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Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy  
in the Philippines and the U.S.

By

Joanne Laxamana Rondilla

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy, Chair  
Professor Patricia Penn Hilden  
Professor Abigail De Kosnik  
Professor Margaret Hunter

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Abstract

Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy, Chair

“Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.” investigates how perceptions of beauty, skin color hierarchy, the globalization of beauty standards, and the ongoing colonial relationship between the Philippines and the U.S. are related. This project takes a transnational approach in order to compare beauty and skin color hierarchy among Filipinas in the Philippines and in the diaspora. It examines how beauty standards are constructed locally and globally, and how Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. respond to these standards. It addresses the popularity of skin-lightening products in the Philippines and looks at how Filipino American women are affected by this practice. This project also explores how skin-lightening products are marketed and analyzes the role of mixed-race models in this marketing.

To my sisters. For our daughters.

## Table of Contents

Abstract

Dedication

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Questions and Methodology

Situating the Conversation

The Chapters at a Glance

Chapter 2: Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.

Skin Color and Colonization

Moving Beyond the Black-White Binary

The Value of Skin Color

The Mixed Race Body as the Ideal Filipino

Chapter 3: Dark Matters: Color Conversations Across the Pacific

On Dark Skin

Tanning Trends

Perceived Class, Perceived Color

Acceptance

Chapter 4: Family Expectations, Romantic Relationships, and Skin Color

The Intimate Beauty Queue

Dating and Marriage Expectations

Chapter 5: Global Beauty and Selling Lighter Skin

Defining Global Beauty

Global Beauty and the Mixed Race Body

Selling Lighter Skin: Advertisements in the Philippines and the U.S.

Epilogue

References

Glossary

Appendix A: Interviewee Guide

Appendix B: Interview Questions: Primary Subjects

Appendix C: Interview Questions: Secondary Subjects

## List of Figures

- Figure 1.1: Photo of author's mother
- Figure 5.1: Advertisement for L'Oreal's UV Perfect
- Figure 5.2: Advertisement for Clarins UV Plus
- Figure 5.3: Advertisement for GlutaMax
- Figure 5.4: Excerpt from Esolis catalog

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Chua, it has been many years. Though a lot has happened since the group started, I thank you for your incredible mentorship and for paving the road for people like me. In addition, I would like to thank the Critical Filipina/o Studies Working Group (especially my partner-in-crime, Gladys Nubla) for all the incredible conversations. I'm proud to note that what we did at Cal matters. To Vince Diaz, I still have not forgotten the ways you and your work have influenced me. I am so proud of you and all of your accomplishments.

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A heartfelt *maraming salamat* goes to my family. I know that you may not always understand my life choices. However, you nonetheless, support me unconditionally and this has always meant the world to me. For that, I love you. Mom, thank you for the ways you invigorate my research. In particular, thank you for keeping me company during my field research in the Philippines. To my sister Tina and her family (Norbert, Sonia Ann, Theo, and Brendan): many thanks for always providing me with another home to hang my hat. To my brother Gerry and his wife Faye, I am indebted to you for Pacquiao fight nights and stimulating conversation. To the Castro clan (Auntie Lily, Uncle Jun, Junji, Liezel, and your respective families), thank you for providing a home base for all of our family gatherings. To the Laxamana clan (Uncle Bobby, Dodie, Chris, Ferd and your respective families; Auntie Yoly, Alex, Baby, Lisa, Pochay, and your respective families) and the Padama clan (Auntie Monina, Uncle Jun, Jay, Joel, and your respective families): I am grateful to have such a wonderful extended family. Many thanks for your support. To the Vergara clan (Auntie Gigi, Din, Cha, Bing, A, Anjoo and your respective families), one of the best things that happened to me in grad school was re-connecting with all of

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Gladys Nubla, Margaret Fajardo, Diana Halog, and Shirley Rivera: I don't know what graduate school life would be like without you. Who we were when we first met is drastically different from who we are now. Thank you for showing me that great change takes bravery and has many rewards. Fritzie De Mata: Thank you so much for your input and mastery of translations. You are wise beyond your years and a hundred times the scholar I'll ever be. Ayu Saraswati, you are a sparkling example of awesome-ness! Loan Dao, I always root for you and I am so happy to see your continued success.

Before I was a graduate student, I worked full time in the cosmetics industry and continued to do so on a part-time basis while in school. That experience eventually shaped my research and kept me grounded when most grad students were reaching the breaking point of insanity. To my cosmetics family: thank you so much for your continued support and showing me that there are still good people in the industry who continue to redefine, inspire, and empower.

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I am sure there are many others who I've missed out and I greatly apologize for that. Again, my deepest gratitude goes to all of you.

## Chapter 1: Introduction



Figure 1.1

The teenage girl in the photo is Sonia (Figure 1.1). She and her family hail from San Pablo City in the province of Laguna, which is a three to four hour drive away from metro Manila in the Philippines. Each year, San Pablo City (like many towns in the Philippines) celebrates the *Flores de Mayo* festivities, a Catholic celebration which honors the Virgin Mary. It also features the *Santa Cruzan*, a pageant that features the royal court, including the *Reyna Elena*, the pageant queen. When Sonia was fifteen, the parade organizers approached her family and announced that she would be crowned *Reyna Elena* that year. Although this was a huge honor, this was no surprise. Her parents were local business owners and years earlier, Sonia's sister, Aleli, was crowned *Reyna Flores* (the equivalent to first princess). Also, a number of Sonia's cousins had been part of the royal court before. Currently in her 60s, Sonia sits in the living room of her daughter's home. I ask about her reign as *Reyna Elena* and she reminisces, "I became *Reyna Elena* because when I was young, I looked simple and shy with tantalizing eyes... I had a round face, and my skin was so fine and so pretty and so white. I had such beautiful skin."<sup>1</sup>

The former *Reyna Elena* of San Pablo City is my mother. Growing up, I was told stories about my mother and aunts who were beauty queens of their hometown. The stories always began by explaining that their beauty came from their great grandfather, a bona fide, authentic, full-blooded Chinese man named Jose.<sup>2</sup> It was his fair skin that gave his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren their beauty. There is also mention of the Spanish blood that is in their lineage. Where this blood originates is often up for debate. However, I am told that the Spanish *mestizo* blood mostly comes from my grandfather, thus explaining why he is so light-skinned

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<sup>1</sup> Sonia L. Rondilla, interview by author, October 2002, California, tape recording.

<sup>2</sup> Upon immigrating to the Philippines from China, he changed his name to Jose for business purposes.

compared to my grandmother (who is comparatively darker skinned and known more for her kind nature).

I share this story about my mother and her family because it helps us understand how notions of beauty and its relationship to skin color is a part of one's everyday life. I am reminded of this when I look at old photos of my mother and aunts, most of who are light-skinned. Growing up, I remember watching my mother making herself up at her make shift vanity. She would start by taking a bottle of Eskinol, shaking it, soaking a cotton ball with the lemony astringent, and then swiping it over her face and neck. From there, she would use various creams, lotions, and powders from containers with non-English labels and rub those concoctions over her face as well. During a recent trip to the Philippines, relatives often greet my mother by telling her how *maganda* (beautiful) she is because she's so *maputi* (light skinned). They tell her how wonderful it is that she is able to maintain her beauty. My mother's skin color is much like the celebrities on The Filipino Channel (TFC) that grace the television screen during my visits with her. I am also reminded of how young I was when I learned the value of beauty and skin color in my own everyday life. Even now, I now watch relatives swoon over my Filipina-Chinese goddaughter, Alyse. Her light skin, light brown hair, and delicate features are reminiscent of my aunts and my mother. She is living proof that my cousin married well and that the Laxamana family's coveted beauty will live on.

More importantly, my family's story is a reflection of many families' stories. Embedded in these narratives are the various layers of Philippine history and the legacy of Chinese, Spanish, and American presence in the archipelago. This history includes a trade relationship with China that begins in the ninth century, hundreds of years of Spanish colonialism, which starts in the late 1500s, American rule at the turn of the twentieth century, brief occupation by the Japanese during World War II, and then back to American rule in the post-war era.<sup>3</sup> The annual parade in San Pablo City pays homage to Philippine colonial history through its queen and her royal court (the various reynas – *Reyna Elena*, *Reyna Flores*, etc.). However, what is most striking to me about the Laxamana family is the way they take so much pride in their Spanish *mestizo* lineage and in Jose, their full-blooded Chinese ancestor who allegedly blesses generations to come with his fine and delicate features, notably his light skin. This pride in Jose's Chinese blood is not exclusive to my mother's family. Historian Eufonio M. Alip notes, "The union between the Chinese and the natives has been found to be beneficial, physically and intellectually. It appears that Filipinos of the *mestizo* type possess more beautiful and handsome physique and greater intelligence, ability, and achievements than those of the so-called 'pure' native type."<sup>4</sup> Alip points out that being *mestizo*, or mixed is more desirable than being a "pure native type," as if being native were completely undesirable.

Even beyond my own family history, I became interested in how women understand, process, and respond to beauty standards through working in the cosmetics industry, where I have been working since late 2000. One day, I was working when two women came by my counter to scout our skincare. As they were exploring, I could not help but notice that one of the women looked like she had recently suffered severe burns over most of her face. The middle part of her face looked normal, but the rest of her face had large, burnt areas that looked like scabs ready to fall off. They looked painful. While she seemed to be okay, I could not help but wonder what had happened to her. After talking to the two women, I learned that the burns were a result

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<sup>3</sup> Tedoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People (8<sup>th</sup> edition)*, (Quezon City, Philippines: Garotech Publishing, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Eufonio M. Alip. *The Chinese in Manila*. (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974) 22.

of a chemical peel. Although I am no expert in the process, the procedure entails a professional of some sort burning off the top layer of skin. From there, that top layer peels off and underneath that burnt layer comes a fresh new layer of skin. The end result: out with the old skin, and in with the new.<sup>5</sup> After her friend asked me a few questions about skincare, I realized that she was on a frantic search for the perfect skincare system — something that would “remove her dark spots” and make her face look “brighter.” She was looking for such products because she was “tired of being so dark.” In short, she was looking for skin-lightening products. Although this was just one isolated episode, I have been approached countless times by women searching for the perfect product to help them avoid having dark skin.

The goal of this project, “Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.” is to try to understand how history, notions of beauty, material culture, and Filipino women’s experiences are connected. Ultimately, this work attempts to debunk the allure of beauty by attempting to understand why beauty standards exist, and who are the people that benefit when such standards are imposed. I grapple this topic with the hope that women no longer feel limited by their skin color or perceived lack of beauty.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

“Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.” investigates how perceptions of beauty, skin color hierarchy, the globalization of beauty standards, and the ongoing colonial relationship between the Philippines and the U.S. are related. This project takes a transnational approach in order to compare beauty and skin color hierarchy among Filipinas in the Philippines and in the diaspora. It examines how beauty standards are constructed locally and globally, and how Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. respond to these standards. It addresses the popularity of skin-lightening products in the Philippines and looks at how Filipino American women are affected by this practice. This project also explores how skin-lightening products are marketed and analyzes the role of mixed-race models in this marketing.

This project is important and timely because the popularity, sale, and usage of skin lightening products among Asian women in the U.S. and Asia are increasing at alarming rates. A 2004 survey reports that fifty percent of respondents from the Philippines currently use skin lighteners.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, sixty-two new skin lightening products are launched in the Asia-Pacific region — an area that has seen on average fifty-six new skin lightening products four years prior.<sup>7</sup> That same year, the global skincare market is valued at \$38.3 billion and is expected to grow to \$44.8 billion by 2010 with the U.S. and Japan being its largest markets.<sup>8</sup> In June 2005 the *L.A. Times* runs a major article addressing skin lightening usage among Asian women in the

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<sup>5</sup> I later discovered that this process is called a “blue peel.”

<sup>6</sup> The survey was conducted in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Korea.

“Skin Lightening Products in Asia – A Bright Future?” *Synovate In:Fact*, June 2004, <http://www.synovate.com/insights/infact/issues/200406/> (accessed December 15, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> “Asia’s Obsession With White Skin Leaves a Black Mark,” *The Asian Pacific Post*, May 10, 2006, [http://www.asianpacificpost.com/portal2/ff8080810b1faf95010b2498f44a01b7\\_Asian\\_white\\_skin.do.html](http://www.asianpacificpost.com/portal2/ff8080810b1faf95010b2498f44a01b7_Asian_white_skin.do.html) (accessed August 26, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Simon Pitman, “Facial Brightening – the Next Big Thing in Anti-aging?” September 4, 2006, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Products-Markets/Facial-brightening-the-next-big-thing-in-anti-aging> (accessed August 26, 2008); Katie Bird, “Future of Skin Care Lies With Emerging Markets,” March 5, 2008, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Products-Markets/Future-of-skin-care-lies-with-emerging-markets> (accessed August 26, 2008).

U.S. and states that skin lightening products make approximately ten million dollars in sales per year.<sup>9</sup> A 2006 survey reports that nine out of ten Asian women in the U.S. are likely to invest in skin care products.<sup>10</sup> Such ethnic-specific markets have grown nineteen percent between 2001-2006. By the end of 2008, this market is expected to gross approximately \$2.6 billion and by 2012 and is expected to reach \$3.3 billion.<sup>11</sup>

Given these factors, the major questions “Colonial Faces” asks are: How are beauty standards constructed locally and globally, and how do Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. respond to these standards? In what ways do U.S. and Philippine colonial history inform our understanding of savagery and civility? How does this historical relationship shape the way darkness and lightness are valued? What impact do these values have on familial and intimate relationships? Why are skin-lightening products popular among Filipino women in the Philippines and how are Filipino American women affected by this practice? How are skin lightening products marketed to Filipina consumers and what is the role of mixed-race models in this marketing? Why is it important to focus on beauty and skin color hierarchy in the Philippines and its relation to the diaspora?

There are three major components to the dissertation. First, it employs historical knowledge by situating the colonial context of the Philippines with an overview of Spanish colonialism and U.S. occupation and its impact on notions of savagery and civility. This project incorporates a discussion of the emerging Chinese *mestizo* middle class as a way to understand current class relations and ideas about skin color. It also historicizes the immigration of Filipinos to the U.S. and the ongoing movement of people and goods between the two countries. My research challenges previous studies on skin color hierarchy by establishing these complex issues. It shows that contemporary notions of beauty and skin color are an intensification of colonial history, ideas of civility, the formation of a Chinese middle class, and the flow of information between the Philippines and the U.S.

The second component of the dissertation is the heart of my research because it focuses on the forty-four interviews that I conducted with Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. Their voices give us insight to their personal experiences and the consequences of skin color in their daily lives. The discussion starts with these women comparing the assumptions of those who have dark skin versus light skin. These voices underscore the idea that light skin is desirable because those who are lighter skinned are assumed to be better looking, more intelligent, and wealthier. In contrast, dark skin is undesirable because those who are dark skinned are assumed to be unattractive, unintelligent, and poor. The interviews explain how these perceptions change or are maintained when one immigrates or is born in the U.S. This work complicates standard notions of skin color hierarchy because as these women explain, having dark skin in the U.S. is acceptable (given the diversity in the U.S. coupled with trends in tanning). Another set of concerns the interviews explore is how skin color is understood in intimate circles. The work

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<sup>9</sup> Euromonitor, a market research firm reported the sales figures. Jia-Rui Chong, “Beauty and the Bleach,” *Los Angeles Times*, (July 26, 2005), A-1, A-13.

<sup>10</sup> Nine out of ten the highest rate out of any ethnic group surveyed. NPD Group, “Ethnicity and its Impact on the Beauty Industry: The NPD Group’s Latest Report Finds Hispanic Women Favor Makeup, Asian Women Gravitate to Skincare Products and African American Women Fancy Fragrance and Bath Products,” *NPD Press Release*, January 22, 2007, [http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press\\_070122.html](http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_070122.html) (accessed August 26, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Staff Reporter, “Johnson and Johnson Targets Diversifying Ethnic Market,” April 1, 2008, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Products-Markets/Johnson-and-Johnson-targets-diversifying-ethnic-market> (accessed August 26, 2008).

investigates the value of skin color and how it is correlated to familial relations, dating preferences, and marriage expectations.

The last major component of this project is an analysis of advertisements for skin lightening and beauty products in Philippine- and U.S.-based women's magazines to illustrate a transnational and global conversation about beauty standards. I am concerned with the deceptive notion that cosmetics companies are diversifying ideas of beauty through the usage of mixed race models in their advertising. By interrogating how beauty is becoming globalized, I show that that mixed race models represent what scholar Margaret Hunter calls repackaged Eurocentric ideals. This section also examines the language used in cosmetics advertising. Though the products themselves do not change, how they are marketed in the Philippines and in the U.S. differ. I argue that the language used in Philippine advertisements illuminate colonial assumptions about Filipinas as savage and infantile. This is why the language focuses whitening and perfection. I contrast this with a discussion of U.S. advertising and its focus on anti-aging and protection. By weaving these three major components, my dissertation underscores the importance of taking a global/transnational approach to re-conceptualizing beauty and skin color hierarchy.

In order to tackle such a complicated research topic, it requires a methodology that allows for flexibility and creativity. The research method employed here is heavily influenced by grounded theory.<sup>12</sup> Kathy Charmaz describes grounded theory in the following way:

Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules. Thus, data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct. Grounded theorists collect data to develop theoretical analyses from the beginning of a project. We try to learn what occurs settings we join and what our research participants' lives are like. We study who they explain their statements and actions, and ask what analytic sense we can make of them.<sup>13</sup>

While grounded theory is flexible and focuses on drawing theories directly from the data, it is important to note that there is a set of methods that are consistent in grounded theory. Melanie Birks and Jane Mills, in *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide*, outline ten primary stages that are consistent with such research. Some of these stages include coding and categorizing data, writing memos, and being mindful of the position of the researcher.<sup>14</sup> While this dissertation does not follow the ten stages in precision, I do believe that the methods used in the project does pay its due respect to grounded theory.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For more on grounded theory, please refer to the following texts: Barney G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions* (Mill Valley: Sociology Press, 1998); Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990); Melanie Birks and Jane Mills, *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011); Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006) 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> For extensive information, please refer to: Melanie Birks and Jane Mills, *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011) especially chapters 1-2 and 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> I owe many thanks to Makana Paris for his insight on this and introducing me to this literature.

With regards to following the hard line in social scientific methods, when developing *Is Lighter Better?: Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans*, my co-author Paul Spickard and I write:

This study is not quantitative social science. It is more like social observation. It is likely some social scientists will not be fully satisfied with the methods employed. They may argue that what they regard as the ground rules for social scientific investigation were not sufficiently followed. From the perspective of the interviewers, however, method is not about rules. It is about approaches. The interviewers are trying to figure things out. They have identified a problem – or perhaps it will turn out to be a series of more-or-less related problems. The interviewers are trying to figure out what are the issues at work in the problem (or problems) of colorism, and they are trying to point in the directions of some interpretations. It is a bit like slow journalism. That is, the interviewers are questioning, investigating, observing, recording, reaching after meaning, and reporting – not in the rapid-fire manner of journalistic writing but with a bit more time for systematic investigation and reflection.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the day, when designing the methodological approach for this study, I was less interested in following a social scientific hard line. Instead, I invested my energy in developing creative approaches to address a set of identified problems. Much like the interviewers from my previous study, I engaged in, “questioning, investigating, observing, recording, reaching after meaning, and reporting.” Additionally, I took time for “systematic investigation and reflection.” I approached this study possessing three primary identities. Having grown up in a family that valued light skin (and at times, de-valued dark skin), I constantly question and explore how these values affected relationships in familial and social circles. As a long time employee in the cosmetics industry, I witness first hand how beauty standards are defined, marketed, and continue to fluctuate. Finally, as a scholar, I am able to make sense of skin color hierarchy within a historical, social, and political context. Working within my data and knowledge set allows me to develop a set of interpretations and connections. In these reflections, I do my best to be mindful of my limitations as the primary researcher.<sup>17</sup>

The analysis employed in this research and any theoretical concepts I develop are born from the data itself. Majority of the data presented come from formal interviews that I conducted. However, over the years, I have kept numerous “memos,” (as grounded theorists describe) chronicling an ongoing thought process on the matters regarding the subject at hand. These memos include conversations with colleagues, friends, and family, ethnographic notes collected during my stay in the Philippines, a large archive of photos, magazines, and news stories, as well as personal logs describing my experience in working in the cosmetics industry for over twelve years. While many interviewees talk about skin lightening and beauty as seamlessly as the day’s weather, the scholarship on the subject matter in relation to Filipino

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<sup>16</sup> Joanne Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* (Latham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007) 46-47. For more on slow journalism, please refer to: James V. Spickard, “On the Epistemology of Post-Colonial Ethnography,” in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, ed. James V. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire (New York University Press, 2002), 236-52. See also: Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes from a Balinese Cockfight,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukherji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 239-277.

<sup>17</sup> My limitations were many. I will outline them in detail later on in this chapter.



women is extremely limited.<sup>18</sup> With that, the research requires a methodology that allows for creativity and flexibility.

### *Approaching the Interviews*

To gain a better understanding of the research questions posed, it is important to conduct interviews with Filipino women in the Philippines as well as the U.S. Interviews are conducted from October 2007 to May 2008. U.S. interviews are conducted first (October 2007-February 2008). From February to May 2008, I traveled to the Philippines (primarily in Manila) to continue the interview process. While overseas, I visit numerous malls, cosmetics stores, and beauty salons in the Metro-Manila area to gain a sense the beauty and consumer culture there. In total, forty-six women are interviewed for this study. Interviewees are classified as primary and/or secondary participants. Primary participants have to be women over the age of eighteen, who identify as Filipino, and are interviewed using the questionnaire designed for primary interviewees.<sup>19</sup> There are forty-four primary participants in this study — twenty interviews are conducted in the Philippines, and twenty-four interviews are conducted in the U.S. Secondary participants have to have worked (or are currently working) in the cosmetics industry. They are interviewed using the questionnaire designed for secondary interviewees. In total, there are four secondary interviewees — one from the Philippines and three from the U.S. Two of the secondary interviewees are simultaneously interviewed as primary participants.

