#TheDarkestShade: Exploring Skin Tone Labor and the Role of Colorism in the Cultural Messaging Around Black Beauty Influencers

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to John Love (1935-2021), my loving and hilarious grandfather, who would always jokingly ask, "*Say baby girl, when you gon be done with school*?"

I finally finished Grandaddy.

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First, I would like to acknowledge and thank God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit for guiding me along this journey. There were so many times when I felt alone, and God reminded me that He gave me this vision and therefore would provide me the strength to complete it. I am forever thankful for your love, mercy, and grace and promise to always acknowledge that you are the director of my path. I am also grateful that you have placed encouraging and supportive people– whom I will mention and thank below–in my life as it reflects your thoughtfulness and care for me.

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List of Abbreviations

BBP	Black Beauty Publications
BWJ	Black Women Journalists
WPP	White Presenting People
POC	People of Color
CST	Critical Skin Theory
RPL	Racial Phenotype Labor
LSI	Light Skinned Influencers
MBSI	Medium Brown Skinned Influencers
DSI	Dark Skinned Influencers
LBSC	Light Brown Skin Condition
MBSC	Medium Brown Skin Condition
DBSC	Dark Brown Skin Condition
BBI	Black Beauty Influencers

Abstract

Black beauty influencers are a part of the growing number of internet users, from marginalized communities that are using social media and other digital platforms to reshape industries that have historically discriminated against them. Black women are typically perceived as existing outside of hegemonic notions of desirability–thus their production of visual content in the digital beauty genre is a resistance strategy to the negative narratives often attached to definitions of Black womanhood. This study is a mixed-methods examination of the ways that Black women have used discourse to reshape the beauty industry–all while combating skin tone prejudice, or colorism. Colorism is a phenomenon in our society that privileges those with lighter skin tones, as they are perceived as being closer to the societal standards of Whiteness. Prior research also notes that darker skinned Black Americans receive less income and have worse health outcomes in comparison to lighter skinned Black Americans. The research on influencers in the digital beauty sphere notes that racism generally is present within this space and contributes to marginalization within the wider social media influencer industry. This project centers colorism as the premier element which shapes Black women's contributions to beauty discourse, their labor requirements as influencers, and the way they are perceived by other consumers of digital beauty content.

Study one uses discourse analysis through a case study on Jackie Aina–arguably the world's most popular Black beauty influencer–to interrogate how Black beauty influencers and conversations about colorism are framed within mainstream beauty magazines. I find that Jackie

Aina and other Black women in this genre are often praised for their vocality and centered as experts. However, they must still contend with sinister forces, such as White celebrity privilege and algorithmic marginalization. This study reveals that although Black women's discursive labor has reshaped the beauty industry, White hegemonic voices are still the purveyors of conversation and largely shape the narrative framing around Black beauty influencers and their work in the beauty sphere.

Study two uses survey experiment methodology to explore if skin tone impacts perceptions of attractiveness and competence among viewers of digital beauty content. This study surveyed African Americans (N = 576), primarily Black women (n = 524), finding that beauty influencers with darker skin tones are rated as less attractive and less competent. Participants also revealed that they would be less likely to click on the videos of dark-skinned beauty influencers in comparison to influencers with light brown and medium brown skin tones, potentially hinting at income discrepancy among Black women influencers.

The findings of Study 1 and Study 2 enable me to argue for a theory of *Racial Phenotype Labor*, asserting that Black influencers are judged by their phenotypes as opposed to their race alone. Therefore, dark-skinned influencers have to engage in *skin tone work* as an extra added layer of influencer labor, where much of their content revolves around creating acceptance, both aesthetically and materially, for darker skin tones. Overall, this project calls for more research into the ways that colorism operates within the digital beauty sphere and the greater social media influencer industry.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Operationalization of Beauty in the Digital Age

In 2018, it was revealed that Jeffree Star, arguably the highest paid beauty influencer on social media, compared Nigerian American and dark-skinned beauty influencer Jackie Aina to a gorilla through a text message exchange (Payne, 2018). After the revelation, Aina made headlines in several beauty publications, stating that she would not, "excuse blatantly racist behavior" (Payne, 2018, p.1). In this example, Jackie Aina, like many other Black women in the digital beauty genre, was simultaneously subject to racism and misogyny, as it was a White man shaming her for her race. In fact, Aina was experiencing what Moya Bailey calls misogynoir, a specific form of misogyny common in media and popular culture "that targets Black trans and ciswomen," (Bailey, 2016, p.1). Additionally, Aina was also subject to colorism, adding an extra layer of racism and bias to this encounter. Aina not only identifies as Black, Nigerian, and woman, but she is also dark-skinned, a phenotypic trait which she celebrates and has built her platform around. Star's racist comments, then, not only target Aina because she is Black, but also invokes colorism, targeting her skin-tone, and is meant to delineate her as the extreme "Other." This example points to the depth of ugliness present in the beauty genre, conveying that this innovative and creative community which has reshaped culture both digitally and industrially is–unfortunately–not free from racism or skin tone bias. While colorism is a result of racism, those who experience racism do not always experience colorism in the same ways. In fact, some people benefit from the implementation of colorist practices, while others (who look similar to Jackie Aina) may be further marginalized. To this point, Black Beauty Influencers (BBI) within

the digital beauty community are open about their encounters with racism and their belief that colorism is prevalent within the beauty industry generally. While beauty studies, colorism studies, media studies, and Black feminism each have their own existing bodies of research, there is less analysis on the ways these areas merge together in the digital beauty genre and how it impacts Black women in this particular digital space. Therefore, my dissertation aims to integrate these disciplines in an effort to thoroughly interrogate how Black women navigate this digital community. The digital beauty genre is a site in which Black women's encounters with beauty standards, racism, labor, success, colorism, and anti-racism discourse are all integrated, making their experiences distinct from other members in this digital sphere, and particularly nuanced for Black women who occupy identities farther from the established center of Whiteness.

Research on the topic of beauty, studied through the lens of race, views beauty discourse as a contested arena where politics and identity politics are negotiated (Craig, 2002). The media plays a role in this struggle by disseminating images that frame certain beauty ideals as the standard. Jennifer Richardson-Stovall (2012) posits that "mainstream media has provided audiences with what could be called beauty criteria: a monolithic cultural standard or definition of beauty," (p. 76). In the United States, these standards find Whiteness and those closest in line to that concept as more favorable and desirable (Bond & Cash, 1992; Gatewood, 1988). As an example, Black people are viewed as occupying the space of the other, and therefore antithetical to notions of Whiteness. However, Black people with lighter skin receive more favorable treatment in comparison to Black people with darker skin (Thompson & Keith, 2001). As a result, scholars note that skin tone, or colorism, often impacts perceptions of beauty when it comes to racialized bodies (Frisby, 2006). Further, the study of beauty in relation to Black

women in America often explores the subject as one where Whiteness and Blackness are both heavily defined by the other (Hunter, 2013; Frisby, 2006; Thompson & Keith, 2001). The media is the primary vehicle that shapes beauty and Whiteness as synonymous ideals (Richardson-Stovall, 2012).

The creation and expansion of social media has reshaped the media landscape and has altered the way that women engage with beauty images and beauty content. People have created digital subcultures for those interested in all things beauty, a community which spans multiple blogs, websites, and social media platforms including YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Originally, those who created content for audiences interested in beauty were referred to as beauty vloggers (a portmanteau of "video" and "blogger"). Now, those who are able to amass large followings essentially become brands in their own rights, earning them the title: *beauty influencer*. The online beauty community intersects with the beauty industry as many of the genre's top influencers have millions of followers, are able to market and sell their own beauty products to audiences and earn revenue in the millions of dollars (Eksouzian-Cavadas, 2018). Florence Garcia-Rapp (2016) observes that the videos in this genre generally consist of young women who create content that explores make-up application techniques, hairstyling techniques, and often provide advice on beauty related products (p. 2). I would add that this community, or digital genre, is also responsible for providing fashion advice through clothing hauls and outfit of the day (OOTD) videos. Many beauty influencers create content across all aspects of beauty (e.g., makeup, hair, fashion), but there are some who choose to use their online platform to focus on one niche beauty area (e.g., hair or makeup). Social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Tik Tok have also enabled beauty lovers with marginalized identities

to build digital communities providing more visibility to people who are typically considered "not beautiful" or "undesirable."

Expanding Knowledge Around Black Beauty Influencers in Digital Media Studies

My own positions as a beauty vlogger and researcher have brought to my attention two main problems within the digital beauty genre and digital media research. It must first be stated that the ways Black women engage with digital technologies is a constant focal point in digital media and social media research (Brock et. al, 2010; Noble, 2013; Brown, 2021). Additionally, much of digital scholarship investigates how Black communities online deal with racism, capitalism, and appropriation (Fuchs, 2018; Daniels, 2013; Roth-Gordon et.al, 2020). However, my first concern with digital media research is that less scholarly attention is given to intragroup experiences on social media platforms. Racism in the digital beauty genre is mentioned within previous literature, but how colorism functions as the key hierarchal ranking mechanism in this specific digital space is underexplored. Therefore, this research enters the study of Black women, digital technologies, and media research from the entry point of skin tone bias and urges us to reconsider how colorism shapes racism online.

Second, research on Black women and their contributions to the digital beauty genre has rarely gone beyond the topic of natural hair. Although the natural hair video genre on YouTube has reshaped the way modern day Black women engage with themselves (Sobande, 2017), it is also necessary to explore how Black women contribute to and experience other subgenres on digital platforms. Although Black women have commonly shared experiences, their experiences are still non-monolithic. Whether intentional or unintentional, only exploring one particular area can further perpetuate the false idea that all Black women experience racism to the same degree. Additionally, only exploring one aspect of a genre assumes that racism is experienced evenly

across all sectors of the digital beauty space. Therefore, this dissertation aims to first acknowledge the contributions of Black beauty influencers outside the genre of natural hair through the exploration of the subgenre of makeup. This project analyzes intragroup encounters with racism online by addressing documented instances where colorism comes into play. This is undoubtedly a Black feminist project and follows the work of Audre Lorde who believed in acknowledging difference. Lorde (1984) argued that the human experience differs based on one's position and recognition of those differences allows for the building of community. It is through this diverse community that true liberation can be achieved (Lorde, 1984). Only through acknowledging the vast and diverse experiences of Black women within the digital beauty genre, and therefore digital and social media, can we work to understand the inequities Black women are subjected to as a result of their use of and interaction with digital and social media platforms. This is also what will help us build digital spaces that are free from the racist, colorist, and sexist tropes that continue to embed themselves within our media systems. Lastly, it is only through acknowledging differences that we can complete adequate research that represents the digital contributions that Black people make to online spaces.

Therefore, I use this dissertation to posit two arguments. First, this project argues that the digital makeup genre is a site of important interrogation for understanding how Black women's discursive labor online impacts the intersections of race, media, and beauty. My argument is not that the makeup subgenre is a more appropriate site in comparison to other beauty subgenres, but I am suggesting that it is an additional site of Black women's cultural production that is worthy of exploration. Further, makeup products tend to focus on complexion as makeup is often designed to offer products that match women's individual and various skin tones. Therefore, I argue that the colorism prevalent within the digital beauty realm only exacerbates the relational

web of racism, labor, appropriation, activism, tech inequality, and success that Black women experience in the digital, thus obfuscating the progress that Black women have made in the areas of beauty and media representation. Additionally, I am further suggesting that the relationship between Black beauty creators and the broader beauty community reflect Black women's initial relationship with American capitalism which extracted, exploited, and appropriated their labor for the success of Whiteness and colonialism. Although Black beauty influencers practice and engage with makeup content for themselves and for the intent of celebrating a wide range of Black aesthetics, the labor they produce for themselves is completed in a racist, colorist, and structurally inequitable environment. This is not new, as Black women's work has always been completed in a structurally inequitable environment and is often physically, emotionally, and intellectually draining. However, this project places Black beauty influencers in conversation with the histories of Black women's labor to understand how the physical, emotional, and intellectual demand for Black women's work are reimagined and sustained in the digital.

This leads to my second argument which is that social networking platforms complicate Black women's labor in the beauty genre because it ultimately forces them to engage in *Racial Phenotype Labor*. This concept posits that because of inequitable platform structures and racist beauty standards, Black women with phenotypic features deemed as undesirable enter digital spaces at a further disadvantage, ultimately requiring them to complete additional physical, emotional, and mental work in an effort to be considered legitimate members of this digital community. In the digital makeup space, this primarily manifests itself through *Skin tone work*, where dark skinned Black women must use their digital content to combat the biases and prejudices associated with their physical features, namely their dark skin. This requires them to work harder to achieve visibility on their platform of choice, in this case, YouTube. Despite this

reality, this research advocates that Black women do have a great deal of agency and their contributions to the makeup genre are based on their desire to help themselves and can thus be grounded in discourses like Black joy and #BlackGirlMagic.

Research Question

Considering the impact that colorism has on Black women in other areas of society, this project investigates how Black women are impacted by colorism in the digital beauty genre. This is especially important to consider as the beauty industry and other social institutions push to become more inclusive and diverse–if not genuinely, then at least in appearance and through their discursive practices. The broader question of this project therefore asks *what role does colorism play in the perceptions of and expectations around Black beauty influencers?* Using the framework of intersectional tech, this work recognizes that the identity and performance of Black women online does not solely revolve around instances of oppression and marginalization (Gray, 2020). However, by investigating the role of colorism in the construction of Black beauty influencers, this work aims to simultaneously point out that Black women still manage to make significant contributions to the digital beauty genre despite colorist practices implemented by the beauty industry, social media platforms, and other members of the digital beauty community.

Organizational Structure of The Dissertation

To better explore the relationship between colorism, beauty, and media, the second chapter of the dissertation consists of a literature review. This review of prior scholarship on the intersections between beauty, race, and media help ground this study in pre-existing paradigms in an effort to place these bodies of literature in conversation with one another. By examining the literature on colorism, beauty, and media, I am able to argue that this newfound digital beauty genre is an ultimately a continuation of the work that Black women have always completed and

is especially reminiscent of the ways Black women have historically used beauty to forge safe spaces and resist hegemonic ideologies. However, this review of past research helps convey that although this type of work completed by Black women is not new, they are more vulnerable than ever to marginalization and discrimination because of the structure of social media and digital platforms.

The third chapter uses discourse analysis to explore how the discursive labor of Black beauty influencers is multifunctional. Through a case study of YouTube star, Jackie Aina, I use articles from mainstream beauty magazines to illustrate how much of the work that Jackie Aina completes in the digital beauty genre revolves around skin tone. By studying the media frames associated with Aina, I provide evidence for the ways that colorism is centered in the beauty genre and how this shapes the nature of the discursive work that Black women, particularly dark-skinned Black women, are essentially required to complete. Ultimately, this chapter shows that despite the murkiness of the intersections between race, beauty, and media, Black beauty influencers have helped advance societal conversations around colorism in a way that could be considered substantial, contributing to forms of progress in both media representation and the beauty consumerist marketplace.

Building on the revelation that colorism and skin tone work are at the forefront of the labor that Black beauty influencers complete in the digital beauty genre, the fourth chapter uses survey experiment methodology to demonstrate how colorism impacts the perception of Black beauty influencers. By manipulating the YouTube thumbnails of Black beauty influencers, this chapter shows measurable evidence that respondents interested in beauty content rate dark-skinned beauty influencers as less attractive, less competent, and are less likely to click on their content in comparison to lighter skinned influencers. This chapter discusses these findings in

conjunction with phenomena such as algorithmic bias to convey how colorist preferences have the potential to further marginalize dark skinned beauty influencers socially, culturally, and financially on video-sharing platforms like YouTube.

The fifth chapter then carves out a theoretical definition for *Racial Phenotype Labor* and *Skin tone work*. Through an examination of prior literature on Blackface, and its digital practice, commonly referred to as *Blackfishing*, this chapter argues that the commodification of Blackness has created a digital environment where Blackness as an identity is purposely being disaggregated. As a result, desirable aspects of Blackness (e.g., light skin) are recentered, thereby marginalizing dark-skinned Black women. This makes it so that dark-skinned Black beauty influencers enter the digital space from a vantage point of defense, where they have to labor to be seen as legitimate members of the digital beauty community because their very phenotypic characteristics are in conflict with normative beauty standards.

The concluding chapter discusses the implications of the project and provides insight on future directions for this type of work. In this chapter, I re-center my identity as a beauty vlogger to make comment on the benefits and limitations of conducting this type of work as a dark-skinned Black woman. By placing the knowledge I have obtained as a vlogger in conversation with the knowledge I have obtained as a researcher, I attempt to convert myself from researcher into research subject (Boylorn, 2008), further exploring the added layer of labor placed upon the Black beauty influencers who must call out skin tone bias and the dark-skinned Black women scholars who cover this phenomenon, noting what happens when these roles coexist in one body. My ultimate contention in this chapter is calling for more studies on colorism, by scholars and researchers who are not necessarily subject to it, as the labor of researching about colorism when you are doubly part of the population to suffer from it (e.g., Black beauty influencers and dark-

skinned Black women) can be mentally, emotionally, and physically draining, which similarly culminates in the Racial phenotypic labor that is discussed in Chapter Five. Overall, the goal of this research is to begin to peel back the layers of racism and the resulting phenomenon, colorism, attached to it. By treating racism as this monolithic concept, in some ways we continue to feed it, further framing it as something that just happens on its own. By breaking it down and focusing on how racism is operationalized (e.g., through colorism), we can begin to make policy decisions, social judgements, and cultural choices that force us to question how our own prejudices and biases continue to impact marginalized communities, especially when the rhetoric of our time so desperately wants to liberate these communities. Examining colorism, then, forces us to reckon with how current narratives around inclusiveness, and diversity in the age of Black Lives Matter, ultimately still serve the aims and goals of White supremacy and racial capitalism.

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Chapter 2

The Relationship Between Beauty Practices, Colorism, and Media

This chapter begins with a theorization of beauty, which is largely framed in the literature as a feminist issue that involves varying types of labor. Wendy Chapkis (1986) argues that the "*transition from female to feminine is artificial*," (p. 5). Chapkis further asserts that the components of a society's desired "beauty package," can change every so often, (p. 14). This means that as the components of the desired beauty package changes, women modify their behavior to attain the standards of the package. In an ethnographic account that uses the stories of various women, Chapkis reveals the secrets, tactics, and work involved in women altering their appearance, revealing beauty work as a form of assimilation. Ultimately this work brings into focus the relationship between women and their bodies, while also considering questions around power and agency. Feminist writer Naomi Wolf (2009) builds on Chapkis' sentiments claiming that media help construct ideas about the "ideal woman." She asserts that television pays women according to their looks, older women are rarely shown in the media, and Women of Color are virtually ignored in the media unless they possess "*Caucasian features*," (p. 6). Wolf ultimately concludes that the beauty myth is not solely about appearances, but about behavior and the ways women must work to fit into, "*men's institutions and institutional power*," (p. 13). Both Chapkis and Wolf discuss the nature of the work involved as it pertains to beauty and ultimately argue that the beauty work women perform is in line with a patriarchal view of

aesthetics. The labor involved in performing beauty is often for the White male gaze and those who do not or cannot alter themselves to fit the standards of that gaze are ostracized.

Wolf's point about the media and the idea that media are an important distributor of constructions about womanhood is notable. Media historian Susan Douglas (1995) explains that for the first generation of women raised by mass media culture, girls and young women of the late 50's and 60's, the media presented contradicting views of womanhood. This happened so much that women grew up having a love/hate relationship with themselves because of these contradictions (Douglas, 1995). This cycle followed and is reinforced with girls and women in later generations. The work of Chapkis, Wolf, and Douglas share a common thread of asserting that beauty as a concept is a space where hegemonic norms, culture, and power are ascribed onto the female body, where women labor to get their bodies to fit into these norms. The authors assert that beauty is not solely an issue for women, but that the constructions around beauty mainly target women, complicating their relationships with themselves, gender, sexuality, and media.

Additional research hones in on the labor-centered focus of beauty practices by examining the experiences of workers in specific sectors. This includes the work experiences of hairstylists (Gimlin, 2002), models (Mears, 2011; Wissinger, 2015) and beauty pageant organizers (Banet-Weiser, 1999). Through qualitative interviews with hairstylists, Gimlin's research (2002) reminds us that constructions of beauty standards are not independent from class, as working class and upper-class women often come together to "*enact gendered identities*," (p. 22). Gimlin's work reveals how beauty labor can differ by class, where those in the upper-class depend on the labor of the working-class to perform the expectations around beauty and gender constructions. A limitation of this study is that it excludes Women of Color, a criticism which

Gimlin recognizes as necessary in an effort to, "*focus specifically on class differences in relation to the beauty myth,*" (p. 22). However, Black feminists make clear that class is an intersectional component of identity for Women of Color and cannot be separated from their lived experience. The writings of the Combahee River Collective (1983) state this fact when writing,

> "We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is a such thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by White men as a weapon of political repression," (p. 3).

In other words, beauty standards which are also shaped by class cannot be separated from the ways that Black women view themselves in regard to beauty standards, as class is a significant component of their identities which shapes their lived experiences. Therefore, Gimlin's decision to focus on class differences, without thinking about the racialized components of class, slightly ignores the gendered and racialized constructs that have helped form beauty ideals. In additional literature that aims to articulate beauty as labor, Elias et al. (2017) claims that beauty is a form of aesthetic labor working within the confines and boundaries of neoliberalism. Therefore, aesthetics applies not only to appearances, but the ways in which one behaves, their voice, demeanor, and personal style (Elias et al., 2017). The authors write, "There is an increasing tendency for organisations to manage the way their employees feel and look, as well as the way they behave so that work is emotional and aesthetic as well as (or instead of) productive," (p. 32).

This dual labor of working to create an aesthetic in addition to being skilled and productive at the actual job is something cosmetic brands capitalize on (Elias et al., 2017, p.23). In this thread of research, the relationship between beauty, labor, and class are analyzed from the point of the actual work required by jobs in the beauty industry, the work that it takes to

complete the work (Duffy, 2017; Moon, 2020), and what groups of women are completing the work. Although the research on varying types of labor within the beauty industry points us to how constructions of beauty are operationalized, less attention is given to how raced individuals like Black women with multiple intersecting identities, experience additional layers of work based on their various characteristics–in addition to the beauty work experienced, and or required, by all women. Therefore, I argue that beauty work for Black women is compounded by their race, skin tones, and gender, and in historical alignment with the capitalist expectations on Black women and work.

The Relationship Between Black Women's Labor and Capitalism

The relationship between labor and capitalism often works to further marginalize Black women who possess a range of intersectional identities. Much of the work around capitalism and labor is generally influenced by Karl Marx, who theorized capitalism as a mode of production. This mode of production involves man tackling nature in an effort to sustain his material existence through the production of goods (Althusser, 2014). Under the Fordist model of production, the separation and specialization of workers making specific parts is critical to production and inhibits people from creating a whole product. Marx calls this the alienation of labor; a practice designed to benefit the bourgeoisie class, who profit significantly from the labor of the proletariat (working) class (Marx, 1978). Ultimately, the relationship between capitalists and workers is not reciprocal; rather, it "is a relationship based on exploitation and domination," (Scannell, 2007, p.9). Black women, as an integral part of the American capitalist function, are historically members of the proletariat class and have long been subjected to exploitation and domination through their physical, emotional, and intellectual labor.

Black women's relationship with labor is written about in ways that explicate the physical, emotional, and intellectual demands a capitalist society places on them. Historian Manning Marable (1983) reminds us that Black women were forced into reproductive labor, as they were often sexually assaulted by their slave masters (p.72). These slave masters not only fetishized Black women's bodies, deeming them sexually promiscuous, but it was financially profitable too, as the children of Black women represented a new generation of workers and free labor. Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman (2016) notes that while labor in the context of slavery can be complex to think about in terms of gender and sexuality, understanding the reproductive labor of Black women is necessary for understanding life after slavery and the expansion of global capitalism. Mass migrations of Black people from the southern to the northern United States produced urban ghettos where Black women became the sole providers to their family (Hartman, 2016). Hartman writes,

> "Mothers and wives and daughters were forced into unskilled and low-paid work, with the overwhelming majority confined to labor as domestics. Black women served as the primary breadwinners in households that bore no resemblance to the patriarchal nuclear family. These black laboring women troubled gender conventions by being "outfitted like men," as was the case with their enslaved mothers and grandmothers. The independence granted by wages, even low wages, made them less willing to marry or live with men unable to provide and granted them a degree of sexual autonomy," (p.169-170).

Hartman's writing conveys two important points. First, after slavery, Black women were often viewed by their families as leaders of the household, which ascribed to them a title typically only given to White men. In this way, they are "outfitted" like men by taking on what was thought of as men's responsibilities. Second, Hartman explains that after slavery, Black women worked in low-wage domestic jobs, continuing to symbolically give birth to capitalism through their labor in the jobs nobody wanted, but were ultimately necessary for the "proper" functioning of society. In addition to modes of physical and symbolic reproductive labor, scholars have written

about how Black women's work extends across various public and private domains. Historian Jacqueline Jones (1985) theorizes slavery as the beginning of Black women's labor history in America, but also explains that Black women were still responsible for nurturing their immediate households and their own communities (p.7), adding an additional layer of emotional work for Black women. This emotional labor expected of Black women is one that still burdens this group until this day as Black women are often seen as beacons of support throughout their communities. Jones is clear in defining "work" as the activities that lead to marketable goods, with all activities of Black women during the slave era designed specifically for the financial interests of the slave master (p.12). Further, Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2019) explains that White women, in collaboration with their husbands, and often in their own right, owned and profited economically from slave ownership. Rogers' work explicates how White women have a history of profiting from the labor of Black women (Jones-Rogers, 2019), which shows the many angles that Black women have historically been exploited in. Therefore, throughout history, whether Black women were giving birth to a sellable child, nurturing their communities, or assisting with the nurturing and grooming of White women and their families, the literature asserts that Black women have been and are always laboring in America.

Black Beauty as a Labor Alternative

The end of slavery and the reign of Jim Crow invites considerations of how the nature of work for Black women was continuously reshaped to support varying modes of the capitalist agenda. However, in noting the adjustments, scholars also reveal the increasing amounts of agency that Black women possessed in the labor market after 1865. Historian Tera Hunter (1997) writes that Black women were relegated to service and domestic jobs. Particularly in the south, they were paid low wages, but used their small, newfound freedom to organize strikes and

protest against unfair labor practices (Hunter, 1997). As Black women acquired more economic capital, the nature of their labor shifted to various industries, and specifically the beauty industry, where they were able to escape the horrors of low-paying domestic work and forge new paths for themselves and their communities. Historian Tiffany Gill (2010) explains that Black women's ownership of physical spaces through beauty salons—spaces that other Black women found to be safe havens—increased their economic and political autonomy and opened the door for a communal activism that allowed them to make strides towards financially and socially advancing their communities. This newly acquired economic capital made their voices more likely to be heard in regard to social and racial affairs (Gill, 2010). Sociologist Adia Wingfield (2008) explains that the growing profession of Black beauty culturists in the 20th century were the result of gendered racism in other industries, motivating Black women to seek other employment alternatives (Wingfield, 2008). In the beauty industry, Black women marketed their own beauty products, owned their own businesses, and employed other Black women (Wingfield, 2008). The beauty industry remains a key industry in which Black women extend their labor, but Phyllis Wallace and LaMond (1977) reveals that Black women in all industries were the lowest wage earners in the labor market from 1939-1976. Recent data show that the working conditions remain unfavorable for Black women as they are one of several minority groups to most likely to experience job loss, due to the decrease of jobs in the public sector (Laird, 2017). Black women are also less likely than Black men, Whites, and Hispanics (regardless of gender) to find jobs in the private sector (Laird, 2017). Instability in the employment sector illustrates why the creation of the Black beauty industry is historically important for Black women. Not only has it aided them in the reshaping of beauty discourse, but has also aided them by providing financial stability, enabling them to profit from their own labor. Further, the Black beauty sector–sustained

by Black women for the flourishing of other Black women–is an example of how Black women continue to symbolically birth new labor markets in capitalist society, transforming their work into something that is always reproductive.

Black Beauty as a Political Tool

Although Black women have historically used beauty and beauty labor to uplift their communities, they have done so amid racism, and hegemonic beauty standards that deem them as existing outside parameters of desirability. Maxine Craig (2002) explores how beauty contests for Black women in the 60's and 70's were "explicit attempts to rebuild a lost black culture and implicit acts of self-love," (p. 16). These methods, Craig argues, were used for articulations and renegotiations of race at the height of the Black is Beautiful movement. Craig uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a framework, which explains how individuals are equipped with different forms of capital, increasing one's chance of upward mobility in a variety of fields (Craig, 2002). Craig argues that racial discrimination makes it harder to convert one form of capital into another, but beauty is an area that offers Black women social and economic advancement. Though beauty has long been a political tool used by Black women for social and economic advancement, Susannah Walker (2007) explains that Black beauty ideals were "narrow" up until the 1960's (p. 170). Walker writes,

> "Aside from declaring that Black women could be beautiful in the first place, aesthetic discussion of black women rarely offered a diverse vision of African American beauty standards in the years leading up to the 1960's. Few African-Americans, inside or outside the beauty industry, challenged the ideal of shiny, long hair and light brown skin in the 1950's and early 1960's," (p. 170).

Sociologist Shirley Tate (2009) has questioned the meaning of Black beauty arguing that it's a set of practices about 'race-ing' bodies, a practice that is performative rather than one that's based on something inherent. Tate further suggests that Black beauty should be understood

outside of the confines of a White and Black dichotomy, asserting that despite existence of racialized binaries, Black women are "expanding the boundaries of what counts as Black beauty, delineating Black beauty as performative and at the same time investing beauty with a recognizably Black social capital," (p. 15). For Craig and Tate, whose works are pioneering in the field of Black beauty studies, beauty, race, and politics are intersectional and are therefore a space where the politics of race are discussed, frequently challenged, and negotiated over. However, Walker's work points out that though Black beauty has long been celebrated by Black women, we cannot ignore how racism, and/or colorism has often shaped beauty standards.

