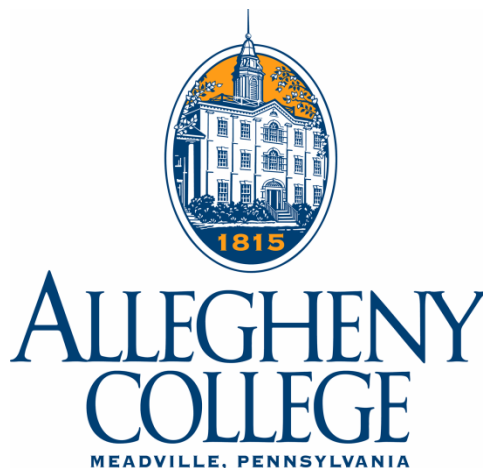


Team Light Skin or Dark Skin: A Literary Analysis of the Impact of Social Media on Colorism
and Self-Esteem Amongst the Black Diaspora



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Dedications:

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Abstract

Colorism has been a historical systemic issue that has affected Black individuals for centuries. However, the introduction of social media in the modern world has provided new means for colorist ideas to spread throughout society in various ways. Previous research has highlighted how intra-racial colorism and discrimination have produced low self-esteem, negative psychosocial implications, and varying effects on skin color perception and satisfaction (Oh et al., 2021). Accounting for the pervasiveness of social media, this literary analysis seeks to analyze the impact of social media on the Black Diaspora, especially concerning self-esteem and skin color. Common themes in the literary analysis suggest that individuals of different skin tones have varying levels of satisfaction and self-esteem. The themes highlighted in the literature pertained to high levels of social media usage and similar demographics in skin color, and age. Additional themes extended to the content on social media and the psychological implication of social media usage. Specifically, the themes present found that darker individuals were inclined to have higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of self-esteem. Future empirical studies might explore developing effective therapeutic measures to counteract the psychosocial implications that colorism might have on self-esteem and skin color satisfaction in members of the Black community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

For decades, pre-existing research and societal laws have affirmed that skin color is a governing agent of societal status serving as a point of unification and separation for the Black diaspora. The thin line between disunion and unification propagates incidences of social comparison and self-esteem fluctuations. Deeply rooted in skin color, the points of social comparison and self-esteem can alter the perception and satisfaction one has with their skin color. Inevitably altering how Black people feel they are perceived in society, and thus the treatment they feel they should acquire based on these perceptions, whether ethical or not. Given the interconnectedness of skin color (i.e., colorism,) satisfaction, perception, and self-esteem, understanding how these play out in social media, will be vastly insightful.

Within the Black community, colorism has been a historical systemic issue that has guided how Black individuals have been treated and perceived in society for generations. Colorism can be defined as an implicit and explicit form of skin color-based biases rooted in favor of lighter-skinned individuals and discrimination towards darker-skinned individuals (Crawford et al., 2018). The biases present in colorism also extend to physical attributes such as hair texture, facial features, and body type. They are often compared in their similitude to Caucasian (White) individuals (Boepple, 2015). Within the spectrum of colorism, emphasis on similitude to whiteness stems from systematic racist ideals and the praise of eurocentric features (Boepple, 2015). Widely esteemed Eurocentric features generally included “long straight hair, small nose, a thin and tall figure,” and “light eyes” (Chen et al., 2020). The praise of Eurocentric features stemmed from slavery-based ideals and notions of white superiority (Boepple, 2015). Coined the “Mulatto advantage,” the illegitimate mixed children of slavers and enslaved people were often afforded greater opportunity and privilege as well as other lighter-skinned Black

individuals (Harper,1978; Reuter,1917). This extended to the realms of academia, economics, socioeconomic wellbeing, and occupational prosperity (Keith and Herring 1991). As lightness was heavily indicative of closeness to whiteness and virtue, Black individuals of darker-skinned colors and or complexions were often omitted or limited from the opportunities regularly present for lighter-skinned individuals (Harper,1978; Reuter,1917). Furthering the division (physically. i.e.) amongst the Black diaspora and advertently prompting an onset of generational trauma and an enclave psychological implications.

From adolescence onward, research findings have shown that exposure to colorist ideals and colloquialisms such as “redbone, high yellow, and blackie” have increased mental health disorders (Coard et al., 2001). In prior studies that assessed intergroup colorism (skin color-based discrimination experienced by members of the Black community), darker-skinned individuals were more inclined to have a lifetime of psychiatric disorders (Oh et al., 2021). These psychiatric disorders included mood disorders (dysthymia, depressive disorder), anxiety disorders (agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, etc.), post-traumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia) (Oh et al., 2021). These findings do not mean that light-skinned Black people are not inherently void of having psychiatric disorders (Oh et al., 2021). Statistically, the incidences of lighter-skinned Black people having short or long-term psychiatric disorders are significantly less than their darker-skinned counterparts (Oh et al., 2021). Anxiety and depression were the most prevalent disorders experienced by Black individuals of varying complexions (Oh et al., 2021). Darker-skinned Black individuals experience higher reported levels of depression in comparison to their lighter-skinned counterparts (Williams, 2021). The higher reported levels of mental illness amongst darker-skinned individuals stem from the negative association attributed to dark skin and beauty and the positive association between

lighter skin and societal idealization (Louie, 2020). The inverse relationship present for dark-skinned individuals emphasizes the concept of “dark-skinned disadvantage” and, in most cases, is the underlying factor for lower self-esteem (Uzogara, 2014).

Self -Esteem and Skin Color Amongst The Black Diaspora/Self Esteem in its Relatio

Amongst the numerous studies studying colorism, self-esteem is a prominent and recurring variable that has been studied in relation to colorism (Daniel, 2001). *Self-esteem* is often defined as an individual's overall positive evaluation of oneself (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). Specifically, this concerns an individual's perception of their self-worth, negative and positive views of self, self-respect, and self-confidence (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). On a global scale, approximately 85% of the population (adolescents and adults included) encounter low self-esteem or self-esteem fluctuation ranging from low to high self-esteem (Shrader, 2019). Despite racially-based undertones in colorism, colorism is more of an intragroup phenomenon in which the intrapersonal environment influences self-esteem amongst the Black diaspora more. Specifically, Black individuals are more inclined to compare themselves to other Black individuals they are exposed to or in proximity with rather than white individuals (Hughes et al.,1989). Prior studies affirmed this concept when they realized that interracial contact (contact between Blacks and Whites) did not impact Black participants' self-esteem (Hughes et al.,1989). On the contrary, self-esteem for Black participants, when compared solely with the white demographic regardless of skin color, was statistically higher than their white counterparts (Hughes et al.,1989). Johnson and Matthews attributed this to personal environments (Matthews & Johnson, 2015). Black high school students, who are usually surrounded by other Black individuals, not whites, tend to compare themselves with other Black Individuals. Krause's (1983) study supports this conclusion, showing that interracial contact among students is

irrelevant to Black self-esteem (Hughes et al., 1989). The high prevalence of intragroup comparison amongst Black individuals is predominantly linked with skin color (Thompson, 2001). Specifically, satisfaction with skin color and perception of skin color are essential predictors of self-esteem amongst the Black community. *Skin color* is defined as a classifying criterion and status cue that refers to the color of someone's skin in terms of lightness to darkness (Jablonski, 2020). For decades, skin color has been a salient variable often attached to self-esteem. Self-esteem will be one of the principal variables explored in this study. The perception of skin color, self-comparison, and satisfaction with skin color are the accompanying mechanisms used to analyze it further.

