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Faces of the Future: Race, Beauty and the Mixed Race Beauty Myth

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Introduction

In November 2009, popular fashion magazine *Allure* revealed the "Face of the Future". Between pages of glistening models with features ranging from freckled faces with full lips to loosely curled afros and almond-shaped eyes, photographer Marilyn Minter gave us not only the changing face of America, but the changing face of American beauty. As the highlight reads: "More than ever before, beauty is reflected in a blend of ethnicities and colors." The accompanying editorial by fashion journalist Rebecca Mead extolls the "extraordinary" beauty of mixed race people and their potential to change "the fashion and beauty industries."

She begins with the growing numbers of mixed race people in the US. With 6.8 million Americans identifying as mixed race in 2000, and nearly half of these being under 18, she says, "young America is starting to look very different from old America, and not just because it has far fewer wrinkles and better muscle tone."

The article goes on to describe each of the models according to her ethnicities, which are given in terms of both nationalities ("Barbadian," "German," and "Brazilian) and American ethnic or cultural groups ("African-American," "Hispanic," and "Creole"). Mead includes brief quotes from two of the women about their experiences with mixed race identity, particularly around phenotypic ambiguity. She emphasizes the unique looks of these models, saying that "fashion and beauty industries sometimes don't know what to do with these models, but they had better get used to their like," because they will soon be – if they aren't already – the epitome of American beauty.

In a celebration of this new 'ethnic' beauty, Minter is quoted saying, "[mixed people] are more interesting-looking humans—they are extraordinary-looking, and so much more beautiful than the flawless blue-eyed blondes." Mead finishes the article by reiterating her hope for the future, as "perhaps a time will arrive when faces such as [these models] are seen not so much as beautifully extraordinary, but simply as extraordinarily beautiful." But this supposed celebration of 'ethnic' beauty and of 'difference' is couched in otherizing, exoticizing rhetoric.

These women are "beautiful" particularly because they are different. Mead plays up this difference both in the contrast between "young America" (which includes the mixed race subjects) and "old America" (of which we presume she is a part), and in the opposition of traditional beauty, represented by "flawless blue-eyed blondes," and the "interesting-looking," "extraordinary-looking" mixed race beauties. While these statements seem to foreground the beauty of mixed race subjects, they simultaneously privilege a Eurocentric aesthetic, as this is the assumed norm against which multiraciality is posed as extra-ordinary.

Furthermore, the racialized bodies of the models are characterized and fit into binary paradigms of beauty, sexuality and femininity. This way of coding bodies only reifies essentialist notions of race, gender and morality. Mead writes, "Victoria Brito, who is Brazilian and Austrian—and looks as blonde as an Alpine maiden and at the same time as sultry as the girl from Ipanema." This statement affirms a cultural association of sensuality and excess with tropical locations and racial Others. It positions the "Alpine maiden" and the "girl from Ipanema" as diametric opposites, thereby associating the

converse with European (white) bodies. And the model in question is more exotic than either of these stock 'types' because within her face these opposites are juxtaposed in a "blend of ethnicities and colors" that people find too "interesting" to pass up.

To satiate readers' need to categorize, the women's ethnicities are listed in the corner caption of each picture along with the makeup products that they wear. In these representations, their heritages or composite "parts" become nothing more than products that they can put on for a photo shoot, and that the reader might just as easily purchase for herself. This reduction of identities and histories to an optional appendage that one can simply put on and take off at will, or to a commodity that can be bought in stores, reflects current post-racial ideology of the neoliberal individual subject who is supposed to move freely through society unfettered by race, class or gender.

Problematically, while the article claims to celebrate 'ethnic' beauty and 'difference,' it still upholds whiteness as dominant, as all of these models have European heritages, and all, as blogger Latoya Peterson critiques, "would easily pass the paper bag test"[1] (2009). This rhetoric of inclusion only reinforces the boundaries of difference by excluding blackness as *too* Other – too far outside the norm to be accepted.

In the narrative about mixed race bodies that Allure weaves, identity is individualized, privatized and depoliticized. The mixed race subject is included in the institution of beauty, but this comes at the cost of others. Here, inclusion of the mixed race subject not only reifies the dominance of whiteness, but also further otherizes

[1] The "paper bag test" refers to the traditional standard that black people whose skin tone is lighter than a brown paper bag be afforded special privileges. This has been seen in the context of historically black colleges, sororities, and elite clubs and societies.

blackness. This inclusion also hinges upon racialized and gendered paradigms of bodily essentialism. While mixed people may be welcomed into the institution of beauty, it is under specific stipulations. Mixed race identity is defined as inherently different from all other racialized groups, as necessarily part-white, as socially and racially flexible, and as inherently beautiful.

And *Allure* is not the only place where we see these ideas. In 1993, *Time* magazine began the trend towards this myth of mixed race beauty with their computer-generated Eve. She, like the models in *Allure*, was presented as "The New Face of America," and was celebrated by the magazine editors and staff members as "beautiful." Within the last ten years, sources from fashion magazines to the *New York Times* have touted mixed race beauty as fascinatingly beautiful, exotic and novel. In an October 2009 TV episode of *America's Next Top Model*, Tyra Banks has contestants "portray two very different, distinct races" according to a Hawaiian-based "hapa" theme. Models donned full-body makeup to change their skin tone and props to represent their adopted backgrounds, and revel in the cultural essentialism and identity tourism that modeling allows, all the while fetishizing the mixed identities portrayed as "exotic" and "beautiful." Hair and skin care lines such as L'Oreal[2] and Carol's Daughter[3] have launched ad campaigns that specifically use multiracial models not only because they are

[2] L'Oreal's new line of TrueMatch™ makeup features Beyoncé Knoles in their advertisements, which list her "African American, Native American, French" heritage as she says, "There's a story behind my skin. It's a mosaic of all the faces before it." And L'Oreal is the only makeup that can match this "unique" skin tone perfectly. (L'Oreal Paris 2012)

[3] Carol's Daughter is a black-owned beauty supply company that caters generally to black women. The decision in 2011 to sign three mixed race singers and models as spokeswomen for a "polyethnic" beauty raised outrage from the black community. (Necole Bitchie 2011)

beautiful, but because they will appeal to a broader audience – both the separate ethnic groups which they claim and the emerging category of mixed race identity. The *New York* Times, in 2003, marked the beginning of "Generation EA: Ethnically Ambiguous," and ushered mixed race models as well as regular folks into the spotlight of the coming century. Furthermore, various psychological and scientific studies have shown that mixed race faces and bodies are more attractive to others than 'monoracial' ones, and a 2011 survey by *Allure* magazine reports that 64 percent of those surveyed think mixed race women are "the epitome of beauty." (Dunham 2011)

But what prompts the proliferation of conversations in popular magazines, television, advertising and model agencies, and even scientific inquiry, about the reigning beauty of multiracial women, ultimate cuteness of mixed race kids, and overall attractiveness of "mixed" people? What (other than vanity) prompts us to say that mixed people are the most beautiful? In this project I hope to explore the question: Why are mixed people the most beautiful? –or why does everyone seem to think they are?

To get at this question I take two routes: I will first examine popular conceptions of beauty and how these have been linked with race. I will bring mixed race bodies into the conversation of beauty standards and ideals, asking: What do people mean when they talk about "beautiful mixed people"? Is it a certain type or combination of racial identities? And if so, how does this image fit into pre-formed ideas about race and beauty?

For the second leg of my journey, I will take on the question of beauty as something more than skin-deep. Many scholars of beauty have said that the construct and

its definition – who it includes and excludes – is linked to not only personality and moral character, but also to racial inferiority and national identity. Here I ask: What is being said about beauty and mixed race? How is this discourse being circulated?

And finally: Why now? Why mixed race? How does the myth of mixed race beauty fit into current discourse around mixed race identity? How is the concept of 'beauty' representative of broader social trends such as citizenship, neoliberal inclusion, and new racial projects concerning multiracial identity?

This paper combines an interdisciplinary review of theories on beauty, race, gender with a critical mixed race studies lens. Previous scholarship on the history of American beauty standards and ideals lays the groundwork for my exploration of racialized beauty standards. Scholarship in critical mixed race studies and critical race studies are the foundation for my discussion of the beauty myth as part of a larger social trend around race and mixed race identity. Contemporary cultural texts such as the "Face of the Future" article inform my investigation of current beauty ideals and my discussion of the discourse around the mixed race beauty myth and beauty in general. This project uses commentary from focus groups conducted with students at Macalester College. The findings from these focus groups represent the opinions, ideas and dialogues of and between contemporary subjects who live within this beauty culture. The results from these focus groups situate my work in the experiences and opinions of real people and guide my analysis of the mixed race beauty myth.

My contribution to the discussion on beauty will be the inclusion of modern-day mixed race subjects. Thus far there has been research on the hypersexualization of

mulatto women during slavery, but the racialized sexualization of mixed-race women today has been less explored. I also critically analyze the presence of previously described beauty ideals and types in contemporary culture, testing the theories of previous scholarship and the standards of years past for relevance in our current cultures of beauty.

I place the mixed race beauty myth within a broader conversation about multiraciality. Both of these discourses elevate the mixed race subject in the popular racial imaginary to the status of super hero. Through analysis of the mixed race beauty myth, I want to contribute to a larger critique of the idea that mixed people will all somehow save the world, simply by existing – or simply by being beautiful.

I chose this project out of personal interest. As a woman with a mixed race identity, I have heard this statement that "mixed people are the most beautiful" many times. As a woman immersed in a culture that emphasizes the importance of femininity and attractiveness, the question of beauty has concerned me. And as a light-skinned woman of color I have been bombarded with conflicting messages telling me that people who look like me are or aren't attractive, or that I am, but my darker-skinned sisters cannot be. It is necessary for me to recognize the positionality that I bring to this project, because it doubtless informs the way I approach these questions, their answers, and my entire process.

Beauty, femininity and sexuality

> "In gendered systems of representation, women are defined by beauty. Women who lack beauty are flawed as women." (Craig, 167)

But where do our ideas about beauty come from? How do we define who is the most beautiful? What determines who is beautiful at all?

Ideals of feminine beauty have varied across time and space and between individuals: each culture has its own ideas about what qualities and characteristics a woman must have to be beautiful. It is also somewhat subjective – some prefer skinny women, some fat; some like blondes, and some brunettes – but there has always been an objective standard agreed upon by the society. Individuals are taught these standards through interactions with acquaintances and through consuming hegemonic images in the media – I'm sure everyone can remember being told which celebrity is "cute," "hot," or "pretty" by a friend, family member or classmate – and we, the self-disciplining subjects, follow what we see as the norm in order to fit in. But how did this norm arise in the first place? Our ideas of beauty are formed through society's negotiation of the complex interactions between many social, cultural, historical, economic and environmental factors.

Often beauty is defined by women in power: as by Europe's Queens and America's First Ladies. Other times it is synonymous with signs of wealth: pale skin is valued when lower-class women work in the sun, and thicker bodies are desired where malnourishment is a legitimate concern. In America, often termed the 'great melting pot' of cultures, beauty is defined largely by our European and Colonial histories – taking

aspects and ideas from both our colonizer and our colonies. What is celebrated as beautiful in the mainstream is constantly in conversation with subcultures of beauty. Each of these subcultures competes with the dominant standards, as they challenge certain aspects and incorporate others of the mainstream ideals.

Through its history, the ideal American beauty has fluctuated with social trends, but one racialized system of classification has always prevailed. (Anglo) whiteness and the upper class has been associated with morality, purity and innocence. Ethno-racial Others and the lower-class has been linked with immorality and an essential sensuality. The two concepts of race and beauty are mutually constitutive – the social construction of each builds on the other. While the mainstream American culture has borrowed exoticized images of beauty from its non-white subcultures, these images have remained in sexual contexts, maintaining their connection with immorality and the erotic. We see in images from the popular media such as advertisements, musical performers and magazines' yearly lists of the world's "Most Beautiful People" that the same system of beauty still holds: different ideals are valorized in different contexts.

My research draws from many sources, including feminist scholarship on beauty and critical race theory. Martha Banta's discussion in *Imaging American Women* of beauty as "types" is fundamental for my discussion. She claims that the "American Girl," in addition to ideal feminine beauty, became the visual and literary representation of the nation's values, fears and desires. People take for granted that an attractive exterior signifies inner moral beauty, and these assumptions have been backed up by educated "authorities" on physiognomy.

Lois Banner's *American Beauty* was foundational in my research, as she details a history of beauty standards in the US through the 19th century and into the first half of the 20th. Banner's history, however, all but erases women of color from the history, leaving gaps in key places. The discussion of Jewish and European working-class immigrants here is key, as these groups were racialized as non-white ethnic Others, and generally fell between whiteness and blackness in the beauty hierarchy.

Maxine Leeds-Craig and Patricia Hill Collins work to fill some of the gaps left by Banner, Banta, and other scholars of beauty. They note the racism inherent in American beauty standards. Collins discusses the controlling images used to define black womanhood throughout history. She asserts that black women have been defined as the opposite of the ideal, where the ideal is piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The images of black women as "mammies, matriarchs," and "hoochie mamas," she says, have been used to justify oppression, and are perpetuated by social institutions including schools, news media, and government agencies. Leeds-Craig's book *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?* further investigates the place of black women in US beauty hierarchies as well as describing separate standards of attractiveness within black communities. She focuses on the project of racial uplift of the early 20th century, and the politics of respectability used to change the image of black women as hypersexual, immoral objects for consumption. She also describes "how black became popular" through efforts of racial rearticulation, providing a foundation for my research on the appropriation by mainstream (white) culture of black beauty standards and aesthetics.

Feminist scholars have made a range of critiques on the disciplinary nature of beauty institutions and the damage done to women's identities. Naomi Wolfe decries "beauty" as a social construct that has been used specifically to keep women oppressed, distracting them from focusing on real achievement. Joan Jacobs Brumberg argued that increased marketing to young women in the 20th century heightened women's self-consciousness about their bodies. Young and Bartky theorized beauty work as a disciplinary practice policed by the pervasive male gaze. They pioneered the idea that a woman sees herself as men see her, and in regulating her own femininity, she acts for the man.

Debra Gimlin, writing on *Body Work,* emphasized the subjectivity of beauty and the agency that women have in shaping their identities through altering their bodies. Women who engage in body transformation do so to feel normal, rather than beautiful. Furthermore, women negotiate beauty standards as collectives – and have a role in changing them. She focuses on the body as a representation of self, and avers that body work is about identity.

Maxine Leeds-Craig develops a strong critique of these scholars for their exclusion of race and class identity from their research. She succinctly summarizes some of the main theories on beauty and then seeks to complicate their individualist frameworks, which ignore the value of community and the impact of racial and class difference on women's beauty work. While others theorize the body as representative of the person or the feminine ideal as representative of the nation, Leeds-Craig purports that body work can be a performance of racial or class identity.

As Leeds-Craig says, "In gendered systems of representation, women are defined by beauty. Women who lack beauty are flawed as women" (167). Thus, feminine beauty comes to define self-worth, not only of the individual but of the race. Collins similarly states that the location of a group of women in the beauty hierarchy determines the location of that group in broader racial/social hierarchies.

Craig notes that beauty can be a resource, but also remembers that beauty is "stigmatized capital." Because of its association with sex and sexuality, it is only beneficial to a certain point. Notice how a certain hyperfemininity – overdone, gaudy femininity – is attached to working-class black and Latina women; and this is stigmatized because of its association with sex.

Sarah Banet-Weiser, in her book *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, builds on these theories in her analysis of beauty pageants, specifically the Miss America pageant and its implications for national identity and feminine representation. Like Banta, Collins and Criag, she purports that the female body, especially that in the Miss America contest, is representative of the nation. Much as I intend to do, Banet-Weiser interrogates "beauty" ideals as symptomatic of larger societal anxieties and tensions, posing the arena of the pageant as a place where these anxieties are negotiated and "resolved." She explores performances of diversity and femininity in pageants, and describes the ways these serve to confront tensions about gender, race and class through incorporation into an idealistic discourse of multiculturalism. Beauty pageants and beauty products give us "hip diversity," she writes. They are a way of coping with multiculturalism without having to address issues of oppression and inequality.

"Strange to wake up and realize you're in style," remarks writer Danzy Senna. Indeed, it has seemed as though mixed race people took the fashion and popular culture industries by storm, almost overnight. This project also draws from critical mixed race studies to place the assumption that "mixed people are the most beautiful" within this specific socio-historical context that celebrates multiracialism. Like Senna, scholars such as Mary Beltrán, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and Kimberly McClain DaCosta are critical of the recent 'trend' of multiracialism in pop culture, advertising, and neoliberal multiculturalist projects.

Beltrán and DaCosta each detail the recent popularity of mixed race actors and characters in popular culture. DaCosta examines the use of ethnically ambiguous bodies in advertising, claiming that they function as an "everyman" which consumers of all racial backgrounds can identify with or see themselves reflected in. Beltrán critiques the casting of multiracial actors and characters as supernatural, superhuman superheroes. She exposes the popular discourse that mixed people are somehow going to save the world, simply by existing.

Of course, these ideas are not as entirely new as we think. Martha Banta illuminates discourse from a century ago, at which point essayists and thinkers predicted that America would find her beauty in a "new racial mix" – an amalgamation of the great European nations. In a U.S. reflection of José Vasconcelos's *Raza Cosmica*, they theorized that as immigrants entered the States in larger numbers, "Intermixtures will follow and racial lines will gradually fade." (Banta 1987, 57) Charles Chestnut, an American novelist and essayist who wrote around the turn of the 20th century, took this a

step further and proposed that the great new American race would be made up of not only European immigrants, but Negros and Indians as well.

Suzanne Bost, in *Mulattas and Mestizas*, draws a comparison of mixed race representation in literature and popular culture between the current era and the late 19th century. These parallels stem from shifts in racial definition and a racial 'browning' of the nation. The anxieties produced by these changes have manifested in the form of fascination with mixed identity and a racist fear of losing the current hierarchy. Bost, like Banet-Weiser, worries that the new identity politics may be unintentionally playing into conservative political shift, neoliberal colorblindness and "melting pot" assimilation, representing a regression in racial politics.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva further critiques the popular belief that "one day everyone will be mixed and there will be no more racism." He compares the racial projects currently going on in the U.S. to those that have formed Latin American racial paradigms. He suggests that the racial 'browning' of the population will lead not to the disappearance of race or to an era of colorblindness, but rather to the *Latinamericanization* of race in the U.S. As in most Latin American countries – and as has happened in the past with white ethnic immigrant groups – whiteness will expand to maintain supremacy, filtering multiracial populations by color and the specifics of their ancestry. My analysis of the mixed race beauty myth draws heavily on these critiques of idealistic futurism and neoliberal ideology that represses as it includes, and oppresses while it excludes.

1. Racial Histories

Race is a social construct that operates differently in various social, historical, political and cultural contexts. Racial categories and the borders that define them reflect the specific environment out of which they come, and serve particular needs of the ruling class to maintain power. It is, however, important to note that despite the constructedness and illogic of race, it is far from a mere illusion. The concept of race and the structures that surround it have very real effects on people's lived experiences. Race is mutually constructed within and upon ideas of gender, sexuality, class, nation, and within these, beauty. Because beauty and race are mutually constitutive, the concepts cannot be extricated from each other. It is therefore necessary within a study of beauty to consider the history of racial formations.