In both the Philippines and the U.S., the recruitment process is the same. Using my various networks, I email a recruitment letter that describes the study, the eligibility requirements, what participation entails, and my contact information. I kindly ask people to forward the recruitment letter far and wide. After sending the recruitment letter to that initial set of contacts, those people forward the recruitment letter through email and various social networking outlets.<sup>20</sup> From there, interested participants contact me and interviews are scheduled accordingly. Once interviews begin, at the end of each interview, I ask participants if they know anyone who would be interested in being interviewed for the study. More interviews ensue from there. No one is turned away from the study (unless they do not meet the preliminary requirements). The interviews that are not administered are due to a lack of time or availability.<sup>21</sup>

For this study, it is important that participants feel comfortable with sharing very personal experiences. While I do not interview anyone I am related to, participants are people who are connected to me in some way. For example, most people know me through a common friend or an organization that we participate in together. Establishing that comfort level is important

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the work of Ronald Hall, please refer to the following books: *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001); *Asia Color Quest* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp, 2001); *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Please note that I did not incorporate strict definitions of “women over the age of eighteen, who identified as Filipino.” Several interviewees have mixed racial/ethnic backgrounds. Also, while recruiting, the question of whether transgendered or queer gendered women were allowed to be interviewed for this study arose. While none of the interviewees identified as transgendered or queer gendered, these were not limiting factors for the study. I was open to interview any “women over the age of eighteen, who identified as Filipino.”

<sup>20</sup> At the time, *Myspace* was still fairly popular among U.S. participants and *Facebook* was still quite new. In the Philippines, *Multiply* was the social networking tool of choice. Though participants may have heard about the study through email or other social networking avenues, their identities and participation in this study were kept in strict confidentiality.

<sup>21</sup> I mention this last part because several men in the Philippines asked why they are not included in the study. Also, a small number of interested participants did not go through with the actual interview due to our inability to connect in a timely manner (specifically, I had already left the Philippines when they responded to the recruitment letter).

because it helps ease any anxieties about sharing personal, and sometimes painful stories. Participants are generous and candid with what they share and I believe that part of what makes their stories so vivid is that they feel at ease with being interviewed with someone they are connected to.<sup>22</sup>

Interviews run as short as twenty minutes and as long as three hours. On average, they run about sixty to seventy-five minutes long. Interviews are documented by using a digital recorder and then transcribed accordingly. Participants are allowed to choose their pseudonym for the study. Those who have no preferred pseudonym are assigned one at random.<sup>23</sup> Interviews take place at a location of the subject's choice, usually a public café or coffee house. They are given no compensation.<sup>24</sup> Although actual interview times average sixty to seventy-five minutes long, actual time with the interviewees is two to three times that. I take the time to develop a rapport with each interviewee before and after the interview. Currently, I am fortunate to still keep in touch with a number of participants.

In terms of recruiting subjects, my primary challenge is making sure that the study incorporates a diverse set of voices, while ensuring that the interview experience is comfortable — especially given the sensitive nature of some of the interview questions.<sup>25</sup> I do my best to interview a diverse set of participants with respect to age, class, education level, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic identity. Again, this is difficult to ensure because participation is dependent upon who responds to the recruitment announcement.<sup>26</sup> Recruiting in the U.S. is much easier than recruiting in the Philippines because in the U.S., I am involved in various networks. Therefore, the recruitment letter is forwarded far and wide, and people are familiar with my work and the project. Recruiting in the Philippines has its limitations for several reasons. First, I am in the country for a limited time (three months).<sup>27</sup> In a short time frame, I have to orient myself with the landscape of Manila as well as figure out how to recruit participants for the study. Again, like I do with U.S. recruitment, I contact people in my Philippine network (which is much smaller than my U.S. network) and ask them to forward the recruitment letter far and wide. I also ask friends and family members if they know people who would be interested in being interviewed for the study. Admittedly, it is a bit of a slow start.

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<sup>22</sup> I cite and have great respect for Ronald Hall, whose work examines similar issues. However, in the interview portions of his research, the interviews read a little too polite and politically correct. When I designed this study, I tried to avoid that pitfall as much as possible. Granted, no research design is ever perfect. In some situations, I was still an outsider. However, overall, the quality of interviews recorded for this study is quite remarkable.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that two participants, Tyler and Rae Haro are sisters. I assigned them a common last name to note their relation. Otherwise, most of the interviewees are addressed with one name only. Those with two names (e.g. a first and a last name) gave themselves a first and last name.

<sup>24</sup> At best, I provided participants with a drink, snack, or simple meal. I should note that a few of the U.S. subjects generously treated me to an occasional drink, snack, or meal.

<sup>25</sup> In particular, I was concerned with the diversity in age. Margaret Hunter, an esteemed committee member, noted that this was one of the challenges she faced in conducting her research, as most of her interviewees were college-aged women.

<sup>26</sup> In short, I did not personally approach anyone to participate under the guise of needing to check several diversity boxes.

<sup>27</sup> The interview times in the U.S. spanned four months compared to three months in the Philippines. However, interview time in the U.S. intersected the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. With that, I focused on both sets of interviews within roughly a three-month time span. I wasn't concerned with time. Instead, I was focused on collecting a specific number of interviews. Initially, I was hoping for forty total interviews (twenty in the U.S. and twenty in the Philippines). However, the response in the U.S. was overwhelming, so I interviewed as many people as I could. While the response in the Philippines was also overwhelming, due to me having to come back to the U.S., there were two interviews that I did not conduct.

However, once I start, interviewees themselves are very generous in helping me recruit others to participate in the study. There is a lot of interest in the project and many people who help me recruit (by way of email or personally introducing me to potential participants) are extremely generous and supportive.

Another challenge that I face with Philippine interviewees is my lack of language skills.<sup>28</sup> The interviews are conducted in Manila, where many are multi-lingual and there is a large English speaking population. With that, I know that I will still be able to conduct interviews. When interviewees express a comfort in responding in *Tagalog* as opposed to English, I encourage them to do so. I am proficient enough to understand them, but I do note that I will respond in English. Once I start the interview process, I quickly learn that not being able to conduct an entire interview in *Tagalog* is going to limit the variation in class background of participants. To remedy the situation, Maverick, one of the participants, who also refers a number of interviewees, volunteers to be present and translate interview questions to participants she refers. She does this for two of the interviews.<sup>29</sup>

Given my limitations, I would like to note is that research on this topic needs further development by people with a different skill set than I have. Over the course of this research, people have made numerous suggestions such as including men in the conversation, conducting interviews in multiple languages and dialects, and incorporating a specific section that focuses on sexuality and skin color. This shows the importance and relevance of the subject matter. There are a million directions that this project could have gone. With that, I have to confront my own inadequacies while firmly grounding myself in the project's focus. I do my very best to do justice to a very important subject, and I look forward to its future.

## **Situating the Conversation**

### *Whiteness, Race, and Colorism*

Though this research is designed to cross many academic fields, I will situate it by focusing on the relationship between whiteness, race, and colorism, and the connections between gender and beauty. Cheryl L. Harris explains that whiteness has its benefits and like property, it has value that is maintained at the expense of non-whites. This relationship can be traced back to slavery where black bodies are (and continue to be) sacrificed in order for whiteness to keep its value. Harris writes, “[T]he critical nature of social relations under slavery was the commodification of human beings.”<sup>30</sup> While some may not be able to (or perhaps even refuse to) calculate the actual value of whiteness, Harris points out that the assumed value of whiteness is what automatically de-values black bodies and in turn, justifies slavery. “Whiteness became the quintessential property for personhood.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, the inhumane treatment of slaves and the usage of their bodies as expendable property happens because whiteness has both a *property value*, which must be maintained at a high level and a *human value*, which ensures charitable treatment.

Along those same lines, scholar George Lipsitz asserts,

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<sup>28</sup> I am proficient in simple conversational Tagalog. However, it takes time for me to process and translate.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, I owe many thanks to Maverick for her generosity and interest in the project. She and I had many conversations over coffee and dessert. At times, it seemed as if she was as invested in diversifying the research as I was. Her insight and our eventual friendship mean the world to me.

<sup>30</sup> Cheryl L. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Neil Gotanda, Kimberle Crehshaw, Garry Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1996), 279.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations.<sup>32</sup>

The differences in the values between whiteness and non-whiteness are: 1) Those that benefit from whiteness own its value. 2) These same beneficiaries also determine and own the value of non-whiteness and have the power to make sure the value of whiteness remains high. For example, during slavery, slave owners take the liberty of buying, selling, beating, etc. black bodies because their position allows them to determine the low value of black bodies against the high value of their own. This is what Lipsitz refers to as the possessive investment in whiteness. 3) Whiteness has human value, which determines particular standards and deems these standards normal and natural. In contrast, non-whiteness does not necessarily have human value. Additionally, non-whites are expected to uphold whiteness standards even though the benefits do not equate.

The idea of civilizing non-whites has created a profound power dynamic in the U.S. and abroad. However, we must note that ideas about race are series of intricate meanings that are constantly changing through political struggle.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, race has more to do with power than it does about actual human difference. Michael Omi and Howard Winant assert, “there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along the lines of race.... race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation.”<sup>34</sup> Although there is no biological or scientific basis to race, it does have social meaning. The idea of race is still used as a political tool to assert the power of one group over the other.

Directly related to the value of whiteness or lightness is how colorism operates. Scholar Cedric Herring defines colorism as:

[The] discriminatory treatment of individuals falling within the same ‘racial’ group on the basis of skin color. It operates both intraracially and interracially. Intraracial colorism occurs when members of a racial group make distinctions based upon skin color between members of their own race. Interracial colorism occurs when members of one racial group make distinctions based upon skin color between members of another racial group.<sup>35</sup>

This discriminatory treatment sometimes prompts people within the same racial groups to discriminate against each other because it is assumed that one’s skin tone is directly related to specific assumptions about that person. For example, Herring states that skin tone determines the level of perceived attractiveness for African American women. It also serves as a physical marker of one’s assumed “authenticity” or dedication to nationalism. Authors Kathy Russell,

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<sup>32</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge), 55.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 55-56

<sup>35</sup> Cedric Herring, “Skin Deep: Race and Complexion in the ‘Color Blind’ Era,” in *Skin Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the Color Blind Era*, edited by Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 3.

Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall call this “the color complex.”<sup>36</sup> In their study, Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith find that self esteem among black women is related to their skin tone – that these women’s self esteem increases as their skin tone lightens. There are correlations between skin tone and educational attainment, occupational success, and even health.<sup>37</sup> These studies show that while the privileges of whiteness are imposed on people of color, these benefits are also internalized, and in turn, cause friction within racialized groups. This is a very important point, particularly for Asians in the U.S. and abroad, because this relates to perceptions of light-skinned versus dark-skinned Asians, where skin color itself has a social and political value.

While the research in colorism in the Asian/American community is limited, I would like to take some time to highlight the work of Ronald Hall. He is one of few scholars who tackle this issue with respect to Asian/American communities. Specifically, Hall has published several texts examining Asian women and colorism, including: *Asia Color Quest*, *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization*, and *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal*.<sup>38</sup> *Asia Color Quest* seems to be the text that eventually inspires the two other texts. Hall notes that *Asia Color Quest* is an “honest attempt to promote dialogue in the outcome for the book’s ability to expose all forms and manner of colonial denigration.”<sup>39</sup> There are a few points that he establishes in this book that are important in understanding the specificity of colorism in the Asian/American community. First, he establishes a global context and discussion with respect to race and skin color, and how this functions in a post-colonial world. Next, he explores colonialism in Asia to establish the imbalance of power between Asia and the West. From there, he incorporates a discussion regarding inter-racial partnerships. Hall coins the term “eurogamy” by defining it as: “a select marital specific dictated by Western domination under the rubric of exogamy. It is the preferred marital pattern of a less powerful group, Asians, into a dominant group, Western male.”<sup>40</sup> He then explains that eurogamy is a product of Eurocentric psychological consequence, and he explores this through a few interviews, which are featured in the book. Hall’s next work, *Filipina Eurogamy* explores similar issues, but this time, he specifically looks at Filipino women and the specificities of the Philippine-U.S. colonial relationship to explore Filipina eurogamy. In comparing *Asia Color Quest* and *Filipina Eurogamy*, the interviews cited are the same. However, the latter has the specific Filipino focus. Also, it incorporates a survey and its results help to understand skin color bias. Finally, *Beaching Beauty* is again, a continuation of *Filipina Eurogamy* in that there is a lot of crossover in the material. However, this last text concentrates on beauty and skin bleaching as both a physical and psychological process. The interview portion focuses on a group discussion about beauty (as opposed to individual interviews).

I commend Hall for making some insightful assertions in this overall body of work. He is making proper connections between colonization and its current impact on Filipino women with respect to dating and marriage choices and self-perception. He also incorporates interviews, which give audiences a sense of these women’s experiences. He points out early on that his

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<sup>36</sup> Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1992), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Maxine S. Thompson and Vera M. Keith, “The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem and Self Efficacy,” *Gender and Society* (15:3; 2001), 339.

<sup>38</sup> Refer to the following by Ronald Hall: *Asia Color Quest*, (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp, 2001); *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization*, (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001); Ronald Hall, *Bleaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal*, (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Hall, *Asia*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

approach and assertions may be misunderstood, as he is an outsider trying to approach the subject matter. As an insider, in many ways, my work is an extension of his work, as I have access and insight that he may not have. With that, this dissertation differs from Hall's work in the following ways: (1) I actively and consistently incorporate the interviews into the analysis for a more cohesive conversation (whereas his work separates the interviews in a designated section). (2) My interview sample is significantly larger than his and is conducted in both the U.S. and the Philippines. (3) Compared to the interviews in his books, my interviews seem to be less clinical and delve into the intricacies of these women's lives. Again, this is likely because of my insider status. Being a woman of the same ethnic background of the participants can make for a more comfortable interview situation.<sup>41</sup> (4) This project's analysis on skin lightening advertisements distinguishes itself from Hall's work. When I first discovered Hall's work, I was impressed, but always felt that something was missing. As others read my work (hopefully along with his), they too, may feel that something is missing. With that, it is again, my hope that others continue this type of research.

### *On Gender and Beauty*

With respect to women and notions of beauty, previous studies concentrate on local or national dynamics and emphasize the contrast between Eurocentric/non-Eurocentric notions of beauty.<sup>42</sup> One's desire for beauty or to be beautiful is, according to Nancy L. Etcoff, author of *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, part instinct and part fantasy. It is instinctual because it is human nature to desire beauty or to have it in one's life.<sup>43</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, authors of *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, agree and state, "the desire for beauty, or at least for attractiveness, possesses every woman, that every woman considers her looks a vital part of herself, that to fail to realize one's full potential for beauty is to feel oneself a failure as a woman and a human being."<sup>44</sup> While beauty is said to define so much of one self, it is still difficult to determine exactly what beauty is. Some feel that they do not know what it is, but

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<sup>41</sup> I emphasize "seem" because I'm not sure if he had another archive of interviews that he may not have been able to include in the publication.

<sup>42</sup> Please see: Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1992); Cedric Herring, *Skin Deep: Race and Complexion in the "Color Blind" Era*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Ronald Hall, *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization*, (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001); Ronald Hall, *Bleaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal*, (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006); Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1996); Bonnie Berry, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power* (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Bonnie Berry, *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008); Amina Mire, "Skin-bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power and the Politics of the Colour Line," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28:3/4 (2001): 13-38; Amina Mire, "Pigmentation and Empire: The Emerging Skin Whitening Industry," *Counterpunch*, July 28, 2005, assessed July 29, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/mire07282005.html>; Sarah Banet-Wiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Ann DuCille, *Skin Trade* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996); Georgina Reyes Encanto, *Constructing the Filipina: A History of Women's Magazines 1891-2002* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Nancy L. Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (Lexington: Doubleday, 1999), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 12.

believe it is recognizable when it is seen. Others, such as Edmund Burke, attempt to outline what he believes are authentic beauty traits. In 1757 Burke writes:

On the whole, the qualities of beauty, as they are merely sensible qualities are the following: First to be comparatively small. Secondly, to be smooth. Thirdly, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but fourthly, to have those parts not angular, but melted as it were into each other. Fifthly, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of strength. Sixthly, to have its colours clear and bright, but not very strong and glaring. Seventhly, or if it should have any glaring colour, to have it diversified with others. These are, I believe, the properties on which beauty depends; properties that operate by nature, and are less liable to be altered by caprice, or confounded by a diversity of facts than any other.<sup>45</sup>

Lois Banner, in her book *American Beauty*, defines beauty by outlining the historical beauty trends in the United States. According to Banner, during the Antebellum period, the ideal beauty is a frail, pale, and willowy woman. After the Civil War, the ideal shifts towards women who are voluptuous. In the 1890s, tall and athletic women are in style. In the 1910s, small, boyish women are preferred. By the 1920s, flappers are in vogue. From the 1930s-50s, the shift goes back to voluptuous women. The 1960s is considered to be the era of rebellion and the “other,” which is when women of color – particularly black women are considered beautiful.<sup>46</sup>

Banner also points out that beauty has some scientific value – that beauty is a matter of survival of the fittest (or prettiest). She also notes, “Some Darwinians argued that all human beings ultimately would be beautiful, as men and women chose beautiful people as mates and passed this beauty on to offspring, while ugly people, unchosen, had no progeny.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Etcoff believes that there is a science of beauty – that examining beauty via cognitive science and evolutionary psychology – we can make sense of beauty and why the desire for it is so innate. The problem with both arguments is that they do not take into account that beauty is also socially constructed – it is gendered, raced, and classed. Definitions of beauty – like concepts of race – change depending on the current historical climate or through political struggle.<sup>48</sup> For example, in looking at how Burke defines beauty in 1757 or how Banner outlines historical beauty trends in the U.S., these definitions are situated within a particular time and primarily speak to white, middle-class women. By defining what beauty is or why the desire for beauty is so innate, it is simultaneously defining what beauty *is not* and *who* do not possess beauty. These definitions are also another way to maintain gendered, racialized and classed hierarchies. Scholar Kathy Peiss asserts:

Notions of Anglo-American beauty in the nineteenth century were continually asserted in relation to people of color around the world... And because appearance and character were considered to be commensurate, the beauty of white skin expressed Anglo-Saxon virtue and civilization – and justified white supremacy in a period of American expansion.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>46</sup> Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 5. It is important to note that the beauty trends Banner is talking about applies mostly to white, upper middle class women. Beauty standards of women of color are not taken into account until the 1960s. Given that history has different effects on women of color, the beauty trends that Banner asserts would be very different for these women.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>48</sup> I know it’s difficult to see the connection between beauty and politics, but I’ll get to this point in a bit.

<sup>49</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) 31.

Defining beauty – either through science or perceived “common sense” has nothing to do with actual truth. Rather, it is used to separate the civilized from the savage. Over time, this, along with the idea that the desire for beauty is innate becomes profitable business.

Because discussions on beauty have mostly revolved around white, middle-class women and the corresponding beauty standards that apply to them, references to race and racialized beauty are absent. For example, Banner fails to recognize racism in beauty. In reference to representations of beauty in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, she sates, “The rampant nativism of the period did not influence writers on beauty, who welcomed an amalgamation of racial types and argued that our mixture of any racial stocks would come a higher kind of beauty, truly unique, democratic, and American.”<sup>50</sup> Banner’s argument mirrors those who believe that when a non-white person marries or has children with a white partner, these children and in turn their offspring, create a new race of people who are neither black nor white, but a new kind of multiracial group of people. For Banner, multi-racial people and the way they change the “look” of America are a symbol of a new country that embraces change. However, Banner actually points to a larger issue in U.S. colonial history. G. Reginald Daniel, in his article, “Passers and Pluralists: Subverting the Racial Divide,” states that the U.S. has always operated under the rule of hypodescent – that if a person has a drop of black blood, that person will always be considered black – even if that person may be phenotypically white.<sup>51</sup> In short, Banner’s assertion that a new kind of beauty that includes a multitude of diversity would be welcome is untrue because it fails to recognize the racialized hierarchical implications behind such beauty.

In a similar vein as Banner, Etoff’s work states:

Despite racism, misperceptions, and misunderstandings, people have always been attracted to people of other races. Today the world is a global community where international beauty competitions have enormous followings (although many complain that these contests favor Western ideals of beauty). There must be some general understanding of beauty, however vaguely defined, since even three-month old infants prefer to gaze at faces that adults find attractive, including faces of people from races they had not been previously exposed to. In recent years scientists have taken a deep interest in the universality of beauty.<sup>52</sup>

Again, while well meaning (especially since her work is released in 1999 – a time when racial bias is clearly recognized), Etoff does not see that again, beauty is racialized. That white bodies are superior relies on the perceptions of black and/or racialized bodies as subordinate. Scholar Kathy Davis writes:

White, Western women are trapped by the promise that they are special, which gives them a vested interest in maintaining the beauty system. The norms which equate the light-skinned, Western look with beauty permeate relations between white women and women of color, as well as between women and men of color. Women of color are bombarded with cultural messages which not only link whiteness to feminine beauty, but, more importantly, to ‘gentility, female

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<sup>50</sup> Banner, *American Beauty*, 206.

<sup>51</sup> G. Reginald Daniel, “Passers and Pluralists: Subverting the Racial Divide,” in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Mara P. P. Root (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992) 91-107.

<sup>52</sup> Etoff, *Survival*, 137.



domesticity, protection from labor, the exacting standards of the elite, and Anglo-Saxon Superiority’ - in short, to power.<sup>53</sup>

Davis makes an important point with respect to the ways beauty standards hurt *all* women. White women are hindered by having to maintain a beauty standard that is defined by them, while made to feel inadequate when they do not measure up. Non-white women are trapped by beauty standards because it highlights their inferiority when compared to white women. Generally, beauty standards simultaneously connect and dislocate white and non-white women in the name of maintaining power. Lakoff and Scherr add, “Beauty is never more political than when it is used to prop up the power of one race while it renders others powerless, immured in self-hatred.”<sup>54</sup> The exalted white beauty as the universal standard is created to emphasize difference. Universality in beauty does not truly exist because the idea behind universality is that there is a particular beauty standard that transcends through time, culture, political struggle, etc. Universality completely erases the notion that beauty is related to power and is used to maintain hierarchy – particularly racialized hierarchy. Scholar Sarah Halprin echoes Davis, Lakoff and Scherr when she states:

The myth of the beautiful white woman has been used to drain all women of power in the world and ownership of our sexuality. Whiteness, in women, is often associated with purity, innocence, and chastity, qualities that are assumed to be morally desirable and opposed to the “undesirable” qualities associated with sexual experience. It is by upholding this complicated myth that white women actually become a danger to others, not by being beautiful, but by representing one limiting standard of beauty which renders all other unbeautiful.<sup>55</sup>

Going back to Etcoff’s earlier point regarding beauty contests, she is correct to some degree that “the world is a global community where international beauty competitions have enormous followings (although many complain that these contests favor Western ideals of beauty).”<sup>56</sup> However, she fails to interrogate which women are allowed to represent this beauty. What do these women look like? What kind of features do they have? According to whose standards are these women seen as beautiful? Her small note in parenthesis is not enough. In her study on beauty pageants, Sarah Banet-Wiser points to how the bodies of women of color have been commodified in these contests:

Diversity becomes a commodity that is purchased through the representation and display on nonwhite feminine bodies.... Thus, the ironic, unintended effect that characterizes the realm of representation becomes one in which white Americans feel more tolerant than ever, even as they continue to live in an increasingly segregated nation.<sup>57</sup>

In short, Banet-Wiser points out that diversity in beauty contests allow white Americans to feel like they are open-minded, inclusive, and “tolerant,” despite living very segregated lives. Interestingly, Maxine Leeds Craig, in her study on black beauty queens during the Civil Rights era, also states that while black women participating in pageants becomes a political statement,

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<sup>53</sup> Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 51-52.