The Creation of Social Media and its Pervasiveness

Modernity and technological innovation have given way to an evolved form of colorism accessible by everyone via social media (Sharma, 2022). Since its advent in 1997 (Ngak, 2011), social media has morphed from a small collection of websites to a major digital interactive platform accessible on all technological devices (Statista Research Department, 2022). Social media's newness, pervasiveness, and evolving nature have generated a plethora of message-based and visually based sharing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Youtube (Dingli & Tanti, 2015; Robinson, 2021). The high interactiveness, limitlessness, creativity capabilities, control, and sharing speed of social media have cemented media sites as an integral part of everyday life (Smith, 2015). Since 2005 social media usage has skyrocketed from 7% to an astounding 84%, accounting for 270.1 million of the population in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2021). The most utilized social media platforms and or apps as of 2022 are Facebook (used interchangeably with Meta), Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok, and Youtube (Pew Research Center, 2021). Social media can be categorized into five categories: social

networking, photo sharing, video sharing, interactive media, and blogging/community building (Bump, 2021). Instagram falls solely under photo sharing, with usage ranging from 13%-71% in users aged 18-65+ (Pew Research Center, 2021). Individuals aged 18-29 account for the highest percentage of active users on Instagram, ranking 71% (Pew Research Center, 2021). Snapchat and Tik Tok (100 million monthly active users in the United States) are categorized as a form of interactive media, given their photo, video, and message sharing features (Bump, 2021). Approximately 65% of active users in the U.S of Snapchat are aged 18-29 ("Snapchat by the Numbers," 2022), and approximately those 10-19 account for 32.5% of users. Individuals aged 20-29 fall close behind statistically at 29.5% of active users on Snapchat (Doyle, 2022). Like Instagram, Youtube is categorized exclusively as a video-sharing platform catering to various viewer interests (Bump, 2021). It accounts for the highest percentage of adult consumers (95%), with most in the age demographic of 18-29 (Pew Research Center, 2021). Across all platforms, 54%-70% of the population use social media (Pew Research Center, 2021). Modernity has highlighted the vast influence social media has on individuals in burgeoning adulthood and how it has cemented itself as an integral part of their lives. Most active users are people of color, with Black individuals accounting for 77%-84% of users across all platforms (Pew Research Center, 2021). According to U.S Census Bureau Data collected on demographic media platform usage, African Americans accounted for the highest percentage of users on Facebook (Grimes, 2017). On platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, exposure to skin color-biased imagery and impractical body ideals (i.e., slim thick) has increased the prevalence of body dissatisfaction and varying impacts on self-esteem (Hughes, 2021; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013). Skin color-biased imagery on these platforms can entail images or metadata tags (i.e., hashtags) (Barbee, 2018) that favor or utilize individuals generally of lighter skin tones. Imagery can also extend to

filters/photo effects on social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat) that automatically lighten the user's skin color. In conjunction with the skin color changes, the features of the user can be altered to more eurocentric features (i.e., smaller nose, bigger eyes) on these platforms (Ryan-Mosley, 2021). Indirectly, affirming that Afrocentric features and darker skin tones are not a beauty ideal and thus should not be a point of aspiration (Ryan-Mosley, 2021).

Research Question

Technological innovation and the importance of social media in society have brought a potentially harmful mechanism for colorism to grow in the Black community. To expound upon the effects of social media, colorism, and its accompanying variables, through a literary review, this research seeks to assess the proposed research question, "How does exposure to social media impact self-esteem and colorism amongst the Black diaspora? The impending research is of importance for an enclave of reasons. First, the interconnectivity between skin color satisfaction and perception and self-esteem has not been studied in depth concerning social media. Second, pre-existing primary research focused on colorism in relation to social identity development and skin tone-based trauma is dated. Thus, an alternative modern perspective is essential. Third, accounting for the salience and pervasiveness of social media, the research findings of this study can provide insight into developing effective therapeutic measures to counteract the psychosocial implications attached to the variables of interest. The research question proposed will be inspected further in the subsequent three chapters. The subsequent chapters will expound on the history of colorism in the United States, colorism and self-esteem, social media and its relation to the perception of skin color, self-esteem and skin color satisfaction, and analysis/ discussion of prior research findings and their applicability to the research conducted on my behalf.

Methodology

To assess the research question proposed for this study, terminology relating to the variables of interest (self-esteem, skin color satisfaction, perception of skin color) was plugged into google. The terminology used included "Skin Color and Self Esteem Scholarly" (yield about ten pages, 19 sources per page), "Skin Color Satisfaction and Body Dissatisfaction Scholarly," "Social media usage in the United States Statistics," " Social Comparison and Social Media", "Social Media and Self Esteem Scholarly,".

The digital images encompassed within this literature review were compiled from Google Images, Twitter Posts, and Facebook Posts. To locate these posts and images on the platforms , the following terms and phrases were use #Team Light Skin Vs #Team Dark Skin, Light Skin Memes, Lightskins Be Like, Darkskins Be Like, Darkskin Memes , and Light Skin Memes. Images that compared Light Skinned Black People and Dark Skin people were included. Comparison extended comparison of the two skin color groups to food and other objects.

Given the breadth of the results, scholarly articles and verified sources referring to skin color (satisfaction and perception), social media, colorism, slavery, self-esteem, and psychosocial health were included. Articles on other racial groups (Hispanic, Asian, i.e.) except for Indians were redacted from the search list regarding skin color and omitted from the references. Articles referring to other racial groups were allowed when social media was spoken in the broader sense. This is not to say that members of these races are not affected by colorism. However, their experiences do not affect the demographic of the intended study.

