect their faces with powder. Also in this investigation, he mentioned that he had "not seen a single case in natives, negroes, or mulattoes."[421] While the variation of skin tones of the 5,000 patients are unclear, it is valuable that a wide range of skin tones were studied. However, this study suggested that darker skin tones were not at a high-risk of skin disease in comparison to white skin. This presented misleading scientific information on the skin, putting those with darker complexions at risk of skin damage.

Experiments with UV rays were also conducted on rats and mice, of which, the sun's rays produced malignant tumours in 70% of the animals in the experiment.[422] Roffo concluded that the legions observed in experiments correlated closely to humans with "photosensitive skins which have been much exposed to the sun, and these observations emphasise the danger of such exposure."[423] Professor Roffo clearly illustrated that the sun's UV rays caused malignant tumours, seen in the investigation of humans, rats, and mice, and subsequently emphasised the danger of the sun. Considering the context of the time, with the growing popularity of heliotherapy and desires to achieve a suntan, it is surprising that both the practice and popularity of suntanning increased exponentially, and that people did not heed the advice of medical and scientific professionals. However, the dissemination of this scientific information could have impacted this, as the majority of the population would not have read *The Lancet* or *The BMJ*. The relationship between expert scientific knowledge and popular wisdom among society has a much broader historical context. With scientific research and recommendations "shrouded with obscurity" or unrelatable for many, over time, as scientific research regarding the danger of UV rays became more accurate, detailed, and

[421] *Ibid.,* p.472
[422] *Ibid.,* p.472
[423] *Ibid.,* p.472

widespread, suntanning still grew in popularity.[424] The competing discourses on the popular practice of suntanning versus scientific knowledge, did not merge or inform one another. Rather, much scientific knowledge was viewed as an esoteric practice, boxed away from society, and for experts only.[425] As such, some members of the public, even long into the 1960s and 1970s, resisted scientific facts due to the cultural distance from such advice, may not have believed the dangers of the sun, and placed more personal and social value on achieving beauty than maintaining skin health.

Concurrent with the popularity of heliotherapy as a medical practice and the investigation into the damage of UV rays, the sunscreen industry began with the introduction of tanning oils in the late 1920s, most notably from cosmetics giant L'Oréal. Founder Eugene Schuller, experienced sunburn and advised a laboratory of chemists to create an oil using benzyl salicylate, a chemical which acted as a UV-B light absorbent.[426] In the mid-1930s, Schuller's oil was released in France as the now well-known Ambre Solaire oil, and was exported globally, to Britain and the U.S. in particular. As people began to experience the physical impacts of sun damage on skin, medical journals shed light on the emergence of sun protection creams, alongside the increasing knowledge surrounding the dangers of UV rays.

In 1946, *The Lancet* published an article on the 'Prevention of Sunburn', detailing the experimental substances used to try and protect the skin. Using the example of American soldiers during the Second World War, when they became stranded in the desert or on rafts in the sea after accidents, they by consequence lost much of their clothing, exposing them to the sun.[427] Though many substances were tested, Dark Red Vet Petrolatum oil, a refined grade of

[424] R. Cooter and S. Pumphrey, 'Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularisation and Science in Popular Culture', *History of Science*, 32 (1994), pp.237-267, p.237
[425] *Ibid.*, p.238
[426] H.Limm, L. Thomas and D. Rigel, "Photoprotection" in *Photoaging*, Rigel et al. eds (New York, 2005), p.74
[427] Lukeish and Taylor 'Prevention of Sunburn', *The Lancet*, 247 (1946), pp. 577-578, p.577

petrolatum proven not to irritate sensitive skin, provided "complete protection to an exposure equivalent to 20 hours of the strongest intensity of sunlight."[428] However, despite its effectiveness, it could "scarcely be removed by scrubbing with soap and water."[429] For those who needed protection in extreme situations, the difficulty in removing the product would be advantageous, yet in a domestic setting, it was evidently far from ideal. These initial investigations illustrate the scientific development of lotions and liquids to protect the skin from the "wrath of Helios."[430] The author also mentioned the popularity of sunbathing and necessity for scientifically developed creams for protection, as "in the days before the war, self-prescribed and self-administered heliotherapy was practised on all the bathing beaches of Europe."[431]

With regard to commercial social use as opposed to military use, in 1944, the production and sale of Benjamin Green's Coppertone suntan cream saw the sun care industry skyrocket. In 1946, another sun tan oil was also introduced to the market. 'Gletscher Creme' (Glacier cream), was developed by chemist Franz Greiter and beautician Marga Greiter having suffered over-exposure to the sun.[432] Now known as Piz Buin, it became the first truly effective suntan lotion. Three years later, in conversation with the piece published by Lukeish and Taylor, further (unnamed) doctors commented on investigations into sun protection substances in 1949. They noted that due to the poor weather in Britain and notable lack of sun in comparison, it "perhaps explains why most of the recent work on protecting the skin against the sun's rays seems to have been done in America."[433] This, along with the growing

[428] *Ibid.,* p.577
[429] *Ibid.,* p.578
[430] *Ibid.,* p.578
[431] *Ibid., p.578*-578
[432] Segrave, *Suntanning,* p.74
[433] 'Prevention of Sunburn', *The Lancet*, 253 (1949), p.744

popularity of sunbathing as a fashionable and desirable activity, could perhaps explain the huge market development and growth of products in the US.

From the 1950s onward, medical journals begin to intersect with the practice of suntanning in popular culture, as many questions - though still medically related - began to be asked and answered within the journals. These medical journals still reinforced the dangers and high risks of sunbathing, often reiterating the consequences of UV rays when publishing in the journals. However, as this is compared alongside the sales figures, it becomes obvious that these warnings were not heeded, but illustrates a change over time with regard to products used in the sun. This changed from either no protection at all, to dermatologically inaccurate home remedies, and people purchasing mass-produced protective creams from sun lotion companies.

The *BMJ* offered readers the opportunity to ask questions and have a medical professional write a response. In 1955, one reader asked for a prescription for a powder that would provide protection against sunburn.[434] In response, the author referred to an experiment recently conducted by A. D. Porter, for a powder containing "talcum, 58%; prepared chalk, 5%; zinc searate, 10%; and fullers earth to 100%" into which, small quantities of ferric oxide, carmine, and orange G can be added to tint the powder to the desired shade.[435] Interestingly, achieving the appropriate shade for the powder was still considered for aesthetic purposes, even though protection of the skin was the main concern in this piece. When this powder was applied on top of a non-protective cream it doubled the light tolerance of the skin, but coincidentally, the use of an ordinary cosmetic face cream and powder was nearly as effective in protecting against the sun with a substantial coverage.[436] This particular question in the

[434] Any Questions? *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1955), p.628
[435] *Ibid.,* p.268
[436] *Ibid.,* p.268

*BMJ* points toward the popularity of suntanning in British society, as the author made sure to reinforce that using powders for UV protection was a "considerable drawback for sunbathers on the beach" because it is easily washed off.[437] Thus, whilst this was chiefly a medical journal, it shows the growing attractiveness of suntanning by the British public, and the need to consider the practicalities of sunbathing when publishing articles about UV rays. In comparison to other advice, this doctor suggested that "the use of protective substances prevents the development of natural tolerance" which would make the skin more sensitive to the sun than usual.[438] In one sense, it echoed the beliefs of heliotherapy in the importance of building tolerance to the sun for health reasons. However, this advice contrasted much of the medical advice by suggesting that natural tolerance was important, without providing advice on how to safely build 'natural' tolerance when considering the potential damage and danger of UV rays.

In a 1964 article titled, 'Suntan Oils', a reader had asked how oils act in preventing a sunburn and promoting a suntan. In response, the medical professional provided a somewhat sarcastic but truthful insight into the dangers of sunbathing and dismissed various home remedies that had been circulating among the general public. The author first explained the particular wavelengths of UV rays needed to be absorbed by suntan oils to prevent the skin from burning, and consequently, these rays caused the skin pigment to darken and produce a tan. They continued:

> "the curious habit of sunbathing and ritual massaging of the body surface with odorous lubricants can be regarded as a harmless manifestation of narcissism that one day may interest sociologists, anthropologists and the like. On the other hand, it can be likened to smoking…sun burn and suntan are the early manifestations of injury to the skin by noxious radiation that is eventually carcinogenic."[439]

[437] *Ibid.,* p.268
[438] *Ibid.,* p.268
[439] 'Suntan Oils', *The British Medical Journal*, 2 (1964), p.555

Smoking was discovered by medical professionals to cause lung cancer and other medical issues around the same time as suntanning began to be publicly denounced as dangerous. The comparison here, illustrates the effort to promote the cancerous effects of sunbathing. While this emphasis on the potential consequences of sunbathing was seen frequently throughout medical journals, in widely circulated magazines of the time, this was not the case. Framing sunbathing as a manifestation of narcissism suggests that generalised knowledge of suntanning was that of a beautification process, similar to the use of makeup or ritualised beauty practices. As these warnings did not appear to be taken seriously, it gives credence to the popularity of suntanning during its peak in the 1960s and 70s. As the *BMJ* was a specialist journal, there was less likelihood that the general public would have access to this information. Yet, as this period progressed, there was increasing information regarding the dangers of sunbathing presented in widely circulated magazines.

In the same year as the *BMJ* article on suntan oil appeared, the *Daily Mail* partially engaged with the information provided in a piece of its own, yet it did little to promote the dangers of suntanning. Rather, it explained that while sun lotions help with protection from the sun, the popularity of a suntan was emphasised, as opposed to the protection of the skin. The author suggested: "I bet half the population of Britain will be slapping on the old suntan lotion and lying out on the lawn."[440] While illustrating the wide-spread consumption of suntan lotion during this time, it also reinforces the popularity of sunbathing itself. Further, emphasising the explicitly gendered notion of such sunbathing practices in many cases, he enthused: "And guys like me find the ritual massaging of the body very pleasant indeed, especially when the body belongs to the little girl in the bikini who can't quite reach that bit in

[440] 'Are you Browned off?', *Daily Mail*, 28th August 1964

the middle of her back."[441] This ritualisation of sunbathing and application of sun lotion implied a sexual element of suntanning. Stemming from the influence of heliotherapy, sunlight as an activator of sexual desire perpetuated the idea of women as healthy procreators and emphasised the aesthetic beauty attached to this gendered responsibility as this period progressed. While the engagement with medical journals is somewhat present here, the tone of the article emphasised the gendered rituals associated with applying sun lotions and basking in the sun, referred to here (and in most articles), as an explicitly feminine desire practiced to achieve beauty. The differing language from professional journals as opposed to print media will be emphasised later, yet this presents a rare engagement with medical literature while still promoting the desirability and fashion of a suntan, as opposed to the medical dangers of such.

An article published in *The Lancet* nearly 10 years later on the topic of sunburn instigated a similar response with regard to the dangers of sunbathing, presenting an annoyance with the apparent lack of public knowledge about the dangers of the sun. This became a recurrent theme within conversations in these medical journals, yet why was popular knowledge not responding? There was a disconnect between scientific knowledge and public actions. Scientific and medical knowledge was often distanced from popular culture, or at times missed completely. The lack of effective transmission of scientific knowledge through various popular culture outlets meant that science was viewed as a specialist and esoteric practice.[442] In turn, science as a specialised practice maintaining a superior social status limited the interaction between scientific knowledge and popular culture, with its "production epistemologically privileged" and as such, out of reach for

[441] *Ibid.*
[442] Cooter, *Separate Spheres and Public Places*, p.237

many.[443] In terms of suntanning and the dangers of UV rays, it would be easy for one to assume that the knowledge of the sun damaging the skin would thus translate to the British population no longer desiring a suntan. Indeed, a diffusionist discourse surrounding the dispersion of knowledge would see this as a simple explanation. The "natural knowledge cultivated by elites is perceived as watered down, then trickled down for popular consumption."[444] Yet, this chapter illustrates that this is too simplistic, as other cultural factors, such as beauty and its pervasiveness in magazines, proved to be much more influential. As illustrated here, "popular culture can generate its own natural knowledge which differs from and may even oppose elite science." [445] Whereby suntanning was concerned, culture created the idea that white, tanned skin was beautiful, ringing more important than the dermatological care of skin.[446] Per The *Lancet*, "the relation between sunshine and skin cancer is well established…[yet] sunburn is the affliction of the young, the careless, or the ignorant."[447]

## Sun Protection Factors

In the 1970s, efforts to protect the public became more prominent due to the increasing popularity of sunbathing, growing sales of sun creams, and significantly, the rising number of skin cancer diagnoses by consequence of the lack of adequate protection available earlier in the century. In 1974, the Greiter's (creators of Piz Buin), introduced classifications of 'sun protection factors' (SPF). This was calculated to determine which fraction of UV-B rays would penetrate the skin with various strengths of sun lotion, and thus, enabled producers

[443] *Ibid.,* p.240
[444] *Ibid.,* p.248
[445] *Ibid.,* p.248
[446] *Ibid.,* p.248
[447] 'Sunburn', *The Lancet* , 302 (1973), pp.30-31, p.30

of sun lotions to determine the strength of the products they released. In 1978, as the sun care market boomed, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officially recognised SPF as a categorisation for the strength of sun protection lotions that manufacturers should, but were not officially required to, abide by.

The SPF model adopted by the FDA was the first standardised method of regulating the effectiveness of sun screens. Protection factors were numbered from 2 to 15, which indicated the potential for protection from UV-B rays: the higher the number, the more protection. The effectiveness of the SPF depended upon the application of 2mg of cream and a specific period of time spent in the sun before reapplying to protect the skin from sunburn. Factor 2 indicated that the product would double the safe exposure time for a consumer after application before causing sunburn, and as such, offered a low protective value. Factors in the range of 8-14 were classed as heavy sunscreens offering a longer duration of protection with the ability to tan, and factors 15 and over were sun blocks, which allowed for maximum protection with little or no tanning.[448] However, the FDA or sunscreen manufacturers were not then aware that SPF was only an indicator of the effectiveness of screening out UV-B rays, and not UV-A rays.

There are notable controversies when using SPF as the main guidance for sun protection cream. During this period, the maximum level of protection according to SPF was 15, which meant that when using factor 15 sun cream, consumers could endure sun exposure fifteen times greater than without sun lotion before causing sunburn. Yet, calculation of such exposure protection was based on users applying 2mg of cream and the cream being applied effectively. Further, it did not account for specific environmental factors or locations, strength

[448] 'Skin-Care Elegance Hits the Suntan Scene', *Chemical Week*, 6th February 1980, p.52

of wavelength and type of UV ray, or the potential for irregularities of the skin surface. [449] Thus, if the product was applied incorrectly, then the protection of the cream would be significantly less than stated on the bottle. For instance, whether the SPF value applied was 8 or 10, if applied incorrectly, the SPF value of 10 with supposedly more protection against sunburn, would be no more effective than the SPF 8.[450] This caused considerable problems concerning adverts for creams and advice columns in magazines. As specific SPF values were being based purely on whether users were able to achieve a tan - and by consequence, the skin tone of the readers - previous sunburn, general photosensitivity, environmental factors, or efficacy of application was not considered. This had a considerable impact on the level of protection and potential for skin damage, which went unnoticed among business owners and consumers.

In relation to the developing awareness of cancerous mutations caused by UV rays, tests in the 1970s to calculate SPF factors only considered the amount of protection needed to prevent sunburn, and thus, against UV-B rays.[451] Sunbathers were applying sun cream which had in many cases only been tested for their effectiveness against UV-B rays, which prevented sunburn and basal and squamous cell skin cancers. These are non-malignant and normally easily treated. However, SPF factors and sun lotions did not protect against UV-A rays which can cause malignant melanoma, a form of skin cancer which develops in the growth and production of melanocytes. These growths alter the DNA of cells, which can lead to tumours that spread throughout the body. However, the danger of UV-A rays was only discovered and made public knowledge in the 1980s, having long been considered as

[449] Schalka, *Sun Protection Factor*, p.511. The increase of SPF values occurred in 1993 and 2007, respectively, SPF 30 and SPF 50+ was introduced by the FDA.
[450] *Ibid.*, p.511
[451] *Ibid.,* p.513

harmless.[452] Before this discovery, British sunbathers who used sun creams during the height of suntanning, were unknowingly exposing themselves to harmful and potentially carcinogenic UV-A rays. While the medical journals discussed above explicitly explained that sunbathing was harmful and cancer inducing, a simultaneously harmful narrative developed in the boom of suntan lotion sales. Persuasive and misleading advertising campaigns reassured users that sunbathers would be fully protected from the sun's harmful rays upon applying suntan lotions. In reality, they were unknowingly causing more dangerous harm to the lower layers of skin.

Based on research conducted in the late 1980s by epidemiologist Frank Garland (and others), it was argued in the *New York Times* (*NYT*) in 1990 that the use of sun creams by sunbathers were causing more cancers. As sunbathers used more creams, with the higher SPF factors available, more choices, and entrenchment of the need to use sun cream by advertisers, people thought they were able to stay in the sun for much longer because they were using protection.[453] However, as this was only UV-B protection, spending longer in the sun without adequate (or any) protection from UV-A rays exposed sunbathers to much greater risks of cancer.[454] This, combined with people not applying enough cream, not reapplying enough, or not applying it properly, only led to further dangers from both UV-B and UV-A rays. Broad spectrum protective creams were later developed in the 1990s to provide further protection from UV-A and B rays. However, these sun creams could not guarantee full protection against the longest wavelength UV-A rays.[455] The overwhelming message from the advertisements in the popular press was that of the importance of being beautiful and

[452] R.B. Webb 'Lethal and Mutagenic Effects of Near-Ultraviolet Radiation' *Photochem* and *Photobiol* 10, (1976), pp.169-261, and Segrave, *Suntanning,* p.199
[453] N. Angier, 'HEALTH; Theory Hints Sunscreens Raise Melanoma Risks', *New York Times*, 9th August 1990, Section B, p.10
[454] *Ibid.,* Section B, p.10
[455] Schalka, *Sun Protection Factor*, p.511

achieving the perfect, golden tan. Unless explicitly exposed to medical journals, or having done personal research, it is unlikely that prior to 1970, the dangers of sunbathing would have been fully explained in advertisements to British sunbathers.

In 1981, the *NYT* expressed that there was a concern among manufacturers that sun tan products had fallen into "two warring camps:" those that blocked out UV rays and those that promoted a tan.[456] This supposed split in the advertising of suntan products was due to the growing concern of sun induced skin cancers among sun bathers and the general population. The growing number of skin cancer cases poised many members of the public to be more receptive to acknowledging the risks of sunbathing. According to *Chemical Week* in 1978, the image of tanning products was changing. While advertisements still showed the imagery of a desirable, beautiful, and glowing golden tan, adverts would "also be emphasising protection: not just against sunburns which they have always offered, but protection against premature ageing and skin cancer."[457] The FDA released figures regarding the increase of sun induced skin cancers in the U.S. In 1973 it stood at 1,409 cases, yet in the five years that followed there had been a rise of 300,000 new cases of skin cancer each year.[458]

Suntan lotion companies had to respond to the exponential market growth in the popularity of sunbathing, alongside the increasing awareness of skin cancer. In order to secure higher sales figures among a broader range of consumers, many companies began to develop and provide sun creams 'for all skin types' and a wide range of users. However, this supposed inclusion of skin types was misleading, as this referred to sun cream which catered for 'all types' of white skin - for sensitive, dry or oily skin - as opposed to accurately reflecting the

[456] 'New Brands of Sun Care Products Join a Booming but Crowded Market', *New York Times*, 4th July 1981, Section 2, p.7. At this point in 1981, the retail market for products in the U.S was worth $225million.
[457] 'Health is in for Suntan Products', *Chemical Week*, 5th July 1978, p.19
[458] *Ibid.,* p.19

skin-based needs of the diverse population in which these companies existed, but seemed to ignore.

