EXPANDING THE BEAUTY SPECTRUM: A CASE STUDY OF
LUPITA NYONG’O AS THE BRAND AMBASSADOR
FOR LANCÔME COSMETICS

by

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, Lupita Nyong’o became the first black spokeswoman for Lancôme Paris cosmetics, the first in the company’s 80-year history. Previously, the advertising industry took issue with using models outside of the European standard of beauty for various reasons including perceptions of consumer relatability and response, but Nyong’o’s contract is a direct challenge to this notion. The intent of this study to explore news coverage of the first year (April 2014 – April 2015) of Nyong’o’s contract with Lancôme to determine why Nyong’o was chosen as the first black ambassador, how the decision was received, and what the implications are for the beauty standards, especially the black beauty standard.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who supported me and guided me through the writing process. Especially, my mother and father who have always supported and encouraged me.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It is strange to say I’ve had a tumultuous relationship with something that’s not a person, but it is the best way to describe my encounters with makeup—many of which happened during my most impressionable years. I remember counting the long days, weeks, and months until my 13th birthday; it was significant because this is the age my mother gave me permission to wear makeup. There was no other age – other than 21 – that I wanted to be so badly. It was the weekend after my 13th birthday when my mother finally took me shopping for cosmetics. I was overjoyed when she asked me to come to Wal-Mart with her, so I could pick out some makeup. On the car ride over to Wal-Mart, I was going over my planned purchases in my mind like a mantra, “foundation, mascara and eyeshadow…foundation, mascara and eyeshadow.” It was meant to keep me focused on the task at hand.

I knew foundation was the key to all makeup application – I’d been watching my mother and sister (who is nine years older than me) apply it for years. My sister used CoverGirl, so I figured that is where I would start. I went straight to CoverGirl, but there was a problem…what shade was I? I hadn’t thought about this before; in addition I didn’t even know what shade my sister was, so I began opening bottles to find my match. I started with Rich Mink, not a match. Toffee, not a match. Spicy Brown, not a match. True Ebony, not a match. Warm Carmel, not a match. After trying every shade that appeared to be targeted to people with my skin tone in the CoverGirl line, and finding no match, I moved on to another brand, L’Oreal. No matches either. It went on like this until my mother came to get me in the cosmetics section. I didn’t know how
long I’d been there, or how many shades I tried on that day, but I could not find anything that was dark enough to come close to my skin tone.

“Are you ready?” my mother asked. My response was a defeated expression.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I didn’t find any foundation that matched my face,” I said.

“It’s because you’re so dark,” she responded casually.

I didn’t understand why my dark skin was the issue – I’d been this shade, with some variation, since birth– but in that moment I didn’t want my dark skin if that was the reason I wasn’t going to be able to wear makeup. In this moment in my life, I had associated makeup and other cosmetics with beauty and femininity. I was an impressionable teenage girl who had seen all of the women in her life apply makeup daily, so I thought this is what all women did who wanted to be regarded as beautiful.

I didn’t have a response for my mother. I didn’t think I ever would. My dreams of beauty and femininity were taken away from me. I left feeling invisible with no cosmetic purchases, numerous questions, and lowered self-esteem. I wondered if there were any cosmetics for people with my skin tone, and if I would ever find any. I also couldn’t help but think about my mother’s comment about me being too dark. If my skin tone were the problem, would going to a different store really fix it? I didn’t want to ask her that, but the question loomed in the back of my mind. I kept thinking about how my shade was left out of the beauty spectrum: did that mean I wasn’t pretty enough, or was I not the kind of beauty they wanted to feature?

At the age of 13, in 2004, my first attempt to buy cosmetics left me in emotional turmoil. It was a defeating day because it made me wonder why my sister and mother were able to find a shade and I was not. Fast-forward 11 years, and mainstream cosmetics companies are expanding
their shades to include darker tones. There are more brands, now, that have a shade available for me, a dark-skinned African woman, and for women like me. In addition, these mainstream brands are using representatives that I can actually relate to: women who look like the everyday African woman. One such woman, Lupita Nyong’o (see appendix, figure 1), was contracted by Lancôme on April 3, 2014 to be its first black\textsuperscript{1} ambassador in the company’s 80-year history. The deal caught my attention because of my previous encounters with makeup, and the invisibility I felt when I looked down the aisle toward the models and products; she makes women that look like me feel seen. This study, then, explores the contract Nyong’o has with Lancôme, specifically examining the reasons she may have been retained, what this could mean for black beauty standards, and the discourse it may have sparked in the subsequent coverage of the news about her during the “Year of Lupita,” 2014. In addition, this study will be looking to see if the aforementioned sensibilities about cosmetics were captured within the coverage.

\textsuperscript{1} “Black” will be used here as a blanket term for race, referring to all black people (US and globally) regardless of their birthplace. “African-American” will be used as a term to define the ethnicity of black people born in the United States. Finally, “women of color” will be used to refer to women with skin of color, or non-white women.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

**History of Cosmetics**

Makeup, or the concept of adding something to one's face/body for beauty, has been a large part of human history. Cosmetics can be traced to ancient Greece, Egypt, Rome and several other countries/nations; their products and techniques differ from practices of today, but they used these products for beauty enhancement (Schaffer, 2006). As history marched on, so did cosmetics. In the United States, white and fair women did not want to look like they were wearing makeup because they wanted to show their natural beauty, so they used natural remedies to make them appear paler and to distinguish themselves from working women who were tan (McGlinchey, 2013). The American beauty standard in the 1800s and early 1900s was the European standard of fair skin and Anglo-Saxon features, and some of the first cosmetic brands catered to that standard, such as Max Factor (1909), L’Oreal (1909), Elizabeth Arden (1910) and Maybelline (1915) (McGlinchey, 2012).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the US population was not as racially or ethnically diverse as it is today; therefore, cosmetic brands did not typically target black consumers, but when they did it was for skin bleaching creams and products to lighten/alter their skin tone (Davis, 2013). White and Black manufacturers made and sold these skin-whitening creams, but only White-owned companies advertised them: offensive caricatures of a “black” woman with her face split in half, a sort of before and after, one side dark and the other side lightened by the
product (Davis, 2013). By selling whiteness, those companies were essentially calling African-American features ugly (Scanlon, 2000). In turn, because such marketing approaches generated very little response from African-American consumers, the companies would neglect the African-American women’s market for decades.

**Brands for Black Skin & Skin with Color**

The decision of mainstream cosmetic companies to pursue these women was because of the success of African-American entrepreneurs of the time such as Madame C.J. Walker (1867-1919) (Scanlon, 2000). During her time Walker paved the way for black owned companies with the invention of the hot comb and the hair care system for African-American women; her marketing strategy was geared toward making African-American women feel beautiful (Scanlon, 2000). Although Walker’s company did not produce cosmetics, it made hair products for African-American consumers. Currently, there are no products made by Walker’s company on the market, but her success in marketing to the female African-American consumer led to others attempt to reach them. The first cosmetics line created for African-American women was Lena Horne Prestige Cosmetics in 1960; she placed the first advertisement in Ebony Magazine (Ebony, 1959). It was never sold in stores - women could only purchase product through a representative, similar to today’s Mary Kay system (Ebony, 1959). Horne’s line no longer exists, unlike the second line created by and for black women, Ebony’s Fashion Fair (1973), a high-end brand sold in department stores throughout America (Fashion Fair, 2015). Several bloggers and online reviews praise the brand and its products, but the price point is such that only women of certain socioeconomic classes can afford it. To address this discrepancy, Ebony added a separate cosmetics line that was more affordable for women in different socioeconomic classes (Scanlon, 2000). In 1994, two more cosmetics brands debuted that targeted black women, Iman and Black
Opal; both of these lines were created by black women to solve the specific undertone issues that are difficult to capture/match in skin of color (Schaefer, 2015). Both of these lines are significantly cheaper than Fashion Fair; they can be found in numerous drugstores and cosmetic shops. All of these lines were created by women of color to challenge the way mainstream makeup creates or mixes foundation shades for non-white skin, and to give options to black women and women of color that may better match their skin tones and undertones. According to supermodel and entrepreneur Iman on her cosmetics website, for example, her goal is to have a line that is more inclusive of all shades of skin, not just black tones.