Chapter 2 Historical Overview of Colorism

Colorism and Slavery in Antebellum Era

The arrival of enslaved persons to the United States in 1619 signified the commencement of inherently racial and, eventually, skin color-biased ideals (Smith, 2019). These ideas ultimately formed the "biased" concept of colorism. During the era of slavery (1619-1865) (Lusane, 2021), skin color was a definitive factor in the allocation of plantation labor-based roles and the degree of treatment slaves were subjugated to (Ware, 2013). Within the realm of slavery, a hierarchal structure was present, encompassing field enslaved people and domestic enslaved people (house enslaved people). Darker-skinned enslaved people were designated the most arduous forms of plantation labor as field enslaved people (Harper, 1978). Synonymously known as field hands, field enslaved people were tasked solely with outside-based labor (Harper, 1978). Historically, their demanding roles encompassed crop collection (cotton picking, wheat, i.e.), catering to livestock, and the construction of plantation facilities (Brown, 2006). In other circumstances, female field hands non-consensually provided sexual favors and comfort to masters (Yarbrough, 2005). The raping of darker-skinned female field hands (Yarbrough, 2005) often resulted in mixed children known as mulattoes (Harper, 1978). Constituting field hands as the "lowest class of slaves," often overworked and maltreated (Harper, 1978). It rendered them stereotypically labeled "animalistic," "loutish," and dispensable" by white slavers. Field enslaved people's maltreatment and labor roles differed vastly from those of domestic enslaved people (Harper, 1978). Domestic enslaved people and domestic servants (house enslaved people) were carefully selected by members of the slavers' household to cater to the needs of the house. Intelligence, physical attractiveness, linguistic fluency, and, most importantly, skin color were the governing factors of their selection (Harper, 1978). The obligations of house enslaved people

entailed house maintenance (cleaning, laundry, i.e.), caring for members of the slavers' home (children, i.e.), accompanying slavers on journeys, and cooking. The majority of their labor (Harper, 1978). In most circumstances, selected house enslaved people were mulattoes, a lighter-skinned byproduct of racial intermixing between enslavers and field enslaved people (Yarbrough, 2005). Their proximity and association with white slavers' and their kin, physical and genetically via intermixing, created feelings of superiority and further division in the slave regime. Helmed as the "slave aristocracy" (Harper, 1978), domestic servants had better clothing, frequent interaction and inclusion in slaver familial functions, quality of food, and ultimately life (Harper, 1978) when compared to field enslaved people. The less arduous labor and privileges afforded to domestic enslaved people encouraged feelings of superiority in comparison to field hands. The superiority complex was reinforced by white slavers, prohibiting interaction between house enslaved persons and field enslaved persons, encouraging house enslaved people to verbally degrade field enslaved people, and providing house enslaved people with "elevated" labor positions (Harper, 1978).

Moreover, the emphasis on "white is right" by slavers contributed to the unanimous concept that being mixed with white and being fairer-skinned granted superiority over field enslaved people (Harper, 1978). The colorist-based separation within the slave regime often prompted house enslaved people to renounce aspects of their black identity (Harper, 1978). Instead, they aligned predominantly with their white lineage/identity (Harper, 1978). Through aligning with their white identity, lighter-skinned house enslaved people were often afforded the opportunity of education, among other privileges (Harper, 1978). The hierarchical structure present was the root of skin color biased and discriminatory action, furthering social and occupational stagnation for those of undesirable skin tones (Harper, 1978).

The Progressive Era: Colorism in the 1900's Onward

The skin color-based division amongst the Black community during the antebellum slavery era enabled colorism to transpire and grow feverishly (Harper, 1978). Despite the freeing of enslaved people via the emancipation proclamation in 1863 ("The Emancipation Proclamation National Archives," 2022), colorist and discriminatory beliefs still guided and influenced the Black community (i.e., enslaved people of the former slave regime) and their navigation through society for decades (Matthew & Johnson, 2015). Especially during the 1900s into the pre-civil rights era (Massey, 2011), lighter-skinned Black people (Reese, 2018) were afforded greater opportunities (occupationally, academically, and financially). Whether they were directly mixed with white or someone along their lineage was, in many instances, they were able to "pass" for white (Harper, 1978). *White passing* is a racial phenomenon in which a person of color, generally in the context of a Black person, can be perceived as a white person (Fikes, 2014). In doing so, they can experience the privileges afforded to white people (quality education, occupational opportunity, et cetera), significantly minimizing any form of discrimination. The researchers' findings affirmed the theories affiliated with the intersectionality of lightness and success in various aspects of society (Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944). An association was present between skin color and occupational standing in the sense that having lighter skin as a Black person was associated with high professional and occupational success (i.e., doctor or lawyer) (Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944). Accounting for the importance of societal status during this era. Many lighter-skinned Black people embraced this persona for many reasons (Fikes, 2014). To obtain preferential treatment and success in various aspects of society, obtain upward social mobility,

and procure opportunities (academic) to ensure success for current and future generations (Fikes, 2014). An underlying reason was to separate themselves from the Black community (darker-skinned individuals, i.e.) and the negative stereotypes affiliated with the Black diaspora (Harper, 1978).

Colorism and the Mechanisms to Test Skin Color

As a byproduct of the slavery era, many stereotypes present dehumanized Black people, specifically darker skinned Black people condemning them as barbaric, diffident, and parasitic individuals (Harper, 1978). Colorist ideologies were furthered by developing arbitrary unverified tests during the early to mid-1900s (Kerr, 2005). The Brown Paper Bag Test and comb test were among the first tests used by White people to assess and determine a person's degree of blackness and their social ranking ultimately (Kerr, 2005). The Brown Paper Bag Test was initially a preventative measure intended to inhibit lighter-skinned Black persons from "passing" in White environments and organizations (Kerr, 2005). Additionally, the test sought to categorize Black people into groups aligning with their skin color (Kerr, 2005). If an individual was the same complexion or darker than the paper bag, it was easily confirmed that they were Black and thus inferior (Kerr, 2005). The comb test was introduced in the 1950s to evaluate the coarseness of an individual's hair by running a fine-tooth comb from the root to the bottom (Kerr, 2005). If the comb struggled to pass through the hair with ease, the test recipient was classified as Black and generally darker-skinned (Kerr, 2005). This was due to coarser hair being affiliated with darker skin and straighter hair being affiliated with lighter skin and kinship to whiteness (Perkins, 2014). These tests were often used in conjunction with Jim Crow laws, which prompted racial segregation, consistent comparison of skin color, and various incidences of white-passing (History.com Editors, 2022). The active usage and acceptance of these "tests" by white people

had metastasized in the black community, prompting them to absorb and perceive themselves mainly based on skin color. Highlighting that colorism is a multifaceted system consisting not only of skin color ideologies but extends to hair texture and facial features i.e. (Matthew & Johnson, 2015).

