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A Mother's Love: A Narrative Analysis of Food Advertisements in an African American Targeted Women's Magazine

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A Mother's Love: A Narrative Analysis of Food Advertisements in an African American Targeted Women's Magazine

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how food advertisers contributed to the cultural identity of the "good mother" in the 1990s and 2000s. It expands on previous research that investigated traditional gender ideologies in food advertisements by narrowing in on the specific stories presented to African American women. It highlights a time when advertisers were responding to the demands of African American activists to recognize the African American consumer, and depict African American characters in a positive light. A narrative method of inquiry is utilized to deconstruct the stories in 117 food advertisements running in *Essence* magazine (an African American targeted women's magazine) in the 1990s and 2000s. Analyses suggest that the most frequent narrative in both decades was the story of the "good mother." Food advertisers primarily constructed this story with characters of mothers, fathers, and their children in the 1990s, and children alone in the 2000s. Other characters that recurred less frequently were the "good woman," "expert advisors," and "activists and innovators." Yet, these characters made minimal appearances compared to those in the "good mother" category. This study suggests that in the 1990s and 2000s food advertisers were portraying African American characters in a positive manner, but that these positive portrayals reinforced hegemonic ideologies about family life that ignored the experiences of mothers living outside of heteronormative nuclear families.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the narratives in food advertisements targeting middle class African American women in the 1990s and 2000s. The advertisements are deconstructed using a narrative method to uncover the characters within the advertisement. By analyzing the characters, we can see the story unfold. Each character plays a part in the plotline, with the overall story being about an ideal identity or lifestyle for the African American woman.

The production of these identities can reflect and project formula stories, which can produce cultural identities. By a formula story, I am referring to socially circulating stories that describe typical types of characters, acting out typical plot lines (Berger 1997). These are stories that widely circulate the media and everyday life, and narrate cultural identities (DiMaggio 1997) or what it means to be a certain kind of social actor, such as "the good mother," or the "welfare mother." Cultural identities serve to form symbolic boundaries around certain types of social actors, or in other words, they create guidelines for the appropriateness of particular actions for certain disembodied characters (Lamont and Virag 2002). This thesis explores how food advertisers reflected and projected cultural identities of African American women in the 1990s and 2000s.

Why analyze advertisements? Every day we see advertisements that are communicating to us stories about the kinds of lives we should be living. They contain

messages about how our lives would be better if we incorporated a certain product into them. Yet, their messages sell us things beyond the product itself. Advertisements sell us identities or lifestyles (Leiss, Kline, Jhally 1997).

Food as an expression of identity: the purpose of studying food. Food is an important marker of identity. Foods carry meanings beyond their nutritional values, and the foods that we consume can signify something about our identities (Moore 1957; Fischler 1988; Parraga 1990). For example, eating meat can symbolize strength, and therefore, the consumption of meat is often associated with men and masculinity (Fischler 1988). Once a food reaches a symbolic status, the nutritional values of the food become secondary in importance (Parraga 1990). Consequently**,** through the foods one eats and the symbols they represent, an individual can project a desired image of the self that is consistent with his or her values (Parraga 1990). For purposes of this project, I will call the identities we project through our food consumption food identities.

Our food identities develop through our social interactions. Eating is central to social life, and foods take on meaning within these interactions. The meanings that we assign to foods usually come from the culture that we live in or the groups we interact with (Moore 1957). The values of our social group or culture help define which foods are desirable to eat, and which foods are off limits for consumption (Parraga 1990). Through the consumption of these foods, we can assert our oneness with a group and an otherness towards outside groups (Fischler 1988; Mintz 2002). “Food is a symbolic marker of membership (or non-membership) in practically any sort of social grouping” (Mintz 2002: 26). Food consumption integrates us into a culinary system and into the worldviews of a particular group (Fischler 1998). In this sense, a meal signifies much

more than feeding the body, for it also encompasses “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (Barthes 1979: 21). Since our food identities develop within our social groups, food identities serve as “relevant marker[s] of power, cultural capital, class, gender, ethnic, and religious identities” (Parasecoli 2008: 2).

Women and food advertisements. Food advertisers project traditional gender ideologies by promoting food as a way to alleviate the problems that women may face while attempting to feed their families while also appealing to Western body image standards that promote dieting and healthy properties of food (Parkin 2006).

Food advertisements reflect and project gender ideologies that allege that food provisioning is the responsibility of women. Research suggests that women perform the majority of work associated with food, and often feel that it is a part of their role as “wife” or “mother” to feed their family (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). Women often suggest that this work is not really work, but an expression of their love (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). Yet, Devault exposes the abundant amount of emotion work that is actually involved in the process, with emotion work referring to the work done to change an unwanted or inappropriate emotion to a desirable one (Hochshield 1979). Women also believed that part of their role as food provider was bonding their families together though food provisioning, and keeping their children healthy (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). Food advertisers reinforce these gendered ideologies about food provisioning by aggressively targeting their products towards women (Parkin 2006). Food advertisers suggest that a woman can use their foods to express her love,

bring her family together, keep her husband happy, and feed her children foods that are good for them (Parkin 2006).

Food advertisements targeting white women also reflect and project gendered ideologies about food consumption that suggest women should eat less than men should. Charles and Kerr (1988) found that women believed young boys needed more food than girls did because they were more active, and that their husbands needed more food because they were more active by being at work. Because of this, mothers often relinquished their needs for food if there was not enough to go around (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). Similarly, mothers often reported giving up their own personal desires or tastes for food to satisfy their family's tastes (Devault 1991). Food advertisers reflect and project these beliefs by focusing primarily on the food needs of husbands and children (Parkin 2006). Food advertisers also perpetuate gender ideologies that suggest women should limit the amount of food that they eat, by suggesting that their products will help women diet, lose weight, and be beautiful (Parkin 2006).

African American women, food, and advertising. Studying food advertisements directed specifically at African American women is important for two main reasons. First, the food identities of African American women can differ from those of white women. African Americans can use foods to express ties to African American culture, particularly with soul food (which I discuss in more depth shortly). African American women also have a distinct relationship with food in that, historically, African American women often had to give up cooking for their own children to cook for white families (Collins 1994b). In addition, mothering and feeding is often considered a community endeavor (Collins 1994b). The second reason is that African American consumers have

very poorly received the advertising industry's portrayal of African American women throughout history. This poor reception is a result of the stereotypical depictions of African Americans in advertisements and the general ignorance of African Americans as consumers by the industry until the mid-twentieth century (Chambers 2008).

Food and ethnic identity. Food can be used to signify ties to an ethnicity, or in other words, to symbolize one's ethnic identity. The negotiations of what is acceptable to eat or not is an example of how ethnic groups draw boundaries between themselves and others, defining who belongs to the ethnic group and who does not (Devine, Sobal, Bisogni, and Connors 1999). The role of ethnicity in food choices is not set formulas that determine the food ways of a particular group. Ethnicity can be enacted through food choices, with ethnic food identities being more salient in some situations than others (Devine et al. 1999). For instance, ethnic food identities are more salient during holidays or family celebrations, which act as important events to pass down or maintain cultural values and traditions (Devine et al. 1999). Expressing ethnic identities through food is particularly important for minority groups, in which case, meaning arises around whom one shares and prepares the food with (Devine et al. 1999).

The preparation and consumption of soul food is a way for African Americans to express an ethnic identity. By the middle of the twentieth century, the diets of most African Americans resembled those of whites of the same social class (Whit 2007). Many African Americans adopted distinctly American diets following emancipation as a way to express an American identity, and fit in to mainstream society (Whit 2007). Today, the eating patterns of most African Americans are similar to those of white Americans. However, a feature of this diet is often the incorporation of soul food.

The concept of soul food developed in the 1960s as part of the soul movement that sought to define Black identity through arts, politics, and most important to this thesis, food. In its creation, soul food became associated with a shared history of oppression, and for some, a symbol of cultural pride. Middle-class African Americans used soul food to draw boundaries between them and the white middle class, while at the same time, aligning themselves with African Americans in a lower class (Whit 2007). Soul food includes such foods as black-eyed peas, fried chicken, hamhocks, black-eyed peas, grits, hushpuppies, and okra. However, it largely has to do with the amount of love or "soul" that goes into the food. Liburd (2003) found that soul food was an important part of the social relationships of the African American women she interviewed, and that the women used food as a way to express love within these relationships. Women "use[d] food for 'meaning making,' that is, to demonstrate how they feel about others, to create fond childhood and adult memories, and to sustain their social ties with their friends and acquaintances" (Liburd 2003: 163). For purposes of this paper I will refer to embodying the food practices associated with soul food as having a soul food identity.

Contributions of this Study

Parkin (2006) has analyzed the gender ideologies in food advertisement that primarily target white women. Parkin does not specifically examine the construction of food identities for African American women. The reason for this oversight can be traced to the general exclusion of African Americans within the advertising industry and within the images it has produced (Kern-Foxworth 1994; Chambers 2008). However, I perform my analysis throughout the years of 1990 to 2010, a time when advertisers were recognizing African Americans as consumers, and were attempting to create positive

relationships between particular brands and African Americans (Chambers 2008). To date, I have not found any studies that examine the specific narratives in food advertisements directed to African American consumers, particularly in magazines targeted to African American women. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the specific food identities constructed for African American women in the last decade of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

General Theories of Consumption

Amongst social theorists, there are many different arguments about the influence advertisements have on consumption (Leiss et al. 1997). Scholars have attacked advertising for creating a consumer society; while at the same time, advertisers claim that they cannot cause anyone to purchase a product, all the while, spending billions of dollars a year on advertising (Leiss et al. 1997). In this review, I consider how we should view advertisements in regards to the food identities of African American women, concluding that advertisements become part of Bourdieu's habitus, and form a system of meanings around consumption.

Critical views on consumption. A critical perspective on consumption asserts that consumption is the result of the manipulative forces of the capitalist elite, particularly through the use of advertisements. Neo-Marxist writers of the Frankfurt School suggest that advertisements are an attempt to manipulate society bending the desires of consumers. Writers such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) and Marcuse (1964) put forth the argument that advertisements transmit discursive meanings generated by those in hegemonic positions of power (Marcuse 1964, p. 8). The mass media acts as a tool for manipulation creating "false needs", to support the ideologies of the ruling class. These "false needs" require the consumer to have a form of capital to purchase them, therefore keeping the consumer within the capitalist system. The perpetual obsession with

acquiring products to fulfill these ‘false needs’ keeps the subordinate classes from ever achieving class consciousness.

Also arguing that advertising is a manipulative tool, Packard (1957: 11) wrote that advertising is a form of conspiracy attempting to control the thought processes of the consumer by creating consumer anxieties, hopes and fears, which “channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions” (Packard 1957: 11). Ewen (1976) also suggests that advertising acts a form of surveillance limiting individual autonomy. In essence, we become dupes to the advertising industry, which limits our creative abilities and creates needs for products that we do not really need, but come to define who we are.

This manipulation model approach has been criticized as overly simplistic and deterministic. For instance, under this school of thought, food advertising creates a ‘false need’ for the products and consequently leads to consumption of the product, therefore keeping the consumer in the capitalist system to pay for the foods. In some cases, the need for a product was produced by the advertising industry, but in the case of food, we can assume the basic need for nourishment is biological. If advertisements are creating a need for anything then, they are creating the need to purchase a particular brand of products or types of foods. The purpose of most advertisements is to sell a particular brand (Leiss et al. 1997); this lends support to the argument that advertisements could be creating a “false need” for brand name products. However, this model still ignores that consumers interpret advertisements, and can accept, modify, or reject the messages in them based on their social position (Hall 1973).

Veblen and the theory of conspicuous consumption. A Veblenesque approach to consumption suggests that consumers buy goods or products to signify a social status or

position (Veblen 1925). Veblen notes that food can be used as a signifier of social class, with certain foods demarcating a particular social position. Those of the upper classes can assert their high social status by eating high status foods, which is considered a display of conspicuous consumption. According to this theoretical approach, the lower classes may adopt the consumption patterns of the upper class, in what is termed "trickle down effects." When this occurs, the upper class will change their consumption patterns ending in a revolving cycle of "keeping up with the Jones."

Food advertisers in the 1960s suggested to white women that their foods could be a way for her family to access the status of the upper class, but they did not target these same ads at African American women (Parkin 2006). In the 1960s, food advertisers began marketing their products as a way for white women to achieve social status for their families, suggesting that their foods could lead the family into the upper class (Parkin 2006). At this time, middle-class white families were able to buy what they "wanted", and not just what they "needed," changing the way that advertisers marketed foods to white women (Parkin 2006). Advertising trade journals in the 1960s reported that African American women heavily used name brand food products, and ate meals that were distinctly American as a way to fit into mainstream America, but advertisers did not advertise these messages to African American women (Parkin 2006). This suggests that African Americans may have used food to signify an association with middle-class America, but food advertisements did not communicate this association. In addition, the social construction of soul food suggests that food consumption has meaning for African Americans beyond social class.