Since the founding of Fashion Fair, Iman and Black Opal, there have been other cosmetics brands that have been more favorable to black women and women of color. These brands were founded after 1999 and by people of various genders and ethnic identities. For example, department store brands that black women and women of color (bloggers and video bloggers) recommend are Black Up, Becca Cosmetics, Make Up Forever, Clinique and MAC (Yvette, 2015; Xue, 2015). The Black Up founder is a black French male, the Becca founder is a white Australian woman, the founder of MAC is a white Canadian male, the founder of MakeUp Forever is a white French female, and the founder of Clinique is a white American female. Drugstore brands that are recommended by bloggers and vloggers are CoverGirl Queen Collection or L’Oreal True Match (Xue, 2015; Sicardi, 2015). Although there are some drugstore brands that claim to offer a range of shades, they are owned by mainstream companies that in truth offer limited choices. For example, L’Oreal True Match foundation is advertised as an extended line, but their tones for dark-skinned women are not dark enough. However, with the recent push by mainstream cosmetics brands to expand shades, such as Clinique’s Even Better line, the Maybelline Fit Me foundation, and even the L’Oreal True Match line, more drugstore
and department store brands are adding to their collection of foundation. Like CoverGirl, Iman, and others, these brands are also going a step further by using models and/or spokeswomen with more diverse skin tones for their advertisements.

*Maison Lancôme*

Lancôme Paris, the luxury cosmetics line within L’Oreal Paris Company, is one of the brands that has recently extended its foundation shades from 12 to 28, ranging from 100 Ivoire to 560 Suede, thanks to L’Oreal chemist Balanda Atis. Creating a darker foundation shade was a quest that Atis began before the announcement of the Nyong’o/L’Oreal deal. Atis watched her Haitian family and friends struggle to find the correct foundation shade with the right undertone. It wasn’t until she was given extra time in the L’Oreal lab that she was able to perfect the foundation shade that Nyong’o now endorses and uses exclusively: 560 Suede (Segran, 2015).

Armand Petijean founded Lancôme Paris in 1935; he chose the name because of his favorite ruined chateau in the center of France. Le Chateau de Lancôme also had a rose garden that inspired Petijean to adopt the rose as the symbol of Lancôme Paris. The first Lancôme boutiques were located in the center of Paris, and sold five unique fragrances. In 1936, the Lancôme Beauté line was launched with Nourishing La Nutrix, a cream that was used to treat sunburn, plant and insect stings, chapped or cracked skin, chilblains, frostbite, razor burn and diaper rash. Petijean eventually moved on to cosmetics, starting with lipstick. On February 9, 1942, le École des Techniciennes was created to train Lancôme beauty advisors who were available in stores to help women reach their beauty potential (Lancôme.com, 2015).

Lancôme can only be found in department stores and high-end cosmetic stores such as Sephora, Ulta, Belk, and Niemen Marcus. Its previous marketing strategy targeted older women who were looking for a luxurious anti-aging brand, but Lancôme has repositioned itself now as
one of the leading luxury brands that can be cutting-edge, sophisticated, and modern to appeal to a younger target market. Previous ads have focused on ambassador Julia Roberts and Lancôme’s anti-aging/skin care line. As a brand that prides itself on keeping up with trends and consumer needs, Lancôme is now attempting a personal approach to beauty by establishing an emotional approach with women and using ambassadors with whom younger women can relate (Business, 2015). With the addition of Nyong’o, the brand has not only extended its foundation line to darker shades to better serve their new ambassadors’ needs, but also to serve the needs of consumers in the new markets it is attempting to reach. Nyong’o’s 560 Suede ends the Lancôme shade range and is the darkest shade it has ever offered (Lancôme, 2015). While there is no specifics about what exact strategies Lancôme will use to target younger women of various races, Lancôme has said that it wants to produce new products for younger consumers and highlight its products for darker skin tones (Business, 2014).

Self-identity

This shift to expanding shades may correlate with several factors. First is L’Oreal’s stated goal to expand its brand into Sub-Saharan Africa (L’Oreal.com, 2014), a large portion of the continent that encompasses 13 countries including Kenya, Nigerian, and South Africa. Another factor concerns shifts in American demographics. The US Census categorizes race based on the ways in which Americans self-identify: white, black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and Two or More Races. In 2000, the Census added a separate category for those who were of Hispanic descent, so they could choose their ethnicity and their race separately. Currently, the Census calculates Hispanic origin/ethnicity into the race category instead of placing it in a separate column. According to the US census of 2000 and 2014 (see appendix, tables 1 and 2), the US population has seen an
increase of at least 80,000 people per race category, while African-Americans have increased by over two million during that time. However, the shift to expanding shades cannot be attributed solely to the increase in the African-American population, since the Asian population has increased by over two million as well. The Hispanic population has seen a population increase of over four million since 2000 (see appendix, table 3).

Still another factor, then, in the move to expand shades by mainstream cosmetics companies, is not a reflection of growth in one particular category, so much as a reflection of the growth among people who self-identify across multiple categories. Cohn (2015) of the Pew Research Center found that from the 2000 census to the 2010 census people have either self-identified as multiple racial identities or changed their racial identity from census to census because of past confusion about whether or not Hispanic was seen as a race or ethnicity. More people are willing to identify that they are multiracial, but there are still multiple meanings that define being multiracial in the United States. To some, it could mean having someone of a different race as a family member (e.g., a grandmother), so they may select multiple racial categories. Currently, there is no consistent definition of multiracial; nevertheless, to individual people, the population of multiracial people is increasing steadily (Cohn, 2015).

The Black American Population

In 2013, Nielsen, the company known for tracking television program ratings that in turn help set advertising rates, began tracking consumer behavior by race. In their examination of Nielsen’s 2015 study of black consumers, Pearson-McNiel & Rosenberg (2015) found that “from 2000-2014, the black population grew 35% more quickly than the total population” (p. 3). The rapid population growth has been attributed to an influx of black immigrants to America; they now take up 8.7% of the total black population (Pearson-McNeil & Ebanks, 2015, p. 3). Along
with this rapid increase in population, blacks also saw an increase in overall income. Additionally, according to Pearson-McNeil & Ebanks (2015), between 2011 and 2013 black households saw an income rise of 3.5%, and that number is predicted to continue to rise as black Americans experience the largest income (as a race) increase since the Great Recession (p. 9). Along with rising incomes, blacks’ spending power increased as well. In 2000, the black buying power (the amount of money black consumers spent on goods) was $599.8 billion; it was $946.6 billion in 2010, $1 trillion in 2012, and it is predicted to be $1.3 trillion in 2017 (Cunningham & Perkins-Roberts, 2012).