The Impact of Colorism on Black Women

Researchers have continued to examine the intersections between beauty and race by considering further forms of marginalization, such as colorism. Scholars note that skin tone, in addition to race, can create barriers and expanded systems of marginalization for Black women. The research of sociologist Margaret Hunter (2013) reveals that colorism, or discrimination against darker skin tones, tends to operate as a primary factor in society's *beauty queue*. Hunter's notion of the *beauty queue* is a system where women are categorized into rank order and therefore compare themselves to the women ahead of them in the queue based on skin tone (Hunter, 2013). Through survey analysis and qualitative interviews, Hunter reveals that lighter-skinned Women of Color (WOC) earn more financial income, have higher education, and are more likely to marry into a higher socioeconomic classes in comparison to WOC with darker skin. Hunter's overarching conclusion is that the *beauty queue* is rooted in Whiteness and therefore the lighter a woman's skin, the more attractive she is perceived to be. These findings are consistent with the historical use of skin color as a marker of privilege in the days of slavery and after. Robert Reece (2018) explains that during slavery, lighter skinned slaves, often

mulattos, were given privileged positions on plantations, in comparison to darker-skinned slaves who were given more grueling work. Therefore, colorism has not only been used as a tool to judge Black people aesthetically, but it has also been used as a key tool in the division of labor among Black people. This division of labor along the basis of skin tone still persists today.

Colorism has societal implications that impact Black people's livelihoods. Historically, some Black people have been able to defy racial boundaries and pass as White, allowing them to acquire property and capital (Harris, 1993). Further, in an experimental study, the work of Harrison and Thomas (2009) reveals that light-skinned women are perceived as more attractive and thus more likely to be selected for jobs in comparison to dark-skinned candidates, even when less qualified. This is because attractiveness is related to perceptions of competence (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). The respondents in the study were diverse, but the majority of the participants making the evaluations were White and female (Harrison & Thomas, 2009), insinuating that White people themselves prefer members of minority groups with lighter skin complexions. Further, class position can impact the way women think about beauty standards, particularly regarding skin tone. For example, Black women of higher-class positions tend to feel more positive about their skin tone and have higher self-esteem, regardless of whether their skin tone is light or dark (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Colorism, although a severe result of racism, is a sensitive subject within the Black community and is often ignored for what is considered "the greater good." Scholars note that it is largely ignored for the greater pursuit of racial equality, a phenomenon that Hochschild and Weaver refer to as the skin color paradox, though it often impacts Black people's preferences in regard to "racial policy and economic redistribution," (Hutchings et al., 2015, p. 2). However, in terms of beauty, colorism is omnipresent and largely shapes the messages that Black women see about themselves.

Black women, Cosmetics, and Mixed Advertising Messages

Because of its emphasis on skin complexion and beauty enhancements, cosmetics and cosmetics practices have always been inherently political for Black women. In *Hope in a Jar*, Kathy Peiss (2011) explains that the cosmetics industry–from its inception–"practiced market segmentation by dividing customers into class, mass, and African-American markets," (p. 246). Peiss notes that early 20th century advertising by White and Black cosmetic companies became a "battleground" where hegemonic ideals were frequently challenged, negotiated, and struggled over, resulting in conflicting advertising messages (Peiss, 2011). Peiss writes, "despite the growing consciousness of Africa fostered by Garveyites in these years, advertisers found it difficult to create visual forms that acknowledged the African heritage of black Americans[1]" (p. 220). In other words, many of the cosmetic industry advertisements often featured light-skinned Black women who possessed Eurocentric features. This is no surprise as cosmetics promise the gift of transformation, where one could hope to alter their appearance in an effort to defy "essential markers of a racial underclass," (Lutes, 2002, p. 78). Simultaneously, advertising also heavily promoted skin bleaching creams and hair straightening products to Black women, further insinuating that Whiteness should be the standard to aspire to (Walker, 2007; Lindsey, 2011). Noliwe Rooks (1996) demonstrates that beauty advertisements from the 1940s to the 1980s often emphasized the need for Black women to straighten their hair, as historically Black hair advertisements explicitly connected straight hair to social and economic advancement.

Irrespective of conflicting advertising messages, Black women have always been present in the cosmetics and greater beauty industry as entrepreneurs. This includes Detroit's Vivian

[1] In this quote, Kathy Peiss cites the Kashmir Chemical Company, and the *Messenger* as advertisements where the struggle of advertisements to celebrate African heritage was on display.

Nash who launched *Bee Dew Laboratories* in 1924 (Boyd, 2022). Madame C.J. Walker and Annie Turbo Malone, both hair care entrepreneurs, later introduced cosmetics for Black women into their product offerings (Baird, 2021). Melissa Baird explains that the relationship between Black women and cosmetics has historically been complex because cosmetic products often recenter the painful topic of colorism (Baird, 2021). During the Black is Beautiful Movement, this relationship became laxed. Baird notes that "As 'Black is Beautiful' expanded beauty standards to include dark-skinned black women, new cosmetics companies flooded into market products to meet the newly modified standard," (p. 561). In the early 70's, *Fashion Fair Cosmetics*, founded by Eunice Johnson, became widely popular in the Black beauty sector. Eunice Johnson's role was unique; not only was she the founder of this company, but she was also an executive in the Johnson Publishing company, founded by her husband John H. Johnson and the distributing home to *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Until the 1990's, *Fashion Fair* played a significant role in the Black beauty industry, as it was heavily advertised in both *Ebony* and *Jet* (Whitehead and Harris, 1999). This is also likely a result of the traveling Ebony Fashion Fair show which was launched in 1958 and brought luxury fashion to Black consumers (Bivins, 2015). Modern day cosmetic companies, under Black and White ownership, have made catering to the diverse skin tones of Black woman a primary marketing strategy, and yet Black women continue to experience racist discourse that ultimately recenters lightness and Whiteness as the standard. Chloe Benson (2021) points out that Black women often experience racism through product naming, which often equates darker makeup shades to food and baked goods, subtly reinforcing stereotypes that Black women are "hard" and more "tough" in comparison to White women. It also reiterates the myth that Black women are more sinful (Benson, 2021). Dark-skinned Black women have reported having a hard time finding makeup that appropriately

matches their skin tone (Van, 2017). Further, despite discourses of inclusivity, Black women continue to have limited purchasing options for makeup in mass merchandising stores (Reed, 2019). Ultimately, the continued and subtle erasure of Black women in the beauty industry, and especially dark-skinned Black women, call for exploration of how Black women challenge this discrimination. The following section argues that media is a key tool that Black women use to combat notions of colorism and racism in beauty.

Black Women, Beauty, and (Social) Media Counterpublics

Prior scholarship has long claimed that legacy media (e.g., television, film, advertising) often disseminate images of Black women that are stereotypical and reductive of Black women's lived experiences (Smith-Shomade, 2002). Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) says that Black women in America essentially exist in a "crooked room" often struggling to tilt themselves upright. Harris-Perry claims, "When they confront race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion," (p. 29) Therefore, the "warped images" that Harris-Perry is referring to–which are often mediated–impact Black women across other areas of their lives including the ways they exist and operate in politics (Harris-Perry, 2011). This is notable as Patricia-Hill Collins (2000) asserts that sexist and stereotypical imagery, or controlling images, are often used to "justify the oppression" and marginalization of Black women (p. 69). Historically, Black women have been represented across media as masculine and emasculating (Gammage, 2015), as welfare queens (Gilliam, 1999), as asexual mammies (Sewell, 2012), and hypersexual jezebels (West, 2008). For Black Americans generally, Western media has consistently attempted to characterize and define Blackness and Black womanhood through a White imagination, frequently eliminating Black

voices from their own stories. Beginning with Blackface minstrel shows, Catherine Downing (2007) invokes Henry Louis Gates notion of the 'signifying monkey' to explain that the gendered aspect of minstrelsy "was essentially white men signifying black women," (Downing, 2007, p.1). These signifiers, Downing argues, still plague Black women today. Media texts which evolved with the development of radio, film, and television, continued to possess elements of Blackface and minstrelsy performances. Michelle Hilmes (1997) notes that during the 20th century, *Amos n' Andy*, a text which spanned two mediated platforms (e.g., radio and television) was a significant cultural product that functioned as a lesson to other minority groups of what it meant to be Black in America. This show also significantly disseminated notions of Black womanhood via a White imagination through its character Sapphire, who was portrayed as the "evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful" counterpart to Aunt Jemima, (hooks, 2014, p.85; Allison, 2016, p.x). Throughout the evolution and advancement of media, Black women have challenged these representations, particularly as the number of Black women producers, directors, and media owners have increased (Cheers, 2017). In *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, Jacqueline Bobo (1995) explains that Black women often form interpretive communities that challenge "cultural domination," (p. 22). Bobo defines an interpretive community as Black women who are "cultural producers, critics and scholars and cultural consumers," (p. 22). She further states,

> "As a group, the women make up what I term an interpretive community, which is strategically placed in relation to the cultural works that either are created by Black women or feature them in significant ways. Working together the women utilize representations of black women that they deem valuable in productive and politically useful ways," (p. 22)

Though media tend to present images of Black women that are reductive, these portrayals do not go unchallenged. The evolution of social media and other digital technologies are media tools

that have helped Black women create new images that portray Black womanhood in a myriad of ways.

Digital technologies and social media platforms are increasingly used by marginalized groups to challenge misrepresentations. Scholars have written about the affordances of the internet and its communicative capabilities, which has led to the creation of new Black public spheres (Everett, 2009). Early adopters of the internet believed that the internet would operate as a purely democratic space free from the confines of real-world issues, such as race (Nakamura, 2008). However, race is a central factor that often shapes internet use and online encounters (Williams et al., 2019). Early research on Black women and their use of digital technologies revealed their work in forming digital counterpublics, a concept similar to Bobo's notion of interpretive communities. One key digital tool that Black women used in the early days of the internet were blogs, a mechanism used to correct misinformed narratives and representations about their group (Brock et al., 2010; Steele, 2011). Thus, it is important to note that one of the most impactful ways that Black women have engaged with digital technologies and social media over the last decade has been through the topic of beauty where they have challenged and reshaped beauty standards. Black women have used sites like YouTube to question the politics of blackness (Strangelove, 2010) and challenge assumptions about Black womanhood through the creation of beauty-related videos and natural hair videos (Ellington, 2015; Sobande, 2017; Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019; Love, 2019). Catherine Knight Steele (2021) explains that the Black digital feminism present on sites like Twitter and Instagram originate from the foundation and principles Black women used in the early blogosphere. Tiffany Gill (2015) writes that the internet has enabled Black women to create digital archives around beauty topics like natural hair care, which is antithetical to society's preferred "straight" aesthetic. Gill writes, "they are using

internet forums and social media as educational spaces, both for those who wish to learn more about their hair and those who wish to profit from their own expertise," (p. 74). Gill's work speaks to the commercialization of internet platforms which simultaneously encourages Black women to engage in educational labor, while also financially profiting. The emergence of digital counterpublics via spaces like YouTube, Instagram, and Tumblr, have also enabled marginalized populations within marginalized populations to discursively contest injustice and hegemonic beauty ideals. This includes Fat People of Color who use Tumblr to contest heteronormative ideals around body shape and thinness (Williams, 2017) and Dark-skinned Black women who use YouTube and Instagram to call out colorism in the beauty industry (Childs, 2022). Therefore, the use of social media platforms with an aesthetic focus (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, and Tumblr) offer alternate spaces where marginalized groups can use discourse to challenge social, cultural, and political norms, often bringing into question the nature and politics of the platforms themselves.

Conclusion

The aforementioned literature has brought into focus how the intersection between beauty standards, media, and colorism impacts the lives of Black women and the narrative scripts attached to them. Generally, women in Western societies engage in various forms of labor practices with the hopes of being read as "beautiful", a concept that is often based on the White male gaze. Black women's labor is consistently exploited and appropriated within our capitalist regime and that exploitation is often justified by their perceived lack of desirability. This means that Black women will have to do double the work to participate in a beauty culture that centers and upholds White femininity as the supreme desirable characteristic. Further, the perpetuation of colorism within the Black community and from outside forces often leads to the erasure of

dark-skinned Black women, erasure which they have to fight against. Regardless of these disadvantages, Black women still manage to use beauty culture for social, political, and economic advancement, thereby reframing discourse around beauty and race. Using a case study, the following chapter will examine the discursive framing of Black beauty influencers to suggest that Black women's use of digital technologies in the beauty genre has both enabled and impeded their success in the beauty industry.

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Chapter 3

Framing Jackie Aina: How Discourses of Race, Colorism, and Celebrity, Shape the Cultural Messaging Around Black Beauty Influencers

In January of 2018, Black beauty influencer Jackie Aina was recognized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as its "YouTube Creator of the Year." The award was presented to Aina at the 49th Image Awards—an annual ceremony that highlights and celebrates the achievements of artists committed to Black cultural expression within the entertainment industry. The recognition of Aina's work is the culmination of her decade-long commitment in the intersecting beauty and YouTube communities. Since 2009, Aina's YouTube channel has featured makeup videos that provide beauty advice for Black women. Jackie uses her platform to shine a light on the ugliness of colorism and how societal preferences for lighter skin tones are perpetuated through the availability of makeup products, or rather, the lack thereof. Her channel has an audience of over 3 million subscribers, making her one of the most popular Black beauty influencers on YouTube's platform. Jackie's labor as a beauty influencer involves creating makeup content for dark-skinned women and calling out cosmetic companies that aid in the continued erasure of dark skin. The success of Jackie Aina is a significant example of how Black women use social media platforms concurrently as tools for education, activism, and entrepreneurship. Further, the recognition of Jackie's work by the NAACP also exemplifies how Black women's work online can be transformative in other areas of media and American society.

This chapter examines the impact of Jackie Aina's digital labor by considering its framing within mainstream beauty discourse. Using evidence from digital beauty magazines, I theorize Black women's digital labor as multi-functional, using Jackie Aina and her work as a case study. The work of Kishonna Gray (2020) notes that the digital experiences of marginalized groups, particularly Black women, is often transmediated, meaning that users of digital and social platforms engage in textual production that shape shifts across platforms-creating nuanced and intersectional meanings around Blackness (p. 2). I contend that examining how Aina's digital labor and textual production is framed within mainstream beauty magazines is key to understanding the recent discourse around Black beauty. Further, beauty magazines historically operate as the dominant purveyors of beauty ideals and beauty standards. Ultimately, I am arguing that the discourse present in these magazines allow us to see how the digital labor of Black women is multifunctional and used to serve a variety of purposes, but also that Black women's beauty labor is lopsided for Black influencers with darker skin tones. I use the term *Racial Phenotype labor* to explain how the much of the digital work of Black women in the beauty genre involves working to create visibility and acceptance for versions of Black beauty– namely dark skin–that are often considered the worst parts of Blackness. This work, completed by Aina and others, has reshaped the beauty industry, bringing colorism to the forefront of beauty conversations.

Before delving into the framing of Aina and how Black women's digital labor has greatly reshaped the beauty industry, it is important to note that the NAACP's recognition of Aina is significant in that it represents (in multiple respects) how Black women's digital work is impactful to several domains of American society. First, the NAACP has long served as the driving force behind the fight for Civil Rights in the African American community. While one

may argue that the NAACP's influence has waned because of generational divides and the decentralization of social movements, their recognition of Aina's work symbolizes a changing of the guard—further legitimizing social media as an activism tool and forging a new understanding between generations around activism strategies. Black women have long used beauty as a method for activism and community uplift, but their leveraging of social media platforms has reshaped how impactful digital activism can be. Second, the NAACP partnered with Google to present Aina this inaugural award, making her the first person to ever receive it (Simmons, 2018a). Therefore, recognition of Aina's work not only comes from a prominent civil rights organization, but also from the leader of the "Big Tech" industry, which doubly functions as her de facto employer (Google owns and operates the YouTube platform)[2]. Google's partnership with the NAACP can also be viewed as a futile attempt to dispel notions of racist practices, especially after research has continually demonstrated that Google's algorithms are harmful to Black people and Black women specifically (Noble, 2018). Aina was the first and last person to receive this award in this configuration, begging the question of Google's sincerity in recognizing creators who use their platform to advocate against inequitable systems and structures that Google helps maintain. Lastly, Jackie Aina is one of the few Black makeup creators to have achieved a following surpassing the one million mark, making her one of the most important Black voices in the YouTube beauty space and the beauty industry. Therefore, receipt of this award further legitimizes Aina and subtly expands her role from social media influencer and activist to one of the most influential voices in Black entertainment. A more

[2] In a traditional sense of the employer-employee relationship, Aina is not technically an employee for Google or YouTube, as her use of the platform is voluntary. However, the relationship is employer-employee like being that Jackie Aina is a mega-influencer on the platform, thereby making a percentage of revenue from her videos, and thus likely paid by Google's AdSense program. She has also had sponsorships with Google (Wicker, 2020) suggesting that in at least two forms she has received payment from the company for some type of work–which can be interpreted as monetary compensation from her videos or through working with them directly.

comprehensive discussion on the intersections between influencers and celebrity will follow to further situate their importance in our media and cultural landscape.

Social Media Celebrity and the Rise of Influencers

Understanding the rise of social media influencers must first begin with an examination of the culture of celebrity and its function in society. Foundational scholarship in celebrity studies argues that the concept of celebrity is manufactured and intertwined with America's supreme interest in commercialism (Gamson, 1994). Daniel Boorstin (2012) was one of the first writers to examine this phenomenon in the 1960's, suggesting that meaning making from media texts occurs through pseudo-events, or staged events, by the media which coincided with the rise of America's ability to transmit messages through images (Boorstin, 2012). A celebrity, he argues, is the human version of the pseudo-event (Boorstin, 2012). Boorstin further claims that the nature of celebrity is something that is "made by the news and now make news themselves," (Boorstin, 2012, p. 61). Other scholars in the field note that celebrities are ultimately a form of signification—indicating that we as a public audience interact with them as constructions, not as the real people that they are (Dyer & McDonald, 1998). This concept draws on Roland Barthes research in which he uses semiotics to explain how signs and significations can be produced through media texts and media events within popular culture (Barthes, 1957; Hall, 1997). Further, scholars reveal that there are different classifications of celebrities, with a difference between those who have achieved celebrity through familial relations, their "personal achievements" or through notorious means (e.g., serial killers; Rojeck, 2001). Though celebrities are manufactured through careful planning and creation, they still have a significant impact on public consciousness. To be clear, the early celebrities in traditional media genres like film and television were used to "mobilize attention" as "celebrities helped differentiate products and

were produced as commodity actors to bring audiences," (Gomez, 2019, p. 12). Thus, one of the primary functions of celebrity in our society is to attract attention and translate and/or convert that attention to consumption for various entities.

As media technologies have evolved, scholars also note the evolution of celebrity. Graeme Turner (2014) theorizes this as the *demotic turn* where "consumers" now have more choice and selection in their media consumption, in addition to increasing opportunities for "ordinary people" to participate in media more generally (p. 2). With the internet offering more interactive capabilities, scholarship conceptualizes the practices of microcelebrity as one of the key transformations that can help us understand new modes of celebrity and fame. Alice Marwick (2015) describes microcelebrity as a practice, writing that it is a "self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use a strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans" (p. 34). Additional scholarship has examined this phenomenon from the perspective of how users interact with imagined audiences (Marwick & boyd, 2010), how notions of perceived intimacy and "ordinariness" shaped these interactions (Abidin, 2015) and how gender impacts self-presentation strategies in the digital sphere (Senft, 2008). Social media and video-sharing platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram are premier locations for the crafting of the public persona. Users presenting a more public persona in the digital sphere is not different from our everyday lives where, as Erving Goffman argues, all of us naturally perform for the imagined audiences in our lives (Goffman,1959). It is also important to note that this performance in the digital is often influenced by the corporatization of these platforms. As traditional media like television and film must compete with the increasing affordances of digital technologies, they have opted to reshape platforms like YouTube by helping it move towards professionalization

(Kim, 2012). The primary tactics of traditional media companies include the enforcement of copyright laws, which allows them to collect a significant portion of advertising revenue, both of which are tools that force users to create their own content, which must appear aesthetically professional to remain competitive on the platform (Kim, 2012). This professionalization, along with the intentional crafting of the public persona has led to the rise of the social media influencer, or social media celebrity who is cultivated through self-branding (Khamis et al., 2017) and often used as a branding resource for companies looking to sell products (Delbeare et al., 2021). The beauty influencer, then, is a product of a networked culture that simultaneously prioritizes connectedness and profit (Hou, 2019).

The field of microcelebrity studies does not always adequately address the notion of race and how self-presentation strategies are often impacted by race and gender simultaneously, particularly regarding Black American women. The research of digital Black feminists illustrates that blogs (Steele, 2021), Twitter (Maragh, 2016), YouTube (Sobande, 2017), and Instagram (Parris, 2020) impact Black women globally and help them retell and reshape narratives of their own experiences, ultimately talking back to White supremacist structures. However, this work has largely been seen as separate from the field of microcelebrity studies, as I argue that the foundational scholarship in the field notes that race is important to think about, but rarely expounds on how differing levels of racism impact members of a singular racial group. I argue that issues around race and celebrity in microcelebrity studies deserve further consideration by examining how skin tone is a primary factor in the construction of celebrity. Therefore, this chapter aims to use mainstream beauty discourse to examine how Black beauty influencers are constructed in dominant discourse. Examining mainstream discourse around Jackie Aina, race,

and colorism enables us to consider the micro-celebrity strategies of Black women and how their work on platforms like YouTube impact the dominant culture.

Research Design and Methodological Framework

Textual analysis of media texts enables researchers to explore the various meanings encoded by media producers. As an example, my work in *Broadcast Yourself Redefining Black Beauty Via YouTube* (2019) used textual analysis to explore the meanings and messages Black women send to each other through natural hair videos on YouTube. This analytical method is particularly useful in examining Black women's cultural production on social media platforms and provides us with insight into how Black women use media tools to challenge dominant media discourses and create their own narratives. However, the literature reveals that social media labor, especially work advocating feminism and equality often has implications across multiple social media platforms or spaces on the web (Lawson, 2021). Therefore, the design of this research aims to consider how Black women's cultural production on one social media platform, YouTube, impacts other digital spaces–in this case, digital beauty magazines. This close reading of texts, conducted using discourse analysis, is designed to investigate the discourse and ideas produced within mainstream beauty publications as a result of Black women's labor produced on a separate platform.

The methodology for this chapter uses Jackie Aina as a case study to convey how Black women makeup creators and their contributions are treated and framed within digital beauty discourse. Frames are an important course of study in terms of media messages because they help provide meaning to events situated in a larger societal context. On framing, renowned political scientist Robert Entman (1993) writes that framing involves the selection of, "some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a

way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described," (p. 52). Entman further says that frames help define problems, identifies who is causing the problem, and offers solutions (Entman, 1993). Framing as a theory has encouraged the additional study of agenda setting and priming which scholars argue are interconnected (McCombs et al., 1997; Scheufele, 1999). In other words, the selection of and heightened focus on particular details in news stories can often communicate to audiences what's important to think about regarding certain societal issues. This can have negative impacts on topics around race, in which reductive framing can aid in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of marginalized groups (Jackson, 2014; Lane et al., 2020), doing little to interrupt racial myths constructed by the dominant group. Therefore, this chapter considers media frames around colorism and racism within beauty publications, especially considering that Black Women's digital labor has increased and changed discourse around these topics in the beauty industry.

On August 4, 2017, Jackie Aina announced that she was collaborating with a luxury makeup company by the name of *Too Faced*, agreeing to help them diversify their product availability as it relates to skin tone. The product, consisting of a foundation line, was released on June 29, 2018. Using the Google News search engine, I sampled coverage on Jackie Aina and this beauty event from 8/4/2017 - 12/31/2018, representing a year and a half of coverage. The articles included in the sample are from digital publications that have a target demographic of women and/or a target demographic of women interested in beauty and fashion content. This sample also includes publications that cater solely to a digital audience, as well as those that have amassed a large following, and thus help shape beauty norms because of the legacy of their print version (e.g., *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, *Vogue*). To locate the articles, keywords relevant to the

event were put into the search bar. This included three key search terms: “Jackie Aina,” “Jackie Aina Born This Way Foundation,” and “Too Faced Jackie Aina.” Important to note is that search engines, operated by algorithms, consistently consider user behavior. Therefore, I conducted this keyword search on three separate days: October 19, 2021, October 28, 2021, and November 9, 2021. This method was used to ensure that I was able to retrieve as many articles as possible, as this method also revealed that additional articles were returned after the first initial search. Therefore, by replicating the search three times I was able to reach saturation and ensure that I was able to collect as many articles as possible on this subject. Articles eligible for the sample were based on four inclusion criteria.

First, the publication date of the article needed to be between August 4, 2017, and December 31, 2018. This represents the time beginning from when the collaboration between Jackie Aina and *Too Faced* was announced until six months after the product was released, providing enough time to look at how the product itself, in addition to Jackie Aina, was framed within beauty discourse during that time. Second, articles eligible for the sample needed to be from publications that catered to women, beauty content, and/or both. Third, only articles from American-based publications would be considered for inclusion in the sample, as analysis of international publications must also involve considering the sociopolitical constructions and discursive histories of a given geographical area; while worthy of study, this is beyond the scope of the current project. The fourth and final qualifying criteria required articles to be relevant to Jackie Aina, the *Too Faced* collaboration, and racism/colorism. This last criterion was added after discovering that Jackie Aina’s name (as input into the search bar) returned a wide range of topical results related to beauty, social media, colorism, and pop culture. Not all focused on Aina directly, instead simply mentioning her name or including links to other stories about her at the

end of the article—particularly if the article's main topic was racism and colorism. This indicates that articles that are not solely about her still contribute to mainstream beauty discourse and the framing around race and colorism within the beauty space. Ultimately, 114 articles total were collected, and after application of the eligibility criteria, 101 articles were included in the sample for analysis.

The analytical tool used for this study is critical discourse analysis and critical technocultural discourse analysis. The first method borrows from the operationalization laid forth by Manchin and Mayr (2012), examining the lexical (words) and iconographical (images) structure of the text. It is through analysis of the words and images used in the articles that we can look at how patterns of meaning are produced within beauty discourse. Using qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo), elements of the articles in the sample were coded to the following categories: "skin tone," "racism," "YouTube or digital influencers," "name association," "money," "media," "labor," "inclusivity and/or diversity," "glamor," "expertise," "callout," behavior," "beauty standards," "activism." This means that parts of the articles that explicitly mentioned or were suggestive towards these themes were coded according to the appropriate category. It is important to note that many sentences and/or paragraphs in the articles possessed characteristics to be coded to more than one category, as the convergence of technology, celebrity, economic capital, and identity encourage nuance and merging among these themes. This coding allowed me to identify any patterns prevalent in the talk around Jackie Aina, colorism, racism, and Black women's labor in the digital beauty space. Through consideration of how words and images are used to produce meaning and who can be meaning-makers, this method enabled me to make an educated inference on how the structure of beauty articles align and/or deviate from dominant societal discourses around beauty and race. Andre Brock's critical

technocultural discourse analysis was also used and posits that platform affordances help shape the structure of interaction with digital content, influencing meaning in the production of discourse (Brock, 2018). Therefore, this analysis considered comments, advertisements, and other interactive capabilities that were part of the articles to examine how additional elements of the platform work with the linguistic function to produce certain ideologies and discourse around beauty, colorism, and Black women.

Framing Jackie Aina: The Centering of Black Women as Experts

This section now turns to consideration of the actual discourse produced within the articles and begins by focusing on the lexical and iconographical structure of the text. The primary research question of this chapter examines how Jackie Aina's contributions to the digital beauty community and the beauty industry are framed within digital beauty publications through consideration of her *Too Faced* product launch in 2018. The analysis reveals that Aina, and other Black beauty influencers are often centered as experts–particularly through the lens of inclusivity and diversity, thus framing their contributions as progressive. This is situated within a beauty industry context that currently sees diversity in terms of race and skin tone, as a key metric for measuring diversity and inclusion within the space.

Audience Size and Positioning

Audience size is common theme throughout the discourse that is used to frame Aina as an expert. As an example, a July 2018 article by Khalea Underwood insinuates that Jackie Aina transcends YouTube and is someone readers should know, regardless of their YouTube use. Underwood writes, "*You don't have to be a subscriber to know who Jackie Aina is. Even if you aren't one of her 2.4 million fans on YouTube, or her 330,000 Twitter Followers, or possibly one of 983,000 people who like her posts on Instagram, you've definitely seen her meme'd on the*

internet," (Underwood, 2018). By highlighting that Aina has a large following across multiple platforms, the writer's listing of Jackie's audience in numeric terms situates Aina as someone important that readers should know, especially considering that she has millions of fans. This listing of Jackie Aina's audience size is also listed in other articles in the sample as a way of establishing Jackie's credibility within the digital beauty community (McGrath, 2018; Lawrence, 2018; Hoshikawa, 2017; Donahue, 2017). Later in the article written by Underwood, Jerrod Blandino, the founder and CEO of *Too Faced* is quoted as saying, "*I knew she could do the Born This way launch better than I could. She worked her ass off, did the research and developed these shades with the full authority of my team,*" (Underwood, 2018).

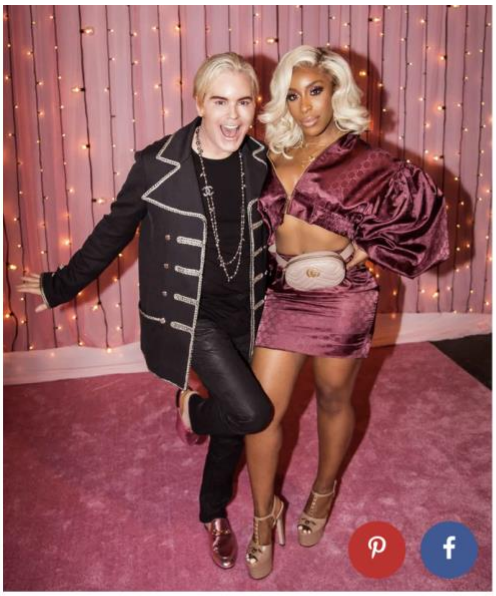


PHOTO COURTESY OF TOO FACED.

Jackie Aina and Jerrod Blandino, founder of Too Faced Cosmetics, at the launch party in L.A.

Last September, when Aina voiced that the Peach Perfect Comfort Matte Foundation needed a shade expansion, Blandino listened and immediately brought her on board. "That type of criticism doesn't come from a place of having an agenda," Blandino says. "I knew she could do the Born This Way launch better than I could. She worked her ass off, did the research, and developed these shades with the full authority of my team."

