Conceptualizing Beauty:

A Content Analysis of U.S. and French Women's Fashion Magazine Advertisements

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Abstract

Although beauty is a major industry, it is elusive and based on culture. The purpose of this investigation is to expand the idea of female beauty beyond physical characteristics through an exploration of women's magazine advertisements from France and the United States. Over 570 ads from ten women's fashion magazines are content analyzed. Among the major findings is that American publications consist of more hair care and makeup products than in France, in contrast, French magazines include more ads for lotions and perfumes. In terms of tone, people in American publications show more smiles, while people in France are more bizarre and sexy. American advertisements present more women, non-working women, and women as decoration than their French counterparts. French publications show more men with family and people in endorsement roles. Differences illustrate cultural priorities and beauty ideas.

Keywords: Beauty, Culture, Advertising, Content Analysis, Fashion

Beauty is an important concept used in advertisements to help sell products. Attractive people are evaluated more positively as are the brands they are associated with (Bissell & Chung, 2009). Beautiful people also are judged as more persuasive (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008) and credible (Bissell & Chung; Solomon, Ashmore, & Longo, 1992). As socializing agents, models in mass media and advertisements create cultural norms and define standards of beauty in society (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2009). However, these ideals are unrealistic and can cause feelings of anger, anxiety, depression, and insecurity among women (Goodman et al.).

A number of studies have focused on how beauty is portrayed in media (Bissell & Chung, 2009; Bissell & Hays, 2010; Lee, 2009) and in advertising specifically (Bissell & Rask, 2010; Goodman, et al., 2008). Although cross-cultural studies of beauty in advertisements are limited, a few have compared attractiveness and beauty portrayals in the United States with other nations, including Korea (Bissell & Rask), Iran (Hanjani, 2011), Singapore and Taiwan (Frith et al., 2009), and Germany (Piron & Young, 1996).

Still, the idea of beauty is elusive. Goodman et al. (2008) suggest female beauty is "multidimensional" (p. 159). Research has shown that beauty is expressed with youthful attributes, including big eyes, full lips, flawless skin, and high cheekbones (Goodman et al., 2008). And, except for thinness, these attributes hold across cultures (Goodman et al.). However, Wolf (1992) argues that a single set of characteristics cannot represent the idea of beauty and the narrow cultural concept of attractiveness especially in the United States only makes women feel "inadequate and unacceptable" (Bissell & Chung, 2009, p. 228).

This investigation attempts to take a different perspective of beauty by viewing it through a broader cultural lens. Advertising images from women's fashion magazines in the U.S. and France, nations where beauty is important, are studied. France was selected as it is one of the largest cosmetic powerhouses in the world, the birthplace of brands like Yves Saint Laurent, Chanel, and Dior. The U.S. was chosen because of its high emphasis on capitalism and marketing. In addition, many scholars have called for researchers to expand cross-cultural investigations of advertisements (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010; Skorek & Schreier, 2009) and this study will help fill that gap.

Research questions here consider a holistic cultural view of how French and American magazines differ in terms of beauty portrayals in advertisements. Specifically, which product types are more prevalent in each country? What roles do people play in each nation's ads? Do men and women have different roles? How are products portrayed? A theoretical framework is built that goes beyond investigations of physical beauty to include advertising strategy and sociological and communication literature.

Literature Review

Scholars across several disciplines see advertising as more than communication about things; advertising is also considered a carrier of cultural values (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996; Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010; Pollay, 1983). Advertising works by associating particular values important to a group of people with a specific brand and emphasizes how these priorities may be gained and experienced through purchase and consumption of the brand (Cheong et al.; Pollay). In this way advertising messages mirror how people behave while simultaneously providing ideas and images about society's attitudes and lifestyles. Moreover, advertising endorses, glamorizes, and inevitably strengthens particular cultural values while ignoring others (Ji & McNeal, 2001; Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). Relative to beauty and attractiveness, by omitting some features and diverse characteristics in portrayals, advertisers promote aspirational images and "beauty ideals" which are narrow and unrealistic (Greer, 1999).

Advertisers strategically attempt to imprint particular images for a brand in the minds of consumers. When planning marketing communication programs, four dimensions are used: frequency, reach, continuity, and impact (Kelley, Jugenheimer, & Sheehan, 2012). Although there are varying opinions about how often a message needs to be seen or heard, consumers must be exposed to a particular advertisement a number of times before it is believed that the message will not only make an impression in the consumer's mind, but also that the consumer will retain and act on the message (Kelley et al.). Advertisers' goals are to reach as many people as often as possible with the most influence as possible.