Advertising and Issues of Identity Construction

More recently, sociologists have shifted their attention to the meaning of advertisements in identity construction within a "postmodern climate" in which, the self is under a continuous state of construction and reconstruction, and the idea of a "true" self seems less applicable than in the past (Gergen 1991). We are expected to be in so many different places at different times and engage in a multitude of social relations that we no longer have one fixed identity (Gergen 1991). For this reason, social theorists debate how advertisements help inform these identities.

Baudrillard and the consumer society. Baudrillard (1998) suggests that we live in a consumer society, where we can express our identities through the consumption of products. In this consumer society, the sign-value, or that which the use of the product signifies, and the use-value, or that which the product actually does, have become disconnected or separated. Most material goods are now consumed for their sign-value instead of their use-value. Commodities become inscribed with meanings, largely through the influence of advertising, and become a form of communication where their consumption equals an expression of an identity. Advertising then creates a system of reality construction and reconstruction where there is no longer any "true reality," but only the signification of signs through which we express our identities. Yet, this "hyper real" world ignores real lived conditions, which effectively constrain the consumption practices of consumers. For example, if one does not have the money or access to a product, then he or she cannot make it a part of his or identity.

Bourdieu and the notion of the habitus. The French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu (1984), suggests that our culture and economic conditions largely inform our

patterns of consumption. In *Distinction,* he develops the concept of cultural capital, which is a form of social knowledge that develops through the habitus, and can grant us access or acceptance to specific groups. The habitus is a set of socially learned tastes, skills, or dispositions that we achieve through our everyday experiences and interactions. As described by Chin (2001: 32), "in the habitus the child is socialized to the small gestures and bits of knowledge that allow a person to operate as a member of one's culture or class: how to eat, where to sit, inflection of the voice, what to wear". In other words, our tastes are a reflection of our social interactions and experiences. Bourdieu's theory suggests that when we consume we are able to actively express an identity, but that our social interactions inform us of the meanings of consuming. It also takes into account that our consumption patterns are constrained by our economic position. Consumption, then, is a way that we can express our identities, not freely, but bounded by our social relationships and constrained by our economic means.

Bourdieu's theory provides a framework for developing a theory on the influence of food advertisements targeting African American women. This theory suggests we use consumption as a way to bind us to our social groups, while accounting for economic constraints. Within this framework, advertisements become part of the habitus, communicating meanings around certain products. However, the readings of these advertisements are understood within one's social context. The discriminatory history of the advertising industry towards African Americans has contributed to a distinctive relationship between African American women and advertisements. Chin (2001) argues that the relationship between African Americans and consuming in general has a unique meaning given that for over two hundred years African Americans were both

commodities for sale, and actively barred from consumption. The act of consumption was often a way that a slave could be distinguished from a free man or slaveholder. A newly freed slave could use consumption as a means to show his status, but in the end, he was still rejected by society because of his skin color (Chin 2001). Advertisers also played a role in barring African Americans from consumption by completely ignoring them as consumers until the middle of the twentieth century (Chambers 2008). The act of consuming brands then, took on new meanings because African Americans began using their purchasing power to support advertisers who presented them in positive ways (Kern-Foxworth 1994; Chambers 2008). The meanings that African Americans construct around advertisements can be viewed as an interaction between: their meanings of everyday life; their relationship with the advertising industry and the specific brands being advertised; and the stories being presented in the advertisements.

If advertisements can become part of the habitus that we interact with, then we must examine exactly what advertisements are selling us. A cultural studies approach to the social meanings of advertisements suggest that the identities produced in advertisements are a reflection and projection of our culture.

A brief history of advertising. During the 1920s, advertisers began attaching their products with particular lifestyles or identities, and were therefore, not only selling a product but a lifestyle (Jhally 1989; Leiss et al. 1997). Around the 1920s, the advertising industry saw a massive expansion and began to act as a social guide informing people of matters of morality, style, behavior, and social roles (Marchand 1985). This shift occurred largely because advertisers needed a way to distinguish their products amongst the many others in the market. Advertisers sought to inform people not only about what

the product could do, but how the product could improve or transform their lives and social relationships (Marchand 1985).

The late 1980s saw another shift in advertising design, which was a movement towards branding, however, this strategy suffered a setback in the 1990s before reemerging as the dominant advertising form in the 2000s. Branding is different from advertising; branding refers to companies selling a name that represents a whole range of products and not a specific product. The advertisement is just one vehicle to convey the identity of a company to the consumer. Brands give companies identities and bring them to life to represent a certain characteristic of lifestyle (Klein 2000). If advertisers are selling us lifestyles or identities, the questions becomes: Where do these identities come from and on what are they based?

Cultural studies and advertising as communication. Cultural studies scholars suggest that advertisements reflect and project ideas about ideal lifestyles and identities. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1997: 5) argue that:

> *Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is rather an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions. This venture is unified by the discourse through and about objects, which bonds together images of persons, products, and well-being.*

In other words, advertisements not only sell a product, but create a system of meanings surrounding certain products, and particular categories of people.

These systems of meanings are a reflection of our culture, as advertisements take in pieces of our culture and replay them back in exaggerated form. Cultural studies scholars assert that advertisers attempt to construct identities for a target audience, based

on what they know about them, and because of this, we can look to advertisements to see the values of a culture (Leiss et al. 1997). They argue that to sell products, advertisers draw upon cultural references and social trends from the target audience to communicate a story about the product or the brand (Leiss et al. 1997). Advertisers attempt to construct stories that will make the consumer associate the product with his or her experiences, relationships, or imaginations, and will consequently evoke an emotional response from the reader. By using social references, advertisers suggest buying a product can bring about positive emotions, such as nostalgia, joy, or relief from stress; or help to avoid negative ones, such as inadequacy and fear. Advertisers repackage the experiences of the target audience in an exaggerated form to sell visions of ultimate realities. Leiss and colleagues (1997: 200) compare advertisements to "a carnival hall of mirrors, where the elements of our ordinary lives are magnified and exaggerated but are still recognizable." By selling us our lives in exaggeration, advertisers are also reinforcing these identities as the ideal lifestyle, creating a cycle where they become more and more exaggerated.

Food Advertising and Women

Advertisers create stories to sell a lifestyle to particular audiences. Until the 1970s, African American women were not one of these audiences. When advertising underwent a great expansion in the 1920s, one of advertisers' main targets was the middle-class "housewife". Advertisements suggested that consuming was part of her role of "housewife" or "mother", and targeted her with beauty and household products. At this same time, there was a general oversight of African Americans as consumers by the advertising industry. Firms did not market their products to African Americans and very rarely featured African American characters in advertisements, with the exception of

featuring them in derogatory or demeaning roles. This trend continued until the second wave of feminism and the civil rights movement challenged representations of race and gender by the advertising industry. Advertisers responded to the challenges from white women by showing working mothers in advertisements, and not just women as "housewives." However, advertisers still targeted women for household products, and more specifically, food products (Parkin 2006). Media outlets such as African American newspapers, television, and magazines, which began appearing during the civil rights movement, gave advertisers a way to respond to the criticisms by African Americans towards the advertising industry (Chambers 2008). Parkin (2006) documents the general oversight of African Americans in food advertisements, yet notes that towards the end of the twentieth century, food advertisers began featuring African American characters in ads in *Ebony*, an African American targeted magazine. The reason these advertisements began appearing is likely due to the gains made by African Americans with the advertising industry towards the end of the twentieth century (Parkin 2006).

White Women, Advertisements, and Consumption. Throughout the twentieth century, advertisers selling household products targeted women because consuming was considered an extension of the domestic labor that was primarily performed by women. Sparking the second wave of feminism with *The Feminine Mystique* and a critique of the "problem that has no name," Betty Friedan (1963) illustrated how the lived realities of housewives did not coincide with the ideal images portrayed in the media. She suggests that we cannot place blame on advertisers for creating the mystique, but that advertisements certainly helped perpetuate its ideals. According to Friedan, advertisers saw a creativity and power in women that was even denied by social scientists at the

time. But, instead of using this to empower women to work outside the home, advertisers used this idea to suggest ways that women could make housework creative, and therefore, psychologically fulfilling. The advertisements suggested that time saving devices could save time and energy so that housewives would have more time to spend on developing their families and family life. When Friedan asked an advertising executive why he did not tell women that they could use this extra time to do fulfilling activities outside the home, like become an astronaut, the executive responded: “We liberate her need to be creative in the kitchen. If we tell her to be an astronomer, she might go too far from the kitchen” (Friedan 1963: 325). Friedan’s work challenged the images of women produced by advertisers, but advertisers did not quit selling women household products. Instead, they began selling them using images of working mothers, suggesting that women can be more than “housewives” and mothers, but that their main responsibility was still in the kitchen.

Parkin (2006) tracks the gender ideologies in food advertisements targeting women. Throughout the twentieth century, food advertisements continued to portray the role of white middle class women to be that of homemaker or mother. However, towards the end of the century, these advertisements became slightly less hegemonic, but subtle clues still reinforced the idea that food provisioning was still women’s work. Parkin (2006) suggests that in the early twentieth century, food advertisers were reluctant to use working mothers in their advertisements and featured women as homemakers. Following World War II, Parkin argues that advertisers began to notice a change in their consumer where women were less likely to associate cooking with being a prerequisite to being a good wife and mother. Advertisers used this information to market convenience foods as

a way for women to cook without having to slave away in the kitchen while maintaining the ideology that it is a woman's responsibility to buy, cook, and prepare food. In the 1970s, the advertisements began to expand to feature women not only as homemakers, but also as working mothers. At this time, food advertisers began to acknowledge the working mother as a consumer likely in need of their assistance in the kitchen. Advertisements perpetuated the belief that convenience foods could alleviate some of the pressures of being a mother. Parkin (2006) found that towards the end of the century, food advertisers started to use fewer individuals in their advertisements and reduced text including gendered terms. Yet, manicured hands with wedding rings continued to enforce traditional gender roles. The late 90s saw a reduction in the gendered messages in food advertisements, yet the advertisements still subtly reinforced the idea that food choices fell to women. However, Parkin's analysis largely reflects the gender ideologies portrayed through advertising to white women. As mentioned previously, the reason for this was the exclusion of African Americans by the advertising industry throughout the twentieth century.

The history of African Americans and the advertising industry. Advertising targeted towards African Americans began shortly after emancipation in African American newspapers and has since expanded to infiltrate many media markets, such as magazines, television, and radio. At the end of slavery, African Americans were allowed to accumulate economic resources, which meant that they could become consumers in the market place (Chambers 2008). However, they were still largely ignored by advertisers for two major reasons, the first was that most advertisers assumed African Americans still had no economic purchasing power. The second reason was that, given the racially

hostile climate of the time, advertisers feared backlash from white consumers if they were to market towards African Americans (Chambers 2008). Roland Marchand (1985) suggests that advertisers work in a form of "market democracy" where one dollar equals one vote. Building on this idea, Chambers (2008:4) argues that in a consumption based society:

> *Advertising's positive and representative depiction of blacks fulfilling their role in the consumer society would be symbolic evidence of blacks' accepted status in society: stereotypes and subservient roles pointed to and justified discrimination, while positive or even simply accurate representations would point to their role as equal consumers and equal citizens.*

With the help of key African American figures engaging the advertising industry to push for more representation of African Americans in advertising, consumer boycotts, and financial reports suggesting that African Americans were an untapped market that now held purchasing power, by the 1970s, the advertising industry began paying attention to the African American as a consumer.

In *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,* Kern-Foxworth (1994) reviews how advertisers represented African Americans throughout history. This analysis focuses largely on images of African Americans in white-targeted print advertisements, but it is nonetheless important to the understanding of the imagery used to represent African Americans in advertisements throughout the twentieth century. The first images of Blacks in advertising were those in slave advertisements, depicting African Americans in derogating images to be bought and sold as property. After emancipation, the depiction of African Americans in advertisements seemed to change very little and continued to portray African Americans in positions of servitude as domestic help for whites. Deck (2001) illustrates how the

image of the mammy used in food advertisements aimed at the middle-class white housewife reassured her that she is always superior, but also that this friendly figure of the mammy would always be there to act as her servant, even if it was just in the form of a convenience food product. This trend continued throughout the early 1900s. Until shortly after the civil rights movement, African Americans very rarely appeared in advertisements, but when advertisers did include African Americans, the images were largely derogatory or demeaning.