Another significant medical issue for frequent sunbathers and manufacturers of suntan products was the ageing of the skin. This was also reflected in the shift in advertising methods by various sun lotion companies. Toward the end of this period, in the 1970s and 1980s, advice provided by both popular media outlets and from medical professionals shifted, but was at times contradictory. While UV-B rays cause skin pigmentation, sunburn, and by consequence, skin dryness, UV-A rays are the "the prime culprit to premature wrinkling."[459] Photoaging is the premature ageing of the skin caused by repeat exposure of the skin to sunlight, in particular UV-A rays. UV-A rays penetrate deeper layers of the skin - the dermis - as opposed to the surface layer, and damages collagen which prevents skin from wrinkling, causes elastosis in the dermis, and degrades skin proteins.[460] Thus, UV-A rays play a proportionately larger role in damaging the skin through photoaging, due to a greater abundance in normal sunlight, a far greater presence in year-round and day-long settings, and has a greater penetration into the skin than UV-B rays.[461] Though many people were protecting their skin from ageing in minimal ways, this was not sufficient to provide full protection from UV-A rays. While most of the sun lotion adverts reinforced the moisturising nature of their creams, which supposedly prevented dryness and ageing, the moisturising elements offered no protection from UV-A rays. As such, much of this was misleading for consumers.

[459] M. Yaar, and B. Gilchrest, 'Photoageing: Mechanism, Prevention and Therapy' *British Journal of Dermatology*, 157 (2007), pp.874-887, p.874
[460] *Ibid.,* p.874
[461] *Ibid.,* p.874

## Scientifically Misleading Advertising

With the plethora of advertisements promoting the use of suntanning products, there often saw blurred and somewhat false scientific facts regarding protection from UV rays, skin care, and ageing. Often sold alongside moisturisers and make-up products, suntanning lotions were subsumed within the narrative of white beauty and youthfulness to create the ideal beautiful, tanned, ageless, bourgeois woman. While some discussed the medical realities of suntanning due to research being conducted on the impact of UV rays, beauty and skin perfection was the overwhelming theme in these adverts.

The 1970s saw some inclusion of the dangers of suntanning on women's skin in popular British magazines and newspapers. Unusually for the *Daily Mail*'s reporting on suntanning, in 1971, medical correspondent John Stevenson reiterated that suntanning was not healthy for the skin: "sunshine causes it to age prematurely so that it loses its elasticity, becomes wrinkled, and spotted with brown patches and scaly thickenings."[462] While the *Daily Mail* played a key role in popularising and embedding a suntan as a fashion and beauty aesthetic in its encouragement of women to sunbathe in advertisements, this is an important instance of information in this newspaper. Another extremely popular publication in Britain during this time which encouraged and printed a plethora of adverts for suntan lotions, was *Cosmopolitan*.

In 1972, *Cosmopolitan*, provided a 'complete skin guide'. While it provided a warning about the dangers of skin cancer from over exposure to the sun, this article also mentioned the importance of ageing. According to *Cosmopolitan*, age shows first on the areas always exposed to the sun: the hands and face, and radiation from sunlight "brings about irreversible

[462] J. Stevenson, 'Death of the Old Wives Tales', *Daily Mail*, 1971

deterioration in the elastic fibres of the skin."[463] More significant for this article, was the greater consideration of skin tones. While not providing in-depth information, the article stated: "Blondes wrinkle sooner than Brunettes. Because of their *extra* pigmentation, Oriental and Black people age more slowly."[464] While this is true to the extent that white complexions can age quicker, due to Black skin having 40-60 more oil glands, it is problematic in the sense that it seems to suggest that by consequence of not ageing quickly, people with Black skin do not need to wear sun cream or could be blasé about sunbathing.[465] Those with darker complexions, did still need to wear sun protection because although darker skin contains more eumelanin for increased natural protection, these cells and layers of skin still needed to be protected from UV-A and UV-B rays. Thus, while Black women were excluded from popular discourses of beauty and tanning, the risk of Black women not using skin protection was not explained or given attention. This idea of Black skin being at less of a risk of damage was part of popular and scientific discourse for much of the 20th century, but these warnings did exist among Black-owned publications.

The contrast here when considering *Cosmopolitan*, as opposed to Black owned newspapers such as *WIW*, is stark. For example, *WIW* published articles promoting the protection of Black skin in sunlight. In one advert for *Fashion Fair*, a Black-owned cosmetics company, the advert reinforced that "Fashion Fair encourages women to…use products with a sun screen [because] *all* skin colours tan, and the emphasis is on protection no matter the degree of pigmentation."[466] Articles such as this, illustrate the limitations of articles printed in mass produced magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. Thus, while the consideration of Black skin,

[463] Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan,* 'The Complete Skin Guide', April 1972,
[464] *Ibid.*
[465] The British Library, LOU.3311, *West Indian World,* 'Woman's World: Beauty Directions for 1984, for Today's Women', 25 January 1984
[466] The British Library, LOU.3034, *West Indian World* , 'Woman's World: Alfred Fornay Jr., Fashion Fair on the Move', 12 October 1983

as opposed to just white skin, in *Cosmopolitan* was a welcome one, the information presented was misleading and confusing with regard to the realities of the need for sun protection and photoaging. Another statement from *Cosmopolitan's* skin guide, was the suggestion that "cosmetics can protect you from the sun if they're pigmented."[467] Presented without any real context or explanation of how this worked, alongside being scientifically incorrect, this could have been misleading for people who were looking for skin protection from ageing.

Remaining with the advice and information presented in *Cosmopolitan*, in articles from both a doctor and suntan lotion advertising companies, there were instances of further scientifically incorrect advice. One reader asked: "I've heard that sunburn can lead to skin cancer, but find this difficult to believe when everyone sunbathes much as they can on holiday. Should we worry about this?"[468] Dr Harold Mercer replied to the question, maintaining the well-known scientific and medical fact that sunlight is a carcinogenic to the skin, but then played down the dangers of skin cancer by telling the reader to "forget it…you are unlikely to be exposed to sufficient sunlight for long enough to provoke this type of reaction" due to living in Britain.[469] While it is impossible to posture whether this is scientifically accurate or not, as it depended on the individual, it was unusual to see a doctor play down the impact of skin cancer, not recommend sun cream, and instead, highlight the importance of ageing. Mercer insisted: "You might remember the ageing effect that more moderate degrees of sunburning has, producing the leathery skin that suits cowboys so well."[470] While it is useful for readers to know that sun burn causes ageing, in reality, Mercer should have suggested that all sun bathing, whether burning or not, caused ageing of the skin.

[467] Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.8088, *Cosmopolitan*, 'The Complete Skin Guide', April 1972
[468] Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'Your Body: Harold Mercer', June 1976
[469] *Ibid.*
[470] *Ibid.*

As such, consumers of magazines are soliciting information from sources they trusted, but at times, the answers were not always correct.

In 1976, an advert for Bergasol suntan lotion promised a "natural tan where you never tanned before."[471] According to Bergasol, it provided users with a Mediterranean tan whether at home or on holiday because it was a tanning accelerator, allowing for users to tan faster than with a normal suntan lotion. Providing women with the ability to tan where they had supposedly 'never tanned before', suggested that a tanned skin tone should be present across the entire body, as opposed to immediately visible areas. While Bergasol enthused that the ability to tan all over was a natural process, the reality was the opposite. The idea of tanning the whole body presented impossible beauty standards for women. Attaining an even, all over body tan to the extent that Bergasol suggested possible was both impractical and unachievable for many women. This was not only due to the practicalities of even suntanning, but that the ideal perfect suntanned beauty was impossible for many white women to achieve in their day-to-day lives. More importantly for Bergasol, then, was providing women with the products for achieving the ideal, and continuously reinforcing the unending possibility of beauty for consumers. The advert also failed to mention of SPF or specific protective values of the cream, but the advert did mention that it contained bergamot oil, a tanning accelerator which "activates those UV rays that normally wouldn't tan you at all: the longer wavelengths."[472] Activating longer wavelength UV-A rays, was the worst thing that a suntan lotion could do for a user's skin because they are more damaging. While it is questionable whether UV rays can be activated just by applying a cream, as per scientific knowledge of the time, sun lotion products should be blocking the majority of the UV rays, as opposed to activating them for a

[471] Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, Bergasol, July 1976
[472] *Ibid.*

"natural fast tan."[473] This, then, is a prime example of misleading and scientifically inaccurate advertising by suntan product companies. Bergasol provided medically dangerous promises of a faster tan due to a single ingredient in a cream, and encouraged the consumer to achieve a deep tan from the longer wavelength UV rays. There was also no challenge or redress to the information provided or the promises the advert made.

By the 1980s, one company in particular presented a more promising and medically realistic stance on sunbathing and sun protection creams. Leonard A Lauder, president of Estée Lauder, contributed to a *NYT* article in 1981. He reinforced that "Lauder [was] moving in the direction of efficaciousness and ageless skin. We have taken a strong anti-tanning and anti-sun position, in contrast to our mass-produced competitors' sun worship position."[474] As a popular brand in Britain, the strong anti-tanning position would have been an anomaly in advertising with regard to many sun lotion companies during this time. This was a positive step in terms of safety whereby science and medical realities were concerned, however, Estée Lauder still sold products encouraging a 'safe' tan, even after their anti-sun position was declared.

In 1985, also reported in the *NYT*, Leonard Lauder, again, reiterated that "suntanning is a national epidemic." [475] This proved to be an accurate statement when considering the prominence of tanning for fashion and beauty, alongside the exponential rise of skin cancer diagnoses in Britain and the U.S. The author of the article reinforced that the current demand in the sun care market was a mixture of both the ability to tan as quickly as possible and to protect the skin from sun damage. [476] Estée Lauder released a new line of sun care products

[473] June Weir, 'Beauty: Care Under the Sun', *New York Times*, 17th February 1984
[474] 'New Brands of Sun Care Products Join a Booming but Crowded Market' *New York Times*, 4th July 1981, section 2, p.7
[475] June Weir, 'Beauty: Care Under the Sun', *New York Times*, 17th February 1984
[476] *Ibid.,* p..84

with the aim of meeting these demands of the sun care markets. Their Biotan cream aimed to allow the user to tan as quickly as possible while still protecting the skin from sun damage: "Biotan is a sun screen, but its action works synergistically with ultra-violet sun filters to increase photo-protection against U.V. rays."[477] This advice seems misleading or confusing, as Estée Lauder did not provide information as to whether further SPF protection was required. While it was not a sunscreen offering protection, the product could work with UV sun filters, which could mean applying the product alongside another cream, to increase skin protection from UV rays. Without clearly explaining how this worked, such as whether it should be used with another sun block and specific SPF, the advertised cream here presents misleading promises with regard to protection of the skin.

Further, Lauder claimed that the "Biotan complex stimulates the skin to produce more melanin" and thus, create a better tan.[478] In comparison to other products which afforded medium protection while still allowing the user to tan, it remains unclear from a scientific perspective how Biotan could increase the ability to tan while not providing sun protection filters. Estée Lauder also claimed that this product could protect the skin against the harmful elements of sunlight that caused ageing and skin cancer: "this key ingredient means a person needs to spend less time in the sun to acquire a deeper tan."[479] The necessity to spend less time in the sun due to the ability to achieve the desired skin tone or suntan for the user, was potentially one of the only benefits of such creams. This could be due to sun lotion companies causing more skin cancer and premature ageing because users believed they could spend more time in the sun when wearing sunscreen. However, this enhanced their exposure to UV rays. By contrast, provided that Estée Lauder's cream had adequate protection from the sun,

[477] *Ibid.,* p.84
[478] *Ibid.,* p.84
[479] *Ibid.,* p.84

sunbathers spending less time in the sun because they 'tanned quicker' would have been beneficial for their skin. In relation to Estée Lauder's apparent anti-sun and anti-tanning position, there appeared to be misleading messaging within the company. They still advertised sun lotion products and claimed to cater for all sunbathers' needs safely. In reality, sunbathers using Estee Lauder's cream were still at risk of sun damage.

Whereby anti-ageing was concerned, while the shift in advertising to remind consumers that ageing was a detrimental consequence of suntanning, the desire to promote the beauty ideal of a beautifully suntanned woman far outweighed the promotion of the medical dangers of suntanning. These scientific inaccuracies, even if the specific knowledge regarding UV-A/B rays was not clear prior to 1980, are important to consider. The words from a suntanning beauty pamphlet 'Golden Girl' sum up these attitudes to a tee. Published in 1982 as part of a series of publications covering various beauty themes called the 'New You Beauty Programme', after explaining the warnings of sun exposure, they stated: "pretty depressing, isn't it? But probably not depressing enough that you'll actually stay out of the sun! For the lure of a golden tan always seems to outweigh possible risks in the distant future."[480] For a large number of people, while the scientific warnings were clear, and the consequences for one's health seemingly damaging for all who practiced, the lure of a golden tan seemed to outweigh health risks due to the prevalence and importance of achieving beauty. This obsession among many in Britain, as influenced by heliotherapy and impacted by scientific developments, will now be explained in the socio-cultural context of which it emerged.

[480] The British Library, X.629/21047, *Golden Girl*, 1982, p.10

## Chapter Five: Consumers of Suntanning Products

In 1929, Coco Channel declared in *US Vogue* that the "1929 girl must be tanned."[481] In the same year, the *Daily Mail* published multiple articles on the importance of suntanning. One such article informed readers that American women were acquiring English complexions at beauty salons which provided an "all new suntanning treatment."[482] Fashion and beauty companies and magazines advertising suntanning products, all capitalised on the notion of a 'healthy glow'. Consequentially, suntanning became an up-and-coming fashion must-have, catalysed by celebrities and wider popular culture. As such, this chapter examines both the influence of popular culture on women's quests for a suntan, alongside women as consumers of the plethora of suntanning products on the market. It traces the rise of the suntan beginning in the 1930s, up until 1980s, when it subsequently fell out of favour among major fashion and beauty circles. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the exponential rise of sunbathing as a practice and use of products for sun protection, was steeped in racialised politics of beauty and exclusion. Tanning the skin to achieve beauty rested on the aesthetic dimensions of racism: the ability for only white women to achieve the ideal tanned skin, due to the necessity of a white skin tone within socially accepted discourses of beauty.

The entrenchment of suntanning was part of a prominent and longstanding socially constructed white beauty ideal, and the specific elements of this trend changed over time. The practice, existence, and normalisation of such beauty ideals were sustained by individuals judging themselves as "successes or failures according to the extent they conform to it."[483] For women, culture has a constant grip on their bodies, with personal care, reproduction, maintenance, and beautification being an intimate fact of everyday life.[484] Per Roland

[481] Vogue Magazine, 22nd June 1929, p.99
[482] 'American Women Acquire English Complexions', *Daily Mail,* 10th August 1929, p.15
[483] H. Widdows, *Perfect Me:Beauty as an Ethical Ideal* (Princeton, 2018), p.19
[484] S. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkley, 1993), p.17

Barthes' analysis on the fashion system, this pressure explains how the beauty and fashion industry maintain their existence: "fashion requires that new clothes are being bought, regardless of need… [and] relies upon consumers wanting to be up to date."[485] The ideal rested on an individuals' belief that achieving the minimum requirements of beauty was necessary to be accepted in society.[486] This was juxtaposed with a failure to conform being "regarded as a moral failure…a failure of the whole self."[487] Built upon false promises of success and happiness, beauty ideals became entrenched in society, and subsequently, consumers were taken advantage of by cosmetics, fashion, and advertising companies.

The growth of mass consumption in the early twentieth century saw gendered, racialised, and classed advertisements of white, bourgeois beauty, go largely un-noticed and unchallenged by white Britons.[488] Both a growth in the culture of consumption and changing ideas of gender roles, meant that during the post-war period, the female body drove many advertising strategies.[489] As will be illustrated in the following chapters, beauty was reinforced as a moral duty for women and an important feature of daily life, with the expectation of devoting time and money to daily routines.[490] The success of consumer capitalism depended on "the continual production of novelty, [and] of fresh images to stimulate desire."[491] The deployment of mass cultural representations of white beauty and femininity, by nature of the society in which these were produced and presented, smoothed out "all racial, ethnic, and sexual 'differences' that disturbed Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual

[485] *Ibid.,* p.102
[486] Widdows, *Perfect Me,* p.19
[487] *Ibid.*, p.19
[488] See: J. Clark, 'Buying Beauty: Female Beauty Consumption in the Modern British World', *History Compass*, 14 (2016), pp.206-217, p.209. Both a growth in the culture of consumption and changing ideas of gender roles, meant that during the post-war period, the female body drove advertising strategies.
[489] J. Clark, 'Buying Beauty: Female Beauty Consumption in the Modern British World', *History Compass*, 14 (2016), pp.206-217, p.209
[490] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.106
[491] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p.25

expectations and identifications."[492] As such, only the normalised features of white, smooth, young skin, long, straight and flowing hair, and encapsulated by a slim, bourgeois woman, was constantly portrayed as the ideal feminine beauty. Features and skin tones which exceeded these parameters were marginalised and excluded. These magazines wielded certain levels of influence over women and hierarchies of beauty when publishing articles and advertisements to reinforce white beauty cultures. Acting unknowingly within a society beleaguered with racist practices, women's magazines, by nature of a competitive market and desire for profit, published and reinforced dominant trends in beauty.

The white-but-tanned bourgeois beauty ideals, built upon long histories of racism, set a minimum standard of beauty for women. Images of this idealised beauty standard throughout these magazines encouraged feelings of inadequacy and inferior beauty among readers. [493] This ensured the purchase of products, and re-purchase of magazines, to allow women to stay up-to-date with trends.[494] Thus, magazines exerted cultural leadership in ways which perpetuated idealised and racialised beauty standards, heightened gender stereotypes, and appealed to feelings of inadequacy among women.[495] With these expectations of beauty and methods to improve the 'self', also frequently consumed at a more vulnerable age as young women, they learned "both their expected social role and their duties as consumers." [496] In many magazines, dominant codes of femininity taught women the accepted rules of a domestic lifestyle. In turn, this created false social norms under the presumption that all women have identical interests, roles, and goals in life.[497] Crucially, these social roles were

[492] *Ibid.*, p.25
[493] E. McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (London, 1993), p.136
[494] *Ibid.,* p.136
[495] *Ibid.*, p.9
[496] *Ibid.*, p.137
[497] L. Duke, 'Black in a Blonde World: Race and Girls' Interpretations of the Feminine Ideal in Teen Magazines', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77 (2000), pp.367-392, p.369

predetermined by both the magazine owners and the society in which they operated.[498] When these messages were read by teenage girls and later as women, many consumed the messages of a racialised society. When analysing the power of magazines over their consumers, it is important to emphasise that women were not merely passive consumers of the ideologies with which they were presented. McRobbie has illustrated the overwhelming presence of a specific feminine ideology in many magazines. Yet, she adds, they were "not solely responsible for nurturing this feminine ideology," nor would these stereotypes and social roles be vastly different had such magazines not existed.[499] Thus, whilst women were not passive consumers of the ideologies presented in magazines, neither could they escape the constant reinforcement of social ideals and develop a completely independent opinion of the lifestyle they wished to undertake.[500]

## The Growing Popularity of Suntanning

The ability to measure and illustrate the growing popularity of suntanning during this period relies on many popular culture outlets, with women's magazines being the most prominent. These included articles from beauty experts which explained how to achieve the perfect tan (and other aspects of beauty), sections answering reader's questions, advice columns, and product advertisements. The 1920s saw a growing focus on women's beauty in women's magazines, emphasising the importance of a pale complexion (and thus ways to bleach the skin), perfect hair, smooth hands, and fashionable clothing. However, as the 1930s progressed, beauty advice changed and suntanning took centre stage as it became a statement of beauty and fashion.

