Afrocentric beauty: The proliferation of 'Texturist' and 'Colorist' beliefs among young women in Kenya

Kecantikan afrosentis: Maraknya kepercayaan 'Texturist' dan 'Colorist' di kalangan perempuan muda di Kenya

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Abstract

The beauty ideals of a Eurocentric nature have been promulgated among African communities for decades dating back to the colonial era. The beauty ideal posits lighter or brown skin tone as prettier and straight hair as attractive. The study aimed to identify ways in which families and peers have perpetuated this common beauty ideal within the home and school settings and how these have influenced how young women view themselves. There were 20 young women of different skin tones ranging from light, medium (brown) to dark participated in two focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was used whereby three main themes (familial influence, peer socialization and self-perceptions) and four sub-themes were identified (general opinion, teasing, family disassociation and preferential vs. unfair treatment). Findings revealed that family member and peers knowingly and unknowingly augmented 'colorist' and 'texturist' beliefs by ridiculing both dark-skinned and light-skinned women. Most of them treated dark skinned people unfairly. The research findings suggested that future research should investigate how body features represent attractiveness within the African communities.

Keywords: Afrocentric beauty; colorist beliefs; kinky hair; skin color

Abstrak

Cita-cita kecantikan yang bersifat Eurosentris telah disebarluaskan di antara komunitas Afrika selama beberapa dekade sejak era kolonial. Kecantikan ideal mengandaikan bahwa warna kulit lebih terang atau warna kulit coklat lebih cantik dan rambut lurus dianggap lebih indah. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi cara-cara di mana keluarga dan teman sebaya telah mengabadikan cita-cita kecantikan umum ini di lingkungan rumah dan sekolah dan bagaimana hal ini memengaruhi cara pandang perempuan muda terhadap diri mereka sendiri. Ada 20 remaja putri dengan warna kulit yang berbeda mulai dari terang, sedang (coklat) hingga gelap berpartisipasi dalam dua diskusi kelompok terfokus. Analisis tematik digunakan dimana tiga tema utama (pengaruh keluarga, sosialisasi teman sebaya dan persepsi diri) dan empat sub-tema diidentifikasi (opini umum, ejekan, disosiasi keluarga dan perlakuan istimewa vs perlakuan tidak adil). Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa anggota keluarga dan teman sebaya secara sadar dan tidak sadar menambah keyakinan 'colorist' dan 'texturist' dengan mengejek perempuan berkulit gelap dan berkulit terang dan kebanyakan dengan memperlakukan secara tidak adil mereka yang berkulit gelap. Kebanyakan dari mereka memperlakukan orang berkulit gelap dengan tidak adil. Temuan penelitian menyarankan bahwa penelitian di masa depan harus menyelidiki bagaimana fitur tubuh menentukan kecantikan dalam komunitas Afrika.

Kata Kunci: *kecantikan afrosentris; kepercayaan colorist; rambut keriting; warna kulit*

Introduction

The origin of the term "Black is beautiful" signified the celebration of the antecedently disfavored Afrocentric features. The social movement sowed the seeds of self-love within the African- American communities in the 1960s-1970s (Craig 2002). This newfound self-appreciation was felt among some Blacks; however, getting rid of internalized beliefs that whiteness is attractive was difficult (Neal &

Wilson 1989, Craig 2002). The color of the skin, size of the nose and the texture of the hair was still used to determine the self-worth, intelligence, success and attractiveness of the African-Americans (Neal & Wilson 1989).

These white beauty standards promote the continuation of plastic surgeries, skin bleaching, hair straightening and wig wearing practices (Corso 2014). Positive body image involved wearing natural Afro hair textures and styles while body dissatisfaction involved continuous use of hair weaves (Gautier 2021). The onset of these indoctrinated beauty standards dates back to the colonial era. Skin color was used in differentiating social hierarchies (superiors and inferiors) and level of attractiveness. Those with dark skin were branded as emblems of ugliness and inferiority while whiteness meant beauty and superiority (Hunter 2007, Thomas 2020).

