# **Representation and Effects of Dark Skin Women on the Media**

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**Abstract**

Along with other race-related issues, colorism exists in the media arena. It exists as a form of racism emanating from color stereotypes regarding the dark-skinned black, racialized through media representation imagery. Stereotypes from the slavery era hold that light-skinned black possesses an advantage over dark skinned individuals. Dark skinned with Eurocentric standards have a greater privilege over the dark-skinned Afrocentric standards. The stereotypes have played a substantial role in the underrepresentation of darker skin individuals in pop culture, films, television, shows, and movies. It has limited access to equality of inclusion and perception into the social world. This dehumanization has reduced the darker-skinned self-concept and harmed their social performance. The stereotypes have also changed the how the youths, and young children relate the black culture to the media. This qualitative content analysis research is anticipated to report the findings through the narrative approach. The research investigates the prevalence of colorism in the media such as Television, Hollywood, and shows in America and globally. It will also assess how colorism contribute to the underrepresentation of the dark-skinned complexion. Considering that colorism exists, the research will also examine the push factors to media colorism and the potential impacts on youths, adolescents, and dark-skinned individuals. Finally, the research will address the potential policy implications to the dark-skinned complexion.

INDEX WORDS: Colorism, Dark –skinned, Light skinned, Eurocentric standards.

**Representation and Effects of Dark Skin Women on the Media**

**Introduction**

Colorism is not just an American phenomenon, but it’s an overarching global problem. As a result, the disparity continues to be a major challenge facing the social inclusion of black women in various economic, political, and social arenas (Smith et al.,2021), despite the efforts to promote females worldwide. Although the United States has an intricate history of race relations, the trait differentiating dominate and the minority group still receive inadequate attention. Persistent gender discrimination, especially to people of color, disentangle the stereotypes that affect black women's economic and social growth. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in media posits that people of color, especially females, have been racialized and socially delineated from the whiteness culture in the media arena and categorized as separate categories (Mctaggart et al., 2022). At most, the effects of these types of discrimination and partiality have lessened the opportunities for progress and achievement for girls and women of color. In Europe, black and migrant women continue to face insidious institutional anti-black racism and associated oppression.

In order to understand the intersecting nature of social inequality in the contemporary lives of dark-skinned black women, including the digital encounter and media inclusion, it is essential to understand the political push activating colorism production in the cultural and media spheres. Black women have been perceived as disadvantaged in countries like the United States, where colorism is more often discussed and practiced. The black are frequently subjected to the stereotypes that whiteness is a cultural standard and an ideal culture. This ideology introduces the concept of the white supremacist, and are used to weigh the preferences of the whites against the blacks. In pop culture, the women who possess a light skin color are adequately represented because they possess the ideal culture (Hassan, 2018). Media producers such as Hollywood tend to hire lighter-skinned individuals with European standards over dark-skinned women. The media is aware of these coloristic prejudices but continues to endorse them to proliferate their profits affluence, grow white audience and build a reputation.

Additionally, the world's portrayals of whiteness in social media have always outweighed the black representations, especially for the black darker-skinned women. Research from various studies has endorses colorism as a detrimental variable determining how the female gender is represented in social media film, pop cultures, and music (Mctaggart et al., 2021; Hassan, 2018; Wilder, 2017). Studies presented by Geena Davis Institute also depict that the number of females with dark skin is too small to be examined alone and hence should consider the overall black community. The research indicated that only 19% of the female from the previous decades possess a dark skin complexion (Tapp, 2021; Mctaggart et al., 2021). As a result, the dark-skinned female becomes racially discriminated from equal opportunities in the media front or is offered less worth responsibilities than the light tone women. For example, the Mctaggart et al., (2021) research indicated that 29.3% of the black women are likely to be represented as violent in the media compared to 24.6% white, twice the percentage of other violent women color.

 This research aims to investigate and analyze how dark-skinned women have been presented in the media in the past and the contemporary context. Through detailed and evidence-based research from various sources, the research will also assess the ratios through which the media endorses disparity or equality in inclusion. The research will also confirm whether the number of light skins represented in the media outweighs the dark-skinned tone females. Finally, the research investigates how coloristic preferences for lighter complexion affect black society and its potential implications.

