

# **Is Black Beautiful?: A Comparative Analysis of Modern Motivations for Skin Whitening**

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Práce stručně shrnuje historii bělení kůže a zkoumá vnímání bílé barvy kůže v historickém kontextu. Tato práce poukazuje na to, že způsob, jakým je bílá barva kůže vnímána mělo velký vliv na podněty k bělení kůže v minulosti stejně jako v jednadvacátém století.

Hlavním cílem této práce je prozkoumat novodobé podněty k bělení kůže ve Spojených státech amerických, Mexiku, Karibiku, Jižní Americe, Africe a v Jižní a Jihovýchodní Asii.

Klíčová slova:

Bělení kůže, odbarvování kůže, zesvětlování kůže, rasa, rasismus, kolorismus, diskriminace, sociální kapitál, privilegium, nadřazenost bílé barvy, Spojení státy americké, Karibik, Jižní Amerika, Afrika, Jižní Asie, Jihovýchodní Asie

## **ABSTRACT**

This work outlines a brief history of skin whitening and explores the perception of whiteness throughout history. It shows that the perception of whiteness and motivations for skin whitening were highly connected in the past and remain so to this day. The main purpose of this work is to explore modern motivations for whitening in the United States of America, Mexico, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Keywords:

Skin whitening, skin bleaching, skin lightening, whiteness, race, racism, colorism, discrimination, social capital, privilege, white supremacy, the United States of America, Mexico, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia

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## INTRODUCTION

“Show me the doll that you like best or that you would like to play with.

Show me the doll that is the ‘nice’ doll.

Show me the doll that looks ‘bad.’”

These are the questions given to young black children in the groundbreaking 1939 Clark Doll Test, which studied stereotypes and children’s self-perception of their own race. The Clarks discovered that black children considered white dolls “good” and “pretty” and more desirable to play with. On the other hand the black doll was “bad” and “ugly”. Furthermore, when the children were supposed to pick a doll with the same color as their own, they frequently chose a doll with lighter skin. The result of this study, considered proof of American societal stereotyping of black people as bad and white as good, were used as evidence in the 1954 Court decision that overturned legal segregation in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

White skin color has often been considered more beautiful than dark skin and has often been associated with many positive characteristics such as purity and innocence. As a result, non-whites all over the world, especially women, are trying to attain lighter skin by a process called skin whitening. Skin whitening, also known as skin bleaching or skin lightening, is the process of using bleaching agents and chemical substances in an attempt to lighten skin pigment. Skin whitening is also being used in non-white cultures, especially by women, as a quick way to lighten whole sections of the skin. But there is also a ‘natural’ way to whiten one’s skin. There are many non-white families all over the world that devote themselves to the struggle for white skin and are gradually, generation after generation, trying to become whiter through selective mating with the intention of producing lighter-skinned descendants who ultimately might “pass” as white.<sup>2</sup>

Despite country of origin, many non-white women all over the world accept the beauty standards set by whites and therefore share the desire of having beautiful light skin which,

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<sup>1</sup> Experiment Resources, "Stereotypes and the Clark Doll Test", Experiment-Resources.com. <http://www.experiment-resources.com/stereotypes.html> [accessed March 31, 2012].

<sup>2</sup> Heather Topham Wood, "Definition of Skin Bleaching," LIVESTRONG.COM. <http://www.livestrong.com/article/65941-definition-skin-bleaching> [accessed April 17, 2012].

as they believe, will ensure them various benefits and generally a better quality life.

Although living in different parts of the world, the motivations for skin whitening of these women are almost the same.

# 1 SKIN WHITENING

## 1.1 Promotion of Whiteness

Skin bleaching is a global phenomenon. Nowadays, international cosmetic companies focus on aggressive promotion of skin whitening products. These companies offer a wide range of products with eloquent names. Examples include L’Oreal and its ‘White Perfect’, Lancôme with ‘Blanc Expert’ or Vichy and its ‘Bi-White Reveal’. White skin and whiteness itself is often promoted as a luxurious commodity and therefore as a sign of racial superiority.<sup>3</sup>

But luxury is not the only way to promote whiteness. A study concerning representations of forty-five skin whitening products sold in ‘regular American stores’ and in ‘African stores’ in Harlem revealed discrimination and derogation which African Americans experienced via these representations. Both, derogatory and non-derogatory representations were identified. Among the derogatory were those which disparaged and humiliated black skin by promoting white skin as a standard, while non-derogatory were those that praised black skin as a standard or those which did not mention anything about skin complexion.<sup>4</sup>

Almost 75 percent of all observed products were sold in the African stores while about 25 percent were sold in general American stores. The majority of these products were made in the United States and Europe. More than 30 per-cent of the samples contained very dangerous hydroquinone – and the majority of these dangerous products were made in the United States. The representations on the skin whitening products were mostly derogatory social images devaluing black skin with statements such as “Making dark skin clear is healthy, glowing and beautiful”, “Lightening improves the black skin by making it white and beautiful” or “Successful skin has light complexion without dark spots”. The majority of products with derogatory representations were made in the United States. These products were promising not only lightening, but cleansing, purifying and beautifying of the skin as well. These images also suggested that skin whitening is socially acceptable

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher A.D. Charles, "The Derogatory Representations of the Skin Bleaching Products Sold in Harlem," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, (June 2011): 122-123.  
<http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/CHARLES%20Final.pdf> [accessed October 22, 2011].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 125-127.

because white skin is superior to black. This stereotype about dark skin being inferior to light skin has a significant influence on non-white people all over the world.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Skin Whitening as a Threat

The users of skin whitening products very often do not realize, or do not want to know, how these products can be dangerous. Some of them contain toxic substances such as mercury or hydroquinone. There are many health problems which are caused by use of skin whitening products. These problems might be of neurological and dermatological character. Long-term users have experienced problems such as irritability, memory loss, insomnia or immunity-suppression. Some of the users also developed tuberculosis and various dermatological problems. No wonder that the use of skin bleaching products containing hydroquinone is under regulation in United States, Jamaica, Japan and many other countries.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.3 Skin Whitening and Skin Bleaching as the Result of a Mental Disorder

Daudi Ajani ya Azibo, a nationally recognized expert in African-centered psychology, established skin bleaching and skin whitening as a mental disorder of the psychological misorientation type. "Psychological misorientation refers to the overt and cognitive behavioral system that derives from ideation itself when said ideation is based in Eurasian concepts, beliefs, and definitional systems." Generally speaking, the body of a person suffering from the psychological misorientation is black, although his mindset is not. Therefore two types of blackness can be identified – genetic and psychological. Skin whitening and skin bleaching is an attack on genetic blackness when the bleachers or whiteners are trying to "kill" their natural blackness. These people, according to Azibo, possess Eurasian-centered cognitive definitional system and behave according to Eurasian socio-cultural standards.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 125-134.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup> Daudi Ajani Azibo, "Commentary: On Skin Bleaching and Lightening as Psychological Misorientation Mental Disorder," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, (June 2011): 220-221.  
<http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/AZIBO%20final.pdf> [accessed October 22, 2011].