The social hierarchies are determined by status and power, with the ranking on the basis value dimension of superior to subordinates (Magee & Galinsky 2008). During colonialism, the social hierarchy was determinant on education specialization. The African children underwent agriculture and industry-based education. In the workforce, Europeans occupied managerial positions in the government and as farm masters. Indians took up construction, Arabs business and trade whereas, Africans were manual labor in the kitchen and farms (Okango 2017). Hence the internalization of white supremacy ideologies persists as an aftermath of colonialism. It was cemented through such callous acts as slavery, discrimination, mistreatment of the dark-skinned and in allocation of better jobs and executive positions to light-skinned women (De Souza 2008, Jablonski 2012).

Being regarded attractive is an asset in our society (Wade & Bielitz 2005). Women want to be beautiful for a myriad of reasons including appeasing their partners (Putri et al. 2018). Colorism is widely present in African, Asian and American nations. For instance in Asia, Indonesia women desire white skin that resembles Korean or Japanese (Puspitasari 2020), In India, light skin preference has been present for decades (Norwood 2014, Vijaya & Bhullar 2022). In Japan and China, light skin is associated with higher social status and in different African countries light-skinned women are seen as attractive and can easily find partners (Norwood 2014). There is a plethora of benefits afforded to women of lighter skin complexions compared to those of dark. Not only is light skin color linked to more attractiveness, higher likelihood of marriage and higher desirability (Corso 2014), but also it is associated to socioeconomic status and privilege (Hughes & Hertel 1990, Dixon & Telles 2017) and emotional stability and intelligence (Maddox & Gray 2002). Darker skin tone on the other hand, is associated to poverty, being aggressive (Maddox & Gray 2002) unattractiveness (Lincoln 1967, Jablonski 2012) discrimination, less intelligent (Charles 2021) and harsher legal punishments (Adams et al. 2016).

Hair is significant in determining beauty. Hair texture acts as the determinant of attractive and unattractive hair based on white beauty standards. Straight hair has been identified as more beautiful hence African is not the ideal of desirability (Banks 2000, Tekie 2020). Although straightening of one's hair perpetuate notions of 'good hair' and 'bad hair,' the benefits attached to it include attaining a good job after college (Adams et al. 2016). Hence, hair is also an important marker when assessing favoritism and privilege within the Black community (Banks 2000). Other than the favoritism of light skin over the dark skin, straight hair vs. tight curls, other Eurocentric features such as eye color (blue, gray, green), and thin lips were highly regarded among African-American communities. On the contrary, Afrocentric features (wider nose, kinky hair, thick lips) were devalued (Ryabov 2013). Afrocentric features are viewed as ugly, undesirable and less feminine. These ideas are inculcated frequently by different social institutions including media, family and peer groups (Awad et al. 2014).

Colorism is referred to as skin-color bias that results in systematic discrimination of darker-skinned members of a particular group (Jablonski 2012). Landor & Smith (2019) noted that colorist incidents could occur within interpersonal relationships or institutions throughout a person's life course. Texturist incidents occur in a similar manner as colorist events. This means socialization acts as an avenue through which young people learn about what is regarded attractive or unattractive. It is referred to as the social processes through which children develop an awareness of social norms and values and achieve a distinct sense of self. Socialization takes place through interaction with others whereby the reactions

of others toward our behaviors influence how we behave (Kornblum et al. 2012). Since family and peers are among the agents of socialization, our research aimed to find in which ways family and peers created the beliefs on what is considered as attractive within African communities. The family play the first role in enabling an African-American child to understand tone skin color differences (Adams et al. 2016). Family attitudes, therefore, determine which attitudes their child will form in regard to the value of lighter or darker skin.