Within their household, black women make most of the purchasing and brand loyalty decisions, and they are more likely to recommend products to other people (Pearson-McNeil & Ebanks, 2014). Black women (13.4 million in population) spend most of their disposable income on beauty and cosmetics, making up 85% of the hair and cosmetics industries’ revenue stream, and this figure is set to continue increasing (Cunningham & Perkins-Roberts, 2012). This increase in buying power is catching the attention of various industries seeking to court the black consumer. And this trend is no less true in the case of the cosmetics industry seeking to court black women and women of color.

**Advertising and the Black Woman**

According to a recent Nielsen study (2014), black and African-American consumers especially women, feel underrepresented and misrepresented in advertisements today (Franklin, 2014, p. 7; p. 259). Black women feel that advertisers don’t speak to true cultural representations of black people, and that ads portray black people as dark-skinned white people rather than conveying cultural differences that are present (Franklin, 2014, p. 256). Black consumers’ attitudes and feelings toward advertising bias have been supported by research. Millard & Grant
(2006) found that many studies were unable to fully incorporate black women because of the lack of models used in print advertisements. In their study, they note that research done in the past (before 2000) found black women in 10% of advertisements as compared to white counterparts. Studies done after 2000 have shown an increase in black models, but they are concentrated in sports advertisements (Millard & Grant, 2006, p. 661). Research has attempted to explore the lack of diversity within advertising models and spokeswomen, but sampling has been limited by the lack of diverse models.

Advertising’s bias aggravates the issue of skin tone within the African-American community, which is a large part of black culture, whether acknowledged or not. Mathews (2013, p. 4) defines this cultural issue as “colorism,” a “‘system’ that grants privileges and opportunities to those that possess lighter complexions within the [African-American] community. Colorism is a function of skin color stratification, along with the function of intra-racial discrimination.” Among black people, there are varying skin tones that range from light to dark; colorism functions in society by deeming those women in the black community who have lighter skin tones and more European facial features as better representing an acceptable standard of beauty (Mathews, 2013). Being a dark-skinned woman, then, means not fitting into the societal mold of that beauty standard (Bryant, 2013). As such this can leave a negative psychological affect on dark-skinned black women and the way they perceive themselves and beauty in general (Bryant, 2013). The colorist politics of beauty make it so that dark skinned women are at the bottom of the desirability scale, which can lead them to detrimental life decisions, internalized self-hatred, distorted body image, depression and eating disorders (Bryant, 2013). Mathews (2013) finds a disparity between the ways black women are treated based on skin tone: darker toned women “experience a disproportionate amount of social and
cultural pressure” because society still devalues their skin tone. This notion leads Mathews to conclude that colorism is well developed within the institutions of the United States, particularly in the aspect of media.

Black people are the largest consumers of television; as such they are affected by and internalize images associated with them in the media (Bryant, 2013). Most advertisers conflate skin tone and race when they are casting black talent, so they don’t understand that hiring a light skinned black person doesn’t automatically mean that all black women will relate to that person. But those with lighter skin tones are most often hired and their images are ubiquitous (Watson et al., 2010, p. 185). It also sets up a system where certain looks and features in the black community are more accepted and desired than others. In fact, it was noted by Watson et al. (2010) that black female models pride lighter skin, associating it with beauty and femininity. An early study of Ebony Magazine showed that they favored black models that had lighter complexions and European features, and that advertisers lighten the skin color of models after the picture has been taken (Keenan, 1997). These advertising tactics have resulted in the black beauty standard being a light-skinned black person with European features. “The European [or white beauty standard] is the notion that the more closely associated a person is with European features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin, straight hair, a thin nose and lips and light color eyes, as beautiful” (Taylor 1999, as cited in Bryant, 2013). Mainstream advertising created a standard of beauty for the African-American community that has not been holistic thereby creating the perceptions in the black community that advertisers and brands don’t understand black people, especially women (Pearson-McNeil, 2014). The advertising industry has even been
criticized for manipulating the hierarchy of colorism among black people by setting the black beauty standard as the lighter-skinned black woman (Watson et al., 2010, p. 186).

The race of models in advertisements has been noted to be problematic in various studies. It was believed by advertising agencies and their clients that the race of the model would cause their primary white consumer either to stop buying their product or at least become less engaged in the advertising (Meyers, 2008). Within her literature review, Meyers (2008) notes a common finding from several studies that looked at White consumer reactions to Black models in an advertisement. She states that they found that most White consumers do not react negatively to the use of a Black model. Building on that literature, Meyers’ research examines consumer reactions to the race of a model, but her study also included skin tone of the model. Her goal was to “understand how skin tone influences perceptions of advertisements by consumer[s]” (p. 27). Meyers (2008) classified skin tone as light and dark within her study to avoid the medium comparison. She found that the model’s “light” or “dark” skin tone did not have an affect on consumer attitude toward the product, the model herself, or purchase intentions; however, Meyers did find that “light” skin tone yields a more positive consumer attitude towards the overall advertisement. Additionally in supporting the findings of previous studies, Meyers (2008) also found that using ethnically and racially diverse models did not have an effect on white consumers; they still bought and used the products as they normally would. Franklin (2014) found, however, that black consumers are more likely to use a product if they see a face that looks like them featured in the ad. Kern-Foxworth (1994) also notes this in her book: black people are more likely to pay attention to advertising ads than any other race. Marketers have claimed that white people are the mainstream or general audience, but consumers of color are less likely to use a product with only a white face associated with it (Meyers, 2008).
An example of this was Alek Wek, an international model born in 1977 in Sudan, now South Sudan, of the Dinka ethnic group (Gundan, 2013). She and her family immigrated to London when she was 14 because of civil unrest, with militant rebel groups causing issues in Sudan (Hughes, 2014). At the age of 14 Wek was discovered by a talent scout in a South London market, and she has been modeling ever since (Gundan, 2013). Wek was the first dark-skinned supermodel among the African, African-American, and British models also widely known at the time such as Beverly Johnson (African American), Naomi Campbell (British), and Iman (African) (Hughes, 2014). Wek became famous doing high fashion runway shows because they were the only clients she was able to book (Hughes, 2014). When she first began her career, there wasn’t a place for models with features such as hers (dark skin, short natural hair and far from European features). Wek admitted to the Guardian that people like her, dark-skinned black women with short hair cuts, weren’t present in the media before she began to model; her features/looks were did not appear in media outlets, even those that catered to Africans and/or African-Americans (Hughes, 2014). Back when Wek first began to model, placing an African woman on the cover of a magazine was seen as taking a risk because it could have been detrimental for sales; however, when Elle featured her on its cover in 1997, she was the first African, first model from Africa, to be featured on the magazine’s cover (Gundan, 2013). Though there were no representations of her in media outlets when she was growing up, Wek got her confidence from her mother, and the confidence she exuded then translated to her being booked for more shows (Hughes, 2014). Wek is no longer modeling at the capacity she was in the ‘90s, but she currently lives in Brooklyn, New York where she writes, models occasionally, and is launching her own handbag collection.
Drugstore brands such as CoverGirl and L’Oreal use black women such as Beyoncé, Queen Latifah and Kerry Washington to market to the “average” black women. There is no debate that these women added diversity to the brands they represent, but black women still feel misrepresented and incorrectly portrayed (Pearson-McNeil & Ebanks, 2015). With all of the stratification of color in the black community, the skin tone and the features of the face of the brand eventually become topics of discussion. In addition, altering the features of a black model and/or spokeswoman will not garner the desired effect that advertisers and companies intend for black consumers. In 2008, L’Oreal was accused of lightening Beyoncé’s skin tone for a print advertisement for the company’s hair product, Feria hair dye (Sweney, 2008). Beyoncé has represented L’Oreal since 2002 (Hoelzl, 2014), and the company denied the accusations of lightening her skin; however, critics were dubious of their denial (Associated Press, 2008), and consumers perceived colorism to be at work. The accusation of colorism not only reaffirms past critics, but it can bring intentions into question when mainstream brands hire black brand ambassadors.