With Aina's help, Too Faced launched 11 new shades of Born This Way foundation this month. The new hues, including nine designed by Aina, feature a variety of undertones suited for nearly *everyone*. And while some consumers might not bat an eye — especially with the new 30-and-up offerings from Fenty,

Figure 1: This image appeared in the Refinery article written by Khalea Underwood and was provided from Too Faced. In the photo are Jackie Aina and Jerrod Blandino, Co-Founder of Too Faced, at the Born This Way launch party.

As pictured above, the quote by Blandino appears next to a photo of him and Aina, further positioning Aina as an expert figure. Blandino's claim that Jackie could do the launch "better

than he could" conveys to readers that Jackie is so knowledgeable that she even knows more than the CEO of a popular makeup brand. As far as images are concerned, there was at least one other time where Jackie was visually positioned next to a popular name in beauty, the figure being Kim Kardashian.



Figure 2: This image appeared in an August 2017 Life & Style article written by Steph Osmanski. In the photo are Jackie Aina and Kim Kardashian at Kardashian's event for her KKW beauty product launch circa June 2017. When Kim K posted this photo on her Instagram, she also posted other photos with several other notable beauty influencers. However, everyone was tagged in their respective photos except Jackie Aina. This led the beauty community to believe that there was a feud between the two, and that Kardashian was upset that Aina did not give her product the best review. Kim Kardashian denied these claims, but subsequent accusations of racism and colorism by Aina against Kardashian and Kylie Jenner often causes fans to speculate that they are not on the best of terms.

This is significant because the article titled, "*How to Apply Highlighter So You Glow Like Kim Kardashian,"* from Life & Style Magazine, has absolutely nothing to do with Jackie Aina and yet it appeared as one of the articles in the search results when her name was typed in the search bar. However, the article did include the photo of Jackie Aina and Kim Kardashian together. Therefore, the positioning of Jackie Aina next to celebrities and celebrity women in beauty not only occurs visually throughout the sample, but it also occurs algorithmically and discursively.

Throughout the articles in the analysis Jackie Aina's name appears in articles that discuss other notable figures, particularly women who have excelled in their fields including singer and beauty entrepreneur Rihanna (Chan & Aina, 2018; Harris, 2018), American ballerina Misty Copeland (Robin, 2018), reality star and beauty entrepreneur Kim Kardashian (Diaz, 2018a), superstar tennis athlete Serena Williams (Cruel, 2018), supermodel Gisele Bündchen (Weiner, 2018), and supermodel Naomi Campbell (Stanovick, 2018). The positioning of Jackie's name is most times an afterthought as the focus is usually on those women, or some other topic in beauty. Taking this example further, in the video article by Mi-Anne Chan where *Refinery* interviews Jackie Aina, Chan begins the video by mentioning that Jackie won "Beauty Innovator of the Year this year [2018] and Rihanna won last year [2017]," (Chan & Aina, 2018). The positioning of Jackie Aina both algorithmically and discursively to accomplished famous women and beauty symbols, such as Rihanna and Kim Kardashian, serves as a discursive tool used to elevate her from beauty influencer to full-fledged celebrity expert with the audience size to validate it.

Knowledge and Honesty

Jackie Aina's expertise is also framed as evolving from her truthfulness and knowledge, which writers describe as characteristics that make her "real." The notion of realness or relatability is a part of what makes social media influencers successful (Abidin, 2015). Thus, these descriptions of her as someone who "keeps it real" adds more credibility to her expertise (Hall & Briggs, 2018). Writers often describe Aina positively, using sentiments that zone in on her popularity and/or her ability to create "mesmerizing glam looks and honest product reviews," (Payne, 2018b). The word "honest" is the most significant term in the quote as this descriptor is commonly used to describe Jackie's work and personality (Hoshikawa, 2017; McGrath, 2018; Fasanella, 2018; Harper's Bazaar, 2018). While Jackie's honesty adds credibility to her

expertise, it's important to note that this notion of her honesty as viewed in beauty discourse, is also intertwined with her knowledge of and about darker skin tones and her advocacy against colorism in the beauty industry. In the *Refinery* article written by Khalea Underwood in 2018, Aina is quoted as saying, “Most of my audience comes to me as the authority for dark-skinned beauty,” (Underwood, 2018). This ultimately speaks to Jackie’s awareness that she is an advocate for this specific demographic. Further, the articles describe her as being an advocate for diversity and inclusion and most importantly as the best person to help the beauty industry solve their problems around colorism. In some of the articles written, it’s mentioned that Jackie is “helping,” “expanding,” “developing,” or “extending,” product shades in collaboration with *Too Faced* for beauty consumers with darker skin tones (Chadwick, 2018; Donahue, 2017a; Donahue, 2017b; Borovic, 2018; Hoshikawa, 2017; Capon, 2018; Steigman, 2017a; Lawrence, 2018; Simmons, 2018b; Simmons, 2017a). Therefore, her expertise is not only strengthened in her tendency to be honest, but this concept of honesty is also grounded in her advocacy work against colorism. Black beauty influencers are at more of a risk of losing sponsorships or being shunned when they call out beauty companies (Lawson, 2021). As a result, Aina’s tendency to speak out against companies who contribute to skin tone erasure, irrespective of the personal cost to her, further solidifies the idea that she is honest—with her honesty being fueled by her commitment to colorism advocacy, further adding to her expertise and credibility on the subject.

Expertise Constructed through Platform Affordances and Journalistic Norms

The formatting of the articles in the sample are in concordance with journalistic norms, considering that many journalists are restricted to a word count or story length. This journalistic constraint also aids in the framing of Jackie Aina as the expert. Almost all the articles incorporate Instagram posts from Jackie’s profile, tweets from Jackie’s Twitter, in addition to the

inclusion of videos from her YouTube channel. Therefore, readers can visually see the content produced by Aina in the article and are able to click to the linked platform if they want to view more of her content. One of the common themes throughout the articles was to use Jackie's content as content for the article. For example, captions on Jackie's Instagram photos may be included into the story and statements from Jackie's videos were commonly turned into quotes. This often minimizes the writer's voice and elevates Jackie's position in the article, framing her as the subject and the authoritative voice.

As an example, in the August 2017 article (updated in June 2018) written by Rosemary Donahue written for *Allure*, Donahue uses two Instagram posts from Jackie's profile with one of the pics being used twice, in addition to the inclusion of a YouTube video from Jackie's YouTube channel. Of the 799 words in the article, 302 of the words were quotes from the captions of either Jackie Aina's and/or Jerrod Blandino's Instagram posts. This means that much of the story was framed around Jackie's Aina's content, allowing the writer to summarize what Aina has already produced on another platform. This minimizes the voice of the writer and further elevates Jackie as the speaker, even though the article was not an interview. This is now a common practice generally for the construction of digital articles and is not unique to the coverage around Jackie Aina. However, this type of elevation of Aina's voice, particularly in mainstream beauty magazines, adds an additional layer of credibility and expertise, particularly considering that magazines like *Allure* have historically played a role in the shaping of beauty norms. However, I argue that this type of journalistic format is also an appropriation of Black women's labor.

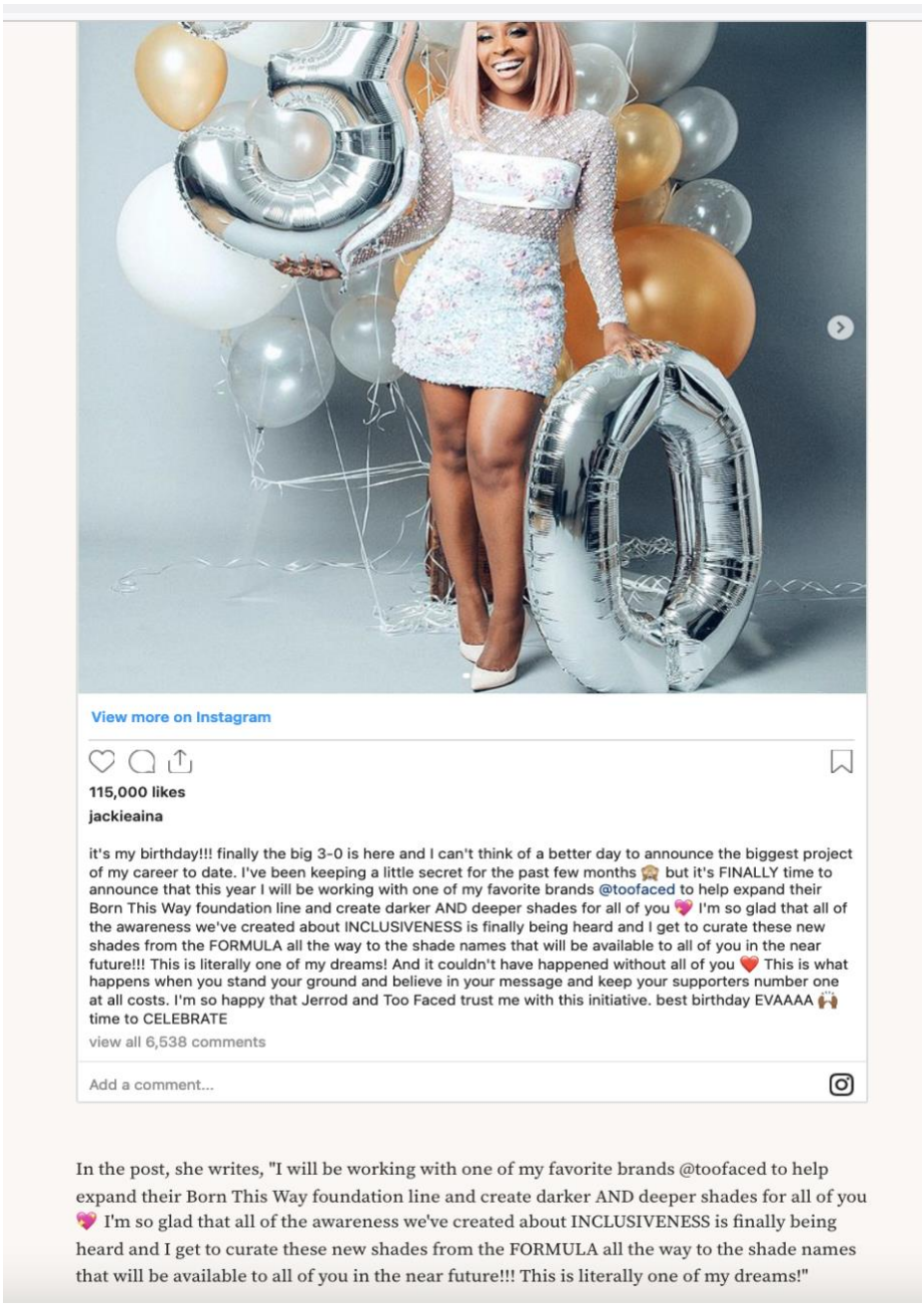


Figure 3: *In this article titled, "Jackie Aina posted a teaser for the New Too Faced Foundation Shade extension," beauty journalist Rosemary Donahue incorporates several of Jackie Aina's Instagram photos and one of her YouTube videos into the article. In the image you can see that the paragraph that succeeds Jackie's Instagram post is essentially the caption that Jackie wrote for her picture. Therefore, the only thing that the writer adds is, "In this post, she writes."*

Framing Jackie Aina as Vocal

The second frame that is commonly visible in the data is the construction of Jackie Aina as vocal. In *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press: Framing Dissent,* Sarah Jackson uses discourse analysis to explore how Black celebrities are treated in the press when voicing oppositional attitudes to the politics of the dominant culture. Jackson notes that Black celebrities often experience cultural punishment discursively (Jackson, 2014). Using Eartha Kitt as an intersectional, racial, and gendered example–Jackson reveals that Kitt's anti-imperialist and anti-Vietnam sentiments, as expressed at luncheon with then First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson, were used to frame Kitt as aggressive and impolite (Jackson, 2014). This aligns with common tropes often stapled to Black womanhood which characterizes Black women as confrontational, aggressive, and ill-mannered. This work sets the tone for understanding how the framing of Jackie Aina as vocal is constructed positively, therefore–at least in this scenario–discursively reversing the negative connotations associated with Black womanhood (e.g., confrontational) and Black celebrity.

The dominant strand within the Jackie Aina as vocal frame constructs her dissent against Eurocentric beauty norms as admirable. Half of the articles in the sample (50%) write about inclusivity and diversity, and in 64.7% of those articles, Aina is celebrated as a leading voice in the beauty inclusivity movement. Her vocalness against colorism lends such descriptors as "innovator," "game-changing," "leading the charge," and "iconic revolutionary" to be ascribed to her (Diaz, 2018b; Brown, 2018, Simmons, 2017b; Blaec, 2017). This is particularly important when we think about Jackson's work and the negative framing that is often associated with Black celebrities dissenting. In this case, the essence of Jackie's celebrity stems from her dissension against Eurocentric beauty standards and colorism specifically, ultimately composing a

significant part of her brand. Therefore, in the majority of the articles, Aina was not always dissenting explicitly—rather the invoking of her name, and/or the recognition of her voice on YouTube, in digital beauty publications, and ultimately the larger dominant discourse is a partial recognition, acceptance, rewarding, and corporatization of her dissent. Further, in articles where Jackie Aina is not specifically mentioned, additional Black women in the beauty industry, such as Rihanna, Alissa Ashley, and Cashmere Nicole are often recognized as important voices who are fighting against beauty norms and making the industry more inclusive. For the most part, in this particular time and context, the dissent of Black women is constructed as something valuable and something necessary. To be clear, I am not saying that the celebration of Jackie Aina's dissent reverses all negative stereotypes typically associated with Black womanhood. However, what the discourse shows is that dissent may be subjective, depending on time and context. And in this context, the dissent of a Black celebrity, particularly a Black woman celebrity, is celebrated and often seen as vital.

Framing Racism: Jeffree Star, Kylie Jenner, and Skepticism Around Jackie Aina's Voice

While the previous section argues that Jackie Aina's vocality and dissension is a part of her branding and thus often rewarded discursively, the discourse also confirms that there are times when this is interrupted, making Jackson's analysis relevant to the 21st century also. Two things that seem to interrupt Jackie Aina's positive framing around dissent are racism as implemented through the construction of White beauty celebrities like Kylie Jenner and Jeffree Star. Racism is something that continues to plague the online beauty community—whether that is through algorithmic invisibility, the erasure of skin tones in product availability, or through the various beauty influencers themselves. Many of the mega beauty influencers (those with followers in the millions) have at some point been accused of making racist remarks, cultural

appropriation, or instituting racist business practices in their companies. Therefore, racism is often a topic in the articles from digital beauty publications–but its framing is sometimes constructed as interpersonal conflict and "drama" as opposed to acts that can potentially have harmful and violent consequences for marginalized groups.

In "*Jackie Aina publicly denounces Jeffree Star over blatantly racist behavior,"* Kelsey Stiegman (2018) discusses the incident in which mega-beauty influencer Jeffree Star was revealed to have called Jackie Aina a "gorilla" in text messages. The actual act of this is racist and colorist because of the historical tendency of the dominant group to associate Blackness with animals and primitiveness. Additionally, this is colorist because phenotypic features such as dark-skin, wide noses, and kinky hair—all of which are features viewed as distinctly African—have come to be viewed as the negative parts of Blackness. Therefore, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter, Jackie was not only subjected to racism through this exchange, but also to colorism. Second, the construction of this article is racist as well, reflecting the way that racism is more than individual and interpersonal interactions, but instead the ways that discrimination and marginalization are institutionalized. For clarity, this work adopts the definition of racism laid forth by esteemed psychologist Beverly Tatum (2003) who theorizes that,

> "racism, like other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals. In the context of the United States, this system clearly operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color," (p. 26).

Therefore, many of the cultural messages on institutional racism in our society question if it even exists, thus silencing those who voice opposition to discriminatory practices. A similar practice is reflected in this article in the sense that it questions Jackie's concerns about Jeffree Star. In the statement that Jackie posted to Twitter, she writes, "I have not and will not excuse his blatantly racist behavior," (Aina, 2018). The writer then lifts and uses the phrase "racist behavior" in

quotations to refer to the allegations against Star. While this is a common literary practice to illustrate words that are or have been spoken by the subject in a story through quotations, in the context of this article's construction, it also aids in the questioning of Jackie's accusations, inviting skepticism around whether Star actually engaged in this behavior or not. Additionally, this writer paints Jackie's denouncement of Starr as a battle between the two by writing, "but this isn't the first time the two bloggers have duked it out" and "Jackie then tweeted again, to make it clear that these will be her last comments on the matter – and that should Jeffree respond with his usual dragging, fans should take a hard look at their idol" (Stiegman, 2018). The use of "duke it out" and "usual dragging" more so align the situation to a dramatic school fight as opposed to one influencer from a marginalized background calling out racism from one of the biggest influencers in the community, who also happens to be a part of the dominant group.

Further, the article shows Jeffree Star's Tweets which were responses to Jackie Aina's statement. And although the tweet where he disparages Jackie is not shown in the article, the writer makes sure to mention it saying, "*Per Jeffree's norm, he responded with FIRE. He went on a brutal Twitter rant, saying: "I blocked that irrelevant rat months ago, way before her "anti haul",' plus a ton of other shade."* Instead of engaging with Jeffree's original racist statements, the writer engages also by writing that Jeffree called her a "rat" without any critical analysis of why continuously associating Jackie to animals is problematic. Additionally, the article asks readers to decide whether they are "Team Jackie" or "Team Jeffree" to truly get readers to buy into the concept of an interpersonal feud.



Figure 4: Jackie Aina publicly denounces Jeffree Star over "blatantly racist behavior", by Kelsey Stiegman for Seventeen magazine, she includes tweets from Jeffree Star's Twitter as a response to the statement released by Jackie Aina. However, the image does not show the Tweet where Jeffree Star called Aina a "rat" presumably because he deleted it, however she includes it into the story without any thoughtful analysis of why relating Aina to animals is why the story exists in the first place.

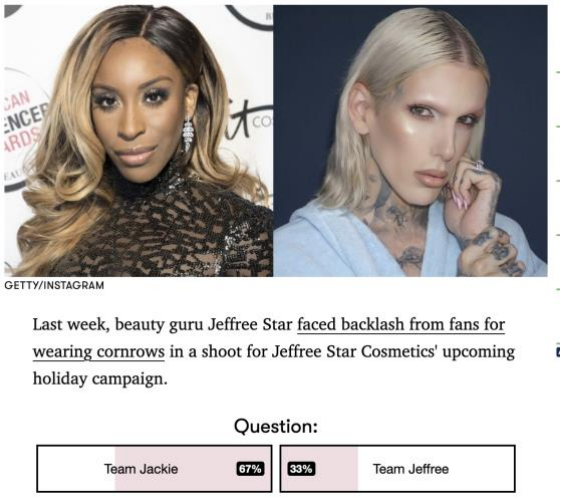


Figure 5: The article also presents a public poll, so readers can decide who they support in the situation. Although Jackie is winning the poll, the fact that there is a poll in the first place ultimately questions her claims of racism against Jeffree Star.

Other articles in the analysis also tend to cover the situation in a way that frames the accusations of racism as an interpersonal feud (Barbour, 2018) and Aina generally is often described as "dragging someone" or "calling them out" (Steigman, 2017b; Steigman, 2018b). The work of Meredith Clark notes that "dragging", "reading", and/ or "calling out" are "discursive accountability practices created by Black counterpublics that are conspicuously absent from the American public imaginary," (Clark, 2020, p. 89). So, while these terms can be viewed as labels for accountability practices in Black digital communities, use of these terms by members of the dominant culture can easily invert the meaning, thereby framing the person, particularly if Black, as belligerent or confrontational. This is similar to the N-word, where its use by Black people can connote kinship within communities, and use of the word by White people often connotes dehumanization. However, there are also other articles, including and excluding Jackie Aina, that frame racism as "drama", "controversy" and or "scandal" (Khan, 2018; Steigman, 2018c; Capon, 2018b; Capon, 2018c; Capon, 2018d). The articles that paint Aina as confrontational or depict racism as "drama" are mostly written by the same people, as evidenced by the citations. In this case, I think it is important to acknowledge that each writer likely approaches the story from their own perspective in the world, carrying with them their own opinion and ideologies. However, the two writers responsible for this framing represent two out of three White presenting writers in the sample that wrote five or more stories on the various beauty topics present within the sample. Therefore, although they are just two writers, the presence of their multiple stories, which occasionally presents racism as "drama," are often just as loud as the stories that position Jackie's vocality as admirable. Therefore, while Jackie's vocality against racism regarding companies is seen as valuable dissent, when Jackie calls out racism among

other celebrities and celebrity influencers, arguably those more popular than her and White, her vocality is transformed into something that's questionable and confrontational. Like Jackson asserts when discussing Eartha Kitt in the 1960's, this type of discursive punishment is not only gendered, and racial, but I also add that it is colorist in that the descriptors which associate Aina with animals and aggressive behavior are also descriptors that are particularly and specifically associated to dark-skinned Black women.

Skepticism around Jackie's voice and the occasional framing of her as confrontational is also present when Kylie Jenner is invoked within beauty discourse. The situation between Jackie Aina and Kylie Jenner occurred when Aina said Jenner did not send her makeup products from her 2017 launch to any dark-skinned beauty influencers.[3] In "*Jackie Aina Thinks Kylie Cosmetics Isn't Sending Makeup to Beauty Bloggers of Color*," the writer mentions, in regard to Kylie's product launch, that "Jackie also had a lot of feelings about the product itself and per usual, she's got some thoughts." This tone frames, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Jackie as complaining. It does not help that at the bottom of the article, the writer's bio says that they spend their days "writing about style, beauty, and literally every move Kylie Jenner makes," (Stiegman, 2018d). "*Jackie Aina Accuses Kylie Jenner of Not Sending Products to Dark-skinned Vloggers*," (Rearick, 2017) is another headline that adds doubt, while another article suggests that ultimately, we do not know "*whether Aina's speculation is true or not, we hope Kylie Cosmetics improves in 2018*," (Pham, 2017). All of which, bring doubt to Jackie's claims. There were only four articles in the sample that cover the situation between Jackie Aina and Kylie Jenner, however, these examples are provided to show how the framing of Black women in this

[3] Any time there is controversy or a situation between Jackie Aina and a member of the Kardashian-Jenner clan, there are layers to how the situation should be interpreted, especially since the Kardashians and Kylie Jenner have engaged in cultural appropriation, specifically cultural appropriation of Black women, for over a decade.

space is not fixed and can be subtly interrupted, even if they are celebratory figures. Articles that bring question to Jackie's claims of racism against Kylie Jenner and Jeffree Star, after nearly a decade of beauty activism, also illustrate the power of Whiteness and how race, power, and privilege can often make a celebrity and/or trump celebrity status depending on where one fits on the spectrum according to power dynamics. Therefore, the framing of racism, at times, as more of a "soap opera" as opposed to social injustice with real potential harm is a part of the beauty discourse that reflects the ways racism is facilitated by structures and institutions, in this case, beauty magazines. This framing also fits within neoliberal parameters, as neoliberalism urges people to take personal responsibility for their life trajectories (Harvey, 2009). This emphasis on personal responsibility is intended to turn attention away from the myriad of ways that structures and institutions maintain and perpetuate systems of unfair advantage. Thus, the framing of racism as an interpersonal matter between two beauty influencers helps reinforce neoliberal logics around race and discrimination.

Framing Colorism: Skin Tone Inclusivity as an Instrument of Rainbow White Supremacy

The previous section explained that mainstream beauty publications have elevated discourses of dissent against hegemonic beauty norms—particularly around colorism–through coverage on Black beauty influencers like Jackie Aina, Rihanna, and Alissa Ashley. In the articles sampled for analysis, 66.3% (67/101) of the articles discuss skin tone equality as the primary way that the beauty industry is pushing towards inclusivity and diversity. Important to note is that rarely is the actual word "colorism" used. Instead, articles speak about how companies are turning to "expanding shade ranges" or incorporating more products suitable for "darker or deeper skin tones." While it is important that the discourse recognizes colorism and the lack of products available for women of darker shades, there is one important caveat that

comes with colorism being adopted into the dominant discourse, primarily revolving around reductionism.

First, the launch of Rihanna's cosmetics line, Fenty Beauty, in 2017, changed the beauty community from both a discursive and consumer standpoint. Her release of 40 shades of foundation (later labeled the Fenty 40) was profitable amongst beauty consumers commercially and discursively. Rihanna's cosmetics line became the standard, as many companies followed suit and began to release more diverse shades of makeup products. Therefore, the Fenty 40 has become a metric by which skin tone diversity is measured where companies who release products with shades closer to the "magic number" of 40 are seen as inclusive. This is commonly seen in the headlines such as "*NYX is Expanding its Foundation Line to 45 Shades*" and "*Lush Is Launching 40 Shades of Cruelty-Free, Vegan Foundation*" (Simmons, 2018c; Prinzivalli, 2018).

Sometimes the headlines included Black celebrity women to further invoke notions of inclusivity and diversity as evidenced through headlines like "*Misty Copeland Helps Estée Lauder Announce the Shade Expansion of Double Wear Stay-In-Place Makeup*" and "*Fenty Beauty Is Winning Because Rihanna Delivered What Black Women Have Been Asking For*" (Robin, 2018; Blaec, 2017). The numbers, and the name of Black women themselves are therefore used to invoke notions of inclusivity. On the other hand, cosmetic companies who release products that are not close in number to "40" have received backlash from consumers online and thus this backlash is also received discursively within beauty publications. Companies who have failed to meet the benchmark of 40 have often received headlines like "*Beautyblender Adds 8 New Foundation Shades After Bounce Backlash*", "*It Cosmetics Listened To People's Complaints & Is Now Expanding Their Foundation Range*", "*Women of Color on YouTube Slam Tarte for Lack of Diversity in Shape Tape Foundation*" (Diaz, 2018b; Simmons, 2017b; Lippe,

2018). In this case, numbers are not used in the headlines, but instead words like “Complaints”, “Backlash”, “Slam” and phrases like “Lack of Diversity” indicate that the company did not come close to the 40 shades initially.

The problem with using numbers as a benchmark is primarily that it is reductive and collapses discourses on colorism to a problem that can be solved as long as the numbers are right. This also feeds into neoliberal logics that individual freedom and personal responsibility better contribute to a free market. Therefore, I argue that this reductionism co-opts discourse around colorism, because it adopts this issue into one that can be solved by the free market, the idea that as long as people are able to see themselves in the market and thus consume, then the market will thrive, and these issues will disappear. Additionally, the reduction also feeds into notions of Rainbow White Supremacy as coined by sociologist Crystal Fleming. Fleming (2022) defines this concept as an,

> “Array of affective, ideological, and cultural practices that invite us to experience subjugated participation in racial capitalism as inclusive, pleasurable, and most importantly, the normal state affairs,” (C. Fleming, personal communication, February 17, 2022).

Fleming’s notion of subjugated inclusion within racial capitalism conveys that discourses around inclusivity and diversity can often be molded to include marginalized groups while still subjecting them to the racist and capitalist order (C. Fleming, personal communication, February 17, 2022). Therefore, the co-opting of the discourse on colorism within digital beauty publications meets that criteria. The measurement of this magic number “40”, which is meant to signify inclusion, operates under a capitalistic framework in that the metric of progress, “being able to buy more foundation shades,” ultimately benefits the capitalistic and neoliberal order. Consequently, the lack of reflection from beauty journalists on the beauty industry’s role in colorism aligns with this ideology in that an industry is not going to properly critique itself or

threaten its own monetary interests, thus molding the discourse to one that uses an arbitrary number as a metric of progress, which can be seen as an affective and effective tool, both of which make people feel pleasure in being recognized and included. I do not wish to convey that the presence of colorism discourse in mainstream beauty magazines is ingenuine. In fact, it is important that issues of colorism are being brought into mainstream beauty consciousness. However, when colorism is reduced to numbers and paired with the framing of racism as "drama," these things can easily work together to prevent a less nuanced conversation, and one that could still be particularly harmful.

Framing Discourse Through Algorithms: Methodology as Research Findings and the Marginalization of Black Beauty Publications

One of the most significant revelations from this study was discovered during the process of data collection before analysis of the articles occurred. The Google News search engine plays a significant role in the structuring of beauty discourse and rarely returns articles from Black American women's and/or Black beauty publications (BBP), indicating that BBP were less visible in the discourse. Of the 114 articles accumulated through data collection via the search engine, 101 articles total were eligible for analysis. The 13 articles that were excluded were done so because they failed to meet the inclusion criteria, or they were no longer accessible[4]. Nine out of the thirteen excluded articles were from Black international outlets and thus excluded on the grounds that they did not originate from American publications. The 101 remaining eligible articles included a total of 9 articles from Black American publications, with only three of those

[4] An example of inaccessibility includes articles collected from the publication *The Revelist*. During the analysis process, the site underwent a transformation, rebranding itself as Cafemom.com. Therefore, even though the link still renders as belonging to *The Revelist*, the link opens to Cafemom.com. The site previously focused on issues related to women and is the same in this regard, but Cafemom has a new focus, intending to capture the attention of those experiencing or interested in motherhood. As a result, three articles collected from this site are not able to be accessed from their archive via the user interface. Whether the articles are actually embedded somewhere else on the site and still accessible to publishers is unclear and unknowable from a user (reader) perspective.

articles being from Black American beauty outlets (e.g., *Essence, Jet,* & *HelloBeautiful*). The remaining articles from Black American publications appeared in *The Root, BET,* and *BlackNews.com,* publications that typically cover a broad range of issues important to the African American community—particularly at the intersections of politics, news, and popular culture. This means that the remaining 92 articles in the sample were from beauty outlets that can be placed in two categories. The first category represents beauty publications that have historically catered to the dominant American culture and originated with a print version of the magazine, including *Harper's Bazaar* (1867 - Present), *Cosmopolitan* (1886 - Present), *Vogue* (1892 - Present), *Glamour* (1939 - Present), *Seventeen* (1944 - Present), *Elle* (1945 - Present), *Allure* (1991 - Present), Teen Vogue (2003 - Present), and *Life & Style* (2004 - Present). The second category represents beauty publications that originated within the digital sphere and have since accumulated influence in topics related to women, including *Refinery29* (2005 - Present), *Bustle* (2013 - Present), *StyleCaster* (2008 - Present), *Cafemom* (formerly *The Revelist*; 2006 - Present), and *Fashionista* (2007 - Present).