Our study seeks to find out the experiences of young women with colorism and texturism in Kenya. Although there is myriad of research on experiences of women with colorism and texturism in America (Ryabov 2013, Awad et al. 2014, Norwood 2014, Abrams et al. 2020) we could not find research in Kenya that covered the issues of colorism and texturism within homes and schools. We sought to identify ways in which family members and peers have influenced the perceptions of beauty among young women in regard to the skin color and hair textures. Our study used the social construction of reality theory of Berger and Luckmann to explain how colorism and texturism have been socially constructed within social institutions. Berger and Luckmann summarized that 'society is a human product' (externalization); 'society is an objective reality' (objectivation); and 'man is a social product' (internalization) (Wallace & Wolf 1995). They used the concepts externalization, objectivation and internalization to divulge the dialectical process through which reality is constructed (Allan 2006). These concepts explain how colorism was constructed through attaching social meanings to skin tones, which in turn results in young women internalizing these ideas as reality and part of their cultural norms. The same applies to the ideas of soft textured hair as signifying 'good hair.'

Research Method

This research applies qualitative research methods. The purpose of qualitative research is descriptive with an aim to understand in-depth the viewpoint/stand of the research participants (Vanderstoep & Johnston 2009), and in addition is the goal to present a range of perspectives or information on a topic. In order to gain an intensive understanding of ways in which colorism and texturism have been internalized within the Kenyan societies, our research integrated young women of different skin tones. This is because, within the Black community, skin color tiers across light to extremely dark tones (Neal & Wilson 1989). We used focus group discussion as our method of study. Focus group discussions are collective conversations or group interviews (Leavy 2014) and allow participants to create synergy among themselves; therefore. ideas, opinions and experiences expressed by some participants can guide other participants (Gordon 2020).

As many as 20 young female university students participated in a semi-structured focus group discussion pertaining their experiences with colorism and texturism within their families and schools. The discussions were held in two groups. The first group consisted of 10 third year university students. Out of these one identified as light-skinned, five identified as medium tone and the other four as dark-skinned. The second group consisted of 10 participants who were second year university students. Among them, four identified as dark-skinned, two as medium tone and four as light skinned young women.

Four prime questions were formulated for the focus group discussion in order to probe into the experiences of the young women within their families and among peers in high school and university. The questions included: (1) what do you perceive as beautiful? (2) In what ways has your family influenced what you perceive as beautiful? (What remarks were made in regard to skin color and hair type), (3) In what ways have your peers influenced what you perceive as beautiful? (4) Do you feel confident about your skin tone and hair texture? Questions one and two were followed with a clarification question, that is, what remarks were made in regard to skin color and hair type?

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, two students, one from third year and another a second selected their classmates and other schoolmates in their same year of study. The students were informed about the general topic and purpose of the study before they agreed to participate. A WhatsApp group was created for the two separate groups, in order to set up the time and location for the discussions to be held. The discussions were held on two different days, depending on availability of the students.

Each of the focus group discussion continued for one hour and 20 minutes whereby the participants took turns to share their experiences and thoughts based on the four questions asked. The discussion was audiotaped to facilitate accurate review and analysis. The participants received light refreshments after the discussions.

The study used thematic analysis. Data that had been recorded into audiotapes was written into texts. We embarked on analysis of our text, developed codes and then transformed these codes into themes. This was as per the guidelines of Lune & Berg (2017). We sorted our texts into these thematic categories noting any similar phrases or patterns and disparities. Our research categorized the data findings into three themes, namely familial influence, peer socialization and self-perceptions. Four sub-themes were identified under the familial influence: general opinion, teasing, family disassociation and preferential vs. unfair treatment. Three sub-themes were categorized under peer socialization: general opinion, teasing and preferential vs. unfair treatment. The sub-themes were then discussed in relation to each other in order to determine if both familial influence and peer socialization had influenced self-perceptions of the participants.

Results and Discussions

Familial influence

Although every family varies in terms of size, location, status and interaction, the family is the main agent of socialization throughout childhood to adulthood (Stolley 2005, Giddens et al. 2018). However every family's socialization process is different because they have their own set of values and beliefs (Ferris & Stein 2018). Hall's research (2017) highlighted how skin color classification is determined by family socialization. Since family is the primary socializing agent, the internalization of colorist and texturist ideas hold more water.