During the civil rights movement, African Americans began pushing for promoting a positive African American image in the media, and more specifically in advertisements (Kern-Foxworth 1994). With the increasing expansion of media outlets, African Americans were able to see that they were being portrayed as second-class citizens and were the have-nots in society. “Armed with this knowledge, Blacks demanded depictions of themselves that more resembled reality and portrayed them in real-life situations such as wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, workers, and family members – people equipped with the same ambitions, desires, and needs of the dominant group” (Kern-Foxworth 1994: 39). In the late 1960s, the government recognized the need for both African American’s participation in the advertising industry, and representation, or more specifically, positive representation of African Americans in advertising imagery. However, these messages seemed to have had little effect as advertisements continued to use Black characters in traditional domestic roles, such as cooking and cleaning. Images of mammies were used to sell household products to whites, as this image was supposed to represent a trustworthy and comforting image of domestic expertise. Successful Black icons such as Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus, were all

successful and considered trustworthy in the 1960s because they relied on notions of Blacks as experts in domestic work. (For full descriptions of these characters representations see Fox-Kernworth 1994).

In the 1960s, advertisements were still featuring stereotypical images of African Americans, however, due to activism during the civil rights movement and onwards, changes began appearing in the 1970s (Chambers 2008). During the fall of 1962, several activist groups began requesting that advertising agencies use African Americans in their campaigns. Prior to this, advertisers never considered marketing directly towards African American consumers, and just expected that advertisements aimed at a white audience would also reach the African American consumer. Audience members were supposed to do the work of translating the generic white person to suit their own identities. Both the Congress of Racial Equality and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People responded to the exclusion of African Americans by the advertising industry and made requests to include African Americans in advertisements. When these requests were not met, the organizations began to threaten the advertising agencies with boycotts by the rapidly growing African American consumer market. At this time, African American owned advertising agencies started to emerge, which helped to define the African American consumer. This consumer was one "who shared the consumer values of the larger society but who had a unique history and social and cultural outlook that needed special expertise to target properly" (Chambers 2008: 14). The increasing involvement of African Americans in the advertising industry led to new images of African American consumers during the 1970s.

Chambers (2008) tracks the emergence and closure of African American owned advertising agencies during the 1970s. These agencies were dedicated to showing positive images of African Americans within African American targeted media. The growth in African American targeted media, such as newspapers, radio, and magazines, gave African American owned advertising agencies a clientele to sell their services. They were able to produce positive images of African Americans and define the soul market. However, the end of the 1970s saw a massive closure of African American owned advertising agencies because of their ineffectiveness of reaching consumers outside of their target market (of African Americans). These agencies could no longer compete with large national advertising agencies and had to shut down.

By the late 1980s, most African American advertising agencies had already closed down, yet African American targeted media was increasing, requiring more advertisements tailored for this demographic (Chambers 2008). This meant that a large majority of advertisements targeting African Americans were being produced by advertising agencies consisting of predominantly white employers (Chambers 2008). Yet, these advertisers were being directed to portray African Americans in non-stereotypical and positive ways. For instance, advertising agencies were encouraged to market to African American consumers by showing positive portrayals of African American families (Chambers 2008). Since this thesis is examining food advertisements targeting African American women in the 1990s and 2000s, the narratives in the advertisements reflect a response from food advertisers to the demands of African American consumers. These demands were that advertisers market to them and show them in a positive light.

Cultural Identities of the "Good Mother"

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, ideologies about what it means to be a "good mother" swarmed the media. Stories about the "good mother" rely on what has been labeled by scholars as "the myth of motherhood" (Thurer 1994), "the mask of motherhood" (Maushart 1999), and "the mommy myth" (Douglas and Michaels 2004). This myth relies on the idea that women are naturally inclined towards mothering and that they are fully responsible for the well-being and development of their children. Maushart (1999: 3) argues that we see this mask in "the values of a culture that glorifies the ideals of motherhood but takes for granted the work of motherhood, and ignores the experience of motherhood." These circulating stories about what it means to be a "good mother" produce cultural identities of the "good mother."

Full-time mothers and working mothers: The 1980s-1990s. During the 1980s, popular mainstream women's magazines and other forms of media exploded with images of the "good mother" who could either be the working mother or the stay-at-home mother as long as she was putting her children's needs above her own. Media depictions of mothering in the 1980s showed stay-at-home mothers with traditional values (Keller 1995). In the 1980s, the growing number of working mothers meant that the image of the "housewife" had lost its prestige, and therefore, needed redefining. In the 1980s, the "housewife" was redefined as "homemaker" and then as "full-time mother" in the media, who was a complete expert in her child's care. The homemaker was not the entrapped "housewife" of the 1950s because she chose to stay at home with her children. During this time, media images of the working mother combatted the accusations that working mothers were "bad mothers" for taking time away from their children's safety, social and

psychological development. They suggested that working mothers were also "good mothers" when they made sacrifices in other areas of their life to ensure they spent just as much time with their children as stay-at-home mothers (Keller 1995).

From "good mother" to "new momism": The 1990s and 2000s. The 1990s and later decades continued to show images of the "good mother". Douglas and Michaels (2004: 13) label this time period the "new momism", which refers to "the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24.7, to her children." Douglas and Michaels contend that with the "new momism" the standards for success are impossible to reach, as mothers are expected to be responsible for every aspect of their children's well-being. This type of mother is expected to do it "all". She has lost authority, as she is not referred to as "mother" anymore, but "mom" and should be the child's friend on top of everything else (Douglas and Michaels 2004).

These images reflect the ideology of "intensive mothering" introduced by Hays (1998), which is an ideology that asserts that mothering should be child-centered. "Intensive mothering" includes the ideas that mothers are primarily responsible for child care, and must be devoted to their child's every need, by being emotionally nurturing, guided by expert advice, and financially self-sacrificing. Circulating media stories about mothering suggest that mothers that embody the beliefs of "the myth of motherhood," "the mask of motherhood," "intensive mothering" and the "new momism" are "good mothers," producing a cultural identity of the "good mother."

African American mothers as examples of the "bad mother." The media rarely depicts African American mothers as "good mothers." African American mothers are usually shown in complete opposition to the "good mother", instead, embodying the role of the "welfare mother", or in other words, the "bad mother." Douglas and Michaels (2004) note that African American mothers were rarely featured in mainstream media from the 1980s to early 2000s, with the exception of Claire Huxtable on *The Cosby Show*. For the most part, when African American mothers did appear in the media, they were used as examples of "bad mothering."

Beyond featuring African American women as "welfare mothers," the media has also projects other stereotypes of African American women. These other stereotypes include the "mammy", the "Sapphire", and the "Jezebel" (Collins 1991).Stereotypes such as the "Jezebel" and the "Sapphire" also perpetuate the notion that African American mothers are "bad mothers." While the stereotype of the "welfare mother" or "welfare queen" depicts African American mothers as lazy and leeches on the government system, the "Sapphire" suggests that African American women are overbearing, hard, nagging, and emasculating. The stereotype of the "Jezebel" depicts the African American woman as a sexual prowess who is immoral and uses her body for seduction. These stereotypes are often combined and used to depict working class Black mothers as "bad mothers" (Collins 1994a). The media depicts these mothers as overly sassy or nagging, and neglectful of their children, but continuing to have more because of their overly sexual "nature" (Collins 1994a).The "mammy" stereotype is the opposite of the "Sapphire," she is all nurturing and good-natured. However, her image is related to her former presence in the homes of whites, where she acted as a domestic servant and caretaker for white

children. The “mammy” is typically heavyset, masculinized and lacking the qualities that are supposed to make women desirable.

Collins (1994a: 139) argues that “the controlling images associated with poor and working-class Black women become texts of what *not* to be. To achieve middle-class status… [African American women] must somehow figure out how to become Black “ladies” by avoiding these working-class traps.” Claire Huxtable reflects this new identity of the middle-class Black women. “The character of Claire Huxtable was beautiful, smart, and sensuous. No cornrows, gum chewing cursing, miniskirts, or plunging necklines existed for [her character]” (Collins 1994a: 139-140). Collins argues that these images of middle-class Black women are not denounced because they contain Black women’s sexuality to domestic life, which is only expressed within a heterosexual marriage.

Research Statement

This thesis explores the narratives in food advertisements targeting African American women in the 1990s and 2000s. Since advertisements reflect and project identities and lifestyles (Leiss et al. 1997), this thesis explores how food advertisements reflected and projected cultural identities of the “good mother” or the “good woman” to African American women. By using a narrative method, it takes into consideration that advertisers constructed these ads for a specific purpose, which was to convince African Americans that they respected them as consumers. This thesis answers the question: *what did food advertisers in the 1990s and 2000s construct as the ideal identity or lifestyle for African American women?*

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Narrative Method

I suggest that if advertisements are telling us stories about ideal lives, then we should analyze them using a narrative method. If advertisements are acting as a form of communication, then the symbols and signs within them can become part of our habitus that we engage when we consume. If advertisements are communicating stories about lifestyles and identities (Leiss et al. 1997), then a deconstruction of advertisements should reveal ideal identities or lifestyles. These ideal identities or lifestyles, however, may not always reflect the ideal values of the target audience. For instance, many African American women feel that advertisers do not understand them (Lattimer Communications 2009). Therefore, we cannot assume that the identities of African American women in advertisements are accurate reflections of African American women's lives. A narrative method satisfies this concern because it allows us to consider such things as for whom and why was the story told? For this reason, and others I will discuss below, I used a narrative method of inquiry as explained by Loseke (2011) to analyze the stories in food advertisements targeting African American women.

To analyze the food advertisements targeting African American women, I utilize Loseke's (2011) four steps for empirically analyzing a formula story. These four steps include establishing social context, doing a close reading, categorizing explicit descriptions of story characters, and unpacking symbolic and emotion codes. In the

following sections, I will explain each of these steps and why it is particularly important when examining food advertisements targeting African American women. First, however, I consider how advertisements meet the requirements for a narrative analysis.

Narratives, or stories, contain characters, a setting, a plot, and a moral. The structures of narrative can all be found within advertisements. Advertisements can be read as stories by looking at the characters within the advertisements, where the characters are situated (the setting), and the actions and result of actions performed by the characters (the plot). Actions met with positive results illustrate the proper way to act as a certain character, in other words, demonstrating the moral of the story. Each character in the story serves a specific purpose, and must be read within the social context of the advertisement.

Establishing social contexts. The first step in analyzing formula stories, establishing social contexts, asks "who authored the story? Why does the author claim the story is written? Who is the intended audience? What type of story (fact, fiction, fictionalized fact) is being claimed?" (Loseke 2011: 257). This step is important because it allows us to consider the relationship of advertisers to their target audience, which can have a considerable influence on the stories that advertisers narrate. It also allows us to take into account the social contexts of the time when advertisers were narrating the stories. This is particularly important for advertisements directing African American women because unlike white women, advertisers ignored African American women throughout the first half of the twentieth century creating feelings of angst between African American consumers and advertisers. This relationship between African

Americans and the advertising industry must be accounted for when analyzing advertisements directed at African American women.

Categorizing an explicit description of story characters. This step requires us to deconstruct the characters within the advertisement categorizing them according to their typical actions and characteristics. In this step, we can categorize which characters are considered "good" characters, and which characters are considered "bad" characters. By doing so, we can see what advertisers constructed as "good" identities for African American women. In addition, this step also helps us consider how other characters besides the African American women herself help contribute to the identity of a "good African American woman."

Unpacking symbolic and emotion codes. This step requires us to unpack the symbolic and emotions codes within advertisements. Symbolic codes are socially or culturally circulating codes that suggest how the world functions, how it should function, and the rights and responsibilities of particular social actors in their world (Alexander 1992). Symbolic codes include meanings of race, gender, ethnicity, and family life (Loseke 2007). These are often socially constructed concepts that appear to be "truths" of the world. Emotion codes are culturally circulating ideas of what are appropriate emotional responses to particular events or people (Loseke and Kusenbach 2008). This step is important when examining advertisements because it allows us to consider how food advertisers associate specific emotions with their products. It also allows us to consider how advertisers viewed the lives of African American women through deconstructing the symbolic codes within the advertisement.

Lastly, when we are analyzing stories we must keep in mind three major assumptions. The first assumption is that the story will be interpreted differently based on different social actors' understandings and acceptance of the symbolic and emotion codes. Secondly, we must assume these stories do not reflect the lived realities of the characters that they produce. And lastly, we must acknowledge that the story is likely producing a one-dimensional character, which does not reflect the complexities of everyday life. By keeping in mind these assumptions, we can analyze the story itself before considering its influence on identities (Loseke 2007).

Sample

The advertisements included in my analysis come from the magazine *Essence.* I chose this magazine because it is one of the highest circulating African American targeted women's magazines, with a paid circulation in 2011 of 1,060,613 (*Essence* Magazine 2011). I also chose to analyze *Essence* magazine, because it was the first magazine targeted specifically towards African American women.