The lack of articles from Black beauty publications in the search results prompted me to attempt to locate articles from these outlets in more strategic ways. Using the Google News search bar and the same date filters (8/4/2017 - 12/31/2018), I used three additional search terms: "Jackie Aina Essence Magazine," "Jackie Aina Ebony Magazine," and "Jackie Aina Jet Magazine." Despite there being stories about Jackie Aina and other Black beauty influencers, the Google News search engine did not return any stories about Jackie Aina or the *Too Faced* event from *Essence*. This procedure was separately replicated for *Ebony Magazine,* followed by *Jet*

Magazine[5]. Despite there being other articles in the search results that were about Jackie or other Black beauty influencers, no articles from *Ebony* were retrieved. Instead, the *Ebony* search did return one article from *Jet Magazine*. However, this article was not about Jackie Aina, but about Avielle Amor, another Black beauty influencer who was selected as the Jet Beauty of the week on January 30, 2018 (Garwood, 2018). In the article, Amor mentioned that she admired and was inspired by Jackie Aina and her advocacy against racism in the YouTube community (Garwood, 2018). This is an example of how articles tagged with Aina's name appeared in the search results, even if they were not explicitly about her. The separate search for *Jet Magazine* also returned this same article in addition to other publications with articles about Jackie Aina and/or Black women beauty influencers[6].

One of the articles in the overall sample was from *Essence* magazine, but this article was only located by direct search of the publication's website. Using the search term "Jackie Aina Too Faced," one of the same search terms used in the initial Google search, I was able to locate this article, but noticed this method possessed several limitations. First, *Essence*, along with *Ebony* and *Jet*, did not have a date filter tool for their search engines, restricting me from identifying the exact dates when articles about Jackie Aina were published. Second, the original publishing date of an article was not present in the story if the article was later updated. For this matter, I was forced to use my own expertise, context clues, and historical knowledge to infer an estimation of the time the story was written. As an example, I was able to locate the article,

[5] Because the passing of time can impact the algorithmic makeup of search results, the procedure for the three Black magazines: *Essence*, *Ebony*, and *Jet* was replicated on February 18th, 2022. This was done to ensure validity and the results mentioned above were again confirmed.

[6] *Jet* magazine was originally founded by John H. Johnson in 1951 who, along with his wife, Eunice Johnson, founded *Ebony* magazine in 1945. Thus, historically *Ebony* and *Jet* are sister publications owned by the same parent company. Johnson Publishing sold both magazines to Clear View Group in 2014 (Anderson, 2021).

"*Ready To Find Our Shade! Beauty Influencer Jackie Aina's Too Faced Collection Finally Gets a Launch Date*." The published date is described as updated in October 2020, but the article mentions that the product is "finally receiving a launch date after announcing the collaboration in 2017," (Dirshe, 2020). From this, I was able to infer that the original article was written after Aina's Instagram announcement in August 2017, but before the product launch in June of 2018, making the article eligible for analysis.

Through this search inquiry on the website of *Essence*, I was able to retrieve 13 articles, with only two of them being directly about Aina. The other articles either mentioned her in passing or used her likeness for a broader discussion on other beauty related topics as illustrated by Figure 6 and Figure 7. Therefore, unearthing how Black beauty publications contribute to beauty discourse through its representations of Jackie Aina, her beauty related events, and the labor of Black beauty influencers is a future study that will have to be conducted using archival methods suitable for their platforms, as methods viable for the Google News archive is not always suitable for other search engines. Also, this invites further questioning around how algorithms on racialized sites (those specifically designated as Black) are designed. Are they designed by Black programmers? Does this impact how they may operate in contrast to more mainstream algorithms such as Google? These questions would be answered best through ethnographic and interviewing methods, but what this process does reveal is that even though beauty publications overall are talking more about Jackie Aina, colorism, and discrimination in the beauty industry, discourse presented by BBP are rarely considered and presented in the Google News archive via its search results.

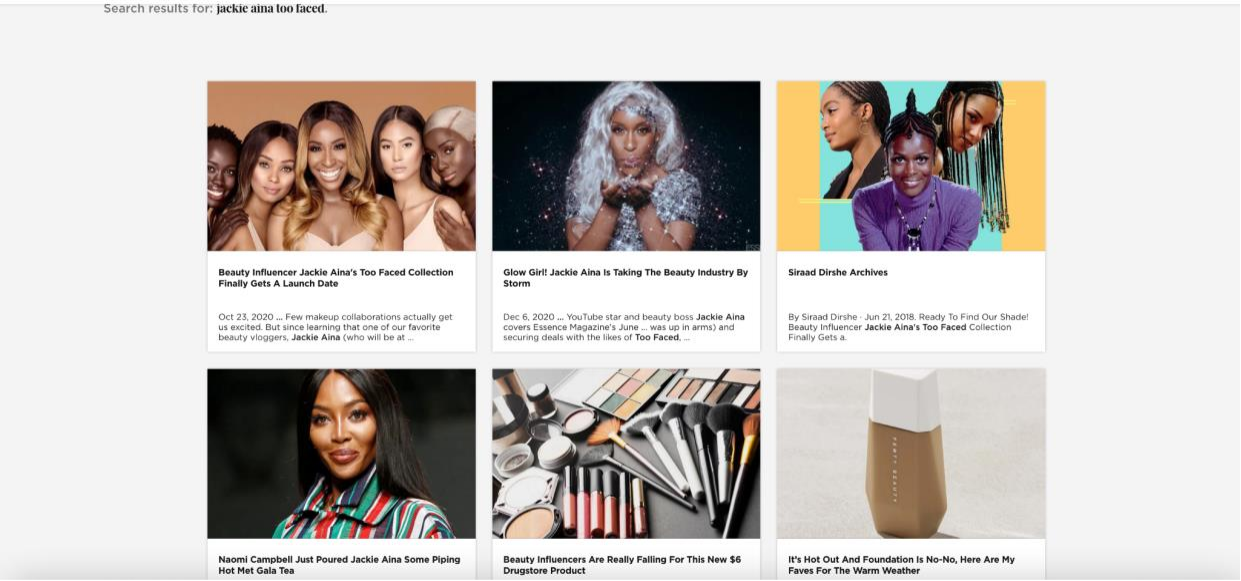


Figure 6: This image represents a screenshot of the first six articles presented to me by Essence via the "Jackie Aina too faced" keyword search. Important to note that only two of the articles are about Jackie Aina directly, while the rest mention her name in passing.

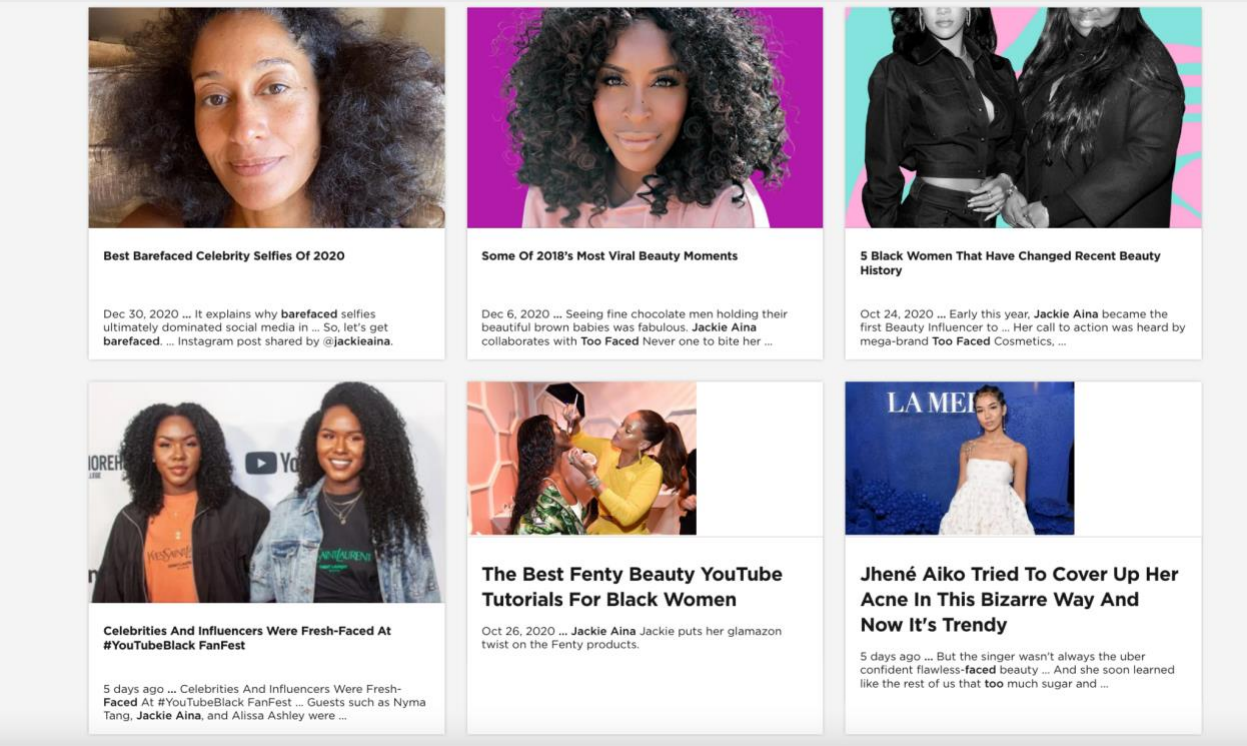


Figure 7: This is a screenshot of six more articles presented in the Essence search results. Again, you can see that all of the articles in this image are not about Jackie Aina directly but mention her in passing or use her likeness for other beauty related topics. The last story (not pictured) is about Black male influencers and not Aina directly.

The algorithmic structuring of beauty articles in a way that excludes the discourse produced from BBP is significant for several reasons particularly as we talk about framing and who is responsible for media frames about Black women. The literature reveals that there are debates over what the term "algorithm" actually means (Gillespie, 2016; Seaver, 2017), but computer scientists would argue that they are mathematical equations designed as input instructions for the production of output. However, while algorithms are often defined as a mathematical tool, scholarship also notes that societal understandings and beliefs around algorithms impact their role and use in our digital environment, and society at large. Researchers note that social media users, to varying levels, are aware of the algorithm's impact on the organization of their social media feeds. As a result, the "intuitive and folk theories" that users form about algorithms guide their behavior with the platform (Rader & Gray, 2015; Eslami et.al, 2016). Further, one of the reasons that algorithms are particularly relevant is because they contribute to patterns of inclusion, or exclusion (Gillespie, 2014). Tarleton Gillespie (2014) explains that algorithms are not mythical tools that operate on their own, but instead use the information provided to them, writing: "Before results can be algorithmically provided, information must be collected, readied for the algorithm, and sometimes excluded, or demoted," (p.169). Therefore, the lack of articles from Black beauty publications indicates this particular type of information is not being "readied" for the Google News algorithm. My search results from October 28th and November 9th indicate that not only were BBP rarely present in search results about Jackie Aina and the *Too Faced Cosmetics* product launch—but when they did appear they were not on the first couple of pages, but instead buried on additional pages (e.g., page 4, page 5, etc.). The lack of articles from BBP and their additional demotion to the later pages of Google's search results are an example of the exclusion and demotion that Gillespie

mentions. Although the content of the articles included in my analysis focuses on how Jackie Aina's advocacy against colorism is framed, the lack of articles from BBP in Google's search results may inherently suggest that these publications are not contributing to the discourse around this topic. In other words, I am suggesting that although Black beauty influencers are responsible for contributing and reshaping beauty discourse, algorithms dictate–at least to beauty consumers through beauty articles–what discourse is visible or deemed important. Additionally, this creates an oxymoronic paradigm where although Black women and/or Black people are celebrated for their activism in the beauty industry, the Google search engine presents limited information on this topic from the perspective of Black voices. Thus, the beauty articles located via the Google News archive are largely from mainstream beauty magazines which have a history of centering White women and Eurocentric standards of beauty.

The exclusion and demotion of Black beauty publications as illustrated through the results from the Google News search engine is on par with the literature that explicates the marginalization of Black web content. Charlton McIllwain (2017) reveals that Google uses "coded contextual information" to provide sites with an identity, thus labeling them as Black (p.1080). McIllwain further argues that this coding often leads to "segregated traffic patterns" where users who frequently visit non-racialized sites, or sites not categorized as Black, tend to more frequently visit sites within the same identity category (p. 1083). McIllwain notes that the opposite rings true as well, meaning users who tend to visit racialized sites are more likely to visit sites within this same identity category (McIllwain, 2017). McIllwain contends that this phenomenon is akin to the legacy of spatial segregation, where Whites used infrastructure and geography to physically separate themselves from Blacks (McIllwain, 2017). Therefore, in terms of beauty discourse, the relative absence of BBP from the search results subtly reignites these

notions. First, the marginalization of BBP within the search results creates a notion of digital space between Black beauty publications and historically White beauty publications. Also, the separation of articles from BBP that discuss Jackie Aina and her *Too Faced* collaboration continues to fuel historical notions of the public sphere and who is seen as legitimate contributors to discourse generally. This is further cemented by cultural expectations and understandings around the meaning and relevance of search results. As an example, provided below are memes that humorously discuss appearing beyond the first page of Google's search results as a tragedy.

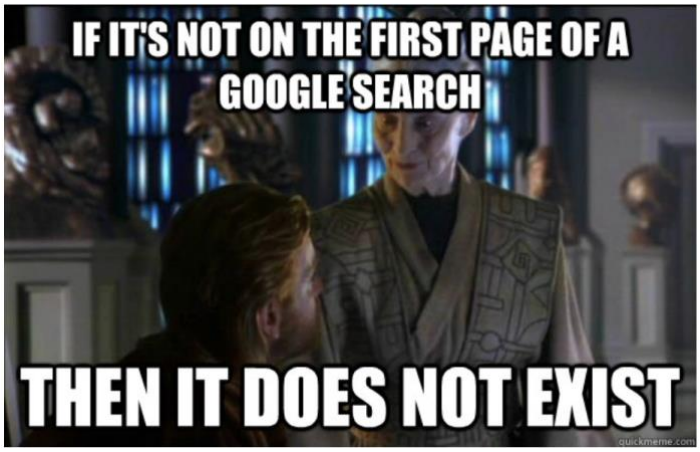


Figure 8: This meme is a still shot from the 2002 film Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones. In the scene, character Obi-Wan Kenobi, portrayed by Ewan McGregor, is looking for a document that he believes exists on the Jedi archival system. However, the document is not showing up in the system, which Kenobi believes is a mistake. The Jedi librarian Jocasta Nu, portrayed by the late Alethea McGrath, explains that it is not a mistake and that if the system is not showing the document, then it doesn't exist.



Figure 9: This collaborative meme represents two individual memes, each made popular by Black Twitter users, which have been put together as commentary on Google's search results. The first picture portrays musician Muyi Fre$co who took a blurred picture of himself smiling in excitement. The second picture is an image of former NBA player Michael Jordan who was presumably crying tears of joy as he was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame. However, the latter image, commonly referred to as the crying Jordan meme is often used to express disappointment. Both pictures are commonly used across social media to connote excitement and sadness respectively.

In the first meme, the literal scene from Star Wars and the wording on image is used to convey the idea that if any information you seek is not on Google's first page, then it does not exist. Interestingly enough, this picture also frames Google as all-knowing, being that the Jedis in the Star Wars cinematic universe are guardians of records (with supernatural powers) on the fictional planet Coruscant. In the second meme, a viral photo of musician Muyi Fre$co smiling in excitement is paired with a crying Michael Jordan, meant to convey that those who show up on Google's first page should be excited, while those who show up on Google's second page and beyond should be distraught. Both memes are examples of how cultural understandings around being on the first page further give legitimacy and relevancy to the results that show up within this societal parameter. Additionally, this cultural rule that privileges the first page is on par with the rise of the attention economy, and the idea that people want to consume information quickly, as opposed to having to take time to search for it. The cultural belief that if something is not on

the "first page" of Google search results, lends further credence to the idea that absence in the search results and/or presence in the later pages of Google's search can literally and symbolically lead to marginalization and obscurity, especially for information that is already demoted by Google itself—in this case articles from BBP that offer critique and perspectives on Jackie Aina, colorism, and the phenomenon of Black beauty influencers impacting the beauty industry. Although BBP are contributing to discourse in this area, their absence in the search results shows that historically White publications in the discourse on racism, influencers, and beauty are more privileged and preferred according to the algorithm.

The Caveat of Black Women Writers in Mainstream Beauty Publications

The caveat this study reveals is that while BBP were demoted and marginalized in Google's search results, Black women journalists (BWJ) still contributed to the discourse around Jackie Aina, colorism, her collaboration with *Too Faced*, and the current state of the beauty industry. The work of BWJ appeared in legacy outlets including *Allure*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Teen Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Elle*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Their work also appeared in newer digital outlets that include *Refinery*, *Bustle*, *StyleCaster*, *HelloBeautiful*, *Fashionista*, and *Cafemom.com* (formerly *The Revelist*). Important to note is the demographic of writers that produced the articles in the sample. Nineteen BWJ were responsible for 34.5 articles out of the 101 articles in the sample[7].

[7] A singular article in the sample written on March 21, 2018, from *Glamour* Magazine, titled *The Best Foundations for Every Skin Tone* was written collaboratively by Marci Robin, a White presenting woman and Jessica Cruel, a Black woman who became the editor-in-chief of *Allure* in September 2021.

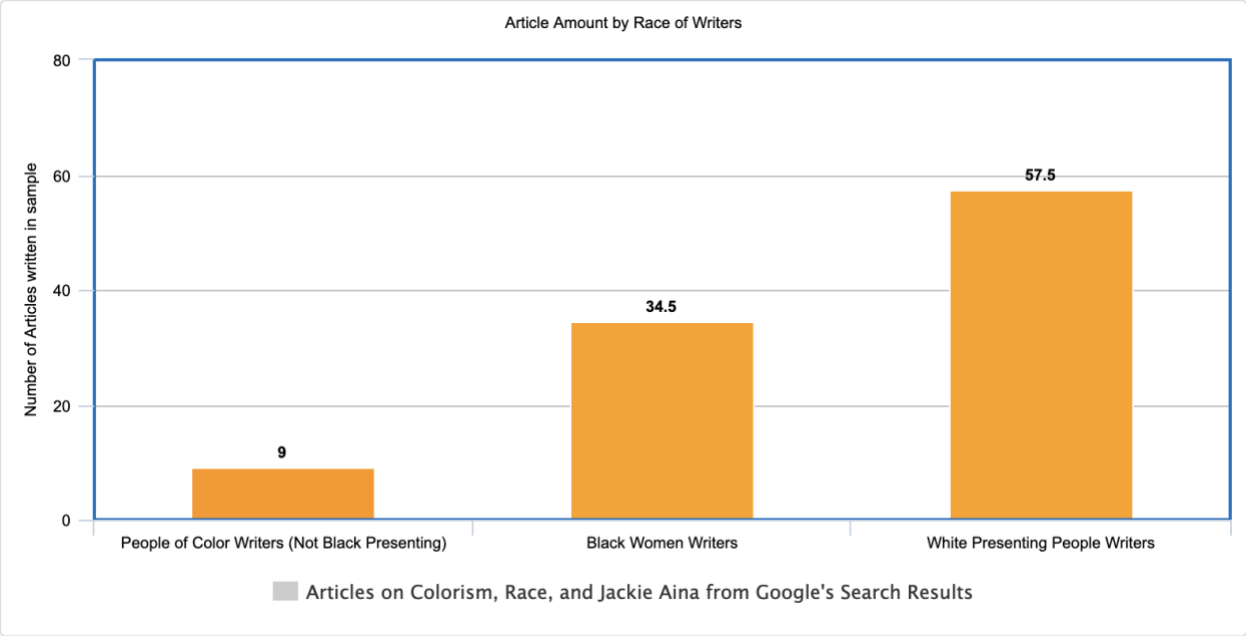


Figure 10: This is a visual representation of the number of articles written by racial demographic. These numbers are reflective of the number of articles eligible for analysis based on the including criteria. The total number of articles in the analysis was 101.

This is in comparison to the remaining 66.5 articles in the sample written by people across other races and identities, meaning that BWJ only accounted for 34.2% of the articles in the sample. Important to note is that 9 additional articles were written by People of Color (POC)[8] from various racial and ethnic cultures. This means that 9 of the remaining 66.5 articles were written by POC, while the 57.5 remaining articles (56.9%) were written by White Presenting People (WPP).There were a total of 50 writers overall. Combined, a total of 26 people who were BWJ (19) and POC (7) contributed to 43.5 articles (43.1%) about Jackie Aina and *Too Faced*,

[8] Two of the writers in the sample presented as male and thus the term "people" is used when talking about the People of Color and White Presenting People who wrote these articles. However, out of the 50 writers in this sample, 48 presented as women. The term "presented" is used because I recognized that my perception of how a person looks is not necessarily how this person identifies and navigates through society. Additionally, sometimes White people do not identify as White. However, race in America has been constructed socially from the binary of Blackness and Whiteness which means that historically all White ethnic groups (Irish, Greek, German) have gradually become lumped as White as a distinction from Blackness and as a way to continue the oppression of Blacks. For this reason, the term presented is used when referring to POC and WPP because I do not know each individual person's preferred racial identification. All the Black writers in the sample presented as women.

representing the majority of the writers on the subject (26/50). This is in comparison to the remaining 24 WPP who were writing about this topic. However, while there were more Black and POC writers total, WPP were responsible for more of the articles at 56.9%, writing a little more than half of the articles in the search results. This is significant because even on a topic about race, colorism, and erasure in the beauty industry, the demographic makeup of the writers illustrates that WPP had more published content in the search results in comparison to Black women and other Persons of Color total.

Numbers do not tell the whole story, however. As a former journalist, I am convinced that there are visible and invisible reasons, not explicitly sinister, that contribute to the makeup of the demographic of writers. Namely, newsroom diversity in traditional media has historically been lacking as news editors were initially reluctant to integrate their newsrooms in the early days of integration (Mellinger, 2013). This suggests that Black women and other marginalized groups are historically and more likely to be underrepresented in this space. Further, journalism is a practice that is often racialized through its obsession with objectivity, a media norm which shuns critical approaches to storytelling thus "casting itself as universal," (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2020, p. 70). This would mean that those who report on social issues from a critical standpoint, particularly from a marginalized identity position may be viewed as biased, which is antithetical to the profession. As a result, recognition of the fact that the majority of articles presented to me in my Google search, 55 out of 101 to be exact, come from outlets birthed out of the original journalism tradition is key to understanding how the demographic of writers in the sample may reflect journalism traditions and its problems with diversity as a field.

Additionally, there are many other industrial considerations that may impact the racial demographics of journalists in this sample. One major consideration I offer is that the internet

and digital technologies have transformed journalism, changing and diversifying who is able to disseminate a story to broader audiences. Black women have notably used social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Blogs, etc.) to create their own discursive communities that allow them to craft and shape their own narratives. These discursive spaces are often insulated, but frequently intersect with mainstream media, thus influencing and impacting larger societal conversations. My contention is, then, that the affordances and abundance of social media platforms continue to nurture Black women's desire to create their own discursive spaces and may be seen as more lucrative than joining an established legacy medium such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Vogue*. Therefore, the underrepresentation of content from Black women in the Google search results is likely due to several industrial and cultural reasons, but nonetheless their underrepresentation in mainstream beauty publications, and thereby Google's search results, reflects the racialization of and marginalization within the journalism profession as whole.

The underrepresentation of BWJ in Google's search results and mainstream beauty publications invites a critical question: *When BWJ are present in these spaces, are they writing about Jackie Aina, colorism, and the beauty industry differently in comparison to White Presenting People and other POC?* The data shows alignment with previous literature that asserts that more representation in news organizations does not always immediately change the tone of the coverage. Past research has noted that increasing representation of Black women in the newsroom does not always change the structure or the content of news itself, despite their efforts to resist and challenge hegemonic norms (Meyers & Gayle, 2015). However, there were instances in the analysis where Black women did use the platform of their respective beauty publications to interrogate considerations around race and beauty, and often from an autoethnographic perspective. This is additional discursive work that encourages readers to make

broader connections between racism, the climate around beauty influencers, and society. I offer two examples to further ground this claim. In a December 2018 *Cosmopolitan* article titled, "*Please can we stop naming dark foundations after puddings, thanks,"* journalist Akesha Reid questions the cosmetics industry's tendency to name makeup products for darker skin tones after puddings and/or an "unimaginative brown caffeinated drink," (Reid, 2018). Reid argues that there needs to be consistency in naming, being that if darker shades of makeup are going to be "fetishized and made into a hot drink/pudding, the lighter shades should get the same treatment too," (Reid, 2018). Though this article questions naming practices around makeup and skin tone in the cosmetic industry, it also subtly engages a larger conversation around history and fetishizing of the Black body (Mercer, 1999)[9]. Similarly, an October 2018 *Teen Vogue* article by Teryn Payne, titled, "*Jeffree Star Responds to Cultural Appropriation Claims After Wearing Cornrows,"* examines cultural appropriation accusations against Jeffree Star, arguably the beauty community's biggest influencer. Payne is careful to remind readers that Star is a repeat offender when it comes to instances involving racism, writing:

> "This isn't the first time Jeffree Star's been called out for being insensitive to the black community. He's been accused of using the N-word numerous times, he allegedly called Jackie Aina a "gorilla", and he was charged with making several derogatory comments about black women, reportedly saying he wanted to throw battery acid on a black woman to lighten her skin to match her foundation," (Payne, 2018).

By listing all of Star's transgressions, Payne connects the topic of Black hairstyle appropriation to other instances of racial violence Star has been accused of, inviting readers to think about the

[9] The chapter by Kobena Mercer (1999) titled "*Reading Racial Fetishism: The photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe"* appear in *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in black cultural studies*, 171-219. This work aims to reveal how race and eroticism are often intertwined in such a way that leads to the fetishizations of the Black body.

current offense as a pattern of behavior as opposed to an isolated incident. In the last sentence of the article, Payne also reminds readers that although Jeffree has been accused of various acts of racism, he "seemingly remains untouched," pointing out that Jeffree has not suffered any consequences as a result of these accusations (Payne, 2018). Further, Payne reminds readers that another prominent beauty influencer by the name of Laura Lee was punished for her racist allegations, through the loss of sponsorships, while Star, who has had multiple rounds of racist allegations arise, remains in good standing. It can be inferred that Payne is subtly asking readers to think about the implications of gender in both instances of racial offense, as Star identifies as a man, with Lee identifying as a woman.

In both articles, both Reid and Payne use their privilege as newsmakers and their identities as Black women to offer subtle critiques on the practices and norms around race within the beauty community. Additionally, both articles are under 700 words, which may reflect journalistic practices around word count and article length. Despite this, it is evident that BWJ work within journalistic norms and constraints, while also still attempting to engage beauty readers in broader conversations around race, skin tone, and beauty. I am not arguing that the writers of other races do not encourage broader conversations around these topics. In fact, there were some occasions where articles by WPP attempted to engage conversations around fetishism and microaggressions (Murray, 2018), racial capitalism and Kylie Jenner (Sinks, 2017) and how the work of Jackie Aina is a form of activism (Simmons, 2018a). However, the identity positions of Black women often allow them to engage their readers in a way that encourages broader connections between race, beauty influencers, and society, particularly using tools (e.g., mainstream beauty publications) that have historically excluded them. Therefore, BWJ writing about these issues in mainstream beauty magazines such as *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Allure* are

not only writing about beauty and racism within the digital beauty industry, but through their writing, they are also simultaneously (intentionally and unintentionally) engaging and confronting the legacy of racism that these magazines have helped maintain and perpetuate. To summarize, the caveat here, then, is that BWJ are present in mainstream beauty publications, and thereby somewhat present in Google's search results, even though they represent a smaller number of writers. Simultaneously, BBP were often excluded or demoted within Google's search results, thus inherently structuring the discourse on Jackie Aina, colorism, and her *Too Faced* product launch as a project led through the lens of Whiteness.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the framing around Jackie Aina's beauty launch with *Too Faced* and the framing of her overall position within mainstream beauty discourse centers her as an expert, where the dominant frame constructs her vocality as something that is trustworthy and necessary for the progression and advancement of the beauty community. This is significant because Black feminists have long pointed out that the knowledge production of Black women is often devalued and often seen as illegitimate sources of information (Hill-Collins, 2002). Therefore, the construction of Jackie Aina as an authoritative voice on matters related to colorism, racism, and beauty have helped restructure mainstream beauty discourse in a way that encourages writers to think about the beauty experiences of those frequently marginalized along the lines of race and skin tone. People with these intersecting identities are being advocated for through beauty influencers like Jackie Aina, influencers who can leverage their social media popularity in a way that encourages companies to create makeup products specifically designed with marginalized people in mind.

However, the analysis also demonstrates that old habits do in fact die hard and the tendency to construct Black women as aggressive and confrontational never completely disappears. The alternative is that there are competing frames, where the framing of Jackie Aina is often dependent upon the goals and aims of the writer and the larger subject context. Because of this, even though the voice of Jackie Aina is elevated within the discourse, we often see the discourse appropriate and use her voice and labor for a variety of purposes. When the frame wants to highlight and focus on the progress being made in the beauty community as a result of diversity and inclusion efforts of companies, then Jackie is seen as an activist and leader within this space and as someone who has contributed to this change. When writers focused on the more dramatic and more entertaining elements of this community, often through the construction of racism as interpersonal feuding and drama, then Aina's construction changes from expert and is almost likened to a boxer in a fight. The nuance around the way that Jackie Aina is framed reveals that the discursive labor that Black beauty influencers engage in to be legitimate members of the beauty community, is more laborious than influencers of other races in this space. Additionally, their labor is often used by multiple parties, including writers, who often use the content of Jackie Aina as content in their own articles.

Lastly, this chapter strives to demonstrate how the structure of beauty discourse is not only dictated by the discursive labor of the beauty influencers and beauty journalists, but also through the platform affordances of social media platforms and its operating systems–namely algorithms. All these elements, which are predominately favorable to White patriarchal understandings of racism and diversity, further decide whose thoughts and opinions are viewed within the discursive record, in this case Google's search results. Therefore, the following chapters will provide a new theorization for Black women's labor in social media influencing, as

algorithmic invisibility and labor appropriation impact the types of labor they have to do. Also, this research will consider how the preferences of Black women, regarding beauty content, may or may not be accounted for within the algorithm. The work in this chapter, then, leaves us with the understanding that Jackie Aina and her beauty collaboration with *Too Faced* were framed progressively, but remains in competition with technological and discursive systems that operate under capitalist and racist constraints.