**Literature Review**

 **The Historical Context of the Dark Skin**

The ideology of the dark-skinned is engrained in the painful stereotypes of the white supremacist based back in American slavery. The historical context is supported by the story “The making of a slave” by Willie Lynch. The story endows the inhumane psychology behind the African slave trade, which focused on maintaining the enslaved people physically healthy but psychologically weak (Lynch, 2011). The untold story reveals the practice of white and light skin supremacists over the black and the dark-skinned female. The words in the speech portray the social delineation and racialization of the black. The indoctrination and stereotypes developed during that time have always been passed to generations. The barbarism beliefs have ruined the ability of dark-skinned women to share an equal opportunity in the real world. The stereotypes are strongly rooted in the slavery era when work was selective based on color. In most cases, the light-skinned are perceived as more privileged and more likely to progress compared to the dark-skinned tone. In the realm of the colorism ideology, the dark-skinned female has continued to be socially excluded and racialized in televisions and films or has been portrayed as people of less worth based on the positions in social media.

**Drivers of Colorism in the Media**

 As the ideology of colorism dominates the media arena, it is essential to understand the core drivers of the white supremacist dogma. According to wilder (2017), families, institutions, and relationships have played a vital role in alleviating the expansion of the underrepresentation and misrepresentations of the black tone. However, the social world must not underestimate the roles of the media in perpetuating dominant colorism. Hassan's (2018) research indicates that, media-driven messages are the most influential forces and accentuate an existing preference to promote the idealism that success is worth the lighter-skinned female. Efficacious black female in the media are represented as having a lighter skin color than their actual skin color, and the darker-skinned tone continues to be underrepresented. As a result, the larger proportion of the dark-skinned black female in the contemporary world continues to feel ashamed of their skin color. Despite the higher efforts to promote the appearance of black women in the media in an equitable way, disparity based on the physical appearance or colorism continues to persist.

Recently, Mctaggart et al., (2021) acknowledged discrimination against black women, especially the dark-skinned black women in Hollywood films. Dark-tone Black females are rarely equally featured in leading roles in Hollywood films. All prominent roles in the features the black women with lighter skin, which portrays the light-skinned supremacist based back in the slavery era. The media has always perpetuated a limited white definition of beauty, leading to a challenging experience as the darker-skinned women struggle to receive a fair representation. Media channels especially Television shows and films and advertisements have always typically perceived light skinned women as both cultural imperative and racially ideal excluding the black women in the popular cultures (Kulaszewicz, 2015). However, if the black women are represented in these films, they are featured with Eurocentric features contrary to the distinct African features. According to Mctaggart et al., (2021), black women have been featured with straightened hair that resembles white European standards products. Unlike the conventional dark-skinned appearance, which resembled braided, dread rocks and natural hairstyles, the contemporary representation in the media has undergone a paradigm of dynamicity to what is attractive to the larger audience. These evil stereotypes have been rooted in the oppressive messages that undervalue their blackish culture. Therefore, the entertainment media can be perceived as a source of blackish bias but can also be used to endorse the change of perceptions against the black women cultures.

**Impacts of Colorism in the Media**

The predomination of the light-skinned complexion in the contemporary world has impacted life opportunities and the progression of African American women for centuries. The stereotypic practices and experiences have instigated the dark-skinned to hate their natural skin color, hair texture, and shape of the noses and begin to envy the European standards. According to Mathews & Johnson (2015), colorism perpetuates even in the traits. The positive traits have been linked to the lighter skin complexions, while the dark-skinned are socially delineated and situated into distinct categories. Numerous findings have indicated that lighter-skinned women have had higher self-concept and capital affluence compared to the dark-skinned. This perception has changed the way youths perceive their social world. They believe that they will at some point encounter these dark skin hues and are likely to suffer from racial stress (Adams-Bass et al.,2014). Across the African American ethnicity, the lighter skin tone has fewer societal barriers while the darker-skinned have always faced progression struggles. Smith et al., (2021) identifies that these types of stereotypic discrimination have affected and caused harm to black women in beauty ideals, socioeconomic, and social status. Sometimes the latter has also been found to cause increased psychological and emotional harm to women during their early stages of development.