Lancôme and Lupita Nyong’o

Lupita Nyong’o was born March 1, 1983 in Mexico City while her father was teaching there (Britannica, 2015). Nyong’o, one of six children, was quoted as identifying herself as “Mexican and Kenyan at the same time” (Oldenburg, 2014), and lived with her family in Mexico City until they were able to return to Kenya. During her teen years, Nyong’o returned to Mexico to learn Spanish. After high school, she attained her bachelor’s degree in African studies and film from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and then went on to attain a master’s at the Yale School of Drama (Coulton & Jordan, 2014). From there she embarked on acting, directing, and producing roles (IMDB.com, 2015)
Although active on social media in the meantime, Nyong’o was made famous by her role as a brutalized slave named Patsey in Steve McQueen’s 2014 drama, *12 Years a Slave*, earning her a Golden Globe and an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. Media coverage during this period reveals that Nyong’o was a fan favorite from the time the movie premiered. Women, especially black women, were obsessed with her fashion, what she was wearing or going to wear, her day-to-day life and the roles she would be starring in next (Henderson, 2014). People wanted to know what products she was using and there was a brief Twitter campaign to make her a Mac spokeswoman. Instead, Nyong’o became Lancôme’s first ambassadress\(^2\) of color in the company’s 80-year existence (Sze Tang, 2014). Fans are drawn to Nyong’o’s elegance, global lifestyle, and natural beauty. So when she became famous so did her standard of beauty; in 2014, within a month of announcing her partnership with Lancôme, she became the first dark-skinned woman with natural hair to be named as *People* magazine’s Most Beautiful Person (Oldenburg, 2014). That is, within months of this Mexican-Kenyan actress making her international debut in a British film about an African slave in the American South, she became the first dark-skinned international spokesperson for an upscale, global cosmetics brand, Lancôme, and then named *People’s* Most Beautiful Person.

In a time when cosmetics companies are expanding their foundation shades, Lancôme is expanding its range of spokeswomen, including in skin tones. While Nyong’o has been revered for her beauty and elegance, she is not the typical Lancôme face. She is the antithesis of the previous and other, current Lancôme ambassadors. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the first year of Lupita Nyong’o’s position as the brand ambassador for Lancôme.

**RQ 1:** Why was Nyong’o contracted as the first black ambassador for Lancôme?

\(^2\) “Ambassadress” is Lancôme’s, used to designate spokeswomen; however, I will use “ambassador” hereafter.
RQ 2: How was the decision received by the industry?

RQ 3: How has news of the contract affected discourse around the beauty standard, especially the black beauty standard, and colorism?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research will employ an exploratory case study method; this method is limited to sources that are available to anyone publically through searches of library databases and public information (O'Rourke, 2003). The case study method is employed when in-depth investigation is needed of a subject, company or opportunity (Winston, 1997). For this study, a search was conducted on the University of Alabama’s library database to find coverage of the deal during the time period of April 2014 to April 2015; from the first month Nyong’o announced her position on Lancôme’s YouTube channel through the end of the first year of her Lancôme contract. To capture industry responses during this timeframe, databases were: General OneFile, EBSCOhost and Gale Cengage Learning. Within these databases certain keywords were used to limit sources to relevant terms: “Lupita Nyong’o + Lancôme,” “dark-skin,” “dark-skinned,” “darker skin,” “beauty standard,” “first black,” “ambassador (ambassadress),” “skin tone (skintone),” “Mexican-Kenyan,” “Kenyan,” “beauty” and “beauty spectrum.” The search term “Lupita Nyong’o + Lancôme” was used as the base search (Lupita Nyong’o + Lancôme was treated as one search term and matched with other key words) and the subsequent keywords were used one at a time with the base terms. To supplement this sample, and to provide other perspectives, the same terms were used in ProQuest Newspapers and Newspaper Source for the same time period to capture perspectives from the business press, the mainstream press, and the black press. In total, the search yielded over 300 results. To exclude coverage that was unrelated
to the study, results were filtered to limit results to publications in the United States and written in English. Articles were eliminated if they discussed Nyong’o and Lancôme to solicit sales (e.g. fashion magazine ads and articles that discuss what products she uses/where to buy them); the kind of Lancôme makeup Nyong’o was wearing at an event; or her makeup tutorial example. The publications that featured more than one article in the timeframe were: USA Today (daily), People Magazine (weekly), Essence (monthly), CNN Wire (daily), International Business Times (monthly). In addition to the University of Alabama databases, the L’Oreal company website was utilized to find similar information. Final results, then, yielded 34 articles in the period of study. Because Nyong’o conducted interviews in Spanish and French while in the US, the sample size was limited due to Nyong’o’s polylingual abilities. It should be noted that Nyong’o’s own social media streams, particularly Twitter and Instagram, where she tends to post words and images of herself most frequently, were going to be monitored for her comments/reactions to this coverage. However, her Twitter feed does not allow continuously scrolling or searches for individual tweets because of the volume in her feed--over 2,000 tweets since 2013—therefore, access to her early tweets were limited by the Twitter site/app and then her later posts were inaccessible after July 3, 2014, limiting analysis.

To analyze each article, a spreadsheet was utilized, noting: the author and publication date, my three research questions broken down across three separate columns, other notes/findings (outside of my questions) and publication information. Articles were then examined for key words that matched search terms, thematic language (for example beauty spectrum became a thematic word that led to the use of it as a search term) and answers to my research questions. Articles were analyzed 3 times, individually, for meaning related to research
questions, other additional meaning/findings; in addition, notations were made throughout analysis.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

To examine the 34 articles found, I began by arranging them chronologically. The articles began with L’Oreal’s (Lancôme’s parent company) strategy to reach consumers in Sub-Saharan Africa. The L’Oreal strategy was revealed on April 3, 2014, the day before Lancôme announced that Nyong’o was joining its team. The new strategic outreach to Sub-Saharan African consumers is designed to reach a more internationally diverse market and position L’Oreal as a brand leader in Sub-Saharan Africa. The day Nyong’o announced that she was joining Lancôme there were four articles written from wire network sources: World Entertainment News Network, UPI NewsTrack, PR Wire and the trade journal Women’s Wear Daily. A theme was noted in the way the sources approached reporting the announcement of Nyong’o’s contract with Lancôme. The articles were arranged as follows: they announced that Nyong’o was the new face of Lancôme, noted her Oscar winning status, and used this quote from Nyong’o: “I am truly honored to join the Maison Lancôme…I am particularly proud to represent it’s unique vision for woman and the idea that beauty should not be dictated” (World Entertainment News Network, 2014; UPI NewsTrack, 2014; PR Newswire, 2014). The original source of this quote was Lancôme’s website, from its official profile of Nyong’o, among the profiles it posts of each of its

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ambassadors (Lancôme.com, 2016). *PR Newswire* was the only media outlet that cited the Lancôme site as a direct source. There is no date on the website (other than the copyright date of 2016) pertaining to when the profile was written, but the *PR Newswire* article came out on April 4, 2014, the same day Nyong’o announced her contract with Lancôme. The *Women’s Wear Daily* article, “Nyong’o on Lancôme and Hollywood,” drilled further down into Nyong’o’s story than the wire networks did. The authors sat down with Nyong’o, which gave them insight into her educational background, her career history behind the camera and her upcoming projects. Nyong’o also talked about her thoughts on Lancôme.