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Chapter 4

Measuring Skin Tone Bias Towards Black Beauty Influencers

"I've been doing this from the beginning…so….so many of the things that I've championed have become trends. And it's like you don't get any credit you know if your numbers aren't at a certain level and you….don't social climb in a certain way. It'll become hard for you if you stop."
– Destiny Godley on being a Black beauty influencer

The release of Rihanna's cosmetics line in 2017 and the subsequent cosmetic campaigns by various makeup companies in 2018 were largely marketed as inclusive and diverse beauty events, events meant to be read as the beauty industry's reckoning with inequality and exclusion. Although 2018 saw the success of Black mega-influencers like Jackie Aina, Alissa Ashley, and Nyma Tang, not all Black Beauty Influencers (BBI) experienced the same amounts of success.[10] Indeed, Black women's experiences online in the beauty genre are nuanced and uneven. In July of 2018, shortly after Jackie Aina's product launch with *Too Faced,* Black beauty influencer Destiny Godley announced that she was essentially "canceling" herself (Kai, 2018). Godley's reasoning for this was YouTube's algorithm—claiming that the platform was suppressing her content and making it difficult for her subscribers and other users to view and find her content. According to Kai, in the video (now deleted) Godley says,

[10] In 2018, Black mega influencers Jackie Aina, Nyma Tang, and Alissa Ashley, all of which have followers in the millions, had collaborations with popular makeup companies. Jackie Aina released her Too Faced collaboration, Alissa Ashley partnered with NYX to create over 40 new foundation shades (Weiner, 2018), and Nyma Tang created a lipstick product with MAC (Arlexis, 2018).

> "Do I know what's happening? No. Do I know why it's happening? No. Am I surprised that it's happening? No. Well, things generally don't work out for me; I have to work harder, longer, stronger, smarter; I have to be more talented; I have to run faster, I have to jump higher ... So, I'm not surprised that YouTube is shitting on me right now," (Kai, 2018).

As the writer states in the article, Godley's comments point to the fact that Black women must be "twice as good to get half as much," (Kai, 2019). The article then also mentions that Destiny Godley is not as successful as other BBI like Jackie Aina and Nyma Tang.[11] Godley was one of the first dark-skinned beauty influencers on YouTube. Yet despite 13 years on the platform (Godley posted her first makeup video in January 2009), she has only accumulated 361k followers—significantly fewer than some of her mega-influencer peers.

Godley's subscriber numbers should not be seen as an indictment against her talent or an indicator of her importance to the beauty influencer community—she was one of the first to champion diversity and inclusion for women with darker skin tones. Rather, Godley's comments about algorithmic suppression coupled with her slow audience growth on YouTube invite a closer look at nuance in how BBI of varying skin tones experience the digital beauty genre. The work of Ronald Hall (2018) encourages us to consider Critical Skin Theory (CST) as an additional mode for analyzing how racism functions in our society. Hall writes, "as an alternative to race, CST acknowledges that racism by skin color (i.e., colorism) is germane to the social core of Western civilization," (p. 2139). What Hall is pointing to is the notion that racism functions through additional marginalization tools such as skin tone bias and we should pay closer attention to this as Western society becomes more racially and ethnically diverse. Additionally, scholars note that colorism and hair texture discrimination (negative bias against certain afro-hair

[11] Godley's subscribers, per the comment section of her videos, have alluded to the fact that Jackie Aina has stolen some of Godley's video concepts (Godley, 2022). Godley (2022) herself has mentioned that a more prominent Black creator has stolen her video ideas and become famous but has not stated explicitly to whom she was referring. In a comment on one of her videos, uploaded on January 8, 2022, which directly accused Jackie, Godley responded to that viewer alluding to the fact that the viewer was correct in their assumption.

textures) are often intertwined for Black women, creating additional barriers of discrimination for them to navigate (Robinson, 2011; Perkins, 2014). As an example, although Jackie Aina and Nyma Tang are both successful dark-skinned beauty influencers and versatile with their hair styles, Destiny is commonly known for proudly wearing her short-textured hair in an afro, a style which has long been perceived negatively when worn on Black dark-skinned women. Because aesthetics plays a significant role in one's success in the beauty genre, a thorough understanding of Black women's labor in the digital beauty space requires looking at how other aspects of identity in addition to race—such as skin tone and/or hair texture— contribute to how Black women are perceived.

This chapter examines viewers' response to Black women's aesthetic labor by assessing how BBI are perceived on the basis of skin tone. Whereas Chapter Three uses discourse analysis to examine Black women's discursive labor and its impact on beauty and colorism discourse, Chapter Four uses survey experiment methodology to statistically test how colorism may impact the success of Black beauty influencers. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, workers in the beauty industry complete various types of labor to be considered legitimate members of the profession. For beauty influencers who use social media platforms like YouTube, part of their job involves creating images that reflect beauty and glamor–also known as thumbnails. Therefore, this study uses thumbnail images—aesthetic creations produced by Black women on YouTube's platform—to test hypotheses about the impact of colorism on viewer perception and thereby provide insight into the relationship between beauty influencers, colorism, and algorithms. Quantitative research on colorism in the beauty influencer realm is lacking, limiting the breadth of knowledge on this issue. The current study contributes toward fully articulating how perception of Black women may correlate with their success in this genre. The guiding

research question for this study asks: *How does skin tone impact Black women who blog about beauty on YouTube and other social media platforms?* A more comprehensive literature review on the relationship between colorism, beauty, and algorithms follows, integrating bodies of the literature that are often discursively separated.

Colorism as an Economic and Socialization Tool

Colorism, or skin tone bias against darker complexions, penetrates all sectors of our society. In *The Color Complex*, Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall (2013) explain that skin color classism has been around for centuries, with skin color evolving into a signifier for a person's amount of resources, or lack thereof (p. 26). Sociologist Robert Reece (2021) writes that colorism in America "can be traced to chattel slavery," (p. 296), elaborating: "The density of local slave labor directly influenced color stratification after Emancipation. The more slaves that were in a county, the larger the economic differences between light and dark-skinned Black Americans," (Reece, 2021, p. 296). Reece's statements point to the fact that colorism not only plays a role in the socialization of Black Americans, but it also plays a significant role in their economic and financial lives. Research shows that compared to dark-skinned Black Americans, light-skinned Black Americans have higher amounts of income in America's workforce (Reece, 2021; Goldsmith et. al, 2006; Keith & Herring, 1991; Monk, 2014) and better health outcomes (including higher life satisfaction and less psychological distress; McCleary-Gaddy & James, 2022); and that colorism generally is linked with worse physical health conditions overall (Monk, 2021). Media research reveals that apparent skin tone may influence perceptions about an individual; for example, viewers report more negative responses when exposed to dark-skinned (as opposed to lighter-skinned) Black perpetrators in crime news (Dixon & Maddox, 2006). The work of Rameca Leary (2018) also reveals that media content, such as

film, is often a vehicle in which colorism is on display and contributes to people's understanding of the discriminatory practice.

Scholars argue that it is particularly important to examine the effects of colorism as the racial order in America continues to evolve. Blackness, as determined by slavery, labeled persons who had any Black ancestors as legally Black, commonly referred to as the "one-drop rule" (Hickman, 1997). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Victor Ray (2009) note that analyzing racism under this premise may no longer be sufficient, as the United States is increasingly becoming like Latin America where "various racial strata receive social goods in accordance to their proximity to Whiteness," (p. 181). Taunya Lovell Banks (2014) puts forth a concept called *disaggregated Blackness*, an analytical framework for studying race since the Obama era. Banks argues that Black people will increasingly be judged based on salient characteristics in addition to race, including skin tone, education, and wealth (Banks, 2014). Banks writes that we are moving toward a pigmentocracy where,

> "Whiteness is on the top, and blackness broadly defined to include other dark-skinned non-whites, is on the bottom. In the middle will be a broad and changing group of non-whites, light-skinned individuals from various races–who's quest for Whiteness will reinforce this country's persistent ideology of White privilege," (p. 109).

Because racism and discrimination are not linear across any marginalized population, this work adopts the view of the referenced scholarship, treating skin tone as a salient characteristic that influences how Black people are "read" in society. This unfortunate fact potentially adds another layer of discrimination that Black people may have to combat, due to negative perceptions of darker skin tones. On the other hand, those with lighter skin tones may acquire more social and economic privileges because of their aesthetic proximity to Whiteness.

Colorism and Black Women

Colorism is a barrier prevalent in several ethnic cultures, and for Black women in American culture, it is related to attractiveness, beauty, and capital. Research demonstrates that lighter skinned Black people are seen as more attractive in comparison to darker skinned members of their racial group (Frisby, 2006; Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Margaret Hunter (2021) explains that light skin also plays a role in people's "assessments of other traits such as intelligence and kindness," a phenomenon Hunter calls the "halo effect." Black women learn about, and sometimes internalize, colorist ideology at a very young age. In *The Paper Bag Principle,* Audrey Kerr (2005) notes that stories about colorism often serve as folklore in the African American community and thus become "patterns of knowledge that organize or affirm our understanding of who we are," (p. 287). Early research on colorism revealed that while African American women are often satisfied with their skin tones, many of them often idealize "lightness" (Bond & Cash, 1992). Their study revealed that skin color is positively associated with one's satisfaction of their overall appearance, with 36% of their sample stating that they would prefer to be lighter if given the opportunity (Bond & Cash, 1992). Recent research demonstrates that assumptions about colorism by African American girls are like those held by African American women, indicating that colorist ideology is recycled and passed down generationally (Abrams et al., 2020). However, the literature also shows that while colorism is prevalent in Black American family structures (Tharps, 2016), Black girls often resist colorist ideologies that are related to racism and White supremacy (Rosario et al., 2021). Additional research on this topic shows that other factors such as racial socialization, self-esteem, and ethnic identity, can be used as Black cultural tools that often shield Black people from the "pervasiveness of colorism," (Pinkston, 2015, p. 2). However, the persuasiveness of colorism

remains strong and is commonly reflected in the actors and actresses featured in various television and film content (Foster et al., 2021) and through marketing messaging promoted by the beauty industry. The preference for lighter skin is even on display within beauty publications designed for African American audiences (Puff, 2016).

Colorism and the Beauty Industry

The beauty industry is notable for promoting images and aesthetic ideals that reinforce "Whiteness" as the supreme standard to aspire to. Meeta Jha (2016) explains that commercialized events and products such as beauty pageants and Disney films often sell us the myth of the "White princess." Jha writes that the configuration of the White princess is meant to convey "the feminine equivalent of the American dream, achievable through consumer practices of grooming, hygiene, fashion, fitness, hair and skin care and surgical modification, producing racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism in everyday media practices," (Jha, 2016, p. 1). Jha further argues that industries such as the skin lightening and cosmetics industries thus essentially bank on women attempting to alter themselves to meet Eurocentric beauty ideals (Jha, 2016). In comparison to darker shades of makeup, lighter shades of make-up are marketed and seen in greater number (Frisby, 2019). The clothing industry also tends to alienate its darker-skinned workers while using its lighter-skinned workers—who can be read as racially ambiguous—to create a pseudo sense of diversity and inclusion with brands (Walters, 2018). These findings align with Margaret Hunter's argument that our society is designed for consumers to buy into or change aesthetic features to move closer to the standard of Whiteness—also known as the process of attempting to acquire racial capital (Hunter, 2011). This is because lighter skin can help increase one's "social capital, symbolic capital, or economic capital," (Hunter, 2011, p. 145). Therefore, colorism in the beauty industry, an extension of racism, is often used under the

guise of inclusion—privileging some members of a marginalized group and further marginalizing others.

The Intersections Between Aesthetics and Algorithmic Capital Among Beauty Influencers on Social Media

The literature asserts that colorism impacts evaluations of personality traits (e.g., competence) and other aesthetic traits (e.g., attractiveness). Therefore, beauty influencer research—which often considers how hegemonic beauty norms shape this genre—should further consider how skin tone bias can affect the economics and organizational structure of this particular digital sphere, especially for marginalized groups like Black women. Scholars note that beauty influencers turn into internet celebrities acquiring "economic and social benefits" while also being "praised, emulated, and looked up to by millions of viewers (Garcia-Rapp, 2016, p. 1). Research demonstrates that social media use correlates with economic success in other industries. The work of marketing and computer scholars indicates that consumer engagement on social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook is positively correlated with engagement in legacy media, impacting things like box-office revenue for example (Oh et al., 2017). Further, past scholarship also notes that the number of views, comments, and subscriptions, impact a YouTuber's yearly revenue (Han, 2020). Social media sites like YouTube are operated by algorithms, or tools embedded into the platforms that help rank and organize the information available. Safiya Noble (2018) explains that algorithms, especially Google's algorithms, are biased against Black people and particularly harmful to Black women. Google's search engines often link images of Black women to pornography and criminality in its search results, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Black women (Noble, 2018). It is notable that Google's search engine is also linked to the YouTube search engine, being that Google owns YouTube. In the digital beauty genre, algorithms play a role in determining what beauty videos

and whose beauty videos are the most visible to viewers. Indeed, in YouTube's digital beauty community, scholars also note that Black women are commonly subjected to racism and that there is a racial hierarchy (Lawson, 2020; Duffy, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to study algorithms as a primary component that structures the digital beauty genre.

The problem with studying the design of algorithms by large technology companies like Google and YouTube is that the algorithms themselves are considered trade secrets, part of a company's intellectual property. Therefore, access to the specific components that make up the design of the algorithm is often restricted (Pasquale, 2015). However, scholars are creative and have resorted to studying input and output in search engines to understand how certain keywords are linked to certain search results (Mahnke & Uprichard, 2014; Noble, 2018). Scholars also suggest studying the culture of tech companies and how workplace environments influence the design and construction of algorithms (Seaver, 2017). However, it is also difficult to study algorithms on sites like YouTube because algorithms change and adapt to user behavior and preferences (Bliss, 2020). User behavior is a key input; thus, one way to study algorithms is to study user behavior on a given platform. Documenting response of the beauty audience on social media to influencers of varying skin tones can provide measurable evidence of how colorism can potentially impact Black women's success in the influencer industry.

Hypothesis and Goals of the Study

Considering that skin tone informs identity and serves as a cue in person perception, this study explored colorism in the digital beauty community by analyzing influencers apparent skin tone as a variable that shapes user assumptions and content engagement. Using survey experiment methodology, this study examined whether influencers' skin tone predicts the likelihood of clicking on videos of Black beauty influencers, which has (as previously reviewed)

an impact on YouTuber's yearly revenue. In line with existing scholarship, I argue that perceptions of competency and attractiveness are dependent upon perceptions of skin tone. Prior research demonstrates that lighter-skinned people are seen as more attractive and as a result seen as more competent in comparison to darker-skinned members of their same racial group. Therefore, the survey accounts for this and measures the relationship between attractiveness, competence, and likelihood of participants to click content created by the influencer. These perceptions influence interest in content and, ultimately, which videos viewers click on and watch. User clicks serve as input in the algorithm that influences which videos are recommended and rise to the top of search results. As an example, if videos by darker-skinned women are clicked on and watched less than those by lighter-skinned women, then the former are less likely to be recommended by the platform. This can be an example of the platform suppression that Destiny Godley spoke about in 2018. Because the algorithms are not transparent, this study explored user preferences and perceptions to understand how colorism may operate to impact user inputs on platforms like YouTube. Therefore, my broader research question: "*How does skin tone impact Black women who blog about beauty on YouTube and other social media platforms*?" leads to the following specific hypotheses for this study:

H1: A beauty influencer's apparent skin tone impacts their perceived (a) attractiveness and (b) competence, such that lighter skin predicts higher ratings of both attractiveness and competence.

H2: A beauty influencer's apparent skin tone influences user intentions to watch or click on Black beauty content, such that lighter skin predicts greater intention to view.

Method

Participants

Research on natural hair content produced by Black women on YouTube (Sobande, 2017; Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019) shows that we can assume that Black people represent a significant portion of the viewers that watch Black beauty content on the platform. Therefore, this study was limited to respondents in the United States who identified as Black, African American, and/or Afro-Latino, recruited via the research panel firm Dynata. A total of 602 responses were collected. After removing administrative survey previews (n = 2), respondents outside the United States (n = 10), and respondents who did not self-identify as Black, African American, and/or Afro-Latino (n = 14), data from a total of 576 adults over the age of 18 were retained for analysis.

Materials

Experimental Stimuli

To better approximate the way in which users are presented with viewing options on YouTube, respondents were presented with photo thumbnails from beauty YouTube videos created and produced by Black women. Video thumbnails are images that YouTube requires content creators to upload; they are the first images that viewers see when deciding to watch or not watch a video. Creators have the option to make their own images and upload them into the thumbnail slot; if creators decide not to upload their own image, YouTube will select still shots from the video itself and make an automated selection about what image should be used for the thumbnail. Many creators opt to create their own images using image software such as photoshop or an online generator like Canva. Thumbnail photos sometimes use words and other designs to attract viewers and provide informational cues about the video's content.

Selection of Stimulus Material. Through convenience sampling, 24 beauty videos by Black women were selected. The beauty videos produced and created by Black women had a variety of skin tones, hairstyles, and subscriber counts. The thumbnail images were extracted from these videos using an online generator. Beauty videos were searched according to three categories: light-skinned beauty videos for Black women, brown-skinned beauty videos for Black women, and dark-skinned beauty videos for Black women. This was to ensure a wide range of skin tones were present within the sample. For consistency, thumbnail images that used the same editing styles were selected. All the images did not include any words and consisted of dual images where the creators are facing the camera. It is common within the YouTube beauty community for creators to make thumbnails that consist of dual images of themselves—this is so that viewers can clearly see the finished makeup look or hairstyle. To protect Black women's aesthetic creations, the thumbnails were only used in the survey experiment and will not be reprinted within the dissertation. Therefore, for reference, as an example of the stimuli materials, I offer a thumbnail image from one of my own YouTube beauty videos (Figure 11).



Figure 11: This is an example of what a thumbnail image looks like. The images come from a real YouTube video with over 10,000 views and projects what the stimuli looks like in a real platform environment. The images are designed to cover the video so that they are the first thing

viewers see.[12]

Preparation and Manipulation of Stimulus Materials. The 24 thumbnails, reflecting a range of Black women beauty influencers, were then edited to produce the final stimuli for the experiment. Specifically, each thumbnail was digitally altered to produce three different versions that varied only in apparent skin tone: light brown skin, medium brown skin, and dark brown skin. This produced a final set of 72 stimulus photos where each of the 24 beauty influencers were depicted in each of the three different skin tone conditions. Photo editing was completed by a professional graphic designer and other characteristics in the images (e.g., hairstyle, eye color) were not changed.

Measures

Dependent Variables. Perception of influencer competence, attractiveness, and interest in watching the video were the main outcomes of interest.

Competence. Two items were used to assess competence. Competence was assessed with two questions: "*Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger*[13] *pictured*" and "*Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured*," both on 5-point scales with response options from "Highly Skilled" to "Not Skilled at all." Possible responses were Highly Skilled, Skilled, Average, Low Skilled, and Not Skilled at all.

***Attractiveness*.** One item was used to assess attractiveness and asked: "*Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?*" Possible responses include: Extremely Attractive,

[12] This thumbnail image deviates from the images in the stimuli in that it possesses words, and I am not completely facing the camera in the second image. However, the side-by-side photo style of the image is prototypical of the format used in the stimulus materials.

[13] The variation in terminology should be addressed with an understanding that vlogger and influencer are used interchangeably here. Participants were exposed to the word "vlogger." However, influencer is the proper term considering that many vloggers have now transitioned into influencers, with influencing being a legitimate occupation, whether paid or unpaid.

Moderately Attractive, Average, Slightly Unattractive, and Not Attractive at all. The five-point attractiveness scale used here is based on the work of Cynthia Frisby (2006), in which photographs of people were altered according to skin tone to measure the relationship between colorism and physical attractiveness. However, the current scale has a more extreme high-end verbal anchor (i.e., Extremely attractive, as opposed to very attractive) and a neutral—as opposed to negative—low-end verbal anchor (i.e., Not Attractive at all vs. very unattractive).

Likelihood of Clicking. One item was used to assess participants' likelihood of clicking on content created by the beauty influencers they saw. They were asked, "*Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?*" Possible responses include: Definitely Likely, Likely, Not Sure, Probably Not, and Definitely Not.

Additional Measures. Beyond the primary variables of interest, data were collected to assess success of the manipulation and to collect demographic and other individual-difference information.

Skin Tone. The independent variable for the study is the skin tone of the beauty influencer. As a check on whether the skin tone manipulation was successful, respondents' perception of skin tone in each image they saw was assessed using an adaptation of the New Immigrant Study Skin Color scale (Massey & Martin, 2003; Massey et al., 2003). The original scale presents bitmap-type photos of 10 hands on a 10-point scale, with 0 representing absence of color and 10 representing the darkest skin tone. This scale was also used in research by Hutchings et al. (2015) to examine how skin tone impacted Black Americans' beliefs in regard to socioeconomic policies and to control for the impact of survey interviewers' skin tone on respondents' answers. My adaptation omits values for White or Caucasian skin tones, as they are not present in the current stimuli. This results in a 7-point scale (see Figure 12). Second, instead

of images of hands, the scale uses images of foundation makeup smears; this better aligns the judgment being made with the stimuli presented and the overall study context. Additionally, creators of the scale designed the scale with the intention that respondents participating in their study would not see the scale (Hutchings et al., 2015). In a deviation from previous studies, participants in my study saw the scale and used it to make their own judgements in relation to the questions being asked.[14] Further, respondents in the study saw the scale multiple times as they used it to make judgments about the influencers and used it as a guide for judging their own skin tone. This is an important intervention because the original procedure relies on the observation of skin tone from the perspective of a single interviewer, which can potentially introduce miscalculation of all sorts (e.g., misinterpreting skin tone; Hannon & DeFina, 2016). However, my study allows each participant to essentially take the place of the interviewer and therefore make their own judgment about skin tone.



Figure 12: Modification of the New Immigrant Study Skin Color Scale using Foundation Smears

In addition to using the adapted scale to assess the skin tone of the influencer (e.g., "*In your opinion, please select the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger*

[14] The instructions for 2012 ANES Study for interviewers measuring skin tone asserts that participants should never see the scale, assuming that if they see the scale this could potentially change how they respond to questions. However, the participants in my study did not complete this study face to face, but in isolation in the privacy of their own homes, and hypothetically without seeing the skin tone of me, the interviewer.

pictured"), it was also used to ask participants about their own skin tone (e.g., "*In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches YOUR skin tone.*")

Online Beauty Content Interest & Familiarity. To assess respondents' interest in the genre they were asked: "*In the last 30 days, how often have you watched beauty related videos on social media?*" and "*In the last 30 days, how often have you watched beauty videos on YouTube?"* To assess whether respondents recognized any of the vloggers presented in the stimulus materials, they were asked: *"During the survey, did you recognize any of the beauty vloggers in the photos?*"

***Race and Ethnicity*.** The requirements for participation in the survey stipulated that respondents identify as African American or Afro-Latino and lived in the United States. However, it's important to note that the term "African American" also includes many other ethnicities. Therefore, participants were asked to answer the open-response prompt: "*In your own words, please describe the race or ethnicity with which you primarily identify.*"

***Beauty Products*.** To further assess the participants interest in beauty, respondents were asked: "*On average, how much money do you spend on makeup and/or other beauty products monthly?*" Possible responses include: None at all, Less than $20, $20 -$50, $50 - $100, and $100 or more. Respondents could only select one of the answers provided.

***Household Income*.** Participants were asked about their household income: "*What was your total household income during the past 12 months?*" Possible responses include: 1)Less than $25,000, 2) $25,000 - $49,999, 3) $50,000 - $79,999, 4) $80,000 - $99,999, and 5) $100,000 or more.

***Gender*.** Participants were asked to select their gender as a response to the following prompt: "*Please describe the gender with which you primarily identify*." Participants had the

opportunity to select multiple of the following: 1) Man, 2) Woman, 3) Transgender Man, 4) Transgender Woman, and 5) Nonbinary, Gender Non-Conforming, Two-spirit, Gender Fluid, or another gender not listed (If you are comfortable doing so, we welcome you to specify your own term(s). Participants also had the option to write in a gender that was not listed in the survey.

Age group. Participants were asked to select their age group as a response to the following prompt: "*Please select the category that best represents your age group*." Possible responses include the following: Age 18 - 25, Age 26 - 33, Age 34 - 41, Age 42 - 50, Over 50.

***Hometown*.** Like ethnicity, the culture of African Americans based on geographic areas can also influence how people interpret or interact with our societal beauty standards. Therefore, respondents were asked to answer the following open-ended prompt: "*As Black women living in the United States, we are often shaped by the cities and states we grow up in. Although Black women in America are diverse and come from all over the world, we are often impacted by the American cities in which we live. In your own words, please tell me the city, state, or region you would consider to be your hometown. Please feel free to explain why this place is or is not important to you.*"

Procedure

Overview of Participant Experience. Dynata provided eligible members of their survey panel with a link to the survey, which was administered via the Qualtrics survey platform. Participants first read an information form that explained that the study was about understanding Black women's interest and evaluation of beauty content created by Black women, and what general procedures would be used during the survey. Once they indicated their consent to continue, each respondent answered the two *Online Beauty Content Interest* items, and then completed 12 vlogger rating trials. Each trial was presented on a separate page and consisted of a

thumbnail photo followed by the competence, attractiveness, likelihood of clicking, and vlogger skin tone items (in that order). Following the influencer rating trials, participants were presented with questions that assessed influencer familiarity, race and ethnicity, their own skin tone, amount spent on beauty products, household income, gender, and age group in that order. Finally, participants were shown a box for open-ended feedback ("*Is there anything you would like to tell us in regard to your experience completing this survey*?") and then were provided with a closing page containing additional detail about the goals of the study, thanks for their time, and researcher contact information for questions or concerns. The determination of this research by The University of Michigan Institutional Review Board was designated as "Exempt."

Overview of Experimental Design. The experiment used a fractional factorial design in which each participant saw beauty influencers in each of the three skin tone conditions. Skin tone was digitally manipulated to control all other aspects of the images, in an effort to rule out the impact of other variables, such as attractiveness, hair, and or facial features. No respondent saw the same influencer more than once—either within or across skin tone condition; that is, respondents never saw different skin tone versions of the same influencer. To keep the respondent burden manageable, participants saw only 12 photos—4 per skin tone condition. In order to ensure that equal numbers of responses were obtained for all 72 stimulus photos, the influencers were divided into 2 groups using a random process; the resulting sets of stimulus materials each included 36 total photos (12 influencers, each with a light, medium, and dark-skinned version of their thumbnail). For each stimulus set of 36 photos, 6 counterbalanced influencer skin tone condition "blocks" were created, such that each influencer appears an equal number of times in each skin tone condition. The assignment of stimulus photos to blocks is

presented in Table 1 (within a given block, the order of presentation for 12 assigned trials was randomized for each respondent).

Table 1

Counterbalanced Block of Beauty Influencers

Block number	Photo version presented (Skin tone condition)		
	Lighter-skinned	Medium-skinned	Darker-skinned
1	A-D	E-H	I-L
2	A-D	I-L	E-H
3	E-H	A-D	I-L
4	E-H	I-L	A-D
5	I-L	A-D	E-H
6	I-L	E-H	A-D
7	M-P	Q-T	U-X
8	M-P	U-X	Q-T
9	Q-T	M-P	U-X
10	Q-T	U-X	M-P
11	U-X	M-P	Q-T
12	U-X	Q-T	M-P

Note. Each of the 24 influencers is represented in the table by a letter, A-X. Each Block thus includes a specific set of 12 stimulus photos. Respondents are randomly assigned to one of the 12 Blocks at the time of the survey. Within a Block, stimulus photos (trials) appear in random order.

By randomly assigning respondents to one of the 12 counterbalanced blocks, all participants a) are prevented from seeing the same influencer with different skin tones and b) view equal numbers of stimulus photos in each condition. Further, equal numbers of responses are obtained for all stimulus photos, across all skin tone conditions. Importantly, the design allows for influencer skin tone to be a within-subjects variable.

Analysis Plan

The counterbalanced design and manipulation of the photographs allows for a linear mixed model in which the influence of skin tone can be examined independently from any

effects arising from other variability across the influencers and the participants. The research of Judd et al. (2012) explains that treating both the stimuli and participants as random factors allows for researchers to account for the variance in both categories. Judd et al. writes, "failure to adopt analyses that treat participants and stimuli as simultaneous random effects comes at a substantial cost" (p. 54); by failing to incorporate the distinct variance in the stimuli and participant responses, results from experimental studies are likely not replicable if different stimuli are used (Judd et al., 2012). Therefore, I treat skin tone condition as a fixed variable, while influencers and participants are treated as random variables. This accommodates the "imbalanced" design feature of not collecting responses from every participant for every influencer in all skin tone conditions. Further, it allows me to account for (though not explain) any systematic variance in the outcomes of interest that can be explained by a) variation in influencer characteristics beyond skin tone (e.g., hairstyle, face shape), and b) individual participant idiosyncrasies (e.g., aesthetic preferences, mood).

Results

The demographics of the sample are important to note as perceptions of beauty are also impacted by one's own position in society. Table 2 shows the percentage of participants for age, gender, and household income based on the categories provided. Table 3 shows the participants' skin tone to demonstrate where on the scale participants rated themselves in terms of whether they identify as lighter skinned, medium brown skinned, or darker skinned. The results show that the majority of participants were over the age of 50, with the majority of the sample making less than $25,000. However, if we collapse income categories, I assert that about one third of the sample made less than $25,000, about a third made between $25,000 and $49,999, and about a third made over $50,000. Additionally, 42% of the participants identified themselves as having a

medium brown skin tone (Shades 3 and 4), while 27.9% of the participants represented themselves as having light brown skin (Shades 1 and 2). This means that nearly 70% of the participants (69.9%) identified as having a medium brown or light brown skin tone.

Table 2

Categorical Demographic Information on Survey Participants

Category	*n* (Total number)	% (Percentage)
Age Group		
Age 18 - 25	79	13.7
Age 26 - 33	96	16.7
Age 34 - 41	81	14.1
Age 42 - 50	86	14.9
Over 50	192	33.3
Did Not Select	42	7.3
Gender		
Man	7	1.2
Woman	524	91
Transgender Man	3	0.5
Transgender Woman	1	0.2
Non-Binary	10	1.7
Did Not Select	43	7.5
Annual Household Income		
Less than $25,000	179	31.1
$25,000 - $49,999	163	28.3
$50,000 - $79,999	112	19.4
$80,000 - $99,999	29	5
$100,000 or more	43	7.5
Did Not Select	50	8.7

Note. $N = 576$, so *n* represents the number for each category. Participants were only allowed to select one option for each question, with the exception of the gender question. In the gender question, they were allowed to select multiple answers, therefore some of these participants are represented twice in only the gender category. None of these questions were required.