The persistence of colorism in the media has also caused a shift in the societal stance of how they perceive color. These stereotypical beliefs have been fueled by the continual exposure to media, television, and internet messages that continue to endorse light-skin supremacists (Rahman, 2020). The experience has lured the youths into socially accepting the light skin complexion over their natural color. According to Adams-Bass, et al. (2014), continual exposure of adolescents to the negative representation of the dark-skinned have tendered the youths to think what they see is the real world representation, thus changing their perceptions towards dark-skinned women. When dark-tone women are exposed as sexualized, violent, and in minor responsibilities in the top gross films, it affects the self-concept of the black youths and cause shame of their blackish culture. They tend to agree that these are the expected behaviors of the black cultures and develop a negative attention towards movies, films, television shows, and online campaigns. (Hassan, 2018; Rotondo, 2020). In addition, dark skin media portals affect cognition and reasoning abilities which later explains the cause of their behaviors in their social world. Therefore, there is a need for a proactive racial socialization strategy to empower the youths to better cope with racial stress.

**Methodology**

The methodology used in this particular research is qualitative content analysis. The methodology is ideal when analyzing communications textual data through codding and identifying the themes and patterns (Elo, et al., 2014). The method examined language characteristics, especially getting into the bottom meaning of the teat and visual communication message. The rationale for using the qualitative content analysis was to utilize the media news articles and research databases to investigate the extent of representation of dark skin females in television and films. The data was collected from various sources, including newspaper articles, media messages (Twitter) and stories, journal articles, gender-related research databases, and visual films. The search strategy for the research encompassed google search for "dark-skinned in the media, media portrayals for black Americans women, or Hollywood colorism.” The inclusion criteria involved resources within the last five years, which was relevant to the topic of Study for the factual data and slavery time for the historical context.

**Data Description**

**Data collection**

Data from the Institute of Geena Davis Institute of research, peer-reviewed journal, media messages, and inclusion data of dark-skinned women in holly wood films was abstracted and printed. Data synthesis was feasible to check the data eligibility, reliability, and relevance to the topic. Any source that did not meet the inclusion criteria was rejected. The rationale for including Twitter messages and Hollywood data as additional resources is because they serve as an affluent environment to investigate practices and representation stereotypes and practices in the media world. Twitter also provides data from both the private and public worlds.

**Thematic Analysis**

Analysis of the journals articles, data reports, and news reports followed a thematic analysis considering the themes and the representation of the facts. The first step included locating the resources relevant to the research topic. This step included checking the year of publication, author’s database, and information significance to the study topic. This section involved incorporating the information and assessing the representation of dark-skinned females in the media. The analysis also included how the sources identified the representation of dark-skinned women. In order to identify the relevant statements and avoid repetition, highlighting and recording were relevant. After rereading the chosen sources and identifying the phrases that encoded the developed themes, I presented the themes in a narrative form through a word document.

**Fig 1.0 Coding on Media Message**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tweet** | **Meaning**  | **Condensed meaning** | **Code**  | **Categories**  | **Themes**  |
|  | "The way dark-skinned Asians get better media representation in every other continent but their own is always surreal. South Asia is still doing the paper bag test while this girl on Netflix." | Asian Dark skinned get better representation.South Asian is still discriminatory in Netflix inclusion. | Racialization of Dark-skinned  | Media reference | Restrictions to dark-skinned inclusion in media  |
|  | "There is nothing left to say about colorism in media. If you are not casting dark-skinned people of all ethnic backgrounds in your film and show it's on purpose, you are a colorist assisting in the disappearing and (State) harm that dark-skinned people face." | The media is purposely not casting dark-skinned films and shows.The media is responsible for dark-skinned suffering.  | Dark-skinned underrepresentation and implication  | Self-affirmation  | Using media messages to show colorism portrayals |
|  | "Dark-skinned characters have been replaced with lighter tones across broad media. It's a jarring look at the shift that happened in the 90s." | Light skinned supremacist The historical context of the barbarism of lightness  | Light skinned domination  | Factual reference | Privileged white skin  |

**Inclusion Criteria. Fig 2.0**

Other sources search (N=4)

Data Base Search Records (N=33)

Records after duplicate

(N=30)

Articles excluded

(N=7)

Full –texts articles excluded (N= 10)

Not published in English (N=0)

Not relevant to colorism in the media (N=5)

Discussing of black male (N=3)

Abstract articles (N=2)

Full article accessed for eligibility (N=23)

Studies included

(N=13)