As it is an African American women targeted magazine, *Essence* has a predominantly Black readership (92% of readers), and a low white readership (6% of readers). Readers are also predominantly women (75%), have a median age of 39, and a median household income of $48,589 (*Essence* Magazine 2011). More than half of its readers have a college education (67%), and slightly less than half have a household income over $50,000 (48.5%) (*Essence* Magazine 2011). Just under half of *Essence* readers are homeowners (48.9%) (*Essence* Magazine 2011). About half of *Essence* readers are mothers (51.8%), and 23.7% are working mothers (*Essence* Magazine 2011). Less than half of *Essence* readers are married (37.4%) (*Essence* Magazine 2011). The

magazine is considered a general interest women's magazine meaning that it covers a broad range of topics that appeal to a large and heterogeneous audience. This means that the overarching target audience of the magazine is an audience of middle-aged, middle-class African American women. I will note that even though this magazine was targeted to African Americans in the middle class, given that it is one of the few African American targeted magazines, we may assume that women of all classes were reading it.

In my analysis, I include all even-numbered years between the years 1990 and 2010. These years are important because they encapsulate a time when advertisers were finally attempting to brand African American consumers (Chambers 2008). I included all issues from the months October, November, December, and January. I chose these months because they are typically associated with holidays, where foods are a common part of social interactions and events, and these months, are therefore, a common time to express food identities.

I collected my sample by taking pictures of each advertisement that was selling food as a main product. I excluded advertisements that contained food only if food was not the product being sold, such as advertisements selling cleaning products where food is displayed in the image but not being sold. I excluded these advertisements because their focus is not on the provisioning of food. I included advertisements for grocery stores because food is the main product for sale at these stores. I did not include beverages in my analysis as a systematic way to reduce my sample size.

The total sample of food advertisements throughout this period was 201 ads. Only advertisements with characters were included in my final narrative analysis (58.2%) for a final sample of 117.

To draw comparisons between this sample of food advertisements and food advertisements in mainstream media I use the work of Parkin (2006). I use her work to look at the general trends in food advertisements to observe the similarities and differences in advertising themes between mainstream magazines and an African American targeted magazine.

Categorizing the Data

The characters in these advertisements were categorized into four different character categories. These categories were created inductively and were based on the characters in the advertisements and the plot lines that the characters enacted. All characters were placed into a character category based on their contribution to the overall identity of the "good African American woman." The character categories include: the Good Mother; the Good Woman; Expert Advisors; and Activists and Innovators. I show the frequency of these characters overall (see table 1), and by decade (see table 2). I further examine how the narratives within the stories change by decade through qualitative analysis.

Good mother. Advertisements featuring characters comprising the identity of the Good Mother were the most commonly occurring advertisements. This story was prevalent in 49.6% of the advertisements. In the 1990s, 54.7% of advertisements used the story of the Good Mother, and in the 2000s, 45.3% did so. In this category, I included all advertisements that featured the characters of mothers, children, and husbands. For a character to be considered a mother, she had to either be with children in the advertisement or the advertisement needed to make specific reference to her as a mother or feeding her family. Characters that were children were included in this story category

if they were with their mothers, or the advertisement referred to how a mother could improve her child's life through preparing him or her proper foods (i.e. the foods in the advertisements). Lastly, I put husbands in this category when the images showed the father bonding with the child but reference was made to the mother buying, preparing, or cooking the food. I placed husbands in this category only when it was explicit that the husband was not the one preparing, cooking, or, serving the food. In the 1990s, 48.3% of advertisements using this story featured a mother with a child or children, whereas 27.6% featured a father and a child or children, 20.7% used one or more children, and 3.4% showed a husband and wife. In the 2000s, advertisements featuring only children became more popular with 65.5% of this category being comprised of images of the Good Mother's children. Of the remaining advertisements in this category, 27.6% included the Good Mother and her child(ren), and 6.9% included a father and his child(ren). (For a full break down of these characters by decade, see table 3). I largely focus my analysis on the story of the Good Mother because of its pervasiveness throughout the advertisements.

Good woman. Another prevalent character category in this story is the Good Woman. This Good Woman was used in 13.7% of the ads overall. However, almost all of these ads ran in the 2000s. In the 1990s, 3.8% of the ads included the story of the Good Woman, while in the 2000s, 21.9% of the ads featured her. This category includes all women who were unspecified as mothers, but were preparing food for either themselves or others where the party being served is not specifically the woman's family. In this category, I included all images of women exercising, or women giving exercise, weight loss, or nutrition tips, specifically for the reader's or character's own body. I classify these women as separate from the ones in the expert advice category because they are

either not famous or not displaying any esteemed expertise about cooking or nutrition that a chef or scientist would possess.

Expert Advisors. The characters in the Expert Advisor category are all giving advice based on their expertise or their authority as celebrities or esteemed experts in a specific area. This story was present in 12.5% of the advertisements in my sample. It was more prevalent in the 1990s, when it composed 20.8% of the ads, than it was in the 2000s, when the theme was included in 10.9% of the ads. This category included all experts such as scientists, athletes, chefs or cooks, and popular media figures. Almost half of this expert advice came from chefs (41.2% of advertisements), whereas the rest came from a variety of other experts (58.9% of advertisements). All of these experts were Black (100%). The most commonly occurring media figure in this sample was Bill Cosby. In this category, I also included well-known fictional figures such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, but Uncle Ben only appears once and Aunt Jemima only appears as the face on the pancake box at the bottom corner of advertisement. This may represent a more critical response to Aunt Jemima's associations with slavery versus Uncle Ben's associations with being a rice farmer (Kern-Foxworth 1994; Parkin 2006). In the end of the twentieth century, food advertisements in mainstream magazines also used Aunt Jemima's face only on the box in the corner of advertisements (Parkin 2006).

Activists and Innovators. In the Activists and Innovators category, I included characters that symbolized success, perseverance, and community activism. The purpose of the characters in these stories was to sell an identity of African American pride and success. Therefore, advertisements were included in this category when they were selling a brand identity that associated the company with African American success, and made

little to no reference to the food product. This category made up 12.5% of all of the advertisements. In the 1990s, 13.8% of ads used these characters. Similarly, in the 2000s, 12.5% of ads included activists and innovators. This category consists of characters such as Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights activists, community leaders, and other successful African Americans.

Table 1. Overall Frequencies of Character Categories in the 1990s and 2000s

Character Category	Frequency[a]	Percentage of Total
Good Mother	58	49.6
Activists and Innovators	18	15.4
The Good Woman	16	13.7
Expert Advisors	15	12.5
Other	10	8.5

[a] Out of 117 total advertisements (total is based on all advertisements that included characters).

Table 2. Frequencies of Character Categories by Decade

Character Category	Frequency in 1990s[a]	Percentage of Total in 1990s	Frequency in 2000s[b]	Percentage of Total in 2000s
Good Mother	29	54.7	29	45.3
Activists and Innovators	7	13.8	8	12.5
The Good Woman	2	3.8	14	21.9
Expert Advisors	11	20.8	7	10.9
Other	4	7.5	6	9.4

[a] Out of 53 total advertisements (total is based on all advertisements that included characters in the 1990s).
[b] Out of 64 total advertisements (total is based on all advertisements that included characters in the 2000s).

Table 3. Frequencies of Characters within the Good Mother Category by Decade

Character(s)	Frequency in 1990s[a]	Percentage of Total in 1990s	Frequency in 2000s[b]	Percentage of Total in 2000s
Mother and Child(ren)	14	48.3	8	27.6
Child(ren)	6	20.7	19	65.5
Father and Child(ren)	8	27.6	2	6.9
Husband and Wife	1	3.4	0	0

[a] Out of 29 total advertisements (total is based on all advertisements that included characters categorized in the Good Mother story in the 1990s).
[b] Out of 29 total advertisements (total is based on all advertisements that included characters categorized in the Good Mother story in the 2000s).

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

The Good Mother

Food advertisements targeting African American women between 1990 and 2010 suggested that their products could help her be like the Good Mothers in their advertisements. The identity of the Good Mother was included in 49.6% of ads in the sample. Food advertisers showed their products as a way to help the reader solve the problems that she faces as a mother keeping her children and husband happy, and healthy. By doing so, they also constructed an identity of who the Good Mother was, which reinforced a cultural identity of the Good Mother that was present in mainstream media in the 1990s and 2000s. According to these advertisements, the Good Mother is one who happily provisions foods for her children or husband as a symbol of her love. Her identity as a mother is the most important identity in her life. Even if she is a working mother, she does not let her child(ren) go to school without giving them a "proper" meal. She also keeps her children happy by satisfying their tastes, and healthy by satisfying their nutritional needs. She does this all as a symbol of her love.

Food advertisements in *Essence* magazine in the 1990s narrated a story of how their products could help the Good Mother who lived within a middle-class heteronormative nuclear family. The products offered her a way to solve the problems such as a shortage of time associated with being a working mother. They also told her that their products could help her be the best homemaker and help her carry on traditions.

Food advertisers also suggested that their products could help the Good Mother bring her husband and children together. These stories sold the identity that Good Mothers were married mothers, homeowners, and all nurturing. In the 2000s, the food advertisements in *Essence* magazine emphasized the importance of the Good Mother's role in two major areas: keeping her children healthy, which resulted in school success and achievements; and bonding with her children, which happened when she provided them with fun foods. The consistent plotline throughout the 1990s and 2000s was that the Good Mother provisioned all of the food for her family as a symbol of her love, reproducing gendered food identities.

Food equals love. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, food advertisers associated food provisioning with a way for mothers to show their love. About 80% of the food advertisements in the 1990s and 2000s associated food with love to sell their product. Parkin (2006) notes that food advertisers began associating food with the emotion love as early as the year 1902. Food advertisers particularly stressed that convenience foods could be used as a sign of love, a concept developed by advertiser Ernest Dicther (Parkin 2006). He suggested that:

> *In appealing to appetite, perhaps more than any other area of advertising, it is imperative to avoid the cold, straight pitch, to keep away from the attention-getting devices, which jangle the emotions. Appetite flourishes in an atmosphere of love, warmth, trust, and security. Like a loving mother, food advertising must neither demand, nor insist, but rather gently offer its wares (Dichter 1957, as cited in Parkin 2006: 32).*

I found the idea that food is equivalent to love in my sample throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Food advertisers told African American mothers that they could use the company's products as a way to express their love for their husbands and children. By

doing so, the advertisements reinforced the ideology that there is a natural association between mothering, love, and food provisioning, thereby including food provisioning within the identity of the Good Mother.

The Good Mother in the 1990s. In the 1990s, advertisements narrated stories featuring middle-class heteronormative families. These advertisements featured either working mother or mothers as homemakers. These advertisements also featured fathers that were working in professional or managerial jobs. These traditional nuclear families lived in houses furnished with leather couches and children's rooms full of toys. The advertisements suggested that their company's foods were able to assist the role of the mother within this family structure. Their products could help her prepare foods for special occasions and daily life at a convenience. These foods would also meet the nutritional needs and tastes of her family. Even though they were convenience foods, the advertisers told the Good Mother that her mother would also approve of their products. The advertisements perpetuate a heteronormative nuclear family as the ideal family form. Their products offer solutions to the problems within this family, ignoring that this "ideal" family form was not the reality for many African American women in the 1990s.

Working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers: the 1990s. In the 1990s, 48.3% of advertisements selling the identity of the Good Mother used images of mothers and their children, creating a story about what it means to be the character of the "Good Mother". In these advertisements, the good mother is nurturing and all loving. She has straightened hair, and she wears dress suits, blouses, and pearl earrings, suggesting that she belongs to the African American middle-class. The use of straight hair in these advertisements engages the politics of African American women's hair, and suggests a symbol of

conformity to white culture that may be rejected by African American women who prefer natural hair to signify ancestral or racial pride (Rooks 1996). The Good mother looks similar in appearance to iconic Claire Huxtable from the *Cosby* show. She represents a complete opposite of the "welfare mother", or the domineering "Sapphire". She is not lazy like the "welfare mother," she is hard working either devoting her time to being a perfect homemaker, or working outside the home while still fulfilling her child's every need. She is not domineering like the "Sapphire," but she is soft and gentle and lovingly embraces her children.