<sup>54</sup> Lakoff and Scherr, *Face Value*, 248.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Halprin, “*Look at my ugly face!*” *Myths and Musings on Beauty and Other Perilous Obsessions with Women’s Appearance* (New York: Viking, 1995) 43.

<sup>56</sup> Etcoff, *Survival*, 137.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Banet-Wiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 20.

there are still limitations in which black women are actually participating in. Craig notes that the politics overshadow the fact that there is a particular beauty standard that has to be upheld among black women and that light-skinned contestants are often the participants. “The black press, in its focus on the race (and not the color) of black contestants entering white contests, had ignored the light complexions of the civil rights contestants.”<sup>58</sup> Even in spaces that are meant to be inclusive, western beauty standards still apply.

Finally, beauty is a gendered concept, as historically, it is considered to be a woman’s responsibility to be beautiful or to maintain her beauty. Men are exempt from beauty responsibility because it is assumed that men’s bodies are already superior to women’s bodies. A man’s worth is based more on his ability to provide for his family or how he earns or maintains a particular class status. If a man makes beauty his responsibility, he is thought to be deviant, homosexual or considered an embarrassment.<sup>59</sup> For women, beauty is their responsibility because it is believed that women’s bodies are naturally deficient. Because they tend to be more emotional, women are thought to age faster. Their physical capabilities as well as their status do not compare with men’s. Scholar Kathy Davis explains, “Since medicine has historically defined the female body as deficient and in need of repair, cosmetic surgery is easily legitimated as a ‘natural’ and, therefore, acceptable therapy for women’s problems with their appearance.”<sup>60</sup> If a woman is beautiful, her beauty could raise the status of both her and her partner. Being with a good-looking woman increases a man’s status. When people are shown pictures of a man with a very attractive woman, who is described as his girlfriend, they say that he is more self-confident, intelligent, and likable than when they are shown the same picture but told the woman is a stranger.

In their study, Murray Webster and James E. Driskell outline beauty advantages, which include positive perceptions of success, competency and confidence. While some of the negative assumptions of beautiful people as dangerous, vain and egotistical exist, Webster and Driskell still believe that the benefits outweigh the negatives. This is because, “Beauty or ugliness is one of the most accessible features of a person and acts as readily available status information in most encounters. While discrimination because of race or sex may decline because of changes in laws and educational practice, discrimination based on attractiveness evidences no comparable movement.”<sup>61</sup> In short, beauty bias (like racial bias) will always exist. However, institutionalized beauty bias is more difficult to track and less likely to ignite legal legislation.

### **The Chapters at a Glance**

The dissertation incorporates four substantive chapters. Chapter two outlines the parameters of skin color hierarchy by illustrating how it is an extension of colorism. This chapter focuses on four key points of skin color hierarchy. First, skin color hierarchy addresses the complexities of colonialism, where skin color defines who is civil and who is savage. With respect to the Philippines, ideas about skin color are influenced by Spanish colonialism, American colonialism, and the class status the Chinese have obtained during these two periods. These colonial histories construct the indigenous Filipino as savage and uncivilized as an assertion of imperialist power over the people of the Philippines. Additionally, the Chinese are

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<sup>58</sup> Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 59, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Kathy Davis, “‘A Dubious Equality’: Men, Women and Cosmetic Surgery,” *Body & Society*, 8:1 (2002), 54.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Murray Webster and James E. Driskell, “Beauty as Status,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 89:1 (1983) 162.

exempt from such classifications because as the merchant class, they hold economic power that indigenous Filipinos do not. Framing Filipinos as savage and uncivilized helps construct notions of beauty by valuing those with lighter skin and sharper features.

Second, skin color hierarchy moves beyond the black-white binary by taking into account the complicated nature of colonization in the Philippines and how these processes continue to impact Filipinos. Previous research<sup>62</sup> on colorism has mostly focused on this binary, where darkness or blackness (often associated with Africanness) is seen as undesirable when compared to lightness or whiteness (often associated with Europeaness). Skin color hierarchy goes beyond the black-white binary by considering the rising power of East Asia, the desirability of East Asians in popular media, and how this affects current assumptions about skin color. Skin color hierarchy shifts the discussion from racial differences to skin color differences across racial and ethnic lines.

The third key point of skin color hierarchy focuses on the personal impact of skin color. For this research, I conducted forty-six interviews in the Philippines and the U.S. These women's voices help to illuminate and personalize the consequences of social class and economic standing in relation to skin color. Their stories show us how ideas of skin color affect the way they understand their social standing and the economic opportunities that they have access to. They also give us insight to how skin color determines their economic and personal choices. Finally, skin color hierarchy considers how multi-ethnic and multi-racial people affect assumptions about skin color. Though colorism and pigmentocracy consider multiraciality, these discussions often focus on mixed race Europeans.<sup>63</sup> This research looks beyond such mixes by again, considering Asia and Asians as light skinned and desirable.

Chapter three addresses on the value of darkness by exploring how skin color is understood on both sides of the Pacific and how these perceptions are related to each other. This chapter begins by examining how dark skin is understood in the Philippines by using interviews and ethnographic observations. Philippine interviewees show that they have a richer understanding of skin color that challenges the old standard of light and dark. While there is room for understanding dark skin as beautiful, interviewees still hesitate embrace such ideas. Next, the chapter investigates the issue of tanning. We explore the contrasting views that U.S. interviewees have regarding tanning as a social practice, and how this is related to perceptions of skin color. In addition, we look at the ways in which skin color is simultaneously significant and insignificant to Filipino women in the U.S. Finally, testimonies from U.S. interviewees who have travelled back to the Philippines help us understand how one's proximity to American-ness elevates her status when she goes back or interacts with family from the Philippines.

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<sup>62</sup> Please refer to: Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, *Skin Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the Color Blind Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1992); Maxine S. Thompson and Vera M. Keith, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem and Self Efficacy," *Gender and Society* (15:3; 2001); Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Amina Mire, "Skin-bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power and the Politics of the Colour Line," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28:3/4 (2001): 13-38; Amina Mire, "Pigmentation and Empire: The Emerging Skin Whitening Industry," *Counterpunch*, July 28, 2005, assessed July 29, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/mire07282005.html>.

<sup>63</sup> For reference, please see: Kimberly McClain DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Chapter four explores the ways in which intimate circles influence interviewees' perceptions of skin color. Here, I argue that how a society values skin color functions in similar ways in intimate circles. For example, society values light skin over dark skin. These values apply in intimate circles, where, for example, siblings with light skin are valued over those with dark skin. Additionally, intimate circles influence the way a woman understands the value of beauty and its relationship to skin color. Through interviewee accounts, this chapter will examine how family and friends shape these women's perceptions. Oftentimes, these intimate circles are as influential as the media and popular culture in helping a woman shape her ideas of beauty in relation to skin color.

In this last substantive section, chapter five, examines the ways in which beauty has become increasingly globalized, especially through the image of the mixed race body in cosmetics advertising. Specifically, it looks at the idea of global beauty and how this seemingly new, inclusive standard of beauty is carried through the light skinned, mixed race body. By weaving interviews, observations from my field research, and current studies on marketing and mixed race people, this chapter will illustrate how skin color hierarchy operates in popular media in the Philippines and the U.S. In addition, it explores how skin lightening products in the Philippines and anti-aging products in the U.S. are marketed and sold, and what these advertisements say about skin color and beauty. Finally, this chapter explores how the interviewees in this study resist popular notions of lighter skin as superior to darker skin.

This dissertation ends with a brief concluding chapter that sums up the work, explores future directions for the project, and shares some final thoughts about developing similar research.

## Chapter 2: Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.

Scholar Cedric Herring, whose work focuses on skin color dynamics among African American communities, states, “Even within ‘racial groups’, skin color matters. People who are usually considered to be of the same race are judged by the hue and shade of their skin.”<sup>1</sup> He continues:

Colorism may rise from, among other things, racist ideology, class based assumptions, the symbolism of colors white and black, or a combination of these things. Knowledge of the complexity of colorism, however, is essential if we are to advance our comprehension of the increasingly diverse society in which we live in.<sup>2</sup>

In short, Herring points out that within racial (e.g. among those who are of Asian or African descent) and ethnic groups (e.g. those who are of Filipino or Chinese descent), skin color has significant meaning. The color of one’s skin says something about one’s social and economic standing. Such assumptions are rooted in, among other things, the value of light over dark, white over black. He also asserts that it is imperative to understand the complexity of colorism across racial and ethnic lines because it allows us to understand how skin color continues to define one’s social and economic standing, despite society’s growing diversity. Taking a cue from his assertion, this project explores the contours of skin color and its significance among Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. For example, Maverick, a thirty-three year-old research and planning assistant in the Philippines explains why light skin is so highly valued there:

*Here in the Philippines, I think most people prefer light skin, mestiza (mixed) or Chinese. I really think it’s because for the most part, we’ve been colonized. The Philippines has been colonized for a long, long time. Like, the Spanish colonized us for three hundred years. Then afterwards the Japanese during World War II, then the Americans. So we have some sort of identity crisis. I don’t know if it’s identity crisis so much, as we haven’t really fully understood and accepted what it means to be dark skinned. So that’s the perception. And you can see it actually even in TV, in the commercials. They have all these whitening stuff. Down from the lotion and of course other clinics. Beauty clinics are making a killing just to keep white, stuff like that.*

— Maverick, 33, Philippines

Maverick explains that Spanish and American colonization of the archipelago are major factors as to why light skin is so sought after. Further, Maverick describes a skin color crisis, where Filipinos “haven’t really fully understood and accepted what it means to be dark skinned.” This is because colonial processes have taught many Filipinos that light skin has higher value over dark skin. Also, this lack of understanding or accepting dark skin in positive terms is something that continues to haunt Filipinos on both sides of the Pacific. With that, many resort to beauty treatments that feed their desires to be lighter skinned. Similarly, in the U.S., Lynn, a forty-two year-old project manager states:

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<sup>1</sup> Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, *Skin Deep: Race and Complexion in the "Color Blind" Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

*We were told don't be dark. You want to be light because it's considered status quo. You get, I don't know if respect is the word. But you're the one that gets the attention. It's more favorable, more favorable treatment. Whereas if you're dark, you're considered someone who is working out in the field. And people who work out in the fields generally don't have much money. And it just revolves around the whole status, economic status.*

— Lynn, 42, United States

Though they are located in different parts of the world, Maverick and Lynn agree that dark skin is not valued within the Filipino community. Lynn notes that dark skin indicates low economic status, which is why people are told, “don’t be dark.” She also notes that those with dark skin are disregarded.

These women’s voices show the anxieties that many Filipinos have with respect to having dark skin. Maverick and Lynn tell us that the value of light skin over dark skin has implications regarding one’s social status, economic class, and perceived beauty. A dark person is typically considered poor, is disregarded, and deemed unattractive. Finally, Maverick and Lynn illuminate that the “lighter is better” mantra is rooted in the colonial past of the Philippines, where Filipinos (whom, regardless of actual skin tone, are often seen as darker skinned in comparison to the colonizers) are seen as savage. It is a past that has an impact on how Filipinos see themselves today. This chapter will focus on explaining the concept of skin color hierarchy and how it is an extension of the current literature on colorism.

Skin color hierarchy is an extension of colorism in a number of ways. This chapter will focus on four key points of skin color hierarchy. First, skin color hierarchy addresses the complexities of colonialism, where skin color defines who is civil and who is savage. With respect to the Philippines, ideas about skin color are influenced by Spanish colonialism, American colonialism, and the class status the Chinese have obtained during these two periods. These colonial histories construct the indigenous Filipino as savage and uncivilized as an assertion of imperialist power over the people of the Philippines. Additionally, the Chinese are exempt from such classifications because as the merchant class, they hold economic power that indigenous Filipinos do not. Framing Filipinos as savage and uncivilized helps construct notions of beauty by valuing those with lighter skin and sharper features. By doing so, it devalues dark skin and broad features. These constructions are carried out through representations of Filipinos as constructed by those in power – from the displays of Philippine villages at the world’s fairs to popular media representations.

Second, skin color hierarchy moves beyond the black-white binary by taking into account the complicated nature of colonization in the Philippines and how these processes continue to impact Filipinos. Previous research on colorism has mostly focused on this binary, where darkness or blackness (often associated with Africanness) is seen as undesirable when compared to lightness or whiteness (often associated with Europeanness).<sup>3</sup> Skin color hierarchy goes

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to: Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, *Skin Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the Color Blind Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1992); Maxine S. Thompson and Vera M. Keith, “The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem and Self Efficacy,” *Gender and Society* (15:3; 2001); Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Amina Mire, “Skin-bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power and the Politics of the Colour Line,” *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28:3/4 (2001): 13-38; Amina Mire, “Pigmentation

beyond the black-white binary by considering the rising power of East Asia, the desirability of East Asians in popular media, and how this affects current assumptions about skin color. Skin color hierarchy shifts the discussion from racial differences to skin color differences across racial and ethnic lines. By taking this into consideration, skin color hierarchy broadens our understanding of how skin color is valued. In fact, it speaks closely to the concept of pigmentocracy, and steps out of the black-white binary by creating a more extensive explanation of skin color values.<sup>4</sup> It considers these terms locally, globally, and recognizes its scope beyond Europe.

In addition, previous research has focused on the structural consequences of skin color such as social class and economic standing.<sup>5</sup> Though skin color hierarchy recognizes the importance of these elements, the third key point of skin color hierarchy focuses on the personal impact of skin color. For this research, I conduct forty-six interviews in the Philippines and the U.S. These women's voices help to illuminate and personalize the consequences of social class and economic standing in relation to skin color. Their stories show us how ideas of skin color affect the way they understand their social standing and the economic opportunities that they have access to. They also give us insight to how skin color determines their economic and personal choices.

Finally, skin color hierarchy considers how multi-ethnic and multi-racial people affect assumptions about skin color. Though colorism and pigmentocracy consider multiraciality, these discussions often focus on mixed race Europeans.<sup>6</sup> This research looks beyond such mixes by again, considering Asia and Asians as light skinned and desirable. It also considers the social meaning of being mixed race black. These four points will extend current discussions on colorism and help us gain a better understanding of how skin color hierarchy operates.

### **Skin Color and Colonization**

*"You would like to have a fairer color because you would look more clean than others.": Skin Color, the Savage, and the Civilized*

In her book, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Patricia Hill Collins states that in the U.S. context, young, white, slender women with light skin and blond hair define beauty and femininity for all women, including non-white women. These

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and Empire: The Emerging Skin Whitening Industry," *Counterpunch*, July 28, 2005, assessed July 29, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/mire07282005.html>.

<sup>4</sup> For a more extensive discussion, please see: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David R. Dietrich, "The Latinamericanization of U.S. Race Relations: A New Pigmentocracy," in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 40-62. This work charts three categories in the color spectrum: whites, honorary Whites, and the collective black to complicate the racial/ethnic stratification system in the U.S.

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to: Maxine S. Thompson and Vera M. Keith, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem and Self Efficacy," *Gender and Society* (15:3; 2001); Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Bonnie Berry, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power* (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Bonnie Berry, *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008). Murray Webster and James E. Driskell, "Beauty as Status," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 89:1 (1983): 140-165.

<sup>6</sup> Kimberly McClain DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Hannah Beech, "Eurasian Invasion," *Time*, Apr. 16, 2001, accessed February 25, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,106427,00.html>.

definitions, “automatically render the majority of African American women at best as less beautiful, and at worst, ugly.” She continues, “Under these feminine norms, African American women can never be as beautiful as White women because they never become White.”<sup>7</sup> Though Hill Collins speaks to the experience of black women in the U.S., her assertion is also true for many Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. For many Filipinos, those with light skin and sharp features define what is beautiful. To understand why these features have such high value, it is important to understand the role colonization in the Philippines.

For the U.S., colonizing the Philippines is a mere extension of the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans. When the U.S. defeats Spain during the Spanish-American war, the main goal of the Americans is to expand their territory towards the Pacific. The Philippines is acquired because of its ideal location for building the U.S. military.<sup>8</sup> Under American colonial rule, indigenous practices are outlawed (or highly discouraged), including speaking and writing in respective native languages, and practicing traditional customs such as dance, chant, whistling, etc. An American colonial education system is installed, with English as the mode of education. Eventually, this produces generations of Filipinos whose cultures and identities are stripped and replaced with American ways of life – from the imposition of the English language, an American style of government that is composed of white men and local elite, to required enrollment in American colonial schools. This, along with the unrecognized Philippine-American war contributes to the growing historical amnesia of U.S. imperialism and its violent means of takeover in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

Franz Fanon’s seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, highlights the power dynamic that colonization creates. He explains that the colonial project aims to convince native cultures that without colonialism, native cultures would be backward:

The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives’ heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality. On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts.<sup>10</sup>

Using his terms, Fanon explains that the colonial project creates a system where the native (the colonized) becomes dependent on the settler (the colonizer). This is because the native is savage and when left to his own accord, would wreak havoc. Given that, the native needs the settler to

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 194.

<sup>8</sup> Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) 108.

<sup>9</sup> Oscar V. Campomanes, “The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 2:2 (1995): 145-200; Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Luis Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010); Abe Ignacio, et al., *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T'Boli Publishing and Distribution, 2004); Luzviminda Francisco, “The First Vietnam: The Philippine-American War 1899-1902,” in *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance*, ed. Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (Boston: South End Press, 1987) 8-19.

<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 211.



teach the native ideas of civility. The fundamental idea behind this relationship is that the native is thought to be immature, savage, bad, weak, and ugly. In contrast, the settler is seen as mature, civilized, good, strong, and beautiful. Over time, this creates a system of the haves (the settlers, the colonizers) versus the have-nots (the natives, the colonized). Novelist and social critic Ngugi explains why it is important for the colonizers to put this power structure in place:

The imperialist cultural tradition in its colonial form was meant to undermine peoples' belief in themselves and make them look up to the European cultures, languages and the arts, for a measurement of themselves and their abilities. It was meant to undermine their belief in their capacity to struggle successfully for control of their whole social and natural environment.<sup>11</sup>

Ngugi explains that the colonial project relies on the idea that the native sees himself as inferior. By doing so, the native cannot see his capacity to rebel against his colonizer. The most notable long-term effect of the colonial project is that the native (the colonized) begins to believe in his inferiority – that his value is much less than that of the settler (the colonizer).

The U.S., in order to suppress Filipinos, perpetuates stereotypes of indigenous islanders as savage and in need of proper manner and civility in order to progress. Such stereotypes also justify colonization and define the U.S. as a nation of progress and democracy. To help do this, human bodies from the newly acquired colonies are put on display in the World's Fairs at the turn of the century. Scholar Shari Huhndorf states:

To those few who questioned the justice of this conquest, the exposition promised that the dominance of (white) civilization over (Native) savagery was an inevitable part of the 'universal law of progress,' the 'manifest destiny' of white Americans. By indicating that progress (rather than European-American acquisitiveness) underlay the conquest, the exhibits also conveniently deflected difficult ethnical questions about centuries of slaughter of Native peoples and usurpation of their resources.<sup>12</sup>

Displaying indigenous cultures as uncivilized and backward gives Americans a sense of identity. How white Americans see themselves (distinguished, civil, proper) is shaped by how they view indigenous people (indolent, ill-mannered, savage and in need of being saved). Showcasing indigenous cultures and creating the myth that the U.S. has to save the island barbarians helps erase the harsh violent realities of colonialism. Scholar Nerissa Balce describes this as, "images of war displayed as peace."<sup>13</sup> The World's Fairs function to display such images and perpetuate long-standing myths. For example, the Chicago's World's Fair in 1893 centers around the celebration of Columbus's alleged discovery of America. Huhndorf asserts why celebrating the mythical discovery is so problematic:

By defining his story as the nation's originary moment, planners created a vision of an America born in imperial conquest. This story thus implied a more expansive vision of America's past and its future than had the exhibits at Philadelphia, one that prefigured the heated debates on imperialism that came to the fore at the close of the decade.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ngugi, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993), 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Nerissa Balce, "The Filipina's Breast: Savagery, Docility, and the Erotics of the American Empire," *Social Text* 24:2 (Summer 2006): 105.

<sup>14</sup> Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 38-39.

Although pointing to Columbus's alleged discovery of America illustrates the country's imperial past, the Fair celebrates Columbus and completely erases the history of Native Americans before Columbus's arrival and European conquest. These fairs hide the realities of conquest and instead subjugate Native American bodies in its displays.

The 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis showcases America's new colonies in the Pacific. At the same time (and without intent) it reveals the connections between Native Americans and their indigenous cousins across the Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Again, Huhndorf observes:

The implications of America's "ceaseless movement westward," including the relationship between Natives and America's other colonized peoples, became much more explicit.... In St. Louis, the Philippines Reservation, temporary home to 1,200 Filipinos, recast the bloody U.S. campaign against the islands which had ended only two years earlier. From the earliest days of overseas expansion, the links between America's imperial wars abroad and the conquest of Native America had been clear. Not only did soldiers and officers who had been stationed on the frontier participate in expansionist campaigns overseas... the nation's earlier conquest of "savagery" seemed to justify white Americans' struggles for dominance abroad.<sup>16</sup>

In the Philippine reservation, organizers try to show that although savage, there is hope for Filipino progress. This is done by contrasting the bodies of the *Igorots* who are shown either bare-breasted or in loincloths killing and eating dog, with the Visayan village. The *Visayans* are displayed by wearing western-inspired clothing and weaving textiles. Balce extends this conversation by specifically examining the display of Filipina (and to a smaller extent, Native American and Pacific Islander) women's bare breasts as a sign of savagery. The representations are what Balce calls "the erotics of the American Empire." She defines this as:

The discursive and material processes that created the sexual and racialized representations of the Filipina colonial subject in American popular culture.... the erotics of empire is the play of earlier racialized and gendered discourse that constructed the Filipina as a new nonwhite other whose alterity incorporated the ideas, images and vocabularies of the conquests of the New World, the frontier, and the legacies of slavery.<sup>17</sup>

Her discussion focuses on American violence of Filipinos – from war to colonial education, to stereotypical imagery of Filipinos and how these persist, even in today's popular culture.<sup>18</sup> The contrasting images of Filipinos as both untamed and civil will continue to haunt the self-perceptions of future generations of Filipinos.