General opinion

The overall perceptions of family members regarding which skin tone and hair texture they considered attractive was paramount to our discussion. Participants shared their families' perceptions on what is regarded as beautiful in a woman. Certain families, were inclined to the view that light-skinned are beautiful compared to dark skin. "…. almost all of us we are light-skinned. The light-skinned are treated better" (ASH, light skinned participant, 2nd year). "In my family we have less people who are light-skinned. They prioritize those who light-skinned in our family more than those who are dark" (FEL, light-skinned participant, 2nd year).

Although some received reassurance that 'they are indeed beautiful as dark-skinned' from their immediate families, "Among all my sisters, I am the darkest, my mom is always complimenting me calls me beautiful so I have never been insecure about my skin color" (MAR, dark-skinned participant, 2nd year). In an earlier study, Harvey et al. (2005) found that in contexts where dark skin tones were highly valued, those with this skin tone had higher levels of self-esteem. These feelings were fueled by their female relatives through continued assurance, encouragement and compliments in regard to their beauty and capabilities (Maxwell et al. 2015, Hall 2017).

Some participants also received disapproval from their extended family members. "I have some cousins who ridicule me because of color" (MAR, dark-skinned participant, 2nd year). Hall (2017) also established that young women receive discriminatory remarks from their extended families. In line with this finding, another research detailed that stereotypical beliefs about skin color were espoused by cousins and sisters (Maxwell et al. 2015).

Participants used the terms 'good hair' and 'bad hair.' Good hair referred to hair that was thick, long and soft textured. On the other hand. bad hair signified short, thin strands, and hard textured. "I am told I don't look nice with short natural hair….I look good when I have long braids" (PRU, dark-skinned participant, 3rd year) "…….Styled my natural hair into an Afro. I knew I was beautiful in that

hairstyle. My mother disagreed and asked me to put on some hair dye so that I would look good" (DAI, dark-skinned participant, 3rd year). For some families, short hair was preferred due to different beliefs including neatness, stunted hair growth and looking more natural. "…… keeping short hair is perceived as beautiful. Braiding means you have added artificial hair to your hair" (YVE, dark-skinned participant, 2nd year). Banks (2000) noted that straight hair and non-kinky texture were a privilege among Black communities. Kinky hair was regarded as 'bad' hair while straight symbolized the 'good' hair. Neal & Wilson (1989) also found that good features represented straight or long hair, and other facial features like thin lips whereas bad features included short or kinky hair as well as thick lips. Overall, good symbolized whiteness while bad symbolized black.

Teasing

Teasing reflects how family members perceived different skin tones and the negative social meanings they attached to different complexions, thereby propagating colorism. Those who identified as dark-skinned divulged their experiences with being ridiculed and teased by family members. They pointed out that the remarks which can be classified as colorist, were disguised as jokes. Some remarks devalued the self-confidence that dark-skinned women had in their beauty; "Since I wear short clothes, my mom jokes that, if I was light skin, I would walk around naked" (PRU, dark skin toned participant, 3rd year) indicating that light-skinned are perceived to have higher self-confidence in how they look. "I wore a short dress, then my cousin said short clothes should only be worn by light-skinned people" (DAI, dark-skinned participant, 3rd year). Identically, Hall (2017) found that dark-skinned women experienced excessive ridicule and condemnation.

Light-skinned women are also teased for their skin tone, especially by extended family members. Comments usually depict light-skinned women as being conceited: "you don't want to sit in the sun so you don't become darker" (NEL, light-skinned participant, 2nd year). They were seen as lazy, unable to do house chores especially by extended family members mainly in the rural areas: "In the village, light-skinned are viewed as people who can't carry out home duties. So there are comments like, 'with all this beauty your husband will leave you because you don't know the wifely duties'" (CHER, dark-skinned toned, 2nd year). Although in this study, light brown women expressed their experience with prejudicial judgments, another study noted that it is unlikely for those who are lighter skinned to report discriminatory treatment and worse treatment in everyday activities on the basis of their skin color (Hersch 2011).