“What appealed to me about Lancôme is that they’re not dictating what beauty is. What they do supports something that already is – and that was appealing to me, too. It’s what drew me to them. Hopefully it’s a symbiotic relationship – that I benefit from being associated with them, and they benefit from being associated with me, as well. And for the consumer at large, I think Lancôme has a range of products for every woman, and I think having me will expand people’s understanding of, hopefully, what Lancôme stands for, who Lancôme is for (Naughton & Born, 2014). Though Nyong’o may have liked Lancôme before she was contracted, it is unclear whether or not parts of the quote were engineered or reflect her genuine feelings or both. Her statement does align with Lancôme’s stated strategy to reach the Sub-Saharan African demographic; she is the example for the image they want associated with their brand. In addition to conveying her thoughts on her latest venture, Nyong’o reveals that one of her inspirations is Alek Wek (Naughton & Born, 2014) and that she and Wek were formally introduced after the *Essence* lunch in 2014 (Hughes, 2014).
On April 23, the first piece appeared that discussed Nyong’o’s Lancôme deal in the context of her challenges as a dark-skinned star in Hollywood. Lucas (2014), a Brooklyn based writer/editor, asks some of the questions she believed black people were interested in regarding Nyong’o: in breaking the mold as a dark-skinned, African woman with a short Afro, what is going to happen to her in Hollywood? Lucas states that there are very limited roles for women who look like Nyong’o in Hollywood—“let us not pretend that when it comes to black women, Hollywood doesn’t favor women with lighter complexions”—and she prompts readers for the last time they remember seeing a black, let alone dark-skinned black, woman playing the leading role in a mainstream film. Lucas inevitably stepped into the realm of colorist tendencies of Hollywood without directly using the academic term, “colorism”; nevertheless, she is giving life to the politics that govern colorism without calling out the name. She even states that “[she] believes Nyong’o’s biggest challenge moving forward won’t be her dark complexion but the limited roles that are afforded to black women in Hollywood.” That is, Lucas delved beyond the immediate news of Nyong’o’s Lancôme contract to ask what long-term effect it might have on film roles for dark-skinned women. Her conclusion was that the contract would not ease the kinds of limitations Nyong’o would confront in Hollywood because her skin tone is at the heart of colorism and beauty politics in cosmetics and in film. With the exception of recent celebrations of actresses such as Taraji P. Henson, most black actresses are typecast as a slave, as a historical, significant black figure or as a white counterpart’s best friend, never the everyday main character. “There’s never been a black actress who has become the equivalent of a Julia Roberts or Angelina Jolie” (Lucas, 2014). Though these are facts that the black actors and actresses of Hollywood have to deal with and navigate, Lucas believes that the presence of Nyong’o may be an indication that things are changing.
In a study of the black beauty standard among elementary school children, Trice (2014), a columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote about a project that took place in an elementary school with young girls ages 9-10. Asked if they believed a dark-skinned girl with a TWA\(^4\) could be beautiful,

“The nearly 20 girls unanimously agreed that if a woman had short, kinky hair, she was not beautiful. But when Brumfield, the director of a project empowering young girls, passed around a photograph of Lupita Nyong’o, the dark-brown-skinned actress who sports an extra-short natural, the girls were silent for a moment. Then, once again, their answer was unanimous. They agreed Nyong’o was beautiful” (Trice, 2014).

Similar to how I felt in the makeup aisle at 14, these girls did not have a visual representation in the media of someone that looks like them being called beautiful. The materialized image of Nyong’o gave them a concrete idea of what beauty is and let them know they could be deemed beautiful too. In addition, they learned about other types of beauty that excluded the European standard. Nyong’o’s TWA\(^5\) opens doors for the discussion of black hair, how it can look and be kept. Because of Nyong’o, Mintel, a marketing intelligence firm that does market research, market analysis, product intelligence and competitive intelligence (“About Mintel”, 2014), will be adding the TWA to their survey of black hair care (Trice, 2014). The TWA has been considered unprofessional in the past, but Nyong’o wearing it casually everywhere is changing the conversation about which hairstyles are deemed professional for black women, and in which settings. Interestingly, this *Chicago Tribune* article ran twice in two separate news outlets: the *Journal Gazette* in Fort Wayne, Indiana and the *Watertown Daily Times* in New York. The *Journal Gazette* article ran in the Living section of the paper, and the *Watertown Daily Times* put

\(^4\) Teenie Weenie Afro, an acronym coined by natural hair Internet bloggers and v-loggers to describe the short Afro of natural black hair, Nyong’o’s current style.
the article in the Currents section of the paper, each of which serves a community that has, according to the US Census Bureau, a white population of over 74%.

Most of the 2014 articles were written in April (23 of the 34), followed by May (3) and December (3). The biggest spike in April’s coverage about Nyong’o came with *People* magazine’s April 23 announcement that Nyong’o had been named as *People’s* Most Beautiful Person of 2014, the fourth woman of color to be so named (Hyman, 2014). The day the news was announced seven articles appeared followed by six more in the next few days. Articles that reported the announcement of Nyong’o as *People’s* Most Beautiful took a similar approach to reporting as the sources that announced her Lancôme deal: they began with the announcement of the news, some mentioned her Lancôme deal earlier in the month, and used a quote about how Nyong’o thought of beauty when she was younger. At the Black Women in Hollywood Luncheon organized by *Essence*, Nyong’o gave a moving speech, which was quoted in several of the wire articles that covered the event: “Beauty is what I saw on television, you know light skin and long, flowing, straight hair” (Frizell, 2014; Hyman, 2014; Kelly, 2014; “Lupita Nyong’o,” 2014; “Oscar Winner,” 2014; Watkins, 2014). She added that at the time she actually didn’t want her skin and prayed to God for it to be made lighter, demonstrating the power of the internalization of the Eurocentric beauty politics of the media, how deep those impressions ran for Nyong’o. Nyong’o’s response to the announcement, a nod to the invisibility that is present in the makeup industry in relation to dark-skinned women, was quoted often: “It was exciting and just a major, major compliment. I was happy for all the girls who would see me on [it] and feel more seen” (Hyman, 2014; Kelly, 2014; Oldenburg, 2014; Reuters News Service, 2014; Sanchez, 2014; Watkins, 2014). Another quote that was featured often was the advice Nyong’o said her mother gave her about her skin tone: “You can’t eat beauty, it doesn’t feed you…what
she meant was…you can’t rely on how you look to sustain you” (Nyong’o, 2014). Unlike the articles that announced Nyong’o’s Lancôme deal, the articles announcing her People recognition included quotes from Nyong’o that were themed around beauty and gave life to the effect media can have of dark-skinned black women. Nyong’o did not grow up with representations of herself in the media, other than her inspiration Alek Wek, but she has been able to express her issues with colorism and beauty politics in a manner that is causing new discourse and change in mainstream media, fashion and beauty.