Table 3

Self-Reported Skin Tone from Participants

Reported Skin Complexion	*n*	% of Participants Per Category
 (Light Brown Shade)	56	9.7%
 (Light Brown Shade)	105	18.2%
 (Medium Brown Shade)	130	22.6 %
 (Medium Brown Shade)	118	20.5%
 (Dark/Medium Brown Shade)	85	14.8%
 (Dark Brown Shade)	25	4.3%
 (Dark Brown Shade)	3	0.5%
Did Not Select an Option	54	9.4%

Note. *N*= 576, so *n* represents the number for each category. Participants were only allowed to select one option for this question.

The results for this study were achieved using a linear mixed model for the hypothesis testing to further explore the relationship between the fixed effect of skin tone, and participant ratings for attractiveness, competence, and their likelihood of clicking. The analysis used the linear mixed effects model package (lme4) in R. Participants and influencers were treated as random effects. However, this dissertation focuses on the fixed effect of skin tone.

Hypothesis 1A tested the assumption that a beauty influencer's apparent skin tone predicts their perceived attractiveness. Table 4 (Appendix B) shows the linear mixed model where the relationship between attractiveness and skin tone are measured, treating participants and influencers (vloggers) as random effects and skin tone as the fixed effect. The model uses the Light Brown Skin Condition (LBSC) as the reference condition, and produces an intercept estimate of 3.93 (on a 1-5 point scale; 95% CI: 3.79 – 4.07). This means that in the LBSC, on average, Light Skinned Influencers (LSI) are rated between *Average* and *Moderately Attractive* The remaining skin tone conditions are reported in reference to the estimate of 3.93. For the Medium Brown Skin Condition (MBSC), the intercept estimate is 0.02, indicating that on average, Medium Brown Skinned Influencers (MBSI) were rated 0.02 points higher on the attractiveness scale (95% CI: -0.06 – 0.10). In contrast, for the Dark Brown Skin Condition (DBSC), the intercept estimate is -0.19, indicating that on average, Dark Skinned Influencers (DSI) were rated 0.19 points lower on the attractiveness scale (95% CI: -0.29 – -0.08). The 95% confidence interval for influencers in the MBSC includes zero, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between ratings for influencers in the LBSC and the MBSC. The 95% confidence interval for influencers in the DBSC does not include zero, indicating that DSI are, on average, rated lower than LSI. Overall, influencers in all skin tone conditions were rated as attractive by participants, with the ratings falling between *Average* and *Extremely Attractive*. However, DSI on average, were less likely to be rated as attractive in comparison to influencers with lighter skin tones.

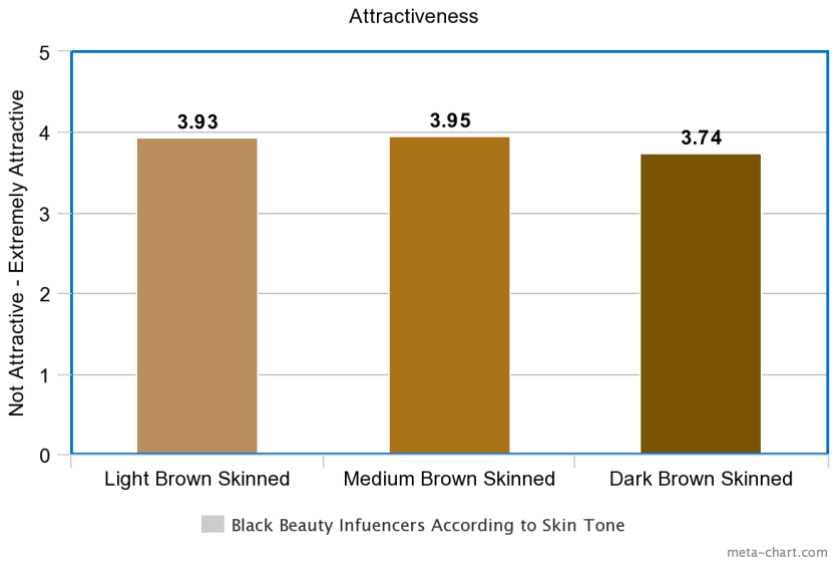


Figure 13: This graph that shows the attractiveness ratings of Black beauty influencers (BBI) by participants. There is a 0.02 increase in attractiveness ratings between the MBSC and LBSC. There is a -0.19 decrease in ratings between the DBSC and the LBSC.

Hypothesis 1B tests the assumption that a beauty influencer's apparent skin tone predicts their perceived competence, such that LSI will receive higher competence scores. The competence score for influencers were combined into a single variable, though measured conceptually through two items. Table 5 (Appendix C) shows the linear mixed model where the relationship between competence and skin tone were measured, with participants and influencers (vloggers) treated as random effects. Skin tone is treated as the fixed effect, with LBSC as the reference condition. The competence estimate for the LBSC is 3.81 (95% CI: 3.67 – 3.94), indicating that on average, LSI received scores that measured their competence as somewhere between *Average* and *Skilled*. The estimate for MBSC is 0.06, with a 95% CI of -0.02 – 0.14, indicating no difference from the LBSC. In contrast, the estimate for DBSC is -0.16, with a 95% CI of -0.27 – -0.05, indicating that on average, DSI were rated lower than LSI. Overall, all of the influencers were rated between *Average* and *Skilled*, but DSI received lower scores of competence.

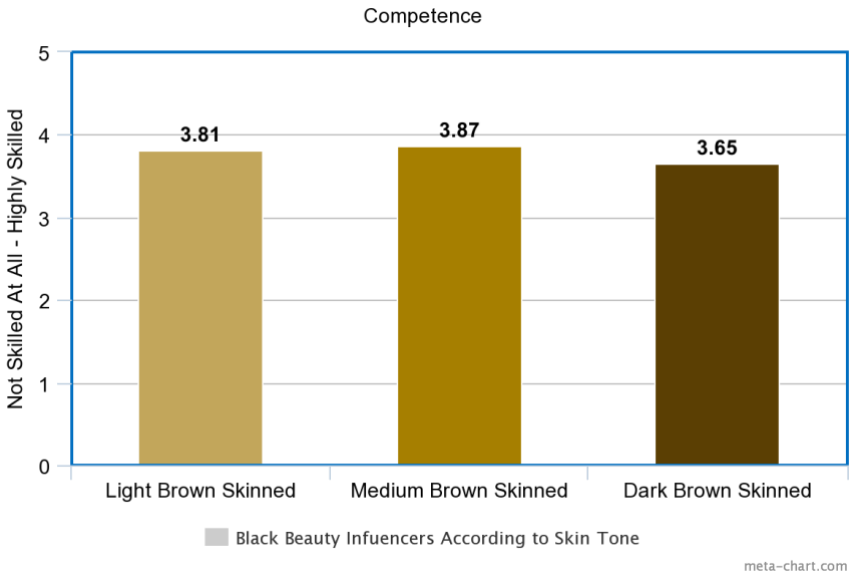


Figure 14: This graph that shows the competence ratings of BBI by participants. There is a 0.06 increase in competence ratings between the MBSC and LBSC. There is a -0.16 decrease in ratings between the DBSC and the LBSC.

Hypothesis 2 tests the assumption that a beauty influencer's apparent skin tone predicts the likelihood that participants will click on videos made by BBI–assuming that LSI will receive higher click scores and are more likely to be watched. Table 6 (Appendix D) shows the linear mixed model where the relationship between clicks and skin tone were measured, with skin tone treated as the fixed effect and participants and influencers (vloggers) treated as random effects. The click estimate for influencers in the LBSC is 3.48 (95% CI: 3.34 – 3.62), indicating that on average, LSI received scores that measured the likelihood of clicking as between *Not Sure* and *Likely*. The estimate for MBSC is 0.07, with a 95% CI of -0.01 and 0.15, indicating no difference from the LBSC. In contrast, the estimate for DBSC is -0.17 with a 95% CI of -0.27 – -0.05, indicating click scores for DSI are definitively lower than LSI.

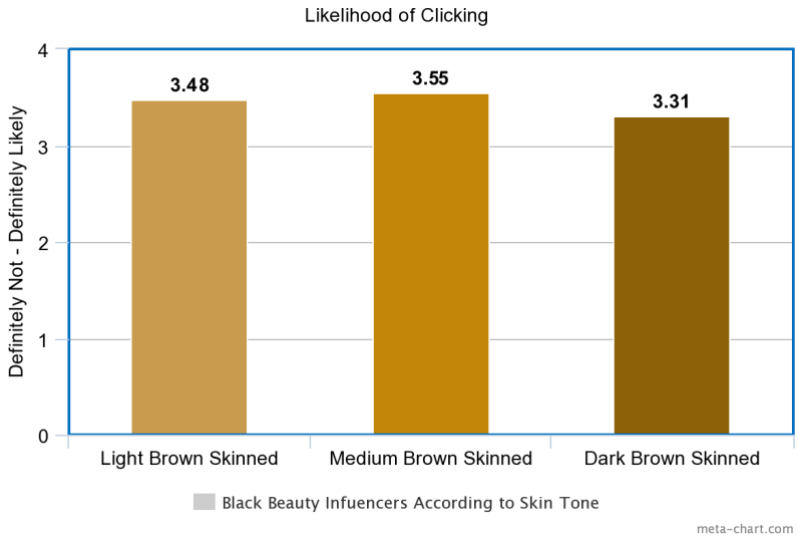


Figure 15: This graph that shows the likelihood of Click ratings of BBI by participants based on the three skin tone conditions. There is a 0.07 increase in click ratings between the MBSC and LBSC. There is a -0.17 decrease in ratings between the DBSC and the LBSC.

Discussion

My analysis provides support for the hypotheses tested in the study. My first hypothesis is ultimately supported, indicating that influencers with light brown and medium brown skin tones are perceived as more attractive and more competent than influencers with darker skin. My second hypothesis is also supported, as respondents were less certain that they would click and view the beauty content of darker skinned beauty influencers as compared to influencers in the light brown skin tone conditions. There are a couple important implications that these results raise. First, biases against darker skinned influencers may not only demonstrate that skin tone bias impacts likelihood of click decisions in beauty content, but also that these biases have the potential to impact dark-skinned Black women financially. Social media influencers that meet qualifying criteria, particularly on YouTube, are able to make a percentage of money from their videos. The more their videos are clicked and watched, the more of a chance they have to increase the revenue for their channel. As a reminder, the respondents in my survey study primarily identified as Black women, the group assumed to be the target and core audience of

Black beauty content. Therefore, if Black women themselves are less certain that they would click on videos of darker skinned influencers, this could potentially contribute to DSI being watched less. This may ultimately put this group of creators at a financial disadvantage on YouTube's platform, contributing to more marginalization.

Second, YouTube's algorithm tends to promote videos that have heavy traffic leading to more views for those videos that are heavily being watched. If potential viewers of Black beauty content are less certain that they will click the videos of darker-skinned influencers, this means they may not click, which would mean that YouTube's algorithm will push video by darker-skinned creators further to the bottom of its search results, trending, or suggested video sections. This could lead to algorithmic invisibility for darker skinned Black women, where this group is not only being marginalized by user preferences, but also by the platform itself because of user preferences. This also creates situations where skilled creators, like aforementioned influencer Destiny Godley, feel that they have to work twice as hard to beat the algorithm and gain visibility on the platform. If viewers are unsure that they would watch Black women's content and algorithms marginalize the content because of low engagement, this likely suggests that influencers with darker skin tones may not have an equal opportunity to have their content viewed, and thereby in comparison to influencers with lighter skin tones, will not have an equal opportunity monetize their content. Scholars note that quantifiable metrics, such as "likes, favorites, subscribers, and shares," are important markers of online visibility and can help dictate influencer success in "digital creative economy," (Duffy et al., 2021, p. 1). Therefore, on YouTube, data analytics such as number of views, likes, and dislikes are all publicly available data metrics that can be used in favor or against influencers in the influencer economy. The work of Sophia Bishop (2021) asserts that influencer management tools are often used by "talent

agents and brand liaisons" when they select influencers for marketing campaigns (p. 10). Bishop explains that these tools, "present analytics data and make algorithmic calculations designed to support marketers in selecting appropriate influencers for advertising campaigns, through subjective calculations about influencers' *brand safety* and *risk*," (Bishop, 2021, p. 1). Bishop further concludes that the process used to select influencers for appropriate campaigns tend to harm creators from marginalized groups, as they can likely have lower scores, which decrease chances of selection (Bishop, 2021). Black influencers are already marginalized in the influencer sphere, therefore, if darker skinned beauty influencers are more likely to receive less clicks, which can culminate in less views, they have the potential to be marginalized by users, the social media platform itself due to algorithmic invisibility, and the wider influencer industry who use the quantifiable data publicly available on social media profiles to make inferences about the marketability of particular influencers.

Project Limitations and Scope of Future Research

There are four limitations to this study that will be expanded in future work in order to better assess the marginalization that Black women experience in the digital beauty genre. The first major limitation is that the observations of user preferences were not measured or observed on an actual social media platform, in this case YouTube. Therefore, this study relies on participants' perspective to assess what type of content they may or may not click on, but it does not measure what participants would actually click on when they are presented with the actual videos in a platform environment. Additional studies should thereby observe how these behaviors play out on the actual platform. However, that type of study is complicated by the need to make sure the content presented to participants is not shaped by any personalized search

history, as algorithms tend to present us with options that match our previous search preferences or viewing habits.

The second limitation of this study is the age of the sample. Although it is important to know the social media habits of older populations, especially older Black populations, the generalizability of this study would be strengthened by knowledge of how younger populations perceive this content. Greater diversity in respondent age would better reveal how colorism is viewed from an intergenerational perspective and how those intergenerational differences, or similarities, impact creators in the digital beauty genre.

The third limitation, which was discovered upon obtaining the results of this study is that nearly 70% of the sample identified as light or medium brown skin and could be considered of lower socioeconomic status. The majority of my sample is not only lighter skinned or medium brown skinned, but 31% of the sample makes less than $25,000 dollars. These results may point to internalized colorism as a result of the women having a skin tone advantage[15]. This is consistent with research that explains that as socioeconomic income is lowered, skin tone becomes an identifiable characteristic which impacts one's self esteem, especially for African American women (Keith and Thompson, 2001). Therefore, women who are lighter skinned but from low socioeconomic backgrounds are going to have higher amounts of self-esteem in comparison to darker-skinned women (Keith and Thompson, 2001). This can further perpetuate instances of colorism. It is possible that the lighter skinned or medium brown skinned women in the study related more to the content of influencers that matched their skin tones. However, discrimination upon the grounds of colorism can be intentional and unintentional, and even if something is unintentional, the harm can still be significantly impactful in the lives of dark-

[15] This phrase is used for lack of better terms. While it is ugly to think that some people have advantages simply because of their skin tone, it is true, and people who have it are often aware of it.

skinned Black women. However, I am aware that there could be a multitude of reasons for the selections made by participants, which is why in-depth interviews with participants would be insightful in future research. Further, darker-skinned Black women were underrepresented in the study. With the results showing that lighter skinned women and medium brown skinned women received more favorable ratings across attractiveness, competence, and likelihood of clicking, it would be necessary in a future study to tease out whether 1) these results would be the same if darker skinned wore more equally represented and/or 2) why the lighter skinned and medium brown skinned women feel this way in terms of their selection.

The fourth limitation of this study is that it is genre dependent. While beauty is an important site of investigation for the digital labor of Black women, I want to make clear that I do not assume that the logic and norms embedded within this digital enclave apply to all social media genres. Better stated, I am not assuming that darker skinned influencers in the beauty genre automatically have the same experiences in other digital communities, such as the gaming genre or the cooking genre. However, because colorism is pervasive throughout society, it is reasonable to hypothesize that similar effects might be present. Future research should continue to examine how racism and discrimination online impact marginalized groups in other genres, from the vantage point of other identity characteristics such as skin tone, body type, class, education levels, etc. This is necessary because discrimination is not linear or even and therefore does not impact all groups the same. If we can reveal the different ways that minority groups are marginalized, then we can also begin to come up with solutions that hopefully lead to a more equitable internet and social media experience.

Conclusion and Project Contribution

This study is the first step in revealing that there are viewer preferences along the lines of skin tone for Black beauty influencers, which can potentially open up further study about income inequality among Black influencers generally. Because these preferences were observed, future research should replicate this phenomenon and explore whether the perception of favorability among skin tone predicts financial profits from content produced online for Black women. As mentioned previously, scholarship in the area has hinted at the fact that racism impedes opportunity in the social media influencer industry, being that the industry revolves around numerical and quantifiable metrics. However, there are less quantitative studies that show these possible discrepancies and so this study is one of the earliest to provide measurable evidence to further support what critical cultural scholars have long noticed. Future studies should examine this phenomenon by surveying influencers themselves in regard to the income they make from their content. This will expand digital studies scholarship to include study of compensated labor online and how skin tone impacts this domain. This is increasingly important to consider as digital technologies are used by Black populations as a means for simultaneous activism and entrepreneurship.

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Chapter 5

Towards a Theory of Racial Phenotype Labor: Theorizing Skin Tone Work in the Beauty Influencer Industry

"When we talk about racism, I feel like…I think some of us are having different conversations. Because there is no racism without colorism, it does not exist. Because they are looking for people who are Blickity-Black…..who are…I can look at you Black…and I know that you Black… I know how to mistreat you when I see you type of Black…. these are the people who get mistreated." – Dr. Donna Oriowo on *The Grapevine* Panel Series

"The reality is that phenotype matters, genotype…you know all of these things matter." – Uchechi Chinyere on *The Grapevine* Panel Series

Although Black women beauty influencers continue to make significant strides in the digital media and beauty industries, this research aims to effectively illustrate that labor required of Black women influencers is separate and unequal from that of other influencers in general, particularly for those with darker skin tones. Chapter Three uses discourse analysis to explain how Black women's discursive labor has impacted the dominant script around racism and colorism in the beauty industry, with more brands latching on to marketing around diversity and inclusion. The research of Ronald Jackson (2006) concludes that ideological and political discourses are often placed on to Black public figures and the Black body is further "scripted" to possess certain connotative meanings (Jackson, 2006; Jackson 2014). For Black women influencers like Jackie Aina and Alissa Ashley, who have come to be regarded as public figures, conversations about racism, colorism, and inequality have been attached to their platforms and mapped onto their very beings–burdening them with the tasks of confronting these issues. This research has illustrated that this is a call that many Black beauty influencers eloquently answer,

as the presence of Black beauty influencers in the digital sphere has aided in the reshaping of beauty discourse and beauty industry practices.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of Black beauty influencers, the survey study in Chapter Four provides measurable evidence that illustrates that Black women may still be negatively impacted by the dominant scripts of the beauty industry–which prefers aesthetics associated with lighter skin and Whiteness. Participants in the survey indicated that they would be less likely to click on the beauty videos of darker skinned beauty influencers, which can potentially lead to invisibility and low revenue for some Black women beauty creators. Much of the work on beauty influencers has recognized the costs and hidden labor associated with the glorified influencer occupation and have even considered how racism plays a role in the hierarchy of influencers. However, less attention has been given to the ways that skin tone defines one's subject position in the beauty influencer industry, thus shaping the very nature of the labor required of Black beauty influencers who are seeking to be recognized as legitimate members of this digital genre. The extra labor required of persons from a severely marginalized subject position within a marginalized population is what I call *Racial Phenotype Labor (RPL)*. I argue that Black people, and Black women specifically because of racist beauty standards, with phenotypic features perceived as undesirable, enter digital spaces at an additional disadvantage, thus making it a requirement for them to complete additional physical, emotional, and mental work particularly as beauty influencers. This work must combat the biases and prejudices associated with their physical features, namely their dark skin. This chapter uses a review of the literature to offer new conceptualizations about the labor completed by raced individuals on social media platforms, particularly by dark skinned Black women in the beauty influencer

community. This chapter will examine *skin tone work* which I argue is one of several layers of RPL.

The Labor Logics of Social Media and Digital Platforms

On social media platforms, the lines between users and producers are increasingly blurred because users are able to occupy dual roles (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012). Media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) deems this evaporating line of demarcation as convergence culture, the site at which media content travels across multiple platforms in a way that establishes cooperation between audiences and various media industries (p. 2). Jenkins argues that the flow of this content is reliant on active participation by users, which he terms participatory culture. This is different from consumers of older media who were generally thought to be more passive (Jenkins, 2006), though scholars reveal that people have always occupied the dual roles of consumer and producer (Ritzer et al., 2012). Jenkins and Mark Deuze (2008) also assert that convergence culture is both a top-down and bottom-up process driven both by corporate companies and consumers. They write, "This push to 'harness' audience power is implicit in current discussions about 'user-generated content', which some see as enabling a more diverse and responsive media culture and others consider as a means of outsourcing ('crowd-sourcing') creative labor," (p. 6). Jenkins and Deuze's assumption are that the roles of users and companies fluctuate, thereby creating a unique culture based on new forms of creative labor. Feminist media scholars Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson (2011) assert that convergence culture is gendered, requiring women to participate affectively, similar to the ways that they are 'expected' to operate in the home. Ouellette and Wilson agree with Jenkins that participatory culture is not an equitable environment and that even within research on this area, many groups, including women, are ignored. They call for scholarship to consider women's interactivity outside

"feminized private spheres," (p. 1-2). Although beauty is the central topic of this project, an area that is considered feminized, Black women historically have been considered unfeminine and so exploration of this feminine sphere is worthy of study.

However, the rise of tech companies and their relationship with capitalism reinvoke scholars' earlier concerns around digital labor and the possible formation of the digital bourgeoisie and the digital proletariat. Digital theorist Tiziana Terranova's work (2000) explains that the relationship between labor and society is increasingly complicated as the boundaries between labor and the completion of voluntary activities become intertwined. Terranova writes,

> "Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labor on the Net includes the activity of building Web sites, modifying software packages, reading, and participating in mailing lists, and building virtual spaces on MUDs and MOOs. Far from being an "unreal," empty space, the Internet is animated by cultural and technical labor through and through, a continuous production of value that is completely immanent to the flows of the network society at large,*"* (p. 33-34).

Terranova's point is that many (if not all) aspects of the internet and its use involve some type of labor, and that (for most of us) that labor is voluntary, leading to a sphere that relies on and profits from this flow of constant production. In line with Terranova's arguments, Christian Fuchs (2015) uses the notion of audience commodity to interrogate how users of social media sites potentially contribute to their own exploitation. This especially impacts Women of Color who have found the internet and social media sites to be both a place of refuge and place of harm. Raven Maragh (2016) argues that social media sites like Twitter profit from Black women's engagement as they produce affective labor. Maragh explains how Black women's' use of Twitter when discussing television content, stereotypes, and colorism–though emotionally and mentally draining–is monetarily profitable for Twitter as a business. The discourse around Black women, stereotypes, and their experiences is on public display and Black women work to correct misinformed narratives about their group. And while Twitter offers a space for this marginalized

group to be heard, it also–theoretically–profits off their trauma. Thus, the literature reveals the veil of the various types of labor that users of the internet and social media platforms engage in, and how the lines between users and producers are blurred.

User-Generated Content and Segmentation of Users

User-generated content and the rise of social media networks have led to the theorization of different types of users notably in the contexts of entertainment, self-branding, and beauty. Theresa Senft's (2008) research explains that the rise of network culture forces us to make decisions around our 'presentation of self' and we construct this presentation around our thoughts on the perceived audience of the presentation. Using Arlie Hochschild's theory of emotional labor, Senft asserts that engagement online through self-presentation is work and the audience is the consumer (Senft, 2008, p. 9). Senft (2013) further argues that the internet is essentially a marketplace and users frame themselves through the categories of seller, buyer, or commodity. Senft theorizes that obsession with self-branding is a 'paradox in late-capitalism' in which people have grown weary of the "American dream/bootstrap mythos, as young people continue to endure and recover from reoccurring economic crashes," (Senft, p. 349). Digital media theorist Alice Marwick (2013) asserts that social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube inherently teach users to be concerned with branding, marketing, and attention—ultimately reproducing inequality. Marwick writes,

> "These strategies combine the entrepreneurialism fetishized by techies and businesspeople with marketing and advertising techniques drawn from commercial and celebrity culture. Social media has brought the attention economy into the everyday lives of millions of people worldwide…," (p. 10).

The attention economy through likes, retweets, or shares often benefits users with larger audiences, allowing them to attract the attention of corporations. Sites like YouTube and Instagram, where visuality is the selling point of the platform, have become embedded into our

cultural fabric. The embedding of the attention economy into aesthetic social media platforms, means that there is a high reward in cultivating a public persona. This also means that users become segmented into categories which include social media users and social media influencers. The social media influencer category is thereby hierarchical, as it consists of micro-influencers, macro-influencers, mega-influencer, and A-list social media celebrities (Gomez, 2019).

Types of Labor Required of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers engage in work that is physically, emotionally, and socially strenuous, all to appear as niche experts and credible voices in their genres. Crystal Abidin (2016a) explains that influencers often engage in *subversive frivolity*–where normalized influencer practices (e.g., taking selfies) that appear lighthearted or thoughtless are undervalued, and actually possess a cultural power that enables influencers to potentially reap personal and public benefits. Additionally, Abidin suggests that this is the result of the influencer's *tacit labor*, labor which is described as "so thoroughly rehearsed that it appears effortless and subconscious," (Abidin, 2016a, p. 10). Abidin further concludes that influencers engage in *visibility labor*, which are the efforts and activities that aid in the curating of persona, a persona crafted with the intention of achieving recognition (Abidin, 2016b). The caveat then, is that while the work appears to be thoughtless, it is actually thoughtful, with influencers going above and beyond to craft a self-presentation that convinces their followers that they are "just like them." Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka (2017) explain that the intimate connection that forms between the influencer and their audience, especially on YouTube, in addition to the influencer's ability to "naturally promote themselves," is a "primary component" in the success of influencers on the

platform (p. 309). Sarah Banet-Weiser (2021) theorizes the notion of authenticity as labor writing,

> "Instagram influencers craft their self-brand around discourses of "authenticity," where they are more commercially successful the more relatable, intimate, and vulnerable their self-presentation. Yet at the same time, to be "authentic" for influencers also means to strictly conform to dominant white, cis-gender norms," (p. 141-142).

What Banet-Weiser makes clear is that authenticity is a strategic self-presentation. Therefore, this work that is supposed to appear effortless in nature is a rehearsed act. Appearing ordinary thereby involves a lot of work that is hidden and erased from public view.

Influencers, though communicating to their followers that they are just like them, are actually attempting to separate themselves from the masses, the result of a hyper-commercialized digital sphere. Scholarship notes that influencers spend a great deal of time building their audience which amounts to extensive *attention labor* (Brooks et al., 2021). The work involved in attention labor is undoubtedly connected to the celebrification of influencers, "the process by which influencers acquire celebrity capital within an interconnected social media advertising ecosystem," (Brooks et al., 2021, p. 529). Jonathan Mavroudis (2018) explains that this push towards visibility or recognition fosters an atmosphere where participants in social media microcelebrity culture fall victim to engaging in *fame labor*, which is the emotional work performed as a result of trying to succeed in a cultural landscape led by influencers and celebrities. Mavroudis writes, "the persuasive need to publicly document moments in life seems to take priority over enjoying the moment. Interestingly enough, those who do not document are pathologized within microcelebrity circles," (Mavroudis, 2018, p. 89). What Mavroudis' notion of fame labor points to is the work influencers do to manage the anxiety that comes with striving to obtain visibility, while also dealing with the potential ostracization that may arise if one

chooses to opt out of the selfie society. The reality is that this is unsustainable and many of those attempting to become influencers will never reach the platform of mega social media celebrities, which Mavroudis so eloquently notes. Brook Duffy (2018) echoes this sentiment and explains that many engage in this creative work in the hopes of one day "making it"—a practice Duffy calls *aspirational labor*. Duffy writes,

> "Aspirational labor is a mode of uncompensated production where vloggers/bloggers create cultural products in the hopes of one day getting paid, although they are not currently making any economic profits, it is based on the concept of getting to do what you love and it creates the dream of the possibility of leisure and labor coexisting," (p. 4).

Duffy further concludes that aspirational labor is historically linked to aspirational consumption, a gendered mythos that asserts one can increase or change one's social, economic, or cultural status through participation in the consumerist marketplace (Duffy, 2018). What the discussed literature draws attention to is that most of the labor completed by social media influencers is designed to get their followers to "buy in." Whether they are selling or endorsing actual material products or attempting to sell a self-presentation designed around naturalness, ordinariness, and intimacy, many influencers are ultimately aiming to position themselves as similar, yet distinct from that of their audience.

Racialized Emotional Labor in Digital Counterpublics

The labor required of social media influencers is often emotionally and mentally intensified for Black creators and influencers. Wesley Elizabeth Stevens (2022) explains that the historical connections between the simultaneous "othering" and commodification of the Black body places Black influencers in a bind, where they must concurrently embody and distance themselves from Blackness in order to be in accordance with the economic and social norms of the influencer industry. Stevens (2022) writes,

> "Because the Black body has been commodified by governments, economic systems, and media industries alike, race itself has become a commodity. Brands often look to leverage that commodity by collaborating with Black influencers, yet those Black creators are expected to do 'twice the work' to secure partnerships even as their bodies are necessarily objectified in the process," (p. 73).