Colorism and Evolving Beauty Ideals

The American Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s brought to light the earnest need to combat the racially discriminatory and prejudiced ideologies that prompted inequity and negation of human rights (Carson, 2022) for Black people. From this movement, another micro movement called the “Black is Beautiful Movement” was produced (“*Black is Beautiful*”, 2019). The Black is Beautiful movement sought to renounce years of colorist and racist ideologies such as the favoring of eurocentric features and fairer skin. Instead, it sought to embrace and celebrate aspects of the Black identity (culture, ethnicity, skin color,i.e) (“*Black is Beautiful*”, 2019). The introduction of Black-owned magazines such as *Essence* and the presence of Black models in mass media (commercials, i.e) were among the various mechanisms used to encourage Black unification and cultivation of the Black identity (“*Black is Beautiful*”, 2019). A growing portion of media images and commercials began to feature Black individuals with darker complexions and varying natural hair textures (“*Black is Beautiful*”. N.d; Mitchell, 2021). An endeavor to disparage the good hair (eurocentric hair), bad hair (coarse, kinky) dilemma, and darker skin complexion juxtaposition (“*Black is Beautiful*”, n.d.). During this era, skin lightening creams and hair straightening advertisements were still present, however, their prevalence had decreased with the upsurge of afro love (“*Black is Beautiful*”, n.d.). Despite the “Black is Beautiful Movement”, generational trauma and the emphasis on skin color distinctions took precedence, leading members of the Black community to unconsciously harbor such negative ideologies.

Ultimately, this has contributed to an evolved form of colorism heavily based on media (Matthews and Johnson, 2015).

Colorism in the 21st Century and Media

The 21st century signified an era of evolution and change in several aspects of society. In the realm of colorism, evolution during this era generally involved the transference of colorist ideologies and terminology into digital media. Similar to the skin brightening advertisements, tests, and laws created by white people, media (social platforms, advertisements, etc.) served as an indirect mechanism to prompt further division (Matthews & Johnson, 2015). Ironically, in modern society, many of the colorist statements made on social media were pushed forth and upheld by the Black community (Harper, 1978). Highlighting how ingrained ideologies extending as far back to slavery have been in the Black community (Harper, 1978)—creating an amplified form of intraracial colorism. Hashtags utilized on media platforms (Facebook) such as #Team Light Skin or #Team Houseslave, #TeamDarkskin has become synonymous with skin color-based favoritism or disdain (Harrison, 2015). The utilization of hashtags serves as one of the many examples of colorism and the terminology attached to specific skin colors (Harrison, 2015). In a study that analyzed this association, Black people associated negative words such as "ghetto," "burnt," "less intelligent," and "unattractive" with darker skin complexion (Davis, 2017). On the contrary, positive words such as "redbone," "light brite" and "high yellow" were used to describe Black individuals of lighter complexions (Davis, 2017). This denoted that lighter-skinned individuals' were attractive, intelligent, trustworthy, and possessed a degree of decorum (Davis, 2017). These beliefs are often translated into alternative media mediums such as television and advertisements (Guttmann, 2020). Many of these mediums were readily accessible. In U.S based media (television, i.e.) circa 2019, Black women account for 6.5% of

portrayed characters (Guttmann, 2020). They account for approximately 18% of promotional materials (Guttmann, 2020), which pales compared to the 82.6% of white people displayed in promotional material. Of the 6.5% of Black women portrayed in television or music-based media, 80% of Black female characters are of a light to medium skin tone, with medium skin denoting darkness in these circumstances (Mctaggart, 2021)(features and hairstyle consistent with Eurocentric standards (57.1%). An incessant reminder that colorism was prevalent even in modern-day society. When Black women are represented, they are 1.5 times more likely to be sexualized (Mctaggart, 2021) or depicted partially/fully nude (13.5%) than white women (9%). The consistent sexualization and objectification of Black females have led to racialized bodily ideals. Thus, the Black female body is classified as curvaceous, thick, and strong, void of thinness or frailty (Hughes, 2021). Although this classification is revered in today's society, for those unable to attain this figure or the skin color they desire, bodily dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem are bound to ensue (Hughes, 2021).

Social media has enabled harmful colorist ideals to be easily spread across all age demographics (Bump, 2021). This applies to young adults and adolescents, who account for the highest demographic of users (Pew Research Center, 2021). Especially considering that this is an era of life where the environment heavily influences identity development, outside elements, and social interactions (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018). Exposure to such glorified physical ideals (color and body wise) can often prompt feelings of inadequacy or a superiority complex, depending on the individual. These incidences of social comparison have had measurable ramifications on self-esteem, which are explored further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Colorism and Self Esteem

Pre-existing literature and quantitative studies have analyzed and highlighted the interconnectedness of self-esteem and skin color, especially regarding satisfaction and perception of one another. Similar to the relationship between racism and colorism, self-esteem and skin color are interwoven. They can operate as separate entities but still have a profound impact on one another and any other accompanying variable. Across studies, self-esteem has been defined in various ways (Butts, 1963; Jhangiani, 2022). The most common and simplified definition denotes self-esteem as an evaluation of the current self and idealized self and one's perception of their worth and dignity (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018). Developed by Dr. Morris Rosenberg, the *Self Esteem Scale* was one of the mediums developed to measure positive and negative feelings about self (Rosenberg, 1965). However, this scale will not be one of the mediums analyzed to understand self-esteem in this literary analysis. Self-esteem can extend to affection for oneself, trust in one's abilities (intellectual, communicative, i.e.) to counteract challenges (Abdel-Khalek, 2016), and a "momentary emotional state" (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). Momentary emotional states refer to the varying high and low levels of self-esteem and the feelings an individual may feel at these levels (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). In the broader sense, individuals with higher levels of self-esteem exhibited higher incidences of self-worth, respect, resilience, and contentedness (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). Individuals with lower levels of self-esteem characteristically possess feelings of low self-worth, worthlessness, negative attitudes towards themselves, those amongst them, and aspects of their lives (Abdel-Khalek, 2016).

Skin Color Satisfaction and Self-Esteem

When skin color is factored into self-esteem, skin color satisfaction and perception of skin color are generally the mechanisms assessed to understand the depth of this relationship.

Skin color satisfaction refers to contentedness with one's skin color regardless of hue, a fundamental construct of self-esteem heavily influential on self-evaluation and evaluation of those amongst them (Falconer & Neville, 2000). In quantitative studies, skin color satisfaction is generally measured with the Skin Color Satisfaction Scale(SCSS) (Falconer & Neville, 2000). The scale intended to collect and analyze data on the participants' satisfaction with their skin color (about shade and other points of comparison (Howard, 2011). In accordance with skin color satisfaction, perception of skin color, and self-esteem, quantitative studies analyzing the association present have hypothesized that lighter-skinned Black women or women that perceived their skin color as light would have higher levels of self-esteem (Daniel, 2001).

