Skin Bleaching in the African Community

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previous research presents the phenomenon of skin bleaching in a global perspective, in terms of its roots in colonial past and how it has manifested in the 21st century. Skin bleaching is the action in which a person applies chemical substances on their skin to chemically alter their skin pigmentation. In this study I am interested in how and why this phenomenon of skin bleaching is currently occurring in the African Community in the Midwestern U.S., and how skin bleaching practices affect the US African diaspora. I conducted qualitative interviews with 6 women and men of color in the US African diaspora who have engaged in skin bleaching practices, and also conducted an online qualitative interview with 28 people.

Dealing with Physical Insecurities
Blacks who bleach their skin will experience higher levels of low self esteem and high insecurities about their natural skin tone, which may result in the desire to change part of their skin tones for evening purposes or changing their whole bodies.

“People who bleach, I think its more cultural or raised in a family that everybody is bleaching so you feel like you have to bleach also. or its more like, ‘Oh if I'm light skinned I'm going to be more beautiful… it creates a self-esteem for you...’” - Esther (all names are pseudonyms)

Influenced by External Factors
Bleaching happens because of societal pressures such as peer pressure, family influences, social media, fitting in, and deeply rooted psychological effects of self-devaluing, and feelings of inferiority as a result of colonialism that took place in many of the African countries.

“I started bleaching because of my older sister. I grew up watching her changing different creams” - Esther
“It affects me, because if a family member who is trying to change their look, it means that they are not comfortable with themselves or their esteem.” - Barua

References