Omi and Winant (1984) define *racial formation* as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed" (55). They locate the formation of race as a combination of social structure and cultural representation. Racial formations are augmented by ongoing *racial projects*. "A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines." (Omi and Winant 1984, 56)

Since the beginning, race as a dividing factor has functioned to maintain white supremacy and serve the legal, economic and social needs of the dominant group. Under slavery, for example, race in America was constructed to separate black from white and slaves from free men. The two categories were defined as opposites, with whiteness

representing citizenship, civilization, and Christian morality, and blackness signifying subjection, primitiveness, and heathen immorality. The bounds of blackness were wide, to allow for a greater workforce of enslaved labor. Whiteness, on the other hand, was emphasized as necessarily pure – only the whitest of the whites were allowed the privileges of citizenship. This kept the power in the hands of few, and let them reap the benefits of exploitation of other racialized groups. Race has also been central to the nation-building project and the construction of national fantasies that define national identity.

While American racial formations are centered around a black/white binary that positions blackness and whiteness as diametric opposites, there have been other races that sometimes fall somewhere between the two poles, and have at times provided an alternate Other against which to define whiteness. Throughout 18th century waves of migration to the West Coast, whiteness was defined in opposition to the figure of the migrant Asian worker. In border regions, whiteness has been (and continues to be) defined against a Hispanic (or specifically Mexican) antagonist. In these cases, the Other has been represented in similar ways – as a brute, a lawless barbarian, or a hypersexual heathen. These racial formations have always been about defining the self by defining and excluding the Other. And they were fueled by economics and politics, and supported by religion and science.

Racial typology was the science of classifying and ordering people according to racial categories. This began with anthropology in the 17th century, which was originally a form of anatomical study, and morphed into a field of racial typology that used these

anatomical measurements to classify people (Jackson and Weidman 2004). Racial difference was codified and 'proven' through pseudoscientific methods of physical classification and measurements. Projects of eugenics relied upon misinformed theories of heredity, which linked everything from race to intelligence to poverty and laziness with genetic difference. Later on, racial typology took the form of social science, which aimed to define race according to social, cultural and environmental factors.

Later 19th century studies of race in America also focused on anatomy, especially sexual organs, to make generalizations about black men's and women's sexuality that still persist today. Medical findings of and general wonderment at black women's genitalia reinforced stereotypes of black women as sexually accessible, while the construction of black men as sexual predators came out of their scientific finding as primitive, masculine, overly sexual beings (Somerville 2000) (Briggs 2000). These stereotypes justified the dominance of whiteness, and upheld the logic of white supremacy – that whites were on top of the world because they deserved to be there; that this was the natural way of the world.

Throughout American history, much anxiety about race has been spurred by a fear of losing white supremacy. Beginning in the late 19th century, men in power got worried about the rising birth rates of immigrants and racial Others and the falling rates of Anglo-Americans. These men blamed white women and homosexuals for "race suicide" – claiming that they were killing the white race by not having enough babies. Eugenics projects of the turn of the century were also based in fears that U.S.-born whites would become inferior to other groups. These statistics about birth rates and such also added to

scientists' constructions of colored women's bodies as more innately sexual and "fertile," as compared to white women's "weak, frail, and nervous" bodies (Briggs 2000, 247).

Through history, there have always been certain privileges associated with whiteness. These privileges are also inherently linked to ideas of citizenship (both legal and social) and belonging. In a U.S. context, whites have been the only ones seen as truly and fully American. All others are assumed to be foreign in some way. For many years, people could gain legal citizenship only by claiming whiteness, and while there are many stories of Asian and Subcontinental immigrants trying to prove their whiteness, the category remained exclusive. Now, legal citizenship is more inclusive, but social citizenship is closed to non-whites. Visibly Asian and Latino people are often assumed to be immigrants, and challenged as to their Americanness, with questions like "where are you from." People of color are also often excluded from privileges such as protection by the legal system, which still exists to support whiteness.

A Brief History of Race Mixing and Mixed Race People

In times of early colonial contact, miscegenation was often culturally accepted. Henry Tucker, the mulatto son of a European merchant and his African wife, lived in great luxury on the coast of West Africa, trading with both Africans and Europeans as part of the upper class (Rediker 2008). In the Americas, white men frequently indulged in consensual or nonconsensual relations with black slave women, resulting –in places like the West Indies and Louisiana— in an intermediary class of mulattos or free people of color who could hold land and own slaves. In most regions of the US, miscegenation played out a little differently, as most mulattos were classified according to the race of

their mother – which was almost always "Negro" (Morgan 1975). Other laws defined a "Negro" as anyone with more than one-eighth, one-sixteenth, or even one thirty-second African ancestry (Ingersoll 2005).

Thomas Ingersoll, in "To intermix with our white brothers," details histories of interracial relations and "race mixing" in various parts of the Americas. Miscegenation was highly prevalent wherever white women were rare – particularly on the colonial frontiers. English settlers saw Natives as somewhere between white and black – an assimilable population that held the immorality of blackness (racial Otherness), but the potential for white-like beauty. Therefore sexual relations and marital relationships between white settlers and various Native American groups were often encouraged as a tool to "whiten" the Native population and assimilate its people into whiteness.

Race mixing also existed between populations of color. Black runaway slaves formed maroon communities with Native Americans in the South Eastern US. There were also early mixed race populations made up of Mexicans and South- and South-East Asian immigrants. Filipinos especially, had no cultural aversion to race mixing and were not barred by anti-miscegenation laws, and so formed multiracial communities with Mexicans with relative ease. These populations, however, were rare, and did not maintain a significant presence through immigration laws of the 20th century.

In her book *What Comes Naturally*, Peggy Pascoe (2009) details the history of miscegenation laws across the US and explores their function as a vehicle of white supremacy. She focuses on the distinction between legitimate marriage and illicit sex in constructing categories of respectability and deviance that revolved around race and

interraciality. While marriage was respectable, righteous, and "the product of romantic love" (22), illicit sex of any kind was illegitimate and disreputable. Of the first anti-miscegenation laws, Pascoe writes:

> "Laws against interracial marriage didn't prevent masters from having sex with slave women or having mixed-race children, both of which were common occurrences. Rather, they prevented masters from turning slaves they slept with into respectable wives who might claim freedom, demand citizenship rights, or inherit family property, and so undermine the foundations of racialized slavery." (27)

Because whites and blacks could not form legitimate, legal unions, all unions between them became equal with illicit sex.

Following the civil war, radical reconstruction provided an opportunity to redefine the boundaries of legitimate marriage and illicit sex, and many states did overturn anti-miscegenation laws. Between 1965 and 1975, nine states repealed, omitted, or declared their laws unconstitutional. But because of the power of white men who were afraid to lose their privilege, many of these rules stayed the same. Not long after the end of reconstruction, cases involving black men and white women reached decisions that put anti-miscegenation laws back on the books. Here there was not only a need to maintain white male power, but an imperative to protect white women's racial purity. Cases like *Pace v. Alabama* made interracial illicit sex a different and worse offence than same-race illicit sex. From then on, interracial marriage could never be legitimate; it was always classified as illicit sex. Because judges wouldn't let them marry, interracial couples (even

those with long-term, committed relationships) were always classified as immoral, illegal "formication" etc.

Anti-miscegenation laws were often rationalized with the claim that race mixing was "unnatural." It goes against "the laws of nature," and was characterized as "monstrous, wicked." Not only this, but "in Georgia: "The amalgamation of the races is not only unnatural, but is always productive of deplorable results" (Pascoe 2009, 71). The illegitimacy of those interracial unions that were allowed was ubiquitously projected onto the mulatto children, who were, in quite the literal sense, bastards of an illegitimate relationship. Furthermore, as Caroline Streeter argues, the body of the mulatto was often conflated with the illicit sex that brought her into being, feeding into the hypersexualization of mulatta figures.

Miscegenation law, Pascoe further claims, "made race classification seem to be imperative." In order to enforce the law, officials needed to classify people into strict, neat categories. This kind of classification became difficult when dealing with mulattos, quadroons, and octoroons, or those who were visibly white but categorized as black because of "one drop" or more of black blood.

The 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* is credited with the end of the last remaining 19 anti-miscegenation laws, and thereby the recent surge in interracial marriages. Now that these unions are legal, their children are no longer bastards; we may presume that more of these –now "biracial"– children are raised in two-parent homes and that fewer are the product of rape than were a century ago. Many people even claim that the *Loving* decision ushered in a new era of "colorblindness" – in which the law sees no

color, love sees no color, and we are on our way to abandoning racial categories altogether.

The existence of mixed race people particularly troubled scientists of race. The fact that individuals of two different races could reproduce somewhat disproved the theory that the races were of different species. However, scientists like Louis Agassiz, Robert Knox, Josiah Nott and George Gliddon explained this contradiction away in many ways (Ifekwunigwe 2004). Some claimed that mixed-race people were not fertile or not as fertile as "pure-blooded" people. They supposedly lived shorter, had lower intelligence than either race, and were weak and delicate. Some claimed that they would end up inheriting certain characteristics of one race and others of the other, resulting in disproportionate body shapes (long arms and short legs or small skulls and big brains). They also stressed that "mulattoes" could never survive as a race on their own because they would have to marry with someone of one race or the other and (as this continued) the mixed blood would eventually be flushed out of the lineage. The sciences that studied race mixing provided many reasons to lawmakers that miscegenation should be illegal – among them degeneration of the white race and especially (as Agassiz found in Brazil) obfuscation of racial lines. (Ifekwunigwe 2004)

Legally, people of mixed racial heritage in the United States have been included in whichever racial category that allows them the least rights. While the "one drop rule" was not actually written into law in most places, something like it functioned to designate anyone with African ancestry as black, as well as – although this less monolithically – anyone with Asian ancestry as Asian and most with Native American ancestry as Native.

There were certain cultural contexts, however, where these rules did not apply. Racial formations in New Orleans allowed for a "creole" class between black and white, as well as "quadroon" and "octoroon" identities that were allowed greater class status and more opportunities in life than black women, but could still not reach the pedestal upon which white women were placed (Guillory 1999). In other places with large African American populations and widespread histories of race mixing, Mulattos long formed a subset of the Black community, and were granted higher status because of their lighter skin tone and ability to approximate Whiteness. In addition to privileges within black society, certain people of mixed racial descent were able to "pass" for white. These individuals broke the law to redefine their own racial identity and claim the full privileges of whiteness.

Much of the discourse around race mixing and mixed race bodies is centered around a black/white or a white/other binary. While we know this is not the reality of the situation, the issue – as it has been called a "problem" – has been framed in this way because of racial anxieties over the purity and dominance of whiteness. (Senna, Symptomatic: a novel 2004)Until recently, mixed race has been taboo, or at best ambiguous; not a celebrated category. In the late 20th century, this began to change.

Modern (re)surgance: Multiracial Movement, Generation Mix, and the Mulatto Millenium

Since the Civil Rights Movement, desegregation, legalization of interracial marriage, and increasing waves of immigration from Latin America and Asia have

bolstered interracial marriage rates, which have in turn brought on a burgeoning number of people who identify not with one parent group or the other, but as Mixed Race or Multiracial. Evidence of this increase appears in the well documented "Biracial Baby Boom" of the 1990's, followed by Mixed Race advocacy groups and in 2000 the first census with the option to "mark all [races] that apply." Now writer Danzy Senna claims we have entered the "Mulatto Millennium." One in seven new marriages are interracial, the numbers of multiracial children are steadily growing, and such popular sources as the *New York Times* document the increasing pride in Multiracial identity.

What makes these "new people" different from the mixed race children of our grandparents' generation? Physically speaking, not much. But socially, they represent a 'browning' of America; their bodies seem to tell of a day when whites will no longer be the majority. Unlike the mulattos, who were often reminders of rape and exploitation, they are seen as the products of interracial, multicultural harmony. As Pascoe highlights, bi- and multiracial children are now socially and legally legitimate subjects of the state. They, like their parents, are often supposed to be "colorblind," non-racist, and often race-*less*.

The surge of newly legitimate interracial couplings and mixed race children spurred a movement. Starting in the years following *Loving v. Virginia* and building momentum over the years, the Multiracial Movement was spearheaded at first by the parents of multiracial children, and picked up by multiracial adults in the 1980's and 19990's. Advocates have fought for social and governmental recognition of multiracial identities, including the option to check more than one race on the census. They have

used mixed race identities to trouble traditional categories of race, complicating what it means to be 'black,' 'white' or 'Asian,' and sometimes claiming to or aiming to transcend racial identity entirely.

National fantasies that erase the history of white male sexual violence against black women and take national law as ultimate truth tell us that this "Generation Mix" is an entirely new identity category and body of people. These narratives, which assume 1967 to be the inception of interracial relations, invalidate multiracial populations in places such as Louisiana, which have existed for generations, and ignore the presence of multiple racial heritages in the majority of Black, Native and Latino populations in the U.S. Given these narratives that privilege the novelty of mixedness, multiracial people are taken out of context. This decontextualizing force has combined with the efforts of multiracial advocates to redefine "mixed race" as a separate racialized category.

In the midst of neoliberal discourse and multiculturalist projects of the past three decades, multiraciality has become the face to represent diversity and inclusion, post-raciality and colorblindness – often at the stake of people of color who don't identify as mixed, who don't *look* mixed, or who don't have the same privileges afforded multiracial people with one white parent.

Dominant narratives of mixed race identity include phenotypic and social ambiguity, multicultural roots, fluidity, duality and multiplicity. Often assumed if modern multiracials is that they grew up with two monoracial parents; that they have one white parent and one of color; and that they are 'whitewashed' – having less history and

community with their non-white brothers and sisters. Of course, some of these are naïve generalizations, and none of them apply to all multiracial people.

As part of my original research, I sought to find out how "mixed race" is defined in the popular imagination. The particular combinations of racial ancestry as well as the physical descriptions associated with multiraciality are discussed in detail in my discussion of the focus groups that I conducted.

The things we call ourselves (labels, names and capitalizations)

As other scholars have noted, categories of identification such as the term "Mixed Race" itself are complex and often problematic. Labels to define the children of interracial or cross-cultural unions range from "bicultural" to "multiracial" to "mixed," and many choose to identify themselves with terms such as "mulatto," "half-and-half," or any number of colloquial phrases. Some of these terms can be seen as offensive, and many take issue with the privileging of racial ideologies in terms such as "mixed *race*" or "multi*racial*." On the level of individual identity, it is most fitting for each person to label herself. For my purposes I will use the more inclusive terms "multiracial," "multicultural" and "mixed race" (or sometimes simply "mixed") interchangeably to refer to any individual whose parents identify with different racial groups.

I generally reserve capitalized terms for political identities. While a "Mixed" person might be an advocate for multiracial rights, affiliated with the Multiracial Movement, a "mixed" person is simply someone who identifies with heritage from multiple racialized groups.

Language such as 'mulatto,' 'quadroon' and 'octoroon' is antiquated and as inappropriate for a modern setting as 'negro' or 'oriental.' I employ these terms only to differentiate between the multiracial people of today and those born of interracial parentage in the pre-Civil Rights era, when they would have been so designated both legally and socially, and probably self-identified as such.

Some scholars and Mixed-Race advocates also cite as problematic the lumping of all multiracial people into one category. It is true that a mixed, Black and Latino American is likely to have a starkly different life experience and face different issues than a mixed, White and Asian American. And in fact, the question of *which mixed people* is an important one in this project, because of the ambiguity of the statement that "mixed people are the most beautiful." In the context of America, most people think of race in a black/white binary, and so often think specifically of black/white biracial people. However, the myth of mixed race beauty has been applied to people of all multiracial heritages, as participants in my focus groups have demonstrated.

Furthermore, while I acknowledge the presence of multiple racialized ancestries in many people who simply identify as black, Native, or Latin@ today (and the African ancestry in parts of the population that identify as white), I find it important to distinguish between these people and those who identify as multiracial or mixed. The current understanding of race as it applies to my questions ignores the race mixing of the past, and purports that *mixed people*, not *light-skinned African Americans*, are "the most beautiful."

2: What is Beauty?

> "Physiognomy is relevant to race only insofar as certain physical characteristics, such as skin color or hue, eye color or shape, shape of the nose, color or texture of the hair, over- or underbite, etc., are *socially defined* as markers of racial difference." (Lee 1999)

We will begin in Europe, during the Renaissance, before explorers traversed the globe, and when the only knowledge of Asia or Africa were in stories brought back from the fabled Orient or in histories of Ancient Egypt. The proliferation of statues, paintings and poems from this period show us the epitome of European Beauty – "crimson lips," and a "snow-white brow" are revered by one poet, as another praises "arched brows, chestnut eyes, golden curls and a pointed (but not upturned) nose," "pale pink" ears, "high, ivory cheeks" and a "small mouth." Many other artists appreciate similar features – "golden hair" or "blond and curling locks," "creamy" or "pale" skin, and "arched eyebrows" are all recurring themes (O'Neill 2001). The lean body of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was typical of this period (Banner 1984, 46). It was common in this time to emphasize not only the physical attributes of a woman, but also her virtue: that a woman be chaste, modest, graceful, humble, obedient and pious was often more important than her hair, skin and lips (O'Neill 2001). One portrait boasts the inscription "Beauty Adorns Virtue," and painters were always trying to figure out how to properly depict inner beauty in a physical way (O'Neill 2001). This link of virtue with certain physical traits was the beginning of the association we hold today.

But the ideal for Euro/American femininity could not be defined without an opposite. This was found in blackness. Since the discovery of Africa and its peoples,

black and white have been posed as diametric opposites. Likewise, the "Orient," or Asia, was also used to represent the converse lack and excess that Europeans needed to define themselves. 'European' came to mean everything that 'African' and 'Oriental' were not – pious, pure, submissive and domestic. And 'African' and 'Oriental' were defined as everything that 'European' was not – sensual, sexual, primitive, aggressive and masculine.

During Europe's Age of Exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, travelers from Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands and England sailed around the world conquering lands, peoples and bodies. It was in these travels that they discovered people of distinctly different body types than what they were used to, and conceptualized the idea of different 'races.' The photographs and displays of native women from around the world that were put on display for Europeans' edification served a pornographic function (Pieterse 1992). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that this display of black bodies was the original pornography, with all modern porn based on this original objectification and sexualization of black women. The most famous conquest of bodies was that of the "Hottentot Venus," named Saartjie Baartman by her Dutch captors. A native of southern Africa, she was put on display throughout Europe for her "exceptionally large buttocks and breasts," elongated labia and enlarged clitoris (Pieterse 1992, 181). Bodies like this, taken for scientific specimens by seventeenth and eighteenth century scientists, exemplified European theories of the so-called "Negro Race's" essential sexual nature. Europeans believed that other races were more primitive, and therefore less detached from the natural sexuality that everyone was believed to have

(Pieterse 1992). The comparative size of the sexual organs of women like Saartjie Baartman was scientific proof to eighteenth century Europeans of this inherent sexuality (Pieterse 1992).