Although skin bleaching and skin whitening behavior are viewed as a disorder by Azibo he himself admits that some persons of African descent who bleach their skin do so without any pathological motivations. They simply bleach their skin because they were most probably neither taught in the schools or religious institutions about psychological Africanity nor brought up with a commitment to their African ancestry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 224-227.

## 2 MOTIVATIONS FOR SKIN WHITENING THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY

### 2.1 Christian Standards of Beauty

The color white has long been associated with purity, innocence and lightness while black color has often been associated with darkness and expressions like evil, dirty and morbid. As a result, it is not surprising that these prejudices influenced Christianity and the Christian perception of these two contrasts. For some Christians, whiteness is associated with devoutness, salvation and morality while blackness represents the worst characteristics. No wonder that Jesus Christ, the iconic measure of perfection, is often portrayed as extremely white skinned, with light hair and blue eyes, far away from anything even a bit reminiscent of blackness.<sup>9</sup>

As Africana studies scholar Yaba A. Blay wrote, “If, Christ, the Son of God, is portrayed as White, the logical assumption is that God too is White”. Whiteness was therefore associated with overall superiority while black skin was considered not only “punishment from God via the ‘Curse of Ham’ but a divine justification for the enslavement of Africans.”<sup>10</sup>

The Curse of Ham, also known as Curse of Canaan refers to a biblical incident when Noah cursed Canaan, son of Ham, to become “a servant of servants” to punish Ham for looking upon his nakedness. From this might be assumed that the punishment and mentioned curse which was imposed on Ham’s son Canaan is blackness itself, which explains Christian motivation to associate Black people with negative and derogatory characteristics only.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.2 European Expansion in Africa

In the nineteenth century, Europeans started to position and advertise white skin color as the color of civilization via commodities, especially soap. Officially they were trying to

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<sup>9</sup> Yaba Amgborale Blay, "Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy: By Way of Introduction." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4 (June 2011): 10. <http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/Skin%20Bleaching%20and%20White%20Supremacy.pdf> [accessed October 22, 2011].

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>11</sup> David Reaga, "'Curse of Ham or Canaan'," Learn The Bible. <http://www.learnthebible.org/curse-of-ham-or-canaan.html> [accessed March 23, 2012].

“civilize” and “domesticate” blacks by use of soap. A very nice example of the nineteenth-century advertisements are advertisements for Pear’s Soap which promoted soap as a magical tool which would clean the dark skin and make it lighter and brighter. The Europeans were not doing this from the goodness of their hearts but were certainly motivated by profit. The beginnings of this trade, in which the Europeans forced goods of a very low value on Africans and took valuable commodities such as ivory, palm oil and gold in return, were stigmatized by the resistance of Africans, which ended with violence and often the deaths of the Africans. The result of this unfair trade was that Europeans became obsessed with cleanliness and the soap, once the cheapest of all the toiletries, became a highly valued commodity not only in European countries but in its colonies as well. These are the origins of skin whitening both in Europe and Africa.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 European Obsession with Whiteness

Those who first started with skin whitening processes were European women. Since whiteness was associated with godliness and Christ himself, European women, more precisely French and Anglo-Saxon women who represented the “bearers of whiteness”, were by their whiteness trying to “communicate their ability to continue and maintain the race”. Whitening products attained their highest popularity during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, when Anglo-Saxon and French women became obsessed with the so-called “Elizabethan ideal of beauty”.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout history, pale skin and soft hands have been indicators of economic privilege and high status in Western Europe. Rich people had no need to go out and spend their time in the sun since they did not have to work, and therefore their skin tended to be lighter than the skin of those who had to work. Thus, skin color became associated with class. No wonder that the desire to maintain white skin survived and that use of skin whitening products such as powders, creams and lotions remained popular among Anglo-Saxon women throughout the nineteenth and during the first half of the twentieth century. But apart from bringing the desirably white skin, the skin whitening could also have a negative effect on those who practised it. The most ‘successful’ whitening formulas being

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<sup>12</sup> Blay, "Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy," 14-19.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 20.



used in Europe contained toxic components such as ceruse or white lead which not only caused the wanted appearance of matte white skin but also had a toxic effect on its users.<sup>14</sup>

White skin had such a high value that women were willing to suffer from health problems such as shortness of breath, dizziness, blindness and even paralysis caused by the toxic components in the skin whitening products and therefore risk their health and sometimes even life to maintain it. This phenomenon is visible in the twenty-first century as well. Women all over the world keep risking their health by use of skin bleaching products.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.4 Obsession with Whiteness in the Antebellum United States

White skin and whiteness itself was highly appreciated among Americans during the antebellum era. According to various studies, in the nineteenth century white skin was associated with physical, cultural and mental superiority of those who possessed it in comparison to Native Americans and black Americans. It must be mentioned that all the notions of physical differences were sometimes highly exaggerated to support overall the superiority of whites.<sup>16</sup>

Being considered white was quite intricate during the antebellum era, as the example of the Irish proves. American scientists classified the Irish as a separate race, sometimes also described as members of the “inferior Celtic race” that were distinguished from the “superior Anglo-Saxon race”. White inhabitants were by the federal census subdivided into ‘native’, ‘foreign’ and ‘Irish’. This lasted until 1862 when it was declared by a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives that the population of the nation was “the white race, whether Anglo-Saxon, Celt or Scandinavian.”<sup>17</sup>

Women possessing white skin were considered beautiful, but their whiteness was also associated with moral virtues as purity, innocence and goodness and with political identity as well. Wilson Flag identified whiteness with the absence of sin. Evidence of worship and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Cathryn Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White: Beauty Practice among White Women in Antebellum America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 42 (Spring 2008): 29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/528904> [accessed August 26, 2011].

<sup>17</sup> France Winddance Twine, and Jonathan W. Warren, "White Americans, the New Minority?: Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness." *Journal of Black Studies* 28, (November 1997): 202-204. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784851> [accessed October 23, 2011].

adoration of female whiteness is well observable in the nineteenth century literature, especially fiction, which are filled with pure and pious heroines and their moral worth.<sup>18</sup>

Being standard bearers of beauty became a new duty for white American women, whose daily lives were increasingly flooded with beauty books and fashion magazines. To excentuate the whiteness of women, especially their faces and necks as much as possible, the fashion industry created a whole new fashion laces, collars, hats and even hairstyles. Women became obsessed with the necessity to keep their skin purely white and sleeping with the window open, giving up taking hot baths or drinking hot beverages were just some of the methods they used to preserve their whiteness. “Some women ate chalk, drank vinegar, wore camphorated charms, bled themselves with leeches or even ingested arsenic to get the desired result.” Although plenty of beauty products promising cleansing and the brightening of the skin appeared at that time, the majority of women preferred the use of home-made lotions which should only highlight their natural whiteness. It was believed that women should not use any artificial paints and that the beauty must be natural; also some rumors about the safety and negative effects of these products on skin appeared. Later on it was proved that the majority of skin whitening product sold in the United States in the nineteenth century contained toxic components such as, lead, arsenic and mercury.<sup>19;20</sup>

As mentioned earlier, being perfectly white began to be perceived as a political issue. As historian Lois Banner noted, white women were more willing to eat arsenic than use face paints and powders which only confirmed that the reluctance to use whitening products was not connected to health issues. Some American women also used blue pencils to draw artificial veins on their body to look more translucent, just like the Anglo-Saxon women. But some women, especially those being suntanned or having freckles were caught between their craving for perfectly white skin and reprehension for artificial whitening. These women were considered impure and tainted and therefore special creams and lotions removing freckles became very popular among them since they were promising forthcoming glow of purity and innocence.<sup>21</sup>

The use of cosmetics was very often associated with prostitutes and their not very modest appearance. What is more, ‘painted ladies’ were by literal and metaphorical

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<sup>18</sup> Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White," 33.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 36-39.