One of the many ways that the legacy of U.S. imperialism has impacted Filipinos is with respect to skin color and ideas of civility, cleanliness, and beauty. Georgina Encanto, in her book *Constructing the Filipina: A History of Women's Magazines 1891-2002*, explains, "A massive form of pacification to systematically indoctrinate Filipinos on American culture and way of life was launched mainly through the educational system, the media and culture."<sup>19</sup> Through these

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<sup>15</sup> I would like to note that such connections have been pointed out in other ways, such as Native American and Black soldiers leaving the U.S. army in order to fight along side Filipino soldiers for Philippine independence.

<sup>16</sup> Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Balce, "Erotics," 92.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 103.

<sup>19</sup> Georgina Reyes Encanto, *Constructing the Filipina: A History of Women's Magazines 1891-2002* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004), 35.

three avenues, American values are seen as superior over Filipino values. Admiral Pie, a twenty-nine year-old entrepreneur who runs an organic skincare company in the Philippines explains:

*I think it really comes from you know, American, the American colonial period.... Suddenly we were told that we could be educated. We could aspire to something more. And I think it translated also into the physical aspect. We could look like something more. And that something more was the colonizers, the Americans. So we also wanted to have higher, an aquiline nose, we also wanted to have lighter skin.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

Admiral Pie points out the specificity of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines. Americans bring an accessible education system to the Philippines and the hope that people can aspire for more in life. However, these ideals come at a price. Admiral Pie states that the “something more” that Filipinos could aspire to is based on American values, that Filipinos could strive to be like Americans, not just in ideological values, but in physical appearance. Filipinos are taught to value American culture while simultaneously devaluing their own.

Similarly, Carmen, a twenty-four year-old library administrator from the Philippines explains the historical impact of colonization in the Philippines:

*It's historical. We were colonized by the Spaniards, then the Americans and then the Japanese. All of them were lighter skinned than the common Filipino. I guess it perpetuated you know, “Oh you must be ashamed of your color because if you're indio or you're kayumanggi, it means you're stupid. You're not like us insulares or peninsulares who were learned and all those things.” So yeah. I guess it carried over throughout the generations. The preference for, I guess, fairer skin goes with Caucasian features, girls and guys, with Caucasian features or Chinese features, but still fairer skinned.*

— Carmen, 24, Philippines

Carmen states that historically, the colonizers are seen as educated (or “learned” as Carmen describes) and light skinned. In contrast, Filipinos are seen as dark skinned and less educated. In that sense, to be Filipino is to be “stupid” and “ashamed” in relation to the colonizers. Over time, light skin is associated with more positive attributes. Ava, a twenty-nine year-old court secretary talks about why light skin is so coveted among Filipinos. For her, light skin is associated with cleanliness.

*Well, usually they [light skinned people] would appear cleaner or physically just clean. You would like to have a fairer color because you would look more clean than others. But basically for me, it's just for hygiene. But it doesn't necessarily mean that if you have fairer skin you're cleaner. But you would want to look cleaner.*

— Ava, 29, Philippines

Much like early associations of Filipinos as dark and savage and colonizers as light and progressive, Ava's assertions show that these historical ideas of savagery and civility still carry

on today. Light skin is a marker of, among many things, cleanliness.

Unfortunately, these ideas do not stay within Philippine borders. Balbina, a twenty-nine year-old youth development worker from the U.S. echoes the points that Encanto, Admiral Pie, and Carmen bring up.

*It has to go back to being colonized by people with lighter skin and what it means to have that power. And then being fed through the media that lighter skin is ideal. Like when I watch Filipino TV shows. They're all light-skinned, round eyes, that whole picture. And then, I'm not sure, but I've heard this. If you're lighter, then you're not out in the fields working. If you're out in the rice fields then you're going to be dark. And that means you probably don't have a lot of money because you have to do manual labor. But if you're lighter you're not having to be out there doing that work.*

— Balbina, 29, United States

Like Encanto, Balbina speaks to the role of the media perpetuating the higher value of light skin over dark skin. She states that on Filipino television shows, the actors are, “all light skinned” and have “round eyes,” which feeds people “that lighter skin ideal.” Additionally, Balbina speaks to the correlations between skin color and class. Lighter skinned people are of a higher class because they do menial labor outdoors.

### **Moving Beyond the Black-White Binary**

*“Some friends of mine also like the Chinese, people who look more Chinese.”: East Asians and Light Skin*

In his work, “Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital,” Leo Ching states that over time, capitalist centers have shifted – from Europe to America to Asia. He points out that though the U.S. currently has less economic power, American popular culture is still incredibly influential world wide, including in Asia.<sup>20</sup> In the past, Asia (the East) has been positioned in opposition to the U.S. (the West). This is done in order to depict Asia as the other and elevate the status of the U.S. However, Ching notes that today:

Asianism no longer represents the kind of transcendental otherness required to produce a practical identity and tension between the East and the West. Today ‘Asia’ itself is neither a mission between East and West. Today, ‘Asia’ itself is neither a misrepresentation of the Orientalist nor the collective representation of the anti-imperialists. ‘Asia’ has become a market, and ‘Asianness’ has become a commute commodity circulating globally through late capitalism.<sup>21</sup>

Instead of being the other, Asia and Asianness is now neutral in contrast to past perceptions of Asia and Asianness. Ching’s work makes a few important points: 1) that globally, there is a shift of power towards Asia. 2) Asia and Asianness do not have the same negative connotations that it has in the past. 3) Though the U.S. is losing economic power, it still has tremendous influence with respect to popular cultural values and media representations. These points help us understand how skin color hierarchy works among Filipino communities. The shift in power

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<sup>20</sup> Leo Ching, “Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital,” in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 293.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-06.

from the U.S. to Asia is reflected in the current popularity of Asians in popular Philippine media. It is also seen in the increasing number of imported Asian programming in the Philippines. Though there is more Asian representation in Philippine media (e.g. there is an increased amount of television shows being imported to the Philippines from places such as Korea and Hong Kong.), U.S. influence in Philippine media is still apparent (e.g. the many shows from the U.S. are aired in the Philippines). To truly understand how skin color hierarchy moves beyond the black-white binary in the Philippine context, it is important to know the significance of the Chinese in Philippine history.

### *Chinese Relationships Before Spanish Colonization*

By the 1570s there is an estimated 150 Chinese who have settled in the Philippines (mainly in Manila). Civil war in China prompts these families to seek refuge in the archipelago.<sup>22</sup> Although Chinese immigration to the Philippines begins as early as the seventh century, permanent settlements do not happen until the tenth century and then later on in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Besides this small population of settlers, Chinese-Philippine relationships revolve mostly around trade.

Before Spain enters the Philippines in the 1520s, trade relationships are already established between the Philippines and various parts of Asia including China, Cambodia, Champa and Indo China. Trade relationships with China date back to the ninth century, but by the fourteenth century twenty to forty percent of trade with the Philippines is with non-Chinese countries.<sup>24</sup> In the canonical text *History of the Filipino People*, Teodoro Agoncillo explains, “Chinese influences on Filipino life were mainly economic for the Chinese who came to the islands were ‘economic’ men whose interest lay in profits rather than in political domination. Except for perhaps a short period, the Chinese never had any political designs on the Philippines.”<sup>25</sup> In short, Chinese interest in the Philippines has nothing to do with settlement or colonization. This is primarily an economic relationship.

### *Then Came the Spanish*

In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan arrives in the Philippines and lands in Cebu. In 1566, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi establishes the first Spanish settlement in Cebu. Legaspi’s field marshal Marin De Goite meets Chinese traders from Manila while in Mindoro by 1570.<sup>26</sup> This encounter changes the relationship between Spain and the Philippines and opens the door to the Manila Galleon trade between the Philippines (now a Spanish colony), China, and Mexico (another Spanish colony). The Spanish establish Manila as the capital of the Philippines one year later.<sup>27</sup>

The Chinese provide two opportunities for Spanish colonization in the Philippines. One is an extremely profitable Spanish-controlled trade relationship. The other is the hope that the Spanish can Christianize China via the Chinese settlement in the Philippines. When the Spanish encounter the Chinese merchants, they immediately see how important this relationship is. The Spanish realize that they need the Chinese to supply the elites with luxury goods they cannot

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<sup>22</sup> Ch’en Ching-Ho, *The Chinese Community in the Sixteenth Century Philippines*, (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1968) 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> Eufronio M. Alip. *The Chinese in Manila*, (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974) 8.

<sup>24</sup> Tedoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People (8<sup>th</sup> edition)*, (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990) 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Alip, *Chinese in Manila*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

obtain from the indigenous population (referred to as *indios*). They also see prime opportunity to export fine goods from China.<sup>28</sup> Legaspi becomes responsible for establishing trade between the Chinese merchants and the Spanish after the Spanish move from Cebu to Luzon. Scholar Ch'en Ching-Ho explains that Chinese merchants assist the trade relationship between Mexico and the Philippines. By doing so,

The Chinese merchants, by means of continuous supply of commodities maintained by them, gave strong support to the colonization activities of the Spaniards in the Philippines and not only helped Legaspi's expedition make an unforeseen success, but also let Spain control the Philippines for as many as 327 years thereafter.<sup>29</sup>

By 1574, the first official Sino-Philippine treaty is created by Chinese official Pesung Aumon, Manila Governor Guido de Lavesares, two Spanish priests and two layman officials. This treaty is designed to: 1) to allow Chinese to come to the Philippines; 2) to have Chinese goods brought from China in Chinese junks or sampans. There are also limits to Chinese immigration (no more than 6,000 Chinese are allowed to immigrate) to prevent serious competition with the Spanish population. However, the immigration cap is not seriously enforced.<sup>30</sup> This treaty encourages a huge influx of Chinese to immigrate and settle in the Philippines. To help entice immigration to the Philippines, the Spanish guarantee that the Chinese will have greater opportunities that will lead to more stable lives. This is an attractive offer since China is over populated and has limited economic opportunities for its people.<sup>31</sup> Before 1571, the Chinese population is approximately 150. By 1603, the immigrant population rises to 30,000.<sup>32</sup>

Over time, the Spanish realize how vital the Chinese are to its Philippine colony. Antonio de Morga, acting governor of the Philippines between 1595-96 admits, "It is true that the colony (Philippines) cannot exist without the Chinese as they are the workers of all trades and business and are very industrious and worked for small wages."<sup>33</sup> Although there are points where the Spanish attempt to compete with the Chinese merchants, the Spanish are often undersold.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the Spanish hold the Chinese in the highest esteem, as they help the Spanish profit through trade.<sup>35</sup> Scholar Eufronio M. Alip explains that the Chinese fill an important labor and business demand for the Spanish:

The Chinese were willing to do menial works which the proud Spaniards scorned and which the native *Indios* would not or could not efficiently perform. They found the native inhabitants (whom they called *Indios*) uncooperative or at most indifferent to them; and they considered the native products of the archipelago inadequate for their needs. The Spanish merchant class and officials in due time began to think of utilizing the Chinese traders (called *Sangleyes*) for their business interests.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ching-Ho, *Chinese Community*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Alip, *Chinese in Manila*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 8. Although a high number, the Chinese still constituted roughly one percent of the total population. In comparison, the Spanish population was less than 2,000.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Teresita Ang See, *The Chinese in the Philippines: Problems and Perspectives*, (Manila: Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran, Inc., 1997) 34-35.

<sup>36</sup> Alip, *Chinese in Manila*, 9.

Additionally, the Spanish see the opportunity to Christianize China by starting with the Chinese in the Philippines. Leading scholar on the Chinese community in the Philippines, Teresita Ang See explains:

In fact, history has proven that behind the colonization of the Philippines was the hidden motive of using the country merely as a stepping stone toward Christianizing China or Cathey (as the Spaniards called China then). For more than 300 years, the Christianization of the Chinese was not just made to suit the colonial policy of divide and rule, but more importantly, it was also a tool to assimilate and influence the Chinese then.<sup>37</sup>

However, Chinese Christianization is a slow process. This is because religion is not used against the Chinese via the military and politics. In fact, the Spanish cannot risk this since they need to establish a positive relationship with the Chinese (the Spanish do not want to conquer yet, they wanted to establish trade first). The Chinese who follow Confucianism find Christianity to be too rigid. With the Chinese population increasing and their class status being higher than the *indios*, the Spanish strategically create a divide and conquer scenario. With Chinese settlement growing, they encourage the Chinese to live in their own enclaves separate from the *indios*.

However, this seemingly utopic relationship between the Spanish and Chinese does not last long. Eventually, the Spanish are afraid that the Chinese may compete with them and take the Philippines as a colony of their own. This fear comes true when Limahong, a Chinese adventurer and his followers decide to search for new land to colonize. In 1574, Limahong wages two attacks in Manila and is defeated. This becomes a wake-up call for the Spanish. In 1603, the first Chinese revolt is sparked when three Chinese Mandarins arrive in Cavite. Rumors of a possible invasion ensue and this leads to the death of 23,000 Chinese. According to Spanish records, the Chinese emperor does nothing to protest this, as it is thought that people who immigrate to the Philippines are undesirable and less likely to come back to China.<sup>38</sup>

The huge decline of the Chinese population does have an effect on the Spanish. How the Spanish treat the Chinese is largely dependant on how much the Spanish need the Chinese for economic gains. See explains that after massacres of the Chinese population in 1603 and 1639, the economy comes to a halt. "The colonial masters learned what while they hated the Chinese, they could not do without them also because the Chinese, the traders especially, had become the indispensable backbone of the Spanish colonial economy."<sup>39</sup> The Spanish need the Chinese for business. This also creates a middle class between the Spanish elite and the *indios*. As Annibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein explain in their article, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System," ethnic hierarchy is maintained by racism: "Ethnicity was the inevitable cultural consequence of coloniality. It delineated the social boundaries corresponding to the division of labour. And it justified the multiple forms of labour control."<sup>40</sup> In relation to the Spanish and Chinese in the Philippines, the Spanish function as the colonial power that enforces the division of labor between the Chinese business class and the indigenous Filipinos. In turn, this enforces the idea of indigenous Filipinos as savage and not useful in

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<sup>37</sup> See, *Chinese in the Philippines*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Alip, *Chinese in Manila*, 24-26. I have my doubts about the accuracy and/or interpretation of the Spanish account of this event.

<sup>39</sup> See, *Chinese in the Philippines*, 124:

<sup>40</sup> Annibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System," *International Social Science Journal*, (May 1992): 550-51.

helping the Philippine economy thrive. This is why indigenous Filipinos are in the bottom rung of the social hierarchy.

### *In the Middle*

The Spanish and later on the Americans see that the Chinese play a huge role in the colonization process by occupying a “middle” space. On one hand, the Chinese are used by the colonizers as a tool against the Filipinos. On the other, the Chinese manage to carve out a niche for themselves and integrate into. Scholar George Weightmen explains, “the Philippine Chinese have occupied a crucial economic position in the Philippines since the early Spanish colonial period. They dominate the retail trade, much of the wholesale and import trade, and most of the cottage industries.”<sup>41</sup> This middle position is what scholar Edna Bonacich calls the “middleman minority.” She explains that the middlemen minorities have middle status because they are not part of the masses or part of the elite. They usually work in trade or commerce, which turns out to be lucrative businesses.<sup>42</sup> She asserts that most start as sojourners because they have no attachment to the host society and are in businesses which are “portable.”<sup>43</sup> They are also competitive because “middleman community organization combined with thrift, enables middleman firms to cut costs at every turn, so that they can compete effectively with other enterprises in the same line.”<sup>44</sup>

While Bonacich’s argument partly explains the role of the Chinese in the Philippines, it still does not explain the complexity of their status there. The emergence of the Chinese as the middle class has consequences for the Filipino in that it creates an ethnic hierarchy between the two. The Chinese business class during Spanish colonialism creates the “haves” and “have nots.” The Chinese benefit from their class standing without having to assume any responsibility as a colonial power. Because their middle space standing separates them from the colonizer, we run into the dangerous assumption that Chinese integration in the Philippines is actually beneficial for the Filipinos. With respect class standing in the Philippines, the Spanish, and later on, Americans, eventually become the elite class, the Chinese and eventually the Chinese *mestizos* become the business class (which is also an elite class) and indigenous Filipinos occupy the bottom rung of the hierarchy.

In the Philippines, the business class is predominantly Chinese and their class standing is often higher than Filipinos.<sup>45</sup> By the nineteenth century the Chinese become a formidable force in Philippine life. Agoncillo explains:

The economic development of the Philippines in the nineteenth century led to the rise of the Filipino middle class. Non-existent in previous centuries, the middle class, composed of Spanish and Chinese *mestizos*, rose to a position of power in the Filipino community and eventually became leaders in finance and education.<sup>46</sup>

The continuation of the Chinese and Chinese *mestizos* as part of the business class explains the power they have over aspects of Philippine life such as the media and advertising. It is this relationship, whose base stems back to Spanish colonization that helps to explain the images discussed earlier. Given the colonial history of the Philippines, power is not just white. It is *other*

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<sup>41</sup> George H. Weightman, “The Philippine-Chinese Image of the Filipino,” *Pacific Affairs*, 40:3/4 (Autumn 1967-Winter 1967-68): 319-20.

<sup>42</sup> Edna Bonacich, “A Theory of Middleman Minorities,” *American Sociological Review*, 38:5 (Oct 1973): 583-594.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 585.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 587.

<sup>45</sup> See, *Chinese in the Philippines*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Agoncillo, *History*, 129.



*than white*, as it includes the complicated positioning of the Chinese. Even as an independent nation since 1946, these ethnic hierarchies between indigenous Filipinos and the Chinese and Chinese *mestizos* still exist.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Chinese and Chinese *mestizos* are mostly part of the business class, eventually some see themselves as Filipinos as some have participated in the nationalist movements against imperialism. See notes that many revolutionary leaders who are responsible for helping formulate a Philippine national identity are Chinese *mestizos*. She explains, “Prominent Filipinos in both the reform and the revolutionary movements were almost all of Chinese descent, although they joined the revolution as Malay Filipinos and not as Chinese *mestizos*.”<sup>48</sup> Historian Dr. Antonio Tan also notes the importance of the Chinese in Philippine history: “The Chinese *mestizos* were an important element of Philippine society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They played a significant role in the formation of the Filipino middle class, in the agitation for reforms, in the 1898 revolution, and in the formation of what is known as the Filipino nationality.”<sup>49</sup>

As mentioned before, traditionally, colorism and pigmentocracy have been limited to the black-white binary, where blacks take on the subordinate position relative to whites’ dominant position. However, what happens when we are in a different global moment where there is a shift in power from the U.S. to Asia? What happens when whites are no longer the only ones at the center of power and desire? How does this change the ramifications of skin color? In this case, it makes it so that Asia and Asianness have to be considered when looking at these power dynamics – be it economic, political, cultural, etc. All of these factors inform how skin color hierarchy shifts from black and white to *beyond* black and white. The rise of Asia as a global power forces us to re-think the meaning of skin color in economic, political, and cultural terms. With respect to the Philippines, simultaneously understanding Asia and the U.S. is not new. When asked if preferred physical features resemble Asians (such as the Chinese) or Euro-Americans, Maverick illustrates how both factor in:

*I think European sense. Because I think that for the most part, Filipinos think that the center of the universe is America – or at least, our longest colonizer was Spain, right? That’s definitely not Asia, right? And then, this is another thing. Most of the prominent families here in the Philippines would have some sort of Chinese and/or Spanish blood. They’re the richest because getting into history, they’re the richest ones here when the Spanish came and they intermarried. So it’s really Chinese and Spanish. And as for why I say Spanish and not Chinese is because actually, I’m not sure, but it just seems like the Asian age is just now. I mean, at present. We haven’t had an Asian age since forever. I mean, only now.*  
— Maverick, 33, Philippines

Maverick says that most people desire those with European features because of U.S. and Spanish colonial history of the Philippines. This colonial history has had a longstanding impact on what people consider attractive today because the U.S. is the “center of the universe” and Spain is “our longest colonizer.” However, Maverick also points out that the Chinese have power because “most of the prominent families here in the Philippines would have some sort of Chinese and/or

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>48</sup> See, *Chinese in the Philippines*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 28.

Spanish blood.” The desirability of the Chinese or Asians in general is a contemporary phenomenon, that “the Asian age is just now.” Like Ching’s work, Maverick’s interview suggests that though there is a power shift from the U.S. to Asia, U.S. influence is still inescapable. However, to understand skin color in the Philippine context, both the U.S. and Asia must be factored in. Shirley, a twenty-seven year-old writer, editor, and lead singer of a local band in the Philippines, talks about the popularity of the Chinese:

*A lot of my friends like people who look more foreign or white and have features that are more western. But some friends of mine also like the Chinese, people who look more Chinese. They always say they chinita. Also because of the complexion that’s associated with Chinese. You know, the white, the whiteness again and the smoothness.*

— Shirley, 27, Philippines

Shirley points out that the Chinese represent a different type of whiteness – one that is not European, but still symbolizes beauty (and thus, power). The position of the Chinese in the Philippines is two-fold. On one hand, the Chinese are associated with wealth and beauty. This is because of the longstanding economic power the Chinese and Chinese *mestizos* have had in the Philippines. On the other hand, perceptions of the Chinese are not always positive. Admiral Pie observes:

*Chinese whiteness sometimes has a bad connotation here ‘cause it means it’s kind of yellow. So they don’t want to look yellow. They want to look rosy. That’s another term the advertisers use a lot. You want to look white and rosy. And you know that’s their vision. That’s their perception of beauty here.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

Admiral Pie makes a few points here. First, she mentions that paradoxical position that the Chinese have in the Philippines. They are seen as both beautiful and not, both desirable and not. However, there is an understanding that they have economic power. Admiral Pie’s other point is similar to what Ching states in his work – that though Euro-Americans are slowly losing their economic power, they still influence cultural values. This is why, according to Admiral Pie, advertisers position desired beauty as less “yellow” and more “white and rosy.” The image of rosy cheeks is more reminiscent of Euro-Americans than they are of Asians.