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[498] *Ibid.*, p.369
[499] McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.69
[500] L. Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (London, 1996), p.72

The rise in popularity of sunbathing in terms of a fashion and beauty sense, has been deemed to rest on Coco Chanel's (Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel) trip to the French Riviera in 1923. Popular notions of suntanning suggest that Channel returned with a suntan, and upon this return the suntan became popular. However, as argued by Segrave in his suggestion that 'Coco Chanel had nothing to do with it', Chanel was just contributing to an already existent fad.[501] People had been sunbathing long before Chanel took her vacation, yet her celebrity status and prominence as a designer gave it the impetus in society as a symbol of fashion and beauty. Indeed, these stories about Chanel began to appear in women's magazines in the U.S. and Britain in the late-1970s. Writers in *Mademoiselle* and the *NYT* published unsubstantiated stories about the so-called rise of the age of suntanning being attributed to a tanned Chanel alone.[502] Her deeming that "the 1929 girl must be tanned" then, was not Chanel's causing of the social popularity of the tan, but contributed to an already present and growing element of fashion and white beauty.[503]

In March 1929, it was reported among beauty specialists in London that tanned faces were coming into fashion in Britain, and with this, "many women are buying a new tanning cream to be used as a basis for sunburn coloured powder."[504] In June of the same year, "the vogue of sun and sea bathing was given such an impetus…[that] the oiling of the skin has become not only a ceremony but a necessity."[505] For white women, being tanned, slim, perfectly made-up, and fashionable, became the (mostly unachievable) beauty ideal set in the cultural context of the time, by which, many women judged themselves against and aimed to achieve. Suntanning served as "tacit proof of a good vacation," in the desire to achieve social

[501] Segrave, *Suntanning,* p.3
[502] *Ibid.,* p.3
[503] Vogue Magazine, 22nd June 1929, p.99
[504] 'Beauty for the Country', *Daily Mail*, 27th March 1929, p.19
[505] 'When you Sun-bathe: Tanning without the Pain of Blistering', *Daily Mail*, 22nd June 1929, p.19

expectations of fashion, wealth, beauty, and health.[506] At the same time, these early beginnings of the suntan set a mostly unobtainable ideal of beauty for many white women, and doubly exclusionary beauty standard for Black women, based upon the colour of their skin and gendered expectations of beauty. Ultimately, the majority of white women had to contend with a beauty hierarchy of gendered expectations, of which, most women fell short of. The perfect beauty in a real-sense, could either not be achieved or sustained by most women, but the power of the ideal, meant that large numbers of women attempted to achieve it. The importance here, was the impact and power of whiteness and the racialised messages attached to the beauty ideal via skin tone. It acted as an exclusionary force which marginalised and doubly-oppressed Black women from being able to achieve 'beauty' in comparison to white women.

Since the famous visit of Coco Chanel in the 1920s, the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur; the Mediterranean coast of south eastern France), with its close proximity and ease of access for those with disposable income, and reliable weather, garnered a significant reputation as the ideal holiday destination for a suntan. There were multiple instances of such beliefs in the British *Harper's Bazaar* during 1931. Both issues had features discussing the prominence of the Riviera for holiday makers, including diaries of holidays, details of specific beaches to visit, and advice pages describing how women suntanned on these particular beaches. *Harper's Bazaar,* self-proclaimed as Britain's number one fashion magazine and self-marketed for the middle-upper classes, featured life-style, beauty, and couture fashion. Established as a popular social and cultural outlet, even if women did not act on advice or purchase designer clothing, the stories, advice, and adverts in the magazine are important to examine.

[506] Segrave, *Suntanning,* p.77

In July 1931, *Harper's Bazaar* printed two articles about the Riviera, one by Baron de Meyer, a letter written especially for *Harper's Bazaar* from the Cap d'Ail, a commune in France with multiple beaches. The other, was a story describing the holiday of Molly and Noel, a couple termed as "two Moderns [who] go a wandering from Toulon to Cap Ferrat."[507] Describing Molly and Noel's activities on a beach, the article noted, "they began the agonising process of getting browned by the sun, carefully oiling themselves with Patou's *Huile de Chaldée* to prevent themselves from getting burnt too quickly."[508] This agonising process, undertaken by many holidaymakers, involved lying in the sun for as long as possible without or before getting burned, in order to achieve the best tan during the holiday. Noel later described himself as "peeling and hurting all over with this sun," which is unsurprising considering that *Huile de Chaldée*, was to no extent an adequate form of protection. It was an oil, created by Paris fashion house Jean Patou, claiming to soften and bronze the skin. This was later released as a perfume, *Chaldée*, and as such, was more of a fashion statement than sun protection. Despite the sunburn, Molly enthused about visiting Cavaliere, because "the bathing there is the best on the coast."[509] Molly and Noel's story illustrates not only the prominence of the Riviera, but the idea of achieving a suntan on holiday as one of the most important elements of travelling. For many, it would be seen as embarrassing to have been on holiday outside of Britain and not have a suntan upon arriving home. Indeed, this illuminated the intersection of suntanning with class and beauty. The ability to travel for a holiday to achieve a suntan, to mirror the luxuries of celebrities such as Coco Chanel, and for middle-upper class folk to holiday for long durations, made the importance of achieving a tan on holiday socially significant and influential.

[507] The British Library, HIU.LON 249, 'Sun Features by Baron de Meyer', *Harper's Bazaar*, July 1931, p.11. And, The British Library, HIU.LON 249, 'The Riviera Known and Unknown', *Harper's Bazaar*, p.40
[508] The British Library, HIU.LON 249, 'The Riviera Known and Unknown'
[509] *Ibid.*

In August of the same year, a columnist writing from France, the Honourable Mrs James Beck, described that "within the last few years the south of France has become a very popular resort during the holiday months for English people in search of the sun."[510] While the Riviera had been established as an exclusive destination - dependent on class or social status - it illustrated the growing number of English visitors populating the shores of the Riviera due to its reputation as *the* place to suntan. While Beck did list activities other than sunbathing such as boat trips and expeditions, these all had to be conducted "assuming the correct shade of tan, meanwhile."[511] The normal routine among Riviera sunbathers, was to pull down bathing suits to even the tan, ensure one was well oiled, and then "lie prone on a mattress" because such bathing opportunities and conditions are "rarely if ever experienced by those living in England."[512]

There is a key focus here on sunbathing and subsequently, suntanning, as a key element of a trip to the French Riviera. The attitude of making the most of the sun because of the limited opportunities to achieve a golden tan in Britain, the emergence of tanning as the sole reason for holidays, and the idea of tanning to fit into fashion trends, was extremely prominent in narratives on the Riviera and in Britain. Perhaps due to both Chanel's influence and the "guarantee that the sun will be a constant companion," consolidated in the minds of many that the Riviera was a "sunbathers paradise."[513] This, again, echoed the luxurious appeal of the ability to travel for a suntan and mirror celebrity activities, and importantly, buy into the fashion ideal that a golden suntan was beautiful. The French Riviera was entrenched in notions of class, travel, achieving the ultimate beauty, and thus, established links with the

[510] The British Library, HIU.LON 249, 'Holiday Contrasts', *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1931, p.60,
[511] *Ibid.*
[512] *Ibid.*
[513] Bodleian Library, Per.2474 d.352, 'The Riviera Can be Cheap', *Modern Weekly*, June 1935

culture of celebrity. This celebrity influence had a significant impact on suntanning achieving its height of popularity during the 1960s and 70s.

Around the same time as holiday-makers were flocking to the Riviera, in *Modern Weekly*, Kay Fairfax's advice column focussed on how sunbathers could maximise tanned beauty. 'Beauty for Bathers', suggested not to get "suntanned too quicky – you will only get burned and blistered and unbeautiful."[514] Fairfax's recommendation was the use of vanishing cream and powder applied when in the sun, and according to her, "even strong sunshine can do no damage to your complexion."[515] Fairfax's encouragement for women to keep their skin protected from the sun to prevent skin damage and becoming 'unbeautiful' promoted a narrow vision of what counted as a beautiful complexion. Ultimately white, but also tanned to perfection, not crossing the boundary into sunburn. Similarly, in August 1932, another beauty columnist Maxine Lincoln advised girls (and women), to "limit your sun worshipping to ten minutes a day at first…[to avoid] painful results and…skin the hue of a boiled lobster."[516] Lincoln reiterated that a woman's "town pale skin" cannot be kept in the sun for long durations due to the dangers of sunburn, which assumed that all holidaymakers had a pale-white complexion when they arrived, and would achieve an "ugly sunburn instead of a fascinating suntan."[517] While this presumed that women who achieved a tan were white women, it also reinforced that women could not be beautiful with sunburn, and thus, should take all precautions to prevent this. However, this was not medically informed advice about the dangers of UV rays, but a warning of the dangers of sunburn preventing a beautiful suntan. Sunburn causing ugliness, unbecomingness, and a red skin tone, was presented here as

[514] Bodleian Library, Per.2474 d.352, 'Kay Fairfax, Beauty for Bathers', *Modern Weekly*, August 1930, p.882,
[515] *Ibid.*
[516] Bodleian Library, Per.2474 d.352, 'Maxine Lincoln Insists that We All Be Well Groomed in the Water', *Modern Weekly*, August 1932
[517] *Ibid.*

the main drawback of over-exposure to the sun, alongside reinforcing the necessity of whiteness in discussions of beauty. Red skin, according to Lincoln, due to the importance of first appearances, risked the ability for the girl or woman to achieve their holiday romance.[518] This not only illustrates the importance of achieving a perfect tone for white women, but elucidates further gendered pressures placed upon young women during this time: achieving a romantic partner rested upon an idealised skin tone. Due to the privileges of whiteness, redness as a complexion caused by over-exposure rested in a state of embarrassing-but-fixable beauty. As such, their red complexion would eventually fade back to whiteness, and while their skin would have been damaged by the UV rays, white women still had the opportunity to be beautiful.

The 1930s also saw certain terminological instances of describing complexion as similar to a 'red Indian' as related to desires for achieving a suntan. However, whether used as pejorative or seen as inappropriate at the time, this term only gained common currency in the 1930s. *Modern Weekly* printed an article on 'The Sun and your Skin', in which it emphasised the allure of golden skin when going on holiday: "hardly a girl exists who doesn't imagine that to get her money's worth out of her summer holiday, she must finish it up with a coppery brown complexion, something like a red Indian's!"[519] The phrase 'red Indian' to describe the ideal tone of suntanned skin presented a juxtaposition in terms of acceptability of complexion and the use of a racialised term. While it may not have been seen as a racist term by the (white) magazine publishers, Red Indian is assumed here to describe Indigenous peoples in North America, some with a notably darker complexion, and at times, some Indigenous groups painted their skin with red ochre as a ritualised or spiritual practice. Using this phrase

[518] *Ibid.*
[519] Bodleian Library, Per.2474 d.352, 'The Sun and Your Skin', *Modern Weekly*, June 1930, p.437

to describe a suntan, when the acceptability of a suntanned complexion was rooted in whiteness, not only accentuates the objectification of skin colour and race, but also the blurriness of an acceptable golden complexion, and what this meant for different people in Britain.

There was an unsurprising drop in both the style and content of publications after 1939 until the 1950s, largely due to the Second World War. The size of the magazines shrunk to an A5 size, with content focussed away from holidays and toward war mobilisation and domesticity. These magazines presented specific cultural messages of women's moral roles and duties of homemaking and working.[520] Paper restrictions in Britain during the war were not lifted until 1952, which meant that the scope, size, and content of the magazines were limited, and thus, prioritised war mobilisation messages over beauty ideals. Nevertheless, during the 1940s and 50s, there existed a wide range of methods to achieve the desired golden look. The invention of the two-piece in 1946 by French designer Louis Réard, now known as a bikini, allowed for women to easily and efficiently bare more skin, move straps to avoid tan lines, and show off their tan and beautiful body. Additionally, the use of make-up to achieve a golden skin tone allowed women to stay out of the sun if they desired or ensure their whole body was tanned. However, makeup was chiefly considered as a product for white women, with make-up companies providing a very limited range of shades. This was perpetuated by a lack of awareness or consideration of Black skin and the need for people of all skin tones to wear sun protection.

By 1950, magazines seemed to be back on pre-war terms of promoting and reiterating the importance of a suntan. Ann Seymour continued as beauty editor of *Woman and Beauty*, and more widely, women's magazines continued to promote and advertise suntan lotions as it

[520] Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p.20

rose to its peak of popularity in the 1960s. Seymour paid particularly close attention to suntanning. In July 1950, she offered apparent words of reassurance in her suggestion that in taking careful forethought, women could feel confident on the beach. She asked:

> "How do you feel on view that first day on the beach? Worth looking at? Or white, shivery, or unlovely? … Care and forethought will have you swinging onto the beach like a goddess in her own right. Get into trim beforehand…cover your body where it looks too lily-white with a tan makeup."[521]

This emphasised the prominence of suntanning as it developed into an all-encompassing ideal on holiday and when summer had arrived. Not only does this reinforce beauty as intersecting with weight, attracting romance, and possessing the complexion of a goddess, it also promoted the use of make-up to accentuate a tan. The negativity associated with white, pale skin is evident here, both pressuring white women to achieve beauty by suntanning, and excluding Black women from achieving or possessing beauty altogether. Interestingly, throughout this publication, Ann Seymour frequently warned women not to stay in the sun for too long at the beginning of the holiday because of burning and drying skin. Seymour also began to differentiate between women who had extremely pale skin and needed to be careful, and women revelled in the sun.

Indeed, "as the skin turns from alabaster to bronze" Seymour noted, it remained important to do this slowly.[522] However, not all advice was appropriate or accurate. According to Seymour, sun lovers "invite the sun and revel in it with a pagan and pleasurable abandon. Beneath its warm caress, your skin quickly deepens from honey gold, to rich, deep tan."[523] For women who were sun lovers, Seymour recommended using Ultra Tan, a new Swiss sun protection lotion which, once women were brown, they were "safe to bake for

[521] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON.329, Ann Seymour, 'Beauty on View', *Woman and Beauty*, July 1950
[522] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON.99, Ann Seymour, 'Sun or Shade', *Woman and Beauty*, June 1955
[523] *Ibid.*

hours on end without a scorch."[524] This idea of a pagan and pleasurable abandon, also reiterates the notion of sunbathing and the application of sun lotion as a ritualised practice observed by women, taking specific bathing positions, for certain times, and in certain places, to achieve the perfect tone of skin. Seymour reinforced this, in her advice that "the secret of even tanning is to keep on the move, turning like a chicken on a spit, and reaching out for more moisture cream, jelly or screener at every turn!"[525] This ritualised practice and sunbathing routine was practiced whenever and wherever possible by some, and for many, acted as the main goal of a summer holiday. Intersecting with the discourse of suntanning sexualising women: the more tanned and beautiful one is, supposedly, the more sexualised and free one becomes in the eyes of society. This illustrates the emergence of becoming as brown as possible and bathing in the sun for long durations due to the protection from cream and the attainment of a baseline tan.

In 1957, Seymour published another instance of using make-up to achieve the 'look of summer'. Described as the "Brown Girl Look:" an approach to summer make-up and an apparent 'gift' to brunettes.[526] First, the sun was needed to "polish skin to a coppery bronze", and then foundation and powder are used to accentuate and darken the bronze tan, then lipstick, to reach the pinnacle and ideal for "this summer's dark beauty."[527] The language of the 'brown girl look' and darkness of skin tone suggests being as dark as possible, yet this was always rooted in white identity and aesthetics. When considering the diverse British population in which this magazine was published, using 'brown' and 'dark' to describe suntanned beauty suggests a very particular and changing racialisation of skin tone and

[524] *Ibid*.
[525] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 446, 'Ann Seymour: The Wonderful Look of Summer', *Woman and Beauty*, June 1957
[526] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 446, 'Ann Seymour: As Good as Gold', *Woman and Beauty*, June 1957
[527] *Ibid.*

aesthetics. An individual racialised as South Asian or Black would be 'Othered' or not considered within contemporary discussions of beauty practices, even if this individual had an extremely light skin tone. Conversely, an individual racialised as white, would be seen as beautiful if they had a brown or dark skin tone. Black identities and aesthetics, then, were immediately considered as inferior or ignored in society due to the necessity of whiteness to be considered within popular beauty practices. The developments seen during the 1950s to reinforce getting a deeper and darker tan, sunbathing for longer, and accentuating this with make-up, provided a stepping-stone for the popularity of tanning in the 1960s and 70s.

## Suntanning Reaches the Peak of Cultural Popularity

Moving into the 1960s and 1970s, this period witnessed the peak popularity of suntanning, and thus, the widespread use of suntanning products among women to achieve beauty. In popular culture outlets such as television adverts, magazines, newspapers, Hollywood films, and more personal and intimate fascinations in everyday lives, suntanning became an immensely popular practice to achieve an ideal standard of beauty. Alternatively, if women were not seeking 'perfection' per se, it was also a way of 'fitting in' with the current fashion of the time. Directly related to the prevalence of suntanning in popular culture and society, were the sales of creams and the value of the sun care market during these peak decades. These were frequently reported in scientific magazines and newspapers such as *Chemical Week,* alongside various scientific or medicinal information about the products. However, most of these figures and statistics came from the U.S., as the more populous of the two countries, and thus, much higher sales figures and potential for capital. Many of the best-selling suntan lotions were manufactured and produced in the U.S., and were both shipped to and sold in Britain during this time.

As reported in *Chemical Week* in 1975, "despite a worsening economic climate, Britain's cosmetics and toiletries sales continued to do well last year - sales were $579 million, 21% above 1973 totals."[528] Though this accounted for all cosmetics and not suntan lotions alone, it gives an insight into the potential for success in the growing cosmetics market which experienced exponential growth during the 1960s and 70s. Plus, it illustrates the popularity of beauty ideals and the amount paid by members of society to achieve such ideals. *Chemical Week* reported that Unilever by far dominated the market for cosmetics and toilet preparations, with sales at $434 million out of $579 million.[529] In addition, the author emphasised that "basically, Britain follows the U.S. market very closely" which is helpful considering the scarcity of figures on the British suntanning market.[530] That Britain and the U.S. followed a similar market and sales trajectory is unsurprising, considering the monolithic influence of white beauty cultures on so-called 'western' beauty practices. Yet, important to emphasise here is that the U.S. was not an all-encompassing beauty trend setter. Specifically British narratives of suntanning and beauty practices existed, and thus, British suntan lotions and make-up products also influenced U.S. practices and played a huge role in embedding ideals of white beauty in Britain. These influences were multidimensional and mutually reciprocated in terms of the importance of suntanning.