Scholars of Asian or "Oriental" imagery in the Western consciousness[4] Sheridan Prasso and Robert G Lee note that the Orient's mystery and sensuality has been constructed for Europeans both separately from and similarly to the primitive sexuality of Africa. Even from the time of the Greeks, the "Far East" was something exotic, unknown, and "dangerously seductive" (Prasso, 34). Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty and pleasure, was supposed to be of Asian origin, planting in the European mind the idea of a sensual, decadent, deviant East. Marco Polo's reports that Asia was a "land of freely available sex" (Prasso, 35), with prostitutes walking the streets and men offering up their wives and children to passing guests only corroborated this already-pervasive image of Asia. During colonization of the region, European men often took Asian mistresses and visited brothels set up to keep them from contaminating the general population. These liaisons, along with reports from Christian missionaries of Asian women's deviance and the discovery of the sexual practices of Taoism, confirmed Europe's, and now America's preconceived notions of Asian sexuality.

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[4] Orientalist discourse in American culture and the European cultures from which it came cause "Westerners" to see Asians and Asian Americans all in the same "Eastern" light. To many in the US, Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners, stuck in the same static culture. While Asian American women today may not have much in common with Asians in Asia besides physical features, but it is expressly because of these physical features that they are still viewed in the same way by Americans of non-Asian descent. Thus, the history of representation of Asian Americans begins in Asia.

The popular trope of the "Dragon Lady" – a strong-willed, powerful, hypersexual Asian woman – stems from legend of the Empress Dowager Cixi, the last Empress of China. Disliked by many European rulers because of her aversion to change, she was written about by journalists and scholars around Europe. These writers described in great detail her hunger for power and insatiable sexual appetite, some claiming personal experience in her bedchambers. In an echo of the 18th and 19th century pseudoscientific examinations of African bodies and sexual organs, the Empress was even reported to have abnormally large genetalia, taken as indicative of a heightened sexuality. Also drawing connections to the sexualization of Blacks, Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong was in one Austrian representation depicted with grossly enlarged legs and posterior, an aesthetic traditionally associated with African people in general and with the sensationalized body of Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus."

Overall, Asian women were said to be more sexually adventurous, and to provide an experience in bed that men could not get in Europe or America. For colonialists, their stay in Asia was "a sunny, pagan, hedonistic alternative to the cold, pinched and dreary climate of the Christian, especially protestant West." (Prasso, 40) These colonialists were perhaps the first sex tourists in Asia.

At this time there were few Asian American women to speak of. Although hundreds of Chinese men had immigrated to California to work, Chinese or other Asian-origin women were scarce. However, throughout the 19th century, Chinese women were sold in slave auctions on the docks of California. Curiously enough, representations of these women are few, but their presence must have had an influence on white Americans'

perceptions of Asia, adding truth to the stories of rampant prostitution across the continent.

Native American and Latina women, too, have been painted as exotically hypersexual in a Euro/American lens. Both these groups were positioned on a spectrum of whiteness to blackness, always falling somewhere in the middle. European settlers of North America debated heavily over whether Native Americans were truly white (having darker skin because of their environment) or black. Many Natives were proved "assimilable" to European culture through forced abandonment of their own traditions and languages. Native Americans were certainly considered closer to whiteness than blacks, as a "mulatto" was defined as anyone with half Native American ancestry or up to one-eighth black ancestry (Higginbotham and Kopytoff 2000). However, Native Americans were by no means considered white. To the extent that they were physically recognizable as Other, they encountered discrimination in the colonial centers of America, and genocide on the frontiers. (Ingersoll 2005)

Aside from association with the same socio-sexual stereotypes as Asians and Africans, Native Americans were given their own set of 'inherent' traits – most of which were designed to justify sexual relationships with Indian women. While Native men were posed as effeminate and homosexually inclined, the women were vulnerable and unsatisfied by their men. It was purported that Native American cultures preferred a woman to be sexually experienced before marriage. Furthermore, like Blacks and Asians,

Native American women were seen as lascivious jezebels – temptresses that lead white men into sin. (Ingersoll 2005)

Many factors contribute to the American image of the Latina woman, as Latino/Hispanic is only sometimes considered a race, and is generally made up of ancestry from Spain, the Americas, and Africa. All of these racialized histories, however, contribute to the idea of the Latina as exotic, sexual, and seductive. Even from the initial colonization of "New Spain" – after the colonial centers had accumulated women from the motherland and before the population came to identify as mestiz@ – North American colonists, who came mostly from Northern Europe, looked down on the Spanish, who hailed from a warmer, more tropical region, practiced Catholicism instead of Protestantism, and generally had darker skin and features. Furthermore, the Spanish were descended from a mix of "Latins, Jews, Moors and Visigoths" – not nearly the "pure" Anglo ideal (Bost 2003). As supporters of the 'pure' "Nordic" or "Anglo-Saxon" race saw it, the Spanish, Portuguese and Italians were the next closest thing to Africa and its barbaric race – and carried the sexualized traits of the racial Other as well (Banner 1984). Some even considered Southern Europe a race of its own – tropical, exotic, and sexually free. This perception was further compounded by the great amount of race mixing that was rumored to go down south of the (US-Mexico) border. The Spanish had no morals, they said. And as they mixed with Indians and Blacks, the general population of the Spanish colonies, Mexico in particular, became closer to Blackness in the Euro/American mind.

Positioned ambiguously between whiteness and blackness, Latinas have sometimes been elevated to respectable white beauty, and other times cast as hypersexual near-black bodies. Molina-Guzman (2010) situates Latina beauty, femininity and sexuality between the binary of white respectability and black hypersexuality. She argues that because Latinas in the US imaginary have been positioned as neither black nor white, their physical and ethnoracial ambiguity and flexibility allow them to be defined by different 'types' at different times, depending on the performance that body-work constitutes. Negrón-Muntaner (2003) also claims that the emphasis placed on these Latina stars' butts highlights their racial Otherness in a white US context. "A big Latin rear end is an invitation to pleasures constructed as illicit," he avers; "it is a sign for the dark, incomprehensible excess of "Latino" and other African diaspora cultures" (295).

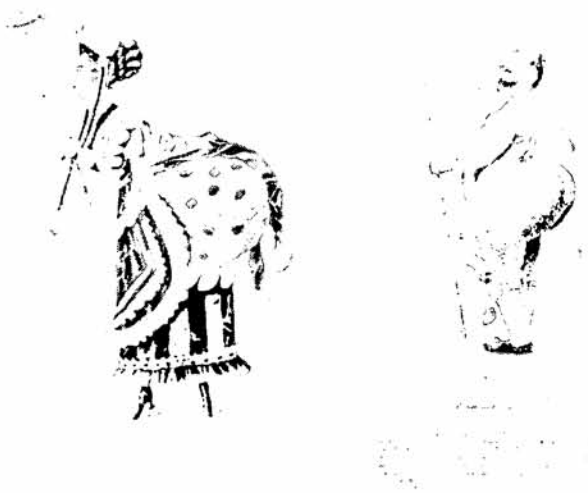
By the Victorian Era, black women were firmly in place as the definition of anti-femininity and anti-beauty, Asian women the epitome of immoral sexuality, and Native and Latina women floating between. America now saw a repression of sexuality and a reversion to the beauty of the Renaissance Era, when chastity and purity in a woman were valued the most. During this period, a lady of good background represented order, morality, repose, piety, domesticity and submission, and was supposed to hold a childlike innocence (Banner 1984, 53). Her spiritual, angelic beauty was shown in her frail, fragile body, oval or heart-shaped face, downcast eyes, soft retreating chin, tiny mouth, 18-inch waist, rounded arms and shoulders, small hands and feet, and white complexion (Banner 1984, 45-46). She was there for her man to protect and patronize – always ill, youthful

and childlike, and in need of protection (Banner 1984, 53-56). Interestingly, dark hair was preferred in this period, indicating an underlying sensuality to the Victorian woman, as Euro/American culture associates blonde hair with purity and dark hair with passion (Banner 1984). Other factors were at work in creating this image, including the privilege of the upper class to stay out of the sun and to avoid a diet high in starch (Banner 1984). Physicians also highly medicalized this version of femininity, purporting that women are destined by nature to passivity and dependence, that the trials of a woman's life demand rest, and that women's digestive systems are too fragile to handle heavy meats and potatoes (Banner 1984).

At this same time, there did exist other, fuller standards of beauty, mainly present in the working-class, immigrants, prostitutes and actresses (Banner 1984). The emergence of the voluptuous woman was a product of European influence on American fashion, paired with the working-class ideal's influence on mainstream ideas about sensuality and desirability.

During the Civil War period, social norms became freer and feminists claimed to liberate sexuality (while really all they were doing was defining it). Relations between young men and women were appallingly liberal for the time (Banner 1984), and women began following sexually suggestive fashion trends and thinking about themselves as potentially sexual beings (Banner 1984). Civil War America wanted not morals, but carefree entertainment and sensuality. Because the idea of sexiness had been previously defined by prostitutes and actresses, the members of the upper-class simply adopted the standards that had before been held only by those individuals whose work it was to be

sexy (Banner 1984). These standards were the ideals of the lower-class – then mostly immigrants who had not yet passed into whiteness – which celebrated thicker, more voluptuous bodies with full hips and busts, "large-boned, massively-curved" women characterized as mature, sensual, "roguish, enticing, bewitching" and "captivating" (Banner 1984, 112, 120). During this period women used padding in their breasts, hips and thighs (Banner 1984), and a "Grecian Bend" or an "S-Curve" came in vogue. This involved using tightly laced corsets and high-heeled shoes to thrust the bosoms and buttocks of a woman out as far as possible, a style that (especially when combined with the bustle on the rear of women's dresses) rather resembles depictions of the famed "Hottentot Venus" (Banner 1984).



There were also medical reasons proposed for the shift in ideal – doctors decided that eating was now healthy for women, and that plump women are cheerier (Banner 1984).

The medicalization of beauty also applied to another "type" that emerged around the same time as the voluptuous woman and dominated in the decades following the Civil War. The natural woman was one who exercised regularly, was often tall and athletic,

and could be voluptuous (Banner 1984). She represented an upper-class return to respectability, where the overtly sensual returned to its position in the lower/working class and in the theatres, and the upper class adopted a more natural ideal that did not demand the use of corsets and encouraged exercise (Banner 1984).

Following the natural woman came the Gibson Girl, depicted frequently in drawings by a man named Charles Dana Gibson. The Gibson Girl took many features from the natural woman, but also incorporated aspects of sensuality from the voluptuous woman. She represented the New Woman of the turn of the century in her independence; she was strong and brave, healthful, skillful, able and free (Banner 1984), while simultaneously ladylike, innocent, modest and young (Banner 1984). Meant to be a companion to man rather than a dependent, and not lacking in sensuality, she possessed "a new kind of femininity suggestive of emancipation" (Banner 1984, 171-173, 166, 165). Physically, she was tall and thin, with a large bosom and hips, thick dark hair and a small mouth and nose (Banner 1984). By thus combining features of the Victorian woman with those of the voluptuous ideal, the Gibson Girl achieved an air of morality with undertones of sensuality.

In the 1920's the Flapper made her appearance, featuring short, bobbed hair, small face and lips, a "hipless, waistless, boneless" structure, and a small, often boyish figure (Banner 1984, 166). Flappers were known for their short skirts, heavy makeup, brazen social activities, and liberal attitudes towards sex and sexuality (Banner 1984). In keeping with their adolescent quality, they expressed their appeal not through the erotic aspects of voluptuous sensuality, but through constant, vibrant movement, vivacity and

fearlessness (Banner 1984). Interestingly, at this same time, black Americans, as part of a process of racial rearticulation, used the apparent immorality of white women to pose their own (light-skinned, middle-class) women as respectable, upstanding, and refined. While these women all had different projects in mind, all contributed to the discourse on sexuality and ultimately underscored the separation of erotic, voluptuous beauty from a refined, petite ideal.

Since then, ideas of what kind of woman is desirable have shifted just as they did between 1800 and 1920, but the association of lower-class immigrants and non-whites representing mysterious, foreign sensuality and having more voluptuous bodies, larger mouth and nose, and more strong, 'masculine' features has always prevailed.

Just as upper-class Anglo-Americans of the 1850's appropriated the image of the lower-class immigrant for their own sensuality, upper-class European Americans now frequently emulate the beauty of people of color, especially Blacks and Latinos, who tend to have thicker, fuller bodies, medium (to dark) skin tones, and dark, curly hair.

During the first two centuries of America's nationhood, while lower/working class and immigrant women were portrayed as an alternative to the Victorian morality, Black and other non-white women were completely excluded from representations of beauty (Craig 2002). Femininity was defined by white women, and women of color in the popular media had no part of it. Minstrel shows of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries showed blacks and Asians as they had always been pictured by Europeans – primally sexual and sexually available, yet (in the case of black women)

unfeminine and unattractive (Craig 2002). In some cases, Asian women and light-skinned black or Latina women could be considered exotically beautiful, such as the ancient Cleopatra (Craig 2002), Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong (Lee 1999), or the 1890's belly dancer 'Little Egypt' (Banner 1984, 185). But for a long time people of color were excluded from beauty just as they were from all other aspects of society. Craig even states that Eurocentric beauty standards were a way of "maintaining racial inequality as well as gender inequality." (163)

"Most beautiful to whom?": Varying and competing beauty standards

> "Rather than a coherent and universal beauty ideology, women face a complicated and contradictory set of expectations that are fragmented by race, class, and sexual orientation." (Craig 2006, 166)

African American communities have largely internalized and incorporated the very assumptions about beauty, sexuality and femininity that have maintained their oppression (Craig 2002). Colorism still prevails in black discussions of beauty today, favoring light-skinned black women with long, fine hair and European features. In fact, until relatively recently, skin lightening creams were very popular with African Americans and hair straightening was a must (Craig 2002). I might argue that black Americans place more value on long, straight hair and other features such as small lips, nose and eyes, than their white counterparts, because of both the history of oppression based on these features and because of more recent projects of racial rearticulation that necessitated black women's respectability and dignity to be worn on their bodies. However, as Maxine Leeds Craig notes, racial politics of the 1960's popularized the idea that "Black is Beautiful." Black people celebrated dark skin and natural kinky hair during this period as never before.

This countercultural movement even influenced the mainstream, as white people exotified and sought to appropriate black "soul" – or as Michele Elam terms it, "black cool."

Black American beauty standards are also known for favoring thicker, more voluptuous female bodies, rather than the stick-skinny ideal promoted by the mainstream. While social scientists have long assumed that mainstream beauty ideals have marginal effects on black women, recent studies have disproved this belief, showing that women of color are largely affected by the pervasive images of thin-bodied, light-skinned, fair-haired models, especially those girls and women seeking class (or race) mobility (Cheney 2010).

Latin@ Americans are subject to similar cultural ideals, as most Latin American cultures value light skin, and long, straight hair. Many Latinas are told to conform their bodies to whiteness both for the purposes of US assimilation and as an effect of their minority culture. The one thing that scholars and lay people repeatedly cite as uniquely characteristic of Latina beauty ideals is a big butt. Scholars have written pervasively about Latina stars, especially Jennifer Lopez, who at one point was more famous for the size of her rear end than anything else[5]. Even outside the celebrity spotlight (or maybe because of it), Latinas in the US see their butts as part of their pan-ethnic Latina identity and an important part of their beauty. So while new Americans of other ethnic backgrounds may be getting rhinoplasty and double-eyelid surgery, and white women's

[5] Molina-Guzman cites her saying that "the world knew her butt before the public knew her face." (58)

body work consists of minimizing their butts, Dominicans in New York are getting buttocks lifts to make themselves more attractive to the Latino gaze (Dolnick 2011).

Molina-Guzman (2010) touches on how colorism is promoted both in Spanish-language media and in mainstream US representations of Latina beauty and Latinidad, as both give preference to light-skinned Latinas. In her chapter on Jennifer Lopez, Molina-Guzman discusses the politics of J Lo's butt in tabloid news, framing her body as both an object of desire and a threat to dominant racial formations in the US. Lopez has been "hailed by the US popular press as the "new face" of US beauty – large(r) and curvaceous" (58). Her ethnoracial difference and Latinidad are defined by her body – "dark hair, light-brown skin, and curvaceous body" (60) – marked as exotic in the white US context. Her body challenged white norms of beauty and respectability, and for this was sometimes celebrated, but sometimes vilified. On the one hand, she showed the world that black and Latina "excess" could be beautiful, leading the mainstream to embrace the hypersexuality associated with Latinidad and "exotic" beauty. On the other hand, when the public opinion of her fell, she was frequently depicted as "the lying, cheating, bossy Latina dragon lady," manipulating and dominating her men (72).

Negrón-Muntaner (2003) examines representations of Jennifer Lopez around her role as Selena in the 1997 film. He engages discussion of both Selena's and Jennifer Lopez's bodies as natural Latina beauties, emphasizing the importance that they did not conform to Anglo beauty standards. This affirmation of curvy bodies, dark hair and *canela* (cinnamon) skin came as a defense of counter-hegemonic standards of beauty and sensuality.

Asian American communities bring another set of beauty ideals outside the mainstream, many of which are influenced by nationally specific cultures of beauty. These in turn have some impact on mainstream American beauty culture.

Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain notes in her research on Japanese American beauty pageants that these communities have indeed formed their own standards of beauty separate from both Japan and America. Here, "beauty is neither a total reproduction of hegemonic norms nor counterhegemonic ideals, but instead is constructed out of an interactive process whereby women negotiate between the two" (King 2001, 164). The women in the pageants, the judges, and their community audiences must find a space for Japanese American beauty somewhere in between the Western ideal of "big lips and a tall, slim build" and the Japanese model beauty with "fair skin, almond-shaped eyes, and jet-black hair" (King 2001, 163).

Growing contention around these competitions focus on the inclusion of Japanese women of mixed ancestry. Racial appearance is equated with "authenticity" and "ethnic integrity", causing some to question the ability of multiracial Japanese to represent the community, both culturally and visually (King-O'Riain 2005, 216). This, combined with concerns over Japanese American communities becoming too assimilated and their culture "fading away" trigger a preference in the pageants towards traditional Japanese looks (King-O'Riain 2005, 217). While some of the women believed that mixed-race Japanese women would have an advantage because of their coveted "white" features, others believed they would never be able to win the pageant because they didn't look "Japanese" enough.

Representing quite a different acceptance of beauty standards, Eugenia Kaw (1994) interviewed Asian American women on their decision to undergo a popular eye-lid surgery that gives them a crease above their eyes. One of the most widely accepted markers of racial difference or Asianness is the Epithantic fold – which causes no crease above the eye[6]. The women interviewed talk about their pre-op eyes as "small" "slanted" reflecting a "dull" "passive" personality, "closed" mind and "lack of spirit" (244). "They themselves have come to associate those features stereotypically identified with their race (i.e. small, 'slanty' eyes, and a flat nose) with negative personality and mental characteristics" (245).

But the women emphasize that they do not want to look white. They rather idealize a Eurasian aesthetic – taking some features of Europeans and some of Asians. They do not want to look like white women, but like other Asian women with European features. One woman even says, although she got the double-lid surgery: "I like an Asian's looks. . . . I think Asian eyes are sexy and have character" (Kaw 1994, 253). This statement and the pattern of preferring Eurasian looks is somewhat reminiscent of the motivation behind white women's appropriation of the Asian aesthetic, but perhaps has different origins. Kaw does not discuss these statements in terms of a construction of Asian American beauty culture, but they are somewhat telling of the body constructions under which Asian American women operate.