### **The Value of Skin Color**

*“Lighter is better. It was just understood.”: Skin Color and Perceptions of Self*

Before the research began, I assumed that women in the Philippines and the U.S. would have varying opinions on the matter. While this is somewhat true, given the specific contexts of the Philippines and the U.S., by and large, interviewees on both sides of the Pacific agree that light skin is valued over dark skin.<sup>50</sup> Their reasons for why that is range from implications about

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<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that while most interviewees agree that light skin is valued over dark skin, many emphasized that this generalization does not necessarily apply to how they understand skin color. While a number of interviewees state that lighter skin is more acceptable, they also state that for them (personally) dark and light skin have equal value. In particular, see interviews U.S. by: D.A., Balbina, Milen, Lara, Anne, Madonna, Duffy, and Sasha; see Philippine interviews by: Natalie, Maverick, Lily, Robin, and Flor.

beauty to educational attainment, where light skin marks someone as more attractive and having attained a higher education level. Such assumptions are not new, as many colorism scholars attest to this.<sup>51</sup> This section focuses on these women's voices to explore how skin color is tied to beauty and labor because these are the two major topics that interviewees consistently point to. Billie, a twenty-six year-old youth development worker from the U.S. sets the tone for this section when she states, "Lighter is better. It was just understood. I mean, not understood in a way where it's like, 'Where did that come from?' But understood in a way where it's like, 'It [light skin] was just more superior.'" Billie points out that she understands lighter skin as being superior goes unquestioned. Also, lighter skin is the standard that many are compared to because it represents what one should aspire to be.

In their work *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, Robin Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr write: "Beauty was not just a product of wealth, but a commodity in and of itself. In other words, it was no longer a matter of looking to wealth to find beauty, but of looking to beauty to find status. Now beauty could give the illusion of wealth."<sup>52</sup> They argue that regardless of one's class status, beauty acts as a marker and can give the illusion of one's wealth. This is why perceived beauty is a reflection of one's class standing. Murray Webster and James E. Driskell make a similar argument when they claim, "Someone with the high state of some status dimension really will be perceived as more attractive than, say, an identical twin who lacks such high status. Thus 'the good are beautiful' would be more accurately stated as 'the high-status people are beautiful.'"<sup>53</sup> In short, Webster and Driskell argue that status determines one's beauty. Ella, a sixty-one year-old court secretary from the Philippines describes what Filipina beauty is to her:

*Queenly and aristocratic beauty, the one with the royal, royal, royal blooded people actresses, para bang ang beauty nila, their beauty if you call it classic, is like ah....what do you call that? hindi baduy, hindi parang mumurahin, parang class. They belong to the higher class, mga elite. [Queenly and aristocratic beauty, the one with the royal, royal, royal blooded people actresses, their beauty is sort of like, their beauty if you call it classic is like ah... what do you call that? It is in fashion, not cheap, it's classy. They belong to the higher class, the elite.]*  
 — Ella, 61, Philippines

For Ella, beauty is associated with money because "queenly and aristocratic beauty" is one that only the rich and elite possess or have access to. By stating this, Ella is implicitly saying something about the relationship between ideas of beauty and being poor – that the poor are not associated with beauty because it is reserved for the rich. Balbina, a twenty-nine year-old youth development worker from the U.S. echoes a similar sentiment when she states, "I think that lighter skin is tied to higher class. I know it's funny because you can be poor with light skin."

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<sup>51</sup> Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, *Skin Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the Color Blind Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1992); Maxine S. Thompson and Vera M. Keith, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem and Self Efficacy," *Gender and Society* (15:3; 2001); Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2007). See the following work by Ronald Hall: *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001); *Asia Color Quest* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp, 2001); *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006)

<sup>52</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 80.

<sup>53</sup> Webster and Driskell, "Beauty as Status," 161.

Balbina brings up an insightful point about the correlation between light skin and class. In reality, one can be light skinned and poor. However, light skin can give one the appearance of being rich. This is because dark skin is traditionally associated with those who do physical, outdoor labor. Sara, a forty-four year-old environmental engineer from the U.S. states:

*Well, I'll say it in the context with people who have darker skin. If somebody has lighter skin as opposed to darker skin, maybe they're smarter and also the stereotype that if you have darker skin you're outdoors. You're a laborer or some sort of servant-related thing, and that it's kind of a socio-economic thing.*

— Sara, 44, United States

Sara makes the correlation between dark skin and labor. She states that those with darker skin are seen as less intelligent. With that, the assumption is that, “You’re a laborer or some sort of servant-related thing.” She shows that skin color carries definite assumptions of one’s class. The darker one is, the more likely that person is a servant.

Similarly, light skin can give the illusion of beauty in the same ways that beauty can give the illusion of wealth. Grace, a forty-five year-old baker from the Philippines describes popular perceptions of people with light skin:

*That they're [those with light skin] probably, they're prettier, prettier than those who have darker skin somehow. Even if you look at their features, sometimes they're not the common standard of beauty but if they're white, somehow they appear prettier. Like for example, put two girls beside each other. And they have the same features, like maybe same eyes, same nose, same ears, or same face shape. It's as though the one with the whiter skin is more attractive.*

— Grace, 45, Philippines

Grace notes that people are conditioned to associate light skin with beauty, even if the actual opposite is true. Therefore, the overarching issue here is not actual beauty or how attractive one’s physical features are. Rather, it is skin color. Grace also shows how dark skin – regardless of how attractive a person is – automatically negates one’s potential beauty. This is because light skin is seen as beautiful, while dark skin is seen as not beautiful. Admiral Pie makes a similar claim when she explains some popular perceptions of those with light skin:

*That they're probably not pure Filipino. That they're either Chinese or have some Caucasian blood in them and that they're more beautiful. Automatically when someone is whiter or really strikingly white, they say, “Oh, she's pretty.” But if you examine closely, that's not always the case. But that's just the stereotype of having lighter skin.... If you look at someone with lighter skin, you'll see that if you sit her beside people, she won't stand out except for her light skin, you know what I mean? And you've met exceptionally beautiful women. You know what beauty is about, you know. I mean, with the strict standard of beauty, I don't think they fall in that category. Not beauty queen beautiful. But they're automatically admired because of that.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

Admiral Pie makes several interesting claims here. First, she states that light skin marks someone as “not pure Filipino” and that in and of itself makes them “more beautiful.” Second, light skin, regardless of what one actually looks like automatically makes that person more attractive. Robin, a twenty-five year-old studio photographer from the Philippines makes a similar claim when she states:

*I know a lot of girls who are considered gorgeous and pretty by men and by the media. But when you look at them they're just pale and that's it. They don't have anything else going for them. Like everything else is covered by makeup. But there is something that even really pretty girls, they're not even interesting girls. It's just the fact that they're pale. So that supersedes everything else.... It's a lot harder for you to be considered a beautiful person if you don't have the skin to go with it.*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

While it is unfair to measure one's beauty and it is not the aim of this project, it is important to point out how light skin is valued over dark skin. Light skin gives the illusion of wealth and beauty while diminishing the value of dark skin. Robin makes this insightful point when she states, “It's a lot harder for you to be considered a beautiful person if you don't have the skin to go with it.” She shows that dark skinned people are automatically ignored. By virtue of their skin color, they carry the assumptions of being unattractive, poor, and uneducated. Belle, a thirty year-old educator from the U.S. describes some common perceptions of those with dark skin. She states, “For the most part, most dark people are ugly. They're poor. They probably smell. You know, and they live in these crappy places. They have to be out in the sun all the time. Their skin denotes their line of work. They have to go to work somewhere outside of the home. You know, uncultured people is associated with being poor.” Belle emphasizes that dark skin denotes a lack of beauty, low class stature, manual labor, and being savage or “uncultured.” She notes that it is skin color, not necessarily the combination of one's physical features that determine one's level of attractiveness.

### **The Mixed Race Body as the Ideal Filipino**

*“I don't think it's a desire to be White. I think it's a desire to um...not be so Filipino-looking.”: The Mixed Race Body as the Ideal Filipino*

Kimberly McClain DaCosta's *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in Redrawing of the Color Line* focuses on how images of mixed race people are used as marketing tools in advertising because it is assumed that their racial ambiguity makes them more relatable. DaCosta explains:

In trying to develop consumers' identification with a message, some advertisers see the racial ambiguity of multiracial bodies as an asset because, it is presumed, viewers from many ethnoracial groups will search for and usually find something in an ambiguous appearance with which they can identify.<sup>54</sup>

DaCosta asserts that mixed race people symbolize progress in racial thinking, that their ambiguity opens doors to new ways of making it possible for people across racial and ethnic lines to relate. In her definitive work, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants*, scholar Rebecca King O'Riain focuses on the importance of the mixed race body in

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<sup>54</sup> DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*, 171.

helping us understand the importance (not the erasure) of race and racial meaning. King-O’Riain asserts that though multi-ethnic or multi-racial people help create a new and more nuanced understanding of race, “the continued existence of bodies of mixed race does not deconstruct or do away with race. On the contrary, race still constrains social action by all people, mixed or not.”<sup>55</sup> I point to these two scholars’ work because on one hand, DaCosta claims that the mixed race body alleviates rigid notions of race. This is because the ambiguous nature of the mixed race body is seen as relatable across ethnic and racial lines. While this may be true, O’Riain emphasizes that the mixed race body is still a racialized body that has social meaning.

Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of mixed race people. It should be noted that when referring to mixed race people, it is assumed that the subject in question is mixed race with European ancestry. When referring to a mixed race person who is not of European ancestry, I have to be very specific with the questions. With respect to mixed race people, it is assumed that they have the best of both worlds in terms of physical features. For example, a Filipino who is mixed race European is thought to have lighter skin and sharper features with almond eyes and dark, straight hair. Such features are considered attractive. In a similar note, Hill Collins makes a distinctive point about the mixed race body and sexuality. She explains:

In order to be marketed, Black sexuality need not be associated solely with bodies that have been racially classified as ‘Negro,’ ‘mulatto,’ or ‘Black.’ Western imaginations have long filled in the color, moving from Black to White and back again depending on the needs of the situation. In antebellum Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana, White men desired quadroons and octoroons as prostitutes because such women looked like White women, but they were actually Black women, with all that that implied about women's sexuality.<sup>56</sup>

In the case of black female prostitutes during the Antebellum period, the mixed race woman is desirable because she looks (or passes as) white while presumably possessing black female sexuality. In relation to Filipinos, I argue that the Filipino mixed race body is seen as desirable because it is closer to looking white or looking like an acceptable or progressed Filipino (e.g. this person does not have extreme features that are traditionally associated with Filipinos such as a broad nose, dark skin, and kinky hair).

Grace, a Philippine interviewee states that when growing up, she tended to think that people who are mixed race European are more attractive.

*Even as I was growing up, I don’t know why. They’re [mixed race people] just really very prettier. Attractive. Even whether it be men or women or little boys or little girls. When they have mixed blood in them, somehow it’s attractive. Even as a child, I didn’t know anything about standards of beauty. But every time I would go to school, immediately, I would find a guapo [handsome] boy or a pretty girl, one who had mixed blood. Sometimes I wished I had mixed blood, that one of my parents were Caucasian and then so, I would have the features of mixed blood.*

— Grace, 45, Philippines

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<sup>55</sup> King-O’Riain, *Pure Beauty*, 29. I believe that King-O’Riain addresses Patricia Hill Collins’s point in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism*. Hill Collins asserts that multiraciality in the U.S. allows for more fluidity in racial categories. (194) Though they are both right, King-O’Riain drives the point that fundamentally, race still matters. With that, I assert that skin color matters as well because race and skin color are so intricately linked. This is important to note across racial and ethnic lines.

<sup>56</sup> Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 29-30.

Because mixed race people are often assumed to have European ancestry, being mixed race has a positive connotation to it. As Grace explains, mixed race people are seen as attractive. That she mentions that she wished she were Caucasian suggests that she considers her features less attractive relative to one who is mixed race. Along similar lines, Maya, a forty-two year-old project manager from the U.S. shares a story about a mixed race cousin:

*I have a cousin that is mestiza... whenever she was around, that was the image of beauty for everyone. She was part Greek part Filipina. So the funny thing is that she had the very light skin – Mediterranean olive skin. When she tanned it wasn't like this [pointing to own arm]. It was bronze. It was just this beautiful color. And she was the image of beauty in our family. She didn't have the [Filipino] features. She had the mestiza features. So I don't know if it's skin color or if it's the mestiza features. I don't know anymore.*

— Maya, 42, United States

Maya notes that in her family, her cousin is “the image of beauty for everyone” in the family. This is in part, because of her skin color. Maya’s cousin is light skinned and even when she tans, her skin color is a more acceptable shade than Maya’s darker skin color. Maya also notes that part of her cousin’s beauty is that she “didn’t have the [Filipino] features.” Milen, a forty year-old writer from the U.S. makes a similar point when I ask her if the desire for one to be mixed race is related to a desire to be Caucasian. She responds:

*I don't think it's a desire to be White. I think it's a desire to um, not look like a native, like an indigenous person. Not so much – I don't think it's a desire to look white. I don't think – I hope not. Oh my God! I've never thought it if that way, you know... not be so Filipino-looking.*

— Milen, 40, United States

Here, Milen points out that the desire to be mixed race is not about wanting to be of a different ethnic or racial background (e.g. wanting to be Caucasian). Rather, it comes from not wanting to have the physical features that are typically associated with a particular ethnic or racial group. In this case, she speaks in relation to not wanting to have Filipino features. Both Maya and Milen mention that features that are associated with Filipino-ness are undesirable. This is likely why Maya’s cousin is the definition of beauty for the family. Her beauty is based on her lack of visible Filipino features while simultaneously being of Filipino heritage. Milen compliments this when she states that one’s ethnic or racial identity is not the issue, but rather, it is whether one looks ethnic or not.

In her work, Encanto states that the mixed race body (or *mestizas*) is the symbol of the upper class. She notes, “On the covers which feature women, there is obviously a preference for the *mestiza* which *señoritas* or *señoras* from the *illustrado* families being held up as the icons of ‘femininity,’ with their obvious Caucasian features. They are held up as epitomes of propriety in dress, conduct, or behavior as evidenced by their regal, upper class bearing.”<sup>57</sup> This passage is in reference to magazines that are produced during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. Encanto notes that mixed race women of the time are revered for their Caucasian features

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<sup>57</sup> Encanto, *Constructing the Filipina*, 19.

because these features symbolize “femininity” and “class.” If this is so, then indigenous Filipino features symbolize the opposite. They denote a lack of femininity and class. This is important to note because the interviews with Maya and Milen make the distinction that while being of Filipino descent is desirable, having indigenous Filipino features is not. Such features imply certain things about one’s class and social standing. Perhaps this is because the mixed race body is considered to be closer to whiteness and progress than the indigenous body. These ideas, rooted in old colonial thinking, still have meaning in these women’s contemporary everyday lives.<sup>58</sup>

With that, one would think that having light skin or being mixed race would be a desirable solution. However, the opposite is true. Several interviewees on both sides of the Pacific express that looking *mestiza* has its disadvantages. Shirley, an interviewee from the Philippines explains that as someone who has light skin and sharper features relative to most Filipinos, she is treated favorably.

*Actually when I was growing up, I mean, I’m mestiza — my features — though I’m full Filipina. But my features aren’t exactly considered Filipino because I have a tall nose and large forehead and brown hair. So growing up... I was really shy because I got stared at a lot because I look different. And I was aware of that. And I think I was aware I was considered pretty because of that.*

— Shirley, 27, Philippines

Shirley explains that while having *mestiza* or mixed features attracts a lot of attention her way, the attention also makes her feel uncomfortable. She knows these features mark her as “different,” and that she “was considered pretty” because of her skin color and her features. However, she is also aware that her features are not considered typical of most Filipinos and has to explain: “I’m *mestiza* — my features — though I’m full Filipina.” Shirley makes the distinction because she acknowledges that her features may cause people to question her ethnic identity. Her story illustrates the complicated nature of the mixed race body. On one hand, it is seen as desirable. On the other, those who are seen as mixed race are often seen as less authentic as those who are not considered mixed race.<sup>59</sup> Again, Shirley’s story shows that lighter skin and sharp features are considered more attractive over dark skin and broad features. However, it makes her feel awkward because she knows her features highlight her difference.

Sasha, an interviewee from the U.S., talks extensively about people’s reactions regarding her ethnic background. When she tells them that she is Filipino, the reaction is often one of disbelief. She shares:

*It bothers me that people judge you. But it’s so natural. They try to guess what you are. “Oh you’re not Filipino! You don’t look Filipino!” As if it’s derogatory to Filipinos. I don’t know. It’s like the way they say “you don’t look Filipino.” I should ask, “What does that mean?” It’s like, “what do you mean by that?” I’m going to start asking that. Sometimes I get insulted, like how they say it. “Oh*

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<sup>58</sup> This dynamic is reminiscent of the World’s Fairs where the Igorots are seen as backward and the Visayans are seen as progressive and are symbols of hope for people from the Philippines.

<sup>59</sup> I write “considered” because often times, if one is perceived to be mixed race, their ethnic or racial background is often questioned. In short, if you look it, you are it.



*you're not Filipino!" Like Filipinos are supposed to not look, you know, whatever. It's like yeah. I'm Filipino. Leave it at that.*

— *Sasha, 44, United States*

For Sasha, her ethnic background being questioned is bothersome because her authenticity is questioned. Her light skin and sharper features allow her to pass as non Filipino. Sasha recognizes that she is treated differently until she reveals her ethnic background. She also questions what it is to “look Filipino,” and if looking Filipino is derogatory within the community itself. She poses these questions because she states that there is judgment with people doubting her identity based on what she looks like. When people tell her, “Oh you’re not Filipino!” there seems to be an underlying assumption there. Are they questioning her identity because she does not exhibit unruly behavior that is expected of Filipinos? Are they questioning her beauty because her looks are uncharacteristic of what they associate Filipinos with? Sasha and Shirley illustrate the discomfort in a perceived mixed race identity.

Literature about mixed race people often overlook the assumptions of those who are mixed race black. As assumptions about those with darker skin dictates, perceptions of those who are mixed race black are often negative. Admiral Pie explains:

*The mixed race Filipino and black, sometimes there's a negative connotation. Because you know how the Olongapo babies who are, when the U.S. base is here, and there were a lot of babies from mixed marriages. So a lot of them were mixed race black and Filipino. So when you're like that, they immediately assume you're from Olongapo. And women from Olongapo were back then, were perceived as you know, automatically prostitutes. So it's a negative connotation.*

— *Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines*

Here, Admiral Pie points out that Filipinos who are mixed race black are frowned upon because it is assumed that they are a product of a Filipina prostitute and a black military man. The negative perceptions have to do with the perceived sexuality of the mother (as promiscuous) and the ethnic or racial background of the father. The distinction between a white and a black partner is troublesome. While a pairing with a white military man and a Filipina should have the same negative connotation, this pairing is seen more desirable because the woman is seen as moving up in stature. In addition, the offspring from this union is considered more desirable because it is assumed that the child will have lighter skin and sharper features.

Belle, a thirty year-old educator from the U.S. gives another explanation as to why being mixed race black is undesirable:

*It's the whole being mestiza as long as you look light skinned. 'Cause if you look like you're half black and half Filipino, that's not a good thing because you're dark. To be with somebody who's black, that's like, I forget who was saying this. Just being with somebody who's black it's just like, unthinkable. You know, 'cause [the perception is] they're ugly people and they're dirty people. They're uncivilized people. In fact, when I was moving to Berkeley and I was looking around for a place to live, my godfather, whose daughter is my god sister – the one who's light skinned who my mother thought was very pretty – he said, “Oh! We're close to Oakland. A lot of black beauties!” Meaning, the way he would say*

*it is this very condescending way. Whenever you say somebody is a black beauty, it's almost incredible that black people can be beautiful. Because on TV, like my mom would say, "Oh, ang ganda ng itim na ito," which translates to "This black person is actually pretty!" It's not that they can't be pretty, but that kind of underlining would suggest that it's unthinkable that they [blacks] could be pretty. So if you are mixed race, it's okay as long as you're not mixed black."*

— Belle, 30, United States

Belle begins by explaining that being mixed race is acceptable as long as one has desirable features (such as light skin) because of it. Being mixed race Filipino and black is undesirable because the assumption is that one will have dark skin, which is, “not a good thing.” Another compelling point is that Belle makes is that blacks, much like Filipinos, are seen as uncivilized. Because of this association, seeing a black person as attractive is unthinkable. In fact, when the idea is posed in conversation, Belle points out that black people as beautiful is meant in a condescending way. This is because, “its unthinkable that they [blacks] could be pretty.” She also points out the irony in describing someone as a “black beauty.” It means that one’s beauty is an anomaly because being dark skinned cannot possibly equate to being beautiful. Belle ends her story by pointing out that not all racial mixtures are considered acceptable: “So if you are mixed race, it’s okay as long as you’re not mixed race black.” Again, this is related to the undesirability of dark skin.<sup>60</sup>

This chapter focuses on understanding skin color hierarchy in relation to Filipino communities in the Philippines and the U.S. It revolves around four major points. First, we examine how Spanish and American colonialism defines indigenous Filipinos as savage while positioning the Spanish and American elites as pillars of civility. Next, this relationship is further complicated by the presence of the Chinese in the Philippines. The Chinese merchant class, considered to occupy a middle space between the Spanish and American elite and indigenous Filipinos, complicate our understanding of the black-white binary. This is because the economic power of the Chinese coupled with ideas of skin color open up the ways we understand skin color hierarchy within Filipino communities. These political, economic, and historical factors have an impact on how the interviewees of this study understand the significance of skin color. Finally, this chapter addresses how the mixed race body complicates our understanding of skin color.

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<sup>60</sup> Please refer to chapter 3 for an extended discussion.