Important to remember with regard to European markets was the popularity of L'Oréal's Ambre Solaire cream. In 1975, L'Oréal sold $744 million worth of cosmetic products, with 56% in France, and the rest worldwide. [531] As such, European markets, and Ambre Solaire especially, cannot be understated. In 1976, Ambre Solaire counted for over

[528] P. L Layman, 'In Any Language, The Beauty Business Spells Success', *Chemical Week*, 17th September 1975, p.26
[529] *Ibid.*, p.26
[530] *Ibid.*, p.26
[531] *Ibid.*, p.26

half of the British sun care market, with Nivea and Boots' own brand creams close behind.[532] There saw an exponential growth in the sun care market from a value of $20 million in 1963, to $120 million in 1978.[533] Part of this increase in sales, many suntan marketing professionals suggested, was not only related to the importance of suntanning in society, but to the divide in attitudes toward suntanning advertising which emerged in the 1970s. While still placing extreme emphasis on the importance of a beautiful golden tan, part of this huge growth in sales was attributed to an "increased awareness and coverage of sun-care products by health and beauty editors in the consumer press."[534] A boom in consumer advertising, plus an increasing medical awareness and promotion of the dangers of UV rays, meant that more people were purchasing sun tan lotions. Whether to increase their tan, protect their skin, or both, it had a huge impact on the advertising and cosmetics sales market. According to an article in *Chemical Week*, "in 1977, about 26% of the population used sun-care products. In 1979, this percentage grew to 34%," and while this represented the U.S., it illustrated the huge potential for expansion in the suntan lotion market. This became a lucrative market for advertisers to promote ideals of beauty when the promises and expectations of white beauty practices were at their zenith.[535]

Notions of youthfulness and ageing presented a prominent story throughout these magazines as an additional feature of white beauty ideals. As aforementioned, in terms of scientific controversies and the damage of UV rays, suntan lotion companies and magazines devoted of time and space into promoting the 'youthifying' aspects of their products. There existed a specific cultural emphasis, particularly in Britain and the U.S., on youth being the best years of one's life, and when seen as being past this stage, women should do all they can

[532] Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, 'Tanning in Depth', *Cosmopolitan*, July 1976
[533] 'Health is in for Suntan Products' *Chemical Week*, 5th July 1978, p.19
[534] 'Skin-care Elegance Hits the Suntan Scene', *Chemical Week*, 6th February 1980, p.52
[535] *Ibid.,* p.52

to claim back their youthfulness and prevent ageing.[536] Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, there emerged a large number of women's magazines focussed upon younger women, with *Cosmopolitan* serving as the best seller. Whilst teenage magazines had their own market, these younger women's magazines targeted women from around the ages of 18-30, and illustrate the instances of self-help and advertisements to help women achieve perfection. Using product advertising to emphasise the ability to achieve a tan *and* prevent ageing (even though suntanning hastened skin ageing), emerged as a key element in white beauty ideals. Whether specifically aimed at younger women or not, women's magazines presented the desirable, perfect, tanned body as though it were possible for all women. By reading the magazines and purchasing the products, it was emphasised that all women could be beautiful, and that was a female duty achieve this. However, this was a very specific, narrow, and exclusionary beauty ideal, of which, very few women could achieve.

### *Celebrities and the Sun*

A major influence on the direction of specific beauty ideals and trends was the growing influence of the culture of celebrity. Modern celebrity culture began in the eighteenth century, when the general public began to take an interest in living authors, performers, artists and politicians, as opposed to rulers and conquerors.[537] As such, the meanings of the words 'celebrity' and 'star' became embedded in contemporary cultural language and knowledge, and was made possible by the coexisting notions of public interest, media publications, and the individual, unique, celebrity.[538] Also growing exponentially, was the means for news and gossip about these celebrities to spread among larger numbers of the British public.

[536] Ferguson, *Forever Feminine,* p.57
[537] S. Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton, 2019), p.9
[538] *Ibid.,* p.1

The new penny press, which appealed to the general interests of the British public, as opposed to targeting a small group of affluent people able to pay higher prices for exclusive information, meant that newspapers and the potential number of readers grew rapidly.[539] Newspaper companies soon realised the need to please consumers with their content, and as such, "celebrities were a reliable way to boost circulation."[540] The nineteenth century saw an explosion in celebrity culture. The increasing interest in individuality and democratisation of media, made it easier for the public to track celebrities lives, easier for individuals to become famous, and easier for print media to appeal to the public's interest of celebrities to attract more readers.[541] As Sharon Marcus notes, "a century before the rise of radio and television commercials, celebrities endorsed wigs, face creams, powders, pianos, and bottled water."[542] Theatre performers were some of the most popular celebrities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until the cult of Hollywood burst onto centre stage in the twentieth century. By the 1930s-50s, "most film moguls used restrictive contracts, well-oiled publicity departments, and their influence over the press, to control what the public could learn about them."[543]

The growing proliferation of popular culture outlets - print media especially - during the twentieth century, and the growing range of publications targeting different interests and lifestyles, meant that certain public figures became household names. While mass publications were growing in circulation, those with the largest circulation still remained owned by, and printed for, a white, heteronormative, and masculinised population. Whether these were film magazines, women's magazines which domesticised women, news, education or workplace focussed, the increasing access to information was undeniable. However, the

[539] *Ibid.*, p.11
[540] *Ibid.*, p.11
[541] *Ibid.*, p.10
[542] *Ibid.*, p.9
[543] *Ibid.*, p.11

diverse population in Britain did not always relate to such print media. During the 1960s and 70s, then, the culture of celebrity was well and truly established in British culture, as was the influence of particular film stars and models in promoting specific elements of white beauty cultures. Not forgetting the influence of Coco Chanel on the glamorous nature of suntanning forty years prior, this was further exemplified in the 1960s. Advertising in women's magazines and print media reached its peak in emphasising the importance of makeup and beauty cultures.

*Picture Show*, one of the longest running film magazines in Britain, published articles about popular contemporary films and entertainment. An article in May 1960 published interviews with film stars, who offered their 'golden rules for golden skin'. Actress Mitzi Gaynor, "rushes into her garden to mop up the sun on every spare sunny moment" and Doris Day emphasised how she was an "ardent sun worshipper."[544] Dianne Jergens liked to "get a golden hue as quickly as possible [because she hated to look] all white and wan among those golden girls on the beach" and Jill Ireland, "despite her blonde hair and fair colouring, sunbathes at every opportunity."[545] The comments surrounding desires for suntanning were unsurprising; as celebrities realised and popularised this trend, the suntan became increasingly desirable. These conversations about being a sun worshipper and possessing a 'golden' complexion evoked particular tonal ideals of skin and exclusionary beauty. As white celebrities and idols promoted the golden tan, it set an ideal which reinforced previously established boundaries of acceptable tonal beauty. Whereby body modification practices such as tanning was concerned, achieving the right shade of tan or brown was important.

[544] 'Screen Stars Offer you Golden Rules for Golden Skin', *Picture Show*, 28th May 1960
[545] *Ibid.*

This was reinforced by Susan Kohner's interview, described as "a brunette with the type of dark skin that only needs oiling first, [so] she can sunbathe to her hearts content."[546] The language used here was quite normal in terms of describing the ability of tanned white women being able to sunbathe for longer without burning. However, after sunbathing she sometimes "finds her skin getting too dark to be pretty, so she pops on trews and a shirt once she has gained a nice golden colour."[547] In the previous year Kohner won a Golden Globe for her role in *Imitation of Life* (1959), in which she assumed the role of a light skinned Black woman who passed for white in various scenes of the movie. Juxtaposed with her interview in *Picture Show*, it makes obvious the distinction in British and American society between tanned and pretty, and the social impact of a tan surpassing the boundary of tanned beauty. The inability to achieve the 'right' shade of a golden brown complexion, whilst also being reinforced by popular celebrities and advertisements, excluded Black women from the outset, and perpetuated exclusionary and unachievable ideals for many.

The exclusionary nature of suntanning via the lack of consideration of Black skin was also evidenced by the brief advice provided by the article. In both instances, Black women's beauty or skin care was not considered. When discussing the ability to reach the ideal of golden beauty, if women were unable to tan, "such as blonde and ginger people, Elizabeth Arden's 'covering cream' will provide an attractive cosmetic bronze."[548] Thus, for white women who were unable to achieve a golden or bronze suntan due to the nature of a fairer complexion, it did not damage social conceptions of whiteness. There existed harmless products to remedy this, and temporarily modify the complexion to achieve a golden tone. Hierarchies and gradations of whiteness, and a fluctuating beauty ideal, meant that

[546] *Ibid.*
[547] *Ibid.*
[548] *Ibid.*

conceptions of ideal whiteness changed over time, yet women with white skin were constantly provided with options to modify their tone to reach skin 'perfection'. False tanning, as a method of complexion alteration, when applied as a lotion or make-up, was a harmless method of complexion modification to achieve a suntan available to white women. It both minimised the exposure to UV rays and acted as a safer alternative for women with lighter skin, reiterating the inequality of beauty practices when striving to achieve 'acceptable' beauty.

By comparison, Black women used skin bleaches to modify their complexion, which damaged the skin and at times posed life threatening health risks for a mostly ineffective lightening practice. The inequality in methods of complexion modification with safety and skin damage considered was stark. In reference to sun protection and tan enhancement, it was reiterated that "*normal* skins, both dark and fair…need protection and assistance in the tanning process. Sunbliss is a cream that not only screens out the burning rays but it encourages a healthy, attractive tan."[549] Whilst the mention of dark and fair skin seemed to suggest inclusion of all complexions, it is evident that when the tanning process is mentioned, namely an attractive tan, it becomes clear that 'normal' dark skin was in fact, a darker tone of *white* skin. This notion of normal white skin 'Othered' and excluded Black skin, and did not emphasise the need for sun protection for all skin tones. This was yet another example of the exclusionary reinforcement of white-but-tanned beauty.

Public figures, while not specifically celebrities, contributed to the narrative of suntanning as a beauty ideal. When considering the 'users' of suntanning products, and the women who were sunbathing with the desire to achieve a tan, the most prevalent element of this idea of perfect beauty was the implicit whiteness. However, the arbitrariness of whiteness

[549] *Ibid.*

and race was pushed to the limits when considering the idealism and changeability of white women's suntanning. One public figure, Grace Halsell, an aide of President Lyndon B. Johnson, was known as 'The White Woman Who Became Black' according to the *Daily Mail*. Reporter Jeffrey Blythe, described how Halsell, a white woman, "lived as a negress in Harlem and Mississippi…for six months after darkening her skin."[550] She acquired a deep suntan which "affected the colour of her skin until she was a deep chocolate."[551] This echoes the links to Susan Kohner's imitation of a Black woman's skin tone for a film role, and further, how the boundaries of desirable suntans and skin tones were constantly changing. As explained by Woloshyn, there were boundaries between a desirable and feared suntan in society: certain shades pertained to an acceptable suntan, whereas in other instances, becoming 'too dark' became an act of racial transgression. However, the importance here lies in the removability of a suntan upon white skin. If this became 'too dark' or no longer desirable, this was fixable for those with a white skin tone.

While this article did not provide an in-depth insight into Halsell's story, her book *Soul Sister*, published in 1969, tells a striking story of her journey. Written in a diary format, it charts her decision to take psoralen tablets and sunbathe in order to achieve a complexion that would allow her to 'pass' as Black. Halsell had discussions with other White House staff about the privileges of whiteness and the problems facing society, and thought "I could do that…I could be black."[552] This decision was inspired by reading John Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961), a white journalist who temporarily darkened his skin to pass as Black, in order to chart the experiences of racial segregation in the Deep South. Halsell was convinced this was well intentioned, and explained her decision as a way to experience the racial prejudice of

[550] Jeffrey Blythe, 'The White Woman Who Became Black, *Daily Mail*, 1969
[551] *Ibid.*
[552] G. Halsell, *Soul Sister* (New York, 1969), p.9

Black Americans with the view to improve American society. However, the ability to change one's skin tone illustrated the social privilege of whiteness. Much like Halsell's darker skin tone was temporary, so too was her experience of racial inequality. During the lead-up to the process of changing her skin tone, in May 1968, she noted: "In the 5 months I have imagined being black, I have seen myself as *black and ugly,* in a dark cheap cotton dress that hangs on my body like a flour sack."[553] This, she also emphasised herself, was the engrained notion of whiteness as beautiful and Blackness having negative connotations, reinforcing embedded notions of white superiority viewed through skin as a signifier of aesthetics.

Conversations Halsell documented with doctors prove interesting when drawing back to scientific and medical discussions of melanin and complexion in relation to skin bleaching in the previous case study. The first doctor, Dr Stolar, who prescribed the psoralen, reassured Halsell that they had not found any dangerous side effects, but "the only damage might come from an overexposure to the sun…you will be very black… you might stay dark for a year."[554] Another doctor, Dr Aaron Lerner, from Yale Medical Centre, provided more information on the medication she would be taking:

> "He told me the medical term was trimethyl psoralen, and said the label generally used is trisoralen. Originally he said, the medicine came from a plant in Egypt, but when it became difficult to secure, it was produced synthetically. The drug psoralen, taken orally before exposure to sunlight or UV light, steps up the melanin production process and turns light skin dark."[555]

This echoes the use of native plants as natural ingredients for complexion modification. Plants from Egypt which became 'difficult' to secure, reiterates the exploitative nature of 'westernised' scientific and dermatological advances. The plant referred to here, is most likely to be *Ammi majus*, a native weed which grew (and grows) along the Nile delta. The seeds

[553] *Ibid.,* p.24
[554] *Ibid.,* p.26. This being danger being the over exposure to dangerous UV rays in her quest for a dark complexion.
[555] *Ibid.,* p.35

from this weed (alongside sunlight) were used to treat vitiligo in Egypt from around 2000 BC onward, and have since been discovered to contain two psoralen derivatives, methoxypsoralen in particular.[556] Thus, the exploitative practice of beauty and dermatological products for complexion modification did not end with sources for skin bleaching products, they were deeply embedded in notions of race and 'Western' superiority.

The tablets that Halsell consumed were synthetic reproductions of psoralen derivatives, and Dr Lerner recommended taking one tablet 1-2 hours before sunbathing, with a gradual increase in both sun exposure time and the number of tablets. In two or three weeks, Halsell was informed she would be "*very dark*."[557] Though she described the changes in complexion as imperceptible, the public reaction to Halsell's skin tone told a different story. At a cocktail party a friend commented: "My, you have a pretty tan! Now it is fashionable to be dark, but only if you are really white. That is, a tan is beautiful - if you keep it this side of black."[558] Halsell boasted of further compliments from various people she encountered: "At the bank a woman teller: 'Oh, what a tan. It looks so-*deep*.' [and] At the health club: 'My you have a good tan. You are almost black.'"[559] This reinforces the necessity of whiteness: a tan can only be beautiful if it is on 'this side of Black'. Thus, she was beautiful because her complexion was tanned whiteness, as such, the dark complexion would not be beautiful if Halsell was Black. This idea of a beautiful deep tan, being close to Blackness, but not actually Black, illustrates the blurred boundaries of beautiful tanned skin. Using the privilege of whiteness to 'pass' as Black and apparently be able to live as a Black woman for six months, not only appropriated Black skin, but pushed the privilege of whiteness and the boundaries of

[556] E. Ben-Hur, P. S. Song, 'The Photochemistry and Photobiology of Furocoumarins (Psoralens)', *Advances in Radiation Biology*, 11 (1984), pp.131-171
[557] Hallsell, *Soul Sister,* p.36
[558] *Ibid.,* p.39
[559] *Ibid*., p.41

a suntanned white skin tone to its limits. Halsell was still afforded the privilege of whiteness in her ability to erase the tanned (or extremely dark) complexion by stopping sunbathing and discontinuing the tablets, to revert back to whiteness. The racialised boundaries of brownness and beautifulness were policed by deeply ingrained assumptions of whiteness, with such being a necessity before achieving a suntan. Being 'too brown' to be beautiful arose directly from having skin not initially white.

By printing these articles, magazines reinforced exclusionary white beauty cultures, illustrating the wider power held by magazines in the continuation and popularisation of specific social ideals and attitudes. By assuming a class-less and race-less audience, these magazine publishers reinforced a racialised beauty ideal encompassing skin, weight, and overall appearance, which marginalised Black British women at the onset of publication. Whereas in many cases, when considering the population demographics of Britain during this time, a large number of the Black British population could have been reading magazine articles which did not take into consideration their specific skin needs. However, these magazines were operating within popular beauty discourses which lauded whiteness and white ideals, within a deeply racialised broader society. This was consequential of broader instances of racism in British society during this time, perpetuated by other media outlets, celebrities and models, and the suntan lotion companies themselves. As such, it could be argued that the practices of skin bleaching and suntanning initially should be criticised as opposed to the magazines.