Stevens' notions of 'twice the work' can be seen in the content produced by Black influencers. Alexandria Lockett (2019) notes that Black women generally use digital platforms to extend the legacy and work of Black feminism, thereby transforming the digital sphere to a space where Black women directly counter and correct "centuries" of misrepresentation. Using that logic, Black beauty influencers enter the digital beauty genre from the standpoint of having to counter the dominant hegemonic view that Blackness, and Black women especially, are not beautiful or desirable. As a result, this requires more emotional labor. Savannah Setter (2021) explains that beauty influencers from marginalized positions (e.g., race, gender, etc.) perform additional emotional labor in their content. Because their identities often lie outside conventional beauty standards, Setter argues that their personal feelings about this are often displayed in their content, and commodified as a result (Setter, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, social media scholars who study the ways emotional labor is employed in digital spaces often borrow from Arlie Hochschild's conceptualization of emotion work. Hochschild (1979) theorizes emotion work as efforts completed to control or manage one's emotions so that they are appropriate for various social contexts. The research of Apryl Williams, Zaida Bryant, and Christopher Carvell (2019) departs from Hochschild's theory in that they assert that for people of color online, much of their emotional labor is uncompensated resulting in more racist interactions and *racial battle fatigue*. What the theory of Williams et al. (2019) adds to the literature is the idea that People of Color are expected to manage their expectations in predominantly White institutions in an effort to survive. This is so their actions

do not affirm controlling images, or stereotypes that White people already have in mind (Williams et al., 2019). Therefore, not only are People of Color expected to do their job which they are paid for, they also must do this emotional work that is unpaid. For Black beauty influencers, this means that they are tasked with completing the work that is expected of influencers, in addition to managing their emotions to avoid racial battle fatigue, while also having to deal with their racial identities being a central part of their branding. I argue that Black beauty influencers cannot avoid racial battle fatigue, as many of their platforms are built through their personal recognition and disdain for racist beauty standards, fueled by their desire to invert those standards in a way that celebrates Blackness and Black aesthetics. Black women sharing their personal experiences online, especially in the realm of beauty has resulted in digital enclaves, placing them as community leaders for other Black women in the digital sphere. Catherine Knight Steele (2016) explains that the practice of blogging for Black women often mirrors the Black beauty shop and acts as a hush harbor where they can form "alternate publics" to "critique the dominant culture," (p. 1). Therefore, not only do Black beauty influencers have to do the emotional work of appearing authentic, ordinary, and beautiful, Black influencers are also voluntarily and involuntarily tasked with leading digital counterpublics–digital communities who challenge hegemonic norms through their discursive practices (Hill, 2018).

Black Beauty Influencer's Mental Labor: Navigating the Threat of Blackfishing and Appropriation

The work of Black influencers and Black beauty influencers is also more mentally intensive in comparison to White influencers. I argue that this is largely due to the potential risk of cultural appropriation by non-Black people, corporate entities, and machines. In America,

historically, Blackness is juxtaposed as antithetical to Whiteness. E. Patrick Johnson (2003) reminds us that,

> "White Americans also construct Blackness. Of course the power relations maintained by white hegemony have different material effects for blacks than for whites. When white Americans essentialize blackness, for example, they often do so in ways that maintain "whiteness" as the master trope of purity, supremacy, and entitlement, as a ubiquitous, fixed, unifying, signifier that seems invisible," (p. 4).

What Johnson points to is the tendency of White Americans to caricaturize and highlight elements of Blackness that they find non-threatening to Whiteness, further labeling these portrayals as "authentic" (Johnson, 2003). This ultimately is a construction of Blackness that helps uphold White supremacy. Johnson further suggests that those who take part in this construction have great social and economic power, writing,

> "Many times these arbiters of authentic blackness have the economic and/or social clout to secure particular attributes of blackness—for example, dreadlocks, vernacular speech, living in a particular part of town, etc.—as the components of the template from which blackness originates," (p. 2).

In the case of Black beauty influencers–they must endure White women, who already possess more economic and social power in society, appropriating their hairstyles, speech, and skin color. Even worse, White beauty influencers manage to accrue more economic and social profit through this performance. This practice, particularly in the digital, is commonly referred to as *Blackfishing*. The term "Blackfishing " is a play on the term "Catfishing", a practice where someone uses modern day technology (e.g., social media, smart phones, computers, etc.) to trick someone into believing they are someone other than who they actually are (Cherid, 2021). This practice is not new and historically related to the practice of Blackface minstrelsy, a performance where White men used dark makeup on their faces and performed in theater and films as African Americans (Johnson, 2012). Stephen Johnson (2012) argues that society is experiencing a

resurgence of this racist artform and that performances of Blackface in media have truly "never left us," (p. 2). Black women in the digital beauty genre not only endure the violent practice of Blackfishing as committed by White women, but they also endure them from other entities. Recent research has demonstrated that companies and brands are creating computer-generated influencers with Black aesthetics to build followings for consumer engagement (Sobande, 2021; Marwick, 2018). In regard to the creation of Black computer-generated influencers, created by White computer programmers and used to diversify brands, Francesca Sobande (2021) writes, "CGI influencers are digital canvases that their creators can project messages about so-called racial diversity on, while platforming their own work and without even having to involve or pay real Black people," (p. 135). Further, visual social media platforms, like TikTok, contribute to what scholars call the "evolution of digital Blackface,"[16] where the content of Black creators (e.g., dance challenges) is mined, extracted, and appropriated by White people and thus rewarded by the platform itself (Davis, 2022). Cienna Davis (2022) argues that,

> "Rather than reaping the full social and economic rewards of their content, Black creators are repeatedly alienated from the product of their labor without proper credit and compensation. Instead, their labor and play become a source of commercial profit for platforms and white influencers who are miscredited with creating cultural trends,"[17] (p. 29).

Blackfishing, then, is the practice that occurs on Instagram and YouTube as White women are reaping the benefits of cultural trends they did not create. In this case, Black beauty influencers,

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[16] Davis notes that the phrase "evolution of digital Blackface" originates from a *Wired* article written by Jason Parham in August of 2020. In my own reading of the article, I was moved by Parham's writing which says, "TikTok is a video-first platform, and on it, creators embody Blackness with an auteur-driven virtuosity—taking on Black rhythms, gestures, affect, slang," (Parham, 2020). Parham explains how video-sharing platforms, like Tik Tok, are often driven and popularized by Black people and Black culture.

[17] Davis cites an NBC article in this quote, written by Kalhan Rosenblatt in February of 2021, which explains how Tik Tok has not ensured that Black creatives are given equal opportunity and recognition on the platform, despite pledging to do so after the summer of "Racial Reckoning" which occurred as the result of George Floyd's death in 2020.

are also at risk of experiencing mental harm. Research shows that instances of racism and microaggressions can adversely impact the psyche of Black people (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000; Nadal et al., 2014). Black beauty influencers are tasked with building and supporting marginalized communities, only to have those same communities and their content, mined, exploited, and mimicked in a way that serves White hegemony and racial capitalism. This prevents Black beauty influencers from maintaining full ownership over their content and their identities and they must mentally reckon with and verbally callout this marginalization as they strive to succeed in their roles as influencers.

Ultimately Blackfishing poses a significant threat to Black beauty influencers who have spent over a decade building visibility and acceptance for Black women through the digital beauty genre. Black beauty influencers have used social media platforms to celebrate the specific parts of their phenotypes that are often categorized as ugly or undesirable. This began with the online natural hair movement, where Black women used blogs, YouTube, and Instagram to challenge narratives around their natural hair textures (Ellington, 2014; Rowe, 2021) and darker skin tones (Hassan, 2018; Parris, 2020), efforts which have encouraged brands and corporations to seek profit from the growing the popularity of Black beauty influencers. Therefore, Blackfishing threatens and appropriates the labor of these Black beauty influencers and their digital communities. Using White models on Instagram as a case study, Wesley Elizabeth Stevens (2021) argues that White women in the beauty sphere often, "appropriate Black culture and urban aesthetics in their work while obscuring the more racially–charged aspects of Black existence, drawing boundaries around which depictions of Blackness are desirable and thus profitable," (p. 2). While the problem of Blackfishing is discussed in research, less attention is given to how the re-centering of lighter skin in this performance also connotes this phenotypic

feature as the most preferred depiction of Blackness, a fact that I argue is important. On the YouTube panel web-series, *The Grapevine*, activist and writer Preston Mitchum (2020) says,

> "And so the one thing that's always been clear to me from the beginning of this conversation is like there would be no Blackfishing without colorism. There would be no Blackfishing without us having to buy into white supremacy or darker skinned people being deemed as like immoral or somehow experiencing, you know, obviously worse forms of structural oppression," (The Grapevine, 2020).

In that sense, I argue that in order to properly contend with and address the problem of Blackfishing and the extraction of Black beauty influencers' digital labor, we must disassemble concepts of racism and Blackness by examining and theorizing intragroup labor practices, with a focus on dark skinned Black influencers. The mimicking of Blackness that occurs through Blackfishing and that centers lighter skinned and White women not only further marginalizes darker-skinned Black women, but it completely disaggregates Blackness in a way to where those who are undoubtedly and phenotypically Black (e.g., dark skin, textured hair) must labor harder to achieve visibility and recognition. Visibility in this scenario is not only about number of followers, but also about desirability, as desirability is succinctly linked to the aspiration mythos embedded in the logic of the social media influencer. Blackfishing, thereby recenters phenotypes closer to the standards of Whiteness as the premier aesthetics to aspire to, subtly erasing the labor and efforts of dark-skinned Black women and those who do not have the desirable phenotype. Consequently, Black beauty influencers with other phenotypic features approved as desirable by Whiteness, even if they are of a darker complexion, may possess privilege within the digital beauty genre and be freed from some of the labor it takes to make one's phenotype appear desirable and consumable for audiences. Therefore, Racial *Phenotype Labor (RPL), which primarily consists of skin tone work,* is an additional layer of work required of Black

women beauty influencers who are consistently pushed to the margins of hegemonic beauty culture within the digital.

Understanding Racial Phenotype Labor and the Resulting Skin Tone Work

Research illustrates that as the population becomes multiracial, phenotype and skin tone help shape people's classification of race, with people possessing dark skin firmly being associated with Blackness (Feliciano, 2016). Lighter skin is associated with Whiteness (Feliciano, 2016). This ultimately complicates the notion of the one drop rule. Additionally, darker skinned African American women often experience psychological distress, "when confronting limitations on social, economic, and relational opportunities they experienced based on their skin tone," (Hall, 2017, p. 77). Research also suggests that for Black women in celebrity culture, their skin tone impacts their experiences with stardom and the perception of them by the "average consumer" (Young, 2021, p. 91). This is undoubtedly related to the culture of social media influencers as influencer culture and celebrity culture now intersect. Because darker skinned Black women have the potential to be alienated within society, especially in beauty culture–I argue for a theory of *Racial Phenotype Labor (RPL)* in an effort to accurately theorize the extent to which Black women engage in digital labor on social media platforms. *Racial phenotype labor* is defined as the physical, mental, and emotional labor involved in making one's self desirable and passable, when possessing phenotypic features, such as dark skin, that are hegemonically viewed as undesirable. I argue that for *Dark Skin Beauty Influencers* (DSBI) this leads to the first layer of RPL which consists of skin tone work, where DSBI enter the digital beauty sphere having to combat symbolic annihilation on two levels–both aesthetically from a representational aspect and materially from a marketplace aspect, widening their experiences with inequality. To define symbolic annihilation, I borrow from the theory of sociologist George

Gerbner (1972) who described absence or underrepresentation of a group of people in media as contributing to the continuation of "social disempowerment" of that group (Means Coleman & Yochim, 2008, p. 1).

Therefore, DSBI essentially enter the beauty space having to represent a whole category of people who are often erased from public view from a media perspective. This leads to skin tone work in which DSBI are essentially required to produce content that centers around skin tone, arguing for its inclusion, recognition, and appreciation on multiple fronts. Chapter Three used discourse analysis to illustrate how Jackie Aina's brand revolves around advocating for skin tone equality and how her presence on YouTube and in the larger beauty culture discursively contributes to conversation and changes within the beauty industry–including encouraging makeup brands to offer darker shades of makeup. This role as a social media influencer and colorism advocate by a darker skinned Black woman creates a situation in which her labor is increased because she has to advocate for herself, other dark-skinned people, all while fighting racism and labor appropriation. Aina and other DSBI are still expected to complete the other emotional and physical work "necessary" to be considered legitimate influencers, thus adding an additional layer of work on top of the work they already have to complete in that role. A lot of this work (e.g., creating skin tone-based content) is how they combat symbolic annihilation on the aesthetic and representational level, thus elevating darker skin into public view in the beauty industry.

However, skin tone work not only involves challenging symbolic annihilation on the aesthetic and representational level, but also on the material level. As an example, I offer the content of another popular DSBI, Nyma Tang. Nyma Tang is a South Sudanese American beauty influencer with over 1.3 million followers on YouTube and over 480,000 followers on

Instagram. As of June 25, 2022, her YouTube channel states that she joined the platform in 2013 and created her first video on October 29, 2016.[18] Her first beauty related video titled, "*How to: Quick Eyebrow Tutorial For Dark Skin,*" was uploaded on November 1, 2016, almost seven years after Jackie Aina began her journey on the platform. In 2017, Nyma Tang created a beauty series titled, "*The Darkest Shade*" where she commits to testing out the darkest shade of foundation makeup by various beauty companies. The work to fight against symbolic annihilation on a material level is often present in her videos as she often mentions that the products are not suitable, or occasionally even available, for her skin tone. In a video titled, "*NYX TOTAL CONTROL DROP FOUNDATION REVIEW || DEEP ESPRESSO,"* uploaded on February 4, 2017, Nyma explains that she had to purchase the foundation online, insinuating that she was not able to buy the darker shade in the store. Tang says, "This was the first time that I have to buy foundation without testing it out in the first place, so we'll see…I have absolutely no clue what I'm getting myself into," (Tang, 2017a). Tang also tells her audience in the video, "You guys know the struggle of always being like the darkest shade….and it's going to be usually like…in high-end department store makeup… it's going to be like forty fifty dollars sometimes," (Tang, 2017a). What Tang's comments point to is the symbolic annihilation dark skinned Black Women face on a material level. First, the lack of availability of foundation in darker skin tone makeup points to the commonly held belief by the cosmetic industry that darker shades of makeup are not profitable, as result the darker shades of makeup are not often carried inside stores (Robinson, 2020). Therefore, what Nyma is also having to combat in addition to symbolic annihilation representationally, is annihilation in the marketplace, causing her to have

[18] Nyma Tang was previously on another YouTube channel with four other South Sudanese women in which she produced a web series titled, "*Ladies of Sosa*." Therefore, when starting her makeup channel, she had some familiarity on the platform.

to take alternative methods (e.g., purchasing online) to even be able to participate in the marketplace as a beauty consumer. Second, Nyma's comments make clear that when darker shades of makeup are available, they are at higher end stores and are more expensive. I argue that this is an example of how DBSI may have to potentially fight classism and income inequality simultaneously, as not all of them may be able to purchase products from higher end stores. Research illustrates that there is an income gap between lighter skinned Black Americans and darker skinned Black Americans (Reece, 2021; Goldsmith et al., 2006). This means that if you are a DSBI already impacted by income inequality and economic marginalization, then you are going to have to do more work, potentially spending more money, that you may not really have just to participate as a consumer, and then as an influencer, creating a terrible matrix of disadvantage.[19] Ultimately, it is beauty influencers' job to review makeup products and if these products are not easily accessible for darker skinned influencers, then DSBI will have to work a little harder to attain these products especially if they are small creators without the notoriety. [20]

If products are materially difficult to acquire because of one's skin tone, then the ability to pass as an influencer will also be harder for DSBI. In reference to beauty influencers with trans identities, Erique Zhang (2022) explains that passing should be theorized as labor, arguing that beautification practices, cosmetic surgeries, and other investments completed by trans

[19] I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that all dark-skinned Black people are poor or of lower income status. This fact is important to point out because I am aware that "poor and living in poverty" is a stereotype often applied to Black people in the media. Therefore, even though income inequality is a real issue for people with darker skin, it is not the reality for all dark-skinned Black Americans. However, DSBI enter the beauty space under these cultural conditions that could potentially and significantly impact them more than Black influencers who have lighter skin or influencers of other races.

[20] Beauty influencers who amass large followings may eventually reach a status where makeup companies send them products for free in hopes that they will review the product positively for their audience, who the companies see as customers. However, smaller creators will have to purchase the products on their own until they reach such a status.

influencers are not only done to fit into hegemonic beauty standards, but are also done, "to amass both economic capital, such as more lucrative career opportunities, as well as social capital such greater acceptance in mainstream society (Pierre Bourdieu 1986)," (p. 3). In the case of Nyma Tang, annihilation in the marketplace not only impacts her as a consumer but can potentially impact her chances at being a successful beauty influencer. This is because part of what makes an influencer successful, is creating an aesthetic that shows they are skilled in their genre, thus allowing them to pass as an expert. Although Nyma's main concern is about being credible when asked for makeup recommendations, I argue that she is aware that testing out makeup is necessary for her role as an influencer. In a video titled, *BOBBI BROWN FOUNDATION STICK REVIEW || ESPRESSO + GIVEAWAY WINNER,* uploaded on March 4, 2017, Tang states,

"Testing out these foundations helps me so that when people ask me what do I recommend, at least I have some kind of like judge on different types of foundations, especially for different types of skin…because if I have….. my dry sensitive skin, someone else might have oily not so sensitive skin and I can't really like go around recommending foundations if I haven't tested out a bunch of them," (Nyma Tang, 2017b).

Important to note is that in the early videos in the series, Nyma tells viewers that she tests the foundations as she goes to her regular job. Additionally, the risk is not always worth the reward, as Tang is occasionally uncertain how the makeup will look by the end of the day and once remarked that the makeup made her look "dead," (Tang, 2017c). Her choice of words is ironic, given the meaning of annihilation and the fact that dark skin Black people endure it both in the marketplace and in the media. In this situation, Nyma is doing double the work, by testing makeup while she is working. Further, she is also risking her comfortability and face[21] in the real world because she does not know how the makeup will turn out at the end of the day. This last

[21] The term "face" originates from the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1955) who essentially defined it as the positive self-presentation we perform for others during social interactions. I say that Nyma is risking her face because feeling like the makeup looks bad could be threatening to her sense of self as she interacts throughout the day, therefore she is risking her face and her literal face to do this work.

point may not necessarily be unique to DSBI, as all beauty influencers experience a degree of uncertainty when testing and reviewing makeup products. However, it is more detrimental for DSBI because they already enter the genre with a lack of product availability because of their dark skin tones, making it unclear if the few products they can use will actually even work. Given my work in Chapter Three, a critique against this point may be that makeup brands have now started to include darker makeup shades in their lineup, making it easier for DSBI to acquire products that match their skin tone. My response to that would be that five years' worth of progress does not undo a century of alienation and annihilation, it is simply progress. Because of symbolic annihilation, both at an aesthetic and material level, DSBI engage in skin tone work that influencers with lighter or fair skin tones, simply do not have to think about–or at least not to the same degree.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a new theorization of Black women's labor in the digital beauty genre by recentering skin tone and phenotype as important traits that shape their labor requirements within this space. To effectively dismantle systems of oppression, including those maintained or facilitated by digital platforms, it is important that we look at colorism and the ways that Blackness is consumed, appropriated, and celebrated in certain contexts–and derided and discarded in others. Those with phenotypic traits perceived as undesirable, like dark skin, are more likely to be on the receiving end of additional alienation and marginalization. Because of our society's preference for Whiteness, and as result with large parts of our society being White spaces (Young, 2021), dark skin Black beauty influencers must engage in *Racial Phenotype Labor* where they work harder to achieve visibility and recognition in the influencer sphere. They are tasked with gaining visibility, all while having to emotionally support the communities

they represent, and mentally battling the likelihood of race appropriation where light skin is recentered. They must also confront the possibility that they are likely to be annihilated in the consumer marketplace because of potential inaccessibility to products or lack of product availability. *Skin tone work*, which I argue is the primary level of RPL, invites us to reconsider how Blackness is consumed, performed, and expressed in digital spaces and how some of these conceptualizations continue to harm and marginalize a large portion of the Black community.

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Chapter 6

A Beauty Vlogger's Point of View

This current project was designed and interrogated with the intent of centering Black beauty influencers, examining how they are framed in our beauty discourse, and exploring the role that colorism plays in their perception and labor requirements as social media influencers. In this concluding chapter of the dissertation, I will summarize the project's findings in relation to the broader research question. This chapter will then have a theoretical discussion that examines the implications and contributions of this research. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of this project and how the future direction of this work will address the gaps in the research.

The Origins of the Dissertation

The broader research question for this project asks: *What role does colorism play in the perceptions of and expectations around Black beauty influencers?* In asking this question, what the introduction chapter does not discuss is how I came to this question. My interest in this subject stems from my positionality as a dark-skinned YouTube vlogger[22] in the hair care subgenre of the Black beauty community. My YouTube channel has over 1,800 subscribers with an accumulation of over 195,000 channel views gained in five years. Over the course of my journey, I have watched influencers come into the Black beauty space, including the Sisterlocks subgenre which I am a member of, and quadruple my channel numbers in a shorter period of

[22] In Chapter 5, I talked about the differences between social media users and social media influencers. Here I refer to myself as a "vlogger" because if we go by the literature's definition of influencers, I have not yet reached the typical audience size to be considered a micro-influencer which Gomez (2019) asserts is 5,000 subscribers. Although, I have wanted to become an influencer, I think vlogger is the more appropriate title at this time in reference to the content that I post online and the structure in which I post it.

time. This reinforced for me that the common belief among Black beauty influencers–that opportunities for mega success on YouTube are not evenly distributed–is in fact true. Therefore, I began a quest to discover why some Black women have more success on the platform than other Black women.

As I began to seek answers, I was reminded of a 2014 viral video–now private– by former natural hair influencer Jouelzy. The video was titled "*So over the Natural Hair Community and Texture Discrimination*." In the video, Jouelzy, a light-skinned Black woman with kinky-coily hair, expressed her frustration that texturism was occurring in the natural hair community. According to Dr. Ijeoma Kola, historian and natural hair influencer, Jouelzy claimed that natural hair influencers with kinkier hair textures do not receive as many likes, shares, and views on their content compared to natural hair influencers with "softer, silkier, shinier, and curlier hair," (Kola, 2014). Kola also asserts that the second part of texture discrimination revolves around lack of opportunity for influencers with kinkier hair textures, alluding to the fact they may not receive as many sponsorships as those with curlier hair patterns (Kola, 2014). Upon going back and researching responses to Jouelzy's video, many natural hair creators expressed that they also noticed Black women with looser curls and lighter skin were able to achieve more visibility on the platform and in the natural hair industry (Duru, 2014; Kola, 2014; Kinksgalore, 2014; Joelle, 2014). However, Dr. Kola asserts that the issue lies with the viewers, as the viewers prefer to watch this type of content, and therefore the natural hair community is at fault, not necessarily companies (Kola, 2014). In her video titled, "*Chizi's Response to Jouelzy and Texture Discrimination,"* Chizi Duru, in agreeance with Dr. Kola, says,

*"*I also feel like it's because companies and businesses always go where the money is at. If people, if viewers, if women, men naturally just knack to a high-end video something that is appealing to the eye and I don't mean their hair, I'm talking about just how they…like if they have a better camera or something like that, companies see that they like that…viewers like to

see videos like that and if the people that are making those videos have curly hair then obviously the companies are just gonna be 'oh just get that girl, get that girl, get that girl' who has a lot of views on YouTube."

Duru continues with, "If we want more representation of us from companies and businesses then we have to show that you know we can do just as well with numbers here on YouTube," (Duru, 2014). Two debates were happening within this conversation. First, the responses were calling out the viewers, essentially saying, that it is our internalized preference for Whiteness and lightness that fuels our desire to watch videos of lighter skinned women with curlier hair.[23] Second, although colorism was not allegedly specifically mentioned in Jouelzy's initial video, some viewers also asserted that colorism and texturism were intertwined and thus happening at the same time because of each other, not separately. The scholarly literature tells us that for Black women, texture discrimination and colorism are often intertwined (Rowe, 2022; Shepherd, 2018).

At that time, I had not formulated many thoughts about influencer labor as I was only a viewer and would not start my YouTube channel until three years later in 2017. However, I now argue that part of the frustration that Jouelzy was feeling was due to her having to engage in *racial phenotype labor*. In Chapter Five, I discussed this concept as the physical, mental, and emotional labor that Black influencers engage in by attempting to make parts of themselves–which are viewed as undesirable–aesthetically pleasing and socially acceptable. Although Jouelzy is light-skinned, having a kinkier hair texture gives her a characteristic that is culturally seen as unappealing, therefore she was having to work harder to make her hair more alluring–in

[23] In 2014, I remember vividly when a light-skinned biracial natural hair influencer posted a natural hair "Twist Out" video that went viral, which is where Jouelzy's discourse about texturism is believed to have stemmed from. Natural hair influencer Kinksgalore (2014), confirms my assumption when asking in her video "*why is it that a biracial girl could put up a video and within two weeks she gets half a million views, but yet someone like Jouelzy who has kinkier hair texture, it takes a year and a half…it takes over a year to get half the views a girl got in two weeks?*"

societal terms–and because of society's preference for Whiteness, she was still not being rewarded for it in comparison to others closer to the standard. Further, in Jouelzy's case she was subjected to engaging in what I refer to as *texture work* as opposed to *skin tone work*, with both falling under the racial phenotype labor category. Now, several years later, my position as both a social media researcher and a natural hair YouTube vlogger, remembered this prior discourse and it prompted me to consider how colorism also plays a role in the perceptions of Black beauty influencers. Although, instead of exploring how this operates in the natural hair community, I wanted to explore a beauty sub-genre where issues around skin tone are explicitly central to the content being produced–the makeup genre. To summarize, this project was born out of my own strife and what I perceived as slow success on my own YouTube channel and the previous chorus of cries from my YouTube sisters who had expressed that colorism and texturism are real marginalization tools that are impacting us in the beauty space, both from a platform and industrial perspective.

The Goals and Accomplishments of the Dissertation

Thereby, the studies in this project are grounded in the intersecting literatures on colorism, beauty studies, and race and media representation, all of which converge, often sending mixed and distorted messaging about Black womanhood to the masses. Chapter Two uses this literature to explicate how colorism has an impact in the social and cultural lives of Black women, in addition to the economic lives of Black people generally, as darker-skinned Black people have lower financial incomes, experience more prejudice in education, and have more negative health outcomes in comparison to lighter skinned Black people (Hunter, 2007; Stockstill & Carson, 2022; Crutchfield, 2022; Keyes et al., 2020). Therefore, and I cannot express this enough, colorism is not solely an aesthetic issue, but a real tool of marginalization

that is designed to discriminate against darker skinned Black folks at every level of society. Chapter Two then provides grounds for understanding that eradicating racism at all levels–including in the beauty and media industries–means centering colorism at the front of conversations about race as opposed to a byproduct.

Chapter Three then uses discourse analysis to examine how colorism plays a role in the cultural messaging around Black beauty influencers–and specifically those in the makeup subgenre. Using Jackie Aina's 2018 *Too Faced* beauty launch as a case study, this chapter asks: *How Are Black beauty influencer's contributions framed within mainstream beauty discourse? What role does this play in Black women's digital labor?* In this chapter I analyzed 101 articles from mainstream beauty magazines finding that Aina was often centered as an expert and praised for her vocality around skin tone prejudice. However, this chapter also notes that race does not trump celebrity–meaning that Aina was occasionally framed as confrontational when juxtaposed to White influencers accused of racism, highlighting the media's reluctance to minimize Whiteness, even when Whiteness is committing harm[24]. The last and most important revelation of this chapter is that the Google News archive algorithms play a significant role in the structuring of beauty discourse, often rendering Black beauty publications as invisible. This indicates that even when discussions about race, discrimination, and skin tone are on display–and brought to the forefront by Black beauty influencers–the voices that are the purveyors of conversation are typically those that are White, rarely deviating from hegemonic ideology, and thereby subjugating Blackness in some ways.

[24] Whiteness as a concept is often more harmful than individual acts completed by White individuals and in some ways by focusing on the individual, we again transform racism as this interpersonal conflict as opposed to a societal structure in which some people benefit from. This is why the term Whiteness as opposed to "White people" is more appropriate to use here.

As I write this, I am reminded of scholars and literature that have forced me to reconsider my constant aligning of Blackness with discourses of discrimination and oppression. "*Is there room for Black joy?*" This is a question that constantly replays over and over in my head as I do this work. Therefore, I want to make sure that I highlight that Chapter Three is designed to doubly function as that chapter where the Black joy can be seen on display. Jackie Aina and other Black beauty influencers do the work that they do out of love and joy for themselves and their communities. Their love for makeup and for wanting to be recognized in the beauty space has contributed to significant change in the beauty industry to where someone like me, or my mom's complexion can now have more makeup options[25]. Therefore, in answering critiques that may suggest we avoid collapsing understandings of Blackness to definitions that solely revolve around its juxtaposition to the White gaze, I must first say that I hear that viewpoint and even agree with that viewpoint. Though, I think that sometimes those of who can take that viewpoint may be a bit privileged, as some of our Black brothers and sisters do not have the luxury of walking into a room without centuries of politics, stereotypes, and negative connotations being instantly attached to their bodies, especially if you are "Blickity-Black" as Dr. Donna Oriowo asserts. I would also contend that discourses around Blackness in an American context are hard to examine without considering how White supremacy and hegemonic discourses play a role in its shaping. Overall, I believe that the work of Black beauty influencers is grounded in joy and celebration of themselves–which has helped reshape beauty discourse to focus on things like colorism and body positivity–conversations that are necessary to have. But, because race is

[25] In Chapter Five, I believe I was bit cynical when talking about colorism and the progress made in the beauty industry, saying that "it is simply progress" (p.145). However, I want to take the time to state here that I am not minimizing that progress, as Black women have used YouTube and other social media platforms to create space for us in ways that arguably have not been seen in previous social movements. Therefore, as a dark-skinned woman, I am happy about that progress and I am grateful that dark skinned influencers like Jackie Aina, Nyma Tang, and Destiny Godley have made created a space for us to exist as we are.

political, Black beauty influencers must also contend with other sinister forces including racist media framing and potential algorithmic invisibility, which this project argues is integral to their experiences as influencers.