A way to look at the impact or effect advertising messages have on people is via Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). The theory suggests that exposure and repetition of messages and images through mass media influence

perceptions of the world. The more people are exposed to media, the more they will believe images, messages, and ideas are real (Bissell & Chung, 2009). The perception of reality is cultivated through heavy media exposure and it has a mainstreaming or homogenizing effect on culture as a whole (Gerbner et al.). Although originally based on television viewing, the theory has since been expanded to other media and cultures.

Cultivation theory can be used to understand how idealized images of beauty and other gendered cultural roles transmitted repeatedly through media impact women (Bissell & Chung, 2009). Specifically, in the current image-obsessed culture where women are exposed to narrow ideas of attractiveness, primarily described as young, thin, big eyes, full lips, flawless skin, and high cheek bones (Goodman et al., 2008), women will more likely think these images are real and attainable (Bissell & Chung). Ideal images can leave women with feelings of unhappiness and dissatisfaction particularly in terms of self-image, eating disorders, and other culturally-induced diseases (Bissell & Chung; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006; Goodman, et al.; Richens, 1991).

Research in this area is important because images affect women's health and well-being. Identifying visuals that young women especially are exposed to can aid in understanding possible sources of low self-esteem and other detrimental social-psychological issues among women. It is also important to consider that beauty ideals are culturally constructed and not the same everywhere. However, as culture is all around us, it is often difficult to detect or articulate, but a comparison of two nations can help highlight subtleties. The next sections provide descriptions of cultural behavior related to beauty that goes beyond mere physical attributes in France and the United States.

In research contrasting France and U.S. advertising in general, Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet (1992) found that French messages had more emotional, sex, and humor appeals, while American publications contained more informational cues. As no study could be found that compared beauty specifically in these two nations, research from books, videos, articles, and blogs are used to support the notion that French women tend to be discreet about their beauty habits and focus on great skincare. American women, on the other hand, spend less time and money on skincare and prefer to invest in makeup to camouflage flaws. They are inclined to purchase makeup based on quantity, not quality.

One piece of research that supports this theory is found in a popular blog entitled "Why Do French Women Always Look so Chic?" In part, the post states:

> I live close to a small town in southern France (population: 7,464), where
> here are 19 hairdressers, five beauticians and four lingerie shops. This should
> tell you something about the priorities of French women. When I first made an
> appointment at one of the 19 hairdressers, I told my French friend Anne that I
> was going to get my hair dyed. "Ssshh," she said, looking anxiously around the
> cafe to make sure nobody had heard me. "You can't tell anybody that. C'est pas
> normale." (Powell, 2007)

French women dutifully maintain their hair and skin, but these treatments are kept private; not even friends talk to one another about their hair appointments.

Another example of the French concept of beauty comes from Ollivier (2003), author of *Entre Nous: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner French Girl*, who writes:

> Arguably, the French girl has the most pristine and practical relationship to her
> skin. Pristine because she grows up surrounded by the most exclusive, highest
> quality beauty care products in the world. Practical because she grows up tending
> to her skin with stubborn regularity: cleansing, steaming, peeling, scrubbing with
> dutiful care. There's an *Institut de Beauté* on just about every corner in Paris and
> on any given day you'll find the French girl having her regular '*soin*' (facial or body
> care treatment)… (pp. 36-37)

This excerpt may suggest why French women are secretive about their beauty routines – such treatments are expected. French girls learn from a young age how to properly wash their faces, which creams to use during the day and at night, and how to maintain the fountain of youth. This concept of beauty is so engrained into French culture that it is never even given a second thought.

Additionally, a segment on the Oprah Winfrey show about international beauty said that, "French women don't like to admit it but, in fact, they spend a lot of time and money on beauty products for every part of their body: the bust, the thighs, the face, and obviously, the

complexion. They spend a lot of time doing it, taking care of themselves, just to end up with a natural look" (Winfrey, 2008).

Other writing supports the idea that French women learn how to properly care for their bodies from a young age. Their main focus is to achieve perfect skin so that makeup can be more natural. Ollivier (2003) writes:

> The French have powdered and puffed themselves with extravagant flourish for centuries, but the distinguishing characteristic of the French girl's makeup is that it's often not distinguishable at all. *Au naturel* is her preference. She invariably chooses quality over quantity and if it works, she doesn't mess with it. She uses makeup to conceal imperfections with the lightest touch (a silky translucent foundation, a fine powder) but never to camouflage her face or paint an entirely new one – and no fancy fingernails or overly coiffed hair, *s'il vous plaît*. She's subtle yet natural – so natural that if she suddenly has to run out the door without makeup, she doesn't feel naked. (pp. 38-39)

Although the French avoid masking their faces with too much makeup, they do not shy away from spending money on skincare items. According to Mintel Reports, expenditures for personal care goods and services in France totaled €24.9 billion in 2008. The country is the second largest European market for cosmetics and toiletries. Although growth has been steady, it has leveled out in recent years (Beauty Retailing France, 2010).