### *The British Public*

Moving away from movie stars and celebrities to more localised social commentary, suntanning was immensely popular among holiday makers and regular Britons. The seaside,

as a quintessentially British holiday destination, be it nostalgia, family tradition, or the quest for a perfect sunbathing destination, holds a wide range of meanings for many Britons. The popularity of heliotherapy from the eighteenth century onwards, meant that coastal areas in Britain became popular among the nobility and middle class retirees in search of the perfect sea-bathing space.[560] At the end of the nineteenth century, Britain was gripped by a "pier building mania," which saw huge levels of growth and development in leisure destinations to attract more visitors and provide entertainment.[561] The development of railways as an efficient, cheap, and suitable means of transport, and a rise in disposable income for those considered as working class, conspired to "promote a unique proliferation of seaside leisure destinations."[562] The "explosion in working class trips to cheaper resorts in the 1920s and 1930s," solidified the seaside, and by consequence the suntan, as a staple of British culture.[563] This coincided with the growth in sun worship and the fashion of suntanning, making tanned skin more accessible (weather permitting), for larger numbers of the British public. Viewed by some as "the most ubiquitous image of the inter-war period" the sun, and those who wanted to reap its benefits by obtaining tanned skin, changed the landscape of British coastlines by introducing new beach fashions, tanning, and increasing publicity and popularity of resorts.[564]

Suntanning, and the users of suntan lotions then, soon realised the possibility for a luxurious suntan in a wide range of locations. The publicity for these seaside resorts also

[560] A. Balkie, 'Beside the Sea: Visual Imagery, Ageing and Heritage', *Ageing and Society*, 17 (1997), pp.629-648, p.639. Also see: A. Garland., *The Beach* (London, 1996); Graves, R. and A. Hodge., *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918– 1939* (London, 1995); L. Lencek, and G. Bosker, *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth* (London, 1998); N.J. Morgan and A. Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside: The Development of Devon's Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Exeter, 1999); D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998)
[561] E. J. Evans and J. Richards, *A Social History of Britain in Postcards, 1870-1930* (London, 1980), p.129
[562] J. K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2000), p.27
[563] Balkie, *Beside the Sea*, p.635
[564] J. Hassan, *The Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800* (London, 2003), p.87

changed to reflect new trends in sunbathing and the possibility for summer holidays in Britain. Coastal resorts changed from an emphasis on sanitation and medical services, to "long sunshine hours and on how the resort's facilities would guarantee a modern, invigorating holiday, so making the young health-seeker even more fit and well."[565] This continued the links of suntanned skin with the health giving properties of the sun previously inculcated by the messages of heliotherapy. Despite weather forecasts and realities, holiday guides along coastal areas tried to convince the British public that their beaches rivalled or equalled the Riviera.[566] By the end of 1966, it was "safely assumed that 24 million people would spend at least a day of their holiday at an English seaside resort."[567] As illustrated by a ten minute BBC news broadcast on a 'Southend Holiday' in 1973, deemed as the Bank Holiday Cockney Costa del Sol, the report spoke to many beach-goers and staff. Evoking a working class dynamic in the use of 'Cockney', it illustrated both the supposed ability for all to suntan, alongside establishing a particular class dynamic or acceptability for this destination. Fred Peacock, the 'deckchair general of Southend', emphasised the popularity of sunbathing via the number of deck chairs on the beach for sunbathers:

> Reporter: "I suppose the Bank Holiday weekend will be a busy time for you, Fred?"
>
> FP: "Well it certainly will be if the weather keeps like it is"
>
> R: "How many chairs do you think you'll have out?"
>
> FP: "Around about 12,000-13,000"
>
> R: What sort of hours will your people be working?
>
> FP: "If it's a very fine day they will be working up until ten or eleven o'clock at night, perhaps even later."[568]

[565] J. Hassan, *The Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800* (London, 2003), p.93
[566] *Ibid.,* p.101
[567] *Ibid.,* p.136
[568] BBC News Archive: 'Southend Holiday: Bank Holiday Weekend in the Cockney Costa del Sol' (1973)

Whilst not explicitly mentioning sunbathing, the notion of going to the beach on a Bank holiday was a well-established British practice, with lying out in the sun being just one element of the holiday. Large numbers of British holiday-makers being outdoors on deck chairs all day, reinforces the idea of staying out in the sun as an essential and ideal thing to do on holiday. Considering the popularity of the Côte d'Azur due to its reputation for having the best sunbathing weather and location, when British weather is considered, it is unsurprising that coastal Britain was so busy in the short time it presented the opportunity to tan. Immediately after this interview, the news report shifted focus to the Miss Lovely beauty contest. Such contests were popular as entertainment events on British beaches during this time. Whilst the discussion of the number of deck chairs for sun bathers did not evoke explicit notions of racialised beauty, this did, as each member of the contest was a suntanned, slim, white woman, and this was replicated across most beauty contests.

During the 1970s, the British public were not only captivated by suntanning destinations, but were influenced and advised by popular women's magazines. There was a proliferation of advice columns in women's magazines, and *Cosmopolitan* in particular, was one of the most popular and widely circulated of its time. 'Tanning in Depth', an article from June 1976, provided advice on how to conduct the "serious business" of achieving the perfect tan.[569] The beauty editor said: "Brown is beautiful. A deep, golden tan makes you prettier, thinner, taller, and far more sexy."[570] According to *Cosmopolitan*, their readers needed to try their hardest to achieve the perfect tan to make themselves more beautiful and desirable, and all of these things were achievable just by getting a tan. The article continued: a tan "hides wrinkles, blemishes, blushes, bags under the eyes, and hangovers and makes you stand out in

http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/bankholidays/7106.shtml, (05.57)
[569] Bodleian Library, Per.2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'Tanning in Depth', June 1976
[570] *Ibid.*

the crowd."[571] Thus, as opposed to the actual consequences of sunbathing causing ageing, a tan apparently hides wrinkles and bags under the eyes, signalling both beauty and youthfulness – two important ideals this magazine suggested women should achieve.

In previous decades, the 1930s especially, much importance and effort was placed on achieving a suntan in the summer months and removing the tan in winter months with bleaching creams to suit the fashion and clothing trends of the winter. *Cosmopolitan* in the 1970s, and thus many of its readers, emphasised the importance of a tan all year round. The true sunworshippers "wouldn't dream" of visiting Britain during the summer months, rather, they stayed away in the sun until November, and upon their return, "they [got] a lot of pleasure out of seeing the envious palefaces clench their teeth as they flaunt their Bermuda brown."[572] This here, evoked the whiteness-as-embarrassing notion of skin tone for white women, while reinforcing the significance of achieving the perfect tan. This idea was embedded in society and popular culture, to the extent that even during the winter months, when many white women's skin would be naturally less tanned, there was still a strive to achieve a tan. This could have been an artificial tan, or due to the privileged ability to travel to countries with a strong winter sun.

However, the article did mention the advice of dermatologists, noting that they were the only people who were "browned off with the cult of sun worshipping" due to its ageing and wrinkling effects.[573] Interestingly, *Cosmopolitan* noted that the advice of dermatologists falls on deaf ears every summer, due to the emphasis on holidaymakers wanting to look tanned every time they go on holiday, or the holiday would not have been worth it.[574] While the dermatological consequences are mentioned, no warnings are explicitly provided about

[571] *Ibid.*
[572] *Ibid.*
[573] *Ibid.*
[574] *Ibid.*

how dangerous tanning and burning was, rather, the extent to which these warnings were ignored by the British public were emphasised to the greatest extent. The desire to be tanned, the social importance placed upon achieving a tan to be beautiful, and the level of advertising to persuade and promote the perfect tan, in many cases during the peak of the suntanning craze, meant that such warnings did not matter. The desire for a suntan overtook the dangers of the sun's rays, all while being deeply embedded within discourses of race and idealised skin tone. Ultimately, Black women were excluded as potential consumers of suntanning and beauty products due to their identity and skin tone. Further, light skinned Black women with a golden skin tone were marginalised only because of their Blackness-as-identity. When examining the seemingly all-encompassing desire to achieve a suntan, it becomes clear the extent to which this version of perfect suntanned beauty was steeped in notions of gendered beauty and racism. Having considered those who suntanned in practice, this case study will now consider the proliferation of advertisements reinforcing the notion of suntanned beauty as ideal beauty.

## Chapter Six: Advertisements for Suntanning Products

This chapter analyses the advertisements published throughout 1930-80, arguing that these reinforced these aesthetic dimensions of racism which excluded Black women in the normalisation and assumption of whiteness. It traces the emergence of adverts from the 1930s onward, which encouraged women to suntan and reinforced the beauty of tanned skin. It then illustrates the plethora of advertisements during the peak of suntanning. It follows the evolution of Ambre Solaire's advertising techniques for promoting a suntan, alongside adverts from other popular magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, to illustrate the overwhelming message toward women to suntan as much as possible to be beautiful.

The notions of whiteness evident throughout all of the following adverts, illustrate that suntanning, and thus, the perfect golden skin tone, not only presumed whiteness, but necessitated it. Marginalisation was presented in many ways throughout the following magazines and advertisements; through the necessity of whiteness in suntanning practices, warnings of sunburn and skin damage targeted only at white women, and the more generalised exclusion or lack of acknowledgement of Black skin within such magazines. Advice in magazines and sun lotion advertisements did much to warn women about the need for sun protection, as possessing red skin was seen as negative for both health and beauty reasons. White women who acquired a red skin tone (sunburn) was not ideal, but their whiteness provided them with a naturally 'fixable' skin tone. As opposed to Blackness, redness was not bounds for discrimination because whiteness was fixable, changeable, and fluid. Just the same, if one's tan was not quite golden enough, it could be fixed with more bathing due to the initial presence of whiteness.

Another way in which whiteness acted as a marginalising discourse was through the assumption that whiteness (and thus being suntanned), was 'normal'. This forced those

outside of this dynamic to be 'Othered' and treated as abnormal in society. Whiteness, and its social and cultural significance, changes and evolves through time and place, yet constantly signifies structural advantage, race privilege, and the production and reproduction of social dominance.[575] In these magazines, exclusion through whiteness was present on the most obvious level, in the overwhelming use of white women in adverts, articles, and illustrations regarding suntanning, hair, make-up, fashion, accessories, fantasy stories, and beach pictures. Further, suntanning advice for different skin types - spotty, dry, oily skin - featured frequently, rarely mentioned were the specific needs of Black skin.

Charles of the Ritz, for example, a popular suntan cream in Britain during the 1970s, claimed to care for all skin types, and separated skin tones into categories to help women decide which of their creams they should use. A dark complexion, was one that "burns rarely and tans easily," a moderate brown complexion "burns minimally and tans well" and a fair/light complexion "burns easily."[576] The limits of a dark complexion here, stretch only to a dark bronze tan, as opposed to considering the needs of Black skin when advertising sun creams. This exemplifies the undertones of racial exclusion and marginalisation of Black women, simply through a lack of consideration. Bolstered by images of tanned white females, these magazines engrained in women's minds that 'natural' skin was white skin and through the performative act of sunbathing, beauty and perfection could be achieved. With assumed or enforced naturalness and normalcy of whiteness "embedded in every aspect of contemporary life… there is no mystery as to why…skin colour politics continues to be a negative force in [Black women's] lives."[577] The minimal recognition of Black British women during the peak

[575] R. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minnesota, 1993), p.236
[576] Bodleian Library, Per.2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'Charles of the Ritz', June 1978
[577] hooks, *Sisters of the Yam,* p.94

of suntanning, reinforced that "cosmetics are never far removed from the fact of white supremacy and the goal of racial progress."[578]

Similar to the constant presence of whiteness in articles, the normalised presence of whiteness within the language of the magazines is also important. In discussions of complexion and suntanning, many women's magazines did not offer Black women alternative visions of female beauty or affirm Black femininity as beautiful. Rather, Black women were 'Othered' because they did not comply normalised beauty ideals of white-but-tanned skin. Even as the presence of Black Britons became increasingly prominent and Black beauty cultures flourished, exclusionary discussions of what constituted as the ideal skin tone in these magazines prevailed. This enabled the perpetuation of a 'perfect' suntan and types of suntan lotion for 'normal' skin, which subsequently erased the Black experience. The notion of white normativity as basic and assumed, both in broader society and throughout these magazines, positioned any deviation to white skin and the white beauty ideal on the borders of normative, and thus, 'Othered' and marginalised. During this time, companies such as Fashion Fair and Flori Roberts produced make-up shades which catered for wide gradation of skin tones, inclusive of Black skin. However, in this instance, the need to advertise make-up for a diverse population was deemed unimportant.

## The Growing Popularity of Suntanning

Going back to the adverts at the beginning of this period, then, while the weather could not be guaranteed, it did not prevent the popularity of sunbathing on British coasts or in personal gardens, nor did it prevent magazines from publishing a wide range of adverts to encourage it. In 1931, *Harper's Bazaar* featured an advert for Innoxa, a British beauty

[578] Young, *Fear of the Dark*, p.203

company which later established its first salon in London's Bond Street 1948. In this particular advert, Innoxa assured women that they could create an 'outdoor complexion' using the powders created in three new shades. Their preparations were "based upon the formulae of a world famous dermatologist, and recommended by *The Lancet*."[579] Reassurance that company products are based in dermatology and medicine was a significant strategy of companies in their advertising, as the reliance on medicine, and thus, health, research, and trustworthiness, was important to many consumers. Some of the shades of powder being promoted were: Blanche, Pearl, Ochre, Futura, and Sun Bronze.[580] Futura and Sun Bronze were the shades of powder which gave an 'outdoor' complexion, ultimately, a suntan or golden complexion. Other shades such as 'pearl', reinforced the implicitness of whiteness within these ideals of suntanning.

Also linking to medical impacts is the misunderstanding or misrepresentation of sunburn by company advertising, advice columns, and other popular culture outlets. From the late 1920s and 1930s onward, as many more women began sunbathing for leisure, beauty, and health purposes, particularly on holidays, there were a plethora of warnings about the dangers of sunburn if too much sunbathing was practiced. However, these warnings were chiefly a reflection of the ugliness of red sunburn, the painful blistering, peeling, and burning that would ruin the holiday, and thus, caused a red complexion. Not mentioned, was the dangers of UV radiation on the skin. In 1930, *Modern Weekly* published an advert for Ponds cream, a beauty company founded in 1849 which opened its first factory in London in the early 1930s. Having developed into a popular brand in Britain during this time, their advert emphasised that "there's a lot to be said for this new sun-tan fashion! Everybody knows how attractive

[579] The British Library HIU.LON 249, *Harpers Bazaar*, 'Innoxa Beautician', July 1931, p.71
[580] *Ibid.*

and fashionable it is to be suntanned, but many girls think they cannot be tanned without getting painfully sunburnt."[581] This provided an interesting insight into the suntanning practices of women during the beginning of this period. It specifically mentioned 'girls' here, suggesting that teenagers and younger women might have been uneducated about the dangers of sunburning and the availability of products to help prevent this. The cream was advertised here as a method to prevent sunburn and enable women to become "delightfully bronzed without discomfort."[582] Thus, while it reiterated the protection from sunburning, this advert also continued the constant emphasis on being beautifully bronzed as the desired outcome from both sunbathing, and using their product.

Another term used during the 1930s to describe a tanned complexion was 'Gypsy'. The use of this term, often to refer to the Romani people is contradictory in ways similar to the use of 'Red Indian'. Genetic and linguistic evidence links Romani peoples originally travelling from the North Indian Subcontinent around 1,500 years ago, settling in many areas worldwide.[583] Designating a particular group of peoples, with vastly disparate locations as an assumption of skin tone or complexion, based on a stereotype of travelling communities being outdoors and acquiring darker complexions, could have led to the uptake of this term by beauty companies. In 1932, *Woman and Beauty*'s beauty editor Ann Seymour featured Helena Rubenstein's products for suntanning. At her salon in London, "where the flower of England's youth and beauty buy their cosmetics," there was an oil advertised to tint the skin a delectable bronze and absorb UV rays to avoid sunburn, such oil was called "Huile gypsy."[584] The following month, again saw an advertisement for Rubenstein's products, these included

[581] Bodleian Library, Per.2474 d.352, *Modern Weekly*, P'ond's Vanishing and Cold Creams', July 1930, p.639
[582] *Ibid.*
[583] I. Mendizabal [et.al], 'Reconstructing the Population History of European Romani from Genome-wide Data', *Current Biology*, 22 (2012), pp. 2342-2349, p.2342
[584] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 446, *Woman and Beauty*, 'Helena Rubenstein's Salon', August 1932

the Huile Gypsy, alongside "Crème Gypsy – one application gives the effect of a glowing tan for blondes and brunettes."[585] Another example in 1938 from *Picture Show* magazine, advertised bronzing powders for women to "emphasise a romantic gypsy colouring."[586] All while claiming to protect against UV rays, the use of the term Gypsy to denote a particular toned complexion, this being, a tanned one, seems contradictory.

Again, illustrating that Gypsy was used as a descriptor of skin tone within a broad range of possible complexions, was another of Ann Seymour's beauty courses on suntan make-up. Seymour described how women having previously desired a pink and white complexion, had now decided they "would like to turn shades varying from pale gold to deep coffee."[587] Within this range of desirable skin tones, then, Seymour described how to achieve these looks using make-up if women did not have time to sunbathe for days on end to achieve a sun bronze complexion. Indeed, "should you want to turn into a real gipsy, there's a liquid that will do this perfectly."[588] This particular statement refers to women wanting to be a "deeper shade," as if they had a very long holiday in the sun, suggesting that an apparent 'gypsy' or 'gipsy' complexion is a particularly dark shade of brown. The use of Gypsy as a descriptor of skin tone or complexion, denoted a cultural construction of certain groups of people as in-between Blackness and whiteness. That achieving a complexion described as gypsy-like, is seen as a positive here, as it implied the supposed exoticism and fashion of a dark (or tanned) skin tone, but not crossing into the boundary of Blackness, and thus, undesirable. Within this beauty ideal of a suntanned 'Gypsy' shade, however, the implication of this ideal is that the use of this make-up or shade of skin necessitated whiteness. As such,

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[585] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 446, *Woman and Beauty*, 'Helena Rubenstein's Summer Beauty Guide - The 'Tan' Effect', September 1932, p.72
[586] 'Tan without Trouble', *Picture Show*, 9th July 1938, p.24
[587] Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 446, *Woman and Beauty*, 'Ann Seymour's Beauty Course – Suntan Make-up', September 1933
[588] *Ibid.*

this make-up and skin tone could also be removed to reveal whiteness. Whereas aesthetically, these advertisements suggest that women possessing 'gypsy colouring' is positive, in society, the notion of Gypsy as identity was viewed very differently.

Stretching back to the beliefs of heliotherapists and those concerned about Britain's waning empire, there echoed a similar message with regard to attitudes about Traveller Communities. Less than twenty years after the conference by King George V (explained earlier), while Britain wanted to maintain a strong and healthy nation - namely, a white nation - there also saw an anti-traveller narrative permeate British society. Among eugenicists, believers in scientific racism, and members of the general British public, an anti-traveller discourse became an "outlet for a kind of empire anxiety, for repressed fears about the destabilising potential of imperial travel."[589] As explained by Jodie Matthews, this certain fear over the degeneration of Britain and its empire, carried with it the notion of travellers being "outside the bounds of civilisation, even as they travel on British soil…[they are] explicitly compared to 'savage' or Native peoples."[590] Thus, because travellers and Romani peoples may have been aesthetically tanned, but were on the boundaries of whiteness, they were marginalised in society.

The traveller culture, then, "deviates from 'Britishness' to such an extent that…it presents Romani gypsies as 'white but not quite white others'" and as such, the inability to possess the privileges of whiteness.[591] Companies such as Helena Rubenstein and magazine columnists such as Ann Seymour, used this phrase to emphasise the tanned skin of traveller peoples constructed as exotic and free. However, within a marginalised and 'Othered' zone in

[589] J. Matthews, 'Mobilising the Imperial Uncanny: Nineteenth-Century Textual Attitudes to Travelling Romani People, Canal-Boat People, Showpeople and Hop-Pickers in Britain', Nineteenth-Century Contexts, 37 (2015), pp.359-375, p.360
[590] *Ibid.,* p.360
[591] 'An Invisible Minority: Romany Gypsies and the Question of Whiteness', *Romani Studies,* 29 (2019), pp.1-25, p.1-4

between whiteness and Blackness, these businesses capitalised upon a culture which could not reap the privileges of whiteness or, ultimately, be seen as beautiful due to their cultural identity. This illustrates the privileges of whiteness, as when white women acquired a tan, they were afforded the privilege of being white initially. Over time, while the language of adverts changed, the reinforcement of idealised tanned white beauty grew stronger.

As aforementioned, there saw an unsurprising drop in both the style and content of publications after 1939 until the 1950s due to the Second World War. In June 1939, advertisements from Cooltan, a new suntan lotion, became popular among the pages of *Woman and Beauty*. This advert bore a striking resemblance to the ways in which products were advertised in the 1960s. Cooltan evoked a wide range of appealing links to achieving a suntan with their lotion, these being: "a rich, natural, attractive bronze tan," a way to screen out UV rays but "capture the beautifying ones," and promised the "same million-dollar glamour as…[on] the world's most exclusive millionaire beaches."[592] It appealed to the glamour, beauty, and riches of "the world's most romantic beach girls" by supposedly illustrating the ease of attaining 'perfect' features if they used these products. [593] This became a popular advertising technique by many suntan lotion companies as this period progressed.