### Chapter 3: Dark Matters: Color Conversations Across the Pacific

In her interview, Lola Ganda, a sixty plus year-old dentist from the Philippines compares the differing perceptions of skin color between Filipinos and white Americans. She shares:

*I understand these Americans [whites] would like the complexion of the Filipinos, no? They [white Americans] suntan, they sunbathe in the sea, they go swimming so they can achieve the suntan complexion. But with the Filipinos, the Filipinas especially, women, they would like to have the complexion of the Americans [whites]. That's why they try everything possible just so they could be whiter.... They want to look good probably! Because it seems that being white would boost their ego. It would make them feel they are prettier if they have white complexion.*  
— Lola Ganda, 60+, Philippines

Lola Ganda states white Americans would like to have darker skin or the “complexion of the Filipinos.” In contrast, Filipinos prefer lighter skin or the “complexion of the Americans” to “boost their ego” or perhaps raise their self-esteem. In his work on Filipino women and perceptions of skin color, scholar Ronald E. Hall confirms Lola Ganda’s statement by explaining, “As a function of Western beauty standards, light skin has been consistently portrayed as beautiful, as if dark skin were not. In the aftermath is a belief that the only attractive women to be found in the Philippines are those who look Caucasian.”<sup>1</sup> In the Philippine context, dark skin is not as valued among Filipinos the same way it is valued among white Americans. Both Lola Ganda and Hall point out the fluctuating value of skin color – that its value changes depending on factors such as one’s ethnic or racial background, what is socially accepted in a particular time and place, as well as one’s locale. On a similar note, Lilet, a forty-six year-old dance instructor from the U.S. explains:

*Well from my experience, 'cause I have dark skin, Europeans, especially Europeans or Caucasian people seem to like my skin. So when I came here in the States it's like, well everybody is complimenting my skin because I'm dark. I don't have to get tan because I'm tan all year 'round. But in the Philippines you don't get that much attraction, or attention if you have dark skin. Now if you have fair white complexion, you know, they [people in the Philippines] seem to favor you more.*

— Lilet, 46, United States

Lilet, who was born and raised in the Philippines before immigrating to the U.S., explains that having darker skin in the Philippines is not favorable in the same way it is in the U.S. Though they live on opposite sides of the Pacific, both Lilet and Lola Ganda share the same sentiment about the value of light skin over dark skin. In the Philippines, a person with dark skin is seen as unattractive and goes unnoticed. In the U.S. context, that person is seen as desirable.

This chapter addresses on the value of darkness by exploring how skin color is understood on both sides of the Pacific and how these perceptions are related to each other. This chapter begins by examining how dark skin is understood in the Philippines by using interviews and ethnographic observations. As interviewees eloquently express, the value of darkness is

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Hall, *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006) 87.

more complex than dark = bad and light = good. In the Philippine context, where large billboards feature light skinned entertainers and models advertising skin lightening products (Gluta-C, Likas, etc.), along with beauty and plastic surgery services (Belo Medical Group, Bio-essence, Cathy Valencia Center, etc.), the equation seems largely true. However, as Philippine interviewees state, some have a richer understanding of skin color that challenges the old standard of light and dark. While there is room for understanding dark skin as beautiful, interviewees still hesitate embrace such ideas. Next, the chapter investigates the issue of tanning. This is one area where interviewees from the Philippines and the U.S. had conflicting opinions. We begin by looking at tanning in the context of the Philippines, where tanning is seen as absurd and unnecessary. From there, we explore the contrasting views that U.S. interviewees have regarding tanning as a social practice, and how this is related to perceptions of skin color. Here, we will hear from interviewees in the U.S. who share stories about how coming to the U.S. helps them change their ideas about dark skin in positive ways. Where they may have been ridiculed for having dark skin in the Philippines, these interviewees find a new appreciation for their skin color in the U.S. We will also explore the ways in which skin color is simultaneously significant and insignificant to Filipino women in the U.S. Finally, the chapter explores how the relationship between beauty and wealth are understood. We will hear from U.S. interviewees who have traveled to back to the Philippines. Their testimonies help us look at how one's proximity to American-ness elevates her status when she goes back or interacts with family from the Philippines. The chapter ends with interviewees sharing their desire for Filipino communities at large to finally embrace their skin color. In all, the chapter explores the fluctuating meanings of skin color in relation to both countries.

### **On Dark Skin Skin**

*"Poor. Provinciana.": The (Un)desirability of Dark Skin*

After assessing interviews from the Philippines, interviewees present varying perspectives on what dark skin or darkness itself means. For example, when asked what are some common perceptions of those with dark skin, Angel Chloe, a forty year-old court secretary states that the assumption is that they are, "Poor. *Provinciana* [from the countryside]. For me, those who have um *morena* [are dark skinned] are less beauty." For Angel Chloe, darkness indicates a lack of attractiveness and that one is from a rural area. For Carmen, a twenty-four year-old library assistant, dark skin is two fold. On one hand it defines one's mediocrity. Carmen explains that dark skin marks one as, "Ordinary, I guess — at least in Manila. Like if you're *kayumanggi* [dark skinned] or you don't look like you're a hybrid [mixed race] or you don't speak with an accent or whatever, you're just ordinary. Common *tao* [people]." On the other hand, dark skin also marks someone who is too far out of the ordinary. Carmen continues: "If you're really dark, like let's say you're an *Aeta* [indigenous] or something, they think that I don't know. It's like you're a completely different species.... At least when we were kids in grade school, the really darker kids would be made fun of incessantly just by the virtue of their dark skin."<sup>2</sup> Carmen notes that dark skin marks one as "ordinary" or not distinctive. In describing those with dark skin as "*provinciana*" or as being an "*Aeta*," both Angel Chloe and Carmen point out that one of the negative connotations related to dark skin is one's proximity to the local or to the indigenous.

In assessing the interviews, there seems to be a struggle to prove one's worth or level of civility. For example, dark skin marks one as being from the province, is associated with the indigenous, and thus, is seen as uncivilized. At the same time, light skin marks one as beautiful,

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<sup>2</sup> *Aeta* refers to an indigenous group in the Philippines. They are described as very dark skinned with kinky hair.

rich, and evolved. These markers of distinction can be traced back to racialized markers that are developed in the Philippines under Spanish colonialism. In his seminal work *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines*, scholar Paul A. Kramer states that under Spanish colonial rule, the Philippines is racially stratified according to “territorial nativity, *mestizaje* (blood mixture), and religious ‘civilization.’” Racial groups are defined by, “the institutions of church, state, and market.”<sup>3</sup> These racial lines determine “systems of taxation, forced labor, and economic exclusion.”<sup>4</sup> Under Spanish colonialism, Spaniards from Spain and Philippine Spaniards (Spanish who were from the Philippines) occupy the highest rung of the racial classification. Right below them are the Spanish *mestizos* (the offspring of Spanish men and *indio* [indigenous] women) and Chinese *mestizos* (the offspring of Chinese and *indio* unions). *Infieles* (Igorots who are animists and Moros who were Muslim) and *indios* (indigenous people who are not mixed race and whom the Spanish felt were within reach of becoming Catholic) occupied the bottom rungs of the racial stratification. The *infieles* and the *indios* are marked because they are not racially mixed and they are not tied to the Catholicism (yet). In both instances, it is their proximity away from European-ness — by way of race and religion — that marks them as uncivilized. These old ways of understanding racial hierarchy stand today, as one’s proximity to European-ness or American-ness determines one’s value.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these long standing values, dark skin also has some positive connotations to it. Jaja, a twenty-two year-old call center worker expresses her appreciation for darker skin. She explains, “There are just a few people that I know who appreciate *morena* [dark skin]. I’m one of them. It’s like the way they carry themselves. You don’t have to have lighter skin just to make yourself look pretty.” Jaja shares that while dark skin may be undesirable in the Philippines, she has an appreciation for it. For her, a person with dark skin has more confidence because that person does not aspire to be anything other than herself. That person is comfortable in her own skin. Similarly, Daisy, a twenty-nine year-old graduate student who also works in the travel industry shares:

*Filipinos’ perception on skin color and beauty is changing now — I mean, at least for me and most of the people I meet. They do not see being dark skinned or morena as something that’s ugly anymore. You know, I mean it’s like just a sign of being more outgoing and being more modern. Having the freedom to experience a lot of things. That’s why you’re tan, you know? It’s not because you’re poor or it’s just because you get to experience a lot of things and just be more bold, you know. Because being white for me is like very safe. People before, just because you’re white or just because you’re light skinned, they automatically think you’re attractive. And now I think it’s changing.*

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 39. In this section of his book, Kramer outlines the different racial classes. They are as follows: Peninsular Spanish (Spaniards from Spain); Philippine Spanish (Spaniards who are from the Philippines); Spanish *mestizos* (typically, these are the offspring of Spanish men and *indio* (indigenous) women); Chinese *mestizos* (offspring from Chinese and *indio* (indigenous) unions); *Infieles* (animists, referred to as Igorots, Moros, who are Muslim; this classification marked their religious practice (they were not Catholic)); *Indios* (indigenous population who did not inter-marry); *Principalia*: landed class; *Ilustrados* (educated elite, part of the *principalia* class)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion, again, please see Paul Kramer’s book. I owe great thanks to Margaret Fajardo for her insight on this as well.

Daisy explains as the Philippines becomes “more modern,” so do people’s understanding of skin color and beauty. Instead of seeing dark skin as undesirable, she sees it as “a sign of being more outgoing and being more modern” and “bold.” While Daisy recognizes that light skin is attractive, she also challenges its value by claiming that it is “safe.” Her interview suggests that having dark skin or being proud of having dark skin can be seen as challenging the status quo in a positive way. The way she contrasts light skin as safe and bland and dark skin as bold, along with Jaja’s association of dark skin with confidence shows a change in how some women understand skin color. Jaja and Daisy show that their understanding of dark skin is not bound by the endless sea of billboards touting the latest in skin lightening products. Nor are they so easily influenced by the numerous light skinned celebrities that invade Philippine media. For Jaja and Daisy, to appreciate and be comfortable in dark skin is progressive.

*“Usually we mean that as a joke.”: The Double Edged Nature of Dark as Beautiful*

While interviewees like Jaja and Daisy show an appreciation for dark skin, others hesitate to embrace a new standard of beauty. Natalie, a thirty-nine year-old lawyer from the Philippines, shares her experience as a member of a choir who toured the U.S. at one point. During the interview, she points out that during their U.S. tour, the darker women in the group would get more attention than the lighter skinned women: “In my experience when I was with a touring group, the members who are exotic, they usually are the ones who foreigners are attracted to for a boyfriend. They’re not really — I wouldn’t say they’re ugly — just not head turners here.” Natalie notes a contradiction – where women who are seen as unattractive in the Philippines, in a different context, are seen as the complete opposite. To non-Filipinos in the U.S., these darker skinned women are now considered beautiful and desirable. Natalie continues:

*But it’s a joke, because we usually use it as a joke. Women we don’t find as beautiful here, when they go abroad, that’s what foreigners like. So we call them exotic beauty. Exotic beauty usually we mean that as a joke. Usually these are the dark skinned. They really look Filipina. Shorter. They’re not as skinny. Those you would find not here, in the streets. For sure they have good features. They wouldn’t be head turners here. They wouldn’t be stuff that models are made of. But they would be very popular abroad among foreigners.*

— Natalie, 39, Philippines

Natalie observes that when around a foreigner, a darker skinned woman can feel more appreciated as opposed to when she is with members of her own ethnic community. This is because the dark skinned Filipina is seen as “exotic” or different to the non-Filipino. Natalie is hesitant to see the exotic Filipina as attractive because in the Philippine context, the woman in question is seen as unattractive. Natalie describes these exotic Filipino women as “dark skinned,” “shorter,” and “not as skinny.” She emphasizes that these women “really look Filipina,” suggesting that aesthetically, they resemble someone who looks more indigenous, as opposed to one who looks mixed race. It is that proximity to the indigenous that “foreigners” (Euro-Americans) seem to find appealing. That same proximity to the indigenous is also the reason

why the exotic Filipino “wouldn’t be the stuff that models are made of.” Again, this is because light skin and sharp features have high value in the Philippines.<sup>6</sup>

Elizabeth, a twenty-four year-old development assistant, was born and raised in the Philippines and moved to the U.S. as an adolescent. In comparing beauty standards in the two countries, Elizabeth asserts:

*In the Philippines everyone wanted to be lighter. Everyone wanted to be whiter. But when I went here in the States, it was just odd because all these people, it’s like, they wanted to be brown. I noticed this about Filipino Americans. And the concept of what is beautiful is completely different. In the Philippines the concept of beautiful is the lighter skin, you know? And when you go here in the States, it’s just like, you know, no one would think I’m pretty – except for some Filipinos. But in terms of what Americans go for, they go for the darker Filipinos. And it’s weird. There’s also this whole fetish, also men. I don’t know if you notice this. But white men? They wouldn’t go for like, a light skinned Filipina like me. They prefer like, the darker looking Filipina. The one that looks more like, exotic, native. Weird thing. They use that term. Like in the Philippines growing up, you know, like, you look like a native basically.*

— Elizabeth, 24, United States

In the same way that Natalie compares beauty standards in the Philippines and the U.S., Elizabeth points out a contradiction in perceptions of beauty. In the Philippines, a darker skinned Filipino is not considered attractive, whereas in the U.S., that same person would be seen as attractive, or “exotic” as Elizabeth describes. While Elizabeth states that a darker skinned Filipino “who look[s] like a native” is seen as more attractive, she states this in the context of how a non-Filipino would perceive her in the U.S. As a lighter skinned Filipina, Elizabeth points out that the shift in beauty standards is “odd” because in the Philippines, her light skin is considered attractive. However, in the U.S. it is not desirable – unless she is around fellow Filipinos.

In her book *Asian American Women and Men*, scholar Yen Le Espiritu explores popular representations of Asian Americans and how these images affect our understanding of Asian American gender relations. She states, “The controlling images of Asian men and Asian women, exaggerated out of all proportion in Western representation, have created resentment and tension between Asian American men and women.”<sup>7</sup> The resentment Espiritu refers to is the popular image of Asian women as sexually charged and the object of desire for white men. In contrast, Asian men are seen as “either the threatening rapist or the impotent eunuch.”<sup>8</sup> Espiritu argues that these popular depictions affect dating and marriage choices and defines Asian men as deemed weak when compared to white men, who are seen as masculine and virile.

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<sup>6</sup> I also wonder if this is a criticism of Euro-Americans, that perhaps their desire for people who are not “head turners” in the Philippines is a jab at their taste level.

<sup>7</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997) 97.

<sup>8</sup> Espiritu, *Asian American Women*, 95 and 86-107. See also: M. Evelina Galang, ed., *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images*, (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2003); Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

Espiritu's discussion can be applied to this notion of the "exotic" Filipina. When Natalie describes the exotic Filipina as a "joke," this is in response to how dark skinned Filipinas are typically depicted in Philippine popular media. In Philippine popular media, dark skinned Filipinas are usually portrayed as maids, considered unattractive, or depicted as the laughing stock. In contrast, light skinned Filipinas define what beauty should be. Lily, a thirty-seven year-old yoga instructor from the Philippines describes beauty standards in the Philippines. She states, "In terms of beauty it's always the long nose, whiter features. If you're black, you don't have that. Even in show business. The black maid is always the funny one, the ugly one." Lily asserts the power of popular media in defining how people understand beauty. Beauty is defined by lightness, while darkness defines ugliness. Given that, when white men are attracted to "exotic" or dark skinned Filipinas, it defies normative definitions of desirability. Also, when Natalie describes exotic women as a "joke," her commentary critiques both the foreigner who is drawn to this "exotic" woman as well as the fellow Filipino who does not find the "exotic" person attractive.

Another related term that the interviewees use is black beauty or dark beauty. Interviewees who use this term use it to describe someone who is considered beautiful, despite being darker skinned. In my collaborative research with Paul Spickard on colorism in Asian American communities, we highlight a story shared by a Filipino American woman, Charmaine Tuason. She shares an experience when a family friend describes her as a "dark beauty." Tuason shares her discomfort with the label: "She [the family friend] might as well have slapped an apron on me and called me the maid. The word *dark* and *beauty* just did not go together. Dark cancelled beauty out. Dark meant you were lower class, ugly, and unimportant."<sup>9</sup> For Tuason, being called a "dark beauty" is a back handed comment. While it is fraught with good intentions, noting that one is indeed beautiful, it does so in the backdrop of an insult. Diana, a twenty-five year-old MBA student in the U.S. shares a similar sentiment when she describes how the term is used in her family. Diana states:

*If I'm with aunts, or friends, or grandparents, and there's an African American or say, a Filipino with darker skin from Ilocos or something who's attractive, they'll say, "Oh, she's such a black beauty." Although it's kind of like a double edged sword. Like you're complimenting her that she's beautiful. But you're also kind of backstabbing her because the term black has that negative connotation.*

— Diana, 25, United States

I then asked Diana to elaborate on why the term has such a negative connotation, she states that the comment implies, "She could be pretty, but she's *morena* [dark skinned]." Along similar lines, Laura, a forty-two year-old revenue officer from the U.S. states, "My relatives in the Philippines would call me, 'Oh you're pretty. But you're a black beauty.' I guess I was black – very dark, but pretty." When I asked Laura if being called a "black beauty" was positive or negative, she responds: "I would say it was more negative." Like Tuason's story, the compliment of being beautiful is cancelled out because having dark skin is so negatively charged. To describe someone as a dark beauty or a black beauty, is a paradox because being simultaneously dark and beautiful is considered impossible.

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<sup>9</sup> Joanne Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* (Latham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007) 27.



Robin, a twenty five year-old studio photographer in the Philippines provides an insightful explanation regarding the rejection of dark skin:

*People here [in the Philippines] tend to relate black people with like, the negra-negro part of ourselves that we don't want to associate ourselves with. As if they're [black people in the U.S.] the anti-concept of what America's supposed to be. Like it's not supposed to be of black people. It's supposed to be of white, pure, richer people than us.*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

Here, Robin makes several interesting points. She begins by stating that people in the Philippines reject darkness, or blackness because it reminds them of the darkness (or perhaps the blackness or indigeneity) that they “don’t want to associate... with.” Robin then connects this rejection of blackness to ideas of idealized American-ness. She states that the image of America does not include positive representations of black people, in fact, they are “the anti-concept of what America’s supposed to be.” In the popular imagination, America is composed of people who are “white, pure, and richer” than the common person in the Philippines. Therefore, to reject darkness or blackness is to embrace popular notions of lightness or whiteness as superior. In his book *Asia Color Quest*, Ronald Hall contextualizes the desire for light skin and the rejection of dark skin in Asia. He asserts:

Light skin has no fundamentally distinct superiority that would set it apart from dark skin. Yet, the global experience of Asians in the West based upon whether they are dark or light-skinned is fundamentally different. It is the racist denigration of dark skin and the notion of light skin superiority that has made a difference. Those people of color socialized under the rubric of colonization do in fact discriminate. Their discrimination is a consequence of having inculcated Euro norms emotionally and psychologically.<sup>10</sup>

Hall states that fundamentally, light skin is not superior to dark skin. However, in Asia and other parts of the world that have been colonized by Europe, dark skin is seen as inferior because these places have adapted this idea. Hall complicates this notion by explaining: “This was not a desire on the part of dark-skinned people to denigrate themselves, but rather a necessity of survival.”<sup>11</sup> Hall continues, “Among Asian-Americans the skin color issue is then a consequence of global domination by Europeans. Resultant domination encouraged their application of racist ideals indiscriminately.”<sup>12</sup> In relation to the paradox of being called black beauty or dark beauty, these terms, on one hand, have a genuine, positive meaning – especially since they are exchanges that often happen among friends and family. However, its concurrent rejection of darkness or blackness as beautiful reminds us that European colonization continues to define our sense of beauty and attractiveness in a postcolonial setting.

### **Tanning Trends**

*“You can’t make yourself any darker. You’re not supposed to.”: The Absurdity of Tanning in the Philippines*

In her discussion on the popularity of tan skin in the U.S., scholar Lois Banner explains:

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald Hall, *Asia Color Quest* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp, 2001) 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

Since the 1890s and the beginnings of women's athletic interest, some women had favored a darker skin tone, associating it with sports and new sensual beach behavior and not with lowly peasant women working in fields. As the vogue of athleticism increased, so did the popularity of tans, particularly with it became apparent that women working in factories away from the sun had pale, not dark, skin. Finally, in the 1920s, Coco Chanel was pictured in the tabloids with tanned skin, and her adoption of it gave the final imprimatur to a style in keeping with class, sensual, and physical-fitness motives.<sup>13</sup>

Banner asserts a shift in how dark skin is understood. Instead of marking one as a field laborer, dark skin is associated with leisure activities such as sports and "sensual beach behavior." These new ideas regarding tan skin also coincide with factory work, where women are working indoors, which makes it difficult to have tan skin. Therefore, tan skin becomes a marker of leisure, not labor.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, scholar L. Ayu Saraswati, whose research focuses on skin lightening in Indonesia and the U.S., gives us insight on how to understand tanning in a transnational context. She explains, "tanning registers within the realm of postmodern playfulness. It invokes temporality, the changing nature of one's skin color, rather than the permanence of desire for darker skin tone."<sup>15</sup> The playful and provisional nature of tanning makes it akin to a fashion accessory. Tan skin is adornment that is worn one moment and removed in the next. In this respect, tan skin is deemed more acceptable than dark skin.

During the interviews, I incorporate questions about tanning. In the Philippines, these questions are often met with confusion. Given the rampant desire for light skin and the heavy marketing for skin lighteners, most interviewees state that tanning processes – especially when one goes to a salon – are absurd. Ava, a twenty-nine year-old court secretary shares: "You usually just get tan skin if you go to the beach. We don't really have like, what do you use in the states? Tanning machine? I don't know why it's called that. We don't have that because we just go out in the sun and that's it! It's that easy." Ava explains that tanning processes in the Philippines are unnecessary and tanning salons are absurd. In the Philippine context, dark skin (regardless of it being tan or not) still marks one as a laborer. This is why dark or tan skin is still considered undesirable. However, the few Philippine interviewees who do share thoughts on tanning share stories about friends who, after leaving the Philippines, come back with a newfound interest in tanning.

Grace, a forty-five year-old baker from the Philippines shares a story about a friend who now lives abroad:

*I remember one of my friends who came from Europe before, who lived in Europe for a while. She was already normally dark. And she would really toast herself and really tan herself. And then we would wonder why because here in the Philippines you're dark. And then you can't make yourself any darker. You're not supposed to. And then she said, "You know, it's funny because abroad, they like dark skin. And the darker you are, they like it better." So I said, "Oh, the perception in Europe or in the States is different." So that's what I learned. So when I go abroad like even to Southeast Asia, it doesn't bother me. But I do notice*

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<sup>13</sup> Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984) 277.