On the contrary, darker-skinned Black individuals were hypothesized to have (Coard & Breland, 2001) lower self-esteem and skin color satisfaction. Despite the hypothesis proposed, ample research has contradicted these theories. It has been found that darker-skinned African Americans, specifically males, often exhibited higher levels of satisfaction with skin color but lower incidences of self-esteem (Coard & Breland, 2001). These findings highlighted an inverse relationship between self-esteem and skin color satisfaction (Coard et al., 2001). The incongruence present has been attributed to intra-group division and outgroup perceptions and stereotypes geared toward Black people (Coard et al., 2001). In this context, it is theorized that the negative relationship between self-esteem and skin color satisfaction is attributed to the synonymy of satisfaction and acceptance in this context (Coard et al., 2001). Insinuating that an individual may be satisfied (accepting) of one's skin color, but not like it per se (internalized conflict and lack of satisfaction, i.e.), hence the disparities in self-esteem levels. When applied to the darker-skinned diaspora, it can be presumed that darker-skinned individuals might be confusing acceptance with their darker skin tone rather than experiencing satisfaction with their

skin color (Coard et al., 2001). Findings have also revealed that their satisfaction with skin color "exists on an intellectual level," while "emotional conflict" regarding skin color still exists (Coard et al., 2001). This means that darker-skinned Black people can comprehend their skin color (on both a personal and social level) and convince themselves it is acceptable. However, pre-existing trauma (feelings about themselves) can negatively impact their emotions about themselves. Another reason for the (Coard et al., 2001) inverse relationship is the conflict between self-perception regarding skin color and how they think they are perceived by others (Coard et al., 2001). As stated prior, results from the study implied that darker-skinned Black individuals felt "satisfied"/ or accepting of their skin color; however, changes were present when others' perceptions and idealization of skin color came into play (Coard et al., 2001). Darker-skinned individuals from the population studied concluded that White and Black people would perceive their skin tone in a derogatory manner, similar to the ideologies maintained during the slavery era (Coard et al., 2001). Hence, lower self-esteem and a "compromised sense of self" (Coard et al., 2001). The outside perceptions that darker-skinned individuals are most impacted by our familial relationships and the opposite sex (Coard et al., 2001). Even though darker-skinned individuals may say they are satisfied with their skin tone, their perception of and preference may be altered to align with the skin colors they believe family members or members of the opposite sex idealize (Coard & Breland, 2001). Unfortunately, Black people are subjected to and absorb the "racial bigotry" color-based trauma from prior generations (Coard et al., 2001). Hence, lower self-esteem and a "compromised sense of self" (Coard et al., 2001). Accounting for the close kinship familial dynamic and emphasis on self-esteem. In black families, the differing perceptions of skin color can significantly impact levels of self-esteem for darker-skinned individuals (Coard et al., 2001). Especially under the circumstances where an individual deviates

from the idealized skin color in society and that of their family (Coard et al., 2001). By virtue of modernity and social media, perceptions of family members, members of the opposite sex, and the Black diaspora regarding skin color have spread feverishly. Metastasizing across various technological devices and social platforms affecting individuals of all demographics, specifically young adults (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Chapter 4: Social Media and its Relation to Perception of Skin Color, Self-Esteem and Skin Color Satisfaction

The mid-2010s onward cemented itself as a technological era, plagued by the creation and increased usage of tech devices and notoriously new social media platforms. Of the hundreds of social media platforms in the digital realm (Santora, 2021), Facebook, Snapchat, Youtube, Instagram, and Tik Tok have become the platform of consistent use (Statista Research Center, 2022). With approximately 302.6 million users across all platforms in the U.S and 147 minutes of daily usage (Statista Research Center, 2022), the consistent usage of social media has highlighted its pervasiveness. The availability of social media on the internet and digital apps in conjunction with various digital devices (computer, mobile, tablet) to use has contributed to a surplus of users. For many black people, this surplus has translated into a large number of Black users. According to Statista, mobile phones and computers account for the highest percentage of frequently used digital devices to access social media (Statista Research Department, 2022). Ranging from 12% to 69% of usage for computers and approximately (59%-87%) of usage for mobile devices (Statista Research Department, 2022). The majority of users as of 2021 are adolescents or young adults (18-29), with a significant portion of those users being Black people (Pew Research Center, 2021). According to Grimes, Social media platforms serve as a medium for African Americans to connect with others and or forge new relationships, share imagery (pictures) and stories, and delve further into the history of the Black Diaspora (Grimes, 2017). Similar to the “Black is Beautiful Movement” during the 1970s, the utilization of hashtags for the “natural hair movement” and “Black love movement” in modern-day society acted as an apparatus to abdicate colorist ideologies (Wells, 2020). The “Natural Hair Movement” emphasized the love and appreciation of the varying textures of Black hair, and the “Black Love

Moment” sought to promote universal love internally and externally) for the entire Black diaspora (Wells, 2020). Through these movements and affiliated hashtags, videos (ex. Youtube), on social media, Black users attempted to eradicate any incidences of texturism, racist concepts, and skin color-based biases attached to colorism (Shepherd, 2018). For example, from 2013 onward, numerous social media posts and Youtube channels were devoted to natural hair-based styles (Shepherd, 2018). Although social media can serve as a positive medium for unification, social media has been negatively associated with a significant level of low self-esteem and compromised psychosocial health.

Social Media ,Self Esteem and Skin Color

Since the creation of social media, the relationship between self-esteem and social media has been intricate, extensive, and ever-evolving (Cingel et al., 2022). When colorist concepts regarding skin color, texturism, et cetera are factored in, the circumstances are complicated further. As stated prior, social media can act as a double-ended spectrum enabling positive and negative ideologies to spread throughout society across all demographics (Stabler, 2021). In this context, negative content pertains to any form of media that implicitly or explicitly encourages colorist concepts (# teamlightskin, et cetera), perpetuates stereotypes (regarding body image, hair texture, et cetera), and uses terminology or imagery that incites hate or discriminatory action (Auxier, 2020). Positive content pertains to any form of media that incites or facilitates well-being, promotes body positivity, and reduces incidences of hate, discriminatory action, or harmful terminology usage (McCloud et al., 2020). Pre-existing posts, videos, and hashtags on platforms have been known to incite body positivity, skin color affirmations, and self-love (McCloud et al., 2020). Despite the positive content displayed on social media, a substantial amount of content advertised is rooted in promoting a specific homogenous skin color and body