In contrast, American concepts of beauty are very different. Young girls are not taught how to properly wash their faces and which creams are best for certain parts of the body. Makeup is purchased openly and frequently at drug and grocery stores. Many Americans use makeup to camouflage flaws. They do not favor the natural look and instead experiment with a variety of colors. Although skincare products have grown in popularity, especially with the overabundance of new anti-aging products, they are not widely used and reserved mostly for those with higher socioeconomic status. Additionally women are not discreet about where and when they get beauty treatments. It is acceptable for a group of women to go to the hair or nail salon together. Celebrities, models, and public figures are almost never seen without a full face of makeup. Americans believe that makeup is a necessity for beauty.

The literature review attempts to conceptualize beauty beyond physical appearance and highlight how differently the Americans and French think of the idea. The following research questions are proposed.

RQ1: Which product categories are more prevalent in each country's magazine ads?

The first research question analyzes the amount of different product types advertised in magazines and if variations can be distinguished between the U.S. and France. It considers marketing theory that advertisers provide people with products and attributes that are compatible with people's self concept (de Mooij, 2010). A greater number of ads in any one product group reflect more demand. In addition, the concept of beauty for women can be thought of as on a continuum between natural and covering up. Body and face washes and lotions are considered more natural while makeup is less natural, or more of a camouflage technique.

RQ2: How does the United States and France differ in terms of the tone advertising portrays in each country?

The attitude, quality, or tone is an important attribute in advertising and is usually specified in the creative brief (Belch & Belch, 2012). The tone attempts to highlight the product's brand personality, and it should be congruent with how the audience desires to perceive the advertisement. Reviewing the advertisement's tone will help bring out characteristics of the audience, and cultural attributes in general and beauty ideals specifically.

RQ3: What roles do men and women perform in each country's magazine ads?

Visuals are an important component in advertising messages (Wedel & Pieters, 2008). The roles people play or perform in advertisements are a reflection of the people themselves. People like to see themselves just as people like to be with similar-minded people. In addition, beauty for women is not only about makeup, hair, and other physical characteristics, but it is also how women are treated and related to in society. Do women get to use their intellectual capabilities and whole selves, or are they marginalized? Roles and activities that women are shown doing in ads can tell us a lot about the culture and women's beauty. Men's roles and activities will also be included and used as a comparison and to show relative differences between men and women in each country and how those variations help create an image of beauty for women specifically.

RQ4: How are products portrayed in relationship to men and women?

The last research question is similar to the one prior except it goes one step further to review how men and women are related to products. For example, are the men and women depicted in ads experts, users of the sponsoring products, or merely decoration? Other studies have employed this product-related role (Skorek & Schreier, 2009). The association helps understand the level of involvement each character undertakes in the advertising message.

Method

In order to investigate the concept of beauty, a quantitative content analysis is used. Content analysis has been the method of choice for analyzing communication, particularly for studies of advertising (Ji & McNeal, 2001). The method of research offers an opportunity to compare media content to the real world according to Wimmer and Dominick (2000). In this case manifest content of advertising messages from France and the United States are studied.

Content Analysis

A sample of 574 ads from ten popular women's fashion magazines from the U.S. and France are content analyzed according to the procedures below. The sample includes prominent women's magazines focusing on fashion and beauty with a variety of advertisements. Two titles from each country are used to provide a more balanced view of each culture.

Sampling Procedures

The two American magazines selected for study are *Marie Claire* and *Town & Country*. Both journals are published by Hearst Communications, Inc. According to its media kit, *Marie Claire* is a publication with an international heritage edited for the woman with demanding time constraints. The magazine offers a single resource for women to respond to diverse aspects of life and offers solutions to such challenges. "From global issues and cultural affairs to fashion coverage and beauty news, *Marie Claire* is the magazine for the woman of substance with an eye for style" (Marie Claire, *Media Kit*, 2010). *Marie Claire* (U.S.) has a circulation of 992,995 and is printed 12 times per year. The other U.S. monthly magazine, *Town & Country,* has a circulation of 455,652 and offers similar content. The publication's media kit describes it as "lifestyles and tastes of the affluent in America who have earned the luxury of choice. From fashion, design, and the home to travel, philanthropy,

culture, and wealth, monthly departments and features include all topics of interest and relevance to this consumer" (Town & Country, 2010).