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[6] Interestingly, the Epithantic fold is only characteristic of genetic populations indigenous to northern Asia. But it is still one of the first things that people list as "typically Asian characteristics."

Perfect examples of these "Asian women with European features" are those of mixed racial heritage. Interestingly, King (2001) notes that in the context of Japanese American community pageants, multiracial Japanese American women are not privileged because of their white features. They in fact make every effort to appear more Japanese for the pageant – dying their hair black, avoiding tanning which is considered attractive outside of the pageant context, and so on. However, King does acknowledge the fact that, concerns of authenticity aside, mixed race Japanese American girls are considered very attractive. Other pageant contestants worried that biracial women with European American heritage, if allowed to compete, would have an advantage. With such statements, the women acknowledge the dominance of "European" features in determining beauty in Japanese American communities. King also notes, "mixed people are seen as more beautiful since they are more 'exotic' than either monoracial whites or monoracial Japanese Americans" (167).

Kaw (1994) notes too that popular magazines and other media in Asia now increasingly portray Western beauty standards – either white models or Asian models with white features. This is clearly a reflection of Asian, and not necessarily Asian American culture, though Kaw states that many Asian Americans consume these media in ethnic communities and Asian American stores.

And it is clear looking at mainstream magazines that those Asian/American women deemed beautiful enough to sell beauty products do more often than not have typical European features such as a longer, thinner nose and no Epicanthic fold. Of course Asian American women do not only consume Asian and American popular

magazines. *Audrey* and *13 Minutes* magazines cater specifically to Asian American women and focus on beauty, fashion, and entertainment, as well as current social issues relevant to the Asian American community. These magazines contribute to the formation of uniquely Asian American beauty ideals.

Some of these are expressed in the personal narratives that make up *Yell-Oh Girls*, (Nam 2001) a collection of personal narratives from young Asian American women. Many of these express the frustration of growing up in a world that embraces "white" looks as beautiful and rejects "Asian" features. Others describe how, "as Asian American girls, we are supposed to be short, lightweight, petite, soft-spoken, and light-skinned, with long, straight, jet-black hair" (121). And still others question and critique the "Asian fetish." Many of these women refuse to accept the hegemonic American ideal of European features and light-colored hair, or to conform to what American culture expects them to look like as "exotic" Dragon Ladies and submissive Geisha Girls. Those who are also influenced by the beauty ideals of their parents or grand parents' homes must also push back against this third mold for their bodies to fit into. Julia Wong, age 19, ends her essay emphatically, saying: "Like many Asian American girls, I wish to conform to neither the Western American nor the Eastern Asian ideals of beauty. For our own peace of mind, heart, and spirit, we need to set these standards for ourselves" (122).

Mixed Race Bodies in the Historical Imaginary

Mulattas

Representation of black women has taken the form of two main contrasting images: the Mammy and the Jezebel. At times these tropes have been joined by a bossy Sapphire or an Aunt Jemima, but these two have prevailed throughout. The mammy is an asexual, motherly, domestic servant; while the Jezebel is a "bad-black-girl" seductress with uncontrollable sexuality and "unlimited bestial passions" (Mgadmi 2009). Part of the Jezebel's irresistible allure was her fair skin and European features – thin lips, long straight hair, slender nose, and thin figure (Jewell 1993). The other part was her unbridled sexuality: while she may have looked like a white women, she was not so naïve, and had the worldly sexual experience that white men projected on all racial Others (Jewell 1993).

Related the light-skinned Jezebel was the figure of the Tragic Mulatta. Also a very light-skinned, mixed-race black woman, the Tragic Mulatta believed herself to be white, but was trapped by the "one drop" of black blood that made her black. Like the Jezebel, she was considered very beautiful, as she conformed to white standards of beauty. Pilgrim (2000) writes that "Her heart was pure, her manners impeccable, her language polished, and her face beautiful." But the single drop of black blood made her pathological: the Tragic Mulatta was prone to "self-hatered, depression, alcoholism, sexual perversion, and suicide attempts" (Pilgrim 2000). More than anything else, she desired a white lover. In fact, the mulatto woman's depiction as a seductress whose advances white men could not resist helped justify white men's targeted sexual abuse of

light-skinned black women. The tragedy rested in her mixed blood: "white blood" made her beautiful and refined but "ambitious and power hungry," while "black blood" gave her an "animalistic and savage" sexuality (Pilgrim 2000, Mgadmi 2009).

Both the image of the Tragic Mulatta and the Jezebel – as they are one and the same – appear in early films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Imitation of Life* (1934, 1959), and *Jezebel* (1938). *Birth of a Nation*'s mulatta character Lydia, the housekeeper of a northern carpetbagger, is the "weakness that is to blight a nation" – so seductive that she may ruin white manhood (Pilgrim 2000). Peola in *Imitation of Life* is light enough to pass – and does when she can. She is "beautiful, sensual, a potential wife to any White man who does not know her secret" (Pilgrim 2000). Her sexuality is particularly visible in the 1959 remake, in which Peola passes first as a dancer in a nightclub and later as a chorus girl.

In African American communities too, mulatta women were shunned and sexually stereotyped. "Mixed blood" was associated with "a predisposition to lax morals" (Streeter 1996, 310), and many other black women held mulattas and light skinned Jezebels responsible for black people's racial and sexual degradation (Mgadmi 2009). Streeter (2004) notes how in black communities, skin tone is linked with sexuality, morality, and beauty. Terms like "red," "redbone" and "yellow," are used to describe skin color, but also indicate "an assertive female sexuality" (771) or other "unflattering images" (772). Both "red" and "yellow" women are seen as temptresses that other black women look down on for the overt display of sexuality embodied in their skin tone and European features.

These fictional tropes were mainly used to support the views and actions of white men – particularly slave owners – and served as a filter through which to mediate one's experiences with mulatta women. Mixed race women were often targeted for sexual violence more than other black women, and multiple sources hold that they were sold during slavery explicitly to serve the sexual needs of their masters (Mgadmi 2009, Guillory 1997, Guillory 1999). These "fancy girl" slaves received a higher price, and were sometimes sold with the assurance that they were virgins (Guillory 1999, Guillory 1997). During slavery, white slave owners routinely had sexual relations with their slaves, and either because of the trope of the light-skinned seductress or contributing to it, mulatta women were favored.

In post-civil war Louisiana, a system of "quadroon balls" developed specifically for white men and "octoroons" – or mixed race women – to meet and take up together. The arrangements that came out of the balls were much like marriage: she became his mistress, and he provided for her until – or sometimes throughout – his legal marriage to a white woman. The octoroon women who attended these balls were "cultured, refined, and . . . trained in the social finery" (Guillory 1997, 70). "Nearly everyone who encountered quadroons and other colored Creole women commented on their beauty as well as their striking whiteness" (Guillory 1997, 84), and many admitted that they had never seen more beautiful women as the quadroons of New Orleans. The act of these women marketing their bodies to earn financial support both played on and played into the widespread trope of the light-skinned Jezebel.

Caroline Streeter explores the hypersexualization of the black/white woman, claiming that the hybrid body is a reminder of interracial sex, and as "the embodied result of sex between the races" (186), she is often conflated with the illicit sex that brought her into being. Furthermore, mixed race women are a "symbolic fetish object" both for white men who want sex with an exotic Other and black men who want sex with someone who approximates white beauty ideals. Streeter introduces the idea of "commodification of miscegenation" through sexual desire: the mixed race female body becomes symbolic of illicit sex and an "apparently transgressive heterosexuality." This sexuality, though transgressive, is normalized (over the course of years) through "desire, spectacle, and commodification" (186).

Even today, when the word mulatta is so outdated it's been forgotten, these tropes have stuck in the common imagination. Guillory (1997) applies Joseph Roach's concept of *surrogation* – "the symbolic substitution of one commodity for another" (69) and Fredric Jameson's *simulacrum* – "a transformation of older realities into television images" (78) – to her discussion of New Orleans quadroon balls. The city's remembrance and recreation of these events substitute present-day women for the quadroons of the 19th century, allowing the new signifier to take the place of the old, taking on all the significations inherited from its cultural/visual legacy. Bastiaans describes how contemporary film *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) relies on the viewer's adeptness in perceiving signs of difference or non-visual markers of race. These assumptions of difference are ingrained deeply enough, Bastiaans argues, that the film can rely on them to tell the story of race. The "discourse of seduction" casts "women as seductresses who

wield an inordinate amount of sexual power and whose desire directly or indirectly initiates sexual encounters" (Bastiaans 2008, 233). This discourse makes it the victim's fault when she is raped, and justifies (white) men's sexual violence against (black) women. The main character in *Devil* provides multiple visual and aural cues to indicate her sexual readiness, "desire and consent" (233). Daphne, like mulatta characters throughout literary and filmic history, is posed as a *femme fatale* with manipulative sexuality – a temptress and Jezebel. The equation of racial difference with sexual difference make it so Daphne is not a *femme fatale* simply because of her actions and characterization, but because of her racial identity. "The discourse of seduction and the stereotype of mulatto ambition conspire to make Daphne responsible for her own victimization" (239). In other words, because she is black and a mulatta, "she can never quite be an innocent victim of sexual violence" (236). The use of these themes not only necessitates audience familiarity, but also presents a kind of nostalgic simulacrum. Although the setting of the film does not claim contemporary relevance for its racialized mulatta type, it nonetheless perpetuates knowledge of and belief in this type.

Likewise, Caroline Streeter examines representation of Carey and Keys in both Black and mainstream media. She argues that images of mixed race women function as "both a vehicle for an exploration of the relationship between the races and at the same time, an expression of the relationship between the races" (Streeter 2005, 186). The evidence she brings forth of the women's comparative racialization and sexualization in the media suggest that old tropes of "mulatta as whore" or "mulatta as sexual object" have persevered, both in African American and mainstream media.

After following literary images of mulatta and mestiza women in America and Mexico for a century, Bost addresses present-day representation both in literature and popular culture. Drawing comparisons between the social and political environment now and that of the mid-19th century, she leads us to the realization that not much has changed since then. Now, as in the 1860's, we are experiencing shifts in racial definition. Categories are changing and the makeup of the country is becoming less and less white. Anxieties over this change surround us with "a rhetoric of confusion, tragedy, groundedness, and futurism" (185), just as they did in the 19th century. In both time periods there is a fascination with mixed identity and a racist fear of losing the current hierarchy. "And just as nineteenth-century writings on mixture were split between racist fear and enthusiasm for a new amalgamated America, the contemporary fascination with mulattoes, mestizos, ad Creoles reflects both optimism and anxiety" (191). To get at the cross-temporal pervasiveness of these themes, Bost examines four modern literary texts and "sensationalist responses to mixture" in popular culture, and compares these images with discourses around amalgamation from a century ago.

As an example of one of these texts, Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* introduces some interesting language around sexuality and "monstrousness." The main character of the novel experiments with bisexuality, which echoes the theme of racial deviance (mulatto status) being linked to physical deviance (the ambiguous body) and sexual deviance (bisexuality). Other scholars such as Streeter (2004) note that deviant sexualities – from queer identity to prostitution – have been some of the cardinal pathologies characteristic of the tragic mulatta. Senna also poses the idea of the mulatta as "monster," as Birdie

describes her appearance as "monstrous." "I had liked that image of myself as a mother, and unfinished creation turned against its maker" (Bost 2003, 188).

Mestizas

Mestizos, borne of Spanish and Native American relations, were similarly cast off by both of the groups from which they came. Associated with the sex acts that produced them[7], they have been called "race traitors" by indigenous Mexicans and bastards by the Spanish elite.

From a US perspective, Mexicans of mestizo heritage were often considered inferior to white (Anglo) Americans (Allman 1996). In fact, much US anxiety about Mexico stemmed from discourse around amalgamation. Anglo Americans believed themselves to be of a better stock, and an entirely separate race from their Mexican neighbors. They saw that race mixing had tainted the blood of the Spaniards in Mexico, and feared mixing with them, lest the US become a "mixture of discordant races" like Mexico (Streeby 2002, 114).

Americans sometimes saw mestizas as beautiful, but only if they were white enough. Streeby, in her work on American dime novels at the time of the US-Mexico War, groups American perceptions of Mexican women into two categories: the righteous Europeans, deemed beautiful and marriageable; and the base Indians or mestizas, inferior to Anglo America in every way. Where mixed race Mexican men were stereotyped as backwards, shifty, duplicitous, and traitorous, the women were supposed to be sexually

[7] The most famous being the story of La Malinche, an Indian woman who served as interpreter, advisor, and lover for Hernando Cortez, helping him to colonize Mexico for the Spanish and siring some of the first Mestizo children in the new world.

treacherous, immoral, and undesirable. However, Karen Maeda Allman suggests that mestizas could be seen as "illustrious, moral, [and] chaste" – if they conformed to European beauty. And mestizas were certainly closer to whiteness than blacks.

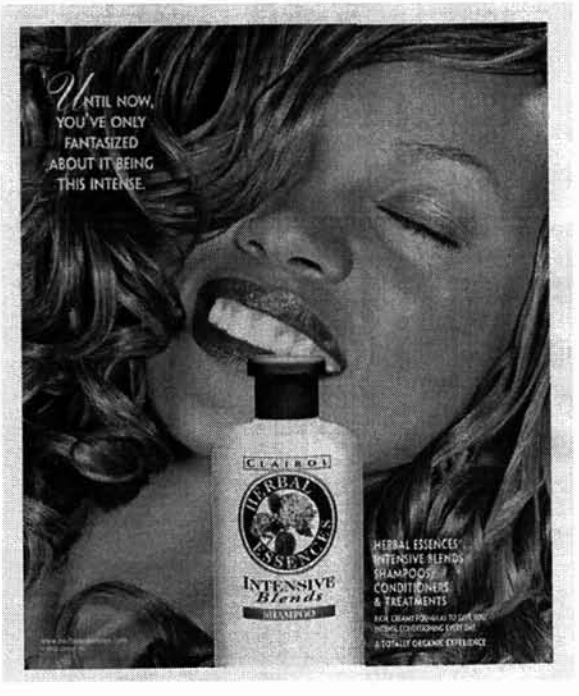
Because of the pervasiveness of mestizaje in Mexico and other Latin American countries, this mestiza image, originally known only in the context of the border, has come to represent all Latinas in the US imagination. Now it is Latinas in general whose beauty, sexuality and femininity fluctuates between white and black, and the "spicy" Spanish flair that Americans associate with Latinidad adds to the exotification and covetousness for this aesthetic.

3: Appreciation and Appropriation: The Exotic Other takes the spotlight (or is pushed into it)

The Black Power Movement of the 1960's brought a new racial pride for Black Americans that used a redefinition of feminine beauty as a focal point for the revolution (Craig 2002). The phrase "Black is Beautiful" was widely representative of the movement, reaffirming Black beauty and rejecting the European ideals that had be largely internalized by the Black community. A large part of this Black beauty was hair. The dominant white culture had defined beauty with long, flowing blonde or brunette locks, and most black people had internalized the idea that this type of hair was better. With racial pride, however, came pride in a woman's natural hair – and thus was born the afro style (Craig 2002). By the end of the decade, natural hair, popularized by famous musicians, became modish even for black women not associated with the movement (Craig 2002). White people (especially in the counterculture) took this idea of Black pride and Black beauty and glorified and exotified both the ideas of strength and solidarity behind it and the physical image of the afro (Craig 2002). White women throughout the 1980's often had their hair frizzed or permed into an approximation of the Black style (Banner 1984).

Even now, when a curly perm isn't as popular as it used to be, volume is one of the most sought-after qualities in hair products. There are currently entire product lines of dedicated to volume (aside from the four or more products under each brand), and

websites and tutorials on the internet about how to get the most volume. While a Google search for "hair volume" returns 47,300,000 results, the search "hair straight" has almost 10,000,000 fewer, and "hair shine," "hair smooth," "hair color," and "hair healthy" (the other search terms suggested by Google) do not even rival these numbers. I personally have gotten all kinds of compliments from white women about how beautiful my thick, curly hair is. Herbal Essences commercials like the one shown below frequently equate voluminous hair with sex and sexuality, featuring clips that compare the hair-washing experience to an orgasm and exotic fruit scents with an exotic sexuality (Herbal Essences 2008) (Herbal Essences 2007). The ad below captures the intersection of 'exotic' beauty and sensuality:



Thick, voluminous, voluptuous hair has become a commodity and a tool in the quest for sexiness.

The way that skin tone defines beauty has also changed to reflect a sexualized image of the exotic Other. Starting in the early twentieth century, tanned skin for European-Americans came into vogue due to its association with the exotic beach vacations and outdoors activities of the upper class (juxtaposed with the lower-class workers' jobs in factories out of the sun) (Banner 1984). The influence of eroticized images of people with brown skin from exotic tropical regions also contributed to this phenomenon (Banner 1984), which continues today, as hundreds of thousands of Americans tan weekly, in their backyards, on the beach, or at one of the 17,000 tanning beds nationwide (NYTimes: Style 1988). Despite constant media attempts to convince the public that "pale is in," the vast majority still believes that having a tan makes them look better, more beautiful (NYTimes: Style 1988).

Lips, which have always been a symbol of sexuality because of our society's emphasis on kissing, are another feature, like hair, that has been stigmatized as a black feature representing excess. Traditionally, thin lips were desirable and thick lips were seen as ugly or buffoonish. Recently, however, in our progress towards sensuality, thicker, fuller, "pouty" lips have made their way to the forefront of beauty. The BBC reported in 2003 that bigger lips make a person more sexually attractive (BBC News: Health 2003); Jessica Simpson got lip enhancement in 2006 (NYDaily News 2009), and Paris Hilton followed suit a year later (McKay 2009); and while women of the nineteenth century would try their best to minimize the size of their lips before taking a picture (Banner 1984, 49), celebrities and models now can be seen puckering up for the camera.

The lips, a highly sexualized body part in American society, are one of the main avenues on which white women are traveling towards sexiness.

A third physical representation of "exotic" sensuality appropriated by mainstream European-American culture is one that has enjoyed time in popular beauty discourse before – that of body shape and size. Because the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries defined whiteness by Anglo or "Nordic" (northern European) standards and excluded southern and eastern Europeans as well as all immigrants to the US, and because these immigrants tended to valorize more supple bodies, it was them that represented a voluptuous, sensual standard for nineteenth century Americans. Now, however, these groups have passed into whiteness, and the same exotification process is happening between white Americans and Black and Latino Americans, whose cultures both appreciate thicker bodies and value a big butt over a small waist.

Similar to the theatres of the eighteenth century, hip-hop music videos and television shows with multicultural casts display working-class, Black and Latino ideals for white consumers. The sexual situations in which these beauties are portrayed add images like J-Lo's ass and Beyonce's hips to already constructed ideas about sexuality and sensuousness.

After images like these appear thousands of times in music and television, people have internalized the association of these physical characteristics with black and Latina women and with characterizations such as 'sexy.' When women then want to be sexy, they draw on these norms of sensuality, mimicking –just as the Grecian Bend and S-Curve did in the late 1800's– the voluptuous body type by wearing high heels and

attempting to stick out their chest and posterior. Padded bras have existed for some time to help women appear bustier than they actually are, and (again, going back a century) padded panties called "Booty Poppers" have come out to enhance the size and shape of a woman's butt and give her "sexy curves - instantly!" (Booty Pop 2010).

