

The Idealization of Light Skin in Guam: A Descriptive Diagnostic of the Bleaching Syndrome vis-à-vis Asia/Pacific Islanders

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ABSTRACT

Under the cloak of Western epistemology, certain members of the academy have sought to validate the myth of race. Consequently, while the rhetoric of the academy is governed by the ideals of race, behavior in the field has been governed by Caucasian ideals of skin color. A descriptive, empirical analysis was conducted in an effort to assess the circumstances. Results suggest a relationship between light skin and Asia/Pacific Islander ideals for a selected Guam population. Subsequently, the Bleaching Syndrome, defined as the internalization of social pathogens relative to the idealization of light skin, is apparent among non-Caucasian populations. The idealization of any single human physiological trait must then be eliminated such that the future of mankind may avoid the aftereffects of post-colonial domination. Future investigation should consider indigenous participation in the collection of data and a more inclusive sampling process to facilitate more confidence in conclusions that are drawn.

Keywords: Bleaching syndrome, Idealization, Light skin, Race, Skin color

INTRODUCTION

In America, race prevails as the most significant and critical criteria relative to the ideals of human hierarchy and human quality of life, according to academic literature. No other attribute so diminishes the tangible as well as the intangible qualities of human worth, which is directly associated with the ideals of self-concept [1]. What is more, human worth is traditionally assessed by racial heritage, which is commensurate with physical attributes and native ethnicity. The outcome is grist for language, causing racial dichotomization of the American population as White and non-White; that is, Caucasian and non-Caucasian, despite lacking any biological significance whatsoever [2]. Other aspects of demography are subjugated by race. Therefore, by racial heritage per Caucasian ancestry, those who are regarded as Caucasian are conspicuous. The subsequent confusion and pathology relative to non-Caucasians extended from this racial construct is a matter of mythology that is construed as science by the academy. Under the cloak of Western epistemology, certain members of the academy have sought to validate the myth of race for less than altruistic reasons. They labor in assigning merit to the auspices of White supremacy absent consideration of alternative views. The ultimate racial objective is to ensure

preferred access to America's wealth and resources for those whose biological inheritance is preferred. Subsequently, the academy has enabled this objective in the production of literature in order to generate in a scientific context for the mythological fiction of superior race theory as scientific fact [3].

In 1994, Herrnstein and Murray [4], the two Euro-American members of the academy, published the infamous *The Bell Curve*, a book that implies the inferiority of non-Caucasians and which ignited a firestorm of controversy during the 1990s. As a related matter, average Euro-American I.Q. scores per Eurocentric intelligence measures are approximately 15 points higher than the average for non-

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Caucasian African Americans [5]. Herrnstein and Murray [4] suggest that this I.Q. differential based on race is a significant intelligence factor in the midst of what they consider to be an unprecedented transformation of Western civilization. In the United States, family surnames and other social prescripts of racial heritage prevail as a prerequisite of success, as the definitive criteria for those who aspire to and arrive at the wealthier, more refined echelons of modern-day society. Enabled by a heritage of superior race, Euro-Americans are accepted at the elite institutions of education, after which they access the most elite of occupations and rates of financial compensation. Left behind are the inferior races, most of whom, the authors contend, are non-Caucasians [6]. Herrnstein and Murray [4] suggest that it is in proximity to racial ideals that certain sectors of the population will succeed in an advanced technological society such as the United States. Increasingly, in an advanced technological society, the ideals of race have been perpetuated where they may be all but irrelevant among certain Caucasian-dominated populations who may not identify as Caucasian but who idealize Caucasian for reasons of success. Consequently, while the rhetoric of the academy is governed by the ideals of race, behavior in the field has been governed by Caucasian ideals of skin color [1]. The idealization of light, i.e., Caucasian, skin color is most dramatically apparent in the twice-colonized, Asia/Pacific island nation of Guam.

Caucasians likely first arrived on the island of Guam in 1521, as Spain officially claimed the island in 1565. Spain then conquered and colonized Guam in the 17th century. The natives fought back for 25 years but were eventually subdued. These Spanish Caucasians from Europe introduced diseases such as smallpox and influenza to Guam's native population, which was then significantly decimated. Relentless typhoons on the island in 1671 and 1693 brought an additional severe loss of life. Guam then remained a Spanish property until a second colonial experience in 1898, when it was ceded to the United States. Except for a brief period of Japanese occupation during World War II, Guam has endured as a U.S. territory under the administration of an American naval officer appointed by the President of the United States [7].