In the 1990s, food advertisers marketed their product towards African American women as a way to alleviate the difficulties of being a working mother. They suggested to mothers that their products could help them fulfill their desire to feed their family "proper" foods, while they participated in paid employment. An advertisement for Quaker Oatmeal that appeared in December of 1992 (see figure 1), read "For Moms who have a lot of love, but not a lot of time". The central image in the advertisement featured a mother with her arm around her son looking at him and smiling, while he smiles down at his bowl of Quaker Oatmeal. The mother is dressed in a blazer and skirt while her son is wearing a collared, long sleeve striped shirt. Their dress appears to signify a middle-class status. Forming a semi-circle around the central image, six smaller faded images depict the busy mornings of this Good Mother. Five out of the six of these images show the Good Mother helping her son out. The images progress as she wakes up her son in his bed, watches him brush his teeth, helps him put on his outfit, heats up his breakfast, and walks him to the school bus, where she finally picks up her briefcase suggesting she is on her way to work with a big smile across her face in each image. The small text of the

advertisement reads “Guess what! In 90 seconds flat – about the same time it takes to make cold cereal – you can make Instant Quaker Oatmeal. He’ll get piping hot Quaker Oats nutrition – in flavors he loves. And you’ll both get a nice warm feeling inside!” The advertisement offered relief for mother’s busy mornings getting their children ready for school. By acknowledging the needs of working mothers, the advertisements included working mothers into the definition of the Good Mother. By doing this, they also perpetuated ideas about “intensive motherhood” (Hays 1998), suggesting that working mothers must also be responsible for their children’s needs.

Figure 1. Quaker Oats Ad Running in *Essence* in 1992.

Advertisers in the 1990s also marketed their products towards homemakers as a way to carry on family traditions with less stress. These advertisements emphasize that their ingredients are just as high quality as those the Good Mothers’ mother used. The Good Mother could depend on these companies to provide her with the quality that she

needed to carry on family traditions and keep her children healthy. An advertisement created by Kraft that ran in October of 1990 (see figure 2) states, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”. A picture of an African American woman wearing an African headscarf and an African patterned dress, while mixing up batter with an electric mixer is at the top right hand corner of the advertisement. In this picture, a little girl holding a Black Cabbage Patch Doll is watching the woman. The advertisement shows a progression in time, and the next picture down the page on this advertisement is a mother with her hair down and styled, wearing a sweater. In this picture, the woman’s traditional African clothes have been replaced with clothing styles of the 1990s.In this picture, the mother is helping her son build a sandwich. The text reads:

> *Times have changed and today, the time you have to cook for your family gets less and less. But, you can count on one thing to stay the same – Kraft’s excellent quality. We’ve made it our business to keep pace with you in these changing times by offering consistently good tasting food products. And convenient new ways to prepare them. And we’ve been doing it for 75 years. Caring homemakers have come to expect nutritious, high quality foods from Kraft. And that’s the one thing we’ll never change.*

The advertisers tell mothers that their products will help them keep pace with the increasing demands of being a homemaker. They suggest that the Good Mother’s mother trusted this brand, and that she should too.

Advertisements reinforced the Good Mother identity by suggesting that their products were good for special occasions or passing along family traditions. The advertisers told women that their products could help her out on special occasions. An advertisement that ran in January of 1992 (see figure 3) featured an African American family gathered around a birthday cake. In this advertisement, a young African American boy is the center of attention. He is wearing a birthday crown and has his eyes lowered

towards his birthday cake decorated with gingerbread basketball players and basketballs. His mother has her arms wrapped around him. The boy's father has his arms around the mother. The boy's two sisters have smiles on their faces as they watch the boy enjoy his birthday cake. The advertisement describes how the convenience of their product made this occasion possible:

> *With Pillsbury plus you can make a special cake come true. Because if adding your own special touches is your way of adding a little love, you can do it with Pillsbury Plus cake. Stir in a handful of oats if you want. Or ginger ale instead of water. And frosting your cake with Pillsbury Funfetti frosting makes that love a little sweeter. Whether you make it our way or yours, a Pillsbury Plus cake is always pure wish fulfillment.*

A larger text below this reads: "Pillsbury plus you makes the moment." The advertisement suggested that by adding extras of her own to the mix, the Good Mother could take away any stigmas associated with convenience foods. The advertisement also gave her suggestions on how to transform this product from the monotony of a convenience food to one that embodies her love and is appropriate to serve on special occasions.

Figure 2. Kraft Foods Ad Running in *Essence* in 1990.

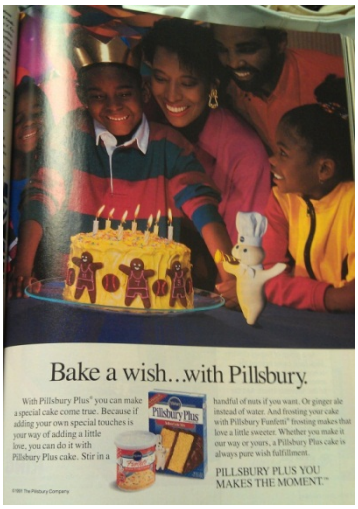

Figure 3. Pillsbury Ad Running in *Essence* in 1992.

A Bisquick advertisement that ran in 1996 and 1998 (see figure 4) told African American mothers that Bisquick could help the Good Mother create biscuits just like her mother used to make. This advertisement sold Bisquick as a way for mothers to carry on traditions related to Southern cooking, but this was a rarity as it was the only ad in this category to include this theme. The advertisement features a young African American girl in pigtails and a white blouse with flowers on the collar holding a biscuit up to her nose. The edge of the biscuit reveals the corner of the girl's mouth averted upwards into a smile. The advertisement tells the Good Mother that she can give her daughters the same memories as her mother used to make for her growing up. The advertisement reads:

> *I Remember opening Momma's hot, fluffy, golden-brown Bisquick biscuits. I always made sure I was in the kitchen before they came out of the oven and m-m-m-m… that aroma. Now, with my kids, I can make fresh Bisquick biscuits quickly and easily every time. My kids tell me, "It's in the mix, Mom."*

The advertisement calls on the nostalgia of the Good Mother's mother's cooking. The company emphasizes their products ability to pass on traditions, such as biscuits. This advertisement ran in October, November, and December in 1996, and in January of 2008. Its frequent recurrence implies that this story was either positively received by African American women, or that advertisers believed it was. While this advertisement frequented a number of issues of *Essence* magazine, it was one of the only advertisements to incorporate traditional aspects of African American cooking with the Good Mother identity.

The Good Father: The 1990s. In the 1990s, food advertisers told the story that their products could help women create a bond between their children and husbands. 27.6% of ads constructing the identity of the Good Mother in the 1990s featured fathers

and their children. Stories that featured fathers reinforced food provisioning as a part of the identity of the Good Mother. By buying, preparing, or baking the foods that she knows her family loves, the advertisements suggested that the Good Mother could bring her husband and children together. Mothers could help fathers share their daughter's interests of teddy bears and tea parties through provisioning the right foods. When the advertisements used fathers with their sons, they referred to the boys' interest in sports or independence. The advertisements suggested that by using the product the Good Mother could help her husband be a good father. Therefore, the advertisements suggested that part of the identity of the Good Mother was bringing her family together and enabling her husband to be a good father.

Figure 4. Bisquick Ad
Running in *Essence* in 1996 and 1998

An advertisement for Kellogg's cereal in 1996 (see figure 5) told the Good Mother that Kellogg's cereal could help her husband bond with his daughter. In this advertisement, the father is wearing a wedding ring symbolizing that this family is living

within the traditional nuclear family structure. The advertisement tells the mother that she can bring together her husband and daughter through their taste buds. “Common Ground”, the main text reads. Following this, a smaller text reads, “Their interests may not always be the same, but their taste is identical. Sweet, crunch Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes cereal. The all-time, all-family favorite”. In the advertisement, the Good Mother’s husband and her daughter are sitting on the front steps of a house with a white fence. The father has an interest in golfing, a high status sport, which is symbolized by the golf clubs that rest at his feet. His daughter, on the other hand is interested in feminine things, which the advertisers symbolize by dressing the girl in pink pajamas and placing a teddy bear at her feet. The advertisement suggests that the Good Mother is active in creating a bond between her family on an everyday basis, in this particular case helping her husband and daughter bond during the meal of breakfast.

Figure 5. Kellogg Company Ad Running in *Essence* in 1996.

Figure 6. Betty Crocker Ad Running in *Essence* in 1996.

An advertisement for Betty Crocker cake mix that ran in December of 1996 (see figure 6) told the Good Mother that she could use the convenience cake mix to create family memories. The advertisement suggested that the Good Mother could express her love by "baking" up memories between her husband and daughter. Similar to the father in the previous advertisement, this father is also wearing a wedding ring suggesting that he is married to the Good Mother. In this advertisement, the father is dressed in a long sleeve collared shirt and has a watch and glasses on making him appear to be middle-class, likely with a professional job. In the advertisement, he is having a tea party with his daughter and her doll, while they are enjoying the cake that the Good Mother made. The loving father smiles admiringly at his daughter as she digs into her cake. We know that the mother performed work prior to this image through the text, which reads: "What's my family recipe for capturing a memorable moment? Baking a Betty Crocker Devil's Food Cake with layers of Rich & Creamy Chocolate frosting. Then I set it right under their noses and step back to watch a sweet memory in the *baking*." The advertisements suggest that the Good Mother can make memories happen between her husband and children through her baking. In this advertisement, the mother was able to bring her family together by baking them a cake. The Good Father in this story serves to reinforce the identity characteristic of the Good Mother. While the Good Father spends time with his children, the Good Mother is still responsible for making this happen.

Parkin (2006) notes the appearance of fathers in advertisements towards the end of the twentieth century. These fathers were typically feeding or preparing foods for young toddlers or infants. In my sample, the Good Father was not feeding a child, but instead, was bonding with his child over foods that the Good Mother had provided. The

Good Father was married to the Good Mother, which was symbolized by the wedding ring on his finger. The advertisements suggested that the Good Father wanted to bond with his children, but sometimes needed help doing so, which the Good Mother was happy to provide. These advertisements reinforce the identity that a Good Mother is one who is married and lives within a nuclear family. These advertisements also suggest that a Good Mother keeps her family happy through the foods she provides.

African American families in the 1990s. The Good Mother in the food advertisements in *Essence* magazine was similar to the images of the "good mother" circulating in the mainstream media in the 1990s, suggesting that this story is part of a cultural identity of a "good mother." The Good Father character also appeared in mainstream media around this time (Douglas and Michaels 2004; Keller 1995). In mainstream media during the 1990s, there was a surge of "good fathers" shown as loving and devoted to their children. These "good fathers" were shown as friends or buddies to their children, but were not helping out with the housework were (Keller 1995). Douglas and Michaels (2004:17) argue that the recent emphasis on fathering, however, does not compare to "new momism", suggesting that "After all, a dad who knows the name of his kids' pediatrician and reads them stories at night is still regarded as a saint; a mother who doesn't is a sinner." The Good Mother story in food advertisements in *Essence* magazine helps reinforce notions about what it means to be a "good mother." This story suggests that African American mothers could, in fact be a "good mother", unlike the abundant images of the "welfare queen" suggested. At the same time, it also reinforced the idea that "good mothers", live in "good families", with "good husbands."

The advertisers constructed an image of the "good family" that was a heteronormative nuclear family, but in the 1990s only about half of African American families were headed by a couple (O'Hare 1991). Significant changes in the family structure around the 1990s prompted observers to suggest a crisis in the African American family, which they believed was the result of the growing number of African American female-headed households (O'Hare 1991). In 1990, only 39 percent of African American women were married and living with their husbands (O'Hare 1991: 17). In addition, African American men in general had difficulty fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner due to low wages and little job security (O'Hare 1991). While the advertisements do not reflect the real conditions of African American families in the 1990s, they serve to reinforce ideologies about what a "good family" is.

Food for healthy, intelligent children: the 2000s. In the 2000s, food advertisers in *Essence* magazine stopped selling their products emphasizing the Good Mother's role in the nuclear family, and began telling her that their products could keep her children healthy, which would result in their school success. These advertisements no longer featured the Good Mother, but images of her children. In these stories, the Good Mother "creates" a successful child by feeding them the proper foods, which are foods that both taste good and are nutritious. In these advertisements, the Good Mother has become the master of her children's destiny. If she performs her food provisioning properly, her children will be successful.

An advertisement for Campbell's Soup running in December of 2008 (see figure 7) suggests that their product will help the Good Mother's child use her imagination. The advertisement features an African American girl daydreaming. The girl has a small smirk

on her face and her eyes are fixed to the upper-left, suggesting that she is staring off into space. She has her spoon placed in a bowl of chicken noodle soup. A rocket sketched by a pencil is bursting out of the soup, symbolizing that she is using her imagination. The advertisement suggests that Campbell's Soup will "Fuel her body and spark her imagination". Since the soup has "no artificial flavors. Just yummy noodles, real chicken, and wholesome carrots" it is "just what she needs to reach for the stars." The advertisement suggests that the Good Mother can help her child use her imagination by feeding her child the right foods.

Figure 7. Campbell's Ad Running in *Essence* in 2008.

Figure 8. Hershey's Ad Running in *Essence* in 2004.