In an effort to maintain similarities, the French version of *Marie Claire* (France) is chosen to study and to represent that nation. The publisher describes the magazine as "a pioneer in the world and in our society" and "anticipates the evolution in women's lives, understands their concerns, and affects them through unique investigative reports" (Marie Claire, *Les Tarifs, 2010*). With 683,525 copies printed each month, the monthly journal is also said to "invest(s) itself in offering the best to its readers. It invites them to create their own personal style, to express their uniqueness, and their femininity" (Marie Claire, *Les Tarifs*). The second women's magazine employed for France is *L'Officiel*. With a circulation of 137,450, it publishes ten issues per year. As the media kit puts it: "A reference that cannot be ignored in the world of fashion since 1921, *L'Officiel* is a dazzling showcase of luxury and innovation" (L'Officiel, 2010). "Throughout its fashion series, but equally in its beauty reports, *L'Officiel* favors a global, modern approach" (L'Officiel). It is not only a "looking glass of design," but has also become the "coach of wants and envy" for its readers (L'Officiel).

It should be noted that circulations of both French magazines are not as high as those for American journals, as circulations are lower in France, in general. However, magazines selected are long established and prominent in their category and when considering readers per copy, they reach a significant proportion of women. The most recent issues of all four magazines available at the time of the study are used, dates range from June 2009 to April 2010. Magazines were obtained from both general and specialized European bookstores located in the United States.

Training and Intercoder Reliability

The authors together developed the coding scheme based on previous studies that focus on culture, including, gender images, portrayals and product relationships (Skorek & Schreier, 2009). The two researchers developed coding definitions and procedures during a six week time period as part of a university level directed study course. Once variables were agreed to, several issues of French and American women's magazines outside of the study were chosen and both researchers coded their ads. Confusion and issues in the coding instructions and

categories were discussed and the instrument was changed to be more clear and detailed. On a last practice test intercoder reliability was accessed using Krippendorff's Alpha.

Krippendorff's Alpha was calculated using SPSS and the KALPHA macro software (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) for each of the variables coded. Krippendorff's Alpha is used as it has the capacity for nominal to interval ratio level variables and data from two coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken (2002). As the present study is exploratory, coding of each variable was considered reliable if it yielded around .60 or higher (Lombard, et al.). All the variables achieved the criteria except for one, copy length, which was eliminated from the study and not reported here. Once both authors were confident that the instrument would yield reliable coding by any trained set of coders, the coders performed a final test on four percent of the sample. Alpha results are reported in the tables. The second author, a research assistant, coded the rest of the entire sample.

Coding Descriptions

The coding instrument required coders to list magazine title, country of origin, issue date, number of pages, number of advertisements, and number of pages of advertisements for each publication. Secondly, ad content was coded into the following areas: general attributes, visual design characteristics, and people-related content.

General and visual design characteristics for each ad was coded, including page number the ad appeared on, product category and brand/company featured in the ad, and whether English was used in French ads, or if French was used in English ads. For advertisements with the presence of the opposite language, ads were given a one for yes or a zero for no.

People were analyzed in a number of ways. First, the number of people present in the ad was noted. All people were counted in the advertisements unless they appeared on a label of a product, or the majority of their body was covered or unrecognizable. The number of men and women were counted, too. Furthermore, each person was coded as standing, sitting, or lying down. Individuals were not counted in this category if they were not doing one of the three actions or if it was unclear as to which action they were performing.

Next, each person was reviewed for the working or non-working category following Skorek and Schreier's (2009) study. If a person was considered working in the ad, no further categories were completed. If a person was considered non-working, either the family, recreational, or decorative role also needed to be specified. The number coded for each of these categories corresponds to the number of people in the advertisement. Each role was also divided by gender. The coding descriptions are provided below:

Working role: Actor is presented while doing his/her job or wearing a work uniform.

Family role: Actor is shown in a family context e.g., with children or grandparents.

Recreational role: Actor is depicted while doing sports or other leisure activities. Actors appear in realistic settings and dressed appropriately.

Decorative role: Actor does not have any of the above roles and is a decoration only.

Each person in the ad was analyzed according to how they related to products. The product-related category was divided into user, endorser, and symbolic roles (Skorek & Schreier, 2009). This category also corresponds to the number of people in the advertisement and was not specified by gender. All ads that had people present were required to specify one of these three roles. Coding definitions follow:

User: Actor is actively involved with the product and uses it in the way the product is designed to be used e.g., wearing clothes because the clothing is the product.

Endorser: Actor is recommending the product (without using it), often by holding it. He/she could be demonstrating or showing the product or brand overtly.

Symbolic: Actor is portrayed as detached from the product. (No physical contact.)