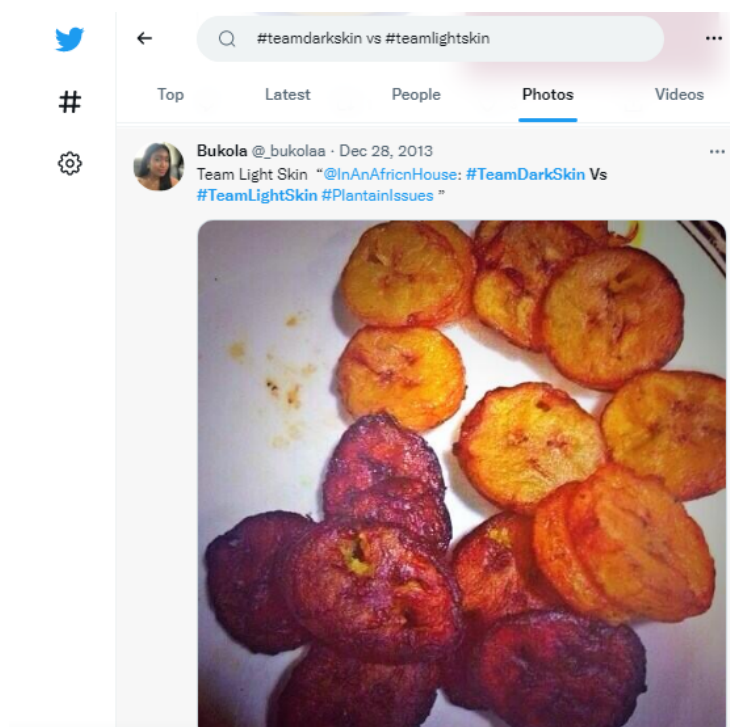
ideal (Cargnino & Nebaum, 2019). The concept of homogeneity has been linked to “social fragmentation”(disconnection between different subgroups inadvertently promoting in or out-group biases) (Cargnino & Nebaum, 2019). The biases present in social media are predominantly a byproduct of intragroup colorism (Rotondo, 2020). Intragroup biases are overtly shown via memes, hashtags, and visual imagery (video or pictures)(Smith, 2015). *Memes* are defined as digital “cultural ideas (image, video, slogan) that spread throughout society via replication or imitation” (Smith, 2015). The content of memes, hashtags, and visual imagery is based on the comparative phenomena of Team Light Skin versus Team Dark Skin.

Team Light Skin versus Team Darker: A Social Media Phenomena

The precise date of inception for this phenomenon is unknown. However, given its popularity from the early 2010s onward, it is presumed to have been fabricated during this era (Cabral, 2012). Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram appeared to be the most utilized platforms that advertently and inadvertently advertised content of this phenomenon. During 2012 and 2013, in particular, the "battle of skin colors" seemed to reach its peak with social media pages primarily dedicated to ##Teamlightskin (page dictating that light skin individuals were better) (@TEAMLIGHTSKINS, 2013) to emphasize the "superiority" of light-skinned Black individuals. This is seen in the image below that describes light skin girls as the best:

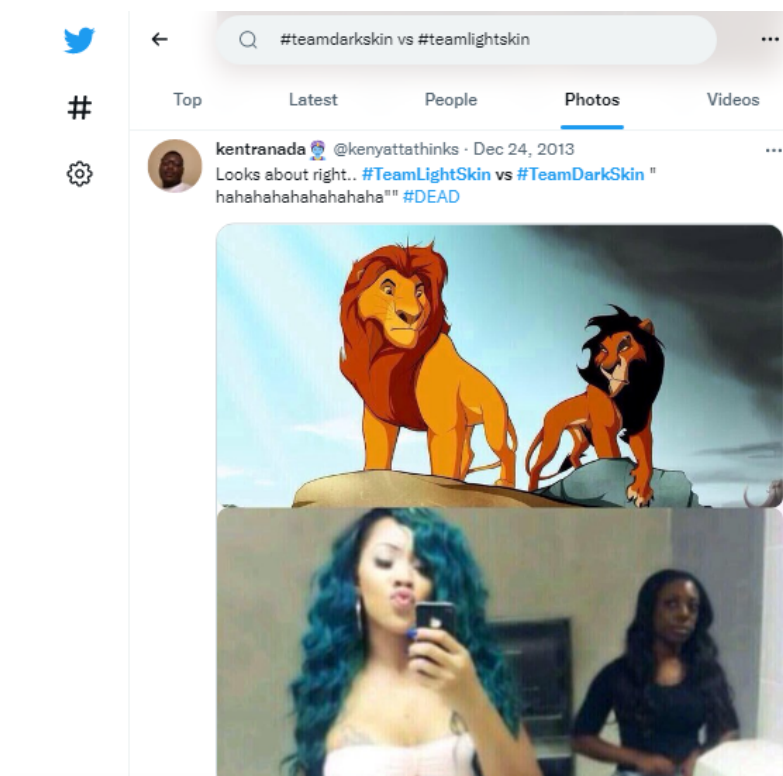


From celebrities to non-celebrities, other media sites were dedicated to #Teamlightskin vs. #Team Darkskin posts (Cabral, 2012) and images (*#teamdarkskin vs. #teamlightskin*, 2013). Individuals from both skin color groups were compared in different manners. In a derogatory manner for darker-skinned individuals and uplifting manner for lighter-skinned individuals. The imagery used not only consisted of Black individuals of lighter or darker skin tones but also objects and food as a point of comparison (*#teamdarkskin vs. #teamlightskin*, 2013). Twitter posts serve as a prime example of the metaphorical skin color comparison to food (@_bukolaa, 2013). In one post with plantains (the inedible burnt plantains were labeled #teamdarkskin, and the edible lighter and properly plantains were labeled #Teamlightskin) (@_bukolaa, 2013).



An additional post compared cakes in which the chocolate cake was equated with #Teamdarkskin and the vanilla cake was equated with #Teamlightskin (*#teamdarkskin vs. #teamlightskin*, 2013). On Instagram, similar food imagery associated #Teamdarkskin with charred grilled cheese and #Teamlightskin with lightly toasted grilled cheese (*#teamlightskin hashtag on Instagram* •

Photos and videos, 2013). Such imagery was found under the hashtag #Teamlightskinded" or #Teamlightskin" on Instagram mainly circa 2013 (*#teamlightskin hashtag on Instagram • Photos and videos*, 2013). Other points of comparison extend to cartoons such as *The Lion King*, in which lighter-skinned individuals were compared to the revered lighter Mufasa and darker-skinned individuals were compared to the Black hair and "darker" Scar (@Kenyattathinks, 2013).

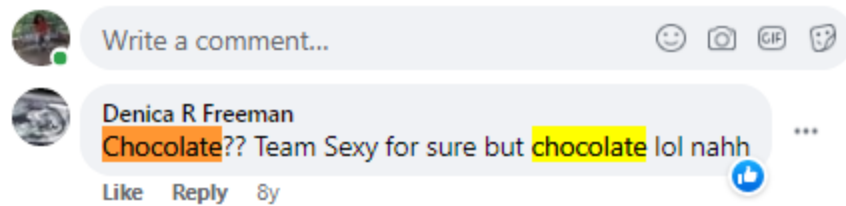


This reiterates and reinforces the negative prototype created during slavery that darker-skinned Black individuals are malicious and ill-intended (Alter et al., 2016). In contrast, lighter-skinned Black individuals were deemed to be purer at heart and revered in the societal realm (Alter et al., 2016). This highlights that colorist ideals and intragroup comparison and discrimination extend to all aspects of society (food, cartons, et cetera).