Guam was first settled by peoples who called themselves *Chamorros*. The ancestry of Chamorros includes Malaysian, Indonesian, Spanish, Filipino, Mexican, and a considerable Asian heritage comprising approximately 30% of the population. Of that number, Filipinos are the most significant after the native Chamorros. Exact demographic percentages of the country consist of Chamorro (37.3%); Filipino (26.3%); white (7.1%); Chuukese (7%); Korean (2.2%); other Pacific Islander (2%); other Asian (2%); Chinese (1.6%); Palauan (1.6%); Japanese (1.5%); Pohnpeian (1.4%); mixed race (9.4%); and other (0.6%). The religion of approximately 75% of the Guam peoples is Roman Catholic [7]. Thus, Guam is an Asia/Pacific island

nation that has been dominated by Caucasian race influences, which predisposes them socially to Caucasian race ideals. Subsequently, as some in the academy might suggest, skin color rather than race serves as the prevailing demographic category. The academy has yet to acknowledge this. Addressing the extent of the skin color demographic will be herein conveyed through (a) review of the literature; (b) methodology; (c) statistical method; (d) results; (e) the Bleaching Syndrome; (f) conclusions; and (g) limitations of the study.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Among the non-Caucasian people of the world, the idealization of Caucasian light skin in lieu of race dominates their social terrain [8]. This is especially true for Asia/Pacific Islanders. Sex appeal is a significant factor in the course of social interaction for Asia/Pacific Islander women. However, their social reference for the ideal is extended from Caucasian race standards. Asia/Pacific Islander women located at a distant proximity from Caucasian standards regarding light skin may suffer from low self-esteem, poor body image, and acute eating disorders. Compared to other women of color, eating disorders among Asia/Pacific Islander women is low. However, research indicates that discrimination and oppression are contributing factors to eating disorders among Asia/Pacific Islander women, which may further exacerbate low self-esteem [9].

The revised social implications of race have impacted the political concept of "blackness" among Asians in Great Britain. It is a modification embraced by Asians in Great Britain due to a false perception associating racial discrimination with skin color discrimination. This new concept implies that all non-Caucasians, including Asia/Pacific Islanders, have something in common aside from how they are treated. This minimizes the size, needs, and distinct concerns of Asian communities in Toto. In addition, most Asians in Great Britain reject the traditional term "black" because it is merely political in use [10]. This rejection was heretofore not irrelevant to colonization by Caucasian factions.

According to Rondilla and Spickard [11], the social implications of skin color are a taboo among Asian Americans, pertaining to an idealization of light skin conveyed via colorism. After interviews of more than 100 Asian Americans from various ethnic groups, they determined that the groups maintain an intense preference not only for light skin but also for Caucasian facial features [12]. Subsequently, this preference precipitates discriminatory treatment of persons characterized by dark skin not only in the Asian community but in the U.S. population generally. Rondilla and Spickard [11] investigated the social implications of light skin from a historical, sociocultural, racial and health perspective in the Asian community. Included were topics such as the impact

of class distinction by skin color and the effort to please the dominant Caucasian community and be accepted by them [11].

The psychological idealization of the light skin by Asia/Pacific Islanders is manifested in colorism. Colorism is a distinct form of discrimination based upon skin color, i.e., dark tones. Using a nationally representative data file, Ryabov [13] investigated the associations of colorism with education among Asian-American adults. Subjects were differentiated by three separate categories: having a high school diploma, some college experience and having a Bachelor's degree or higher. An assortment of independent variables included skin tone, ethnic origin, parental income and education, family structure, parental involvement and family social support. Data for males and females were assessed separately due to the differential impact of colorism upon each. The investigation suggests that Asians characterized by light skin are more likely to be college educated. Ultimately, it was established that dark skin is inversely correlated with education attainment [13].

In 2011, Veenstra [14] conducted an investigation of Asian colorism in Canada. Subjects were accessed by telephone surveys in Toronto (n=685) and Vancouver (n=814). Surveyed populations include Asian, Black, South Asian and White. Those who identify as Black report high blood pressure and hypertension. Those who identify as Asian report poorer self-rated mental health and self-rated overall health, which could not be explained by their socioeconomic status. Regardless of ethnicity via colorism, darker-skinned respondents report pathology as pertains to their well-being compared to their lighter-skinned counterparts [14].

Hunter [12] investigated the implications of colorism among African Americans, Latino Americans and Asian Americans. Her contention is that light skin privileges the members of groups so characterized relative to income, education, housing, and the marriage market. Dark-skinned subjects are disadvantaged compared to their lighter-skinned counterparts. The sole advantage of dark-skinned subjects pertains to ethnic authenticity. The psychological implications of colorism are exported globally to the Asian community by media and the global bleaching cream beauty market [12].