The final category, tone, represents a new category in terms of quantitative analysis as no investigation could be found that reviewed tone. The coding sheet analyzed three different indicators of tone: smile, bizarre, and sexy. All three were given a number, zero through three, with zero indicating an absence of this element, and three indicating the element was very prevalent. For the smile and sexy variables, the ad was given a single score by averaging each actor's score. Coding descriptions are summarized below:

Smile: Actor's smile is considered a three if his/her smile shows teeth and appears to be laughing. Smile is a two if he or she shows teeth and appears moderately happy. Smile is a one if there is a closed mouth smile and a zero is the absence of a smile.

<u>Bizarre</u>: Actor is considered a three on a scale of bizarreness if the ad appears distorted and unrealistic, as if it could never occur in real life. Ad gets a two if it is unrealistic and may not display real people. Ad is considered a one if it contains real people but has elements of fantasy. Ad receives a zero for the absence of bizarreness.

<u>Sexy</u>: Ad gets a three on a scale of sexiness if most body parts are exposed and the actor's face may be covered or cut out by the advertisement. Ad gets a two if the actor has many exposed body parts and the majority of the actor's body is displayed. Actor may also have a facial expression of lust. Ad gets a one if the actor is mildly exposing his/her body (hemlines above the knee) and has a lustful facial expression. A zero denotes the absence of sexiness. Examples of coded advertisements are provided in the Appendix.

After review of magazine advertisements was complete, coders went through all product categories and decided to group them into eight main types that were relevant for women's fashion magazines, plus an "other" category.   The groups of products coded include: clothing, accessories, makeup, skincare products, lotion, hair care products, jewelry, perfume, and other. All ads were placed into one or more of these categories. The number placed on the coding sheet was either a one or a zero, which denoted the presence or absence of that product in the advertisement.

Findings

To study beauty concepts in women's fashion magazines, *Marie Claire* and *Town & Country* from the United States and *Marie Claire* and *L'Officiel* from France were used. These publications were selected based on previously outlined criteria. All four magazines are popular, prominent in fashion, and have a variety of advertisements.

In total, ten issues (four from the U.S. and six from France) were coded, for a total of 574 ads from almost 3,000 magazines pages. A disproportionate number of French magazines were used because publications from the U.S. had so many more advertisements than those from France. A quantitative analysis was completed on 253 ads from the U.S. and 321 ads from France.   On average the proportion of ads to total pages was 42 percent in American magazines and 28 percent in French magazines.

The first research question asks about differences between the U.S. and France for prevalent product categories. There are eight different product categories that detail a number of personal care items. An independent t-test found statistically significant differences in this category. On average, the U.S. has more makeup ads (0.13 versus 0.04, p < .01) and more hair care ads (0.09 versus 0.04, p < .05). France, on average, has more lotion ads (0.02 versus 0.00, p < .05) and more perfume ads (0.09 versus 0.03, p < .01). The remaining categories are not statistically significant.

Table 1. Independent t-tests for product types featured in advertisements by country.

Variables*	France Mean (SD) N = 321	U.S. Mean (SD) N = 253	t value	df	Significance	Krippendorf's Alpha (N = 20)
Clothes	0.34 (0.48)	0.29 (0.46)	1.29	551	ns	1.00
Accessories	0.24 (0.43)	0.29 (0.45)	-1.39	524	ns	.81
Makeup	0.04 (0.20)	0.13 (0.33)	-3.48	397	.001	1.00
Skin Care	0.11 (0.32)	0.13 (0.34)	-0.67	572	ns	1.00
Lotion	0.02 (0.12)	0.00 (0.00)	2.25	320	.025	1.00
Hair Care	0.04 (0.19)	0.09 (0.29)	-2.55	416	.011	1.00
Jewelry	0.21 (0.40)	0.21 (0.41)	-0.23	572	ns	1.00
Perfume	0.09 (0.29)	0.03 (0.16)	3.29	526	.001	1.00

* Product category variables coded: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

Research question two asks about the advertisement's tone in each country. Results are also significant. Independent t-tests indicate that on average, there are more smiles in the U.S.

(0.57 verses 0.38, p < .05). Also France has more sexy ads (0.41 verses 0.23, p < .01) and more bizarre ads (0.24 verses 0.09, p < .001) (Table 2).

Results also indicate that there are more English words in the French publications (0.25 verses 0.06, p < .001) as opposed to French words in the American publications.

Table 2. Independent t-tests for advertisement characteristics, including smiling, bizarre, sexy, copy length and English/French, by country.

Variables	France Mean (SD) N = 321	U.S. Mean (SD) N = 253	t value	df	Significance	Krippendorf's Alpha (N = 20)
Smile*	0.38 (0.72)	0.57 (0.85)	-2.90	491	.004	.64
Sexy**	0.41 (0.72)	0.23 (0.54)	3.48	571	.001	.68
Bizarre***	0.24 (0.59)	0.09 (0.33)	3.68	521	.000	.79
English/ French****	0.25 (0.43)	0.06 (0.26)	6.38	537	.000	.91

* Smile is averaged with coding of 0 to 3 for each visible actor: 0 = no smile, 1 = no teeth with smile lines, 2 = some teeth, 3 = full teeth.