On Facebook, the concept of #Teamlightskin or #Teamdarkskin adopted a literal form of comparison, in which photos of dark and light-skinned women and men were rated and compared (Rollins, n.d). Posts of affirmation for light skin people, such as "Keep calm your light skin" and "Keep calm light skin is always in" (Rollins, n.d), affirmed that lightness was the *creme da la creme*. Lightness was of high beneficiary societal value, thus, members of this skin color group would have minimal to worry about (Uzogara, 2014).



Although posts during his era also uplifted dark skin females, sexualized terminology was generally utilized. (Rollins, n.d). Terms and Phrases such as #TeamSexyChocolate or "Dark skin girls be having the best p*ssy" are frequently used phrases to describe darker-skinned Black females. (Rollins, n.d). Responses from commentators varied from positive to negative depending on the skin color of the discussion (Rollins, n.d). In response to the tag #Teamsexychocolate, one commentator wrote:



Additional post content was found to masculinize and mock darker-skinned women in particular. For example, a meme said, "that one dark skin that's always ready for a fight, Joy Mayweather (@bertcomedy, n.d). This post not only masculinizes dark skin women by referring to them as a form of the male boxer Floyd Mayweather but also vilifies them as potentially violent.

That one darkskin girl that's always
ready for a fight



Joy mayweather 🤔🤔🤔🤔
@bertccomedy

Other posts blatantly compared the skin color of darker-skinned individuals to burnt or extremely dark items such as charcoal for comedic value.



Such terminology and posts regarding skin color could be disparaging to darker-skinned individuals. It reduces them to either animalistic or sexualized beings, emphasizing that they are far from being a beauty standard in modern-day society (Awad et al., 2015).

Social Media and Bodily Satisfaction

Social Media cemented a transition from video vixens (female models of color with ideal figures that were generally scantily clad) to social vixens (Thairo, 2019) synonymously known as influencers or social media models (i.e., Instagram). Social media vixens act as a prototype for the Black female body, either fairing a lighter complexion with a looser curl pattern or darker-skinned women with straight hair or extensions (i.e., wig, et cetera). The image of the social media vixen/influencer has metamorphosed from the skinny aesthetic to the “slim thick fit BBL” popularized by the likes of Kim Kardashian” (Jennings, 2021). Regardless of complexion, models were generally curvaceous, busty and possessed eurocentric features with the exception of favored afrocentric features (i.e full lips). This ideal is enforced via brand endorsement/advertisement, high follower count and favored photos. However, in POC media posts that received the highest follower count and brand endorsement via Instagram and Facebook, approximately (64%) of models were predominantly of lighter skin tone (Adeleye,

2019). The advertisement of females that met this ideal often led them to be objects of desire for members of the opposite sex (males) and a point of aspiration for females of all age demographics. In this digital age, influencers have a profound impact on the latest trends regarding body shape ideals (fitness, ie.), fashion, etc (Aparichio-Martinez et al., 2019). The impressionable and interactive nature of social media has made it a consistent stimuli easily absorbed by its consumers (Krach,2010). As the highest percentage of consumers, adolescent and young adults are among the most susceptible to feel pressure to adhere to not only the body ideals, but the skin color expectations attached to it (McComb et al.2022). Prior research that assessed curvy-ideals, thin-ideals, and fit-ideal imagery on Instagram, found that exposure to “curvy ideal based imagery” prompted “negative shifts in body image (McComb et al., 2022). Negative perspectives were exacerbated further when compared to individuals with slim-thick body types, also known as the BBL body type.

Social Media and Social Comparison

The root of fluctuations in bodily satisfaction and self-esteem is attributed to social comparison and social media. Social comparison is also known as the Social Comparison theory, which refers to the "psychological processes" in which individuals compare themselves. It can be expounded on further to acknowledge the causes and effects of social comparison (Gerber, 2020). It can be broken down into ability comparison (analysis of our capabilities with others), upward comparison (view others as better than you) (Verduyn et al., 2021), downward comparison (the belief that you are better than others), and opinion comparison (behavioral and thought comparison (Verduyn et al., 2020). Social Comparison (abbreviated S.C) is seen as an essential component of "human social evolution," as it provides insight into navigating the social and digital realm (Verduyn et al., 2020).

The structure of social media allows for endless means of connection, and with endless means of connection, the incidences of social comparison increase (Warrender & Milne, 2020). The extent to which individuals are impacted by social comparison pertains to their engagement and use of social media (Verduyn et al., 2020). Social media engagement is broken into two primary categories (active and passive use) (Verduyn et al., 2020). Active use of social media refers to direct exchanges of information between individuals (i.e. "posting a status update," commenting, or sending direct messages to a person on Facebook or Instagram) (Verduyn et al., 2020). Passive use, also known as a form of "lurking," has no direct engagement or correspondence (Verduyn et al., 2020), as this form is where media content is predominantly consumed. In this context, the extent of engagement for media users is viewing and scrolling through other users' profile pages (Verduyn et al., 2020). Statistical findings on social media site usage have found that passive use is more commonly used than active use (Verduyn et al., 2021). The lack of direct engagement and consumerism attached to passive use has been affiliated with "upward social comparison" in which individuals feel that others in the content they are viewing are better than them to some degree (i.e., physicality, intelligence, et cetera) (Verduyn et al., 2021). According to Verduyn et al., such occurrences can prompt feelings of "envy or inferiority rather than social connection" (Verduyn et al., 2021). Advertently, these "feelings of envy or inferiority" can contribute to the development of mental health disorders (Verduyn et al., 2021). The discussion of active and passive use is relevant to understanding how social media is affiliated with the feelings it can conjure up in the user, especially when colorist ideas are added.

Social Media Sites and Mental Health Implications.

Previously stated, colorist concepts and social media usage have been associated with adverse psychological effects, mental disorders, and "negative long-term developmental

outcomes" (Louie, 2020; Tao & Fisher, 2022). On and off social media, darker-skinned Black individuals experience higher levels of perceived discrimination and higher levels of mental health problems (Louie, 2020). Although *darker skin tone* is not defined as a risk factor for mental disorders, it highlights that darker-skinned individuals are at risk for significantly higher levels of disorders such as depression (Louie, 2020). Across the age demographics, adolescents, in particular, are the most susceptible to the negative mental health consequences attached to the "skin tone-mental health disadvantage" (Louie, 2020). This is attributed to adolescence's critical transitional stage in cognitive, emotional, and emotional development (Christie & Viner, 2005). Most importantly, this stage in life sets the framework for them to discern their place in the social hierarchy (Louie, 2020). Especially for adolescents and young adults, the fear of missing out (FOMO) on social media can promote incidences of anxiety (Franchina et al., 2018). FOMO can extend to body image perception and other aspects of self-perception (*#StatusOfMind Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing*, 2017). Higher levels of FOMO are associated with messenger heavy-based platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat. These incidences of FOMO coupled with self-esteem problems (i.e., body dissatisfaction) can incite psychological distress and, in more extreme cases, suicidal ideations (*#StatusOfMind Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing*, 2017; Monk 2015; Williams and Mohammed 2009).