Emphasising the superior quality of a particular lotion in comparison to other companies, alongside making false promises about the level of 'beauty' or shade of suntan consumers were able to achieve, was seen in the majority of adverts in the 1960s and 70s. While there is a fleeting mention of the ability for Cooltan to screen out some of the UV rays, the focus here is on personal beauty, attraction, glamour, and romance, because according to Cooltan, "men can't resist the charming allure of sun bronzed shapeliness in girls."[594] This

[592] The Bodleian Library, LOU.LON 316, *Woman and Beauty*, Cooltan, June 1939
[593] *Ibid.*
[594] *Ibid.*

links to both the suntan being advertised as a method of achieving health, links to weight and body shape, and ultimately, the prospect of romance. All of these lifestyle benefits rested on women and girls achieving a suntan to fit into the wider beauty ideal of the time. Cooltan therefore, was an early example of the pressures placed upon women when thinking about the social expectations of suntanning and beauty. Though fashions and ideals changed, the notion of looking one's best, competing, and constantly striving to reach a mostly unachievable ideal has been a feature of women's lives for centuries, and was further accentuated during the peak period of suntanning.

## Suntanning Reaches the Peak of Cultural Popularity

The growth in popularity of suntanning, alongside a growing number of suntan products, saw an ever-increasing number of advertisements and social commentary to reinforce the notion of white-but-tanned exclusionary beauty. Whilst there are a wide range of advertisements from popular women's magazines which will be analysed, as one of the first sun tan oils released on the market, Ambre Solaire set the tone for the majority of the following decades in the twentieth century. Advertisements from Ambre Solaire will be examined, and following this, it will discuss the broader themes and language used to advertise sun tan lotions during this time. The rising circulation of women's magazines, a huge increase in sales and product choice, and tactics of company advertising, will be examined to illustrate the popularity of suntanning. These were also propped up by the prominence of the white beauty ideal in contemporary society, which not only focussed on suntanning, but weight, hair, clothing, and ageing, all while being rooted in whiteness.

The ability to gauge attitudes toward suntanning and its popularity, relies here on the representations in women's magazines; both articles, social commentary, advice, and popular

advertisements. Women's magazines became hugely popular in the 1950s, until around the 1980s. From the 1950s onward, economic expansionism saw an "explosion of audience and advertising."[595] Increasing post-war affluence, mass market expansion, and broadening of product choices, saw both the circulation of magazines and publishing of advertisements grow exponentially. In 1981, 458.1million copies of women's magazines were sold in Britain, and though this figure seems high, it was considerably less than the circulation peaks during the 1950s and 1960s.[596] National readership surveys illustrate the extent to which a copy of a magazine is read by several people. As Ferguson illustrates, "*Woman's Own* had 3.9 readers, *Good Housekeeping* 7.0, and *Vogue* 16.0."[597] Thus, the importance of magazines are illustrated not only in the post-war boom in sales, but also seen through the multiple readers of each copy. The lifting of paper restrictions in 1952, saw "three decades of competitive struggle in the women's periodical jungle."[598] Taking the example of *Woman*, their readership increased from 1 million in 1945 to 3 million in 1953.[599] Indeed, alongside the rise in magazine sales, there was a huge increase of advertisement revenues, with *Woman*'s revenues increasing from £1.1million in 1950, to £2.2million in 1953, and again to £5.3million in 1958.[600] Thus, in the magazine adverts that follow, it is important to remember the economic motivations and profitability as one of the main drivers for both magazine, beauty, and sun lotion companies when considering women's suntanning practices. While magazines wanted to appeal to the interests of their readers, they also had an incentive to maximise revenue from the most prominent beauty companies of this time.

[595] Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*, p.23
[596] *Ibid.*, p.3
[597] *Ibid.*, p.3
[598] *Ibid.*, p.22
[599] *Ibid.*, p.23
[600] *Ibid.*, p.23

The message of *Ambre Solaire*'s advertising remained much the same across the period, using images in newspapers and television advertisements, of tanned white women and reiterating the importance of a beautiful golden tan. Whilst the advertising slogans changed slightly, from "Europe's most famous sun tan oil is here!" to "Ambre Solaire, the most beautiful tan under the sun," ultimately, the message still reinforced the importance of using their products as a method of achieving a suntan, and thus, beauty.[601] In 1960, Ambre Solaire printed an advertisement in the *Daily Mail* (Figure 12), and in many other newspapers, claiming that its famous sun tan oil gave their consumers a "satin smooth, deep suntan that everybody admires… and nothing else gives you that rich, even copper-bronze tan."[602] The emphasis on the admiration of a deep bronze tan being ideal, was presented alongside a slim, white woman, in a short dress with a deep suntan. This emphasised the prevalence of white beauty persistent throughout this period, and illustrates both the kind of customers Ambre Solaire wanted, and marketed their products toward. Namely, young, slim, white-but-tanned women, who by default of the ideals of the time, were beautiful. This narrow visioned approach to who was considered as beautiful, and thus, which women were used in advertisements, continued throughout the period.

Again in 1964, for a "fast-safe-rich and lasting tan, whether your skin tans easily or is sensitive" there was reportedly an Ambre Solaire product to suit all skin (Figure 13).[603] Also accompanied by a slim, skimpily dressed (for maximum sun exposure), tanned, white woman, the message promoted by Ambre Solaire and wider society is strikingly obvious. Whilst these images were in black and white print, the women shown here are darkened in print to emphasise the so-called 'deep' tan that Ambre Solaire promised to provide all women. In

[601] Ambre Solaire, *Daily Mail*, 30th May 1960, p.9 and History of Advertising Trust, Ambre Solaire, 1982/3, [Accessed 2nd June 2022: https://www.hatads.org.uk/catalogue/record/d8581ecc-a857-46d8-8cd4-60f4e84f557b]
[602] Ambre Solaire, *Daily Mail*, 30th May 1960, p.9
[603] Ambre Solaire, *Daily Mail,* 27th May 1964, p.8

comparison to their initial tanning oil in released 1930s, by the time this advertisement was printed in 1964, Ambre Solaire's range of products had expanded, leading to the apparent ability to "suit every individual need."[604] Rather than being inclusionary of all complexions, Ambre Solaire produced oil, mousse, creme and a newly released liquid-cream. Whilst catering for sensitive skin with new lotions, they failed to produce, recommend, or even mention, the needs of Black skin and the necessity for sun protection.

Ambre Solaire adverts throughout the 1970s provided an interesting engagement with both the suntanning trend and broader social movements. Perhaps the most striking advert considered here in terms of imagery was in the July 1978 edition of *Cosmopolitan*. As one of the most popular women's magazines of its time, this advert would have been seen by many women. It was a double page spread of a young, slim, topless woman lying on a beach, with a deep bronze suntan (Figure 14). The imagery of a luxurious tropical beach and beautiful tanned woman, catches the eye of the reader with its idealism, romanticism, and beauty, all while promoting the importance of the suntan. As well as promoting the idea that a dark bronze tan was the most important element of holidaying, the main message in this advertisement was that Ambre Solaire sun cream allowed the women using this cream to stay in the sun for longer than when using other products. According to Ambre Solaire, the cream includes a "filter that works in different ways to the conventional filters in suntan products…[which allowed women to] stay in the sun longer than ordinary suntan lotions that have the same protection factor."[605] While this statement seems unlikely to be true scientifically, it proved to be an effective marketing strategy, as alongside promoting the effectiveness of the cream, in the same advert, Ambre Solaire twice reinforced to women that

[604] *Ibid.,* p.8
[605] Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, Ambre Solaire, July 1978

the only way of getting a "beautiful tan" and a "deeper and browner tan" is to "spend a long time in the sun."[606] So, while encouraging women to spend longer in the sun to achieve a darker tan, and ultimately damaging their skin more, they could only achieve this deep tan by using Ambre Solaire's superior products. Alongside their sun filters present in the cream, it also had added moisturisers to combat the drying consequences of the sun, and while this may seem true, the skin was still being damaged and photoaged.

The exact same image of a topless young woman lying in the sun on a tropical beach was used a month later, for the same purposes of advertising Ambre Solaire's sun cream, but this time, the huge heading read "The Only Thing a Woman Should Burn is Her Bra" (Figure 15).[607] While reiterating to women that they should buy Ambre Solaire to avoid burning in the sun, they also presented an engagement with the contemporary feminist activist movement. Many feminists were called 'bra burners' during this time, and while it is impossible to gauge what the majority of women who considered themselves as feminists thought about suntanning, there are specific instances which suggested that those involved in feminist activities did not approve of this supposedly all-encompassing beauty ideal. One example of such, is the protest at the Miss World Beauty Contest in 1970. Miss World was one of many long-running beauty pageants which saw over fifty women from various countries compete for the title. In 1970, members of the Women's Liberation Group disrupted the contest by throwing stink bombs at the contestants on stage, and had protested outside the Albert Hall. The women who took part were "incensed by the contest's objectification of women and

[606] *Ibid.*

[607] *Ibid.* Interestingly, in an article written in 1972 about suntanning, another instance of engagement with feminist ideas was also presented. The piece, which was a 'beauty strategy for a sun goddess' enthused that "the Germaine Greer's of this world may come and go, but a goddess is always in style." While not related to Ambre Solaire, this is another engagement with the second wave feminist movement during this time. Many feminists protested against focussing on beauty and following beauty trends, and participating in Miss World and Universe contests, due to its objectification of women and consumer capitalism. It then shifts to argue that the "first liberated ladies were the early Egyptian, and very golden beauties." (Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.808, 'Beauty Strategy for a Sun Goddess: Is This the Year You'll Finally Be One?' *Cosmopolitan*, June 1972).

wanted to make a dramatic statement against misogyny."[608] Apparently, they had also been inspired by a similar protest by the American Women's Liberation Movement who had thrown their bras in a dustbin during a protest.[609] As explained by Historian Natalie Thomlinson, these feminist movements were in the broadest sense, white women's movements, exemplified by the frequent exclusion of Black women, a lack of consideration of the specific needs or difficulties of Black women, and thus, the failure to exist as an intersectional movement.[610]

Moving toward the end of the twenty-year peak of Ambre Solaire in the suntanning market, the company released a television advertisement broadcast from 1982-3. In this advert, the emphasis on beauty and the importance of a tan to make one beautiful was emphasised to the greatest extent. The background music sings 'You Are So Beautiful', the images shown are of a very slim woman in a bikini with a deep brown suntan, sunbathing and jumping into a pool. The narrator emphasised that "the most beautiful tan under the sun starts with Ambre Solaire. It helps protect and moisturise your skin, until it's a beautiful colour that's become famous all over the world."[611] Even though there was a considerable decline in the fashion of sunbathing at the beginning of the 1980s, the popularity and presence of Ambre Solaire remained. This so-called famous skin colour that had become famous all over the world, was a narrow visioned westernised view of beauty, which few women world-wide could actually achieve. The sales and advertisements of Ambre Solaire seemed unshakeable,

[608] 'Smoke and Stink Bombs Hurled by Fem Libs to Disrupt Pageant', *Daytona Beach Sunday News*, 21st November 1979, p.2
[609] *Ibid.,*p.2
[610] N. Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement', *History* , 97 (2012), pp.453-475 and N. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (Basingstoke, 2016).
[611] History of Advertising Trust, Ambre Solaire, 1982/3, [Accessed 2nd June 2022: https://www.hatads.org.uk/catalogue/record/d8581ecc-a857-46d8-8cd4-60f4e84f557b]

even as the market and diversity of products expanded, it remained popular, and the messages of a deep dark tan signalling beauty, also prevailed.

Ambre Solaire, then, as the first tanning oil to be mass produced and marketed worldwide, provided an interesting insight into the broader terminology and techniques of this period. Alongside this, it exposed the 'type' of consumer targeted by Ambre Solaire, and the women using such creams: namely, young white women interested in achieving the idealised white beauty images of the time. This considered, this chapter will now analyse some of the broader adverts for suntanning products. The sheer number of adverts for suntan lotions alone was astronomical in the 1960s and 1970s during the peak of its popularity, which makes it impossible to examine all of the adverts. However, there were a number of significant adverts that are important to highlight. Most prominent, was the overwhelming presence of whiteness when achieving a golden, bronzed tan, and thus, being as beautiful as possible.

The idealism and perfectionism of suntanning was perpetuated in a wide range of magazines, stretching from high fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, young women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, alongside teenage magazines such as *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen*. *British Vogue*, for example, had been published in London since 1916, and was known as the fashion bible, focussing on couture fashion and high society, making most of its revenues from advertising as opposed to sales. As Ferguson illustrated, the multiple readers of this magazine far outweighed that of other popular magazines during this time. A company which frequently featured in *Vogue* to advertise suntan products was Elizabeth Arden. Florence Nightingale Graham (1881-1966), was a Canadian-American businesswoman and entrepreneur (otherwise known as Elizabeth Arden), and started her beauty business in 1910. Selling cosmetics and fragrances in her first store on 5$^{th}$ Avenue in New York, Arden soon became one of the most successful female entrepreneurs of her time, and her skin care range

was one of the most successful worldwide. Considering the success and popularity of the brand, it is unsurprising to see Arden's products featured in high fashion magazines such as *Vogue*.

Combining the appeal of going on holiday alongside being tanned and beautiful, Elizabeth Arden's 'Passport to a Pretty Tan' (featuring on the first page), provided advice on how to "brown beautifully" without burning or parching the skin.[612] Their "wide range of products" allowed women to choose a sun lotion based upon whether they wanted a "gentle, golden tan" or a "deep bronze tan" and also provided products for sensitive skins.[613] Thus, these adverts, alongside other companies such as Charles of the Ritz and Guerlain which frequently featured in *Vogue* promoting similar messages, offered clear examples of the exclusion of Black skin present in this magazine. Particularly important, considering its high circulation and the high average number of readers per magazine of 16.0, was the apparent consideration of a wide range of skin tones, when in reality, this was only variations of whiteness.

Products for all types of white skin inspired companies to create a wider range of creams with varying levels of protection. Since the invention of SPF by the Greiter's in 1974, and its standardisation by the FDA in 1978, sunscreen companies began to create 'sun plans' for consumers, depending on their skin type, destination, and the protection factor and type of cream being used. As soon as 1975, *Cosmopolitan* and sun lotion companies such as Delial and Eversun, picked up on the growing popularity of using SPF as a value to determine the type of sunscreen needed. As seen by the imagery on such advertisements, companies had to move with the times in regards to sun safety. The overwhelming messages in the imagery and

[612] Bodleian Library, ZC.9 d.565, *Vogue*, 'Elizabeth Arden: Passport to a Pretty Tan', July 1960, p.1
[613] Bodleian Library, ZC.9 d.565, *Vogue*, 'Elizabeth Arden - The Most Beautiful Tan Under the Sun', July 1961, and Bodleian Library, ZC.9 d.565, *Vogue*, 'Elizabeth Arden: Passport to a Pretty Tan', July 1960, p.1

text of the adverts are how best to achieve a deep, dark, bronze suntan in as little time and effort as possible. The sun plan charts, were arguably just another way of attracting more consumers who cared about protection, as well as attracting those whose main aim was to achieve the most beautiful suntan.

Liz Smith's beauty column in *Cosmopolitan* explained to readers how the SPF system worked, just a year after it was popularised by Piz Buin. Cracking the tan times tables when buying sun screens, according to Smith, was extremely important for sunbathers to allow them to buy the right product for the length of time they were sun bathing.[614] In the same issue, an advert for Delial sun lotion claimed to protect the skin to allow it to reach a "rich brown tan," while keeping the skin looking younger and staying browner.[615] The model on the advert was a slim, blonde haired, deeply tanned woman, contrasted with a bright yellow background of sand on a beach (Figure 16). Delial included in their advert a 'sun plan' which explained how women could use different strengths of cream, either SPF 2 or 4 depending on their skin type or how much they tanned. Sun milk and sun cream was for women that had "normal skin" and were sun seekers who needed moderate protection.[616] Readers being encouraged to decide which kind of complexion they had, especially asking if their skin was 'normal' or not, 'Othered' readers without tanned skin because they remained outside of the normalised boundaries of white beauty aesthetics.

Similarly, Charles of the Ritz, another popular suntan lotion company, released a tanning plan and chart to both advertise their broad range products for many types of skin, and to supposedly help consumers choose which type of protection was best for their skin. Their sun cream range was produced for "every type of skin" according to Charles of the Ritz,

[614] Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'Liz Smith: What's New and What it Does for You', May 1975
[615] Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, Delial, May 1975
[616] *Ibid.*

yet these skin types encompassed different sensitivities of white skin only (Figure 17).[617] Their extra protective creams were SPF 6 and 7, considered as a high level of protection, and this was for skin which burnt easily, and for women who had a "fair/light complexion."[618] The products with a lower SPF of 2 and 3 were for skin types that burned rarely or minimally and tanned easily, and thus, had a dark or moderate complexion. However, the "dark complexion" referred to here, did not account for Black skin, rather, for white skin that tanned quickly. This is mirrored in the name of the products, such as "bronze fast tanning gel" and "dark tanning milk" (Figure 18).[619] The shades provided here complied with the idealised parameter of white-but-tanned beauty, and continued to imbue the importance of a deep, dark tan in order to be seen as beautiful, while also excluding Black skin. The instance of these tan plans, again, provided no suggestion that women with Black skin tones should wear skin protection, nor did these tan plans cater for anything other than white skin and its (in)ability to tan. Thus, while also making promises about the cream's ability to protect the skin under all circumstances, its claim to cater for all skin was only true in terms of the 'normalcy' and necessity of whiteness, providing a very narrow framework of beauty.

Alongside sun tan plans provided by sun lotion companies, there were a few instances of products for avid sun bathers. One of these products, was the 'mobile bikini' created by Piz Buin, which was designed for "the serious sun lover…and lets 85% of the sun's tanning rays get through the fabric."[620] According to Piz Buin, they had sold over 1 million tan-through bikini's to women who "hate to look white ANYWHERE."[621] The narrative of whiteness-as-

[617] Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, Charles of the Ritz, June 1973
[618] *Ibid.*
[619] *Ibid.*
[620] Bodleian Library, Per.2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'The Mobile Bikini', May 1972
[621] *Ibid.* Another interesting product appearing on the market during the 1970s, was Sylvasun tablets which reportedly worked by 'speeding up the release of the skin's natural resistance to sunburn' and thus, helped women achieve a better tan without burning. Women were encouraged to take the tablets before they went on holiday, and to stop once they were brown, or after two weeks. Worryingly, there was no information included

embarrassment and the strive to avoid being pale, is unsurprising when the social importance of achieving a 'golden tan' is considered. However, the significance here lies in the explicit assumption of whiteness made by both Piz Buin and *Cosmopolitan*, that readers and women purchasing the bikini would be white. Whilst white women who had white areas on their bodies or those who could not tan were pressured to solve this by obtaining a tan, the important distinction here, was that this was still a 'fixable' skin tone, as opposed to Black skin being excluded from such beauty ideals at the outset.