<sup>20</sup> Blay, "Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy," 21.

definition considered 'unwhite'. Also the employers instituted policies forbidding their workers from using face paints and powders. It is also quite interesting that during the antebellum era the perception of black women by some whites changed – many of them were considered attractive or even beautiful. Blackness was becoming an ideological category – just like whiteness was. The difference was that while whiteness was associated with women's virtue, the blackness was associated with evoking sexual desire and their sexual availability.<sup>22</sup>

As the previous section shows, skin whitening has quite a long tradition and has its roots in Elizabethan times when the Europeans, especially French and Anglo-Saxon women became obsessed with whiteness and virtues it represented. Having lighter skin tone also brought easier and more quality life to slaves who via this benefit acquired better and less physically demanding work than their dark-skinned counterparts. The following parts are dedicated to analysis of perception of whiteness and motivations for skin whitening in the United States, the Caribbean and Mexico, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

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<sup>21</sup> Cain, "The Art and Politics of Looking White," 43-46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-46.

### 3 THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### 3.1 Skin Color Alternation as a Result of Racism and Colorism in the United States

Whitening was once very popular among African Americans, reaching its peak just over a century ago. Many dark-skinned women viewed themselves through a beauty lens created by whites and considered themselves unattractive and generally inferior to those with lighter skin. They had reason to do so. Women with lighter skin often had better societal positions – it was easier for them to find a decent job or get married and they were generally considered more attractive. It is not surprising that some African American women longed for lighter skin and that a highly profitable skin whitening industry developed to profit from these desires.<sup>23</sup>

As Treva B. Lindsey wrote, “At the expense of the devaluation of their skin colors, African American women became the central figures of a racially-specific aesthetic-based enterprise that responded to perceived and real desires for social mobility and aesthetic valuation within a cultural hierarchy premised upon white cultural hegemony.” Suddenly, black women were targeted with skin whitening product advertisements promising not only lighter and brighter skin but a better and easier life as well. Skin whitening was not without its opponents, who considered it only a foolish emulation of whites or a betrayal of their own race.<sup>24</sup>

Nowadays, there are many ways to alter skin color, either making it lighter or darker. It is quite common that those with the lighter skin use different products to look tanned since it is considered highly fashionable. But to do this vice versa and to lighten the skin is not that normal yet. There are many different motivations for skin whitening, each of which provokes different opinions not only among whites but among blacks themselves. Skin whitening might be considered a complete denial of Black Pride and of the famous statement “Black Is Beautiful”, and a total betrayal of the whole Civil Rights Movement.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Treva B. Lindsey, "Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4 (June 2011): 108. <http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/LINDSEY%20Final.pdf> [accessed October 22, 2011].

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>25</sup> Richard L. Henshel, "Ability to Alter Skin Color: Some Implications for American Society," *American Journal of 76*, (January 1971): 734-742. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776437> [accessed September 13, 2011].

Some African Americans with lighter skin take advantage of this benefit and pretend to belong among Whites. As Richard L. Henshel wrote “Many Negroes will occasionally pass just for convenience, to get better service; some develop the practice of passing just for amusement”. This is possible due to fact that the border between whiteness and blackness might be very faint sometimes. Blacks in the United States very often serve as a national anchor for Whiteness and those non-whites who are also considered non-Blacks have an open backdoor to slip through.<sup>26</sup>

It was generally assumed that “to be treated as white or black in Latin America would depend on a person’s physical appearance, particularly skin tone, while it would depend upon an individual’s ancestry, particularly on the racial identity of parents and grandparents, in the United States”. Metaphorically, the alleged Latin American approach is the “rainbow” system, while the alleged approach in the United States is the “one drop” rule,” meaning that a person having a single drop of African blood is considered Black.<sup>27</sup>

An example of the application of the “one drop” rule from American history is the passing of Jim Crow segregation laws. During the Jim Crow era, anyone possessing visible marks of African ancestry was considered and treated as black, but as much research shows, the United States has now gravitated towards the “rainbow” system. Those treated as black very often meet with racism – a “flawed conception of race as a biological, inherent identity, when in fact it is a social construction whose meaning changes over time, history and place”, while colorism is “the system that privileges the lighter skinned over the darker-skinned people within a community of color”. Colorism is actually racism within a particular race.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Henshel, "Ability to Alter Skin Color," 738.

Twine, Warren, "White Americans, the New Minority?," 208.

<sup>27</sup> Goldsmith, Arthur, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity Jr. "Shades of Discrimination: Skin Tone and Wages," *The American Economic Review* 96, (May 2006): 243. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034650> [accessed September 13, 2011].

<sup>28</sup> Margaret L. Hunter, "'If You're Light You're Alright': Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color," *Gender and Society* 16, (April 2002): 175-176. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081860> [accessed September 13, 2011].

### 3.2 Light Skin Tone and its Privileges in the United States in Historical Context

Light skin tone was an important criterion for attaining prestige within the black community. This relationship between skin tone and privileges has roots in the times of slavery. Slaves with lighter complexions and therefore of mixed parentage had much higher economic value than dark-skinned slaves. Light-skinned blacks, mulattos, were not only more aesthetically appealing to whites, they were also considered intellectually superior to the dark-skinned. While dark-skinned slaves had very physically demanding work, those with the lighter skin were assigned more prestigious positions such as cooks, butlers or coachmen. These positions were often reserved for the children of these personal servants which was very beneficial for them because “possession of a skill was not only esteemed and a source of pride among slaves, but it often concerned other privileges such as the opportunity to work as a free labourer, save money, and purchase one’s freedom.” Among advantages such as better food, shelter and clothing was also a possibility to learn to read and write.<sup>29</sup>

Mulattoes were aware of the distinction between them and dark-skinned slaves and believed they were superior to them thanks to their white blood. What is more, they were also aware of the similarities in appearance, speech and dress with whites and took advantage of it. “Because of this structure of privilege, the slaves viewed light skin color as a desirable asset and as a symbolic of humane treatment. Black skin and physical characteristics, on the other hand, were viewed as undesirable and as signs of inferiority.” In the end, the stereotypes associated by whites either with darkness or lightness of one’s skin became accepted by slaves.<sup>30</sup>

The situation changed by World War I, when the influence of white ancestry on societal status declined significantly. Education and economic success became more important. Educational opportunities became more accessible for darker skinned blacks; therefore they became more educated and successful. During the 1960s cultural nationalism emphasizing pride in being black appeared and the negative connotations of dark skin color

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<sup>29</sup> Cedric Herring, Verna M. Keith, "Skin Tone and Stratification in the Black Community," : *American Journal of Sociology* 97, (November 1991): 761-762. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781783> [accessed September 13, 2011].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 763.

among blacks disappeared. It might seem that the logical assumption is that the skin color stratification among African Americans will disappear but as many researches show, skin tone still has a significant role to play.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.3 Light Skin Tone and its Privileges in the United States Nowadays

Much research has been conducted on how skin color and skin tone affects the level of education, wage, employment and even a marital status of people, especially women. As the following part shows, skin color stratification is very crucial for African Americans, Mexican Americans and Caribbean Americans living in the United States.