The advertisements construct the idea of a natural relationship between mothering and caring about children's nutritional needs. The advertisements present foods to mothers as a way to satisfy their children's taste, but also as a way to satisfy the Good Mother's natural desire to feed her children healthy foods. For example, an advertisement

for Hershey's Snack Bars running in 2004 (see figure 8) features an adolescent African American boy smiling while eating a "wholesome" snack bar indicating that he is enjoying it, which is a rare occasion as the main text reads: "Hershey's has Mike actually enjoying wholesome snack bars. The event astonished the Good Mother, causing her to faint from the shock. We know this because the advertisement features the Good Mother pushing herself up into a sitting position with her hands, while she has her mouth wide open in disbelief and stars swirling around her head. The smaller text reinforces this story, as it reads "New 'Hershey's Snack Barz' wholesome treats have the delicious taste of Hershey's chocolate in flavors kids love: Hershey's Reese's and S'mores Snack Barz are also a good source of calcium, iron and 7 essential vitamins. Plus, they have 0 grams of Tran's fat, which will make mom happy, as soon as she gets over the shock". The advertisers present the text in two sections, the first being the delicious taste, which is the part of the product that the child loves, and the second being the nutritional aspects, which are the part that the mother loves. This dichotomy between children loving foods for taste, and mothers loving foods for their nutritional aspects is consistent throughout the entire sample.

Studies on women and food suggest that mothers often feel like it is their responsibility to make sure they feed their families a healthy diet (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). Studies examining women and food suggest that women believe there is a relationship between health and food. However, most women had a hard time articulating this specific relationship and most descriptions given were vague or unclear. Providing children with a healthy diet is often a source of conflict within the family. Children may rebel against parental authority by refusing to eat the foods that mothers provide (Charles

and Kerr 1988). Yet, many mothers held the belief that childhood was a time for living freely and receiving treats, and gave their children treats often (Charles and Kerr 1988). Mothers spoke of attempting to balance their children's nutritional requirements, while satisfying their tastes (Devault 1991). Women often gain pleasure from providing food that was enjoyed, and feel hurt when it is not (Charles and Kerr 1988). Many women feel that the provisioning of enjoyed foods is part of being a good wife and mother (Charles and Kerr 1988; Devault 1991). The advertisements offer a way to meet these requirements, but by doing so, they also reinforce these ideologies, which helps to reproduce gendered divisions of labor.

The advertisements, however, also offer vague connections between their products and health. To claim that their foods are healthy, advertisers refer to their foods as "nutritious", lacking preservatives, or as including characteristics that make them fit into the USDA's health guidelines. In her book *Food Politics,* Marion Nestle (2007) illustrates how the United States Department of Agriculture nutritional guidelines have been influenced by food producers and lobbyists. In the early 1900s, the leading cause of disease was nutrient deficiency. The seminal discovery of vitamins and nutrients became of utmost importance to reduce the outbreak of such diseases, and therefore, the first set of guidelines, released in 1917, was based around getting the right amount of micronutrients in one's diet. These guidelines had the full support of food producers and manufacturers because they created a marketing opportunity where companies could market their products based on the vitamins and minerals within the foods. Today, the leading causes of disease are not associated with nutrient deficiencies, but with excessive (or unbalanced) intake of food and nutrients. The 2000 nutritional guidelines, therefore,

needed to include messages of “eat less” to educate people on appropriate serving sizes (Nestle 2007). This concept was not good news for food producers and lobbyists who worked to change these guidelines from that of “eat less” to euphemisms such as “eat moderate amounts of” or “choose lean meats”. The guidelines also focused on the micronutrients within foods that were considered bad. For example, instead of listing foods high in fat to avoid, the guidelines state to avoid fats. They do no inform the consumer which foods are more likely to be high in fat. Food producers were complacent with these guidelines because they did not suggest eliminating one food or another. Yet, Nestle argues that this lack of clarity about what exactly the guidelines mean leaves people confused about what they should be eating to stay healthy. The messages in these advertisements reflect food advertisers attempt to use the USDA’s food guidelines to suggest that their foods are healthy, however, as Nestle suggests, this can still leave mothers wondering exactly which foods are good for her children to eat.

Advertisements running in the 2000s reflect a growing concern about childhood obesity rates, especially amongst African American children who have higher rates of obesity that white children (Wang and Beydoun 2007). However, in the 2000s, Essence also began running advertisements with white children, which could reflect that advertisers were running the same advertising campaigns in both African American targeted media and mainstream media. This would imply that advertisers believed that the concerns of white middle-class women in the 2000s were the same as African American middle-class women, and that advertisers are using more African American characters in mainstream media. Nevertheless, the 2000s showed a distinct turn towards food being good for children’s health and academic success.

The Good Woman

In the 2000s, advertisers began narrating stories about African American women's bodies. Prior to this time, food advertisers ignored the dietary needs of the African American woman, focusing their stories instead on her relationship to her husband and children. Until the 2000s, the advertisements made no mention of African American women's health or figures. In the 2000s, food advertisements in *Essence* magazine began showing African American women eating diet foods and exercising to lose weight. Advertisers also began running ads that featured African American women indulging in food. The advertisements in my sample suggest that advertisers responded to a growing concern about African American women's health by marketing their foods for dieting or indulgence, a practice commonly used by food advertisers targeting white women throughout the twentieth century.

Foods for bodily control. In the 2000s, food advertisers began selling their products to African American women as a way to achieve smaller bodies, suggesting that the Good Woman is one who desires to be slim. The advertisements made reference to eating healthy, but as a way to produce smaller bodies. For example, an advertisement for Publix that appears in the year 2006 (see figure 9) features a slender, young African American woman smiling in the lower right hand corner. In the middle of the advertisements is a loaf of multi-grain bread, with big text above it that reads: "7 - healthy whole grains in each slice. 7 - her new dress size". The small text refers more closely to eating healthy as it reads: "Balancing family, friends, and eating healthy is easy with Publix Bakery Multigrain Bread. An excellent source of whole grains, each loaf is made from the highest quality ingredients, and baked fresh in the Public Bakery. One bite

and you'll agree, keeping fit never tasted so good". The advertisement acknowledges the difficulties that an African American woman may experience when attempting to eat healthy, such as balancing friends and family. This may be a reference to the social pressures that many African American women experience when attempting to eat a healthier diet. Yet, the focus of the ad is the women's new dress size, suggesting that the purpose for eating healthy should be to become smaller.

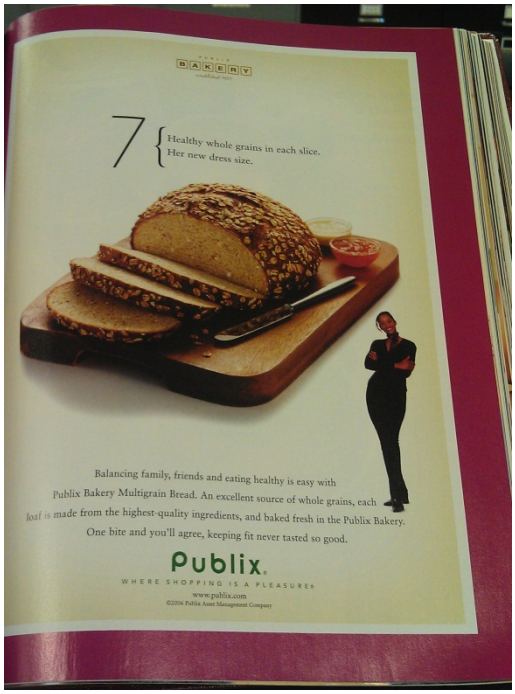

Figure 9. Publix Ad
Running in *Essence* in 2006.

Figure 10. Lay's Ad
Running in *Essence* in 2006.

Foods for indulgence and comfort. In the 2000s, food advertisers in *Essence* magazine began complementing stories of African American women dieting with stories of them indulging. Advertisers suggested that their products were so satisfying and delicious that they could be used for times of indulgence or self-comfort. For example, an advertisement for Lay's Chips that ran in 2006 (see figure 10) featured a young African American woman indulging on potato chips. This advertisement features a young African

American woman who is slender and has a short afro staring longingly at a chip, while sitting at a kitchen table. There is a "BBQ – HOT" sign pointing towards the chip. The smaller text at the bottom of the advertisement classifies the chips as "irresistible" as the text explains to the reader how to "bring home the heat". The text suggests to "tear open a bag. Release the aroma. [And] Enjoy the irresistible sweet BBQ taste with a spicy twist". By using the word irresistible, the advertisement associates the food with something that one should resist, but cannot. The woman's intense gaze on the chip tells a story that she is indulging in something that is almost sinful. The woman is eating off a plate, which holds her chips and half of a sandwich. The half a sandwich and portioned out chips imply that the woman is not overindulging. This Good Woman is used to tell the reader that Lay's potato chips are so good that she should use them at times when she wants to treat herself.

The thin ideal. Kilbourne (1999) and Parkin (2006) suggest that food advertisers throughout the twentieth century promoted food products as a way for white women to control their bodies. Foods labeled as "diet" foods were presented to white women as a way to keep their bodies' small. When advertisements used foods that were associated with fattening the body, such as cookies or ice cream, they suggested that their purpose was for indulgence. By associating their food products with dieting and thinness, food advertisers suggested that their products could help women meet thinness ideals associated with a Western standard of beauty. Wolf (1991) and Kilbourne (1999) suggest a relationship between a Western ideal of beauty that suggests thinness is beautiful (presented in women's magazines) and distorted body images amongst white adolescent girls and women.

The idea that thin equals beautiful is not as prevalent amongst African Americans, who tend to have a greater acceptance of, and in many cases prefer, larger body sizes. Bailey (2006: 44) terms this having a "flexible cultural definition of healthiness", which allows for varying degrees of acceptable body types. Several studies suggest that when asked to judge a preferred body type for self and others using figures of bodies, African Americans of all ages and genders larger figures more often than whites (Altabe 1998; Becker, Yanek, Kofman, and Bronner 1999; Cachelin et al. 2002; Miller et al. 2003; Thompson, Corwin, and Sargent 1997; Welch et al. 2004). Researchers conclude that because of this, young African American women tend to rate themselves higher on levels of sexual attractiveness (Miller et al. 2003), and general body appearance (Altable 1998) than white, Asian, and Hispanic women rate themselves. Tyler, Janet, and Francesca (1997) found that losing too much weight can actually be a reason for some African American women to stop dieting. For example, one of their respondents commented that her family told her that she looked sick from losing too much weight, when she was still 50 pounds above what the medical community defined as a healthy weight. Molloy and Herzberger (1997) suggested that since Black women are rarely shown in the media, they are protected from negative body images because they do not identify with the images of thin white models.

Yet, more recent research suggests that the gap between African American college aged women and white college aged women in terms of body satisfaction is closing, with more young African American women worried about their figures (Poran 2006). This suggests that a focus on body size in advertisements targeting African American women is problematic for two reasons. The first reason is that an African

American woman who does not believe having “extra fat” is a problem may reject the advertisement. The second reason is that these advertisements may communicate white ideals of thinness to African American women, which are associated with lower ratings of body satisfaction.

Expert Advisors

Throughout my sample, a range of experts gave advice about the qualities of different food products. These characters ranged from celebrities, to athletes, to scientists, and to chefs and cooks. The most commonly occurring expert in this story was that of a chef or cook, and therefore I focus my analysis on them. Unlike Parkin (2006), who found that advertisements targeting white women never used women as cooks or chefs, I found that women were commonly used as chefs or cooks in advertisements targeted at African American women. The image of the African American woman chef is a symbol of culinary expertise. The image transforms from being a mammy figure at the beginning of my sample, to a modern woman selling healthier ways to cook soul food at the end of my sample. These advertisements sell the idea that their products can be used as a way to express a soul food Identity.

For the stories of advice to be accepted by the audience, the audience would have to feel respect or trust for the character being shown. I found that about 82% of these advertisements used the emotion code of trust or respect to sell the product. Stories told by experts are generally associated with some form of “truth value”. Therefore, to accept these stories, the audience would have to embrace the code that African American cooks are a symbol of trustworthy culinary knowledge.

Chefs and Cooks. In the 1990s, food advertisers, specifically advertisers for Uncle Ben's converted rice, stressed that their convenience rice was capable of creating traditional soul food meals. They suggested that by choosing their product, women could carry on traditions at a convenience. One advertisement appearing in 1990 (see figure 11) uses Sylvia Woods, the owner and chef of Sylvia's Restaurant, a soul food restaurant in Harlem, New York. This information is given to the audience through her name and title, which reads "SYLVIA WOODS, OWNER & CHEF, SYLVIA'S RESTAURANT, NEW YORK CITY". Sylvia is a heavyset African American woman wearing a chef's hat and coat with a red bandanna around her neck. Her image resembles that of a mammy-figure, known for her dependability in the kitchen. She is telling the audience in bold text that "When I serve my Special Ribs with Cowpeas & Rice, I add a taste of home to the rice. And I always use UNCLE BEN'S". Across the advertisement, Sylvia's handwriting states "Soul food is Good Food Cooked with a Little Magic". The advertisement, therefore, suggests to the consumer that if a famous chef can use the product in her soul food, then you can too. In the advertisement, Sylvia reminds the reader that soul food is about the way the food is cooked; implying that with a little love the reader can also transform this rice into a culinary masterpiece. This story sells the identity of the Black mammy or cook with its product not as a way to alleviate the problems of white middle-class women, but to assure the consumer that the product will be just as good in her own traditional cooking.