Asian American women too have been exotified and their bodies commodified in popular American culture. Europeans and Americans, obsessed with the exotic mystery it provides, have appropriated certain aesthetics of Asia and its people since the 19th century. Products like tea, spices and silk were always admired as exotic by Europeans who hadn't the means to make such things. Two centuries ago, goods and products from China became fashionable in Europe: fine china, Chinese gardens, gazebos and tea houses, silk kimonos and fans were all associated with high class, "luxury, refinement and abundance." (Prasso 2006, 40)

Later on, in the 1930's, Hollywood fashion incorporated an appropriation of the Asian aesthetic. In 1935 Vogue declared it popular to look like a "Balinise maiden," encouraging women to look "as exotic as you possibly can" with the help of deep red lipstick, dark "mysterious" eye shadow, and even "Chinese and copper make up" to give an "amber" skin tone (Prasso, 83). Prasso attributes this trend to women's desire to "present themselves as a combination of (white) virtue and (nonwhite) sexuality." (83) By combining both white and Asian features, white women can appear exotic and "sexy," without deviating too far from the established beauty norm or the requisite morality.

Today, both the image of the submissive, docile Asian/American wife and the hypersexual Dragon Lady prevail. We can see a glimpse of the Dragon Lady in modern media, including Lucy Liu's characters on *Charlie's Angels* (2000) and *Ally McBeal* (1998-2002) and news reporter Connie Chung. These women are bossy, bitchy and sexually liberated – much different from the model minority wives – but somehow both tropes co-exist. And we see the trope of the hypersexual continued in celebrities like Vietnamese-American model Tila Tequila, made famous by her risqué MySpace photos, and whose bisexuality was the focus of MTV reality dating show "A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila."

In the current time when the physical traits of the typical Black Other (and according moral traits) are being incorporated into the mainstream in the form of lip injections, hair volumizers, and fake tans – all suddenly deemed "sexy" – the beauty image of Asian American women is also being appropriated, warped, and commercialized. As with cultural syncretism in which immigrants do not only assimilate to the mainstream, but the mainstream also absorbs some aspects of the immigrant culture, mainstream America has incorporated certain "Asian" traits into its beauty paradigm.

One example of this is demonstrated in Min-Ha T. Pham's blog post on the American supermodel who taped her face to give the effect of having "almond-shaped eyes" (2011). The model claims it was not about race and she was not trying to look Aisan, but to achieve a different "look." Pham comments: "This intangible "something" that has more "drama," more "character," and is so "exciting" is, for Renn, not racially

specific. It is instead a generalized exotica, an experience of vague sensuousness." This type of cultural or visual appropriation as "fashion" dehistoricizes and depoliticizes racial difference, rather than celebrating it. As bell hooks, in her essay *Eating the Other*, names this "desire for transformation through the Other" (Pham 2011). Whites covet the "worldly experience" of imagined people like the Dragon Lady, and wish to "transform" themselves through capitalist consumption and sexual consummation of bodies of color, in turn "becoming something else" – becoming more worldly, more sexual and in short, *sexier* (Pham 2011). A brief perusal of popular magazine advertizements and photo spreads reveals that this model is not the only one who capitalizes on the exotic, sensual mystery of Asia.

As we have seen throughout history, a changing social environment combines with economic and historical factors to shape our collective ideas about beauty. As times change and society looks for different qualities in its women, different trends are born and die. However, one thing that has always stayed consistent throughout American history is the association of Anglo features (blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin, small features and thin bodies) with chastity, purity, innocence, youth and dependence, and the connection of the exoticized Other's features (dark, curly hair, dark eyes and skin, thick lips and voluptuous bodies) with primal sensuality, strength, independence and sexual maturity. In the Euro/American imaginary, non-white people are supposed to be more worldly, sensual and sexual because they are different. But now, this is desired. [B]ell

hooks theorizes such commodification of Otherness in her essay "Eating the Other" (1992).

Contemporary mainstream culture tends to emphasize sex as not only an integral part of a woman's life, but something to be sought after in a partner. White women are able to purchase these ideals of sexiness, as the mainstream market has appropriated them from people of color and packaged them for sale to those who want a darker, more tropical skin tone, thicker, more voluptuous hair, fuller lips, or a curvier, more ample body. However, such messages only increase the discourse surrounding the definitions of beauty and sensuality and reaffirm previously established racialized feminine 'types.' As these ideas of race and sexuality continue to inform popular discourse, members of dominating races, genders and sexual practices seek to make themselves over in the image of the Other. As hooks says, they can "leave behind white 'innocence' and enter the world of 'experience.'"

This inclination towards non-white bodies and aesthetics is often seen as multiculturally motivated – as transgressing a white supremacist past and embracing 'ethnic beauty.' And hooks tells us, for marginalized groups this emphasis on non-white bodies and cultures holds a promise of recognition and reconciliation. However, and hooks emphasizes this point: white dominance is only further defined through an exploration of otherness. Group cultures and the bodies of individuals become nothing more than "alternative playgrounds" for whites to explore the power play between lack and excess. The commodification of identity decontextualizes, individualizes, depoliticizes, and privatizes the histories and experiences of marginalized groups and

individuals. Not only are they ahistorical and apolitical, but they are up for sale to anyone who has enough money. And like booty-pop panties or eye makeup, they become something that one (the liberal individual subject) can simply put on and take off at will – rather than histories that are tied to and inscribed on our bodies.

4: Focus Groups

I chose to use focus groups for this project to gain insight into how a subset of young adults think about these issues. I also want to examine the pervasiveness of mainstream beauty messages in the lives of real people. The groups were meant to tell me things about what physical features are preferred and in what contexts, and how women are characterized according to their race and racialized features. It is important to involve contemporary subjects in this research because the opinions of individuals often differ from the narrative found in mass media. I sought to describe the current beauty standards of real people – not just historical precedents or hegemonic norms. Participants expressed opinions on beauty that differed both from my own perspectives and those found in mainstream media, opening up the diversity of perceptions of race and beauty in a current context.

My overarching question was: *How do the dominant paradigms of race and beauty translate into our personal preferences and associations?* To get at this, the focus groups were structured around the following more specific questions:

(1) What do real people find attractive? What are the dominant conceptions of beauty? How do individuals' personal standards and ideals match that or deviate from it?

(2) How is beauty racialized? Which features are associated with racial difference? How do other elements (clothing, pose, props) contribute to a racialized image?

(3) How are bodies characterized? What can be read from a picture about a woman's lifestyle and personality? How is this characterization conveyed, and when is it

associated with race, femininity and sexuality? Does this constitute a 'typing' of beauty, as previous scholars describe?

Scholarship in cultural studies, feminist studies, and ethnic studies argues that when it comes to beauty, sexuality and femininity, whiteness is equated with morality, purity and innocence, while blackness or Otherness is essentialized as hypersexual and immoral. With the discussion groups I aimed to investigate the prevalence of these ideas and other controlling images, such as the mammy/jezebel and geisha/dragon lady dichotomies, in people's everyday consciousness. Do individuals associate different 'types' of beauty or modes of femininity with different physical 'types'?

I also used these focus groups to gauge popular conceptions of mixed-race identity. In interrogating the idea that "mixed people" are monolithically attractive, it has been necessary to ask, *which mixed people?*. When popular discourse talks about "mixed people," how is this being defined? Is it a certain combination of racial identities? Or are mixed people typed as looking a certain way? Answering these questions will better allow me to place the "mixed people" of public fantasy within discourse about beauty and race.

Process

In the early stages of this project, as I prepared my materials for the discussion groups, I talked to some friends and family members about my ideas, questions, and materials. These preliminary conversations gave me some insights as to how these images are understood particularly by younger women. These conversations also helped shape the format for the focus groups and guided my line of inquiry during the project.

Following these discussions, I standardized the format of the questions and organized formal focus groups that conformed to Macalester College's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board guidelines.

A total of four focus groups were conducted over the course of a month. Each group had three to four participants of ethnically similar backgrounds. Most groups were also socio-economically homogeneous by coincidence. All participants were students in their freshman, sophomore or junior year at Macalester College at the time of the focus groups. The people in each group were previously friends with each other, and most knew the interviewer. A total of eight women and six men participated. Here, participants are given pseudonyms to protect their identities. These names were either chosen by the participants or generated at random on fakenamegenerator.com.

For each group participants filled out a brief survey listing their age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race and nationality, along with an open-ended space for other pertinent information. This information was collected under the assumption that individuals' responses to certain images and questions would vary based on their personal identities. Some of these connections are discussed further in the "results" section.

They were then asked to discuss the meanings of various terms commonly used to describe attractiveness. Martha Banta and Lois Banner describe the historical categorization of women (and people in general) into 'types' based on race, gender expression, physical appearance and personality. While this categorization was very explicit a century ago, I sought to locate it in contemporary discourse on beauty. Words

like "pretty," "cute," "hot," and "sexy," each have distinct meanings under the umbrella of attractiveness, but may not mean the same thing for everyone. I asked what each of five terms meant for them, and they also shared other terms in their lexicons.

There was also a series of questions trying to get at the issue of "which mixed people." I asked which specific mixtures come to mind when they think of "mixed people." I followed up with a question of what image comes to mind when they think of a mixed person (specifically a woman). I then inquired directly about the belief that mixed people are the most beautiful: had participants heard it before? Where had they heard it, or from who? What specific mixed people did they think was referred to when talking about beauty?

The main part of the discussion groups consisted of questions based on a series of pictures that were shown. The pictures used come from various popular beauty magazines published in 2011 such as *Allure*, *Vogue* and *Glamour*, and include both advertisements and magazine articles or spreads. As I showed the group series of 3-5 photos, I asked questions based on each set:

How do these pictures conform to mainstream standards of feminine beauty?

What are these pictures telling us about what kinds of faces or bodies are attractive?

(How) Do these pictures fit in your own personal beauty standards?

Which of the beauty terms (discussed earlier) would you use to describe each woman?

I then asked individually of each picture, *what race do you perceive this woman to be? How can you tell, or what makes you think that?*

(1) "How to"

The first group of pictures was six pictures, all from articles on "how to" do hair or how to dress. The first three all show a woman and a man, and highlight the woman's hair, as this is the focus of the magazine feature. The first woman is shown in profile. We see her torso and head in the photo. She touches the man's face. Her eyes are closed or almost closed, and she wears a low bun with a lace headband. The second woman's entire body is in view, as she stands with the man in a lounge setting. She sports a low ponytail with bushy blonde hair and an outfit that reveals most of her leg and shoulder. She and the man have full-body contact, his hand is on or near her butt, and his head sits next to her neck, which is tilted back. The third woman faces away from the camera so that we only see her back. She has a long, blonde braid and a red dress, which the man appears to be unzipping, with his hand on her lower back and thumb in the zipper.

The fourth picture also emphasizes hair, as the text tells women, "Lots of Natural Texture." The woman is shown from the shoulders up. Her body faces the right but her face is turned in the direction of the camera. We see her right shoulder, her face, and her curly hair, which takes up most of the frame outside of her face.

The last two pictures are focused around fashion and the dresses that the models are wearing. These show the model's entire body and have nothing but a blank wall in the background. The first is a floor-length baby-blue dress with shoulder straps, a slim waist, and flared bottom. The model poses away from the camera with her arms wrapped around her waist. She turns her head slightly back over her right shoulder to gaze into the space to the right of us. Her blonde hair is waved or curled into an up-do. The last model

looks straight at the camera, though her head is tilted slightly to the side. Her body faces us, and both hands are on her hips. Her hair is slicked back so that we cannot see what it looks like.

(2) Bodies

The second set of pictures all accompanied longer articles. They all show the woman's entire body across two pages, and each of the women is posed, alone, each in a different setting or backdrop. The first, which came with an article about flats and a Zimbabwean model, shows the woman in question seated in a chair, with her foot on a second chair to display her shoe. She wears a hot pink form-fitting dress, and her straight, black hair is tied back in a low ponytail. She leans back in her chair and stares directly at the camera, resting her arms one on the table and the other on her elevated leg.

In the second picture we see a woman lying on her back on a rock with waves crashing around her. Her pale blue dress appears wet. The low neckline of the dress expose much of her chest and shoulders, while the sheer material and positioning of the skirt reveal her legs. She is posed with her right arm over her forehead and one leg bent at the knee. Her head is turned away from the camera and her eyes are closed.

The third woman in this section lies on her stomach on a dark-colored sheet. We see her in profile, from her thighs to her head. Her torso is lifted off the bed slightly and her head turned up, looking at something directly in front of her. Her elbows rest on the bed and her hands are near her mouth, so that her thumb touches her tooth. She has black hair that is semi-obscured by the darkness, a sweatshirt top, and nude-colored bottoms

that do not cover her bottom. Her foremost thigh comes down over the side of the bed and the leg is bent at the knee. The text reads, "You'd look even better naked."

(3) Fashion

The next section has five photos similar in composition to the first, but with brighter lighting. The pictures are from magazine spreads that showcase fashion trends and clothes. The first picture shows a woman and a man against a white background. We see both of their bodies (knee to head) but the man's face is cut off. They both appear to be jumping. The woman's skirt comes halfway down her thigh, and the shirt covers her entire torso, shoulders and arms. Her hair is straight or wavy, brown, and just past shoulder-length. She looks directly at the camera and smiles slightly. The second picture is a headshot with similar hair to the first. The woman holds a cupcake to the camera and a scoop of frosting on her finger. She wears a blue and white diagonal striped blazer, hair down, and dark eye makeup. Her blue/green eyes stare into the camera and her lips are barely parted and slightly turned up at the sides.

The third woman sits on the floor against a white background. Her body faces sideways but her head is turned towards us. Her legs are in the air, as if resting against a wall that is off-camera, and she leans back slightly, giving the impression of another wall at her back. Because of the frame, we see her whole body at a closer distance than other full-body shots. Her nearer hand sits on her hip, while the other arm is in the air, triceps resting on a knee. She wears an eclectic mix of brightly colored clothing. Her hair is unrestrained, curly, and black. She looks directly at the camera, unsmiling, but not

straight-faced. The text overlaying the picture reads "Fashion: What to wear now for your style, your body, your budget."

The fourth picture has a stone wall as backdrop. The woman stands facing the camera, her head obscured by shadows. Her straight hair comes down to her chest. She leans one hand on the wall behind her and the other on her hip. Her skirt is slit diagonally up, revealing the inner thigh of one leg, and her shirt unbuttoned to show some chest. She looks out of the shadows straight at the camera. The last picture in this section is set by the sea. The caption reads "Paradise Lost": clear blue sky, a white building with stucco roof, and a low stone wall. The woman walks hand in hand with a man. She is dressed in a large sun hat, fitted black halter top, and red floral-patterned tiered skirt. She looks away into the distance to the right of the camera, lips open, eyes darkened by makeup, and golden-tipped, chest-length hair blowing in the wind.

(4) Faces

The final group of pictures contains five ads for makeup. These all focus on women's faces, while advertising foundation, face cream, eyeliner or mascara. The first photo shows two women side by side. It is a black and white close-up on their faces. Their bodies are angled towards each other, and their faces angled more in the direction of the camera so that we see each of their shoulders and jawlines, and one side of their faces is slightly obscured. Both gaze into the camera lens, the corners of their mouths turned up slightly. Because of the contrast that their bodies provide each other, we can see that the woman on the left has darker skin than the other, and the one on the right has lighter eyes.

The second image shows a woman against a white background from her shoulders up. Her body is angled away from the camera so that her left shoulder is closest to us, and her face turned upwards as she gazes into space above and to the right of the camera. Her hair is straight or wavy, and falls directly behind her head. Her lips are closed and straight. The third woman's face fills the shot completely, with shadows at the edges of the picture that create a sharp contrast with her skin. Her blue eyes and dark eye makeup have a similar contrast. She does not smile keeps her mouth closed, and looks directly into the camera.

The fourth picture has a wallpaper pattern in the background. We see the woman's chest, shoulders and head, as well as a hand that holds the product in question between two fingers. Her body faces the camera, but her head is angled down and to our right, so that we see one side of her face much clearer. Her eyes meet the camera lens, and her mouth is unsmiling, lips together. The final picture is a close-up of a woman's face, so close that we see only her eyes, nose, and part of her mouth. Her head is angled slightly down and to the left, so that her left cheek is prominent and her right eye is partially cut off the side of the page. She wears no visible makeup, and gazes into the camera with her lips slightly parted.

Results

In analyzing the results from these focus groups, I do not seek to quantify responses or percentages, but rather pursue a qualitative understanding of how respondents made sense of these images. The small sample size and nature of the study makes it impossible to generalize the data beyond the individuals with whom I spoke.

Responses might have been entirely different with different images or with a different set of people. Therefore, I am not concerned with percentages or quantitative values, because these results represent the opinions of individuals, not populations.

1. Beauty terms

Participants' responses on the subject of beauty terms varied, although a few trends stuck out. Some people created a scale of attractiveness, with 'cute' on the bottom, 'hot' in the middle, and 'sexy' at the top, while 'beautiful' was off the scale entirely. Others made each term its own scale, associating each with different modes of attractiveness. For example, multiple participants said 'hot' and 'sexy' have a physicality to them, while 'cute' and 'pretty' are more about personality. Often this view also tied the difference between 'cute' and 'hot' to the level of attachment or familiarity. Mike, for example, defined 'hot' as a first impression judgment, while 'cute' was based on personality. In this paradigm, each mode was taken to exist in separate yet intersecting frameworks. Someone could, for example, be 'sexy' without being 'pretty' or 'cute;' or someone could be all three if they play their cards right.

'Cute' was consistently defined as a diminutive comment, associated with children, innocence, and an immature mode of attractiveness. In scales of attractiveness, it was always placed on a lower level than 'sexy,' and other times stood alone as a comment reserved for children or women who are attractive, but do not inspire a particular physical attraction. In this way, it can become a somewhat generic compliment, as one participant noted. Interestingly, 'cute' was also regularly associated with a personality judgment. For someone to be 'cute' for many participants meant that they

have a nice personality, or what they *do* is cute, rather than what they *look like*. Also interestingly, one participant commented on her tendency to use 'cute' to describe men, while she uses other words like 'beautiful' and 'pretty' for women. I too have noticed that hetero women tend to use 'cute' to describe men more than anyone else.

'Pretty' was spoken of briefly, and defined as similar to 'cute.' It is either non-physical or only deals with the face (as opposed to other words that describe the body). It is definitely not sexual, and as a friend noted in preliminary discussions, it is "non-threatening" – implying that other modes like sexiness or beauty do have a threatening aspect. Joe used 'pretty' as a generic response to attractiveness that doesn't definitively fit any other descriptors. Others said 'pretty' can be an objective judgment of physical attractiveness. Women will often call each other 'pretty,' for example, without implying personal attraction. The term 'attractive' was said to serve a similar purpose in remaining objective and/or including the non-physical in the assessment.

'Hot' was often defined in opposition to 'cute' and 'pretty.' While 'cute' has more to do with personality, 'hot' was a first-impression judgment based solely on the body. A few participants equated 'hot' and 'sexy,' although most made a distinction between the two.

'Sexy' was generally associated with sex appeal and physicality, yet some participants (particularly straight men) defined it as an all-encompassing compliment that includes a person's style and attitude as well as her body. Similarly, multiple groups suggested the word "fine" as an alternate descriptor of attractiveness. "Fine" was

generally defined as a combination of the best factors. Alicia described 'fine' as a person's "entire presence," while 'sexy' for her was merely physical.