** Sexy is averaged with coding of 0 to 3 for each visible actor: 0 = not sexy, 1 = mildly exposing his/her body above the knee and has a sexy facial expression, 2 = many exposed body parts and actor's entire body is displayed, 3 = most body parts are exposed and actor's face may be covered or cut out of the ad.

*** Bizarre considers total ad, coded 0 to 3: 0 = not bizarre, 1 = contains real people with elements of fantasy, 2 = unrealistic with or without real people, 3 = full distorted or unrealistic, could never appear in real life.

**** English in French ads was coded as no = 0 and yes = 1, French in American ads was coded as no = 0 and yes = 1.

Research question three is concerned with people and the roles of people in each country. Independent t-tests indicate that there is no difference in the number of people in ads from the U.S. and France and there is also no difference in the number of men. However, there is a difference in the number of women and specific differences within gender roles. The U.S. is found to have more women (1.28 verses 0.98, p < .05), more non-working women (1.26 verses 0.97, p < .05), and more women as decoration (1.06 verses 0.78, p < .01) (Table 5). France is found to have more men with family (0.03 verses 0.00, p = .06).

Table 3. Independent t-tests for number of actors and their portrayals in advertisements, including working, non-working, family, recreation, and decoration, by country.

Variables	France Mean (SD) N = 321	U.S. Mean (SD) N = 253	t value	df	Krippendorf's Alpha Significance	(N = 20)
People	1.22 (2.13)	1.48 (1.90)	-1.56	563	ns	.98
Men	0.20 (0.86)	0.21 (0.66)	-0.26	572	ns	1.00
Women	0.98 (1.22)	1.28 (1.58)	-2.45	466	.015	1.00
Working Men	0.01 (0.10)	0.06 (0.35)	-2.02	282	ns	1.00
Working Women	0.00 (0.06)	0.02 (0.12)	-1.50	331	ns	1.00
Non-Working Men	0.18 (0.82)	0.16 (0.53)	0.33	572	ns	1.00
Non-Working Women	0.97 (1.21)	1.26 (1.55)	-2.47	467	.014	1.00

	France Mean (SD)	U.S. Mean (SD)	t value	df	Significance	Krippendorf's Alpha (N = 20)
Men with Family	0.03 (0.33)	0.00 (0.00)	1.87	320	.063	1.00
Women with Family	0.03 (0.36)	0.02 (0.18)	0.74	572	ns	1.00
Men in Recreation	0.10 (0.73)	0.08 (0.34)	0.41	572	ns	1.00
Women in Recreation	0.17 (0.85)	0.17 (0.64)	-0.88	572	ns	1.00
Men as Decoration	0.06 (0.26)	0.11 (0.49)	-1.51	363	ns	.92
Women as Decoration	0.78 (0.85)	1.06 (1.49)	-2.74	380	.006	.90

The relationship between people and products is examined in research question four. Results from independent t-tests do not show significant differences between the U.S. and France with user and symbolic roles. However, France is shown to have more people in the endorser role (0.13 verses 0.05, p < .05) (Table 4).

Table 4. Independent t-tests for number of actors and their relationship to products in advertisements, including user, endorser, or symbolic, and how they are positioned, standing, sitting, or lying, by country.

Variables	France Mean (SD) N = 321	U.S. Mean (SD) N = 253	t value	df	Krippendorf's Alpha Significance	(N = 20)
Relationship to Product						
User	0.64 (1.10)	0.79 (1.40)	-1.42	572	ns	.82
Endorser	0.13 (0.53)	0.05 (0.25)	2.38	484	.018	.83

Symbolic	0.44	0.62	-1.23	572	ns	.87
	(1.91)	(1.35)				
Positions						
Standing	0.65	0.74	-0.78	572	ns	1.00
	(1.21)	(1.59)				
Sitting	0.29	0.29	0.04	572	ns	1.00
	(1.65)	(0.73)				
Lying	0.10	0.08	0.72	572	ns	.78
	(0.37)	(0.31)				

Discussion

Although Americans sometimes generalize that Western Europeans have very similar cultures to them, this study demonstrates that there are apparent differences between the U.S. and France in terms of beauty concepts, culture, and of advertising in general. Beauty is culturally constructed and elusive; it is not easily defined, but this paper makes an attempt to describe it beyond physical attributes.