The mammy image has been used to sell food products throughout advertising history, specifically food products to white middle class women. Deck (2001) argues that the Mammy image was used in food advertisements directed at white middle-class

women between 1905 and 1953. This image reinforced the domestic role of the white middle-class "housewife," but held her to a higher status than that of the African American woman. The advertisements idealize the cooking skills of the mammy to evoke jealousy from the white "housewife". The advertisements reinforce the idea that in order to keep her middle-class status and her husband's affection, the white "housewife" must learn to cook like the Mammy. She is able to do this by taking home products featuring the face of a Black cook or Mammy who will act as her spiritual guide throughout the cooking process. During the period that the advertisements ran, most white Americans could not afford hired help; however, the advertisements assured the consumer that by buying their products they could have access to an African American cook. While the advertisements suggest that these cooks are experts, they also reinforce the low social position of this role.

Figure 11. Uncle Ben's Ad Running in *Essence* in 1990

Yet, the mammy image used in my sample was not targeting white-middle class "housewives". Unlike the images presented to white women, the mammy is the main character in the advertisement instead of a backup to the housewife, implying that she is worthy of respect and admiration. Therefore, this advertisement suggests that convenience rice can be used in traditional Southern cooking, and does so by using a respected soul food chef to assure consumers that this product can be trusted.

In the 2000s, food advertisers continued to tell African American women that their foods could help them express a soul food identity, but in a "healthy" way. In the 2000s, Kraft used cooks that were African American women to communicate to the readers of *Essence* that Kraft's products could help them maintain tradition, but also live a healthy lifestyle. Kraft ran these advertisements throughout the 2000s. For example, an advertisement that ran in 2004 (see figure 12) featured a "Fried Chicken Makeover" called "Unfried Chicken". The advertisement featured a large image of a piece of oven-baked chicken coated in corn flakes, sitting on creamed spinach casserole, beside some apple coleslaw. The advertisement has recipes for all of these dishes, including the nutritional information of each dish. At the side of the advertisement there is an image of an African American woman who is an expert from Kraft's kitchen. The woman is heavyset and wearing a cream colored blouse. Her heavyset image may have served as a reminder that changing one's diet would be a challenge and would not necessarily make one skinnier, but that the foods would at least be healthier. Beside her image are tips on how to prepare the chicken. The advertisement suggested to the reader that Kraft's products could be used to maintain a healthy lifestyle, while also continuing to express a soul food identity.

Figure 12. Kraft Foods Ad Running in *Essence* in 2004.

Activists and Innovators

Beginning in the 1990s and carrying on throughout the 2000s, food advertisers attempted to create a brand identity, which associated their corporations with African American history, pride, and success. Major corporations began producing these advertisements in the 1990s, shortly before the branding extravaganza of the 2000s. While branding took off in the late 1980s, it suffered a setback during the early 1990s because of the recession, in which case, many people were opting for value and price over marketing and labels. However, major companies continued to brand throughout the 1990s and remained faithful to the ideology that marketing required the selling of brands and not products. For instance, "Coke, Pepsi, McDonald's, Burger King, and Disney weren't fazed by the brand crisis, opting instead to escalate the brand war, especially since they had their eyes firmly fixed on global expansion" (Klein 2000: 17).

Part of this global expansion required these companies to reach out and brand African American consumers. These advertisers used the concept of branding instead of emphasizing the qualities of the food so that they could express to African American consumers that they were respected as customers. At the same time, these companies were suggesting that their company's name could be used as a symbol of African American pride. Large corporations in the 1990s such as McDonald's, Burger King, and General Foods attached their company's logo with images of civil rights activists and African American heritage, such as historically Black colleges. These companies offered their brands as a way for middle-class African American women to express an identity of African American pride and heritage. In the 1960s, food advertisers' trade journals reported that many African American women used national food brands and that African American women were very loyal to their brands (Parkin 2006). The trade journals told food advertisers that African American women used brands as a way to express their ability to consume and fit in with the rest of America, but food advertisers still refused to market to African American women (Parkin 2006)**.** The advertising campaigns running in the 1990s suggest advertisers had recognized the need to brand African American consumers and were making a commitment to do so. Advertisers attempted to brand African American women by suggesting that their corporations were committed to helping the African American community. By doing so, they were proposing that by consuming their brand, she too, is showing support for the African American community.

Collective Resistance and Black Identity: The 1990s. An advertisement by McDonald's that ran in January issues of *Essence* (see figure 13) during the early 1990s told African American women that together they could help keep the dream of Martin

Luther King Jr. alive. The advertisement features two young boys sitting on concrete steps. The advertisement is in black and white and the boys are wearing rugged clothes and sneakers. The slightly older boy has his arm around the younger one and both have forlorn looks on their faces. The one boy's gaze is averted to the ground, whereas the other looks off into the distance. The text across the top of the advertisement reads: "unless we keep living the dream… they'll live a nightmare". The advertisement then goes on to tell the reader that "Each and every one of us must do our part. And McDonald's joins the community in dedicating ourselves to keeping Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream alive. As we celebrate his birthday, we recognize the fact that the man who leaves the world a better place… never leaves." Beside this statement is a small McDonald's logo, but no pictures or descriptions of the food itself appear in the advertisement. In this advertisement, the McDonald's corporation is communicating to African American women that their company supports African American women in helping their children and community reach the American Dream. It should also be noted that the common reference to the civil rights movement may have to do with the fact that my sample included the month of January, which includes Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

An advertisement for General Foods attempted to brand women by suggesting that their brand symbolized a commitment to African American education and career success. This advertisement ran in 1990 (see figure 14) and features an African American college boy eating microwavable macaroni and cheese. He is wearing glasses and a sweatshirt from Lincoln University, an historically Black university. Off to the side, there is a smaller image of the boy's parents also cooking using General Foods instant

products. The parents have their heads together smiling while they read what appears to be a letter from their son. The text reads:

> *Sometimes the key to success is in the sheer power of inventiveness. In finding smart, working, solutions to challenging problems. Whether it's something as simple as fixing a home cooked meal in a dormitory kitchen, or as weighty as choosing a career for yourself.*
>
> *For example, choosing to attend a Black college can be a pretty smart decision. Because it's a decisions that will place you in an environment that encourages you to go as far as you can, and will put you in the company of 40% of Black college graduates in this country.*
>
> *And while you're away at school, discover the ingenuity of General Foods Minute Microwave Dishes. Delicious, convenient meals you can fix for yourself just about anywhere in hardly any time at all.*
>
> *General Foods, the makers of this and many fine family traditions you grew up with, wants to remind you that we've always been there for you… and we're still with you. All the way.*

In this advertisement, General Foods wants African American families to associate their products with the pride and prestige of achieving a college degree. The advertisers associate themselves with a form of cultural capital of middle-class African Americans, which is the knowledge of the meanings associated with a historically Black college. They suggest that their products have been a part of this tradition and can therefore be trusted.

These advertisements ran at a time when there was a growing disparity among the income levels of Blacks. In 1990, the median family income of Blacks was 61 percent that of whites. Yet, income levels of Blacks differed markedly by education level. Due largely to the achievements of the civil rights movement, such as the creation of historically Black colleges, the 1970s saw a rise in the Black middle-class. By 1989, "the

median income for blacks had grown to 82 percent that of whites for families in which both husband and wife worked" (O'Hare 1991: 27). There was also a growing number of affluent Blacks earning over $50,000 per year (O'Hare 1991). Being married and having a college degree were among the highest contributing factors to being in the Black middle-class. In 1989, "among married-couple families where the head of the household [was] 25 to 44 years old and a college graduate, the median income of blacks ($54,500) [was] 93 percent that of whites ($58,800)" (O'Hare 1991: 27). Advertisers were attempting to construct an identity for African American women within the middle class.

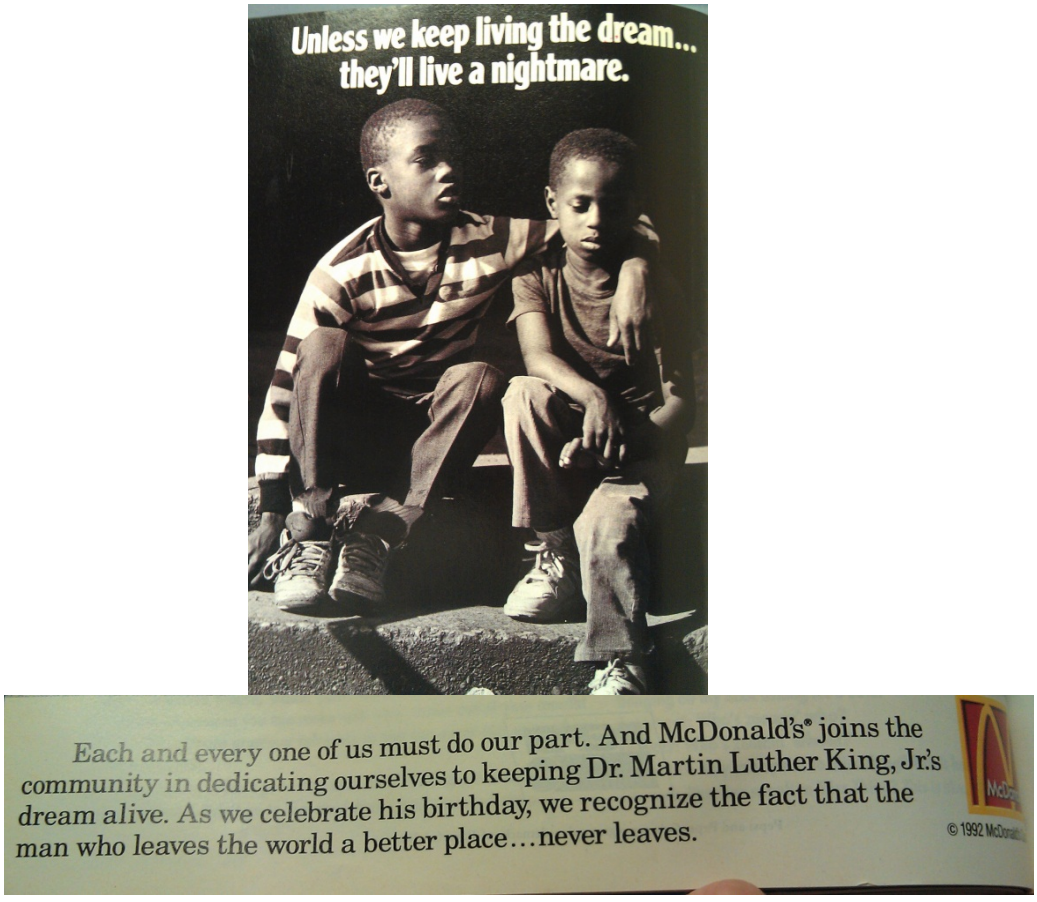

Figure 13. McDonald's Ad Running in *Essence* in 1990.

Figure 14. General Foods Ad Running in *Essence* in 1990.

Innovators and achievers: The 2000s. In the 2000s, McDonald's stopped showing images of civil rights activists and began showing images of successful Americans, suggesting that they were part of that success. McDonald's wanted African American consumers to associate their company with African American success and pride. An advertisement from McDonald's Black365 campaign that appeared in 2008 (see figure 15) illustrates how McDonald's used stories of successful African Americans to sell their brand. This advertisement features three African American men and one African American woman, with the men dressed in suits and the woman dressed in a skirt and blouse. The characters are simply standing and smiling towards the camera against a black curtain backdrop. The main text reads: "the difference between dreamers and dream makers is inspiration". The advertisement continues to thank these characters for playing an active role in the African American community and helping others to achieve their dreams. The advertisement suggested to the African American woman that the image of McDonald's stood for African American success.

These advertisements signify that there was a conscious effort by advertisers to create a positive relationship between their brands and African American consumers. The

stories presented in these advertisements offer tales of success and equality. They acknowledge the struggles of African Americans in achieving the American Dream, and present their companies as a supporter of these struggles. Unlike the past, where advertisers either completely ignored African American consumers or used African Americans in their advertisements in stereotypical ways, these advertisements embraced African American history and suggested that they were on the same side as their consumers. Since African Americans are being represented positively in these advertisements, it suggests that they are being considered as "equal consumers and equal citizens" by the advertisers (Chambers 2008:4).