'Beautiful,' too, was sometimes described as all encompassing – "the ultimate compliment," indicating that someone is both cute and sexy at once, and/or that they are attractive both in physical ways and in how they carry themselves. Some defined 'beautiful' similarly to 'cute' and 'pretty,' associating it with character rather than body. Sometimes 'beautiful' can simply be "a more mature way to say cute." Other times it is much more than that. Wendy noted that Miranda Kerr, a Victoria's Secret model, is beautiful despite her displays of sexuality. This and other opinions seemed to express a certain dignity as requisite for 'beauty.' The viewer must have respect for a woman if she is to be 'beautiful.' This plays into the maturity associated with 'beautiful' and the "elegance" of bearing that participants described in 'beautiful' women. This opinion was reflected largely in responses from other female participants, although men too expressed a need to respect a woman for her to be beautiful.

Certain participants said that 'beautiful' as a descriptor is outdated. They don't use it regularly, and see it as "cheesy," forced or clichéd, like a line from a movie. Yet at the same time, others saw it as a more authentic compliment than objectifying descriptors like 'hot.'

The other addition to the list of beauty terms that was brought up in multiple groups was the use of non-verbal sound to signal taste. "Sometimes there are no words."

So participants use sounds like "mmm" or "damn"[8], varying pitch, length and allophones to encode distinct meanings about the type and intensity of attraction.

2. What does "mixed" mean?

To the question, which *mixed people*, answers varied. Most groups' consensus focused around their own identities and/or the American black/white norm. For example, Asian American participants mentioned that when they think of "mixed people" they might assume white/black, specifically because of the black/white binary that people operate under in the US. They also said that they have heard people talk about white/Asian babies or black/Asian babies as "the cutest." Every other group also named "mixed" as white/black, saying that this is the most prevalent in their contexts. Participants then listed types of mixedness according to their own experience. European American respondents listed generally white/other. Joe, who identifies as Native American, said he would think of Native and something else, speaking later of primarily Native/white or Native/Black. Latin@ respondents mentioned Latin@/white, and told of having heard others say that Asian/white, black/white, or Latin@/Asian people are particularly attractive. Joe also emphasized that it depends on the context of the statement: if I, the researcher, were to say "mixed person," he would probably think black/white; but if someone from "back home" said it, he would think Native/other.

When asked to describe physically what "mixed people" might look like, participants often found it hard to pin down a specific image, simply saying that a "mixed

[8] "Damn" may seem like a word with a definite meaning, but linguistically can take on completely different definitions and connotations depending on how it's said.

person" would be "ambiguous," or have a "mix of features." A mixed person might, as in Wendy's example, have almond eyes (associated with Asianness) and blonde hair (associated with whiteness). Multiple participants emphasized that mixed people have "exotic" or "rare" looks – "things you don't see every day" – and that this is what is so attractive. Overwhelmingly the juxtaposition of features that every group mentioned was that generally associated with black/white mixedness. All listed a "medium" or "light" skin tone (Josh said "light skinned – not like a white person, but light" or "fair skin, not very dark and not very light"), along with "dark," "curly hair." Some responses also involved the juxtaposition of "light eyes" (either blue, green, or light brown) with an otherwise non-white appearance.

3. Discussion of photos

Participants' responses to questions about mainstream beauty standards can be taken together to describe the ideal look. The women in the pictures were nearly always tall and skinny. They had long legs, thin arms, and hourglass figures. Hair was long and shiny, usually let down, and either straight or "big" and "thick"; Alicia pointed out that natural hair was expected for people of color. The women had "flawless" or "perfect" skin, no blemishes, and a "smooth, even skin tone." They had "smooth," "polished," "symmetrical" faces, with high, defined cheekbones, small, straight, narrow noses, big eyes, big lips, full lashes, and long, shaped, thick eyebrows.

A couple of focus groups described one picture as running counter to the ideal body type. This woman was portrayed as "curvy" or "thick." Alicia, Kendra, and Wendy (Black, African American and Asian American) argued that she did not conform to

conventional ideas of feminine beauty because she was not "unrealistically" skinny like the other models. Dawn (white) commented on the same picture, saying that the woman is "voluptuous" – "but in a good way. Not toned perfectly but not fat." This implies that "voluptuous" is usually a bad thing, too similar to "fat," while here the model pulls it off. By pulling it off, or making "voluptuous" look good, this picture aids in redefining hegemonic ideals. Unlike normal mainstream images of beauty, this picture tells us that "thick" or "curvy" bodies are attractive.

Another picture, which advertised a face makeup, similarly contested the beauty portrayed in the rest of the pictures. While most images featured completely smooth, evenly toned skin, one woman in this picture had freckles. Participants generally agreed that they found the freckles attractive, but did not agree on whether this was a socially celebrated ideal. Group 2 debated: Are the freckles a "blemish" – "a hint of imperfection"? or are they "a compliment on her already polished face"? Regardless of their perceived attractiveness, freckles were only depicted in one out of 19 images, and are even more rare in beauty magazines as a whole. It is interesting that something so monolithically appreciated by my viewers is equally monolithically excluded from pictures of "beautiful" women.

Part of a woman's perceived attractiveness is also derived from how her pose (in a picture) or her personality. In responses to these questions, participants also listed characteristics of the photographs or of the characters displayed as representative of beauty standards. The most prominent was the sexuality portrayed in the pictures. Women are placed in sometimes awkward poses, and often have a seductive "model

look" where they gaze into the distance or at the camera. Josh pointed out that the women in the pictures are "positioned in a way to arouse men" (despite the fact that the pictures come from heteronormative women's magazines). Something mentioned in every group was the exposedness of the women's bodies. Many of the pictures are "showing some skin," be it cleavage, leg, or lower back. In some, the "clothes hug her curves," in others the clothes are "sheer" or "see-through," or simply not there, and in others the position and camera angle emphasize sensual parts of the body like butt or lower back.

As scholars of beauty and feminine 'type' suggest, participants often listed non-physical characteristics when asked to describe how a set of photos fit into mainstream beauty ideals. However, the range of personalities that could be considered beautiful varied greatly. For example, within the same grouping of pictures, one group described a "friendly" look, a "serious" gaze, a "clumsy, hip," "fun and playful" persona, and a "naturally classy," "elegant" look all within the purview of beauty ideals. Likewise, a conventionally attractive woman could be "determined," "confident and inviting," or could be "vulnerable," as a "damsel in distress." She could be "determined," unsmiling, and "draw men in with mystery," or she could play a "supporting role," subordinate to their man. These disparate possibilities to conform to mainstream beauty standards stem from the existence of so many 'types' of attractiveness, represented by the terms that I have described. Because we talk only about "standards of beauty" as an umbrella for all of these types, and not "standards of cuteness" and "standards of hotness" as representing separate ideals, our discussion of the variation within mainstream expectations of femininity and sexuality is limited.

Many participants disagreed with the designations ascribed by the beauty magazines on a level of individual features, particularly the idea that attractive women must be skinny. In other respects they agreed, however, saying that they appreciated big lips, big eyes and high cheekbones. Most participants, when asked specifically about their opinions on the mainstream beauty standards that they named, remained impartial. "These things could be attractive," they said, but they are not prerequisite to beauty.

Often, too, participants preferred not to judge attractiveness based on one picture. Mike contested the idea that you can say someone is beautiful based solely on the physical aspects of the photograph. This is "shallow," he said, and too much of the decision is "based on the picture, lighting, camera angle," etc. For him – and other responses echoed this – personal standards depend on a woman's personality or character. Kendra also said in the middle of the second set of pictures, "I feel like I'm stereotyping these people." Wendy and Annie likewise expressed appreciation for a photo because "you can see she has a life," unlike the fake, unnatural poses and scenes of other pictures.

Just as participants listed character traits that fell under the mainstream standards of beauty, they also placed these within (or outside) their personal standards. And these varied from person to person. Of the "look" that models give, they said that the faraway gaze can sometimes be attractive, but that some looks are "threatening," and unattractive. Sometimes an "alluring" or "mysterious" look can be attractive too, as Joe expressed: "It's a step below sexy. But you have to find out more before you can know if she's

really sexy." Other participants said that a model that looks "confident," "provocative" and "in control" is attractive, but "confidence in sexual prowess" is not attractive – this is "threatening," as Ben said. Faces without smiles were generally unappreciated. Participants preferred "open" faces or poses, "friendly" looks, and women that look "content and happy." Josh expressed preference for pictures where the character had "attitude," "spunk," or "her own [distinct] style." Overall, that the women have an expression is key. Expressionless faces are seen as "listless" or having no character, and cannot be fully personified. Mike suggested, "simply smiling might just be the border line between cute and hot" – for him, the difference between an objectifying gaze and a beauty based on personhood. Other participants simply stated that a face with no expression doesn't "draw you in."

Multiple groups brought up the issue of poses and scenes affecting their perception of the women's attractiveness. Tatiana said, "I find these women's faces to be pretty, but the way they're positioned and the way that they are portrayed is not attractive." Participants brought this up in the case of the "curvy" woman mentioned earlier, who is pictured in profile, lying on her stomach, with "her butt in the air" and a skin-colored outfit that leaves her legs completely exposed. The lettering on the two-page spread reads, "you would look better naked." Multiple participants, mainly women of color, said that this woman is attractive, but that the picture is not. Alicia said, "she is closest to my ideal, if it wasn't for her position." The positions of other models drew similar reactions, mainly from other women of color. Another woman is pictured lying face up on a rock by the ocean, with a "sheer" or "see-through" blue dress and waves

splashing around her. She looks nearly lifeless (Mariela said "she looks…dead"), and nearly every group described her as a "damsel in distress." Of this picture, Annie said the "sloppy, giving yourself away" look is unattractive. Alicia echoed this sentiment in a separate group, saying, "I disagree with the 'damsel' look. That's not attractive; that's annoying." In a third group, Tatiana brings up the same point, applying it to both these pictures and another in which the model might be attractive. "They're very sexualized in a way that I don't really find attractive." This rejection of hypersexualized beauty reflects participants' need for some dignity or self-respect in a 'beautiful' woman, and shows that there is more to attractiveness than a good body or flawless face.

The most prevalent comment on personal beauty standards was that beauty should be "natural." Most participants were frustrated with the artificiality and unrealistic nature of the pictures. The perfection that the mainstream celebrates becomes too much when it is unreal. As one participant said, "it's like loving a wall." One of the reasons that people found the woman with the freckles so attractive was that her freckles are there, rather than being covered up by makeup, which, as Josh said, "hides something of yourself." For him, "being able to hold your own" without having to conform is what's really attractive.[9]

The models would overall be perceived as more attractive if they had some flaws and more variety to their looks. A friend, in a pilot stage of my research, voiced irritation at the repetitiveness of the pictures, which all conform to the same general look. Another

[9] I have also seen this preference outside of my research, as popular music sometimes has lines like Drake's "Sweatpants, hair tied, chillin with no makeup on. /That's when you're the prettiest, I hope that you don't take it wrong." (Drake 2009)

reason the freckles are so attractive is that they are "different" and "rare." They make this model stand out from the bunch. My friends, in thinking about these "same-look" models, postulated that a picture becomes "striking" when she has features that deviate from the norm, but that the institution of beauty can only allow up to two deviant features before a face or body becomes 'ugly'.

Certain participants were also critical of the whitewashing of models of color. James, a white man, pointed out that certain models who the group identified as black had probably had their skin lightened at some point in the production process. "Which is really sad," he said, "because if she is darker she would be even more beautiful." My younger friends, in preliminary discussions, noticed Asian models tend to have white – or at least non-Asian – features, and black models have to have white features in order to fit in the modeling world. And while some participants were critical of these standards, others found it more attractive. Dawn said that an "Asian" model in a particular photo had "lighter eyes than Asians normally have," and that this made her "extra pretty." Whether this can be read as an appreciation for that rare combination of features, or as an appreciation for 'white' features is ambiguous.

In using specifically defined beauty terms to describe the women in the pictures, the focus groups confirmed the idea that feminine beauty comes in "types" – each connected with specific physical characteristics, personality traits. It is unclear whether the responses to this question can stand on their own as relevant information. However,

combining these findings with participants' descriptions of the models' physical traits and their racialization of bodies may provide interesting results.

Sometimes participants chose not to apply a beauty term, or could not apply a beauty term, because they did not see the person as attractive in any way. Interestingly, many participants were still able to match beauty terms to women. This suggests that these 'beauty terms' are often more about character – in terms of sexuality and femininity – than actual attractiveness. Sometimes if they didn't necessarily agree with a designation, they might say that she was "going for sexy" – trying to achieve this type through characterization – but not necessarily succeeding.

Participants described four of the women in the pictures as 'cute.' These women were otherwise described as "friendly," "pretty," Barbie doll-like, as having an "open face," and a "loose way of carrying herself." They were "innocent" and "amateur," like a "schoolgirl" or a "little girl." 'Cute' women were "clumsy," "hip," "fun," "playful," and "happy."

There was a lot of overlap between the pictures that were called 'cute' and those that were called 'pretty.' Participants labeled ten of the women in the pictures as 'pretty,' and out of these, three were also called 'cute,' either by the same group or by another. The 'pretty' type less coincided between the groups, as only four of the ten were labeled 'pretty' by two different groups. This category of attractiveness also had a good deal of variation in terms of what types of women were 'pretty.' Some participants described the women that attracted them most as pretty, while others used it as a broad, generic term for women that they didn't really find attractive or didn't fit in any other category. Other

times one person in the group would describe a woman as 'pretty' and another participant would disagree, saying the woman is "unattractive." Some groups would describe as 'pretty' women similar to those defined as 'cute' – friendly, open, playful, fun. Others though, called women pretty whom they also described as "powerful," "proud," "professional," and "mature," overlapping this category with 'beautiful' and 'sexy.' Others connected 'pretty' with the "vulnerable" "damsel in distress," whose "whole body is exposed," or to a "sensual," "seductive," "fierce," or "determined" look.

Physically, 'pretty' women were marked by their facial qualities. They had "flawless skin," "shiny" faces, "high cheekbones," "small noses," "big lips," "nice hands," and "accentuated eye shadow." They are "tall and skinny," with "long legs" and "thin arms." Their hair was "long" and either "straight" or "natural" for women of color. It seems that the 'pretty' women also tended to have "a look in their eyes" or to "gaze away into the distance," further emphasizing the importance of the face to the label 'pretty.'

Participants only described four women as 'hot,' and of these there was no collusion between groups in assigning the label. One group said a woman was 'hot' simply because of that she was wearing – "her own personal style" was 'hot' to them. Another group described a "fierce, aggressive attractiveness" as 'hot.' A third group named two women as 'hot.' The first, who was "trying to be hot" (but presumably not succeeding) was "super skinny," "might be smiling" and "not really attractive." The second was also "trying too hard," "smirking," and was not very attractive to the

participants. A theme was the lack of a real smile (either a "straight face" or "smirk), which appeared on 'hot' women, but which participants didn't actually find attractive.

Participants called the most women 'sexy,' and agreed the most on this category between groups. In the women that participants described as 'sexy,' there were two general themes. Some groups, when they described a 'sexy' woman, did so with the implication of sexuality, sensuality, and sex appeal. Others had a mature elegance implicit in their definition of 'sexy.' This second type overlapped a lot with descriptors 'beautiful,' while other terms like 'hot' and 'pretty' overlapped very little with 'sexy.'

Some 'sexy' women were associated with sexuality because of their "positioning and clothes," the way that they "show skin" or specifically "a more intimate part of her skin" (in this case the lower back), their "pose" and "attitude" or "the look she's giving and the way her lips are pursed." Many of these were described either by the same group that called them 'sexy' or by a different group as "sleazy," "scandalous," "sloppy, giving [themselves] away." They are seen as somewhat "artificial" (as compared to the preferred natural beauty of some), and some are "intimidating" or "threatening" in their display of hypersexuality.

The other type of 'sexy' woman was described as "elegant," "beautiful," "mature," "refined," "professional," "powerful," "proud," "determined," and "confident." Her pose is "inviting," she may be "slightly intimidating." An overwhelming number of the women who were described as 'sexy' in this way also had a "gaze" that participants noticed. This could either be into the camera or off into the distance, and it could be "serious" or "smiling with her eyes," but either way, these were the pictures that

participants noticed the gaze. This type of 'sexiness' coincided more with the participants' attraction to the model, whereas the other type of sexy often turned them off.

'Sexy' women overall were described as having "perfect skin," "big lips," "perfect legs," an "hourglass shape," "full lashes." "Straight hair" was generally a characteristic mentioned, but "lots of hair" was also defined as sexy at other points. Body types varied, from "super skinny" or "thin," to "curvy" and "voluptuous."

Six of the models were determined to be 'beautiful,' with inter-group agreement on two of these cases. The 'beautiful' designation coincided the most with 'sexy' and 'pretty.' The women that participants called 'beautiful' were the ones that they thought most highly of. They generally conformed to a "natural beauty" which people had previously voiced appreciation for. The category of 'beautiful' that participants' responses form is open to a variety of physical types, including "tall and skinny" and "curvy," "straight, slicked back" hair as well as "lots of hair." Overall, naturalness was privileged, as well as confidence and the mature air associated with the latter, more 'beautiful' type of 'sexiness.' Truly 'beautiful' women don't have to try; they don't have to wear makeup or make their bodies conform; they are natural, confident, and comfortable. As Wendy says, "she's just chillin', like, 'I do this every day.'"

I learned during this part of the discussion that there are in fact many other words that my participants use to describe beauty – and these are often more descriptive of attractiveness than those that I or they suggested as beauty terms. These include words like "gorgeous," "stunning" and "striking." These three were the ones that stood out as being consistent in their use, while others were used once or not clearly defined.

"Gorgeous" was defined by James as "classy; not necessarily physical beauty or sex appeal," as well as "intimidating in their beauty." Linda added to that that "gorgeous" is "sexy and then some." The way that the second group talked about these women as "gorgeous" was apparent that this was the ultimate compliment. They defined four women as "gorgeous," all of whom carried the same qualities that have been described as 'beautiful' and/or 'sexy.'

"Stunning" and "striking" were used by different groups of people to refer to a similar look. Dawn called a photograph "stunning" because of the rare combination of features – specifically green eyes (usually associated with whiteness) with olive skin and dark hair and makeup (all usually associated with non-whiteness). In preliminary discussions with friends and family, people used the word "striking" to refer similarly to a look that is beautiful but that one doesn't see every day. My teenage friends expressed frustration with all the models having the same look, but found relief from this in "striking" faces that were different because of one or two features that did not conform to the Eurocentric norm.

In asking participants about popular notions of racial difference, I learned which physical features, as well as clothing styles and props, are associated with each racialized group, and how individual bodies are racialized under the gaze of others on a daily basis. In addition to confirming previous assumptions about public perceptions of race, they also give us an insight into how society views and identifies mixed race or multiracial bodies. The answers to these questions about race can be further combined with the

categories of 'beauty terms' to discern racialization of 'types' of beauty, femininity and sexuality.