Figure 1.
Afrocomb image
Source: Kwiberry.com (2021)

Among the light-skinned people some of them have uneven skin complexion where certain parts of the body like the knuckles, elbows, knees, lips are darker. In case these parts are darker compared to the rest of the body complexion, it is linked to the possibility of a failed skin bleaching attempt. Participants admitted that they were teased for either having short hair or hard-textured hair. The desirability of natural hair was only when it was long to be tied into a ponytail or when it was soft. "I am always told

that my hair was ruined by mother's genes. We are the only ones who use Afro combs because our hair is hard" (WIN, light skinned participant, 2nd year). An Afro comb (see Figure 1) refers to "a large comb or pick with big, wide teeth that can get into tightly curled hair and lift it up and out from the head without destroying the curl (Quarters 2022). Banks noted that the desirability to embrace the natural Afro hair among Black communities existed simultaneously with disparaging reactions of the same hair type. It seems there a thin line between love and hate of African hair. The determinant being length and texture.

Other parents and relatives showed disapproval for braiding and plaiting hair if the hair had no signs of growth. Participants revealed they were asked to cut their hair and save the cost of hair stylists especially if they had 'hard textured' hair which was not easy to comb or style. Closely related to these findings, Eley's (2017) research unveiled that grandmothers, aunties and mothers expressed contempt for natural Afro hair.

Family disassociation

Family disassociation may present itself in form of hurtful remarks (jokingly or not) that detach a young woman from the sense of belonging to a family, due to having a different skin tone from the other family members. Participants indicated that families had different skin color variations, whereby parents and their children had different skin tones. Some are light-skinned, other medium skin tones (chocolate) and other light skin tones. In these instances, participants mentioned that within their family or the neighborhood, people expressed concerns on the paternity of those who had exceptionally different skin tone compared to majority of the family members. They were frequently bombarded with questions such as 'Are you sure you are a member of that family?' 'Are you sure you not adopted?' 'How are you related to these people (their parents/siblings)? Or sometimes they got offensive comments 'your mother must have had extramarital affairs.' Within a family, there is a variety of different skin tones among the siblings and parent (Adams et al. 2016).

Hair textures were also used in making differential comparisons between family members, "...... my sister has received criticism... she has long hair the texture is hard, so whenever she gets her hair straightened by evening it reverts back to its kinky state, so we ridicule her that she is not a member of our family because whenever the rest of us straighten (blow dry) our hair it remains straight even for two months" (VER, medium skin toned participant, 3rd year).

Preferential vs Unfair treatment

Preferential treatment represents the actions of family members in favor of the light-skinned members while unfair treatment indicates how actions of families may disfavor those who are dark-skinned. There was preferential treatment for the light-skinned people in certain families. Division of labor is one of the ways in which inequality presents itself. Certain jobs viewed as dirty and hard are meant for those who are dark-skinned. While tasks that are seen as light and clean are meant for the light-skinned family members. "My sister who is light-skinned wouldn't want to light a jiko (a container made of metal or clay and used for burning charcoal or small pieces of wood, in order to cook or to give heat, Oxford Dictionary) she says since I am dark, I should be the one to touch the charcoal" (MAR, dark skinned participant, 2nd year).

"Light-skinned are given the easier jobs, the dark-skinned will be sent into the forest to fetch firewood. The dark-skinned will also be asked to wash the clothes while the light-skinned will be asked to hang the clothes to dry" (ASH, light-skinned participant, 2nd year). Other than the 'dirty chores' being dark-skinned is sometimes linked to bad behaviors: "I have a sister who is dark-skinned, so every time she makes mistakes, there will be references made to her skin color. She is always crying" (JUN, medium skin toned participant, 3rd year). Colorism included skin tone stereotypes whereby dark-skinned women were assigned negative character traits (Maddox & Gray 2002, Harvey et al. 2017). Besides that, light-skinned were more favored by family members (Eley 2017).