<sup>14</sup> Please note that this discussion focuses on white women.

<sup>15</sup> L. Ayu Saraswati, "Cosmopolitan Whiteness: The Effects and Affects of Skin-Whitening Advertisements in a Transnational Women's Magazine in Indonesia," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 10:2 (2010) 35.

*that even in Malaysia or Thailand or any other Southeast Asian country, they really promote whiteness. Even the actors and actresses that are chosen are all white or mestizo. So it's not only in the Philippines, but it's in the whole of Southeast Asia.*

— Grace, 45, Philippines

Here, Grace points out that in the Philippines “you’re not supposed to” be dark. In fact, someone purposely tanning or getting dark is an anomaly.<sup>16</sup> Again, Grace points out that dark skin has different values depending on locale by explaining that in the Philippines or Southeast Asia, “they really promote whiteness.” In promoting whiteness, darkness is simultaneously devalued. This is a stark contrast to the U.S. and Europe, where perceptions of dark skin are quite different. By leaving the Philippines to travel abroad, Grace’s friend is given the opportunity to defy the standards of beauty that she grew up with. Not only does Grace’s friend enjoy her “normally dark” skin, she also indulges in tanning to make herself even darker. When her friend adopts the European desire to tan, Grace learns that abroad, “they like dark skin. And the darker you are, they like it better.” This understanding of dark skin is tremendously different in Europe than it is in the Philippines.

Robin, a twenty-five year-old studio photographer adds to the conversation when she contrasts the meaning of dark skin the Philippines and the U.S.:

*A lot of them [Filipinos in the U.S.] are actually proud of the fact that they're darker skinned. So it's really different from here [the Philippines]. They [Filipinos in the U.S.] come here to tan. They come here to get even more gorgeous. And it's so different because they don't want to look paler. And I wonder if it's because in America you have people who actually want to have this beautiful, rich golden tan — even if you have to fake it with like tanning machines and whatever. So it's really different when they come here. Then they're like dumbfounded by like, “Why are there all these whitening products?” You know, why do people want to get rid of their skin? ‘Cause it's such an asset to them. They're really proud of it.... I think they definitely look at it differently.*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

Robin explains that she feels that dark skin for Filipinos in the U.S. is an “asset.” For them, to be darker (or more tan) is to be “even more gorgeous.” Like Grace, Robin understands the difference in context that makes dark skin more valuable. While they are aware of this, such awareness does not necessarily help change overall perceptions of dark skin in the Philippines. Though these women experience a different understanding of their skin color, it does not change the low value of dark skin in the Philippines. In looking at Grace and Robin’s interviews, both share stories of friends who tan their skin that is already dark. In these cases, the playfulness of tanning is not encased in the color of the skin, but in the practice of altering the skin. With that, Saraswati’s research holds true. Tanning, regardless of what one’s original skin color is, still

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<sup>16</sup> A few of the interview questions for the Philippine interviewees addressed the issue of tanning. Out of the twenty interviews that I conducted, eighteen interviewees reacted to that line of questioning with shock. For them, tanning artificially is unheard of because people in the Philippines are generally dark. The two who did not have that reaction were partially raised in the U.S. and they were familiar with tanning as a leisure activity.

evokes a sense of play. The process of tanning is deemed beautiful – not dark skin in and of itself.

*“American-born Filipinos have the luxury of not having to think about it.”: Immigrant Generations and American Born Generations Weigh in on Skin Color*

While tanning and dark skin is undesirable in the Philippines, ideas on tanning in the U.S. are quite different. Interviewees in the U.S. are asked about perceptions of skin color and tanning. In particular, they are asked if ideas regarding skin color differs if one immigrates to the U.S. as opposed to being American born. Sasha, a forty-four year-old mortgage broker from the U.S. explains that, “American-born [Filipinos] could care less, I would think. So immigrants, you know, they have this notion from back home about the media. It’s always the pretty girls are always light-skinned. So they [immigrants] bring that on – even when they come to the states.... But American-born, I don’t think they care.” Sasha explains that Filipino immigrants in the U.S. are influenced ideas from the Philippines, especially in the media. In the Philippines, “the pretty girls are always light-skinned.” When one grows up with such ideas, it is difficult to let go of them upon immigrating to the U.S.

Arcee, a forty-eight year-old sales manager for a communications company, is dark skinned and was born and raised in the Philippines. She shares how immigrating to the U.S. helped to change her feelings about her skin color:

*I had no self-esteem in the Philippines. Come to think of it, I didn’t because everything I was, was I guess not meeting their standards. And then coming here is where I have all the realization. My legs, I mean, being dark is the best thing. Do you know how many people are so envious of my skin color? Here [in the U.S.]. You know, they always, when I go for customer meetings, some of these people don’t know who I am or how I look. They always ask me if this is my natural color. And to me, that’s a compliment. You know, which was the total opposite as I was growing up in the Philippines.... [being in the U.S.] made you more appreciative of your own natural beauty, of your God-given beauty.*

— Arcee, 48, United States

In moving to the U.S., Arcee gains a new appreciation for her skin color. In fact, she receives compliments about her skin color. This is something that she has never experienced before moving to the U.S. This experience makes her “more appreciative of [her] own natural beauty.” Instead of being undervalued in the Philippines for her dark skin, Arcee is actually praised for it in the U.S. Though it is important to have a critical understanding of tan skin, Arcee’s story reminds us that it is equally vital to acknowledge a space for appreciation. She no longer feels trapped by the low value of dark skin that she feels when she is in the Philippines. Rather, being in the U.S. gives her the opportunity to appreciate her skin color. Arcee attributes racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. to help explain why being darker skinned is more acceptable. While interviewees such as Arcee develop a positive understanding of their skin color, this does not mean that Filipinos in the U.S. do not experience racial or ethnic discrimination.

Immigrant generations have a particular idea of what success should look like. In the home country (in this case, the Philippines), success is defined by light skin because it illustrates that one is not part of the laboring class and does not have to work under the hot sun. Additionally, the majority of the upper class people in the Philippines are lighter skinned mixed-

race Filipinos.<sup>17</sup> The look of success in the Philippines is very different than it is in the U.S. Filipino Americans (regardless of whether they would like to recognize it) have a particular privilege within the Filipino and Filipino American color hierarchy.

The desire for light skin among immigrant women is doubly important. On one hand, light skin is seen as beautiful in the home country. On the other hand, when they come to the United States, the image of a typical American is usually of one who is white and has Eurocentric features. In our study of skin color hierarchy among Asian Americans, Paul Spickard and I point out that a few immigrant interviewees mentioned that their skin color preference came from their home country. A thirty-six year-old Cambodian Chinese immigrant woman states, “I don’t think the Cambodians that are born here care about skin color. . . . Only the person that was born in Cambodia. They do care about their color.”<sup>18</sup> Immigrant women are definitely affected by various images of Asians in the United States. Although they see few Asians in popular media, they sometimes feel pressure to measure up to such standards.<sup>19</sup>

Anne, a thirty-two year-old grant writer from the U.S. shares her thoughts:

*American-born Filipinos have the luxury of not having to think about it.... Well, maybe not just American-born Filipinos, but also 1.5 [generation] that kind of grew up in American school system. You’re encouraged to run around and do P.E. and all of that. You don’t have to worry about, oh my gosh, I’m getting dark. That’s just a part of it. And you grew up in this like, tan is beautiful kind of world. I don’t know. At least in California that’s what it feels like. Versus if you’re an immigrant and you’re older and you grew up being told it’s not good to be in the sun and here’s some whitening soap that you should use everyday and you know. It’s more on their consciousness I guess? I think it’s a luxury that you don’t have to worry about that. That you can just be free and run around. Not worry that you’re so dark ‘cause you’ve been doing physical activity outside.*

— Anne, 32, United States

Anne explains that if one is raised in the Philippines and immigrates to the U.S. at an older age, that person “grew up being told it’s not good to be in the sun” and that skin lightening soaps are acceptable to use. For these people, notions of what is beautiful are informed by the messages they are surrounded by in the Philippines. The emphasis on lighter skin is more prevalent among these immigrant communities. In contrast, Anne points out that if one is born in the U.S. or immigrates at a much younger age, having dark skin or getting tan by way of sun exposure is not a big issue because “they have the luxury of not having to think about it.” Having tan skin in the U.S. is not a concern because it is a marker of leisure and sports participation.<sup>20</sup>

Maya, a forty-two year-old project manager from the U.S. shares a different perspective:

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<sup>17</sup> I should note that of course, there are upper-class dark skinned people as well. One of the interviewees in the Philippines was dark skinned and came from an upper income family. She was very adamant about being proud of her skin color. At the same time, her class status afforded her the benefit of stating that.

<sup>18</sup> Rondilla and Spickard, *Is Lighter Better?*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Rondilla and Spickard, *Is Lighter Better?*, 58-59; Joanne Rondilla, “Filipinos and the Color Complex,” in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 66-68.

<sup>20</sup> Banner, *American Beauty*, 277.

*My best friend is from here [the U.S.]. She was born and raised – well, she was born in New Jersey. Her father was in the military... her parents are from the Philippines. The fact that they emphasize that she was so dark and it was unattractive, there's very similar ways of thinking. I think hers was even more emphasized because she's darker than I am. So I've never seen a difference in whether it's immigrant versus American born.*

— Maya, 42, United States

Maya shares that ideas on skin color do not always differ depending on one's immigrant status. Though her friend is American born and raised, that her family “emphasize that she was so dark and it was unattractive” shows how Maya's friend understands the value of dark skin. When I ask Maya if people who are third generation Filipino and beyond experience similar attitudes about skin color, she answers, “I think it's very different for them because we [latter generations] don't emphasize it. We don't emphasize it. In fact, our emphasis is that they protect their skin, knowing that they have a side to them that needs to protect their skin.” Maya states that those who are third generation and beyond, the emphasis is less on the lower value of dark skin and more on protecting the skin from perhaps environmental damage.

Esme, a twenty-six year-old graduate student who is mixed race shares her story:

*Just based on my own experience... my cousins in the Philippines really prefer the lighter skin. But me growing up, I really wanted to have darker skin. And actually, I think there were times when I would tan. You know, just lay out in the sun and my friends would say, “Oh you look so hot.” People preferred me darker. I'm not sure if it was because I was growing up in the mid-west as opposed to here where there are a lot of Filipinos. I just didn't feel the pressure that I needed to be lighter skinned.*

— Esme, 26, United States

Esme points out that her family in the Philippines did have a different preference for skin color. However, being raised in a different environment prompted her to have a different understanding of skin color. Growing up, Esme “didn't feel the pressure” to be lighter skinned. In fact, she states that “people preferred [her] darker.” She attributes this to the environment she grew up in. Coming from a Midwest community where the Filipino population is low, paired with her multi-racial background are likely factors in influencing the lack of pressure for her to be light skinned.

Regarding children of immigrant parents, Kathy Peiss, in her book, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, states that daughters of immigrant parents tend to use cosmetics to look more “American.” This is because it helps them (in their own eyes) to assimilate and become part of the landscape of the newly adopted home country.<sup>21</sup> As an industrialized nation, most people already work indoors. Tan skin in the U.S. is a marker of the leisure class, because it implies one is vacationing.<sup>22</sup> This, along with the influences of the black is beautiful, brown pride, and yellow power movements of the 1960s and 1970s make it a little easier for American-born generations not to valorize light skin and other Euro-American standards of beauty. Although many Filipinos in America tend to be perplexed that immigrant

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<sup>21</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) 188.

<sup>22</sup> Rondilla, “Filipinos,” 66-68. See also: Saraswati, “Cosmopolitan Whiteness,” 2010.

members of the community want light skin, they do not recognize that their own desire to have tan skin is related to the same colonial process. Hence, many Filipinos in America who shun skin lightening may opt for the U.S. beauty standard and invest in tanning. Because tanning involves skin darkening, many believe that the process symbolizes going back to a natural state of being. Tanning may give these people a sense of ethnic authenticity and can possibly allow them to believe it is natural for them to be tan (even if they obtained the tan through artificial means). While giving a guest lecture in a contemporary issues course, a second-generation Filipino student states, “I don’t understand why my mother tries so hard to be light. She uses tons of skin-bleaching products from the Asian grocery store, while I’m here trying to get a decent tan”.<sup>23</sup> A critical look at this complex reveals that tanning and lightening are two sides of the same coin. Beauty is part of one’s class identity, but the markers of class identity differ depending on where one is.

Finally, regarding dark skin, Duffy, a thirty-seven year-old photographer shares her love and pride for her skin:

*We’re beautiful. Dark skin is great! I don’t know. For most of my friends who are dark skinned, they love their skin color. You know, they think it’s beautiful! That’s why we’re always wondering why people with light skin are more favored when people are going out to the beach getting tanned, trying to be darker. I just think dark skin is beautiful. And my friends who are dark skinned think they’re beautiful. So I’m in a pretty good group.*

— Duffy, 37, United States

Duffy declares that “Dark skin is great!” and attributes her appreciation for her skin, in part, to her friends who share the same sentiment. She also points out that, “people are going out to the beach getting tanned,” so why wouldn’t a darker skinned person embrace their skin color? For Duffy and the people in her circle, dark skin is simply beautiful and should be appreciated.

### **Perceived Class, Perceived Color**

*“Now they are the queen of the ball.”: How American-ness Lightens*

In their book, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, co-authors Robin Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr argue that, “Beauty was not just a product of wealth, but a commodity in and of itself. In other words, it was no longer a matter of looking to wealth to find beauty, but of looking to beauty to find status. Now, beauty could give the illusion of wealth.”<sup>24</sup> Lakoff and Scherr explain that perceptions of beauty are not fixed. Rather, they are products of wealth. In this respect, beauty has little to do with actual attractiveness, and more to do with the illusion of wealth and status. In short, beauty and its relationship to wealth are a matter of perception. As a researcher coming from the U.S. and living in the Philippines, I was overwhelmed by the stark contrast between popular culture depictions and my own lived experience. Daily life in the Philippines seemed to be coded by *perceived class*. I emphasize *perceived class* because as an American, I was considered to be of a higher class than members of my family who are local. When I would go out and about with my family, my American accent would afford me better service.<sup>25</sup> On one

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<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with the author.

<sup>24</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984) 80.

<sup>25</sup> While I cannot quite figure out how to explain this, I’ve been told by family and friends that my American-ness was clear as day. When I asked why, answers varied. Some said I looked different, others claimed that I carried

occasion, while having lunch with my cousin, I overheard a couple next to us question why I was treating my “maid” to such a lavish meal. I was deeply offended and hurt by this contrast in treatment. My skin color was no different than my cousin. The only thing that made me different from her was that I am an American and she is a local. Though we are of the same blood, it felt like our *perceived class* differences were determined by who was closer to American-ness. In short, my American-ness lightened me and her local-ness darkened her. In this context, lightness and darkness are characterized by Euro-American foreign-ness (light) and Philippine local-ness (dark).

To help shed some insight on this, I turn to Elizabeth, a twenty-four year-old development assistant who was born and raised in the Philippines and moved to the U.S. as an adolescent. In talking about growing up in the Philippines, she shares: “What is light is beautiful. And we’ve always had this obsession of like, you know. You just adored anything that’s American, everything that’s Americanized. Everything that’s like, it’s great. So, I don’t know why would they do that. It’s just, that’s what’s beautiful, is having lighter skin.” Elizabeth states that while growing up in the Philippines, lightness, or American-ness is considered highly favorable. She describes the association between lightness and beauty as an “obsession.” In her interview, it seems that American-ness is something to look up to, as it sets the standard and defines what is good and beautiful. By doing that, dark-ness and Filipino-ness are simultaneously de-valued. This seems to hold true for products as well as people. Diana, a twenty-five year-old MBA student, who was also raised in the Philippines before moving to the U.S. echoes Elizabeth’s sentiment by stating, “I don’t feel as if, at least growing up, there were as many good role models amongst Filipinos. We always looked toward the foreigner as being better. Anything American or foreign was better and something to aspire to.” While in the Philippines, these interviewees state that lighter skin and anything associated with being foreign (or white) is seen as more desirable than things that are associated with the Philippines, or things that are local.

This brings up an important point about how to understand the ways in which darkness and lightness are understood. In chapter two, I had mentioned at length that lightness among Filipino communities in the Philippines and the U.S. has a higher value than darkness. Historically, these values have had racialized connotations – where those who are of European descent are considered more attractive, intelligent, and desirable than those who are not of European descent. The assumption that lighter is better is largely due to colonization, which defines non-Europeans as savage and inferior.<sup>26</sup> In this section, I extend this conversation by asserting that the positive values associated with light skin also indicate one’s proximity to Euro-American-ness. For example, a Filipino from the U.S., when in the Philippines, will find herself automatically pigeonholed into a higher class, even if she is not of that class in the U.S. Her status as an American can elevate her status in the Philippines because of her social, political, and economic proximity to the U.S. Simultaneously, darkness is associated with the indigenous or the local. I argue that currently, the positive values are associated with light skin and proximity to Euro-Americanness. In turn, they are simultaneously dissociated with the indigenous or the local.

To help explain how American-ness “lightens,” I point to Lizzie, a thirty-four year-old program manager from the U.S. Lizzie was born and raised in the Philippines and moved to the U.S. at a young age. Currently, she travels back and forth between the U.S. and the Philippines.

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myself in a different manner. Either way, though ethnically Filipino, I was often treated like a foreigner – especially in service oriented places such as restaurants.

<sup>26</sup> For more information, please refer to chapter 2.



She explains how coming back to the Philippines as an American changes the way she navigates herself in the Philippines. Lizzie shares:

*I think I'm more confident in the Philippines than here [the U.S.], actually. In terms of beauty, I guess like you said, being Americanized gives me a sense of like this, you know, whatever it is that mestizos or mestizas have or think they have, I get it because I'm an American, Americanized. I have a self confidence. Like when I go to the mall – and I only do this in the Philippines – I'll go to the mall. I guess also my money. My money helps me. My money helps give me this confidence. But I go to the mall and I basically say to the sales person, I whisper it to her though. "Can I have what's on the display?" And I tell her my size. You know? And that's something that I don't do. I'm not really fashionable here [in the U.S.]. I mean, I shop at Target, you know?*

— Lizzie, 34, United States

In this excerpt, Lizzie explains that in the U.S., she is like many middle class Americans who “shop at Target.” However, in traveling to the Philippines, she experiences a shift in class standing. Specifically, she experiences the Philippines the way the “mestizos or mestizas” do. This reference is a compelling one, as she compares being a Filipino from America to being mixed race. In short, her American-ness literally lightens her and allows her to be treated like someone who is upper class. With that, she develops a sense of self confidence that she normally does not have in the U.S. Lizzie recognizes that her new confidence and move to upper class status has to do with how her American-ness translates in the Philippines.

On a similar note, D.A., a sixty-three year-old yoga instructor from the U.S. describes a similar experience about going back to the Philippines after having lived in the U.S. She shares: “People who were persecuted in the Philippines who ended up moving here [to the U.S.], who were dark-skinned, now they are queen of the ball! They get all the people flocking around them.... You take an American back home [to the Philippines]. The dark skinned, even the mestizas, flock around [the American].” D.A. shares that when someone immigrates to the U.S. and comes back to the Philippines, that person’s American-ness changes her perceived class standing. Her time and association with the U.S. lightens her status when she travels to the Philippines. Instead of receiving ill treatment because of her dark skin, she is now able to indulge class benefits that she would not be afforded otherwise. D.A. relates this scenario to herself when she explains, “You know, if I went to the Philippines and I didn’t come from the states [the U.S.], and they’ll [people in the Philippines] see my skin like this, they won’t invite me for dinner or have a party for me. My cousins, they won’t.” Again, D.A. makes a compelling point when she states that this treatment she receives regarding her perceived class happens both with strangers and within her family.<sup>27</sup> Coming from America grants her a level of acceptance that she otherwise would not have. When asked why American-ness lightens one’s status in the Philippines, Sasha, a forty-four year-old mortgage broker from the U.S. drives the point home when she asserts: “I think it’s a desire to be American. Americans are still like, put on a pedestal there [in the Philippines].”

## **Acceptance**

*“Maybe we take for granted beauty here.”: Embracing Our Beauty*

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<sup>27</sup> For more in skin color and the family, please refer to chapter 4.

Interviewees share the contours of their thoughts and experiences regarding ideas of skin color. Although there seems to be an overwhelming sentiment regarding the high value of light skin and the low value of dark skin, these women give us valuable insight to the fluctuating value of skin color in both the Philippines and the U.S. While their stories often times varied, there seems to be one unifying thought between the interviewees in both countries. Most (if not all) of the women in the study share a desire to just be content with one's body – regardless of what the standards dictate. In the Philippines, where lighter skin warrants more social and economic benefits, it is easy to understand why the beauty pressure is greater. However, Shirley, a twenty-seven year-old freelance writer and lead singer of a local band shares these thoughts:

*I think people should just be comfortable with what they were born with. But I don't think it's, I just don't like seeing pasty white people. I mean scarily white people. [laughing] So I don't like it when it gets to that point. Because they almost look like they don't have blood in them sometimes. I mean people can get so manic about that — to the point that I don't feel like they look alive. You know? Because they're so white. And it scares me because these are still chemicals that you're applying or that you're taking in. So I don't, I just think it's unnatural. But you know, to each his own. I believe in that too. So it's up to them. But I wouldn't. Like if I could convince somebody to not take or to just be happy with their skin, I'd be happy.*

— Shirley, 27, Philippines

Shirley begins by explaining that people should be content with “what they were born with.” She continues by critiquing the desire for light skin in the Philippines, stating that she feels that when people go overboard with having light skin, there are health concerns, “because these are still chemicals that you're applying or that you're taking in.” Shirley ends by declaring that in the end, people should just be happy with their skin.