“I believe Lupita is a game changer,” the former editor-in-chief of Essence Constance White was quoted in The Philadelphia Inquirer (Wellington, 2014). Nyong’o is not a stereotype of African-American beauty; she has challenged the notion of beauty to the point where she may have surprised herself. Wellington (2014) notes that dark-skinned women aren’t valued, treated as status symbols, or placed on a pedestal, but Nyong’o has managed to secure all of these accolades and milestones. She is a standout because of her drastic departure from the Hollywood Eurocentric mold and the stereotypical African-American mold. Nyong’o is blazing a new path for beauty and discussion around beauty. However, Kamier (2014) raises question about the nature of the acceptance of Nyong’o: “But obviously there’s a marked difference between who is allowed to represent ‘black beauty’ and who isn’t. It’s apparently become okay to have black features like Nyong’o, but you still have to come in the right shape. Though Nyong’o’s ubiquity will do much for elevating the acceptance of black women, it’s difficult to imagine [Gabourey] Sidibe would ever have been put in the same position.” Kamier (2014) also brings up the socioeconomic divide that may make Nyong’o the exception and not the rule when it comes to dark-skinned women in Hollywood: “She [Nyong’o] is an Ivy League graduate, speaks four languages, and comes from Kenya’s globally recognized political class.” As an African-born
woman, Nyong’o represents a more accepted form of blackness because her ancestors cannot be directly linked to the American slave trade or slavery, unlike those of African-Americans. Her background insulates her from the racist “ghetto” stereotypes that are assigned to most black people. As the *Black Hollywood Examiner* (2014) notes, “her ‘blackness’ is an international one; it is deep, broadly realized and authentic.” The obsession with Nyong’o may not mean advertising is ready to start actively representing women that look like Nyong’o in the day-to-day cycles; her Kenyan-Mexican heritage, her upbringing, her seemingly effortless fashion statements all exoticize her in ways that prevent her representation to be normalized.

Nevertheless, the reaction to her beauty, whether she is seen as an exotic beauty or *People’s Most Beautiful* or the ideal TWA, Nyong’o embraces her beauty in an organic, celebratory manner.

Despite the absence of the word “colorism” in their coverage, *The Black Hollywood Examiner, The Daily Beast, Regional Business News, The Journal Gazette* and *Watertown Daily Times* discuss the politics of colorism such as the favoritism of the lighter skin tones in media and product production. As Lucas (2014) suggested, if Nyong’o were a white actress, her skin tone in the context of the beauty discussions wouldn’t have come up for discussion because it wouldn’t have been seen as an issue. Wellington (2014) discusses how Nyong’o is challenging the beauty standards of current media by being a dark-skinned woman in the industry. The very fact, though, that these journalists raise the importance of Nyong’o’s skin tone in relation to her employability status is in itself an instance of colorism. Wellington (2014), *The Black Hollywood Examiner*, Kamier (2014), Raspers-France (2014), Trice (2014) and Vine (2014) all use the term “dark-skinned” or “night-shaded skin” in their articles, whether from a direct quote from Nyong’o or not. That is, the need to talk about her skin tone as different, unique, exotic, or
anything other than the “standard” (European look) demonstrates not a departure from the mindset of colorism so much as a re-entrenchment of it: Nyong’o’s contract with Lancôme is treated as noteworthy because of the context of colorism and existing bias toward European features.

It is not clear if the word “colorism” was omitted because of the heated emotions it could generate or they didn’t want their article to be deemed strictly a racial piece or if, simply, the term resides more commonly in academic discussions. Some authors may even be unaware they are even discussing colorism politics. For many years black people have lived the material reality of colorist politics without being aware that there is a word for the feelings and treatment they are receiving. Of the articles examined here, only Lucas (2014) and Kamier (2014) delve more deeply into issues surrounding colorism. Kamier investigates why Nyong’o’s success doesn’t automatically mean black people in Hollywood are going to get more roles or positions. She essentially tokenizes Nyong’o as the exception and not the rule for black people in Hollywood. The Black Hollywood Examiner agrees with Kamier, in a way, because it notes that Nyong’o’s un-American blackness is free from the “deep scars of racial oppression” and helped to separate her, and make her the darling of 2014. However, the Examiner also discusses her skin tone and implications it may have on her career. The results of colorism spill over to affect all aspects of black women’s lives, so discussing how Nyong’o’s skin tone affects her career is the material result of colorism. Attention has been called to issues that are still very present for black people in media and advertising. There have been good steps taken, but there are still further strides to go. Vine (2014) understood the significance of Nyong’o becoming the face of Lancôme because as little as 20 years ago her Oscar wouldn’t have helped her gain the attention she needed to be
considered for the position. In fact, as little as 20 years ago she may not have gotten the Oscar either. So, her position is evidence of the change that is occurring.

The year of articles ended with retrospectives about Nyong’o that discussed her accolades during the year and upcoming work. Within her Essence retrospective, Henderson (2014) does a monthly breakdown of the year in which he notes that Nyong’o appears in nearly every month. She was recognized for her speech she gave at the Essence Luncheon, her new position with Lancôme, her new movie part in “Star Wars” and her video with Elmo about embracing her unique beauty (Henderson, 2014). Within the Ebony retrospective, Brown (2014) runs a power 100 list of African-Americans “who break the glass ceiling and create new records for others to aspire to reach.” Nyong’o was chosen within the category of cultural influencers which is noted as the “they lead, we follow,” category.

RQ 1: Why was Nyong’o contracted as the first Black ambassador for Lancôme?

Articles did not directly speculate as to the reason why Nyong’o is Lancôme’s new ambassador, or which party extended the invitation for partnership. However, an article did reveal that having an ambassador who takes home an Oscar award boosts a brand’s sales by 1.5% annually (Clark, 2015). While Lancôme may not have known she was going to win the Oscar, Nyong’o’s nomination made her a strong option for ambassador. In addition to her Oscar nomination, Nyong’o garnered a lot of attention for her fashion choices, education and ethnic background. Within most of the articles the authors mentioned Nyong’o’s presence on the red carpet and how it garnered attention from fashion critics and fans alike. In addition to her fashion icon status, some discuss (at length) her ethnic background and Ivy League education to comment on the fact that Nyong’o did not deem herself a typical beauty. Lancôme’s parent company, L’Oreal, announced its intention to build its market in sub-Saharan Africa (L’Oreal
Pursues It’s Growth Strategy, 2014). With that strategy beginning to take form, Nyong’o’s ethnic background would make her a logical candidate as the face of Lancôme. The general manager of Lancôme International, Francoise Lehman, gave other indications as to why Nyong’o was contracted as the first Black ambassador: “Both talented and committed, true to her African beauty, and showing a great curiosity and open-mindedness in her career choices, Nyong’o is by essence the Lancôme woman” (Lancôme Announces Lupita, 2014). While her race may have been a factor in the decision, Lehman gives insight into the kind of woman Lancôme wants representing it’s brand, someone who embodies the ideals of the brand inside and out. The culmination of her background, her rapid rise to stardom, her youthful appeal, her notoriety and status as a fashion icon garnered Nyong’o her contract with Lancôme. She is the embodiment of the idea that the standard of beauty cannot and should not be dictated. And her first year of coverage as Lancôme’s ambassador hints at the possibility that the standard might even be expanding.

The last time a global figure of someone who was similar to Nyong’o in looks rose to fame was Alek Wek in the ‘90s. Like Wek, Nyong’o is an example of dark-skinned Black beauty. She is not the stand-in for all dark-skinned women; she is an example of one person in a larger pool of difference and variation. The difference between Nyong’o and, perhaps, an average dark-skinned Black girl is her striking features; she is a beautiful woman. Many would agree that if Nyong’o were a regular woman on the street she would still be noticed for her beauty. However, this does not give license to say that all dark-skinned Black women are now considered to be beautiful because Nyong’o has been revered as a beauty. Nyong’o’s hyper-visibility calls attention to the invisibility of women who look like her. While one cannot now make her a blanket representative for all Black women, she is an example of what some dark-
skinned Black woman can look like. Nyong’o is expanding the conversation to include more than light to medium-skinned Black women, she’s aiding in carving the space for more conversation about Black beauty in media and advertising. Time will tell about the impact Nyong’o will have on the conversations about Black beauty and the beauty standard in Hollywood.