Certain actions indicated the favoritism for light-skinned family members compared to the dark-skinned, especially during extended family gatherings. "When we visit the village and arrive at the same time, my grandmother will want to great me first as well as the other light-skinned members. Those who are dark will be greeted afterwards. She will refer to the light-skinned as her real children and the dark-skinned as the 'others'" (ASH, light-skinned participant, 2nd year). Pet names given to light-skinned girls indicate they are highly regarded: "My grandmother gave me a nickname 'mugeretha' which means (British)" (WIN, light-skinned participant, 2nd year). Unattractive skin tones among children indicated they were disfavored and poorly parented, hence were at higher risk of psychological harm as a result of discrimination within and outside the family setting (Adams et al. 2016).

The meaning attached to being light skin and being dark skin have been well-articulated in the above sub-themes. Berger and Luckmann's theory of objectivation is important to decipher how the meanings of 'light skin and soft-textured hair is attractive' and 'dark skin and hard-textured hair is unattractive' have been constructed into reality. Through the continuous actions of family members, skin tone is objectified such that it is linked to certain traits, behaviors and domestic roles. As a result of these objectivations, where dark-skinned are linked to 'dirty and heavy chores' and light-skinned to light chores and inability to carry out homely duties; the participants who identified with these classifications face the consequences of being light or dark-skinned. Those who were darker were disassociated from family members, ridiculed and experienced unfair differential treatment.

Peer socialization

Peers are individuals who are social equals (Tischler 2011). Peers not only create social bonds with each other, they also contribute to self-doubt, ridicule and rejection (Ferris & Stein 2018). Landor and Smith (2019) recorded that negative skin tone beliefs shared in the course of interaction with others triggered feelings of isolation and withdrawal.

General opinions

Peers in high school collectively perceive beauty as having light skin, long soft hair or having attractive facial features. Among peers in high school, participants expressed that light-skinned were regarded as beautiful: "Light- skinned were highly ranked in high school. They were perceived as more beautiful compared to the rest" (JUN, medium skin toned participant, 3rd year). Participants noted that their peers in the university mostly did not make any references to skin color but body shape and size. Only one noted that she had received remarks regarding her skin tone among her peers in the university: "I often got compliments that I look good, but if I was light-skinned I would look more stunning" (PRU, dark skin toned participant, 3rd year). Despite this remark, the majority of the young women felt that, within the university setting, peer perceptions on one's appearance were either restrained or mild in existence. When high school is over, the benefit of peer acceptance rapidly disappears (Tischler 2011).

Dark skin would be considered as beautiful if they had other attractions. The same applied to light skin, because, among light skin girls, there was also ranking based on features. Participants pointed out that light-skinned should have certain features to be beautiful, like good eyes, small forehead good hair, good hair features. Dark-skinned were beautiful if they had long hair, pink lips and good body shape. Abrams et al. (2020) uncovered that lighter-skinned people were considered more physically attractive if they had other features like soft un-kinky hair texture and certain eye color. They also noted that this meant that beauty was not entirely attached to skin color or that dark skin tone was ugly. Another study noted that, for darker skin toned women, other body features were important in assessing their overall beauty (Gautier 2021), these features included having 'good' hair (Abrams et al. 2020).

Same as within the family setting, long hair or soft hair was preferred among peers in high school. Those who were in boarding schools would help oil each other's hair on Saturdays. "Girls with long hair were always booked beforehand because everyone wanted to style their hair" (WIN, light-skinned participant, 2nd year). Long hair was thus considered as attractive, easy to style and desirable. Goins (2022) noted that long hair was also idealized because of its close proximity to Eurocentric hair regardless of whether it was Afro-textured. Overall, in the majority of the participants' high schools, the school rules required hair to be cut short so that it was easier to maintain.