The social and psychological idealization of light skin among Asia/Pacific Islanders exists nowhere more dramatically than in the physical aspects. In Thailand, advertisements referencing beauty emphasize skin bleaching, blepharoplasty (eyelid adjustment) and nose surgery to create an idealized Caucasian appearance. Aizura [15] maintains that it would be in error to interpret these cultural formations by a non-Thai observer. In fact, conceptions of beauty in Thailand may be modified by more significant traits, such as light and/or pale skin [15].

Many Asian populations are distinguished by a physical double-eyelid formation. In an effort to idealize Caucasian features, those who can afford to do so resort to a surgical procedure called blepharoplasty, which involves a radian adjustment of the eyelid and relocation of the double-eyelid. The result sometimes requires corrective surgery [16].

Munzer [17] provides an explanation as to why some Asians attempt to alter their appearance by resorting to cosmetic eye surgery. He suggests six theories as a rationale, including benign explanation, performance theory, aesthetic oppression, internalized racism, Foucauldian care of the self, and complicity with a racist society. All such theories would encompass the idealization of light skin by peoples who have been historically conquered, colonized, or otherwise dominated by Caucasian race populations. A descriptive, empirical analysis was conducted in an effort to assess the circumstances.

METHODOLOGY

The original instrument for the study was extrapolated from the work of Dr. Charles Parrish, of the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology, with his work *The Significance of Skin Color in the Negro Community* [18]. The dated content therein necessitated a pilot-test revision for purposes of making the instrument appropriate to our current era. Therefore, a self-reporting instrument called the Cutaneo Chroma Correlate (CCC) was utilized to measure skin color. The CCC was previously pilot-tested for validity and reliability by the CCC investigator [19]. The final test score after two pilot-test administrations and a subsequent modification was 0.85 [19]. In the Guam study, using a sample of college students at the local university, the CCC (Cutaneo Chroma Correlate) was administered during the traditional school year 19. The following null hypothesis was then formulated to provide a context and guide for investigating the extent of the problem: "There is no relationship between light skin color and Asia/Pacific Islander ideals for a selected Guam population." The non-representative sample consisted of 95 participants who were enrolled full-time as University students.

The CCC instrument is comprised of sections "A" "B" and "C" [19] and is a Likert scale. It uses five response categories, which apply to one-dimensional items. The original scoring for each section is as follows: Section A: SA=5; A=4; UND=3; D=2; and SD=1. For both sections B and C, which address skin color directly, the same integers apply, as follows: LL=5; L=4; M=3; D=2; and DD=1.

TYPE OF STUDY

The type of study and/or statistical method is quantitative descriptive. Section "B" (of the CCC) was used in this investigation to assess the respondent's personal values pertaining to the idealization of light skin color. In differentiating responses, a Likert scale designation of lightest (LL) was noted as 5, light (L) as 4, medium (M) as

3, dark (D) as 2, and darkest (DD) as 1. The CCC consists of 49 items in total. Item 20 was utilized to address the idealization of light skin for the current investigation: Q20 “PRETTY SKIN IS ____.”

SAMPLING METHOD

The non-representative sample consisted of 95 participants conducted on the island nation during the relevant school year and selected from the registrar's roster of the school. Respondents were full time social work majors and had a mean age of 20 years. The CCC self-reporting instrument was utilized for a nominal measure of their skin color. No part time students or non-university members of the community qualified to take part.

Within their social environment dominated by Caucasian race ideals Asia/Pacific Islanders have been no less given to the idealization of Caucasian light skin [20]. The existence of such idealization among the Asia/Pacific Islander residents of Guam provides an empirical mechanism for investigation. IRB (Institutional Review Board) permission to conduct the investigation was obtained before making the sample selection. The sample demographic for the investigation was predominantly Asia/Pacific Islanders, Asian descent, and college age (18-24 years).