#### 3.3.1 African Americans

Many African Americans are trying to assimilate into American society via skin bleaching. African Americans see themselves as the minority and accept the American society as culturally dominant and therefore as a majority. They consider having light skin as one of the criteria for full assimilation into this society. This desire of having lighter skin tone connected with the need of minority to assimilate into the more powerful group is symptom of the 'skin bleaching syndrome'.<sup>32</sup>

Skin color has a significant effect on every aspect of life of people of color. The data in Table 1, appendix 1, suggests a positive correlation between lighter skin tone and improved education, wage and employment status. In other words, people with lighter skin are more educated, have higher hourly wages or salaries and have better employment status than their dark-skinned counterparts.<sup>33</sup>

Similar results were achieved in a study made by Goldsmith, Hamilton and Darity. According to their results black workers earn 15 percent smaller wages than comparable white workers and, those with lighter skin earn about 10-12 percent more than those with the darker skin.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 764.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Hall, "The Bleaching Syndrome: African Americans' Response to Cultural Domination Vis-a-Vis Skin Color," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, (November 1995): 172-173. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784841> [accessed October 23, 2011].

<sup>33</sup> Joni Hersch, "Skin-Tone Effects among African Americans: Perceptions and Reality," *The American Economic Review* 96, (May 2006): 251-252. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034652> [accessed September 13, 2011].

<sup>34</sup> Goldsmith, Arthur, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity Jr. "From Dark to Light: Skin Color and Wages among African-Americans," *The Journal of Human Resources* 42, (Fall 2007): 728-729. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40057327> [accessed September 13, 2011].

Table 2, appendix 1, suggest lighter skinned blacks were considered by interviewees to be more attractive than those with the darker skin. Interestingly, those who were considered more attractive had attained higher education, but the attractiveness had no effect on their wages. The Detroit Are Study also asked the respondents if they thought that their skin color had any influence on how white and black people treated them. Those with the lighter skin reported considerably better treatment from whites as well as from the blacks than those with the darker skin.<sup>35</sup>

Researches showed that association between skin tone and physical attractiveness was distinctively weaker for men than for women. Also a survey of American black college students showed that dark-skinned males considered themselves more attractive than those with lighter skin. Interestingly, African American men accepted Eurocentric notions linking femininity to whiteness and usually they consider light skin women more attractive than those with darker skin. Studies of marriage patterns show that although black women long for light skin, they surprisingly do not share the preference for light-skinned mates.<sup>36</sup>

Similar results were discovered by a research made by Udry, Bauman and Chase. Although the study proved that generally light skinned blacks select other light skinned blacks over those who are medium or dark skinned, the study showed an increased probability of a dark skinned man marrying a light skinned woman.<sup>37</sup>

### ***3.3.1.1 Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy among African-Americans***

Skin color and skin tone also have a significant effect on the level of self-esteem and self-efficacy for both, men and women. While skin color is an important predictor of self-esteem for African-American women, it is not as important for African-American men. On the other hand, skin color affects self-efficacy for African American men much more than

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<sup>35</sup> Hersch, "Skin-Tone Effects among African Americans," 254-255.

<sup>36</sup> Mark E. Hill, "Skin Color and the Perception of Attractiveness among African Americans: Does Gender Make a Difference?," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 65, (March 2002): 77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090169> [accessed September 13, 2011].

<sup>37</sup> Karl E. Bauman, J.Richard Udry, and Charles Chase, "Skin Color, Status, and Mate Selection," *American Journal of Sociology* 76, (January 1971): 731. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776436> [accessed September 13, 2011].



for women. Men's self-efficacy is also highly influenced by their education and disabled health conditions while their attractiveness and weight have almost no influence on it.<sup>38</sup>

Studies also prove that skin tone, as well as education, employment, attractiveness and weight highly influence the self-esteem of African-American women. One study yielded an interesting result: among women with low and average incomes the self-esteem increases as the color lightens while there is no connection between the skin tone and self-esteem among the women with the highest incomes. Therefore women who consider themselves successful evaluate themselves positively, not taking their skin tone into account. Also, the self-esteem of women judged as unattractive or average increases as the skin tone becomes lighter while there is no connection between the skin tone and self-esteem among women who are considered as highly attractive. To sum up, "skin tone does not have much relevance for self-esteem among women who have higher levels of income and who are attractive." Having lighter skin tone has a significant effect on self-esteem of black women who are judged as unattractive and who attain low or average income – therefore might these women tend to skin whitening as a way how to increase their self-esteem more often than women with the highest incomes and those who are considered attractive. It is quite interesting that education does not have a very significant effect on women's self-esteem.<sup>39</sup>

Analysis also shows that skin tone has a significant effect on self-esteem for men who are either under or overweight – among the under-weight men the self-esteem decreases as skin tone gets lighter and among the overweight men the self-esteem increases as the skin tone gets lighter. The lowest self-esteem is found among men who are overweight and dark skinned. When dealing with the self-efficacy of women, there are no significant interaction effects, but among men the skin tone and weight emerged as marginally significant. Studies show that skin tone and efficacy are negatively associated for underweight men, marginally significant for average men and positive for those judged as overweight. Among those judged as overweight the lighter men are more likely to have higher level of self-efficacy. These findings show that physical appearance, especially weight in connection to skin tone has a significant effect on self-esteem of African-American men – while those being overweight and light-skinned have higher level of self-esteem, and those with the darker

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<sup>38</sup> Verna M. Keith, and Maxine S. Thompson, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy," *Gender and Society* 15, (January 2001): 344-347. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081888> [accessed October 22, 2011].

skin suffer from lower self-esteem. From this might be assumed that men who are overweight and dark-skinned are likely to engage in skin whitening in order to increase their self-esteem.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3.2 Hispanic Americans

According to the U.S. government, there are two ways to classify Hispanic Americans. One definition is that a Hispanic or Latino is “a member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to 20 Spanish-speaking nations from Latin America and Spain itself” with the exception of Portugal and Brazil. The second approach is that Hispanic is actually anyone who says he is – and nobody who says he is not. In July 2008 there were 46,943,613 Hispanics living in the United States, comprising about 15 percent of the population.<sup>41</sup>