Figure 15: McDonald's Ad Running in *Essence* in 2008

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The African American Woman as the "Good Mother"

Food advertisements targeting African American women perpetuated the cultural identity of the "good mother" in the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, the advertisements contributed to a set of widely circulating stories about mothering, and therefore, reinforced notions about which characteristics a "good mother" should embody. In the 1990s, the cultural identity of the "good mother" was a mother living within a heteronormative family structure, who embodied the qualities of "intensive mothering," putting her children's needs before her own. In the 2000s, the cultural identity of the "good mother" was a "scientific practitioner" of her children's diet, but also their friend. These advertisements portray African American mothers in a positive way, but project expectations about mothering and African American life that many women cannot meet.

The "Good Mother" in the 1990s

In the 1990s, advertisers constructed the identity of a "good African American woman" as a middle-class married mother, living in a heteronormative nuclear family that expressed her ties to African American culture by cooking soul food, and sending her child to an historically Black college. Since the advertisers' target audience was middle-class, African American women (*Essence* 2011), the advertisers were attempting to construct what the ideal life of an African American middle class woman looked like.

The most salient identity of the "good African American woman" in this sample is the identity of the "good mother." When the "good African American woman" was with her family she projected the idea of "intensive mothering" (Hays 1998) that was more commonly shown using white mothers at the time (Keller 1995; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Parkin 2006). Images of "good fathers" complimented these images of "good mothers," which was another growing trend in mainstream media (Keller 1995; Douglas and Michaels 2004). The advertisers were suggesting that "good mothers" lived in heteronormative families, the same family structure that advertisers projected to white women at the time.

African American culture and branding. When advertisers did refer to African American culture in the 1990s, they did it through the concept of branding, meaning that advertisers wanted African American consumers to associate their company with African American cultural capital, such as the civil rights movement, soul food, and historically Black colleges. These advertisements made no reference to how food provisioning was done in the home, but instead used characters such as civil rights activists and soul food chefs to assure that their products could help the "good African American woman" express a connection to African American culture.

Overall identity constructed in food ads in the 1990s. When we combine the messages coming from all of these characters, the overall story in the advertisements read that the main identity of the "good African American woman" is her identity as a "good mother." She carries on cultural traditions that associate her with a Black identity, but she conforms to a heteronormative family form.

Economics and family life in the 1990s. These stories were constructed in a time when there was a growing economic inequality between African Americans and whites, and when there was a growing disparity between the economic levels of African Americans who were classified as middle-class, and African Americans considered poor (O'Hare 1991). This income inequality was often attributed to the changing family structure of the African American family and the rise of female-headed households. In the 1990s, less than half of African American women were married. In addition, less than half of *Essence* readers are married (37.4%), yet just over half have children (51.8%), suggesting that many *Essence* readers are single mothers (*Essence* 2011). The ads in the 1990s reflect an attempt by advertisers to construct the ideal image of a "good family" for African American women, but this ideal image did not match the family structures of many African American women at this time.

Positive depictions. The advertisements depict African Americans in positive roles, signifying an attempt by advertisers to show African Americans in a positive light in the wake of consumer boycotts from the mid-1970s (Parkin 2006; Chambers 2008). Following the consumer boycotts, advertisers were directed to show African Americans in positions of respect, and living in intact nuclear families (Chambers 2008). My sample supports that by the 1990s, major food companies were aggressively marketing towards African American consumers, suggesting that African Americans now have a voice in the market.

The price of a positive image. Conversely, these overly positive depictions of African Americans may come at a cost. By privileging heteronormative families, these food advertisers ignore that more than half of African American women in the 1990s did

not live in this family structure (O'Hare 1991). Like the character Claire Huxtabel in the *Cosby Show*, the production of these "good mothers" support the stereotype of the "middle-class Black lady" (Collins 1994a). These women are "good characters" because they contain their sexuality to a marital relationship. The "good mothers" in the food ads in *Essence* in the 1990s lived in intact, heteronormative nuclear families. They were married, lived in houses, attended college, and lived a middle-class life. Therefore, the ads imply that if "good mothers" are those that reside in heteronormative family structures, then "bad mothers" are those that do not.

Seiter (1990) argues that since the Moynihan report of the 1960s, the media have explained the economic inequalities between African Americans and whites as deriving from the absence of the fathers and the rise of female-headed households, or the rise of the "matriarch". The food advertisements in *Essence* magazine are another example of this trend. By presenting the opposite image to the African American mother as the "bad mother," these advertisements suggest that African American women can be "good mothers" and enjoy the same economic security as white women if they do not live in "matriarchal" households.

The "Good Mother" in the 2000s

In the 2000s, advertisers constructed the identity of the "good African American woman" as a mother who was concerned about her and her children's health. In this decade, advertisers shifted away from showing mothers and fathers with their children, and increased the number of advertisements that featured only children. These children contributed to the cultural identity of the "good mother," because the advertisements suggested that the "good mother" was responsible for the children's health and

achievements. The “good mother” was one that knew which foods were good for her children based on scientific evidence, but only fed them these foods if she knew they also enjoyed them. The advertisements proposed that children who were fed properly performed better at school or were more creative, implying that the success of the “good mother” is reflected in her children’s achievements. The advertisements reflect the idea of “new momism,” which suggests that mothers must be completely devoted to their children’s well-being. In the 2000s, the story of the “good mother” remained the most significant story in the sample of food advertisements.

Women concerned about weight. Although it was still uncommon, food advertisers began suggesting that part of the identity of the “good African American woman” in the 2000s was being conscious about her own diet. These advertisements were present in women’s magazine targeting white women throughout the twentieth century (Kilbourne 1999; Parkin 2006). Their appearance in the 2000s reflects a growing concern about increasing rates of obesity amongst African American women. The messages in the advertisements, however, endorse “thin ideals” that have been criticized for promoting eating disorders and poor body image amongst white women (Wolf 2001), and not necessarily healthy eating habits. The advertisements suggest that “good women” control their bodies and the foods that they eat.

Health and soul food. Advertisements appearing in the 2000s also began incorporating health when they marketed their products as a way to express a soul food identity. While food advertisers in the 1990s offered their products as a way for women to make soul food more conveniently, advertisers in the 2000s presented their products with suggestions on how to prepare soul food in a “healthier” way.

Health conscious mother. The overall identity that the advertisers constructed for African American women in the 2000s was that of a "health conscious" "good mother." This mother based her children's diet on scientific evidence. She also began paying attention to her own dietary needs for the purpose of losing weight. The "good mother" continued to keep family traditions, but was worried about cooking soul food in a healthy way. While this analysis focuses on the advertisements in the 2000s, similar nutritional messages targeting the "good mother" were appearing throughout the 1990s. However, advertisements in the 2000s placed less emphasis on the "good mother's" role in bonding together her nuclear family, and put more emphasis on her role as a practitioner of her child's life. Consequently, more of these advertisements relied on health as their main theme, instead of as a side note.

The "obesity epidemic." The construction of this identity takes places during the rise in media coverage on what the medical community has termed the "obesity epidemic" (Boreo 2007). The medical community has illustrated that African American women have the highest rates of obesity in the United States (American Heart Association 2011), and African American children have the highest childhood obesity rates (Wang and Beydoun 2007). This study suggests that a public health narrative, that advocates that the foods we eat influence our physical and mental health, informs the messages in these advertisements. Yet, these messages are often vague and do not necessarily provide mothers with accurate health information. Nonetheless, the advertisements contribute to the narrative that health is the responsibility of the "good mother."

The paradox of food is love. The advertisements frame feeding the family as an expression of love, which puts women in a paradoxical position where they must control their families' bodies but also provide them with the foods that they love. If food is an expression of love, then denying food may be considered denying love. This paradox may increase anxiety in mothers, as Thurer (1994) gives the example of a mother watching her ten-year-old daughter scarf down junk food and then complain about her appearance. To deny her daughter these foods would make her a "bad mother" because it would be denying love, but to allow her to eat them and gain weight also makes her a "bad mother" because she is not keeping her daughter's body "healthy".

The advertisements associate food with love, but they very rarely connect the emotion love with images of soul food. It was expected that the symbolic code of soul food would appear more throughout my sample; however, this was a very infrequent theme.

By framing food as a symbol of love, the advertisements ignore the work that goes into feeding the family. Devault (1991) found that women spoke about food provisioning in terms of love, and not as work. Their accounts deemphasized the real work behind food provisioning, which Devault suggests includes emotion work, and meticulous planning. By conveying food provisioning as an expression of love, the advertisements reinforce the ideology that this work was part of the identity of the "good mother."

Lived realities of mothering. Food advertisers construct nutritional concerns as part of the identity of the "good mother," yet the narratives ignore the numerous obstacles that African American mothers face when feeding their families healthy foods. Some of

the greatest barriers to healthful food consumption that African American women face are issues of access and economics. Predominantly African American neighborhoods tend to have less access to grocery stores, which are associated with lower rates of obesity (Morland, Wing, Diez Roux, and Poole 2002; Baker, Schootman, Barnidge, and Kelly 2006; Powell et al. 2007). In addition, the high cost of healthy foods can make it difficult for African American women to afford a healthy diet (Baker et al. 2006). In fact, some research suggests that when white women and African American women are living in the same neighborhoods and in the same economic conditions the disparity in obesity rates between the two groups nearly disappears (Bleich, Thorpe, Sharif-Harris, Fesahazion, and LaVeist 2010; LaVeist, Pollack, Thorpe, Fesahazion, and Gaskin 2011).

In addition, mothers are often not aware themselves about which foods are considered healthy to eat, and which are not. Instead, mothers tend to rely on the practices of their mother, trial and error, or their own beliefs of what constitutes a proper meal (Charles and Kerr 1998; Devault 1991). Many mothers express skepticism and confusion over nutritional advice, which is often conflicting, and constantly changing (Charles and Kerr 1998). The nutritional messages in the food ads in *Essence* used claims about micronutrients, and not specific foods. Nestle (2007) argues that the food advertisers approved the food guidelines because they focused on which micronutrients instead of foods to avoid. This benefits advertisers because they can use claims of micronutrients to convince consumers that their products are good for them (Nestle 2007). Food advertisers marketed foods to African American women based on this strategy. This can make it confusing as to which specific kinds of foods are good to eat, and which should be avoided (not just micronutrients).

Lastly, mothers often experience cultural barriers to making healthier food choices. Airhihenbuwa et al. (1996) and Delores (2004) suggest that African Americans often resist changing their diets because they do not want to give up the foods that are associated with their ethnic identities. The Kraft campaign that ran in the 2000s offered mothers a way to cook soul food in a healthy way. The "good mother" ads did not include this theme. This conveys that advertisers largely ignored the issues that African American women face when attempting to balance cultural traditions and their families' health.

The individual narrative of motherhood. The health messages in the food advertisements associated the feeding and caring of children with an individual responsibility of mothers. Collins (1994b) argues that the idea of mothering as individualistic is a privilege enjoyed by mothers who do not have to be concerned about the effects of a racist society. African American mothers must not only be concerned about their own children's bodies, but the bodies of all of the children in the African American community. Figure 13 reflects the concern of African American mothers for all of the children in the African American community; however, this type of advertisement was rare. Most advertisements focused on the individual aspects of mothering, suggesting that "good mothers" perform food provisioning, even if they are working-mothers or single-mothers.

Closing Statement

Food advertisements in *Essence* magazine in the 1990s and 2000s reflected and projected circulating stories about the "good mother." The narratives in food advertisements targeting African American women constructed what the characteristics of the "good mother" should be. The food advertisements in *Essence* projected ideologies

about mothering that privilege heteronormative nuclear families and unrealistic expectations of mothering.

Suggestions for Future Research

While I rely on the work of Parkin (2006) to provide a comparison group for my advertisements, future research may perform a narrative analysis on the specific stories in food advertisements targeting white women throughout this same time period. Other analyses may also want to focus on different comparison groups, such as advertisements targeting other minority groups or genders. These types of analyses would provide insight into the different identities that advertisers are attempting to construct for their consumers.

These analyses may also want to compare whether different stories are being told in advertisements that use characters and those that do not. In my analysis, I only used advertisements that used images of characters because these advertisements contained the specific narrative structure that I was looking for. However, future research may want to examine what kinds of stories are being told in advertisements that do not use images of people to tell the story.

Lastly, future research should examine how African American women interpret the messages within these advertisements. Hall (1973) argues that the message encoded cannot prescribe what will be decoded, but instead sets limits and parameters on how the message is most likely to be interpreted for meaning. Hall presents three hypothetical ways that a message can be decoded. The reader can accept the message that is being sent, negotiate the message being sent, or reject the message being sent. Consequently, future research should examine how African American women respond to the messages

in these advertisements and seek empirical ways to examine how these messages influence the production of personal narratives.

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