Analysis of Social Media Data and Self Esteem

For the studies included in this literary analysis, variables related to social media often accounted for self-esteem and self-comparison. The sample sizes across the articles were variable in size ranging from (31-to 206) on the respective smaller and larger end. The sample sizes described were collected from studies except one that did not explicitly count skin color as

a means of measurement (Sharma et al., 2022). A quantitative study that analyzed self-esteem and social comparison with Facebook usage found that the more time spent on Facebook, the lower the self-esteem of the individual (Franchina et al., 2018). The study consisted of a larger sample size of 250 Italian university students. Researchers found that people with a high desire to make social comparisons use platforms such as Facebook as a medium to "simulate a different self-image from reality" or an ideal self. Females were found to be more inclined to engage in this behavior to improve their "self-evaluation" (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018).

. Additional studies analyzing self-esteem and social comparison on social media examined the concept of FOMO (Franchina et al., 2018). One study consisted of a larger sample size of 2663 teenage students (Franchina et al., 2018). Higher incidences of FOMO were linked with higher frequencies of social media usage on private platforms (Franchina et al., 2018). Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, i.e.). Statistically, this was no surprise as (63%-89%) of participants in the sample possessed an account on this platform and frequented it at least four times a day (Franchina et al., 2018)

Statistically, social media's frequent use and consumption have been affiliated with negative mental/psychological implications (Verduyn et al., 2020). Depression and anxiety disorders accounted for the highest percentage of disorders social media consumers were inclined to have (Louie, 2020). The high prevalence of depressive disorders also extended to studies where skin color was a primary variable (Louie, 2020). For instance, a study that analyzed the association between skin tone and mental disorders (depression/disorder) revealed that darker-skinned Black individuals are more prone to depression/ disorders that exceed the normal healthy threshold. The study comprised 1,163 Black Americans (13-17) and was conducted via in-person and telephone interviews (Louie, 2020). Discrimination and "mastery" (

agreement or disagreement about self-statements) were the accompanying variables used to understand the skin color to mental health association (Louie, 2020).

Although social media was not accounted for in this study, it is evident from pre-existing data that darker skin tones prompt higher incidences of depression (Louie, 2020). In the context of social media, depressive disorders can be attributed to skin color-based discrimination, upward social comparison, and external stressors that incite compromised self-esteem. (Louie, 2020;Verduyn et al., 2021;Tao & Fisher,2022). In the statistical and literary work analyzing the association between social media and colorism (ie, skin color,et cetera), the breadth of research explicitly analyzing these two variables was limited.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings discussed in Chapter 4 Section 2 were used to answer the research question proposed in this literary analysis "How does exposure to social media impact self-esteem and colorism amongst the Black diaspora?". In my evaluation of the data compiled from the sources in the literary review, several recurring themes and findings were prominent. These themes and findings can be categorized by age demographic, psychological implications, social media platforms frequently utilized, content on social media, and factors that influence self-esteem and social comparison (Louie, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021; Grimes, 2017). The studies that assessed skin color and or/ colorism and the accompanying themes, both independent and inclusive of social media as a variable, had similar age demographics studied (Pew Research Center, 2021; Louie, 2020; Franchina et al., 2018). Statistically, adolescents (13-17) and young adults and or/individuals of college age (18-29) (Pew Research Center, 2021; Coard & Breland, 2001) account for the highest percentage of social media consumers across all platforms. Across the statistical studies and articles, this age demographic was also the most commonly studied and mentioned demographic (Pew Research Center, 2021; Coard & Breland, 2001). As implied prior, this is attributed to adolescence and young adulthood being a crucial and transformative period marked by "change (environment, etc) and maturation" (Bonnie et al., 2015). In this period of change, the mind is quite malleable and easily influenced by outside forces hence social comparison and why social media is a potentially harmful and pervasive mechanism (Appel et al., 2020). Another commonality across the sources was the forms of platforms frequently used by consumers and assessed in quantitative studies (Franchina et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2021). Media platforms that allowed for private messaging and/or

interaction (i.e., Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram) appeared to be the most utilized and deleterious to the esteem, mental health, and incidences of comparison (Verduyn, 2020)

Facebook, in particular, was a recurring medium of study in analyzing social media usage and its relation to self-esteem and social comparison (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018; Franchina et al., 2018). Accounting for Facebook's status as one of the oldest and most populous platforms (about utilized specifically for Black users, statistically, this was not surprising (*Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022, ranked by number of monthly active users*, 2022)).

The premise of social media exposure can be expounded upon in the specific themes of content consumed, media engagement, and adjacent impact on self-esteem and social comparison for Black individuals in particular. Media engagement in various texts was favored to be passive. The passivity of these engagements often contributed to increased incidences of negative ("upward") social comparison, low self-esteem, and possessing disorder levels above normal. In the instance where the demographic variable studied was Black people and skin color, comparison was inclined to be intraracial rather than intergroup (Thompson, 2001). This was usually a byproduct of exposure to negative content, which was a recurring problem when skin color was and was not accounted for (Verduyn et al., 2020). Consumers generally interpret negative digital data as a reflection of themselves as individuals in a negative way (Verduyn et al., 2020). The research findings presented in this paper have shown an inverse relationship present between skin color and self-esteem; as the satisfaction with skin color increases, self-esteem decreases.

Future directions

Although the findings of this study and minimal research on colorism and social media may imply it is not an essential topic to research, I beg to differ. Future studies should analyze

the various aspects and subcontinents of colorism, including slavery, texturism, and generational trauma. Specifically, given the qualitative nature of this study, future studies should utilize empirical studies that examine the interrelation between different age demographics (adolescents and young adults). In relation to generational trauma, family dynamics and ideals should be assessed when looking at the mental health implication and skin color as they have been found to have the most impact on skin color perception and self-esteem. Across the studies, it was evident that the applicant pool did not necessarily include males, and if it did, the number of male participants was less than females. Thus, future research should not only include men but individuals' other gender identities and sexual orientations. In addition, future research used to assess colorism and its negative implications should focus on intragroup comparison rather than racial comparisons between Black and White people. If funding is allocated, studies can be extended to other racial and ethnic groups where colorism is an issue. Research should also assess socio-economic and environmental factors as they can impact self-perception and pre-existing stressors. Lastly, research should reassess how colorism has evolved on social media in terms of its content, commentary, et cetera, and examine any movements, phrases, or hashtags used to counteract the incidences of colorism on social media. Specifically, how has the relevance and usage of the #Teamlightskin vs. #Teamdarkskin phrases changed over time.

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