Participants most readily identified "white" models by the markers of blond hair, blue or green eyes, and a light skin tone, described as "pale" or "white." When prompted, they listed more features as tellingly white, such as facial and bone structures and body types. Features are small. Bodies are thin and tall. Chin and face structure are undefined. Cheeks are round. There are no high or defined cheekbones. Noses are "pointy," "narrow" or "prominent". Lips are thin. Necks are long and lithe. Butts are small and hips narrow. Hair could be wavy or straight, and a certain color brown, especially one with some blond in it or that "looks like it would get blond in the sun." Most groups also named freckles as a white feature.

"Black" models were also defined by skin tone – but the particular color participants rarely described, preferring to just say "skin tone." Kendra, who identifies as African American, recognized how media associations of "dark skin" with Africans had influenced her own perception of bodies. Hair texture associated with black women varied, including very curly, "frizzy" or "nappy" hair that is thick or "dense" as well as sleek, shiny hair that is slicked back[10]. African American participants pointed out that hair that was not as tightly curled, and especially in an "untamed" style, implied that a person was not fully black. Black and Latina participants took notice of the difference between naturally straight hair (a white feature) and straightened hair (associated with black bodies). Hair color was always dark though. Blackness is also associated with full

[10] Only the Asian American and European American participants mentioned shiny, slicked back hair as a feature associated with African Americans.

lips, bigger eyes, a wide nose, and high cheekbones. There are also broad shoulders and a curvy body.

Participants described "Asian" features with a general conviction, focusing mainly on the stereotypical "almond eye" shape and epicanthic fold. Mike also mentioned that the distinctive Asian characteristics were eyes and hair – although hair never came up in discussion as a distinguishing feature. As far as most participants were concerned, there was one clearly Asian woman in the slide show. Asian American participants found Asian features in many more of the models however, and a few people applied Asianness to one other model because of her eye shape. According to my participants, Asians are petite, and have small faces and features. They generally have pale skin, although a mixed-Asian person might not. There is a "small," "flat" nose, either a "thinner face" or a "round face," "think lips," and a "smaller mouth." One participant dscribed "porcelain skin" and a delicacy to the models' appearance. Eyes are "almond shaped" and less deep in their sockets, eyebrows are thin. My Asian American participants told me about the "modern look of Asian people,"[11] which involves lots of makeup and crazy hair colors. The participants said that this was partially trying to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, but also was simply an effort to be unique or "exotic-looking."

Native American, as a type or category, did not exist or register. Aside from the one Native participant, no one mentioned features associated with Nativeness or perceived Native American heritage in any of the models. He did provide some features

[11] Some Asian Americans also do this

associated with Native bodies, such as high or defined cheekbones and a strong chin/jawline. He also defined some traits as belonging to specific nations. Navaho people, for example, have full cheeks, both "upper and lower," while Inuit people have the same epicanthic fold as is associated with Asians.

The categories that hold Latina, Middle Eastern and bi- /multiracial bodies are more ambiguous. They often overlapped in people's perceptions, and which one a group chose varied based on their personal contexts[12]. These categories were usually characterized by physical contradictions – a combination of differently racialized features that cause ambiguity. This may be seen in a "very big eyes and very small nose," or in "light skin" and "textured hair." Skin color is described as "tan" or "darker" than other white people, or as "light" and "fair" but not like a white person. Placement in one of these categories was often based more on distinguishing the body from either whiteness or blackness. Often participants listed reasons why the model could not be white (or fully white) – such as defined jaw and cheekbones, curvy bodies, full lips, big eyes, or kinky hair. This emphasis on non-whiteness was framed by the initial assumption (probably because of skin tone) that the model was white. Likewise, with models that are very clearly not white because of their skin tone, participants felt compelled to prove their non-blackness, and thereby prove their mixedness or Latinidad. The discourse around these categories therefore largely focused around a white/Other binary. "Stronger" facial features, a "big butt" and "thick" and "high arching" eyebrows, then, along with other

[12] Asian American respondents only mentioned "Hispanic" as a possibility once, while Latinas brought it up frequently.

features already listed, come to represent all non-whiteness, rather than any one ethnic heritage.

Specific to bodies perceived as "Latina" "Hispanic" and "Mexican," participants listed a "curvy" figure, "sunkissed" skin tone, "full lips," brown or "sunbleached" hair, and some combination of the "pointy" white nose and the "wide" black/Asian nose. Those read as "Middle Eastern" were also characterized by ambiguity and many of the same features as Latinas. One thing that stood out was the shape of the nose, which is "a little bigger on the bottom part." There was also the high, defined cheekbones, the "light" skin tone, dark eyes and straight, black or brown hair (although this could be curly as well).

Bi- or multiracial black people were differentiated from 'monoracial' black people by their hair texture, skin tone, and European face structure. Mixed people were said to have "looser" curls or hair that is more "wavy" and less "curly" or "nappy." Yet at the same time it is thick, dark and curly. This distinction was also often made based on personal context. In preliminary conversations with friends and family, I found that two friends who both identified as biracial (black/white) disagreed on the race of one model – Woman 0b claiming she was "just black" and Woman 0c saying she was "mixed" – because the model's skin tone was similar to Woman 0b's father, who was "just black," but also to Woman 0c's own skin tone, who was "mixed."

Participants also called some women "mixed" without implying that they were black. Some participants talked similarly about seeing both Asian and European features in a woman's picture, and therefore thinking she is mixed. One participant told me that a

model must be mixed because he saw "a little bit of everything in her" – meaning that he could locate heritage from all over the globe in her face.

On the topic of skin tone, participants made some interesting distinctions. They differentiated between "light-skinned in a mixed way" and "in a black way" or "olive" skin and "African American black skin." Given the history of race mixing and presence of European heritage in most Black American lineages, this distinction is probably not quantifiable. However, it is important to note that skin tone lies in people's racial paradigms as a concrete, perceptible difference between a 'mixed' black American and a 'monoracial' black American. The last distinction that people make in skin tone is that between a fake tan and a real tan, or a natural skin tone. Multiple groups debated the reality of the colors in the pictures they saw, trying to decide what color the woman's skin was in and out of shadows, whether the picture had been lightened or darkened, and whether the "sunkissed" color was a "can tan" or "real." James pointed out that magazines and advertisers generally try to lighten darker-skinned people and darken "pale" skinned people. They are looking for a happy medium in terms of skin tone.

This awareness of the alteration of bodily features in the pictures extended to other areas as well, specifically that of hair. All of the groups at some point raised the point that a model's hair was probably not real – whether they were saying it was a "piece" or that her curls were formed by an iron rather than nature. A few times the texture of a models' hair seemed not to match the rest of their racial designation. This incongruity was usually justified by saying that the hair was probably fake or constructed. As with one picture which participants believed to be white because of her pale skin and

blue eyes, but who had "very big lips," one participant stated, "you can tell that she's had work done on her lips," assuring us that big lips could only belong to white women if they are purchased.

Participants also distinguished heavily between countries, regions and parts of the diaspora when naming race. They insisted on the difference between "white" and "European" as well as between Southern European such as "Spanish" and "Italian" and Eastern European. They differentiated between a particular model being black American, "African," or "Afro-Hispanic," asserting differences in these physical appearances. Joe talked about different Native American nations (while others presumably did not have the knowledge to speak to that). And the Asian American participants noted the differences between body types across the continent of Asia.

Participants noticed that the clothes, props and setting of the photograph often influenced their readings of the women. Linda was adamant that a certain model posed in an open white button-down shirt in a tropical setting looked Italian in the picture, but that without these clothes, the model would probably look Arabic or Jewish. Woman 0b was hesitant, but suggested that a pale blue color worn by two of the models identified as white, was "a white color" – or a color that white women wear. Likewise, the other scene shot at the seaside probably influenced participants' judgment on the woman's race because of the setting. However, it is hard to tell what other costumes, props and scenes influenced participants' perceptions, and in what ways.

Often when I asked participants what went into their perception of the models' race, they replied along the lines of "it's just a feeling" or "she looks like someone I

know who is Cuban." I saw this in my preliminary discussions with friends and family who identified a woman as black or biracial based on their own families. These answers did not help me figure out the exact rules by which bodies are racialized, but they are true to many people's experiences, and they are a part of the process of racialization of individuals.

Scholars such as Lois Banner and Martha Banta imply that feminine 'types' correspond with racial 'types,' matching a chaste, moral beauty with whiteness, and a base hypersexuality with blackness. In my focus groups, the most noticeable correlation between models' races and their portrayed characters came up in the second set of pictures, which all depicted a woman's entire body, in a reclined (sitting or laying) position. Despite being compositionally similar, the differences between these photos were striking. The first of the women was identified by all groups as black (and by some as African rather than black American); the second everyone saw as white; and the third was ambiguous – either mixed, Latina or Middle Eastern. Participants agreed that all of these women were in sexual positions, but each was portrayed in a very different way. James pointed out that

> "For me these three images all say something about conceptions of race and beauty because the white girl is just this skinny little thing who's just almost like built like a little boy. Like there's just nothin' to her. And the real dark girl is toned and fit and powerful. And the mixed race girl is just curvy."

And sure enough, other participants in his group and in the other three all described the white woman as a "damsel in distress," "helpless," and "vulnerable," while the black woman was "powerful," "confident," "determined," and "classy." Characterizations of the third woman varied, as some didn't appreciate her sexualized position and exposed body, but others found her confident and "beautiful." My high school-age friends were also quick to notice this dichotomy between a type of "frail beauty" usually exemplified in white-looking models and a "strong beauty" found more in black-looking models.

Another interesting juxtaposition that one group made was between two women who pose together in a black and white picture. The two women are conventionally attractive in a lot of the same ways, and look very similar, despite being racialized differently[13]. This group said that the "black" and/or "mixed" woman, who had a "pronounced nose" and "high cheekbones," was "sexy," while the "white" woman, who had a "pointy nose" and "round cheeks" was a "girl next door" type of figure. While no other groups posed the women in this way, it is still an interesting juxtaposition of character.

Outside of these sharp distinctions, the racialization of beauty types or the typing of racialized bodies varied. Women who were seen as ambiguous – ranging from mixed (of all kinds) to Mediterranean to Middle Eastern to Latina – were typed either as "sexy" – having sex appeal – or as "gorgeous," "beautiful," and confident. Those women identified as black and mixed[14] were more frequently labeled as having a "powerful,"

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[13] Every group agreed that one woman was white and the other was either black or mixed.
[14] When participants guessed a woman was black, it was consistently also suggested that she might be mixed or biracial.

"confident" beauty. Black/mixed-looking women were also described as "pretty," "cute," and occasionally "sexy." Characterizations of the models who participants identified as white varied the most. Some of them were called "sexy" – in the sense of having sex appeal. Participants called these models' characters "sleazy," "fierce," "aggressive," and "threatening." Some labeled the white-looking women "hot" or "pretty" in generic ways, and others said they were simply "unattractive." One model was described by various groups as "cute" and "typical," like a "Barbie" or an "American Girl doll." Another white-looking model was labeled as "beautiful," "natural," "simple" and "gorgeous," and a model who may have been European or "Asian mixed" was equally "natural," "classy" and "elegant." In general there were not enough visibly Asian or Native American women in the photographs for participants to assign a type to bodies racialized in those ways. Within categories of type such as 'pretty,' 'sexy' and 'beautiful,' there was not enough correlation with racial categories to draw any conclusions.

5: Debunking the Myth

Conclusions from Focus Groups

The conversations from the focus groups provide numerous views on how mixedness is defined and mixed race bodies identified in the popular imagination. Participants spoke largely of mixed black and white heritage or physical features associated with this combination. Each individual also used their personal/social context to situate mixed identity, with Asian Americans talking about black/Asian or white/Asian mixtures, Native American respondent thinking primarily of black/white or Native/other, and Latin@ participants bringing up Latin@/white and Latin@/Asian.

Physically, perceived mixed race bodies are identified by their ambiguity and the juxtaposition of racialized features. Their bodies are often fragmented into parts, which are then connected to race. A woman is made up of her pointy 'white' nose, big 'latina' curves, high 'Native' cheekbones, almond 'Asian' eyes, and curly 'black' hair. These composite parts amalgamate to form an idealized combination. There is "a little bit of everything in her," and in theory, or according to the mixed beauty myth, it is the most desirable part of each race.

When describing perceived mixed women's looks, the participants tended towards a white/other binary or a black/other binary. Certain participants perceived the black women in the images as mixed because of their European features, but at times they brought up the possibility of black/Latina, black/Asian or black/Native heritage resulting in the same features. The main distinguishing characteristics of visibly mixed bodies

were "light" or "tanned" skin tone, and dark, curly hair – specifically looser curls than those associated with 'fully' black people. There was also the juxtaposition of light eyes with an otherwise non-white appearance or big eyes and a small nose. Participants overall privileged a black/white or white/other version of mixedness, but were not exclusive with this definition. The main thing they used to identify a mixed race body was the "mix of features" – be it white features and Asian features or black features and Latina features.

The responses of the focus groups also provide insights into how we define beauty and how does the mixed race body fit into these paradigms. Based on participants' responses to the pictures shown, the mainstream commercial culture currently embraces an ideal woman that is tall and skinny, with long, thick hair. She has smooth, flawless skin and a symmetrical face, high, defined cheekbones, small straight, narrow nose, big eyes, full lips, long eyelashes, and long, shaped, thick eyebrows. She positions herself in a way to attract or arouse men, is generally scantily clad, and has a gaze, be it seductive or wistful. The ideal woman can have a range of personalities – whether she is friendly and playful, or serious, elegant and determined, or vulnerable and weak. Each of these acceptably attractive personalities correspond to a different 'type' of beauty, femininity or sexuality.

These dominant ideas of what is beautiful are in some ways surprising and in some ways not. The majority of previous scholarship on race and beauty holds that 'beauty' is an exclusive category open only to white women or to those women of color that approximate a European aesthetic and have European features. However, findings from these focus groups suggest that our current beauty ideals embrace many features

that are associated with non-whiteness in addition to the traditional white-associated features. As we learn from the discussion of racial perception and racial markers, the "big," thick hair that is to often highlighted in beauty magazines correlates with black or Latina identity. High, defined cheekbones are associated with non-whiteness in general, and especially with Native American ancestry. The big eyes, full lips and long, thick eyebrows emphasized in makeup ads and facial close-ups have always been linked to black, Latina and Middle Eastern bodies. Furthermore, the inclusion of a "thick" or "curvy" body in the mainstream location of a beauty magazine suggests that the conventional standards are opening to include black and Latina bodies that do not conform to the "tall and skinny" body norm.

However, when they are included, "black," "Latina" or "Asian" features are always combined with traditional "white" features like tall, skinny bodies, straight hair, and small, straight noses. In preliminary discussions to the research, three young acquaintances suggested that a woman could be really beautiful and "stunning" if her features deviated from the norm in some way. But, they agreed, any given model could only have a maximum of two 'deviant' (or non-standard) features. Any more than this would be considered un-beautiful. This paradigm makes sense in the context that people of color must conform to Euro/American looks, as one of their deviant features is their skin tone. They are allowed one more – perhaps curly hair or a thick body – but if they don't otherwise fit the standard, they will be excluded from beauty. This paradigm of "stunning" beauty also privileges visibly mixed race bodies, as these are most likely to

combine the right features, where typical white bodies may be too "plain"[15] or will not stand out from all the same-looking faces. It is important to note though, that the mixed race bodies that are celebrated here are most likely those that approximate whiteness or have a majority of 'white' features. Mixed race bodies that combine black and Asian features will not be "stunningly" beautiful because they will have too many non-normative features.

In the discussion of participants' personal beauty standards, there was a general rejection of the "unrealistically skinny" ideal. Other features like big lips, big eyes and high cheekbones were attractive, they said, and nearly all agreed that a natural look was better, that some flaws were lacking in the models' appearance, and that more variety in the ideal would be better. Many respondents declined to objectify the women based on one picture, or preferred to base their judgment on discernable character traits or the perceived personality of the woman. In this same vein, Mike hypothesized that people will be attracted to whatever is "different," unfamiliar, or "exotic." Just like the participants prefer variety in the aesthetics, he claims that people want "something you don't see every day," and that this, in being different, will be attractive. This is holds true in the fact that European American participants voiced the strongest appreciation for non-white features like big lips, big eyes, high cheekbones, big hair, and those bodies that they perceived as non-white in general. The preference for "some flaws" also fits into the "stunning" beauty paradigm, if we may interpret "flaws" to mean deviant or non-conforming features.

[15] "Plain" was used to describe one model who was also identified as white.

The desire for natural beauty indirectly supports the assumption that mixed race bodies will be more attractive than others. More bodies that were perceived as mixed or ambiguous were labeled as beautiful or talked about as having that natural beauty than of any other racial category. I explain this through the desire for uncommon juxtapositions of (racialized) features. While a 'monoracial' person could manipulate their appearance by using thick, curly hair extensions, blue or green color contacts, or makeup tricks that give the eyes an almond shape and highlight the cheekbones, these rare combinations are (supposedly) found naturally in visibly mixed race bodies. When people prefer a natural look that doesn't use makeup or enhancements to achieve beauty, but also find these "rare" combinations of features attractive, visibly mixed bodies become more beautiful than the rest, because they are supposed to be the only ones that can achieve both of these things. This paradigm of course leaves out the fact that the majority of African American, Latina, and Native people do have racially mixed heritage but are not identified by society, or by the mixed beauty myth, as Multiracial.

Multiple times participants mentioned a desire for a "happy medium" or a body that is right in the middle in terms of size, skin tone, or what have you. This plays right into the perceptions of mixed race bodies, which have been described as having a medium skin tone and a "mix of features."

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of a woman's personality or character in her attractiveness. This was the area that varied the most in terms of personal preference and inclusion in the mainstream standard. We learn from this that many personality types can be considered attractive. However, based on participants' grouping

of photographs according to type (cute, pretty, hot, sexy, beautiful), each of these performs a different type of femininity. These types are often subconsciously linked to race, class and sexuality.

The set of three photos that linked "strong beauty" with blackness, "frail beauty" with whiteness, and a "confident, sexy" beauty with the ambiguously raced body support the idea that bodies are assigned a 'type' of beauty or femininity based on how they are racialized. But beyond these three photos we cannot draw much of a conclusion. Because the clear-cut division applies only to this one set of pictures, we cannot make any broad assumptions about representations and perceptions of racialized types. However, these photos and the descriptions given by focus group participants do hint that the old forms of racialized types described by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Maxine Leeds Craig still exist, although they may no longer be as prevalent.

There were also many class-based undertones to participants' responses and analyses of beauty. Women who were given the most admiring labels, "beautiful," "sexy" or "gorgeous," were described as "classy," "elegant," and "refined." On the other end of the spectrum, when participants did not approve of a model's 'look' or thought the character portrayed was overly sexual, they called her "sleazy," "sloppy," or "trashy." These women were seen as "giving yourself away," and Mariela emphasized that "confidence is attractive," but "confidence in sexual prowess is not." This dichotomy between 'high class' and 'hypersexual' reflects the assignment of sexuality and femininity based on socio-economic status as described by Lois Banner, and actually seems more prevalent than the typing of race.

Of course the conclusions that can be made from these few focus groups are limited. I was not able to show any other forms of media besides the magazine features and advertisements, so there is no analysis of how bodies in motion are read differently from pictures or how bodies are portrayed in different contexts. It is possible that these same conclusions would not be reached if the material had been chosen from different magazines, or different media entirely.