To further investigate notions of the potential algorithmic invisibility that Black beauty influencers may be subject to, and to see if viewers are part of the problem (as the natural hair influencers claimed), Chapter Four uses survey experiment methodology to ask: *How does skin tone potentially impact Black women who blog about beauty on YouTube and other social media platforms?* In this study, video thumbnails from 24 Black beauty videos were selected and manipulated according to three skin tones: light brown skin, medium brown skin, and dark brown skin. The population surveyed included 576 African Americans, primarily women, again regulating these questions to an American context. Using linear mixed model analysis, the study revealed that although all the Black beauty influencers presented received favorable ratings–dark skinned Black women were rated as less attractive, less competent, and viewers demonstrated that they would be less likely to click on their videos in comparison to the lighter skinned and medium brown skinned influencers. These results are not surprising, I expected colorism to rear its head in some form or fashion. In fact, the designing of the study reminded me of the words of Shirley Tate, who said, “I have been told by other Black women in the past 'don't wash our *dirty* linen in public' and ‘do not reproduce us as victims and as pathological,” (Tate, 2009, p. 53). That is, as someone who is a Black woman and a Black vlogger, I was skeptical of only surveying African American women because I did not want to expose Black women for potentially contributing to colorism in a sense. But, if Black women, thought to be the core audience of Black beauty content, intentionally or unintentionally engage in colorists preferences

online, this–regardless of my feelings about it–has the potential to marginalize a larger portion of our group–dark-skinned women.

As a darker-skinned content creator, this is disheartening to say the least. However, it confirms what me and Destiny Godley know to be true, that some of us have to work twice as hard.[26] For my own channel, I have spent hundreds of dollars on lighting equipment, took care to select the right times of the day to film so I do not appear too dark, made sure to take thumbnail photos in the light–all in an effort to appear brighter. To be clear, I am not signaling that I wish I had lighter skin, but more so of the awareness that comes with having darker skin and knowing that there is a preference for lightness. I suggest that darker-skinned influencers opt for brightness instead, where we do everything we can to be more illuminated so that we are more desirable to watch. Richard Dyer (2017) speaks to my notions of illumination when he argues that "photography and cinema, as media of light, at the very least lend themselves to privileging White people," (p. 83). This is because specific lighting technologies (e.g., cameras and stocks) were developed with the White face as the benchmark for how faces should show up in an image (Dyer, 2017, p. 90). To be clearer, knowing that technologies are biased against darker complexions (e.g., construction of the camera and algorithmic discrimination) influencers then have to engage in labor that sort of cancels these negative marks out, for lack of better terms. Although, this may be completely out of our control no matter if we shoot at 9am when the sun is out or in a brightly lit studio, because the survey study reveals that colorism is present in viewer preferences, which can impact our visibility on the platform, and thereby our YouTube earnings.

[26] See Chapter 4.

Project Implications and Contributions

There are a couple of key implications that the results of this project raise. The first implication is that colorism has the potential to be a severe marginalizing tool on social media and digital platforms period. Much of the internet scholarship that has focused on race and the internet has focused on Blackness as an overarching concept, with less attention to colorism. My contention is that race, as experienced in the digital, is disaggregated, and thus as digital scholars approach the studies of race, you will also have to disaggregate the concept. Second, colorism is generally underexplored in the literature and so this project further reveals that the discipline overall needs to be extended to digital technologies. This is primarily because of the hyper-commercialization of the internet and the capitalist structures of tech companies, which are all in alignment –at least to some degree–with typical American business structures. This structure already reproduces financial and economic harm to Black people generally and along the lines of skin tone, so if digital technologies are following in these footsteps, this means that darker-skinned Black people have the potential to be further harmed, socially, culturally, and economically through social media and digital platforms, all while using these same tools to advocate against this type of discrimination.

The last implication that this project raises is more of a call to action for my fellow scholars and researchers who are interested in studying matters of race and digital media. I cannot stress how mentally and emotionally draining it was to complete this project as a darker skinned Black woman. While I chose this dissertation topic and do not regret it, I have to admit that conducting massive literature reviews on a topic that basically says you have lesser value in society's eyes takes a toll after the 10th article or so. Therefore, by having to engage in this project I feel like I had to engage in double the labor in some ways due to my identity as a

researcher, a dark-skinned beauty vlogger, and a dark-skinned Black woman period. I do not think these identities are separate, but at times because of those three identities the problems around colorism always felt layered and more like a burden. At times, it also felt like my responsibility because it is an underexplored area. If the literature essentially says that the voices of people who look like me tend to be silenced, erased, and marginalized, then in my privileged position as an academic, it feels like it is also my responsibility to bring attention to this unfortunate phenomenon. But I should not have to carry this burden alone. As a media scholar, I already have a hard time watching content without being overly analytical. This project only made matters worse per say, as everything I consumed, even in basic interactions, I began to wonder how much my skin tone was an influence in the situation. Or better stated, I developed a hyperawareness of colorism during this project, one that I do not think I had before, and one that is surely not going away. Therefore, I am calling on my colleagues to center colorism at the front of their analysis on race, so that those of us more likely to be subjected to colorism will not always be tasked with being forced to stand straight up in a crooked room.[27]

Future Research Directions

The one key limitation of this project is that it does not include the voices from influencers and vloggers other than me. And while I think my knowledge and experiences as a vlogger are legitimate sources of information, I believe that the inclusion of other Black women's voices will better illuminate what it is like to be a Black beauty influencer–and at varying levels of audience size as well, which no doubt impacts the type of labor performed. This is particularly why I tried to avoid using the word "experience" as I do not want to over assume about Black women's experiences as influencers because of my own positionality as a vlogger.

[27] See Chapter 2 for a discussion on Melissa Harris-Perry's notion of the "crooked room" metaphor.

However, I have worked with other influencers both in academic and non-academic capacities and those are the experiences which I also pull from. This project–as I hope I have made clear–focuses significantly on labor, arguably making it work located within the scholarship of media industries. One of the best ways to understand the labor structures in our media systems, according to scholars who study production cultures, is to sometimes study below the line (Banks, 2009; Levine, 2001). Miranda Banks (2009) explains that within the media industry, there are notions of who operates above and below the line, with above the line positions being those that encompass creative talent (e.g., writers, producers, directors) and the below the line positions encompassing those positions that are more technical and trade oriented (e.g., cinematography, editors, costumer designers)[28]. In the case of social media influencers–the person is usually all of these things at once–which is why my future research will engage with influencers directly in an effort to better interrogate how race shapes the labor of Black women in above the line and below the line positions. For now, what I hope readers take away from this project is that despite adversity, despite algorithmic marginalization, and despite colorism, Black girls are truly magic[29] and have been able to change the world simply by turning on their camera and giving us beauty and a beat![30]

[28] Though this is paraphrased, Banks describes the differences between above and below the line labor on p. 89.

[29] The phrase 'Black Girls are Magic' was coined by Cashawn Thompson and evolved into #BlackGirlMagic to highlight the achievements of Black women despite the multiple and intersecting obstacles they face (Halliday & Brown, 2018).

[30] The term "beat" comes from the slang phrase "Beat your face" which originated within the LGBTQ+ community and means to put on your makeup extraordinarily well.

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Appendix A

Example Survey

The following pages represent an example of the survey administered to participants through Dynata. The influencers, as they appear here, did not appear in order of the skin tone condition. In this example survey, the Light Brown, Medium Brown, and Dark Brown skin tone conditions appear in order, but in the actual survey, they were randomized for each participant. However, each participant still saw 4 influencers per skin tone conditions.

Screener

We’re doing a study to learn more about people's perception of digital beauty influencers.

Before you can join the study, we’ll need to make sure you qualify. To find out whether you qualify, we’ll ask you two questions about your own identity and geographical location. The questions will take less than one minute to answer.

If you qualify to be in the study and you are interested in joining, you will see a consent form to read and acknowledge. That form will explain the rest of the study.

Do you live in the United States of America?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Which of the following groups best reflects the racial group in which you identify?

- ○ White - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa
- ○ Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- ○ Afro-Latin - A person having cultural origins in any of the several cultures of Latin America while also having partial or full African racial ancestry.
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- ○ Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

IRB Consent

BEAUTY VLOGGERS & THE DIGITAL BEAUTY COMMUNITY

HUM00162024

Principal Investigator: **Ta’les Love, PhD Candidate, University of Michigan**

Faculty Advisor: **Sonya Dal Cin, Associate Professor, University of Michigan**

Hello, I hope all is well! My name is Ta'les Love and I am a graduate student researcher at the University of Michigan.

You are invited to participate in a survey about beauty Black beauty vloggers and your interest in beauty content online. This research intends to understand Black women’s interest and evaluation of content created by Black women. I’m interested in your authentic reactions to this content and believe that your insight will contribute to furthering knowledge around the importance of Black women's cultural creations. So as not to influence your opinions, I may not tell you everything about the purpose of the research at this time; at the end of the questionnaire, you will receive this additional information.

In this study you will be shown photos (YouTube video thumbnails) of Black beauty vloggers, and asked to

answer some questions about your perceptions of them and their content. Your participation in this research will contribute to revealing how beauty vloggers impact social media users online.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any survey question for any reason.

I will protect the confidentiality of your research records by not asking you to include any identifiable information in the survey. Survey questions that ask personal information about characteristics such as race, gender, and/or location will not be linked to any information that can identify your answers to you personally.

Information collected in this project may be shared with other researchers, but we will not share any information that could identify you.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact **Ta'les Love, tllove@umich.edu and/or Sonya Dal Cin, sdalcin@umich.edu**.

As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight.

Online Beauty Content Interest

In the last 30 days, how often have you watched beauty related videos on social media?

Everyday	Every 2-3 days	Weekly	1-2 times this month	Not at all
○	○	○	○	○

In the last 30 days, how often have you watched beauty videos on YouTube?

Everyday	Every 2-3 days	Weekly	1-2 times this month	Not at all
○	○	○	○	○

A - Light

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

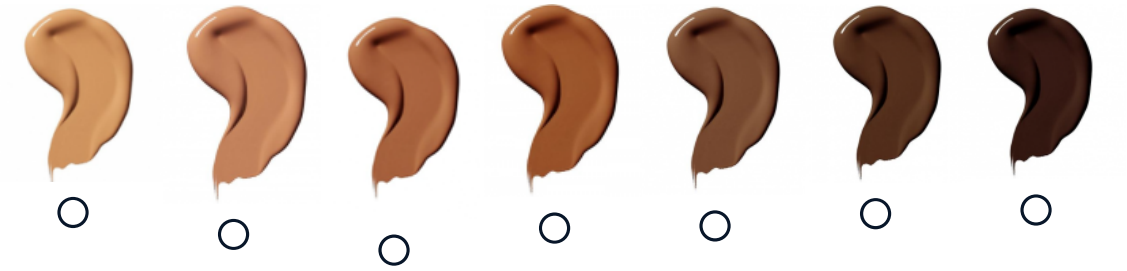
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



B - Light

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



C - Light

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

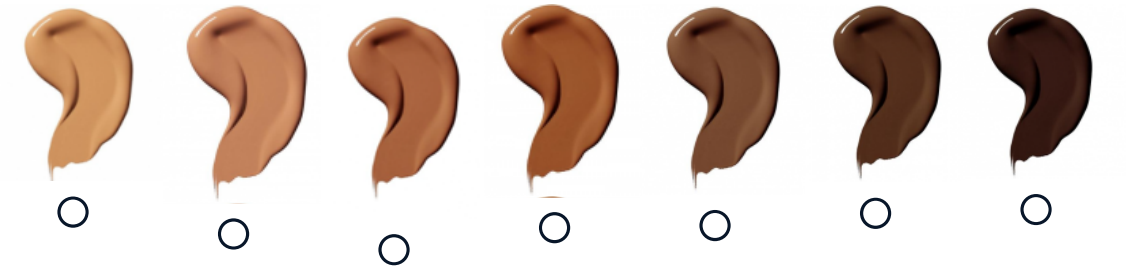
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



D - Light

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

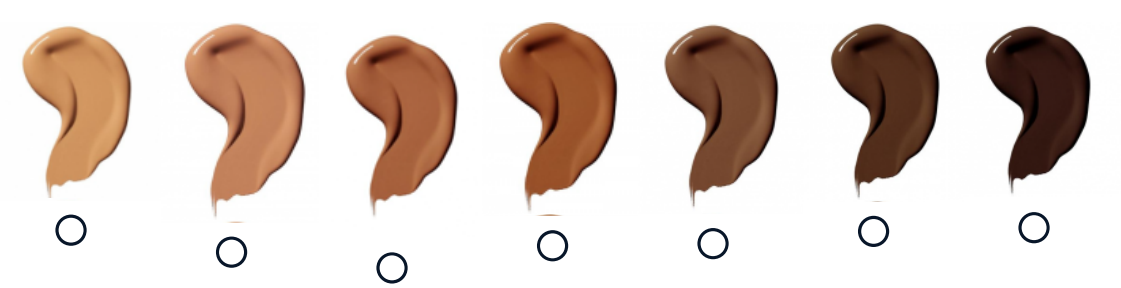
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



E- Medium

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

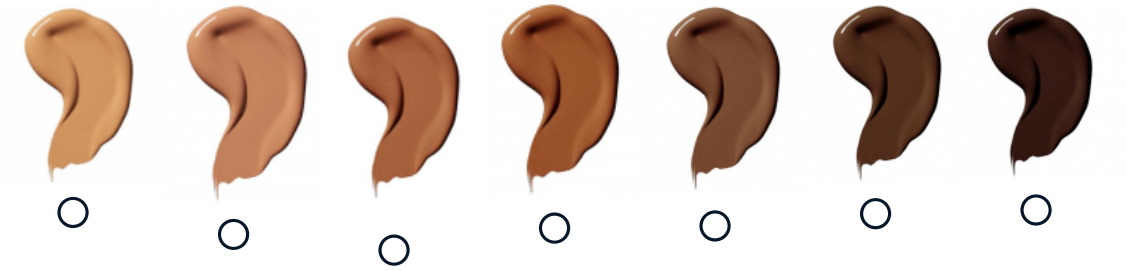
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



F- Medium

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



G- Medium

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

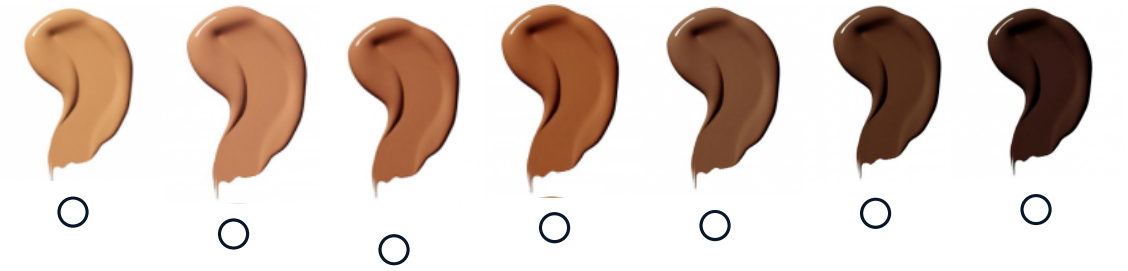
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



H - Medium

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

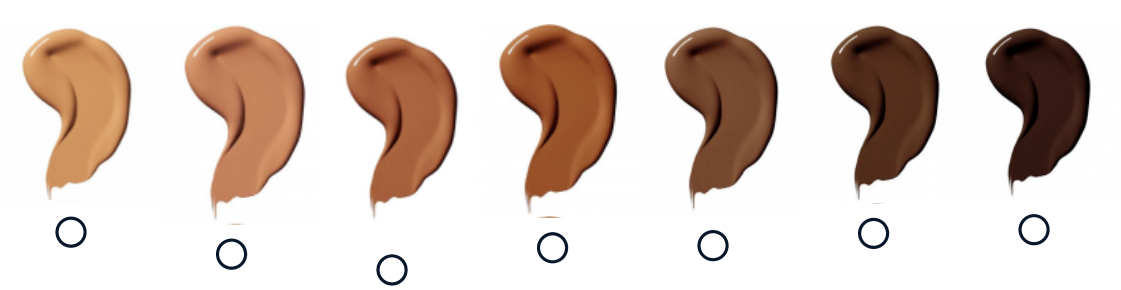
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



I- Dark

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

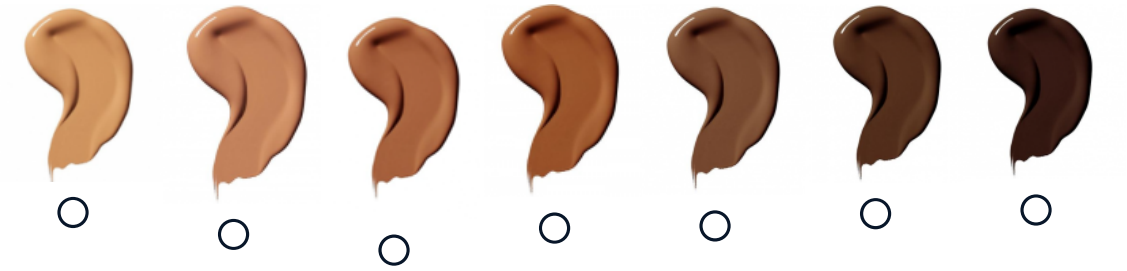
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



J- Dark

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



K- Dark

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

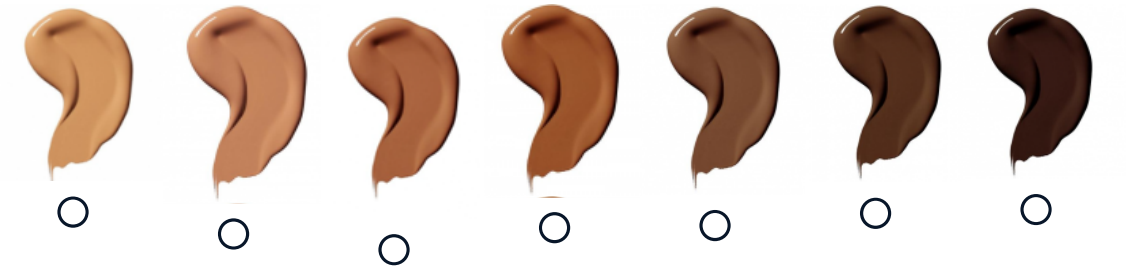
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



L - Dark

Photo of Influencer is Placed here in Randomized Skin Tone Condition

Based on the photo, rate the make-up skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly Skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, rate the hair-styling skills of the beauty vlogger pictured.

Highly skilled	Skilled	Average	Low Skilled	Not Skilled at all
○	○	○	○	○

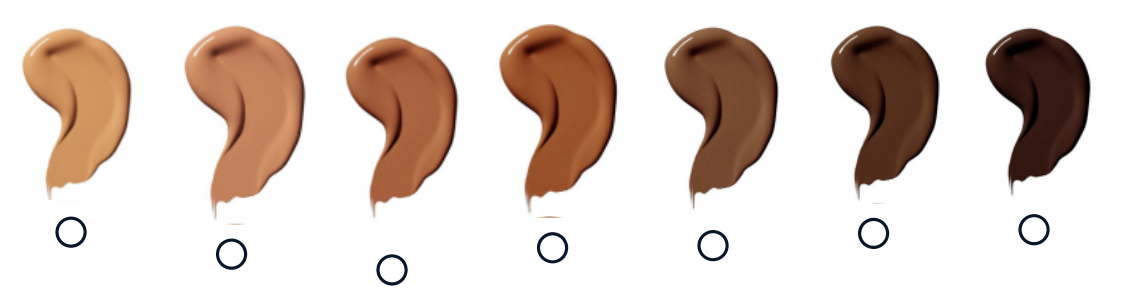
Based on the photo, how attractive is the vlogger?

Extremely Attractive	Moderately Attractive	Average	Slightly Unattractive	Not Attractive At All
○	○	○	○	○

Based on the photo, how likely are you to click on beauty content created by this vlogger?

Definitely Likely	Likely	Not sure	Probably not	Definitely not
○	○	○	○	○

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches the skin tone of the vlogger.



Recognition Question

During the survey, did you recognize any of the beauty vloggers in the photos?

- ○ No, I didn't recognize any of the beauty vloggers.
- ○ Yes, I recognized at least 1 beauty vlogger.
- ○ Yes, I recognized 2 beauty vloggers.
- ○ Yes, I recognized 3 or more vloggers.
- ○ I am not sure.

Demographic Information

In your own words, please describe the race or ethnicity with which you primarily identify.

In your opinion, choose the foundation shade that best matches YOUR skin tone.



On average, how much money do you spend on makeup and/or other beauty products monthly?

- ○ None at all
- ○ Less than $20
- ○ $20 -$50
- ○ $50 - $100
- ○ $100 or more

What was your total household income during the past 12 months?

- ○ Less than $25,000
- ○ $25,000 - $49,999
- ○ $50,000 - $79,999
- ○ $80,000 - $99,999
- ○ $100,000 or more

Please describe the gender with which you primarily identify.

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Transgender Man
- ☐ Transgender Woman
- ☐ Nonbinary, Gender Non-Conforming, Two-spirit, Gender Fluid, or another gender not listed. (If you are comfortable doing so, we welcome you to specify _____ your own term(s).)

Please select the category that best represents your age group.

- ○ Age 18 - 25
- ○ Age 26 - 33
- ○ Age 34 - 41
- ○ Age 42 - 50
- ○ Over 50

As Black women living in the United States, we are often shaped by the cities and states we grow up in. Although Black women in America are diverse and come from all over the world, we are often impacted by the American cities in which we live. In your own words, please tell me the city, state, or region you would consider to be your hometown? Please feel free to explain why this place is or is not important to you.

Voluntary Feedback

Is there anything you would like to tell us in regard to your experience completing this survey?

Thank You.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

We know and understand that the topic of beauty is complex and that there are a variety of factors that influence how people view this subject. We are also aware that there are different cultural standards of beauty within the Black community. However, social media can often present limited images of Black women and influence the content that people watch. In this study, we were looking at people's choices in the absence of recommendations from the social media platform itself to assess how people respond to more diverse images of Black women.

My overall goal is to uplift the work of Black women online and celebrate the diversity of our identities. The research team is very appreciative for your contributions and insight to this topic. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Ta'les Love, at tllove@umich.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Sonya Dal Cin at sdalcin@umich.edu.

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Appendix B

Table 4

Linear Mixed Model Analysis for Relationship between Attractiveness and Skin Tone

	Attractiveness	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*
(Intercept)	3.93	3.79 – 4.07
Medium Brown Skin Condition	0.02	-0.06 – 0.10
Dark Brown Skin Condition	-0.19	-0.29 – -0.08
Random Effects		
σ^2	0.47	
Respondents		
$\tau_{00\ respondents}$	0.41	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.06	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.21	
Influencers		
$\tau_{00\ influencer}$	0.09	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.02	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.04	
ρ_{01}	-0.15	
	-0.01	
	-0.42	
	-0.51	
ICC	0.54	
$N_{\ ResponseId}$	561	
$N_{\ vlogger}$	24	
Observations	6578	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.008 / 0.545	

Note. The following formula for the Attractiveness model was used: Attractiveness ~ SkinToneF + (1 + SkinToneF | ResponseId) + (1 + SkinToneF| vlogger).

Appendix C

Table 5

Linear Mixed Model Analysis for Relationship between Competence and Skin Tone

	Competence	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*
(Intercept)	3.81	3.67 – 3.94
Medium Brown Skin Condition	0.06	-0.02 – 0.14
Dark Brown Skin Condition	-0.16	-0.27 – -0.05
Random Effects		
σ^2	0.45	
Respondents		
$\tau_{00\ respondents}$	0.35	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.00	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.15	
Influencers		
$\tau_{00\ influencer}$	0.09	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.03	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.05	
ρ_{01}	-0.08	
	0.08	
	-0.54	
	-0.53	
ICC	0.52	
$N_{\ ResponseId}$	562	
$N_{\ vlogger}$	24	
Observations	6592	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.009 / 0.527	

Note. The following formula for the Competence model was used: Competence ~ SkinToneF + (1 + SkinToneF | ResponseId) + (1 + SkinToneF | vlogger).

Appendix D

Table 6

Linear Mixed Model Analysis for Relationship between Click and Skin Tone

	Click	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*
(Intercept)	3.48	3.34 – 3.62
Medium Brown Skin Condition	0.07	-0.01 – 0.15
Dark Brown Skin Condition	-0.17	-0.27 – -0.05
Random Effects		
σ^2	0.58	
Respondents		
$\tau_{00\ respondents}$	0.74	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.02	
$\tau_{11\ respondents\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.13	
Influencers		
$\tau_{00\ influencer}$	0.08	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ medium\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.02	
$\tau_{11\ influencer\ dark\ brown\ skin\ condition}$	0.04	
ρ_{01}	0.09	
	0.11	
	-0.54	
	-0.59	
ICC	0.60	
$N_{\ ResponseId}$	562	
$N_{\ vlogger}$	24	
Observations	6529	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.007 / 0.607	

Note. The following formula for the Likelihood of Clicking model was used: Formula: Click ~ SkinToneF + (1 + SkinToneF | ResponseId) + (1 + SkinToneF | vlogger).

Appendix E

Table 7

Beauty Discourse Analysis Code Book

Name	Description	References	Example
AAVE	Use of African American Vernacular English slang words	5	“Once Aina stopped fronting, the big brands started noticing — including Too Faced. Which is why Jerrod Blandino, the brand's founder, tapped the beauty guru to help expand its Born This Way foundation range.” - Refinery, July 2018, File 2
Activism	Mention of Activism/advocacy	60	“From the looks of the image, and from anyone who knows Aina's reputation for championing inclusivity, the range will extend to cater to the deepest complexions, hopefully including tonal variations as well.” - Allure, June 2018, File 4
Beauty Standards	Mention of beauty standards or a direct challenge to them	34	“In another inch towards more diversity in the beauty industry, Estée Lauder just announced that Sudanese model Anok Yai will be the new face of the brand. Slowly but surely, the beauty industry has been shifting more towards diversity and inclusion — a long overdue change that’s been championed in large part by a new wave of brands and influencers like Jackie Aina and Beauty Bakerie. The results? More and more brands are expanding their foundation ranges to cover a more inclusive range of shades, and retooling their beauty campaigns to represent a more diverse representation of beauty.” - Allure, July 2018, File 56

Behavior	References to beauty behavior	5	“RuPaul's Drag Race Star Monét X Change’s Drag Transformation Tutorial” - Allure, June 2018, File 1 *Link to video at end of the story that shows a beauty transformation
callout	When influencers challenge makeup companies or each other	38	“And now, in a video posted to her YouTube, beauty vlogger Jackie Aina is questioning what she says is a lack of outreach to bloggers who aren't white. In the video, Jackie completed a full review of Kylie's new concealer before mentioning that she's "curious" about the brand's "outreach and social media." - Teen Vogue, December 2017, File 38
Expertise	When Jackie is labeled as the authoritative or all-knowing voice	53	“From increasing models of color on campaign ads to ensuring that women on the deepest of the shade range have a variety of colors to choose from for foundations, Aina remains a vocal and outspoken advocate for people and women of color in an industry that seemingly still dismisses us. The best part? She does it all with a snatched face, a smile, and a personality that makes everyone feel warm and right at home.” - HelloBeautiful (Blk publication), January 2018, File 84
Glamor	Instances of influencer lifestyles are mentioned (e.g., expensive handbags, expensive trips); glamor labour is a type of labor that influencers/models engage in	9	“Gucci fanny pack while sitting on the edge of a sofa in the greenroom of her Too Faced Born This Way Foundation launch party in Los Angeles.” - Refinery, July 2018, File 2

Inclusivity or Diversity	When the word inclusivity or diversity is mentioned	129	"Thanks to the launch of Fenty Beauty and their 30 foundation shades, the lack of diversity in the beauty world is finally being addressed. An area that is problematic for Jeffree considering his past racist comments. But after making an apology video he has since announced that he is launching his own concealer and foundation, with a reported 25 shades." - Cosmopolitan, January 2018, File 53
labor	Any references to influencer work	49	"Black beauty influencers are slaying with their creativity all over YouTube. From bomb makeup reviews to important calls for brands to prioritize diversity — they are changing the industry one video at a time." - Cafemom, February 2018, File 90
media	When the media is directly mentioned	1	"Like, we don't have to wait for traditional media to set the trends anymore, 03:42 to tell us what's beautiful, what's acceptable, what's unacceptable. 03:45 It's like, we can create that standard now." - Refiner, November 2018, File 7

money	Any references to money	33	“For anyone hoping to spend their money on brands that are being as genuine as possible in their motives, Aina recommends looking at the people behind the scenes of the company. Some questions she asks herself when trying to determine that on her own: Who are the brands allowing opportunities to sit at the table? Who is making decisions about how the product is marketed? Does the company hire people of color? Do they market to people of color in the brand message and ad campaigns? "Those are just the things that, to me, also reflect how they want to diversify their company as a whole, and not just what benefits them monetarily," Aina says” - Bustle, September 2018, File 8
Name association	Any time Jackie Aina is mentioned	32	“Jeffree Star has called fellow YouTuber, Thomas Halbert, "evil" after Thomas posted a video accusing an unnamed YouTube star of racism. However, earlier this month, YouTuber Jackie Aina publicly denounced Jeffree. Claiming that despite his apology video, he has continued to show racist behaviour.” - Cosmopolitan, October 2018, File 57 *Article was about Jeffree Star and Thomas Halbert, both White influencers
racism	References to racism	44	“On Friday night, La Bronze James herself posted screenshots to Twitter, explaining why she refuses to "excuse [Jeffree's] blatantly racist behavior – not his

			past references to me in derogatory terms, his continued use of the N word, nor his efforts to eliminate spaces and opportunities for people of color." Jeffree hasn't responded to Jackie's statement, because he's currently in the middle of another feud with his former hairstylist, but this isn't the first time the two bloggers have duked it out. In the vid, she explained why she wouldn't be supporting Jeffree Star Cosmetics, saying: "I just have a deep issue with the anti-black comments and things that have been made publicly AND in addition to that, have not been addressed."- Seventeen, October 2018, File 19
Skin tone	References to skin tone or colorism	217	"Believe it or not, but there was once a time when darker skin and coarser hair were considered lesser than within the beauty industry. Even Nigerian hair had a reputation for being tough and unmanageable." - Refinery, May 2018, File 46
YouTube or Digital Influencers	References to YouTube or Digital Influencers	48	"YouTube changed the world. I used to have four seasons a year to release new products but now I have nine or ten seasons with all these new collaborations." - Cosmopolitan, December 2017, File 13

Note. This codebook includes the codes used to label the articles in the discourse analysis. Each category includes an example of the text to illustrate what type of text/words/phrases would be included in the respective code categories. As previously mentioned, much of the text was coded to multiple categories because the nature of the content is intersectional. This example codebook was developed using the codebook developed by Dr. Jessica Moorman (2018) in conjunction with the one NVivo software provides.

References

Moorman, Jessica. (2018). Being Single Is..: A Study of Black Love Media and Single Black Women's Sexual Socialization (Doctoral dissertation).