This chapter has illustrated the seemingly unshakeable image of tanned beauty within British society and popular culture outlets, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Stretching from the pre-eminence of Ambre Solaire and the popularity of their messages, the prevalence of suntanning product advertisements, to the advice throughout popular women's magazines with huge readerships, suntanning seemed to be an all-encompassing beauty trend for white women during the 1960s and 1970s. These particular messages consumed at its peak, not only provided women with all of the instructions and advice necessary to achieve a tan, but also engaged with contemporary activist movements, and alongside this, changes in dermatological advice as seen in SPF values. However, all fashions and fads change, disappear, and sometimes reappear, and while the desire for a golden, bronze suntan did not completely leave the shores of Britain throughout the twentieth century, it did experience a considerable decline. The one element of the beauty ideal which remained, however, was the necessity of white identity and aesthetics.

about what was in the tablets, or how these tablets released the skin's natural resistance to sunburn. See: Bodleian Library, Per.2705 d.808, *Cosmopolitan*, 'Sylvasun', July 1975.

## Conclusion

This case study has charted the rise of the suntan phenomenon through a lens of medicine and science, and culture and society, to illustrate the aesthetic dimensions of racism and beauty politics. Ultimately, the discussions presented in popular culture outlets, medical experiments, and scientific controversies, were not only imbued with contemporary constructions of beauty and womanhood, but deeply embedded with notions of race, exclusion, and culturally constructed 'acceptability' of skin tone. In short, the only accepted version of suntanned beauty, was a woman with white-but-tanned skin. Whether such tan conformed to the ideal, deep bronze suntan, any tan upon a white woman's skin was a step in the right direction toward reaching gendered perfection. Exclusion of Black skin was present in a less outwardly explicit racist narrative, but more as an undertone in magazines and print media. This was seen in both the lack of acknowledgement and failed consideration of Black skin, considering a 'dark complexion' to be only suntanned white skin, and a broader lack of inclusion in wider magazine coverage of make-up, clothing, and models.

White women's suntanning confused the boundaries of whiteness and beauty by 'colouring' or altering the complexion of white skin. Suntanning as a performative body modification process for white women assumed and presumed whiteness. The continuous presence and assumption of whiteness excluded Blackness and the beauty of Black women. This was most notably illustrated during the summer months of women's magazines, in discussions of summer clothing, beauty products, sun and skin care products, and summer activities to maximise tanning. From the outset, discussions of skin tone, complexion, skin care regimes, and ideal beauty trends, excluded Black skin, and made it impossible for women with Black skin tones - especially dark skinned women - to be considered as beautiful according to popular social images.

# CONCLUSION

This thesis has used skin to tell a story of the politics of race in Britain from 1930-80. It has used suntanning and skin bleaching as skin modification practices to illustrate the prevalence of racial discourses in Britain through both a dermatological and cultural lens. It has demonstrated how skin is a continually useful concept to examine complex and intricate stories of skin tone discrimination in Britain. Using these modification practices together as inextricably linked, has illustrated both the social pressures of being beautiful and achieving beauty, alongside the aestheticization of skin as a cultural and political act of constructing racial 'Others'. In turn, as these discourses are deeply implicated in race, beauty, gender and whiteness, these modification practices and the cultural and dermatological stories they have told, exemplify the vast impacts of systemic racism in British society from 1930-80.

The first case study argued that practices of skin bleaching among white and Black women racialised skin in different ways, and points to a much broader history of racism in Britain. Investigations into dermatological and scientific research has illustrated the prominent use of Ammoniated Mercury and Hydroquinone throughout the period, alongside the consequences of their use. It has argued that dermatological histories of skin bleaching in Britain were steeped in politics of race, exemplified by both the lack of regulation surrounding skin bleaching creams used predominantly by Black women, and the exploitation of Native plants and communities for the gain of 'western' capitalist markets.

White women's use of skin bleaches reinforced the prominence of porcelain whiteness; white racial superiority rooted in imperialism and the legacies of this thinking. While skin bleaches were used by Black women prior to the period under consideration here, the rise in use during the twentieth century points to specific cultural moments within this

practice of skin modification. The exponential rise of production and use of skin bleaches rested on the constant presence of whiteness in mainstream popular culture outlets, institutionalised racism, and racialised beauty politics which posited whiteness as the only acceptable form of beauty. Intersecting with various contemporary issues – messages of Black Power movements in particular – positioned these cosmetic products as a method to *be* beautiful while engaging in political movements. Within these Black Power and liberational movements, the vocalisation of anti-bleaching narratives has exposed both the prevalence of skin bleaching within British society, and the power of activist movements in creating a space for Black British citizens beyond the practice of skin bleaching. Whether women expressed personal agency to both beautify their skin and engage in activist movements, the methods of beautification and modification were mired in discourses of whiteness.

Case study two, building on the histories of racism and exclusion through beauty presented in skin bleaching, used suntanning to illustrate further instances of racialised beauty politics. Within the realms of science and dermatology, the rise of heliotherapy as a medical practice, research into the impact of UV rays on the skin, and subsequent scientific controversies regarding sun safety, have illustrated the disconnect between scientific knowledge and popular cultural practice. Notions of the sun having health-giving properties, capitalised upon by various governments for purposes of empire and a strong nation, were embedded in whiteness and the racialisation of skin. The white women studied here, caused considerable damage to their skin to achieve, ultimately, an un-achievable ideal.

Whereby beauty was concerned, the only accepted version of suntanned beauty was a woman with white-but-tanned skin. Whether such tan conformed to the ideal deep bronze suntan, any tan upon a white woman's skin was a step in the right direction toward reaching gendered perfection. Exclusion of Black skin was present in both the lack of

acknowledgement or consideration of Black skin, considering a 'dark complexion' to be only suntanned white skin, and a broader lack of inclusion in wider magazine coverage of make-up, clothing, and models. The expressions of redness or sunburn as a socially embarrassing-but-fixable skin tone, the assumed normalcy of whiteness within discussions of tanned beauty, and the duality of privilege afforded to white women in the ability to 'decide' which skin tone – white or tanned whiteness – they desired, all illustrated the necessity of being racially white to be seen as aesthetically beautiful. Whereby white women were concerned, this notion of perfectly tanned beauty, alongside other beauty requirements within this hierarchy, was also extremely difficult to achieve. While this may have evoked feelings of illegitimacy and personal failures among white women, it exerted a double oppression upon Black women in the immediate exclusion from the chance to achieve beauty in the eyes of white 'westernised' beauty trends. This thesis has not suggested or assumed that Black women have historically wanted to achieve whiteness, or white versions of beauty. Rather, it has sought to stress the absence of inclusion of a wide range of Black skin tones within mainstream media and society to reinforce the beauty of natural Blackness. It has sought to exemplify the overwhelming cultural assumptions and norms around radicalised beauty ideals, rather than to assume the active or passive consumption and engagement of these ideals by Black women. This thesis has illustrated the overwhelming presence of whiteness, suntanned whiteness, and beauty practices dictated by racial whiteness in twentieth century Britain.

By drawing together these case studies, comparing seemingly disparate methods of skin modification, this thesis harnesses these practices as interlinked processes which enable a historical analysis of twentieth-century British racism. A consideration of skin bleaching and tanning together in a British context, not only highlights the originality and usefulness of these practices as a lens to interrogate systemic racism, but also necessitates such analysis be

conducted on a transnational scale. In a historiographical sense, the originality of this thesis lies is its determination to bring together these points of comparison, alongside the juxtaposition of dermatological and popular literature archival materials, to illustrate the various opinions, knowledge formations, and change over time in attitudes regarding not just beauty practices, but constructions of race and whiteness.

The use of scientific and popular discourse throughout each case study has demonstrated a notable disconnect between the messaging of popular literature such as magazines, newspapers, and printed advertisements of products, in comparison to that being espoused in medical and scientific journals. There existed multiple examples whereby company advertising and magazines took heed of scientific advice, for example in the dangers of suntanning without protection. Upon the awareness of these dangers, some companies reiterated the safety of their products, which saw a notable inclusion of SPF values and warnings of sunburn in advertising. However, whilst these dangers may have been alluded to in adverts, in no instance did they outweigh the importance of sunbathing for beauty and fashion reasons. By consequence, public responses to such scientific discourse, did not match the research of the dermatological community. Oftentimes, scientific and dermatological literature was presented in inaccessible journals for academic communities. As such, by notion of the power of social trends in beauty and fashion, suntanning and skin bleaching for purposes of achieving ideal beauty, far outweighed any risk with regard to the skin modification practice.

Further, the comparison of both case studies has brought to light notable ignorance and silences within the historical record when dermatological and popular literature are considered. Dermatological research consistently privileged white skin whereby research into skin damage was conducted. The lack of scientific research into, and suitable regulation of,

harmful cosmetics that Black women were applying to their skin on a daily basis, points to a transnational ignorance about Black skin, alongside the embedded structural racism and racialised politics of beauty across the globe. When popular literature is considered, the sources reveal white women's worries, inner thoughts, ideas about beauty, and illuminate popular beauty trends in broader society, but these sources were limited in their reach to Black women. The lack of space afforded to Black voices within national and international magazines even when considering discussions of Black beauty, fashion, and modification practices, tells its own story. Magazines that set out to cater for Black communities - and the agony aunt columns in particular - speak to the potential cultural sensitivities and implications of some Black women when publicly vocalising the use of skin bleaching creams. Advertisements for skin bleaches in Black-owned newspapers and magazines, then, has illustrated the vast, international practice of skin bleaching among Black women, in part, filling the silences of personal testimonies regarding skin bleaching. The intervention in print culture presented here, in the use of both dermatological and popular literature sources to compare and contrast these skin modification practices, not only reveals the disconnect between science and society, but also the prevalence and impact of systemic racism within British society.

The instances of skin modification among Black women throughout this thesis speaks to Black history writ large. Black British women were excluded from visions of beauty in popular national and international magazines, due to beauty standards of the time only viewing white aesthetics and identity as beautiful. Thus, there remained a silence surrounding Black skin, until the Black population began to produce beauty products for Black skin, publish relevant magazines, and circulate information specifically relating to the needs of Black skin. Until the circulation of magazines providing information on the impact of UV

rays, the availability of make-up products for a wide gradation of skin tones, and even places to purchase skin bleaches, the needs and importance of Black beauty went unnoticed and ignored. The silences surrounding the needs of the Black population in widespread popular culture outlets (and in the scientific literature), had been the experience not only whereby beauty was concerned, but in Black politics and Black culture, too. This thesis has drawn attention to these silences, in conjunction with the knowledge productions of Black British communities to combat such national and international silences, and highlight the prevalence of systemic racism in British society from 1930-80.

In light of this research, other areas of future historical investigation have emerged. A transnational history of skin modification practices would prove timely to further the concept of skin for telling histories of race. Ultimately, a story of Black liberational and anti-colonial politics has to be a global one. Not only to include the U.S. and the Caribbean, but worldwide movements for liberation which erupted across the globe during this time, all drawing from a multiplicity of intersectional ideas. Using these movements and ideas in a transnational framework to utilise the concept of skin as a way to frame these histories, may offer an invaluable and unique view to writing new histories of race and racialised beauty politics.

A deeper investigation into the discovery of UV-A rays and the damage on the skin discovered in the 1980s would prove fruitful. Alongside obtaining figures for skin cancer rates and sales figures for suntan lotions in Britain, the U.S. and Caribbean, would provide both an insight into the prevalence and popularity of suntanning, alongside the medical and cultural problems this fashion caused. The Caribbean in particular, when viewed as a holiday destination and site for both tanning and bleaching is steeped in colonial and imperial attitudes which continue to implicate skin to this day, especially when considering the popularity of a ‘brownin’ skin tone in contemporary culture. Questions also remain over the

longer histories of skin bleaching substances and their origins, both hydroquinone and other variations of its chemical structure. Investigating the uses of these substances, such as mercury, lead, and hydroquinone from indigenous plants world-wide, and following their transformation into viable bleaching agents through scientific and dermatological investigations, would prove a revealing and insightful view of how skin modification practices are deeply implicated in histories of race and exploitational practices of the 'western' medical and scientific establishments.

Whether Black women sought after whiteness, a lighter shade of Blackness, or general inclusion in what was viewed as beautiful, all women trying to achieve a balance of unattainable idealism makes suntanning and skin bleaching inextricably linked. Tonal beauty was more than just a personal desire to achieve a desired 'look', it had much broader social and cultural implications. Tonal ideals differ in each society, which reinforces the importance of considering skin and race in a specifically British context, while bearing in mind global diffusions of both white idealism and Black Power activism. Using suntanning and skin bleaching as case studies for skin modification practices has complicated notions of ideal beauty and whiteness, whilst simultaneously illustrating the seemingly permanent notion of white ideals within popular notions of beauty. This thesis has argued that skin can be used as a concept for which to view and analyse racism, gender, and beauty in Britain from 1930-80.

# EPILOGUE

The beginning of the 1980s saw a gradual decline in the popularity of suntanning among many social commentators, celebrities, and the general public. Concurrent with the medical controversies, discoveries of SPF values, and the danger of UV-A/B rays to the skin, some took heed of this information and began to be more careful in the sun. At the same time, many beauty companies and magazines moved with this cultural moment and decided to both increase the safety of their products, provide further warning of the sun's dangers, and began to popularise the notion that tanned skin was not the 'ultimate' perfection. However, while some did this, it is important to reinforce that this was not replicated across the entire suntanning industry, market, and sales, nor in women's magazines. Indeed, the 1990s saw an explosion in tanning salons (even though indoor tanning beds had been popular since the late 1890s), and a large number of white Britons continue to achieve a dark bronze summer tan whilst on holiday and at home into the 21st century. This was exemplified in *Health and Beauty Salon* – a magazine for the beauty industry - in 1983, in which both the growing knowledge of the damage of sunlight began to be popularised, alongside the social desire of a suntan. In a cosmetic update for July, they wrote: "it is singularly unfortunate that the damaging natural phenomenon to healthy white skin is sunlight. At the same time, it is the ambition of the majority of white skinned people to acquire a suntan."[622] Thus, while the dangers of sunbathing were hence being spoken about more openly by businesses and the press by the early 1980s, the popularity of tanning among white women (and men) persisted.

It was not only industry magazines sending a message of the fading desirability of a suntan, popular and widely read newspapers and magazines such as the *Daily Mail* and *Cosmopolitan*, along with more niche pamphlets such as *Golden Girl* also echoed this

[622] British Library, P.513/2666, *Health and Beauty Salon*, 'Cosmetic Chemistry Update', June-July 1983, p.45

message. In August 1982, at the peak of suntanning season, the *Daily Mail* published an article by beauty editor Susan Douglas explaining 'Why the 'In' Girls are Staying Out of the Sun'. It explained how, according to some beauty writers and current trends, that a "suntan is no longer a fashion symbol…For the girl that really wants to be 'in', there is nothing more preferable than a pre-Raphaelite pallor."[623] In short, the *Daily Mail* suggested here that whiteness, or a pale white complexion, was now the latest beauty ideal for skin tone. While tanning has always necessitated whiteness in its ideal vision of perfect white beauty standards, this ideal was policed by fluctuating boundaries of the right shade of bronze or brown. Now that a bronze tan was considered by some as passé, there was no escaping the necessity of whiteness and explicit exclusion of Blackness in this very specific beauty ideal. Interestingly, the article also mentioned that, as the advertising industry was "quick to monitor and reflect such changes."[624] As such, celebrities, socialites, and models had to be receptive to ongoing changes in fashion during this time; the ability to adapt from tanned complexion to whiteness, required white skin. Lorraine Ashton, a prominent modelling agency executive in 1980s Britain, added: "I consider it unprofessional of my girls to turn up nowadays with a tan."[625] Indeed, it seemed quite the dramatic turnaround for the beauty ideal to have switched to an all-encompassing vision of whiteness, with models being labelled unprofessional if they had a tan. In reality, tanning was still promoted and still popular, particularly among the general public, with the suntanning industry specifically targeting holiday makers. While not a swift departure in social practices, then, it signalled a slight change in attitudes toward the socio-cultural 'value' of a suntan among high fashion and popular culture periodicals which

[623] S. Douglas, 'Why the 'In' Girls are Staying Out of the Sun', *Daily Mail*, 18th August 1982, p.13
[624] *Ibid.*
[625] *Ibid.*

reported on beauty ideals, especially when considered alongside increasing medical knowledge and warnings.

*Golden Girl,* a short pamphlet released in 1982, perfectly summed up such paradoxical messages. It encapsulated the fact that suntanning was still desired and seen as fashionable, reinforced white beauty ideals, but placed a huge emphasis on sun safety. It began by emphasising: "the prospect of a glowing, tanned face and smooth, bronzed body is irresistible… it can make you feel and look so much sexier and healthier…and can even make you look slimmer."[626] These phrases echoed the prominent idea that a suntan made women more beautiful, slimmer, and feel better about themselves, and shows no shift from the same messages presented at the peak of the suntanning fashion in the 1960s and 1970s. Such phrases and reinforcements were scattered and repeated throughout the entire pamphlet.

Another interesting suggestion was that a suntan was "natures finest cosmetic" and related to medicine as a way to achieve "complete relaxation and wellbeing…and glowing with health and vitality."[627] Narratives of health and wellbeing, and improved mental health, link to discourses surrounding heliotherapy, with both sunlight and tanned skin as a prevention and solution for health problems. While this echoed narratives of suntanning present at its peak, it also reinforced quite vociferously the importance of taking precautions when sunbathing. Whilst promoting increased confidence and improved appearance with a tan, these articles emphasised treating the sun with caution, explaining the damage that UV rays inflicted on the skin, the importance of shielding the eyes, how melanin functions, and warned of premature ageing and skin cancer.

[626] The British Library, X.629/21047, *Golden Girl*, 1982
[627] *Ibid.*

The pamphlet also touched upon a wide range of skin considerations: for sensitive skin, fair skin, and darker (tanned) complexions, with reference to the SPF range of sun cream women should be using. This reinforced the normative lines of exclusionary beauty present during the peak of suntanning in the 1960s and 1970s. The only instance in which Black skin was mentioned, was in a section called 'Fact or Fiction'. It explained that, "because suntanning is such a popular pastime, quite a mythology has been built up around it."[628] One such mythology being that "Black people don't need sunscreen."[629] The pamphlet suggested that Black skin does not age or burn as easily as white skin due to the extra pigment in the skin, yet it can still get dry and prematurely aged. As such, *Golden Girl* suggested using a "sunscreen with a low SPF which will protect and moisturise at the same time."[630] As opposed to earlier advice columns and adverts, there was some consideration of Black skin here, yet with questionable advice and knowledge regarding the specific needs of Black skin in the sun. Wearing a higher protection factor is better for all complexions, as the more protection skin can get from UV-A/B rays, the better. However, it still remains important that in this instance, Black skin was included and the importance of wearing sun cream was reinforced.