If in fact, bodies are assigned different types of beauty based on their perceived race and features, the idea that mixed people are more attractive is supported in multiple ways. First, participants expressed a strong preference for the "gorgeous," "confident" beauty of the visibly mixed race models. This was the type of femininity that they respected the most and which they were most attracted to. Second, apart from this view of multiraciality as a separate racialized category, my concept of amalgamative beauty, or "the best of both worlds" applies not only to a combination of features, but also to a combination of the personality types represented by those features. Visions of the mixed race body incorporate both the exotic sensuality associated with big hair and a curvy figure, and the refined morality associated with light skin and small facial features.

Mixed Race Beauty Myth

In summary, there are many potential factors to which we can attribute the perceived beauty of mixed race women. The old idea of physical 'types,' as documented by scholars such as Lois Banner, Martha Banta, and Patricia Hill Collins, come into play when discussing the many ways that a woman can be considered attractive. The current

"common sense" understanding of race and phenotype tells us which features belong to which race. A similar and parallel understanding of beauty and looks tells us which features correlate with which personality types, femininities and sexualities. The combination of these paradigms gives each body a racialized and classed social position, along with moral and sexual qualities according to its physical features. The difference between an attractive woman being labeled as "beautiful" or "sexy," "cute" or "hot" lies in the viewer's perception of her physical/moral 'type.'

As I observed in focus groups and in personal correspondence with friends, mixed-race women's bodies are often *fragmented* into racialized body parts. People talk about attractive mixed women in parts – both, as feminist scholars have suggested, in terms of body parts (women are broken down into their legs, bust, hips), and in terms of heritage. Describing a multiracial woman comes down to listing her ancestry. The features most readily associated with each 'part' are then ascribed to the woman's body.

One of the most commonly cited reasons for mixed people being "the most beautiful" is the idea that mixed-race bodies combine "the best of both worlds." I term this *amalgamative beauty*, after 19th century theories of physical anthropologists that predicted the tragedies of amalgamation – arms too long for the body or a scalp too loose for its skull. Now we see these theories do not hold, but we have taken up a vision of a more perfect union of features.

In racialized systems of beauty and gender, mixed race women represent a meeting (or a mixing) of two polar ideals. In terms of both physical and moral types, the apparent 'amalgamation' of features is what makes the "mixed race" woman attractive:

her body incorporates the best features and characteristics of both races – e.g. the exotic sensuality associated with dark (or tanned) skin and a but butt, and the refined morality associated with light skin, long hair, and small facial features.

Sometimes this amalgamation is seen as a smooth blending, as a medium skin tone or loosely curled hair, but other times there is a sharp juxtaposition of features within one face or body. I call this *amalgamative irony*. Many people have claimed great appeal in the combination of two contrasting and rarely combined features – such as light-colored eyes and dark skin or hair. Even in the case of monoracially white people, blue eyes with black hair is considered striking and beautiful. People of mixed racial background have greater genetic potential to take this a step further. These kinds of unusual combinations are perceived as beautiful precisely because they are so abnormal. The contrast is unexpected, "striking," different from all the "same" faces we see routinely, and therefore beautiful. This is also known as the "You look so interesting" comment.

The simplest way that we can explain the attraction to mixed race women from all sides of the color line is the exotification of these women by each of the racialized groups to which they belong. For example, a woman who has both Asian and European heritage is different and exotic to both Asian/Americans and Euro/Americans. But also to both groups, she is not *too different* – if her body were completely unfamiliar it would no longer be attractive. It is a combination of the familiar and the exotic that makes the multiracial woman so beautiful. As King-O'Riain (2006) notes in the context of Japanese American beauty pageants, "mixed people are seen as more beautiful since they are more

'exotic' than either monoracial whites or monoracial Japanese Americans" (167). Molina-Guzman (2010) also avers that "Latina, Asian, and multiracial women often perform a safe yet exotic sexualized femininity because of their racial and ethnic ambiguity" (7). These views were supported by focus group findings. A few participants said that they thought people found mixed people more attractive because of their "unique" looks. As Mike astutely noted in the focus group, "people want exotic things that you don't see every day." To the extent that people desire to "eat the other," they are also looking for something safe – a body from which burdensome histories and identities can be detached at the end of the day.

Not only are mixed race people "exotic," but they are also useful in advertising, film and other areas of commercial culture. Because "you can see the whole world in her face," (Beech 2001) the visibly mixed-race woman can be a figure that represents the multitudes, as Kimberley McClain DaCosta describes Tiger Woods' media persona (DaCosta 2006). In addition to being "unique," the mixed race face is also one "that everyone can identify with and accept" (Beech 2001).

Body work

Other scholars have suggested that mixed people pay greater attention to their looks and therefore spend more time and effort on "body work" such as beautification processes. This heightened self-consciousness is caused by the constant focus by others on the mixed race body. Because of the ambiguity of (readably) mixed people's bodies, others tend to examine our features much more than what is normal for interpersonal

interaction. Many mixed race women internalize this focus on their bodies and respond by putting in more body work.

Rebecca Chiyoko King, in the introduction to her book *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants*, suggests that her own identity as mixed race and her ambiguous phenotype have caused her to focus more on her physical appearance – in terms of both its racial aesthetic and its beauty. Mixed race studies scholar Carla K. Bradshaw also mentions that racial ambiguity causes a heightened emphasis on physicality and corporeality. "This increased attention to physical appearance is expressed in such labels as *exotic, beautiful,* or *fascinating*" (77). Furthermore, Joan Jacobs Brumberg (cited in Craig 2006) argued that increased marketing to young women in the 20th century heightened women's self-consciousness about their bodies. Now, as more and more mixed race people are visible in Hollywood and advertising, mixed race women have become more aware about their bodies as objects of attraction, as well as being disciplined (a la Foucault) to a certain aesthetic norm.

Similarly, Molina-Guzman (2010) argues that Latinas physical and ethnoracial ambiguity and flexibility allow them to be defined by different 'types' at different times, depending on the performance of body work. I believe the same applies to mixed-race women, who are similarly situated ambiguously between the binary of white respectability and black hypersexuality. While I have done no research to back this hypothesis up, it is likely a factor that contributes to the view that more mixed people are attractive.

"Hybrid Vigor"

Since 19th Century efforts to create a racial typology, scientists have looked at mixed race people as a cross between species. Then, mixed race bodies were 'proved' to be degenerate, unfertile (as a mule), genetic mistakes. Now a new theory –taken from the study of plant species—says that "hybrid" bodies are more able, more resilient, stronger, smarter, and better in every way. "Hybrid vigor" (or "heterosis" as it was initially named by Darwin in 1876) is the idea that "cross-bred offspring have greater genetic fitness than pure-bred offspring" (Lewis 2010).

An article in *Perception*, a scholarly journal that treats issues of perception – mainly from a psychological standpoint – claims that humans perceive "people of mixed race" to be more attractive because we are genetically programed to select the mates with greater "genetic fitness." Based on a British study of black, white and mixed-race faces, the author seems to prove that mixed-race faces are perceived as more attractive, and attributes this preference to hybrid vigor in mixed race bodies. Lewis says, "The results appear to confirm that people whose genetic backgrounds are more diverse are, on average, perceived as more attractive than those whose backgrounds are less diverse." (Science Daily 2010)

Another article in *Psychology Today* states, "Eurasians may possess genetic advantages that lead to greater health and, as a result, enhanced attractiveness" (Adams 2006). The author backs up these claims with evidence from a study, which showed both Caucasian and Japanese volunteers to prefer Eurasian faces. This preference, according to evolutionary psychologists, is based on both mixed-race faces *looking* healthier, and

mixed-race people *being* healthier, or more evolutionarily "fit." Says Randy Thornhill of the University of New Mexico, "If you hybridize two genetically diverse populations—another way of saying you cross races—then you create more genetic diversity in the offspring." And in 2004 biologist Craig Roberts at the University of Newcastle found a direct correlation between physical health – specifically the ability to resist infection – and perceived physical attractiveness, which he believes "helps humans pick healthy mates." (Adams 2006)

While these studies may have scientific validity to the extent that they consider genetically isolated populations with no previous admixture, this assumption privileges a false biological basis for race. The heterosis theory does not hold in the context of U.S. racialized populations, which have large amounts of mixed ancestry within each "monoracial" group. This does not explain, for example, why mixed race people with more 'European' features are favored over those with equal amounts of 'black' and 'white' features. Randa Racha Penrice, writing for black news community site The Grio, critiques contemporary commercial culture's changing trend to embrace black and latina beauty. She notes that while "many of the attributes long identified with black women are now in demand by the mainstream," these features are only accepted on otherwise white-looking, traditionally beautiful bodies. It is as my young friends pointed out: a small amount of deviation from the norm is acceptable, or even beautiful; but more than two deviant features becomes too much.

If the preferred mixed-race beauty is that which favors whiteness (as we have seen in cultural texts), and the races are far from "pure," the heterosis theory falls apart.

But the fact that scholars have gone to such great lengths to prove the mixed race beauty myth is not insignificant. As with all racial fantasies, if society wants to believe something enough, they will build proof up to protect it from all sides. In the next section I will discuss why our society might be so bent on proving the beauty of mixed race people in this specific historical and social context.

The Mixed Race Messiah: Racial Aspirations and Utopian Fantasies

Not only is Mixed Race beautiful, but, as *Allure* tells us, it is also the "Face of the Future." As sources from fashion magazines to the *New York Times* have celebrated mixed race bodies as fascinatingly beautiful, exotic and novel, the people who identify as Mixed Race are touted as a Second Coming. They are the new generation that will save America; "a step towards transcending race" (Saulny 2011). Many look forward to "a place where America is free of bigotry, prejudice and programs like affirmative action" (Saulny 2011). The logic goes: one day everyone will be mixed, there will be no more race, and no more racism. Multiracial people (particularly those with white American heritage) are the floating signifiers that mark a raceless future, and that let white America forget its racist past.

These national fantasies about post-raciality play out in many areas from politics (see the election of Barack Obama, and the public outcry over his choice to identify as black on the census) to entertainment, as multiracial stars and celebrities step into the limelight and cross over into pop stardom. They are supported by Mixed Race subjects who claim fluidity and racial transcendence; those that are successful despite their color,

supposedly disproving the relevance of affirmative action or need for reparations; those that reject race as a defining category; those for whom identity is ethnic food, music and cultural dance, not the subjection of racialized bodies. Even in recent film trends, multiracial and racially ambiguous actors are being cast as superheroes with special powers that often exist solely to save us. It's true, everyone seems to be saying, Mixed people are going to save the world (simply by existing).

Essentially, American society wants to like Mixed people. They make us feel good about civil rights and inclusion, and seem to promise a brighter future. This utopian fantasy of non-racist (mixed race) "faces of the future" is projected onto mixed race bodies in the form of the mixed race beauty myth.

Cultural studies scholars such as Martha Banta, Patricia Hill Collins and Sarah Banet-Weiser have written that the typical American Beauty represents national identity and citizenship. As historically the "cult of true womanhood" excluded non-white women from definitions of beauty, non-white subjects in general have been excluded from personhood and citizenship. These ideas are further tied up with morality, which represented both the rights of full citizens and the qualities required to gain citizenship. For women, because they could not participate fully in society except through their marriages, morality came in the form of beauty. Beautiful women were moral, chaste, pure, and above all white. All others were immoral, hypersexual, and unattractive; and therefore excluded from the nation.

Now, however, as America's national imaginary opens to embrace mixed race subjects, our definition of beauty has broadened. American beauty, like the nation, is now

multicultural, "colorful": a "blend of ethnicities" (Mead 2009) – like the old melting pot metaphor, but spicier. These changing "beauty" ideals are merely symptomatic of larger societal anxieties and tensions. But why now? and why mixed race?

The mixed race population in the US is growing – and so is the non-white population. It is projected that, based on immigration and intermarriage trends, by 2040 white Americans will no longer comprise the majority of the population. It follows that this newly multicultural America should need a new representative type, and should celebrate a more inclusive kind of beauty. But what also follows is white racial anxiety over a potential loss of power. When whites are no longer a clear majority, how will white supremacy be maintained? We see the results of these racial anxieties in disproportionately high rates of incarceration of men of color, and in the tightening of immigration policy, particularly laws that legalize racial profiling. We see it in the cutting of programs like affirmative action and public welfare, and the creation of scholarship programs specifically for white men. We see it in popular discourse around "reverse racism," and the banning of ethnic studies programs in Arizona. It is clear that not everyone is celebrating multiculturalism, as neoconservative actions buckle down and reinforce the bastion of white supremacy.

But this is not the first time this has happened. At many points throughout history, racial anxieties have arisen from potential challenges to white racial dominance. Early colonists in America handled mixed race subjects differently, often depending on their own demographics and modes of power. Anxiety about racial mobility in 18th Century Spanish colonies, for example, was responded to with angry resistance to miscegenation.

People became obsessed with classifying each other racially, often according to indistinguishable racialized traits and hues. Russian settlers in the Pacific Northwest, on the other hand, reacted differently to race mixing. Because of their unique situation with no Russian women and a shortage of personnel, they encouraged interracial relationships, with the hope that the offspring would join the Russian colonial force. Creoles were elevated "to that degree of civilization which will make them useful not only to themselves, but to the state." (Ingersoll 2005, 22) This type of ideology may be similar to what is happening in the US today.

Suzanne Bost highlights a similar parallel between mixed race representation in the current era and in the late 19th century. Here she leads us to the realization that not much has changed since then. Now, as in the 1860's, we are experiencing shifts in racial definition. At both points, the nation – or its white, native-born citizens – was overwhelmed with growing populations of immigrants and people of color. The racial anxiety of the previous era manifested itself in the form of eugenic pseudo science and the Johnson Reed Act of 1924. In both time periods, anxieties over this change have surrounded us with "a rhetoric of confusion, tragedy, groundedness, and futurism" (185). Both times, along with a deep fear of losing racial dominance, came a fascination with mixed race identity. "And just as nineteenth-century writings on mixture were split between racist fear and enthusiasm for a new amalgamated America, the contemporary fascination with mulattoes, mestizos, ad Creoles reflects both optimism and anxiety." (191) To get at the cross-temporal pervasiveness of these themes, Bost examines contemporary discourses around amalgamation and those from a century ago.

A 1864 essay by David Goodman Croly stated, "the miscegenetic or mixed races are much superior, mentally, physically, and morally, to those pure or unmixed." (Bost 2003, 194) He believed that the brown people of the world existed to better the white race, who are "physically weak though intellectually superior." (Bost 2003, 194) Croly also stated that the ideal beauty was a mixed woman:

> ""rounded cheeks" with "a tint of the sun," "pouting" lips, hair that "descend[s] in crinkling waves. . . . the most beautiful girl in form, feature, and every attribute of feminine loveliness . . . was a mulatto. . . . This was a ripe and complete woman, possessing the best elements of two sources of parentage. Her complexion was warm and dark, and golden with the heat of tropical suns" (36)." (Bost 2003, 195)

As we can see from descriptions of ideal beauty in focus groups and popular cultural products, these opinions have come back to haunt us in a new era of racial anxiety.

Martha Banta similarly illuminates discourse from a century ago, at which point essayists and thinkers predicted that America would find her beauty in a "new racial mix" – an amalgamation of the great European nations. In a U.S. reflection of José Vasconcelos's *Raza Cosmica*, they theorized that as immigrants entered the States in larger numbers, "Intermixtures will follow and racial lines will gradually fade" (Banta 1987, 57). American essayist Charles Chesnutt wrote in 1900 on "The Future American," a new racial type that combines the best parts of "the European races" with Indian and Black "blood" as well (Chesnutt 1996). He held that heterogeneity, rather than racial purity, would be the secret to the perfect "American ethnic type." This type, he claimed, would be mainly white blood, but would have "absorbed and assimilated the blood of the

other two races" (19). While he does admit that this fusion of races would take a long time because of the state of race relations, he maintains that it would happen once the intense racial prejudice of this country subsided. And some may think that that time is now.

Scholars from Rainier Spencer to Michele Elam to Danzy Senna have critiqued the post-racial logic of multiracial pride, exposing its tendency to reproduce the very racial categories that multiraciality is said to subvert. By promoting the idea that "Mixed Race" or "Multiracial" is a novel identity and emphasizing its difference from "monoracials" –be they Black, Latino, Asian or white– whose ancestries are often just as diverse, we are privileging ideologies of race as totalizing and biologically founded. We ignore race mixing that happened in the past and take the 'races' as inherently different, separate and 'pure.' Furthermore, much discourse around mixed race identity emphasizes its essential difference from other monoracial groups, as in the film "Biracial…not black, damn it," hair products like *Mixed Chicks* which market specifically to multiracial people of any and all ethnicities, or the myriad of social groups, student clubs, and dating sites targeted towards mixed race people. This discourse and racial specificity casts "Mixed Race" as its own racialized group, and locates it ambiguously between black and white, along with Asian and Latino.

And like Asian and Latino groups, neoliberalism has set Mixed Race subjects – and particularly those with a white parent – in the contention for "honorary white" and "model minority" statuses. Representative Multiraciality is nearly always portrayed through fluidity, mobility and racial transcendence. We can supposedly "pass" for

anything, inhabit multiple social spaces at once, and are not constrained by a totalizing racial identity. The New Multiracial Subject represents the epitome of neoliberal individualism and multiculturalism. The Mixed Race category very well may be on its way to being "melted down" into the great American melting pot. Or as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests, Mixed Race may be moving towards an honorary white status. With the "browning" of America, he avers, our racial hierarchies will be re-stratified to align more with the racial system of Latin America. Whiteness will expand to maintain supremacy, including or excluding multiracial populations based on color and the specifics of their ancestry. In the meantime, blackness will remain at the bottom of a more disjointed hierarchy.

The recent inclusion and celebration of Mixed Race identities may seem to allow for greater fluidity overall, a societal transcendence of race, or at least prove the success of civil rights and equality. However, when we examine the terms under which mixed race people have been welcomed into the charmed circle of normative citizenship, we see that this is not the case. This apparent inclusion is at the sake of other (less white) people of color, who are left on the bad side of a widening racial gap. Mixed Race people, in order to be included, must conform to most standards of whiteness, as well as abandoning their racial histories for the ever-mobile individualistic identity of the racially transcendent. The addition of Mixed Race people as nearly-white further bolsters white supremacy, not only by reifying the dominance of whiteness and forcing it upon Mixed Race bodies, but also by adding strength in numbers, in case there is a revolution (or to

make sure that there isn't one). If Mixed people can be counted as white, Whites will no longer have to worry about becoming a racial minority in 2040.

These discourses of Mixed Race identity and neoliberal, multicultural inclusion are very present in the beauty industry. Because the definition of feminine beauty is an ascription of worth on female bodies, beauty ideals tend to follow social trends. The beauty industry is a place where social anxieties about race, class and gender are negotiated and "resolved." And beauty is a 'safe' way of dealing with these issues. It allows us to incorporate multiculturalism and diversity without actually addressing issues of oppression and inequality. It turns histories and identities into products or costumes that can be bought and sold, put on and taken off at will. While it is true that the imagined mixed race body fits almost perfectly in contemporary ideals for feminine beauty, we must also consider that America sees these bodies as physically beautiful because we want to see them as socially beautiful. The mixed race woman is beautiful because her face represents a new America and a national fantasy of racial redemption.

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