Teasing

Through the use of hurtful remarks by their peers and facing indifference from light-skinned women, dark-skinned women felt ridiculed and devalued. The dark-skinned students found it difficult to form friendships with lighter-skinned peers. "In high school it was difficult to make friends with light-skinned girls, they used to be egoistic, and their pride was at the top" (VAL, medium skin toned participant, 2nd year). This was consistent with Uzogara's (2014) study where light-skinned women felt they did not fit in with dark-skinned women who perceived them as snobbish due to their attractiveness. Another student noted segregation amongst those who were light-skinned and those who were dark: "In our high school, the brown-skinned would hang out together, call each other 'Shorties' (refers to a beautiful woman)" (DAM, medium skin toned participant, 2nd year).

Similarly, Landor & Smith (2019) indicated that, although light-skinned women always received more positive labels, they were referred to as having too much pride, being less intelligent and feeling more worthy than their dark-skinned counterparts. Certain hurtful names were used to refer to dark-skinned women including sufuria (cooking pot that turns black as it coated soot), and makaa (charcoal). Eley (2017) unearthed derogatory name calling in high school among the dark-skinned women with such terms as gorilla, burnt cookie, and Oreo.

Preferential vs Unfair treatment

The actions of peers toward those who are dark-skinned was regarded as hostile, contrary to favoritism of the light-skinned women. Participants reported preferential treatment for light-skinned girls compared to dark-skinned. These came from fellow peers in high school as well as teachers. "Light skins were mostly favored by teachers they were sometimes not caned if found in a mistake." When it came to punishments, dark skin toned girls received harsher tasks: "Dark-skinned would wash the toilets, light-skinned would wash the class" (ASH, light skin toned participant, 2nd year). Other than punishments, they were also favored in the compulsory allocation of duties at school. Light skin toned girls were perceived to be conceited and arrogant due to the preferential treatment and amount of adoration they received (Abrams et al. 2020).

Several participants identified that, during partner selection, their male peers preferred light-skinned women. While the others did not find skin tone as important, instead they argued men paid more attention to body size and body shape, especially within the university settings: "male friends sometimes remark they wouldn't marry a dark-skinned girl and get charcoal-colored children. They won't comment or judge my skin color but they will be looking at a light-skinned girl and talk about how good she looks" (ROS, dark-skinned participant, 3rd year). Another student shared "I was in a mixed (boys & girls) high school; during interactions with boys, boys would pick girls who were pretty, light-skinned" (EST, medium toned, 3rd year). Bond & Cash (1992) also found that Black male peers perceived light-skinned women as more attractive. On the other hand, "in the university setting, men prefer dark women because they are perceived as easy catch" (WIN, light skin toned participant, 2nd year). Despite perceiving dark-skinned women as attractive, Corso (2014) discovered that some men preferred to only sleep with these women but not engage in a long-term relationship with them.

Similar to family, peer groups within the high school setting perpetuated the meaning of skin tones. The light skin, soft, long hair is attractive idea continued to promulgate amongst high school students. Skin tones are objectified since, once again, they were associated with character traits, male attention and even socializing habits. Therefore due to these skin tone classifications, being dark or light came with perks and drawbacks. The light skin toned and those with long soft textured hair were viewed as popular among their peers, but also referred to as proud and unfriendly, while the dark skin toned received less male attention, were termed as and 'easy catch', they received harsher punishments and were also teased and ridiculed by teachers. On the other hand, those with longer hair received more attention from their peers and offers to aid in hair maintenance and styling.

Self-perceptions

Contrast between women's skin color and their perception of which skin color is attractive may equate to skin color dissatisfaction but not to the desirability to change it. On other hand, women's perceptions of attractive hair correlated with hair texture dissatisfaction and a desirability to change it. The participants seemed to have varying perceptions of what beauty meant them. Some of the dominant terms used in determining beauty included body shape and size, facial features (smaller forehead, lighter lips, cute eyes) hair textures, hairstyle (e.g. with laid edges). Some participants defined beauty in terms of skin color; among the second-year participants, Ash thought light skin to be beautiful while DOR (dark skin toned), WIN (light skin toned) and DAMA (medium skin toned) expressed preference for medium skin tone. The preference for medium skin tone can be associated to the fact that those with this skin tone did not seem to have received discriminatory remarks.

