

SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

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## Skin Deep

With a growing ethnic population in the U.S., large and small marketers need to turn their attention to skin-care products.

By Steve Herman

*Men's skin is different from women's skin. It is usually bigger, and it has more snakes tattooed on it.*

—Dave Barry, *Saving Face*

**D**ave Barry is correct, in his unique way, in observing that different people have different skin qualities. However, it is not the gender difference, but rather ethnic variations, that should concern the modern formulator and marketer. The rapid expansion of the ethnic population in the United States makes it a vital growth opportunity. Carson Products acquired Johnson Products in 1998. Cosmair (now L'Oréal USA) bought Soft Sheen in July 1998, followed by its purchase of Carson Products in February 2000. The ethnic market was, until recently, the domain of independent niche-oriented companies. A cosmetic observer waking from a three-year nap would

find the American ethnic product landscape reshaped beyond recognition.

By 2050, nearly half of all Americans will be non-Caucasian. The percentage of the African-American population is fairly constant, the explosive growth is in the Hispanic and Asian sectors. Beyond America, the diverse populations of the world are looking

for products tailored to their special needs. In addition to sheer numbers, it is known that ethnic consumers spend more on personal-care products than any other consumer group. This phenomenon is particularly strong in the hair-care area, where relaxers dominate product lines.

While most of the specialized ethnic products are hair-care-oriented, including men's shaving products, the last decade has seen an increasing awareness by marketers of the need for specifically formulated skin products. As large as the hair-care market is, the greatest growth is expected in skin-care. Most ethnic users have been limited to using products tailored for Caucasian skin. The first area where this was clearly inappropriate was makeup, and products are now formulated for different skin coloration. Color cosmetics are now the second largest sector in the ethnic market. Attention is now focused on other aspects of skin-care.

Melanin is the source of skin color, and ethnic skin generally is more deeply colored: 35 color hues<sup>1</sup> compared with seven for Caucasians. In skin of African origin, it is not only the amount of melanin but its distribution that matters. Skin-lighteners are designed to reduce the color, either for an overall lightening or to eliminate areas of hyperpigmentation.

The only legal way to lighten skin in the U.S. is with hydroquinone, banned in many parts of the world. Alternate products like kojic acid, its derivative kojic dipalmitate, magnesium ascorbyl phosphate (MAP), or arbutin can be used, either as independent ingredients or as components of botanicals.<sup>2</sup> For example, Bearberry (*UvaUrsi*) is 18 percent arbutin. Licorice

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\*Greek kosmEtikos, skilled in adornment or decorating.

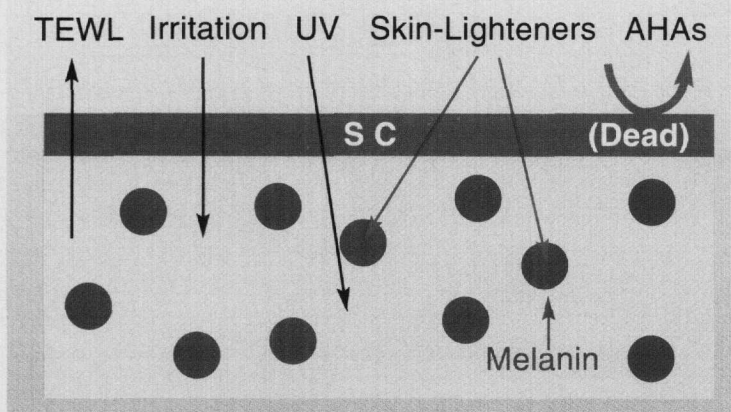
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extract and Wildberry extract also contain lighteners. Non-hydroquinone products must be positioned differently, using phrases like "evens skin-tone" and "makes skin glow" or "brightening" instead of "skin-lightener." The product becomes a cosmetic rather than a drug. In most of the world, the safety and efficacy of these products is readily accepted.

Melanin offers protection from the sun.

**FIGURE 1** Living Skin



The more melanin present, the darker the skin will be, and the more resistant to sunburn. Skin of African origin also has a different distribution of melanin, being composed of large aggregates. Other skin types have a more even distribution. Very light individuals suffer sunburn easily, so it may logically be assumed that dark skin is resistant to sunburn. This is generally true, but it is emphatically not true that dark skin is not adversely affected by sun-exposure.

Dark skin can burn, and it does darken with UV-exposure, but the significant response of the skin is irritation. One visible consequence is hyperpigmentation, areas of unusual coloration. It can be suggested that even dark-skinned individuals use an SPF 15 sunscreen routinely. A study<sup>3</sup> of a number of parameters of black and white skin, including pH, elasticity, and electrical capacitance, found transepidermal water loss (TEWL) lower on the black skin. This indicates a higher epidermal barrier function. Figure 1 shows a simple view of some of the dynamic

activity that occurs in skin. In terms of irritation, it is known that Asian skin is more sensitive than Caucasian.

Many Japanese, coming to live in the United States, continue to use products from Japan to avoid irritation problems. With desquamation, the sloughing of dead cell, dark skin can exhibit an ashy-gray complexion. This phenomenon is more pronounced in cold weather. Use of an AHA cream can

reduce this effect. Oily skin seems shiny on a dark complexion, and enlarged pores are a common problem. Skin cleansers and toners can be helpful.

The delivery of active products is a major goal of treatment products. The thickness of the stratum corneum, its percutaneous absorption, and the irritation potential<sup>4</sup> are all crucial to creating products optimized to a particular skin type. While a number of studies have been conducted, the definitive skin pro-

files for different ethnic groups have not been finalized.

African, Asian, and Hispanic groups each have unique skin, with specific problems demanding focused solutions. The least studied skin thus far is Hispanic, exactly the group with the greatest population growth. Will the small independent companies still left (or new ones filling the void) or the global giants address the needs of these groups? Hopefully, the competitive marketplace will encourage both large and small companies to give these consumers the products they have deserved for so long. ■

## References

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