This study indicates that the French are exposed to and in theory prefer to purchase items that relate to the care of one's skin, like lotion and perfume. The French also are more sexy and bizarre. These ideas are embedded into French culture. Considering France's history from Louis the XV to the twentieth century with surrealism and the proliferation of prostitutes, cabaret, and pornography, an inclination towards sexiness and the bizarre makes sense.

The U.S. is shown to have more ads for makeup and hair care products. People also are presented as smiling more often. These results have many potential implications. First, the product categories align with the literature that Americans prefer makeup to skincare products. They use makeup to cover up flaws and treat it as a commodity. More ads that display hair care products may indicate that Americans value great hair and are easily persuadable to try new products. It is also interesting that Americans smile more than the French. This fact can be interpreted many different ways. One could question whether this demonstrates that Americans are happier than French people. It could also be used as evidence that Americans value straight, white teeth, or that smiles are used to make

consumers believe that if they purchase a certain product, they will be as happy as models in advertisements.

This study also investigates gender roles as part of culture and the idea of beauty. It may not be surprising that the U.S. had more non-working women, and women as decoration. This seems to imply that the U.S. values traditional gender roles. Other studies have found more stereotypical gender portrayals, including males in authoritative roles and women in secondary roles, in the United States (Aronovsky & Furnham, 2008; Furnham & Imadzu, 2002). American advertisements indicate its culture associates men with work, and places women in decorative roles. Although many Americans believe that their society has advanced since the staunch gender roles of the 1950's, these advertisements illustrate that 60 years later, Americans may still perform the same roles. For women, this may mean limited opportunities in America and can lead to anxiety, frustration, and low self-esteem. In contrast, French advertisements show more men with family. This could indicate more contemporary gender roles. Female beauty is not only how women look, but it also is how they are treated in society which influences respect, self-worth, and happiness that can radiate in beauty.

This study also reaffirms the overarching differences in advertising between the U.S. and France. Americans tend to focus on the mottos of "bigger and better" and "more, more, more!" Advertising capitalizes on these ideas, thus over saturating society with advertisements. In general, American magazines are comprised of 45 to 50 percent advertising compared to editorial content. Clearly, advertising has been wildly successful as a marketing technique in the U.S. The French, in contrast, disapprove of an overabundance of advertisements. Their publications allow a proportion of advertising to total pages of about 25 to 30 percent. Marketing techniques are also tightly monitored by government agencies. Furthermore, according to the *Handbook of French Popular Culture*, "a great number of ads in France do not inform the public about price, features, or quality; rather, they seek to foster an awareness and create an image for a product" (Dobkin, 1991, p. 7). The handbook summarizes it as:

> The distinctive character of French advertising, which is quite different
>
> from the American tendency to search for the "bigger and better" idea.
>
> Effective advertising is where the concept is by all appearances quite distant

from the satisfaction it seeks to promote in the reader. The important element
is seducing readers and having their active participation in the "decoding" of the
ad. (p. 9)

Differences in the manner in which each country prefers its advertising are critical to international advertising firms and to multinational corporations. This paper shows the importance of culture and the need to recognize and articulate the differences between various diverse societies. If a company wants to successfully place an advertisement in a French publication, for example, it must consider all cultural elements, no matter how subtle.

However, the most important aspect of this paper is to identify how women's products, portrayals, ideas of beauty, and gender roles are shown in advertisements as it lays the ground work for understanding media effects. Studies have shown that teenage girls and women have felt that media pressures them to have a perfect body and after reading women's magazines, women felt worse about their own appearance. Comparing content across-cultures helps to identify subtleties of culture and social behavior which can trigger image issues. Understanding content is necessary before battling the effects.

Limitations and Further Research

This study provides the base and inspiration for investigating the concept of beauty in a broader perspective in France and the U.S. However this single effort cannot do it alone. Analyzing more advertisements, including from more issues of these four women's magazines can help validate results. Moreover, additional publications, including different magazine genre also can help in the generizability of the findings.

In the current climate of globalization, this research can be expanded by studying other major countries from Europe, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and South America to determine how beauty is viewed in different nations and if there is a universal idea of beauty. Additional themes could also be added to the investigation, like more facial expressions, dressing style, and body language. Understanding beauty and attractiveness from an audience perspective through surveys, focus groups, and ethnographies would also be beneficial to help understand what is in the mind of consumers. As the old saying goes,

"beauty is in the eye of the beholder." And in today's interconnected world, how does this affect women's self image and respect for women by members in society?