Many Hispanic Americans were influenced by the Spanish racial categorization. Within this categorization the *Peninsulares*, those with purely Spanish ancestry born in Spain occupied the highest level of the socioeconomical ladder, followed by *Criolos*, Spanish born in the Spanish colonies. These ‘full-blooded’ Spaniards were followed by racially mixed *Mestizos* and native inhabitants of the Spanish colonies. This racial categorization influenced Hispanics and led to stratification based on skin tone.<sup>42</sup>

The majority of Hispanics are *Mestizos* of mixed origin with signs of European, African and Indian ancestry. Various skin tones are to be identified when speaking of Hispanics, which often leads to skin color stratification within Hispanic communities living in the United States. Skin color stratification is based on the differences of the skin tone within a certain community and is highly connected with colorism - the fact that those having the lighter skin are being treated more favourably than those with the darker skin. As Margaret L. Hunter wrote “Light skin is associated with Europeans and is assigned a higher status than darker skin, which is associated with Africans or indigenous people, and is assigned a lower status.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 347-349.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 349-351.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey Passel, and Paul Taylor, "Who's Hispanic?," *Pew Hispanic Center* (May 2009), 1-2. <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/111.pdf> [accessed April 24, 2012].

<sup>42</sup> Chelsea M. San Nicolas, "Criollo," *Guampedia.com*, <http://guampedia.com/criollo/> [accessed April 24, 2012].

<sup>43</sup> Hunter, "If You're Light You're Alright," 175-176.

Skin color stratification has a different impact on women than on men. For many Hispanic women, whiteness and lightness is highly associated with beauty – and beauty is connected with the social capital of any kind. As Hunter's analysis based on the data from the National Survey of Black Americans (1980) and National Chicano Survey (1980) show, lighter skin color assures higher privileges in education and income for Mexican American women. This analysis shows that the skin tone of a Mexican American woman, just like the skin tone of an African American woman has no significant effect on her choice of marriage partners.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 181-187.

## 4 MEXICO AND THE CARIBBEAN

### 4.1 Mexico

In Mexico people are usually divided into three racial categories – whites, racially mixed (*Mestizos*) and Indians. *Mestizos* were in the past deemed the national symbol of Mexico and the ideology of *Mestizaje* based on ‘mixing’ Europeans and Africans with indigenous people was very popular not only in Mexico but in many countries of Latin America. Nowadays, many Mexicans use this ideology as a strategy for whitening themselves and often choose light skinned partners to ensure lighter skin for their descendants. They consider whitening to be an act of ‘cleaning and bettering the race’ - their main goal is not to be racially pure but to become phenotypically white. Physical signs of black ancestry such as a flat nose, round face and thick lips are often considered unattractive and unappealing, and even those possessing them sometimes refer to them with disdain. The ideology of *Mestizaje* created a society in which people praise their mixed origin and aspire to look white at the same time.<sup>45</sup>

Phenotypic appearance very often drives the individual opinion about race mixing. Descendants who came out lighter skinned and with Caucasian features are very positive about the *mestizaje*, while those who inherited more African features and dark skin are very often frustrated. One such frustrated individual is Martin, a dark-skinned navy captain who stated: “My dad was tall and dark skinned. My mom was white, but short. So I got what I didn’t want to get: shortness from my mom and dark skin from my dad. I should have gotten whiteness from my mom and being tall from my dad, right?”<sup>46</sup>

When talking about mixing of races in an attempt to lighten skin color, the logical assumption is that one person is usually darker skinned than the other. Those possessing darker skin and African features are often considered unattractive. Due to this might high socioeconomic status and level of education be the only added value which can help them to attract lighter-skinned mates.<sup>47</sup>

The ideology of *Mestizaje* has for a long time proclaimed that racism cannot exist in a racially mixed society and Mexico held a race-blind ideology where any indication of racial

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<sup>45</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, ed. "Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters," (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 115-117.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

differences was seen as a racist act. Interestingly, Mexicans see no or very small connection between race and color – they very often refuse to identify someone's race since they consider that racist and immoral. Very often they do not even know how to express themselves when talking about race identification, but they have no problem with identification in terms of shades of color. An example is Rodrigo, a thirty-seven year old dark-skinned fisherman whose responded to a question about his racial self-identification was following: "Well...mmm, how could I say it? ... Racially I consider myself...well, a dark-skinned person, normal, without discriminating against anyone."<sup>48</sup>

Mexico was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a big importer of African slaves, and by 1600 those with African ancestry outnumbered those of European origin. After the slavery system collapsed in early 1700s, it was believed that Africans will biologically integrate with the rest of the Mexican population and that the African population will 'disappear' through race mixture. But the African ancestry left an imprint on the Mexican population. Interestingly, many Mexicans distance themselves from the black category and consider blackness as something foreign. The darker phenotype of some Mexicans is very often explained by intense sun exposure. One of the motives for skin whitening is also the fact that even today blackness is still associated with slavery and low social status.<sup>49</sup>

## 4.2 Jamaica

"Sometimes I lie down at night and wish I could wake up in the morning and just look like I did before this process started," says Carlene, a thirty-five-year-old Jamaican woman who had been bleaching her skin for three years. Carlene used skin bleaching creams twice a day, and what started with an innocent desire to bring an even skin tone ended with seriously damaged skin. Some skin bleaching products contain toxic components such as hydroquinone, which might be very dangerous. As Carlene stated: "Even though I've stopped bleaching, I still use something mild, to maintain my skin tone. Because if I stop now, I'm going to look like I'm poison. That's the effect it has on you."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 117-120.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 121-123.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 124-128.

<sup>50</sup> BBC NEWS, "'Bleaching destroyed my skin'," BBC NEWS.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/africa\\_have\\_your\\_say/8095882.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/africa_have_your_say/8095882.stm) [accessed March 11, 2012].

Although very dangerous, skin whitening is very popular in Jamaica – men, women and even ten year-olds in school are taking bleaching pills and use whitening products. No wonder – even small children are told that “White is better than brown and brown is better than Black”. It is assumed that skin bleaching is a result of slavery and deep-rooted colonialism – European culture was considered as superior, while the African culture was “relegated to the bottom of the society”. It is also believed that the main motivation for skin whitening is self-hate and the low self-esteem of those who bleach themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Research done by Christopher A.D.Charles refutes that self-hate and low self-esteem are the motivations. Yet, results of his research do indicate that “wanting to look beautiful, wanting to attract members of the opposite sex, and peer pressure are some of the reasons for the bleaching phenomenon in Jamaica”. Even so, more extensive research on the topic of motivations for skin whitening in Jamaica is needed before any definite conclusions can be drawn.<sup>52</sup>

That said, a growing number of men and women practicing skin whitening recently forced the government to speak out and inform people about the dangers of skin whitening. The government tries to persuade people not to use the whitening products through various promotional campaigns, such as “Don’t Kill Your Skin”, which are mostly designed to discourage people from skin whitening by pointing out the health problems it might cause.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Christopher A.D. Charles, "Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate, and Black Identity in Jamaica," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, (July 2003): 711-712. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180843> [accessed September 13, 2011].