Earlier research also found that medium skin toned women were found not to have any denigrating stereotypes due to their skin color; therefore, they were more affirmed and validated by teachers, parents and by male peers and partners (Uzogara 2014). Only two participants, (VAL (medium skin toned), CHER (dark skin toned) and YVE (dark skin toned) among the second year students leaned toward beauty representing spotless darker skin complexion. Among the third years, ROS defined beauty as including lighter skin complexion and PRUD as smooth dark skin tone. From this, the preference for dark-skinned was attached to other desirable features, mainly absence of acne, and presence of smooth, sleek skin. The rest of the participants from both years argued that beauty is not determined by skin color.

When asked if they were satisfied with their skin color and hair texture, almost all were contented in their skin color. However, hair length, hair edges or hair texture raised expressions of discontentment. Just as Corso (2014) found that familial influence is not only a source of ridicule but also provides solution and source of healing, CHER noted that, even though she hated the size of her lips, the fact that "my grandmother complimented me that she blessed us with beautiful lips and skin" made her confident in her own appearance.

ROS pointed out that she would rather be either evenly black or evenly light: "I would have liked to be very light-skinned or very dark because, at the moment, I have inconsistencies in my complexion. The color of the legs seems different from the hands." Other participants expressed that they were dissatisfied with their body size or body shape.

Participants acknowledged that the majority of their families, and peers idealized light skin as beautiful, in the same way as Coardz et al.'s (2001) findings were discussed, nevertheless, participants were satisfied with their skin tones despite not meeting these societal standards. Maxwell et al. (2015) concluded that the skin color satisfaction for Black women signified a form of positive defiance. Since despite experiencing high levels of skin tone discrimination, they avoided internalizing negativity attached to dark skin and embraced positive self-evaluations. However, our readers should note that expressing skin color satisfaction does not equate to higher self-esteem, especially because the participants perceptions of 'self' did not tally with how they perceived beauty. Similarly Coardz et al. (2001) noted the same contradiction our research did, that self-esteem was not in tune with skin color satisfaction. Their research was also keen to note that Blacks were inclined to denial and conflict when it comes to matters of skin color.

Skin tones have been objectified within the social institutions that carry out primary and secondary socialization, in fact young women had internalized the perceptions of light is attractive and soft hair is attractive from their family members and peers at school. Unknowingly, even though they now lived separately from family and the domineering influence of high school peers, participants still harbored the society's perception of beauty. They expressed a desirability for medium toned skin, dark skin (but only with attractive features), and long, soft hair with well-laid edges, all of which were a representation of the beauty standards they encountered at home and at school.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the contribution of family members and peers in promulgation of colorist and texturist beliefs. Young women recounted their experiences with colorism and texturism within the context of home and school. There was chronic colorism existing in these social institutions. There were several colorist incidents present within the family and among peers enacted openly or in disguise, once or multiple times, unintentional or intentional through language and actions.

Family members and peers idealized light skin and soft, long hair as attractive and dark skin and hard-textured hair as unattractive. They believed in the social meanings constructed that linked different skin complexions to behavioral traits and social roles. Due to these beliefs, dark-skinned and light-skinned participants were teased for their skin color and hair texture. Since dark skinned was attached to negative stereotypes, they received unfair treatment. Young women had, therefore, internalized the idea that beauty was represented in either light or medium toned skin and soft hair, and although they claimed to be satisfied with their skin complexions, their perception on what beauty was seemed to contradict their self-image. Dark skin was viewed as attractive only if the young woman had other facial features considered attractive, such as smoothness of skin, good eyes and lips.

Texturism experiences had triggered the desire to change hair texture and hair length among young women. Although the study leaned toward hair and skin color as determinants of beauty, the study participants continuously mentioned body shape and body size as markers of beauty, especially within the university's settings. Based on our findings, future research should investigate how body shape and body size influence women's perceptions of beauty with the African contexts.

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