RQ 2: How was the decision received by the industry?

Nyong’o was heavily covered by the media in the 2014 year; not only was her Lancôme position covered, but her other accolades and awards were covered as well. However, heavy coverage does not equate to being loved by the media. In Nyong’o’s case, she was heavily covered, and no directly negative responses were found in regard to her or her contract with Lancôme. Within every article examined for this study, the author notes that Nyong’o is the first Black ambassador for Lancôme, but this doesn’t mean the article exclusively focused on her race. Most journalists focused on Nyong’o as a person: where she grew up, what she thought beauty was (European beauty standard), how she has come to deal with fame, her own reaction to being a Lancôme ambassador and People’s Most Beautiful Person of 2014 (Raspers-France, 2014). It was astounding that as the first Black ambassador for an 80-year old brand none of the writers made it the central topic of their conversation. Nyong’o’s race and status as the first Black ambassador weren’t discussed as in depth as her education or ethnic background; instead, her race, or the fact that she was the first ambassador, were the background topics of the articles, something they mentioned but didn’t delve into. It was the elephant in the room that most of the writers danced around. Nyong’o being the first Black ambassador in the history of the company is a great opportunity to discuss some of the previous biases in advertising and how her contract may affect those notions—a discussion that could have began when she comments about her own
struggles with accepting her skin color. This indirectly negative move by the majority of the writers may speak to the audience that the articles were intended for. Discussing race can be a sensitive subject for numerous people, especially if the conversation is about racial inequality and lack of representation. It seems as though her Blackness does not warrant discussion unless it is in relation to her global upbringing and lifestyle. However, there are many of her quotes that could be used as the foundation for deeper discussion on beauty, the beauty standard, and colorism in Hollywood.

Nyong’o’s life is an interesting one filled with global travel and Ivy League education, which is something only certain types of people can afford. It has been noted that Nyong’o is from the political class of Kenya's government society, so it can be concluded that she does not come from an underprivileged background. Her background, education, the way she carries herself, and her personal style were some of the things that attracted Lancôme to her as an ambassador for that upscale, global brand. In turn, it is likely that Nyong’o will attract similar women—upscale, well educated, transnational Black women--because they can relate to her and see themselves in her. Since there have been no studies done on this, it is unclear how light skinned and brown skinned women will respond to Nyong’o. Some may be more drawn to the brand, now that a Black woman is being featured in their ads, and some may not be drawn due to other factors outside of race. The cost of Lancôme is higher than several other brands, so this excludes certain audiences such as poor and working class women and other people who use cosmetics. Though the price of Lancôme products clearly delineates who their clientele is, media is available to everyone despite socioeconomic status. The demographics of the readers of certain publications may have determined the way articles about Nyong’o were covered.
*Essence* and *Ebony* did year-end retrospectives that briefly highlighted Nyong’o’s major accomplishments, such as the Lancôme contract, the *People* announcement, and her role in “Star Wars,” over the 2014 year. If writers were looking for a proper platform to discuss her being the first Black ambassador for Lancôme ever, then these magazines would have been an example of a useable platform. However, it supports my point about the lack of discussion around her race and being the first Black ambassador because *Ebony* does not discuss it either.

If nothing else, Nyong’o might be the catalyst needed to discuss these issues that they had been mulling over for a while. It is clear that the aura around Nyong’o affected the press as well because they so heavily reported on what she did, career wise, where she was going and what she wore while there.

RQ 3: How has news of the contract affected discourse around the beauty standard, especially the Black beauty standard, and colorism?

The analyzed articles had a commonality in their use of beauty or beauty related themes. When discussing Nyong’o in relation to beauty, articles commented that she represents a more holistic beauty spectrum (Wellington, 2014) and an extension of that spectrum, giving young Black girls a face of someone who looks like them in the media (Kameir, 2014; Trice, 2014), with a position and presence that is adding to discourse about Black beauty. Nyong’o’s Lancôme contract is not enough to catapult her to the representation of Black beauty, but it does give her the platform to be noticed. She is so hyper-visible now that her image can cause a group of 9-year-old girls to change their perception of beauty simply because they saw her (Trice, 2014). She is the example that writers are now using to discuss black women in Hollywood and their futures (Lucas, 2014). Nyong’o is a challenge to the Eurocentric notion of beauty; her presence calls attention to the lack of diversity present in the cosmetics industry. She is also an example
for the way beauty can look; there is no binary for beauty. Her contract with Lancôme is an example of how these concepts merged into an ambassador. The coverage surrounding Nyong’o’s Lancôme contract is not enough to say that she has completely changed the beauty standard but perhaps she is expanding it, showing us that dark-skinned black women have the ability to be considered beautiful as well: “Maybe she won’t be another exotic exception, but proof that the definition of beauty is finally diversifying” (Wellington, 2014).

It cannot yet be concluded that her presence is the beginning of diversifying beauty, but writers are hopeful that she is the beginning. She is a figure that women can use to connect to beauty issues in the Black community. “Lupita connects to the larger issue that a whole group in our society is put at the bottom of what’s beautiful and alluring” (Wellington, 2014). Response to Nyong’o’s contract demonstrated that beauty should not be dictated, and the media in this study started to pay attention.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

It has been 12 years since my encounter in the cosmetics aisle. Since then it has become easier for me to find makeup, but I don’t wear it often. I never really gained an appreciation for makeup because I gave up on it that day at Wal-Mart. The next time I wore makeup was during my freshman year of college, seven years later, because my sister convinced me to let her put makeup on me. Currently, I am 25 years old, and wear very little makeup. I have a sheer coverage foundation that I wear minimally by MakeUp Forever, and Lancôme mascara, Anastasia Beverly Hills Brow Wiz, and a Becca blush palette complete my look. I am still unable to find my shade at my local Wal-Mart, but my local Target offers a variety of brands that carry my shade in their in-store lines of Iman and Shea Moisture. Shopping online, however, offers more brands that cater to women of color. I usually shop online at Sephora, Ulta, Black Opal, BlackUp, MakeUp Forever, or Urban Decay. The last 12 years has seen more brands that are targeting women of color and more access to those brands via online shopping options, making me feel, finally, like I’m being seen. I plan to continue experimenting with makeup in the future, since I did not have the opportunity as a teenager.

Ironically, Nyong’o’s contract points to evidence of continued colorist practices in Hollywood because the impact on her career would not have been called into question otherwise. Lucas (2013) and Kameir (2014) have doubts that Nyong’o’s career will continue to flourish as it has, due to her skin tone and the limitations it has the potential to cause. Hollywood continues to
favor the European look, so it will be interesting to see if and how Nyong’o’s presence will affect that trend.

The discourse around beauty and beauty politics cannot be changed with the presence of Nyong’o alone. Her work and recognition is an important conversation starter and an example of the type of invisible beauty that is missing from Hollywood. While there were great articles that circled the drain of colorism; there were no standout articles that focused on dissecting her race and what her contract means for beauty standards. There was a missed opportunity for discourse around what a contract such as this could mean for the politics around beauty in media and advertising. The articles examined here glossed over the fact that she was the first Black brand ambassador, ever, although that point was the one of the major details that made news of the contract such a groundbreaking occasion. How was it possible that an 80-year-old, global brand was unable to have one single black representative in its company history, and no one was talking about it? It’s strange that this wasn’t at the center of the articles that I examined.