RESULTS

Table 1. Pretty skin as shown by the relationship between light skin color and Asia/Pacific islander ideals for a selected Guam population.

| Q20 PRETTY SKIN IS: | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1 LIGHTEST | 10 | 10.5 | 11.2 | 11.2 |
| | 2 LIGHT | 27 | 28.4 | 30.3 | 41.6 |
| | 3 MEDIUM | 49 | 51.6 | 55.1 | 96.6 |
| | 4 DARK | 2 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 98.9 |
| | 5 DARKEST | 1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 89 | 93.7 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 6 | 6.3 | | |
| Total | | 95 | 100.0 | | |

As shown in **Table 1**:

- Lightest Frequency=10; Lightest Percent=10.5; Lightest Valid Percent=11.2; and Lightest Cumulative Percent=11.2.
- Light Frequency=27; Light Percent=28.4; Light Valid Percent=30.3; and Light Cumulative Percent=41.6.
- Medium Frequency=49; Medium Percent=51.6; Medium Valid Percent=55.1; and Medium Cumulative Percent=96.6.
- Dark Frequency=2; Dark Percent=2.1; Dark Valid Percent=2.2; and Dark Cumulative Percent=98.9.
- Darkest Frequency=1; Darkest Percent=1.1; Darkest Valid Percent=1.1; and Darkest Cumulative Percent=100.0.

The Lightest and Darkest categories provide a startling contrast. By collapsing the Dark/Darkest categories and the

Lightest/Light/Medium categories, the idealization of relative light skin is apparent. What is more, while 37 of the 95 participant’s preferred light skin as “pretty” only 3 preferred dark skin. Therefore, it is plausible to reject the null and accept the alternative: “There is a relationship between light skin color and Asia/Pacific Islander ideals for a selected Guam population.” Such a relationship is a precipitating factor per the idealization of light skin vis-à-vis the Bleaching Syndrome.

THE BLEACHING SYNDROME

As it pertains to the aforementioned empirical evidence, the idealization of light skin is a vehicle of the Bleaching Syndrome. The influence of Caucasian forces upon the Asia/Pacific Islander psyche has manifested in reference to the Bleaching Syndrome. As defined by Webster’s Dictionary [21], “bleach” is a verb meaning to remove color and, in the case of the Bleaching Syndrome, to make one’s identity less Asia/Pacific Islander by idealizing light skin. A “syndrome” consists of a grouping of symptoms, i.e.,

behaviors that occur in conjunction and make up a recognizable pattern [21]. These literal definitions provide a context for understanding the Bleaching Syndrome as a somatic strategy for success in an advanced technological society, which contains three basic components: (a) sociological, according to the beliefs held by Asia/Pacific Islanders en masse; (b) psychological, according to internalized Asia/Pacific Islanders' ideals; and (c) physiological, according to the extent of Asia/Pacific Islanders' personal somatic alterations applied to the self. Subsequently, the Bleaching Syndrome herein is then defined as the internalization of social pathogens relative to the idealization of light skin among non-Caucasian populations.

For Asia/Pacific Islanders worldwide, the Bleaching Syndrome begins with what they perceive about Caucasian light skin. Their acceptance of a negative connotation denigrating dark skin is not compulsory but is merely a part of the post-colonial social and psychological experience. Unlike members of the dominant Caucasian mainstream who are characterized by light skin, this causes existential conflict in Asia/Pacific Islanders [22]. Sociologically, the negative implications of the denigration of dark skin having been internalized by Asia/Pacific Islanders create obstacles to their self-esteem and what they perceive as necessary for a preferred quality of life in an advanced technological society. In an effort to reduce psychic conflict and enable preferred quality of life, those Asia/Pacific Islanders affected by the Bleaching Syndrome make a conscious decision to idealize light skin. The phenomenon is manifested via various social pathogens as the islanders resort to an ultimately destructive self-assessment paradigm [23].

The Bleaching Syndrome is also the conscious awareness of the cognitive and attitudinal levels of both similarities and differences between the light skin ideal and the denigration of dark skin in order to negate one's self for the purposes of self-esteem per societal success. The quality of life this may infer, according to Maslow [24], includes the fulfillment of physiological needs such as food and shelter and safety needs such as protection and security. Less tangible needs are irrelevant for Asia/Pacific Islanders in the context of somatic assimilation paradigms, which means that the Bleaching Syndrome prevents them from advancing beyond the base of Maslow's hierarchy. It requires substantive knowledge and empathic appreciation of alien Caucasians, i.e., Eurocentric culture at the expense of the native culture. The Bleaching Syndrome is also a metaphor that is not limited to skin color, but may include a range of identity characteristics such as the adoption of Caucasian surnames, Caucasian language and speech patterns, and ultimately preferred Caucasian marital partners. Ultimately, the Bleaching Syndrome prevails as a quasi-functional strategy that eventually leads to emotional and/or psychological dysfunction extended from various social pathogens pertaining to self-acceptance [25]. This critical feature of the

Asia/Pacific Islander social environment has been subjugated by references to race and hence all but dismissed in the exchanges of significant intellectual discourse. Resolution of the problem will necessitate an alternative to race paradigms in the main. Such an alternative must negate the denigration of dark skin to the extent the idealization of light skin will affectively begin to dissipate and eventually terminate.