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 718-726

<sup>53</sup> Margaret L. Hunter, "Buying Racial Capital: Skin-Bleaching and Cosmetic Surgery in a Globalized World," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, (June 2011): 149-150. <http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/HUNTER%20Final.pdf> [accessed October 22, 2011].

## 5 LATIN AMERICA

Many Latin American countries are thoroughly racially mixed and this mixing led to a development of a socially recognized middle class – *mestizos*. Interestingly, although this racial mixing was not viewed as a reaction to white supremacy, it did follow “a racially hierarchical pattern with whitening as a goal”. Whitening, also known as *blanqueamiento*, has a long tradition in Latin American countries and it is still performed as part of a hierarchical movement upward.<sup>54</sup>

Whiteness and white appearance is in many Latin America countries, such as Brazil or Ecuador, connected with class status, and has been since colonial times. Although these times are long gone, the ideology of *mestizaje* is still being promoted by media and state in many Latin America countries, supporting a gradual whitening of the population.<sup>55</sup>

Generally speaking, many Latin Americans self-identify themselves as white, but the proportion differs group by group. Interestingly, almost 90 per-cent of Colombians and Cubans self-identify themselves as White in contrast to less than thirty of Dominicans. Latin Americans also often refuse to identify themselves in racial terms – they usually prefer national descriptors such as ‘Brazilian’ or ‘Puerto Rican’.<sup>56</sup>

### 5.1 Brazil

#### 5.1.1 Whitening Based on Immigration Policy

Between the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century more than 3.5 million black slaves were brought to Brazil from Africa. These blacks and their descendants make up a significant percentage of the population of Brazil. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were attempts to attract immigrants, especially of German and Swiss origin, with the intention of decrease the disparity between blacks and whites in the country. There was a belief that white Europeans were superior not only to native Brazilians but to the yellow and black races as well. In 1872, whites accounted for 38.1 percent of Brazil’s total population, while blacks, *Mestizos* and Indians amounted to 61.9 percent of the total. Thanks to the immigration policy, the situation

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<sup>54</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 43-46.

<sup>55</sup> Erynn Masi de Casanova, "'No Ugly Women': Concepts of Race and Beauty among Adolescent Women in Ecuador," *Gender and Society* 18, (June 2004): 291. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149403> [accessed October 23, 2011].

changed any by the 1950s whites accounted for 62.5 percent of the population. In less than one hundred years, Brazil attracted more white immigrants than it had imported blacks during the three centuries of slave trade.<sup>57</sup>

### 5.1.2 Racial Self-Identification and Intergenerational Whitening

Differentiation according to skin color in Brazil is more common due to mixed ancestry than differentiation according to race. Being identified as white, *Mulatto* or black depends on aspects such as body appearance and social situation. It is quite common that even some Brazilians with African ancestry might self-identify themselves as *Mulatto* or even white. As data from a national survey shows, more than 40 percent of Brazilians included in this survey self-identified themselves as white and over 30 percent as light brown or brown.<sup>58</sup>

Nowadays, there is high connection between skin color and socioeconomic status in Brazil. Having light skin is highly desirable for many Brazilian families which are trying to become or remain white by marrying exclusively lighter skinned mates. To marry offspring into whiter, or at least less black families is an important goal of many parents, while having a lighter skinned descendant is for some parents a source of pride. Generally, those attaining higher socioeconomic status are more likely to marry into a white family.<sup>59</sup>

Research made by Luisa Farah Schwartzman shows that, just like in the United States, those who have white skin attain higher education than those with darker skin. Both, men and women considered white attained higher education than those identified as brown or black. Interestingly, those being identified as black, both men and women, attained higher education than those identified as brown. Unlike in the United States, children coming from interracial marriages between black-white and brown-white are mostly classified as white. The higher the level of a non-white parent's education increases the probability that his or her child will be classified as white and decreases probability of his or her child

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<sup>56</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 46-53.

<sup>57</sup> Laurence Hallewell, and Sales Augusto dos Santos, "Historical Roots of the 'Whitening' of Brazil," *Latin American Perspectives* 29, Brazil: The Hegemonic Process in Political and Cultural Formation (January 2002): 61-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185072> [accessed October 23, 2011].

<sup>58</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 10-14.

<sup>59</sup> Luisa Farah Schwartzman, "Does Money Whiten? Intergenerational Changes in Racial Classification in Brazil," *American Sociological Review* 72, (December 2007): 940. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472504> [accessed October 23, 2011].



being classified as nonwhite. From this it might be assumed that attaining higher socioeconomic status in Brazil can in itself result in being considered white.<sup>60</sup>

Statistics also proves that brown and black families in Brazil earn only 40 to 45 percent of the income of white families while black families earn 90 percent of brown family income. Edward Telles and Nelson Lim achieved similar results in their research - white respondents attained 26 percent higher income than brown respondents, while black respondents attained 13 percent lower income than brown ones. These results also prove that socioeconomic status and skin color are highly connected in Brazil.<sup>61</sup>

But the “natural” whitening is not the only way how to attain lighter skin. Cosmetic surgery industry and use of skin whitening products is becoming very popular and nowadays is being practiced in many countries all over the world, including Brazil. Generally speaking, from 2000 to 2008 the number of cosmetic surgeries done on Latinos increased 240 percent. Many darker-skinned Brazilians face discrimination in their everyday life and via skin whitening they try to improve their life and broaden their possibilities – even today it is still common that a job description might require a “clean” appearance “which is often coded language for middle class and light-skinned or white”.<sup>62</sup>

## 5.2 Ecuador

In Ecuador, whiteness and its features such as light skin and eyes is often identified with beauty – whiteness is very often being associated with attractiveness while nonwhiteness with unattractiveness. Interestingly, Ecuador is a country with only 5 percent of whites - the rest of the population are mostly *Mestizos* of mixed European and indigenous origin. Many women are being evaluated as suitable for a potential employer according to their physical appearance. Physical appearance has a significant effect on self-esteem as well as marriage opportunities for Ecuadorian women – those women being considered more attractive have bigger chances to marry into a higher social class which is one of only few ways to raise their social status.<sup>63</sup>

A study concerning beauty standards among Ecuadorian teenage girls was performed by Erynn Masi de Casanova. Girls from the middle and upper classes were considered

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 949-958.

<sup>61</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 18-19.

<sup>62</sup> Hunter, "Buying Racial Capital" 152-153.

<sup>63</sup> Casanova, "No Ugly Women," 292-293.

lighter skinned with more Caucasian features than their counterparts from the lower class. These girls also had higher self-esteem and considered themselves more attractive. Some middle or upper class brown-skinned girls identified themselves as white. This is quite common due to the fact that light skin color is associated with higher class. On the other hand both, very dark and very light skin tone is considered as 'distasteful' - white skin which is being tanned is mostly regarded as the most desirable. Interestingly, Caucasian features are by the majority of teenage girls who took part in the research considered as an ideal of beauty regardless of body type. Attractiveness is by them not achieved by being born perfect but "through concentrating on your good characteristics". Many of these adolescent girls mentioned characteristics such as honesty or kindness when describing a beautiful woman.<sup>64</sup>

Ecuador is a highly stratified society with strong socioeconomic ordering. Those who belong in the upper and upper-middle classes identify themselves as white or *blanco*. Therefore being *blanco* and having light skin is associated not only with beauty, but with power and high socioeconomic status as well. On the other hand, black people usually belong to the middle or lower classes. Just like in Mexico or in Brazil, the ideology of *mestizaje* which is based on racial miscegenation leads in Ecuador to whitening of the population, also known as *blanqueamiento*. Since those being classified as black or Indian are excluded from access to wealth and power, *blanqueamiento* is used as a way of moving up on the socioeconomic ladder.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 293-300.

