

Written Response to Nikki Khanna's book, Whiter: Asian American Women on Skin Color and Colorism.

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October 1st, 2023

Rooted in historical, societal, and cultural contexts, colorism is a complicated form of discrimination that has outstanding consequences for individuals and communities. Originating from colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, colorism took its form when European colonizers imposed their standards of beauty and social hierarchy, associating lighter skin with superiority and darker skin with inferiority amongst other races. In Nikki Khanna's book, *Whiter: Asian American Women on Skin Color and Colorism*, she offers valuable insights into colorism as she gathers personal narratives and experiences of Asian American women, including herself. She explores how the notion of skin influences their lives, its manifestations within the Asian American community and the beauty industry.

Colorism is discrimination based on skin color, also known as colourism, or shadeism. It is a form of prejudice and discrimination in which people of certain ethnic groups or people who are a darker skinned race are treated differently based on their skin color. It is a deeply rooted and ingrained issue that affects millions of people worldwide.

Colorism is manifested in many ways in both products and marketing such as limited shade ranges, whitening products, and tokenism. For example some beauty brands offer limited shades for makeup products. Foundations and concealers are often the two products made excluding people with darker skin tones. This implies that lighter skin tones are the standard of beauty. Another example of colorism in the beauty industry is whitening products where brands promote skin-whitening, suggesting that lighter skin is more desirable, contributing to the stigmatization of darker skin. Lastly is tokenism, where a beauty brand may include a few models with darker skin tones in their marketing or carry a few darker shades of foundation and concealer in an attempt to be inclusive while not putting any meaningful changes in their overall brand, product offerings and hiring practices.

Till this day colorism is a significant form of discrimination in our society. Not only does this form of discrimination happen between two racial groups, but also within the same race or ethnic group where people of lighter complexion are favored and are privileged over people of darker complexion. An example of this is shown within the African American community where there is a long history of discrimination against each other concerning one's skin tone, stemming from slavery and colonialism. Another example of colorism is the preference of lighter skin in South Asia. Many beauty products in this region advertise skin-lightening products, establishing the idea that lighter skin is more desirable. This form of mindset can lead to social biases, concluding that lighter skin are more attractive or successful than their darker skin counterparts. This may lead to people with darker skin in that region to face discrimination in various aspects of their lives such as marriage, employment, and social interactions.

My perspective on colorism is that even though society is trying to correct this wrong, it still feels prevalent in the world. As a dark skin born and raised African young woman, I have seen my fair share of colorism. Whenever I ran errands with my mother, I remember seeing skin lightening products at almost every beauty counter wherever we went. Skin bleaching as they call it there, is still very much prevalent in those regions and with the internet at our fingertips and media influence, colorism is kept alive leading to the internalization of such actions by

society. Understanding the historical roots of colorism and its modern manifestation is crucial in breaking this harmful system. Through education, awareness and inclusive practices, proper steps can be taken towards a more equitable world where people are valued for their character, contributions to society and not the shade of their skin.