Whereas suntanning seemed to ebb and flow in social popularity in the post-1980s, the popularity of skin bleaching tells a very different story. Skin bleaches have gained immense popularity worldwide, with its global market value estimated at US$8 billion in 2020, projected to reach US$31 billion in 2024.[631] Today, as a lucrative market, skin bleaching treatments are used by celebrities and the wealthy, of whom pay large amounts of money for a course of lightening treatment, or by the most economically disadvantaged members of

[628] *Ibid.*
[629] *Ibid.*
[630] *Ibid.*
[631] L. Thomas, *Beneath The Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (Duke, 2020), p.1

society, paying small prices for an equally (or more) dangerous skin bleaching treatment.[632] While India and China are the largest consumers at present, the prevalence of skin bleaching in Britain post-1980 among People of Colour has become increasingly evident. Often, British and American companies produce skin bleaches with percentages of mercury and HQ which are too high to legally sell in Britain, these are subsequently shipped to countries such as Nigeria and Ghana and distributed throughout Africa.[633] Then, these bleaching products are either consumed by those in African countries, or illegally shipped back into Britain (and Europe) and the U.S., and are sold in smaller stores.[634] These shops are often in immigrant communities and sold at low prices, illustrating the deep implications of both race and class (alongside gender and beauty) which impacts the market of bleaching creams today.

This is worsened by large multinational companies such as Unilever, L'Oreal, Johnson and Johnson, Shesheido, and Proctor and Gamble, all selling legal versions of bleaching creams, still including harmful ingredients. They perpetuate the message of lighter skin in their advertisements which reach a huge number of consumers.[635] While explicit advertisements for bleaching products are less frequent in the popular press, this is only a recent change. In 2020, Unilever announced they would change the name of their best-selling cream from 'Fair and Lovely' to 'Glow and Lovely' and both L'Oreal and Unilever said they would remove references to 'white', 'fair' and 'light' from their products.[636] However, these products are still on the market, older versions of terminology are still being sold on third-

[632] *Ibid.*, p.2
[633] Hunter, *Buying Racial Capital*, p.149
[634] *Ibid.,* p.149
[635] M. Senthilingam, P. Munsi and V. Offiong, 'Skin Whitening: What is it, what are the risks and who profits?', CNN,
[Accessed 2nd June 2022: https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/25/world/as-equals-skin-whitening-global-market-explainer-intl-cmd/index.html]
[636] *Ibid.*

party sites, and the cosmetics industry is continuing to perpetuate a beauty ideal mired in racism, exclusion, and lasting impacts of slavery and imperialism.

As the global industry of skin bleaching continues to rise, this is undoubtedly maintained by social media influences such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and the ease of purchase of both legal and illegal bleaches via the internet – especially on sites such as Amazon. However, suntanning and its subsequent dangers and damage on the skin is not absolved from this conversation. In 2021, the revenue for the sun protection market worldwide was US$8.2 million, projected to rise to US$13.6 million in 2026.[637] Thus, as these markets keep growing and the beauty ideal becomes more lucrative, the dangers and damage to the skin from both kinds of modification continue. As the importance and prevalence of skin tone as a signifier of beauty changes over time, the impact and existence of race within these discourses of beauty, remains continually present.

[637] Market Revenue of the Sun Protection Market Worldwide from 2013 to 2026', Statista, [Accessed 2nd June 2022: https://www.statista.com/forecasts/812522/sun-care-market-value-global]

## FIGURES

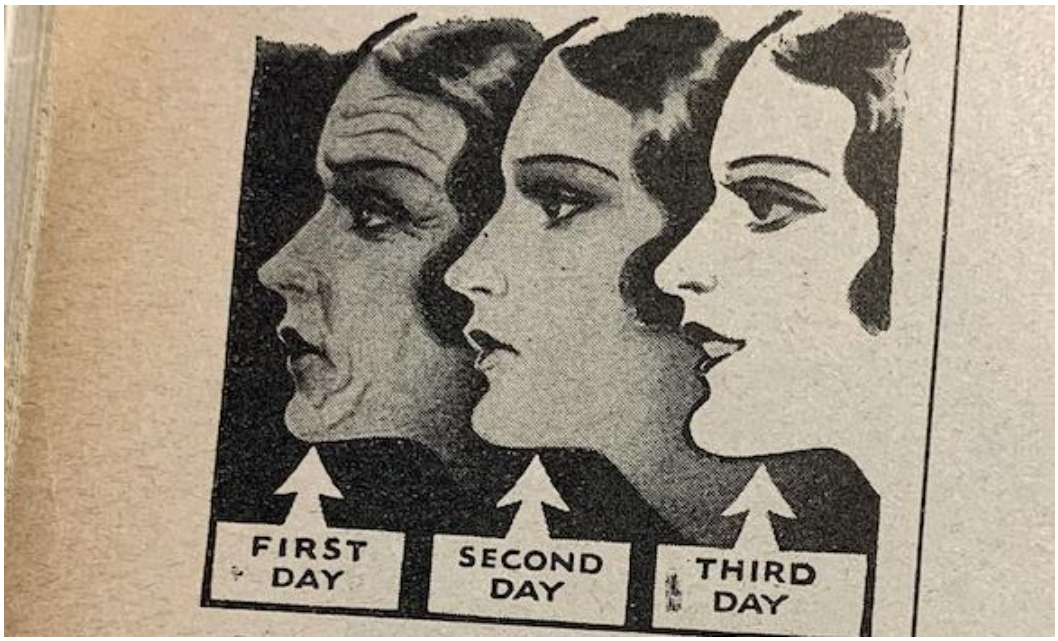



*Figure 1: Creme Tolkalon, Women and Beauty, LOU.LON 883, May 1931*


*Figure 2: Crème Tolkalon, Modern Weekly, 1931*


*Figure 3: Othine Freckle Cream Double Strength, 1928. Image taken from Cosmetics and Skin Blog: https://www.cosmeticsandskin.com/aba/mercolized-wax.php [Accessed: 04.06.2022]*

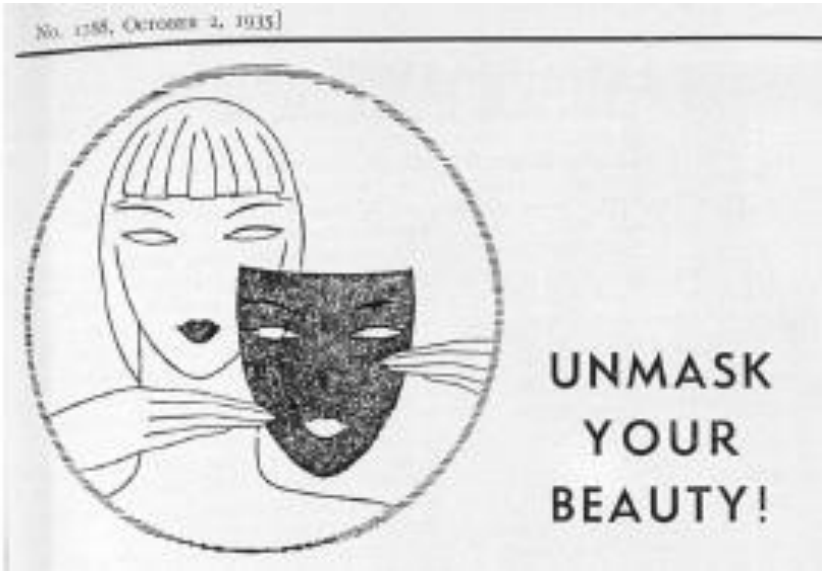



*Figure 4: Helena Rubinstein, Tatler and Bystander, October 2 1935*


*Figure 5: West Indian World, LOU.3453, 10-16th February 1978, Symba, p.12*


*Figure 6: West Indian World, LOU.2926, 17-23 September 1978, Ambi Skin Toning Cream, p.14*


*Figure 7: Black Cultural Archives, DADZIE 5/2 Stella Dadzie Papers, Ebony, 'Ambi Cream', August 1979, p.55*


*Figure 8: Black Cultural Archives, DADZIE 5/2 Stella Dadzie Papers, Ebony, 'Ambi Cream', August 1979, p.97*


*Figure 9: Black Cultural Archives, Periodicals/74, Africa Woman, No.38, March/April 1982, Venus de Milo advert*

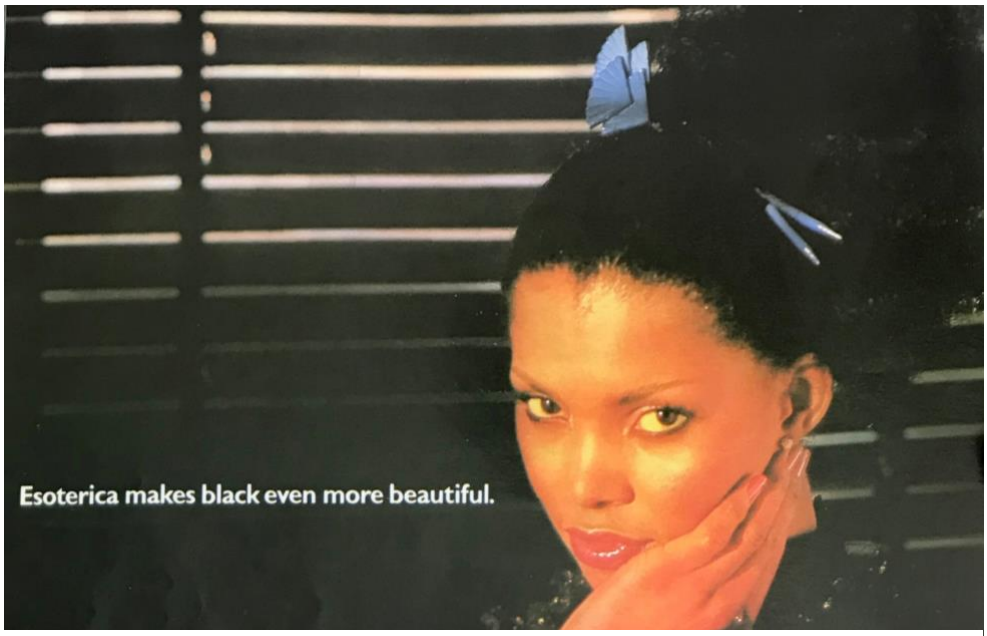



*Figure 10: Black Cultural Archives, Periodical P.443/451, Black Beauty and Hair, Esoterica, Summer 1982*


*Figure 11: Black Cultural Archives, Esoterica, Periodical P.443/451, Black Beauty and Hair, Summer 1982*

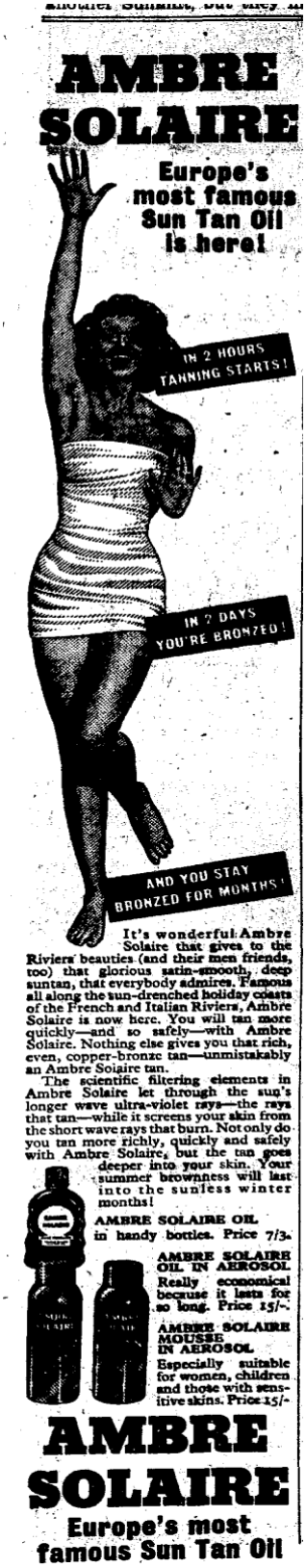



*Figure 13: Ambre Solaire, Daily Mail, 30th May 1960, p.9*

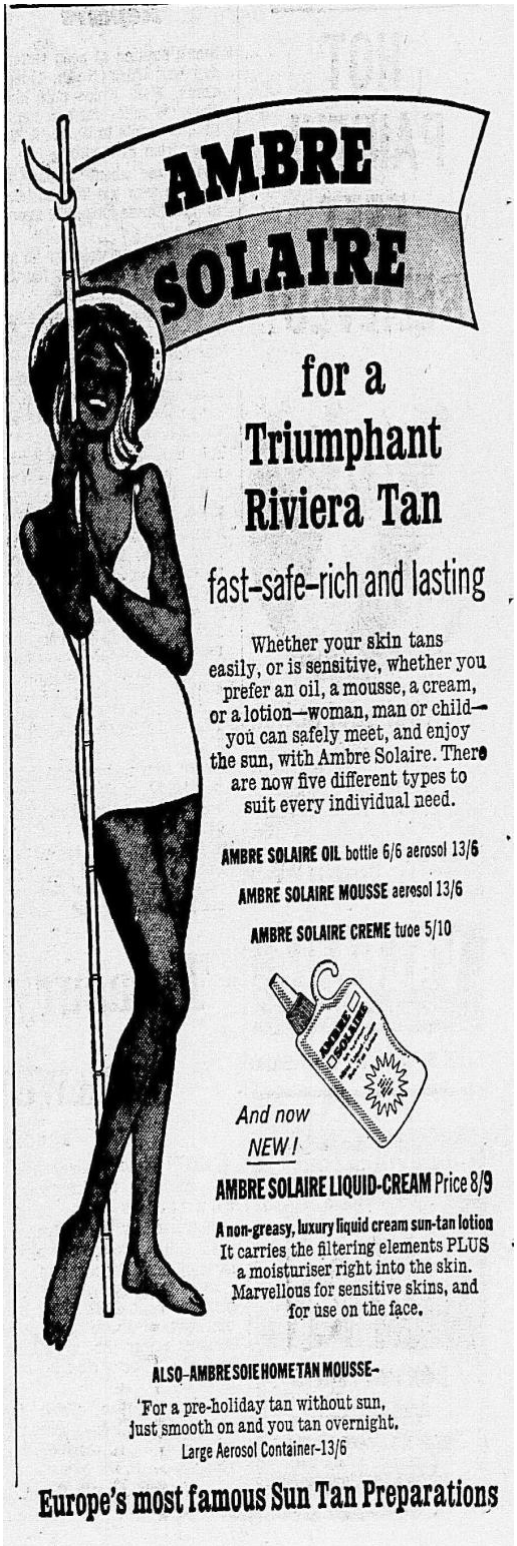



*Figure 12: Ambre Solaire, Daily Mail, 27th May 1964, p.8*


*Figure 14: Bodleian Library, Per. 2705 d.808, Cosmopolitan, Ambre Solaire, July 1978*

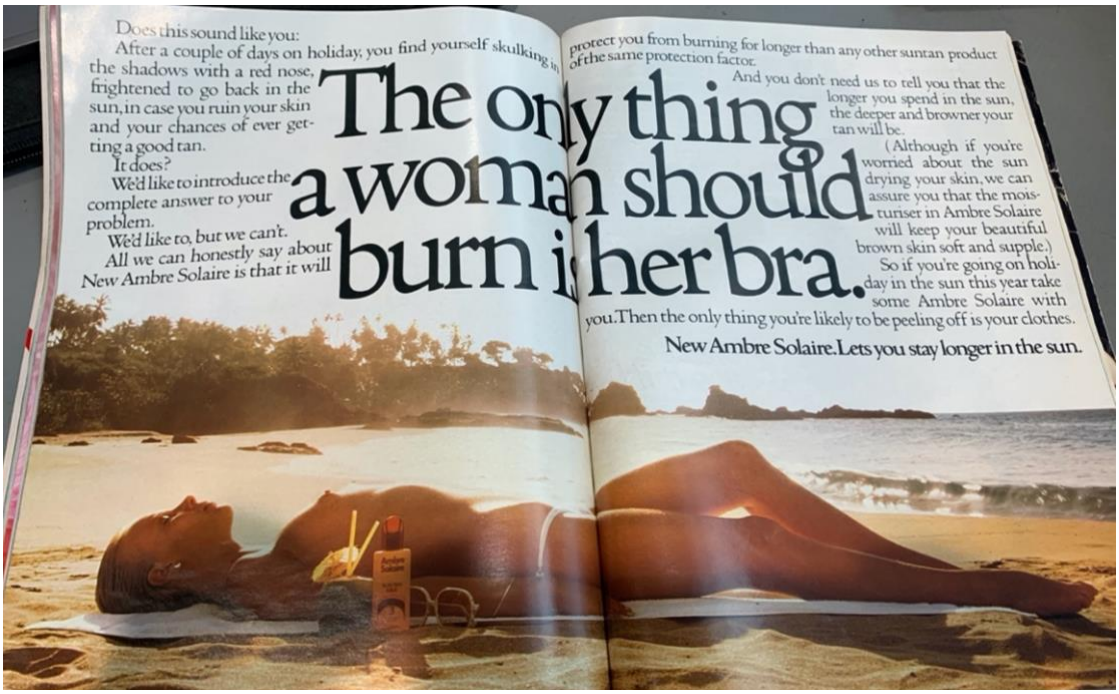
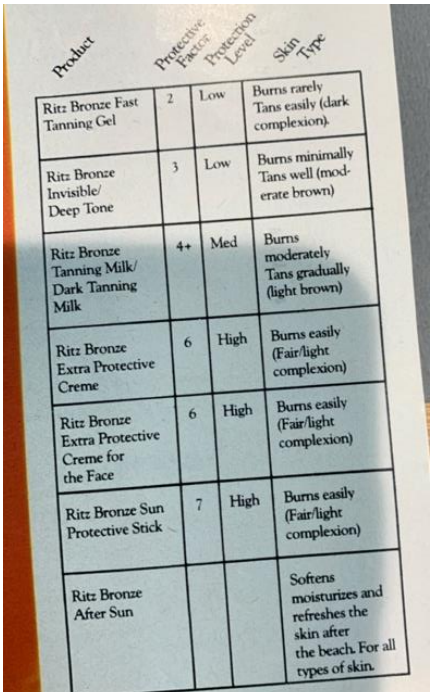



*Figure 15: Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, Cosmopolitan, Ambre Solaire, August 1978*


*Figure 16: Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, Delial, Cosmopolitan, May 1975*


*Figure 17: Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, Charles of the Ritz, Cosmopolitan, June 1973*



| Product | Protective Factor | Protection Level | Skin Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ritz Bronze Fast Tanning Gel | 2 | Low | Burns rarely Tans easily (dark complexion). |
| Ritz Bronze Invisible/ Deep Tone | 3 | Low | Burns minimally Tans well (moderate brown) |
| Ritz Bronze Tanning Milk/ Dark Tanning Milk | 4+ | Med | Burns moderately Tans gradually (light brown) |
| Ritz Bronze Extra Protective Creme | 6 | High | Burns easily (Fair/light complexion) |
| Ritz Bronze Extra Protective Creme for the Face | 6 | High | Burns easily (Fair/light complexion) |
| Ritz Bronze Sun Protective Stick | 7 | High | Burns easily (Fair/light complexion) |
| Ritz Bronze After Sun | | | Softens moisturizes and refreshes the skin after the beach. For all types of skin. |

*Figure 18: Bodleian Library, Per.2705d.808, Charles of the Ritz, Cosmopolitan, June 1973*

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