CONCLUSION

The idealization of light skin in Guam, per the Bleaching Syndrome, is not merely political abstractions reflected passively by culture, traditions, or norms. Nor is it representative of some nefarious Caucasian plot to hold hostage and exploit Asia/Pacific Islanders by skin color exclusively. It is rather a differential equation of colonial power dispersed by political vehicles to aesthetic, scholarly, and cultural texts. It is an elaboration not only of a basic skin color distinction but an idealized light skin perspective [26]. By such a perspective, scholarly discovery and/or philosophical reconstruction not only control but, in some cases, manipulate that which is manifestly different. Colorism by the idealization of light skin is otherwise a colonial discourse that is by no means in a conspiratorial relationship with political factions in the raw; but is generated by an uneven exchange with various sources of power, including race power, political power, intellectual power, cultural power and moral power. Indeed, the selected Guam college students who completed the CCC do not represent Asia/Pacific Islanders on the whole; as such, their responses have less to do with local transgressions than with worldly colonial domination and preferred quality of life [27].

Because the idealization of light skin by non-Caucasian peoples, including Asia/Pacific Islanders, is a cultural and political fact both at home and abroad, it exists not in some archival vacuum or demented fantasy. Quite to the contrary, it is apparent that what is thought or said about the idealization of light skin per Bleaching Syndrome follows certain intellectual prescriptions. It is evidenced by a considerable degree of nuance and elaboration seen as the mechanism of a broad, elusive, colonial super-structure. Thus, most members of the Eurocentric mainstream academy ignore the reality that Asia/Pacific Islanders' oppression is less contingent upon race [28]. They overlook the explicit connection between that oppression and justifications for colorism, which keeps colonial rhetoric pure. Any effort at all to address the subject of colorism per the idealization of light skin has been perceived as rude and/or obscenely iconoclastic. But there is no negating the fact that those opposed to both racism and colorism, per the Bleaching Syndrome on a world platform, have avoided for reasons of power and wealth the effort of seriously bridging the quality of life gap between light-skinned and dark-skinned peoples in an advanced technological society. Yet,

there will remain the perennial escape mechanism of saying that an activist less given to transgression is more concerned with freedom, justice, and equality in the abstract as an ideological analysis. In other words, the argument can work quite effectively to block the larger and more intellectually threatening perspective of which benefits from idealizing light skin [29]. In the aftermath is a form of social pathology even more elusive and insidious than the subjugation of dark-skinned peoples collectively.

As it pertains to the idealization of light skin, sympathizers may say they are against somatic quality of life paradigms when what they really mean is individual acts of discrimination [30]. They refuse to recognize that those who are characterized by light skin benefit as a group from institutional and systemic limitations against all dark-skinned peoples in Guam and the world [31]. Thus, all light-skinned factions are the nepotistic beneficiaries of an oppressive system that bestows upon them inherited "rights" and privileges, which define light skin as both a talent and a skill as it pertains to preferred quality of life. For the more fortunate light-skinned Asia/Pacific Islanders to admit their advantage would render it impossible for them to deny shared responsibility in the oppression of their dark-skinned peers.

As equal members of humanity Asia/Pacific Islanders must be held to a higher standard of social justice activism. Colorism per the Bleaching Syndrome as idealization of light skin has not accommodated their efforts to sustain themselves culturally or ethnically absent adverse consequences [32]. That being so, discouraging the denigration of dark skin is rendered all but virtually impossible. Subsequently, a just and native idealization process becomes a most difficult task to accomplish. The fact that it has not been forthcoming lends credibility to the idealization of light skin as gateway to success in an advanced technological society and hence preferred quality of life. Among the more civil minded among us is then an urgent and ubiquitous need to purge such a transgression from the ethos of humanity at-large. This is an imperative purge made necessary via miscegenation and by declining race recognition ability. The idealization of any single human physiological trait under the circumstances must then be eliminated such that the future of mankind may avoid the aftereffects of post-colonial domination.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The investigator realized that any research involving the human behavior of groups that are not native risks the misinterpretation of social phenomena. The inability to access a representative sample, as well as limited sample size, may additionally contribute to the misinterpretation of social phenomena. Therefore, future investigation should consider indigenous participation in the collection of data and a more inclusive sampling process to facilitate confidence in conclusions that are drawn.

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