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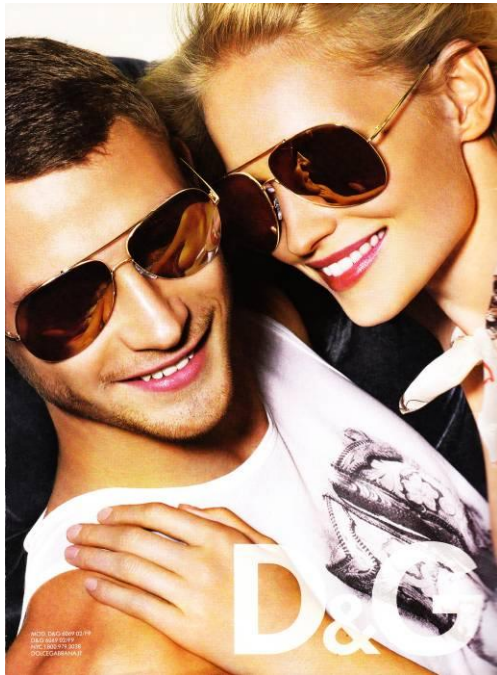
Appendix: Examples of coded advertisements

Figure 1: Couple smiling, rated an
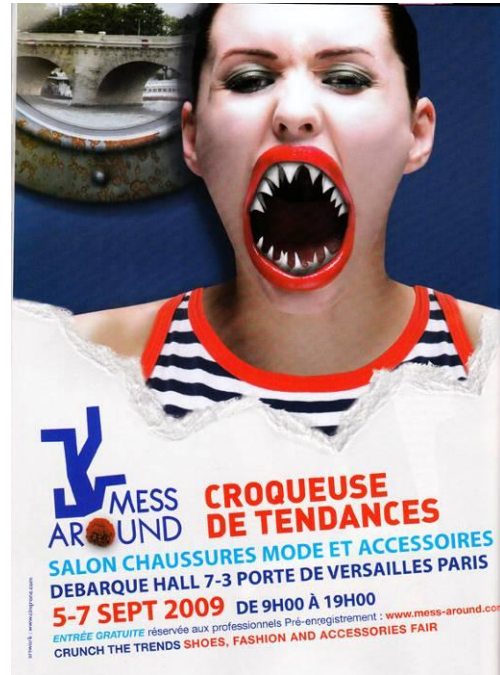average of 2 out of 3 for smiles.
U.S. Marie Claire 4/2010

Figure 2: Woman in a bizarre role, rated
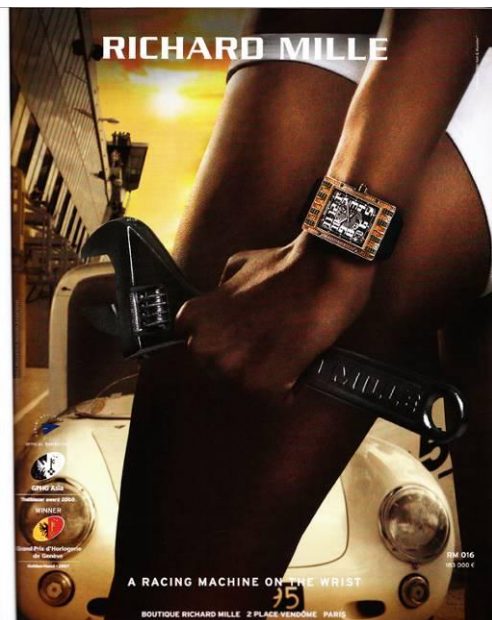an average of 3 out of 3 for bizarre.
L'Officiel 7/2009

Figure 3: Woman in a sexy role, rated an
average of 3 out of 3 for sexiness.
L'Officiel 7/2009

Figure 4: Woman in a user role.
U.S. Marie Claire 4/2010

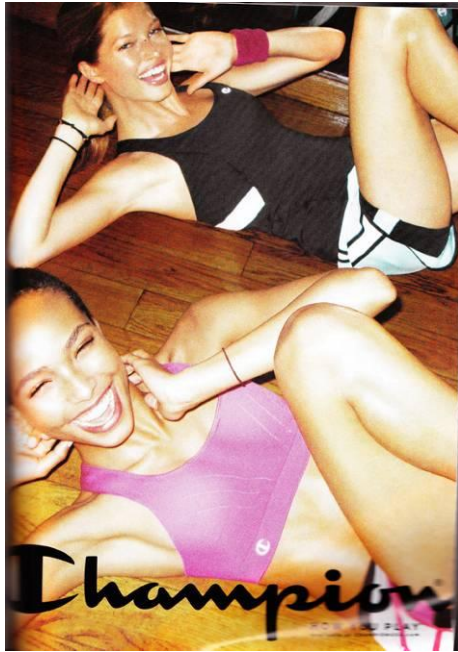Figure 5: Women in recreational roles.
U.S. Marie Claire 4/2010

Figure 6*: L'Officiel 7/2009*

Figure 7: Woman in a symbolic role. *L'Officiel 7/2009*