<sup>65</sup> Everyculture, "Ecuador," Everyculture, <http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Ecuador.html> [accessed April 27, 2012].

## 6 AFRICA

Although the Europeans as well as the colonial regime left African soil a long time ago, they still have an influence on the Africans via the commodity of race. Africans are flooded with advertisements promoting products such as soaps, powders, laundry detergents and skin bleaching products. In the 1950s the main message of these advertisements was about the ability of these products to make things and people clean and nicely perfumed. As the bleaching creams gained popularity, the association with cleansing and skin disease removal disappeared and the advertisements started to promote skin whitening products such as “*Exclusive Whitenizer*” promising a real lightening of the skin. In contemporary Africa, these advertisements are found not only in magazines and newspapers but are also aired on local television and radio stations and positioned on huge billboards in urban areas. No wonder many African women have succumbed and via the use of the advertised products became victims of skin whitening propaganda.<sup>66</sup>

### 6.1 Ghana and Tanzania

Yaba Blay describes the result of a study of skin bleaching among Tanzanian women made by Lewis, Robkin, Gaska and Njoki and the results of an extensive study of skin bleaching in Ghana made by herself, as well as the benefits which the relatively white Ghanaian women attained due to the skin whitening.

As the results summarized in Table 3 of the appendix show, the motivations for skin whitening of Tanzanian and Ghanaian women who took part in the research are almost the same. All of them want to whiten their skin to be considered more beautiful and attractive, have beautiful and soft skin and to appear sophisticated and generally satisfy or impress the others. Their perception of whiteness is also associated with freshness and cleanliness and it can be assumed that since they associate whiteness with cleanliness, they also associate blackness with dirt and therefore these women consider themselves dirty or at least they think that others perceive them this way.<sup>67</sup>

All of these motivations might be considered as ‘external’ – these women are trying to fit into the European standards of beauty because the others expect them to do so. Many research studies have proven that women with lighter skin are considered more beautiful

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<sup>66</sup> Blay, "Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy," 25-36.

and attractive. As can be seen in the third column, Ghanaian women who bleach their skin attained apart from the lighter skin a lot of benefits as well. These women are generally considered more attractive, especially by males, are more likely to get married and have access to more social networks. Therefore it is quite surprising that those practising skin whitening in Africa meet with public disdain. Skin whitening practices are associated with prostitutes, and women who bleach are often ridiculed and considered to have low or no self-esteem.<sup>68</sup>

## 6.2 South Africa

Skin whiteners, first marketed during 1930s to black consumers in South Africa, are nowadays a multimillion dollar enterprise in this country. The history of slavery and racial segregation influenced South Africans and their perception of white skin as a privilege. The very first company which marketed skin whiteners to black consumers was the Kepples Company with its *Freckle Wax* which was promising removing of pimples, blotches and patches while making the face lighter and bringing out its real beauty. During the 1920s and 1930s skin lighteners became a desirable commodity often coveted by women who faced excessive exposure to the sun. The skin whitening industry flourished during the times of Apartheid when shade of skin color took on great significance and when skin color gave away one's social status and life opportunities.<sup>69</sup>

Since the 1950s a mass-production of skin whiteners to the black South African audience appeared. They were quite often promoted in magazines by local music and film stars. Also various beauty competitions appeared in these magazines, creating the idea that a black woman can be beautiful as well. A survey made in Harare in the 1970s showed that more than half of African women age sixteen to thirty-four reported regular use of skin whiteners – this use was often associated with beautification and modernity but it was not without its opponents as well.<sup>70</sup>

Popularity of use of skin whitening products in South Africa significantly declined when it started to be criticised by African political leaders who considered it as a betrayal of race and a vain attempt to become white. Also, the safety of these products was called

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>69</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 188-195.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 197-204.

into question by doctors – they argued that the lighteners contained dangerous substances which could damage one's skin and cause other health problems.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 197-204.

## 7 SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Skin whitening is very popular among Asians, especially among those possessing darker skin living in Southeast Asia. Skin whitening became a billion dollar industry, especially in countries such as Korea, India, Japan or China. There are many skin whitening products available on the market but not everyone can afford them. Many poor Asian women use illegal products containing toxic chemicals and therefore put their life in danger. Statistics show that around 50 percent of women living in Taiwan and 40 percent of women living in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia and South Korea use skin whitening products. Having white skin, as well as searching for a light-skinned partner is shared desire of many Asians.<sup>72</sup>

### 7.1 India

Having light skin is highly attractive and desirable in India and it is not surprising that the skin whitening industry flourishes and is highly profitable there. In Indian culture black color is associated with terms such as ‘hell’, ‘wrong’ and ‘dirty’ and with underprivileged people. On the other hand, white color is considered to be a sign of beauty and purity and is considered as a sign of power and privilege. In contrast to countries like Japan or Korea, Indians very often use Indian models and celebrities as models for the skin whitening advertisements. This might be caused by the ‘globalization’ of Indian beauty, which often succeeds in global beauty contests like Miss World and Miss Universe – from 1990 to 2006 Indian models won more than ten of these titles.<sup>73</sup>

About 80 percent of the population of India are Hindus. Although being very often dark-skinned, those living in the north of the country have prejudice against those living in the south because of their dark skin. In many Indian languages the words ‘fair’ and ‘beautiful’ are synonymous; no wonder that light skin is very valuable among the Hindu Indians – so valuable, that they often overlook the rigidity of class boundaries and even wealthy land-owning families look for light-skinned brides among poorer families from

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<sup>72</sup> Public Radio International, "Skin whitening big business in Asia," Public Radio International, <http://www.pri.org/stories/world/asia/skin-whitening-big-business-asia.html> [accessed April 9, 2012].

<sup>73</sup> Shalini Bahl, Russell W. Belk, Junko Kimura, Eric P. H. Li, and and Hyun Jeong Min, "Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Cultures," *Advances in Consumer Research* 35 (2008): 447. [http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/v35/naacr\\_vol35\\_273.pdf](http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/v35/naacr_vol35_273.pdf) [accessed April 15, 2012].

lower casts. Unlike in the United States, having light skin tone is important for both, Hindu males and females. When a Hindu male possesses some extraordinary talent or wealth, he is eligible to marry a light skin woman.<sup>74</sup>

## 7.2 The Philippines

More than two million units of skin whitening soap are sold in the Philippines every year. Skin whitening in the Philippines has its roots in times of Spanish and American colonization and nowadays is being influenced also by proximity to countries such as Japan, China or Korea. A survey about skin whitening proved that more than 50 per-cent of the respondents currently used skin whitening products. The skin whitening process in the Philippines does not necessarily demonstrate longing for whiteness or a European look. The desirable outcome is to look East Asian – therefore to have big almond-shaped eyes, jet-black hair and extremely pale skin.<sup>75</sup>

Light skin is considered a marker of higher class and therefore darker skinned Filipinos might consider lighter skinned East Asians more privileged. Filipinos keep investing money into skin whitening products even though approximately 40 percent of the respondents of a survey examining popularity of these products reported little or no difference in shade of their skin color.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hall, "The Bleaching Syndrome," 179-180.