Nyong’o’s famous performance in 12 Years a Slave, her subsequent Lancôme contract, People recognition, and her upcoming film projects all helped launched her to the center of several discussions. She, a dark-skinned African woman with a short Afro hairstyle, quickly rose to fame, in a manner that no one before her has done. Alek Wek was famous in her own right in the 1990s, but she did not rise to the same level as Nyong’o, possibly due to social media. Wek may not have garnered the attention that Nyong’o did because Wek was famous for modeling alone, and Nyong’o is famous for her movie roles, contracts and off-camera career roles such as directing. Additionally, Nyong’o rose to fame at the start of the second term of the first Black American president (who is half Kenyan) and his very popular wife, a First Lady known, like Nyong’o, for her education, confidence, and her personal fashion style. That is, it is possible that
there was an element of historical convergence with Nyong’o’s rise and with national and global factors that primed American consumers and Lancôme to embrace a new face for its brand. It is apparent that 2014 was the year of Nyong’o; she made major strides in her career and made an impact in beauty that even she may have not intended to make. Her presence has shown that the beauty spectrum can be extended, and beauty is not fixed to one certain standard.

Future Research

Nyongo’s relationship with Lancôme was significant because the 80-year-old brand tapped a new spokeswoman that was a complete departure from any other spokeswoman they have ever had. This strategic shift has many implications for future research. Since the contract is only one year old, and there has only been one set of campaign advertisements, future research can be done on the effectiveness of using a dark-skinned African woman (who is not American-born) to reach a global audience of black people. The study could also look into the impact of a Black brand ambassador on other races—do light-skinned Black women identify with dark-skinned Black women in ads, for example? Similarly, longitudinal studies could examine the beauty politics associated with having representations of images like Nyong’o’s present in media cycles and advertisements and the effects they have on self-esteem of black women. These effects could also translate to a study of self-esteem of young Black girls growing up at a time where they can find representations of themselves in the cosmetics and where they can find their shade in foundations and/or cover ups. The generation of young black girls that are growing up during this time may have less issues with internalized hatred and self esteem. In addition, the study could look into how and when black girls are introduced to makeup and the impact of advertising on those experiences.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Figure 1: Image of Lupita Nyong’o from Her Instagram
Table 1: 2014 Census: Population of Females by Age, Race (Hispanic or Latino origin included).
Table 2: 2000 Census: Population of Females by Age, Race (Hispanic and Latino origin added)
Table 3: 2000 Census: Population of Hispanic People of any Race, Age & Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Both sexes</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIVE-YEAR AGE GROUPS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>35 305 818</td>
<td>18 161 795</td>
<td>17 144 023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>3 717 974</td>
<td>1 900 431</td>
<td>1 817 543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>3 623 680</td>
<td>1 851 885</td>
<td>1 771 795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>3 163 412</td>
<td>1 617 185</td>
<td>1 546 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>3 171 646</td>
<td>1 688 556</td>
<td>1 483 090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>3 409 427</td>
<td>1 875 130</td>
<td>1 534 288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 29 years</td>
<td>3 385 334</td>
<td>1 826 146</td>
<td>1 559 188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 34 years</td>
<td>3 124 901</td>
<td>1 668 064</td>
<td>1 456 837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 39 years</td>
<td>2 825 158</td>
<td>1 474 462</td>
<td>1 350 696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 44 years</td>
<td>2 304 152</td>
<td>1 178 548</td>
<td>1 125 604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 49 years</td>
<td>1 775 168</td>
<td>886 695</td>
<td>888 473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 54 years</td>
<td>1 360 935</td>
<td>664 236</td>
<td>696 699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>960 033</td>
<td>456 165</td>
<td>503 866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>750 047</td>
<td>347 409</td>
<td>402 998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69 years</td>
<td>599 353</td>
<td>268 184</td>
<td>331 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 74 years</td>
<td>477 266</td>
<td>205 691</td>
<td>271 575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 79 years</td>
<td>326 726</td>
<td>135 463</td>
<td>191 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 84 years</td>
<td>179 538</td>
<td>67 919</td>
<td>111 619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>150 708</td>
<td>49 617</td>
<td>101 091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELECTED AGE GROUPS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 18 years</td>
<td>12 342 259</td>
<td>6 334 844</td>
<td>6 007 415</td>
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<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td>771 053</td>
<td>394 611</td>
<td>376 442</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 to 4 years</td>
<td>2 946 921</td>
<td>1 505 820</td>
<td>1 441 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 13 years</td>
<td>6 185 947</td>
<td>3 160 636</td>
<td>3 025 311</td>
</tr>
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<td>14 to 17 years</td>
<td>2 438 338</td>
<td>1 273 777</td>
<td>1 164 561</td>
</tr>
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<td>18 to 54 years</td>
<td>21 229 066</td>
<td>11 100 077</td>
<td>10 129 891</td>
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<td>18 to 24 years</td>
<td>4 743 880</td>
<td>2 598 352</td>
<td>2 145 528</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 to 44 years</td>
<td>11 639 545</td>
<td>6 147 220</td>
<td>5 492 325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 years</td>
<td>4 846 543</td>
<td>2 554 505</td>
<td>2 392 038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>1 733 591</td>
<td>726 874</td>
<td>1 006 717</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race Alone</td>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>21,936,806</td>
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<td>702,309</td>
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<td>5 to 9 years</td>
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<td>117,022</td>
<td>11,370</td>
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<td>10 to 14 years</td>
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<td>1,006,852</td>
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<td>2,166,032</td>
<td>1,030,850</td>
<td>111,321</td>
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<td>1,175,428</td>
<td>110,953</td>
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<td>2,034,327</td>
<td>1,171,903</td>
<td>105,510</td>
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<td>1,174,829</td>
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<td>35 to 39 years</td>
<td>1,885,560</td>
<td>1,163,530</td>
<td>83,513</td>
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<td>40 to 44 years</td>
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<td>73,801</td>
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<td>45 to 49 years</td>
<td>1,467,106</td>
<td>1,241,644</td>
<td>65,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 to 54 years</td>
<td>1,230,507</td>
<td>1,104,452</td>
<td>53,063</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>952,394</td>
<td>851,641</td>
<td>39,470</td>
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<td>726,824</td>
<td>691,860</td>
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<td>65 to 69 years</td>
<td>519,674</td>
<td>476,610</td>
<td>19,574</td>
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<td>70 to 74 years</td>
<td>384,800</td>
<td>353,110</td>
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<td>75 to 79 years</td>
<td>297,496</td>
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<td>80 to 84 years</td>
<td>212,442</td>
<td>197,387</td>
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<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>175,778</td>
<td>153,404</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 15 years</td>
<td>8,375,632</td>
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<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>4,126,654</td>
<td>3,687,025</td>
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<td>10 to 14 years</td>
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<td>1,520,002</td>
<td>80,330</td>
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<td>15 to 19 years</td>
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<td>1,230,296</td>
<td>700,580</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2,159,174</td>
<td>197,097</td>
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<td>25 to 29 years</td>
<td>7,560,105</td>
<td>6,714,915</td>
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<td>188,075</td>
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<td>1,475,822</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 44 years</td>
<td>117,374</td>
<td>103,698</td>
<td>5,281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: 2010 Census: Population of Hispanic People by race, Age, & Sex