**Data Results**

There were both positive and negative findings regarding dark-skinned representation in the media. The research findings must endorse both sides of the story to eliminate potential information bias. Findings gathered from the Geena Davis Institute of research depict that black women consist of 6.5 % of the United States population, but only 3.7% of the black female are on the top characters in top-grossing movies (Mctaggart et al., 2021; Tapp, 2021). The report has indicated that approximately 80% of the black female characters have a medium to light tone, thus depicting that colorism dominates. The research has also depicted bias regarding dark-skinned blacks. The research has depicted that 57.1% against 42.9%, representing more than half of the black female characters in Hollywood films, conform to the Eurocentric traits. Only 19% of the black females are featured in blockbuster films have a dark-skinned tone. The results infer that when the media features the black female in top-grossing films, most conform to the light skin and hairstyles that depict European beauty. Additionally, the findings also indicate that black women featured in the top-grossing films were either featured in sexualized or violent.

On the other hand, information gathered from media messages has depicted that colorism is still a problem in social media inclusion. Messages from Twitter have depicted how the south Asian community is practicing racial discrimination when including black participants in Netflix shows. The tweet messages retrieved from Twitter were meant to investigate public and private society perceptions of dark-skinned representation in the media. Through self-affirmation, advertisement, and media film reference, colorism is seen to dominate and perceived to cause harm and extinction of the dark-skinned culture. The tweets have asserted social delineation over the distinct category groups in the media films and top grossing shows.

Other studies from peer review and research studies depict a prevalence of colorism indicates that a black woman must have European standards traits (light-skinned). Colorism has been identified as the ideology of the slavery era when the light-skinned black were given host privileges that were not awarded to their dark-skinned counterparts (Tiffany, 2017). This ideology has created a notion that the light-skinned are better, more attractive, and culturally ideal than their dark-skinned equals because they embody closer propinquity to whiteness. As a result, media outlets have perceived light-skinned women as culturally ideal and imperative, forming a background for the dark-skinned exclusion (Hassan, 2018). The struggle for black women to media inclusivity and role recognition in Hollywood has increased and has resulted in skin bleaching to fit the privileged triangle. A good example is a Jamaican culture, where Rahman (2020) indicates that for the blacks to be featured as attractive and worthy, they must have a lighter skin complexion.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, numerous research has showed a significant difference between the dark-skinned black women and light-skinned featured in media. After closely analyzing the content in the research resources, the origin of colorism can be sketched back to European civilization and slavery in history. Countries have developed the barbarism culture concerning whiteness and created a society where whiteness supremacist persists. The context of the problem could be thought to be an American phenomenon, but the Study confirms that it is a global challenge. Analysis of the media message has depicted that south Asia continued to conduct the paper bag test on Netflix films which depicts that discrimination over the dark-skinned actress. Colorism has been fueled by the preceding stereotypes on cultural ideals and colorist ideology. As a result of increased dehumanization and discrimination, the dark-skinned women in shows have been featured as violent or sexualized black women. The impacts have always affected the ability of the adolescents to interpret and differentiate the negative and positive media findings on black female representation. There has also tendered negative perception of the dark-skinned representation, which is likely to influence their development in the social world.

**Policy Implication**

Colorism complexion has always reproduced paradoxical aftermaths due to its complicated ideology. Its expression in the media through classism, racism, and sexism have induced stereotypic notions to the lives of adolescents and young children in what they tend to think is a light-skinned-dominated society. Exposure to these rotten ideologies by far plays a part in the continual of the light-skinned complexion cycle. As the media continues to embody light-skinned female inclusion, more dark-skinned females have adopted an alternative to giving them an equitable fight for equal opportunities. Most dangerously, most black cultures have begun to practice skin bleaching to pass the paper bag test and fit the more attractive culture. In light of this, the dark-skinned population is likely to extinction in the coming centuries. The societal perceptions regarding colorism have also changed to negativity. Defining the blackish society based on the physical appearance of primitive assumptions of their racial backgrounds or abilities produces inaccurate results. Medial producers such as Hollywood, Netflix, and other television shows must begin to recognize the diversity in theatre productions and talent shows. These recommendations are likely to expand the global popularity and the vast reach for audiences. Considering the detrimental impacts of dark-skinned stereotypes, media agencies must minimize racial prejudices and embrace diverse social inclusion for diverse color complexions. Therefore, breaking the pattern of colorism in the media will require acknowledging its actuality and its impacts on a larger picture.

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