<sup>75</sup> Glenn, "Shades of Difference," 63-64.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

## CONCLUSION

Skin whitening is a global phenomenon. Having roots in the sixteenth century, it is being practiced by many non-whites, especially women, all over the world today. Many of those who long for lighter skin use various skin lightening, whitening or bleaching products such as lotions, creams and powders. But there is a 'natural' way to whiten one's skin as well. There are many non-white families all over the world which have devoted themselves to the struggle for white skin and are gradually, generation after generation, trying to become whiter by reproducing with lighter skinned mates with an intention to produce lighter skinned offspring.

The desire of attaining lighter skin tone might be considered a result of deeply rooted beauty standards created by whites which were by many non-whites accepted as their own. Nowadays white skin and white beauty are mass-marketed by many international corporations such as L'Oreal, Lancôme and Vichy. Skin whitening, lightening or bleaching is promoted as something the non-whites should do in order to gain healthy looking skin and become more attractive, beautiful and appealing to the opposite sex. White, or at least light skin color, is often considered more beautiful, pure and more appealing to possible mates than darker skin.

But skin whitening is not without its opponents. It has been proven that many skin whitening products contain very dangerous components, such as hydroquinone, which might not only destroy one's skin and cause many problems of neurological and dermatological character, but can also cause irritability, memory loss, insomnia or immunity-suppression. Skin bleaching and whitening behavior is considered an attack on genetic blackness when the bleachers or whiteners are trying to "kill" their natural blackness. This behavior has been identified as a mental disorder.

Of course, not everybody practicing skin whitening suffers from a mental disorder. Although they put their health and sometimes even life in danger, the majority of them are simply trying to reach the beauty standards they accepted as their own in order to move up the socioeconomic ladder and in case of immigrants to integrate into the superior community. As the data proves, light skin color is by many non-whites perceived as a tool to obtaining higher socioeconomic status, social capital and various benefits such as higher income, more desirable work, higher education and being considered more attractive. Generally speaking, modern motivations for skin whitening are the same all over the world.



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## **APPENDIX**

I Table 1 – Education, Wage and Employment Status

II Table 2 – Racial Environment and Treatment

III Table 3 – Motivations for the Skin Whitening of Tanzanian and Ghanaian Women

## APPENDIX

**Table 1 – Education, Wage and Employment Status**

<b>National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA)</b>				
<b>Female</b>	<b>Very Dark</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Years of education	10,44	10,95	11,52	12,17
Hourly Wage	8,96	8,55	9,29	9,69
Employed (if age 18-65)	43,75	58,92	61,71	64,56
<b>Male</b>	<b>Very Dark</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Years of education	11,14	11,18	11,75	12,41
Hourly Wage	11,29	11,62	11,55	13,97
Employed (if age 18-65)	77,61	77,57	79,32	78,89
<b>Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI)</b>				
<b>Female</b>	<b>Very Dark</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Years of education		12,53	12,79	13,24
Hourly Wage		10,16	9,71	10,55
Employed (if age 18-65)		50,29	56,82	58,44
<b>Male</b>	<b>Very Dark</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Years of education		12,45	13,13	13,23
Hourly Wage		11,11	11,72	12,44
Employed (if age 18-65)		64,49	69,57	69,89

Source: Data adapted from Joni Hersch, "Skin-Tone Effects among African Americans: Perceptions and Reality" *The American Economic Review* 96, (May 2006): 252, table 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034652> (accessed September 13, 2011).

**Table 2 – Racial Environment and Treatment**

<b>National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA)</b>			
<b>Female</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Attractive – above average	30,1	44,5	55,8
Elementary school all or mostly black	85,3	82,4	74,2
Neighbourhood where grew up all or mostly black	84,2	79,9	76,7
Present neighbourhood all or mostly black	82,6	77,8	72,2
Work group all or mostly black	45,9	44,1	37,6
<b>Male</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Attractive – above average	33,4	39,3	61,8
Elementary school all or mostly black	85,9	84,0	81,0
Neighbourhood where grew up all or mostly black	82,6	80,2	80,4
Present neighbourhood all or mostly black	78,9	73,0	68,6
Work group all or mostly black	43,7	49,4	32,1
<b>Detroit Area Study (DAS)</b>			
<b>Female</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Attractive – above average	36,3	35,2	50,9
Work group all or mostly black	51,9	48,1	47,3
Unfair police treatment	24,2	16,1	23,1
Treated as not smart	23,3	16,6	13,0
People act afraid	12,2	10,1	5,6
Whites treat better due to skin color	8,9	8,2	39,8
Blacks treat better due to skin color	4,4	8,2	17,0
<b>Male</b>	<b>Dark</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Light</b>
Attractive – above average	40,0	28,3	63,6
Work group all or mostly black	30,8	32,7	32,0
Unfair police treatment	60,0	60,9	57,6
Treated as not smart	16,4	17,8	18,8
People act afraid	27,3	22,0	12,5
Whites treat better due to skin color	0,0	13,3	42,4
Blacks treat better due to skin color	1,9	10,9	12,5

Source: Data adapted from Joni Hersch, "Skin-Tone Effects among African Americans: Perceptions and Reality" *The American Economic Review* 96, (May 2006): 254, table 3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034652> (accessed September 13, 2011).

**Table 3 – Motivations for Skin Whitening of Tanzanian and Ghanaian Women**

<b>Tanzanian women motivations</b>	<b>Ghanaian women motivations</b>	<b>Benefits of skin bleaching for relatively white Ghanaian women</b>
To remove pimples, rashes and skin disease and to have soft skin	to counteract the effects of the sun	It allows access to particular social networks
to be white, “beautiful” and more European looking	to be and appear beautiful	Facilitates the performance of particular social identities
to remove the adverse affects of extending skin bleaching use on the body	to gain and/or maintain capital, both economic and social	Boosts marriage ability / “husband maintenance”
to satisfy ones partner and/or attract mates of the opposite sex	to attract attention and/or potential mates	Ignites heterosexual (male) desire
to satisfy/impress peers	to appear sophisticated and/or modern	Enables the performance of “modernity”
feel clean and fresh	to appear clean	Attracts attention

Source: Data adapted from Yaba Amgborale Blay, "Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy: By Way of Introduction." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4 (June 2011): 22-22.  
<http://jpanafrican.com/docs/vol4no4/Skin%20Bleaching%20and%20White%20Supremacy.pdf> (accessed October 22, 2011).