

Psychology For Blacks

Making Black Beautiful To Black Children

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Do most people really believe "Black Is Beautiful"? Or are black children still being ridiculed for their dark skin, full lips, and nappy hair?

Many people think that today standards of beauty have changed, so that there is an appreciation of the physical features of black

people. Black children should no longer feel badly about themselves because of their physical appearance. Although some people argue that progress has been made, a recent conversation with a ten-year-old boy we know made us even more aware that attitudes change very, very slowly.

Our young friend told us that two white boys in his class at school called him

"Baboon Lips" and called his friend "Baboon Jr." Our friend's reaction was to try to ignore the name-calling, although the taunts continued. The teacher (who is black), too, ignored them, for it is her policy to let the children settle their own disputes in the "open classroom."

Sensing that this incident was more painful for the little boy than he was telling us, we did what we could to

reassure him that there was nothing at all wrong with his lips or the way he looks.

First, we showed him pictures of apes, gorillas, and baboons in the encyclopedias, pointing out that these animals have thin lips like white people, not full, rounded lips like black people. (Try looking at some pictures yourself if you, too, believe black people's lips look like baboons' lips!) In fact, white people have more ape-like characteristics than do black people.

Another similarity between white people and apes is the amount of hair on the body. We speculate that some white people associate black people with monkeys and apes because of the dark skin color and because some whites consider blacks to be, in general, animal-like and inferior intellectually.

Our little friend was laughing and enjoying the pictures. We went on to show him pictures in magazines of white women who use lipstick to make their lips look fuller and more sensuous. Explaining that many white women want their lips to look rounder and fuller, we told our friend that it seems that white people sometimes try to get the features they ridicule in us. In addition to fuller lips, darker skin color is another trait white people sometimes want for them-

selves.

Our friend understood what we meant, for he said that some white people also have curly hairstyles that look like Afros, even though some of the white boys at school make fun of black people's hair.

Ending our conversation, we told our friend how handsome we think he is. We also said that he was right to try to ignore his name-calling classmates. It is better, we told him, not to let the others think they are hurting his feelings. Some of our readers may disagree with the last bit of advice we gave our friend. We told him that if he tries to ignore the name-calling and it becomes more offensive, he may have no alternative except to fight.

After talking with our friend, we thought about rhetoric and slogans like "Black Is Beautiful". Black children need much more than these abstract concepts to help them develop positive feelings about themselves and how they look. They need to be assured by loving adults that they are "beautiful" and are valued human beings. This assurance must be given on an individual basis rather than through catchy slogans.

Since we, as adults, influence the children around us, we must examine our own values and standards of beauty. Have we really changed our attitudes? Or do we still prize white standards of beauty and communicate this, even in subtle ways, to the children around us?

Finally, we thought about the white children who ridicule their black classmates. In the case of our friend, the white children involved were upper-middle-class, growing up with material advantages which most black people lack. However, something must be missing in these affluent white children's lives, to cause them to belittle people who are different from them. The many white psychologists who study and write about the deficiencies of black families could better spend their time examining the problems of their own families.

Our main concern, however, is not changing the attitudes of whites. Rather, we must work toward giving our own children positive attitudes toward themselves. Positive self-feelings are ammunition with which our children can fight attacks from those who have not yet learned to appreciate the beauty of black people.

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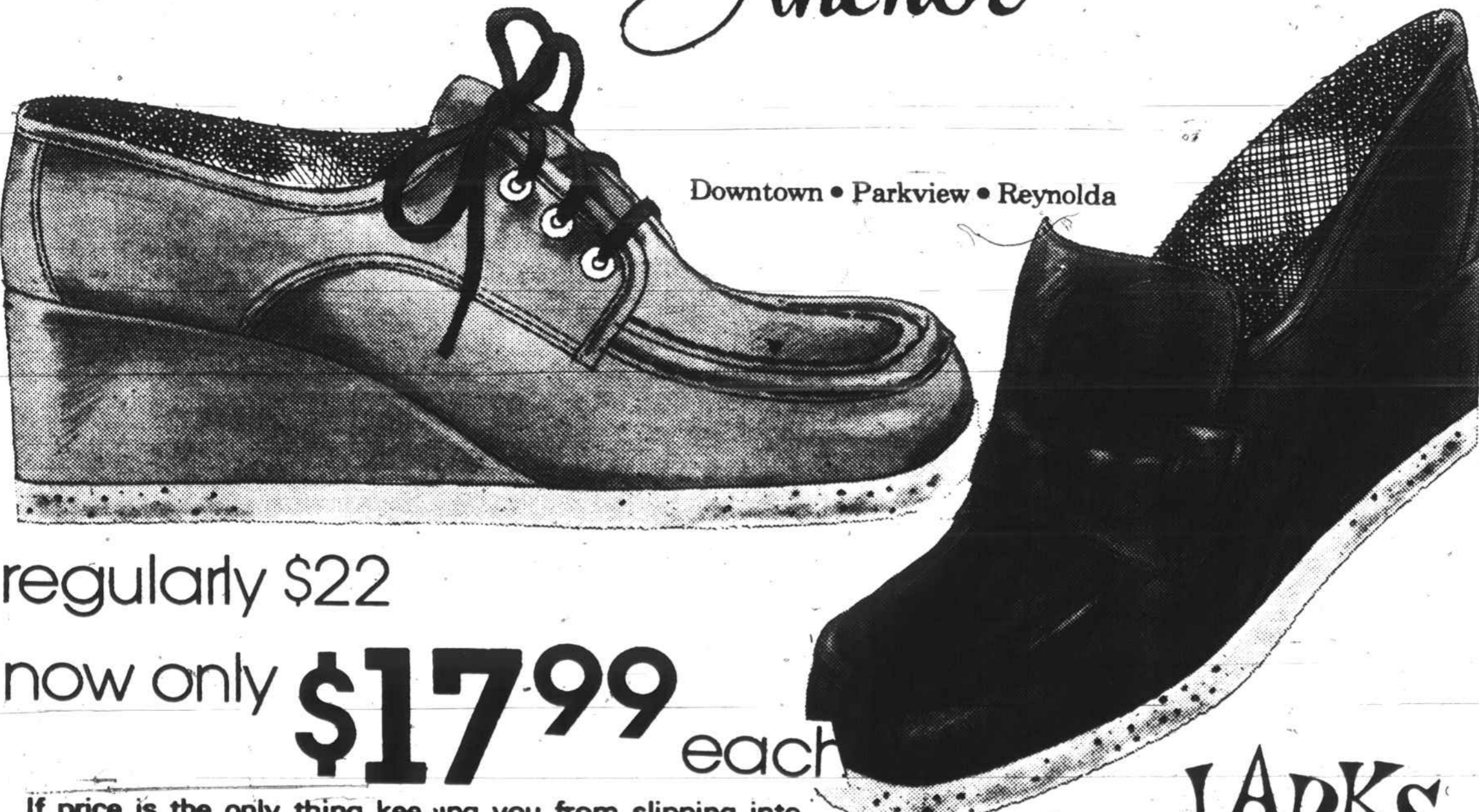
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