Maverick, a thirty-three year-old research and planning assistant from the Philippines shares her satisfaction for her dark skin color: “Actually, I like my skin. Although, you know, what I don't like to see are imperfections like let's say bruises. But then my skin color, I don't have any problem with it.” Natalie, a thirty-nine year-old lawyer shares:

*Maybe we take for granted beauty here [in the Philippines]. Because generally women are, if you take them one by one, look at them one by one, they have beautiful features.... Maybe that's why we're drawn towards white because we see it [people who are darker skinned] all around. We take them for granted. But perceptions are changing. Not only whites are beautiful nowadays.... Maybe because we're becoming more nationalistic compared to before. There were more colonial minded who think only those imported are better. But now there's a surge of nationalism that's “Oh, Filipino products are also good. Women are beautiful.”*

— Natalie, 39, Philippines

Natalie states that beauty is taken for granted in the Philippines and that generally, women “have beautiful features.” She also points out that beauty is associated with light skin because having that skin color in the Philippines is not as common as having dark skin. However, Natalie points

out that, “perceptions are changing.” As people grow to appreciate the Philippines and everything the country has to offer, their appreciation for Philippine beauty grows and changes too.

Carmen, a twenty-four year-old library administrator from the Philippines states that part of the reason why Filipino beauty is not appreciated within the community is because many feel that affirmation from the West is still important. She explains further:

*I think Pinays should just like the way they are. I mean, I don't know if it's a bad thing to like rely on the validation of people from the West too much. But if they [westerners] like they way we look then how come we can't like the way we look as ourselves right? I guess it doesn't, Filipinas shouldn't you know, care too much about their physical appearances. I mean, in terms of skin color or the shape of their noses, the shape of their eyes you know? Or whether or not they have curves in the right places because anywhere in the world someone will find you beautiful.*

— Carmen, 24, Philippines

Arcee, a forty-eight year-old sales manager from the U.S. shares similar sentiments as the interviewees in the Philippines. She shares:

*I just wish Filipinas would be comfortable with their own skin. Not only the skin, but with their own selves. Because in the Asian countries – I've been told about this – that the Filipinas, the Filipino women are the most good-looking race in Asia. And I don't know if we ourselves believe in that. Or are we just assimilating to what everyone else should look.... We need help with our own self esteem.*

— Arcee, 48, United States

Like Natalie and Carmen in the Philippines, Arcee also points out that Filipino women do not acknowledge the beauty that they already have. She points out that while non-Filipinos can appreciate and acknowledge beauty within the Filipino community, she sadly asserts, “I don't know if we ourselves believe in that” and perhaps the solution lies in women empowering their own self esteem.

Duffy, a thirty-seven year-old photographer from the U.S. makes a similar assertion about self esteem within the Filipino community:

*I wish we could just get rid of that white mentality. That white is right 'cause it's not. And it just makes things worse. You know, we spend money for all these skin lightening products. We spend money for products that make us look white. And I'm thinking you're beautiful the way you are. Accept your skin color. And if you do accept yourself the way you are, it will shine. You'll see it. You'll be more proud. And people will see you in that way. You'll come in through the door and you're like the shining beacon of light or something 'cause you are so sure of yourself. No matter what skin color you are. Black. White. Brown. Yellow. Orange. Fuchsia. You know? Like you're so sure of yourself and you're so proud of yourself and that's really important. If we could just get rid of that mentality — especially my mom and the older generation — that the light skin is the better*

*skin. Or even now in the Philippines.... If we could just get rid of that then we wouldn't have problems of like, you know, people not accepting blacks, then everything would be a little bit better.*

— *Duffy, 37, United States*

Like Carmen's assertion, Duffy urges members of the Filipino community to "get rid of that white mentality" and "do accept yourself the way you are." She points out that while "the older generation" emphasizes the high value of light skin, younger generations have the power to challenge these notions. Numerous women in this study share these exact sentiments. While Eurocentric standards of beauty prevail, it is important for people to challenge these standards with ferocity – both in the Philippines and in the U.S.

This chapter focuses on understanding the value of darkness by exploring how skin color is understood in the Philippines and the U.S. It complicates the simplistic notion that light skin is desirable and dark skin is undesirable investigating the different ways tanning is understood across the Pacific. We also look at how these values are tied to class and leisure and how they fluctuate depending on place and context. Finally, the chapter highlights interviewees' desires for overall acceptance as a way to empower themselves.

## Chapter 4: Family Expectations, Romantic Relationships, and Skin Color

In her essay, “A Colorstruck World: Skin Tone, Achievement, and Self-Esteem Among African American Women,” scholar Verna Keith begins by explaining that starting at a young age, black women are taught the value of skin color. They are told to stay out of the sun to avoid getting dark. They should also choose a marriage partner with light skin in hopes that their children can have lighter skin. Such messages teach black women that dark skin has a lower value than light skin. With that, black women have to take responsibility for the state of their own skin by avoiding getting darker. In other instances, black women are encouraged to engage in other beauty practices to that will help enhance their beauty and perhaps help the obtain lighter skin. Not only are black women responsible for the state of their own skin color, but for the skin color of their offspring. Hence, they have to choose marriage partners with light skin on order to benefit the future generation. Keith asserts:

Such admonitions may seem cruel, and perhaps they are, but they are given out of love and a deep, historical understanding that we live in a colorstruck world, where distinctions based on skin tone have historically intersected with racism, sexism, and class to influence how African American and other women of color evaluate themselves, who they will date and marry, how much education they will attain, what kinds of jobs they will have, and what overall standard of living they will achieve.<sup>1</sup>

Keith states that such advice, though crude, is “given out of love” and an acute awareness that skin color has societal value. One’s skin color determines one’s chances in life – including dating and marriage options, educational attainment, job opportunities and an overall quality of life. Additionally, skin color is often conflated with beauty – the lighter one is deemed more beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

Over the course of my field research, I find that Filipino women that I interviewed in the Philippines and the U.S. have similar experiences to what Keith describes. Interviewees are often told to stay out of the sun to avoid getting dark. For example, Robin, a twenty-five year-old studio photographer from the Philippines shares, “Every time I go to the beach my *lola* [grandmother] will be like, ‘Don’t come back a *negra* [dark skinned woman]!” Similarly, Billie, a twenty-six year-old youth organizer from the U.S. explains, “There was always ‘don’t stay in the sun too long.’ . . . If I stayed in the sun I would get dark.” Both Robin and Billie are advised by a member of their intimate circle (family or friends) that they need to stay out of the sun because becoming dark has negative consequences. Like Keith argues, such advice makes sense. Historically, lighter skinned people have been afforded privileges that darker-skinned people have not.<sup>3</sup> It could be said that such advice is fraught with good intentions – especially if it

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<sup>1</sup> Verna Keith, "A Colorstruck World: Skin Tone, Achievement, and Self-Esteem Among African American Women," in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25; See also: Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem, and Self Efficacy," *Gender & Society*, 15, no.3 (2001): 336-357.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please see: Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Ronald E. Hall, *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001).; Ronald E. Hall, *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, please see: Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Shades of Difference: Why*

comes from one's intimate circle. However, the questions I pose are: if her friends and family tell a woman that lighter is better, how does this impact her understanding of beauty and skin color? Why are women told such things within their intimate circles? What is the function of this advice?

There is a plethora of research that points to the media and popular culture as culprits of creating messages that devalue dark skin and equate dark skin with ugliness and savagery while equating light skin with beauty and civility.<sup>4</sup> However, very little research has been done to explore how a woman's family and friends also influence her perception of beauty. I argue that it is not just the media, popular culture, and what Keith describes as a "deep historical understanding" of a "colorstruck world" at play.<sup>5</sup> Women are also influenced by the people in their intimate circles. Often times, these opinions or well-meaning pieces of advice carry much more weight in a woman's life than a magazine advertisement. As Madonna, a 32 year-old interviewee from the U.S. shares, "Growing up, my mom would always stay stuff like, 'You know, you're really cute. It's too bad you have dark skin like I do.' Like, too bad your skin isn't lighter." Similar to Keith's point, Madonna states that she learns the value of skin color, in part, from her mother. Though such advice may have been "given out of love," Madonna continues, "I don't think that she [my mother] really understood that sort of impact."<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores the ways in which intimate circles influence interviewees' perceptions of skin color. Previous research has explored how media and popular culture influence a woman's perception beauty and self.<sup>7</sup> Also, scholars have written extensively about the way skin color functions as social or symbolic capital. Like any asset, social or symbolic capital determines one's quality of life.<sup>8</sup> If skin color has a social value, how does this value translate among families and friends? I argue that how a society values skin color functions in similar ways in intimate circles. For example, society values light skin over dark skin. These values apply in intimate circles, where, for example, siblings with light skin are valued over

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*Skin Color Matters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Ronald E. Hall, *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006); Richard L. Henshel, "Ability to Alter Skin Color: Some Implications for American Society," *The American Journal of Sociology* 76, no.4 (1971): 734-742; Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith, "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem, and Self Efficacy," *Gender & Society*, 15, no.3 (2001): 336-357.

<sup>4</sup> Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T'Boli Publishing and Distribution, 2004); Kimberly McClain DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998); Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1996); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1992); Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Keith, "A Colorstruck World," 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bonnie Berry, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power* (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge, 1984); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Michael Hughes and Bradley R. Hertel, "The Significance of Color Remains: A Study of Life Chances, Mate Selection, and Ethnic Consciousness among Black Americans," *Social Forces* 68, no.4, (1990): 1105-1120; Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

those with dark skin. Additionally, intimate circles influence the way a woman understands the value of beauty and its relationship to skin color. Through interviewee accounts, this chapter will examine how family and friends shape these women's perceptions. I argue that beauty and skin color are often talked about – directly and indirectly – in these intimate circles. The conversations from these intimate circles are another way that women formulate ideas about beauty and skin color. These intimate circles are as influential as the media and popular culture in helping a woman shape her ideas of beauty in relation to skin color. Finally, this chapter will focus on the relationship between skin color, influences from interviewees' intimate circles, and how this affects one's dating and marriage choices.

### **The Intimate Beauty Queue**

*“Two of us are light-skinned and one is dark-skinned.”: Ranking Order in Intimate Circles*

During her interview, Tyler Haro, a 32 year-old model/actress/television host shared a story about her *lola* (grandmother) while growing up in the Philippines:

*My grandma, my dad's mom, she was very into titles. And I don't know what it was. But she always called like, she called me Miss Universe. She called my cousin Erin who's older than me Miss Philippines. And then she called my sister [Anastasia] Miss Cebu.... Ever since I was young I was like, that's stupid. I thought that was a very, I was five years old, but I was already like, this is some stupid bullshit like, trying to rank us? She was my sister, you know?*

— Tyler Haro, 32, Philippines

As an adult, Tyler assesses the situation and expresses frustration at how her *lola* ranks the young girls in the family. Tyler is Miss Universe. Her cousin Erin is Miss Philippines. Tyler's sister Anastasia is Miss Cebu, named after a province in the Philippines. When Tyler describes herself in comparison to her sister Anastasia, Tyler states that the equally beautiful Anastasia has darker, more exotic features. Tyler explains, “My sister and I look totally different.... She's more exotic looking. She's darker skinned.” The classification implies that Tyler's *lola* has a type of ranking order for her grandchildren. It seems that this ranking order is based on one's physical features. Tyler, who has light skin, green eyes, and sharp features is given the highest rank, the title of Miss Universe. From there, the ranking order continues. Cousin Erin, who is a light-skinned, mixed race Filipino, is Miss Philippines. Finally, the darker-skinned Anastasia is Miss Cebu, denoting Anastasia's provincial ranking. Tyler, at a young age, states she understands that the classifications from her *lola* have meaning. In particular, Tyler is ranked above her sister (because Tyler is the ambassador of the universe as opposed to the ambassador of the province) because Anastasia has darker skin than Tyler. Though Tyler has a higher ranking, she shows her discomfort by stating, “She was my sister, you know?” That women are ranked in these intimate circles affects how they look at themselves and their relationships with each other. Tyler rejects the ranking by defending her sister and claiming that the ranking, “is some stupid bullshit.”

The issues that Tyler illuminate allude to what Margaret Hunter refers to as the beauty queue. Hunter states that the beauty queue

explains how sexism and racism interact to create a queue of women from the lightest to the darkest, where the lightest get the most resources and the darkest get the least. The lightest women get access to more resources because not only are they lighter-skinned and therefore racially privileged, but their light skin is

interpreted in our culture as more beautiful and therefore they are also privileged as beautiful women. The conflation of beauty and light skin is part of how racial aesthetics operate – lighter-skinned people with more Anglicized features are viewed by most in American culture (either consciously or unconsciously) as superior.<sup>9</sup>

In short, the beauty queue refers to a societal ranking order that arranges women according to skin color. The lighter one is, the more beautiful she is thought to be, and thus, the more access that woman has to certain social privileges. Tyler Haro's story illustrates that a similar queue exists within intimate circles such as within families or among friends. I will refer to this as the *intimate beauty queue*. Among intimate circles, there exists a system that ranks people based on what that particular intimate circle values as beautiful or attractive. As Hunter states, beauty is often conflated with light skin. With that, the intimate beauty queue explains how skin color and notions of beauty are used to create a ranking order in intimate circles. It ranks people from light to dark, where those who are light-skinned are offered more privileges than those with dark skin. The main difference between the beauty queue and the intimate beauty queue is that the intimate beauty queue focuses on intimate circles. Although the intimate beauty queue is mostly in reference to women, men are not exempt from this queue. The queue functions to rank siblings, friends, cousins, etc. I make the distinction between the beauty queue (societal ranking) and the intimate beauty queue (ranking from family and friends) because the way a person is ranked in these intimate circles often has more impact on how a person sees herself. For example, a dark-skinned person may not be affected by the negative connotations that society associates with her skin color. However, when these values are imposed in a more intimate setting, her self-perception may be greatly impacted because the values are coming from people who are close to her.<sup>10</sup>

Other interviewees make reference to a type of ranking order in the family – where the seemingly more attractive (oftentimes the lighter skinned and/or mixed race) family members are treated better and the allegedly less attractive (often times the darker skinned) family members are left to feel unimportant or less favored. Milen, a forty year-old writer and stay-at-home mother, shares a similar story about experiencing beauty pressure from her grandparents:

*There was pressure from my grandparents, or more like my grandmothers on both sides. There was a lot of when you got ready for an event or something, having to go over to lola's house to show her. The comments were always positive. I don't remember being chastised or anything like that.... She [lola] was on my dad's side – very conscious of skin color. Like I said, I have two older brothers. Two of us are light-skinned and one is dark-skinned. And he [the dark-skinned brother] was definitely not um... not black sheep. It wasn't that bad, but there were subtle comments made about his skin color. He was clearly not a favorite.*

— Milen, 40, United States

At the end of the story, Milen highlights a familial favoritism for her and her light-skinned brother over their darker-skinned brother. Her story illustrates how the intimate beauty queue operates between her and her two brothers. Milen and her lighter-skinned brother are given

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<sup>9</sup> Hunter, *Race, Gender*, 70-71.

<sup>10</sup> It is similar to the earlier example of Madonna, who stated that when her mother told her it was “too bad” that Madonna had dark skin, she shared that being told something like that had a profound impact on her.



favorable treatment, whereas her darker-skinned brother is “clearly not a favorite.” Milen emphasizes that she understands how her darker-skinned brother is perceived by their *lola* because of the “subtle comments made about his skin color.” The intimate beauty queue brings up sensitive issues between people who share the same intimate circle because often times, these people are pitted against each other, causing tension for all parties. Granted, the ranking order is heavily influenced by societal definitions of beauty and privilege. However, the impact it has on personal relationships runs deep. When Milen reflects on her *lola*’s treatment of her and her brothers, there is a sense of sadness in her story because she feels that her darker-skinned brother is “clearly not a favorite” because of something he cannot control: his skin color.

Similarly, Billie, who is twenty-six years old and works for youth development programs, shares a story about her *lola*:

*I think for the most part my lola was always into her grandchildren being so handsome and being so beautiful.... I don't know if my bias happened to come from my relationship with my lola.... I always understood our relationship to be, um. Like I wasn't one of the favorites. You know? ...It was my lola who was always into that... “God he's so handsome,” and “God she's beautiful. Oh. She's mestiza [mixed].” Or with my one cousin. It's perfect with the four girls born in the same year. We're all different. We all come from like, different features and everything. But then there's the mestiza one, the intsik [Chinese] one, and there was the hapon [Japanese] one, you know? And it was always um, and then there was the Filipino one, you know? It was always, the comment was always paired up with, “Oh yeah. She has intsik [Chinese] features.” Or like, she has such beautiful mestiza [mixed] features. It was always paired up with whatever made them exotic, you know? Or their non-Filipino features.*

— Billie, 26, United States

Billie suggests that there is also a ranking order between her and her cousins. She explains that in her family, there are four female cousins, all born in the same year. There is Billie, whose parents are both Filipino, one cousin who is *mestiza* because one parent white, one cousin who is *intsik* because one parent is Chinese, and one cousin who is *hapon* because one parent is Japanese. Billie explains that her *lola* often has favorable things to say about the granddaughters who have “non-Filipino” features. As “the Filipino one,” Billie expresses that her features (which she later explains are comparatively darker) make her the unfavorable one. Like Milen’s darker-skinned brother, Billie knows she “wasn’t one of the favorites” because her features are distinctly Filipino, as opposed to her cousins, who are mixed race and have features that are more racially ambiguous.<sup>11</sup> In this context, the ranking in the intimate beauty queue is based on one’s features – where the mixed race cousins, who are also lighter-skinned, are ranked higher than Billie, who is not mixed race. Billie shares that she understands her relationship with her *lola* is partly based on where Billie is ranked compared to her cousins in the intimate beauty queue. She explains:

*Over time, I didn't feel like an ugly duckling or whatever. I always felt like, I just, in a sense, didn't feel accepted with my lola. And I don't know if it was because of the looks or I just wasn't her favorite or I just wasn't, you know? Like, I don't*

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 5 for a more elaborate discussion on beauty and racial ambiguity.

*know where that came from. But I think over time, my mom wasn't so much into that as much as my lola was. But we lived with my lola for as long as I could remember.*

— Billie, 26, United States

The way Billie's *lola* values particular features and ranks the women in the family takes its toll on Billie. Her story shows that her skin color has an impact on her relationship with her *lola*. Like Milen's story, Billie's anxieties about the treatment from her *lola* are not because of any overt messages her *lola* expresses. Billie admits, "I don't know where that came from," but the subtle things said by her *lola* makes Billie feel like she isn't accepted by her *lola*. Billie states that since she was a kid, she was not considered one of the beautiful ones or one of the favorites. Finally, she points out that though she does not "feel accepted" by her *lola*, Billie's relationship with her mother is a different story. With her mother, Billie does not feel the pressure of the intimate beauty queue as much.

Along similar lines, Admiral Pie, a twenty-nine year-old entrepreneur from the Philippines explains how skin color functions in intimate circles. She states:

*A lot of families, I think, would tease a kid if she was darker than the rest of the family. "You're not my kid because you're darker!" Something like that. Even in school I think they would prefer the lighter skinned girl as a muse than the darker skinned one. So I think it's a mix of that. And then you grow up thinking, "Yes, I think I want to be lighter skinned." ....When you become lighter skinned, you're automatically more successful, perceived as more successful.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

Admiral Pie makes a number of important points. First, skin color is used as a measure of membership within some families. The way Admiral Pie frames this seems to be used in a jokingly way. While this may be true, I caution that the joking can take a toll on a person because the heart of the joking suggests a lack of belonging to the family because of one's skin color. Another point that Admiral Pie makes is that in other instances, skin color carries currency among friends and peer groups. She states that "even in school" peers "would prefer the lighter skinned girl as a muse" over the darker skinned girl. Within intimate circles, beauty and skin color act as social capital. The more capital one has, the more valuable that person is within that intimate circle, the higher they rank in the intimate beauty queue.

*"The other thing she made me use was Eskinol.": Using Skin Lightening Products to Increase Social Capital*

Within intimate circles, skin color acts as social capital. Hunter explains, "light skin tone is interpreted as beauty, and beauty operates as social capital for women."<sup>12</sup> The more capital one has, the more opportunities that person has access to. In this section, I will discuss how interviewees are encouraged to increase their capital by those in their intimate circles. Specifically, I explore the pressure that women face to use skin lightening products as a way to increase their social capital.

Bambi, a 25 year-old government worker from the U.S. explains that while growing up, her mother emphasizes that she wants Bambi to have lighter skin. Bambi shares:

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<sup>12</sup> Hunter, *Race, Gender*, 37.

*As a kid, my mom heard that rubbing lemon all over your skin might make you lighter. So she decided to do that to me not knowing how bad it would hurt. 'Cause the lemon juice, you know, is very acidic. I was in elementary school, so probably eight [years old]. Maybe around that age? But I'm still pretty dark. And then I remember a family member would go home to the Philippines. She [mom] would always ask them to bring back Likas – that papaya soap. So I would always have that there and I would use it.*

— Bambi, 25, United States

At a young age, Bambi understands the importance of having light skin because it is emphasized within her intimate circle. Her mother hopes Bambi will be lighter skinned by “rubbing lemon” all over her skin. In addition, her mother asks relatives and friends who travel to the Philippines to bring back *Likas*, a popular skin lightening soap that is sold in the Philippines. These actions indicate the high value of light skin in Bambi’s intimate circle. As someone who is darker skinned, her mother hopes to increase Bambi’s opportunities for success by giving her the tools to obtain lighter skin.

Though her mother may have good intentions for doing this, Bambi explains how these actions affect her in the long run. She asserts, “It’s traumatizing when people tell you to be a certain way. Even though you really can’t control who you are. Yeah. They’re doing it all out of love. I understand what she [mom] was trying to do. But gosh, when I really think about it, I wouldn’t want to do that to my own children.” Bambi’s story illustrates the physical and emotional pain that many women go through in order to answer unfair beauty expectations. These expectations within intimate circles are of a sensitive nature because they are encouraged by people who are close to that person (in Bambi’s case, her mother). Bambi explains that though she cannot control her skin color, she is forced to do so regardless of how physically painful it is. At the same time, she acknowledges that her mother’s actions are not spiteful. Rather, they are done “out of love.”

Scholars such as Deborah Rhode, Bonnie Berry, Naomi Wolf, and Susan Bordo provide detailed discussions about the benefits of beauty.<sup>13</sup> In short, beauty matters in this society. Those who are considered beautiful reap considerable rewards for it. Within intimate circles, a mother (for example) will try to help her daughter increase her social capital because she feels she is providing her daughter with the best resources at hand. This can be interpreted as a mother showing love. Though this process can be painful (as illuminated through Bambi’s story), the daughter understands that this has less to do with her mother being cruel and more to do with the immense pressure women are under to be beautiful, to rank high in the beauty queue. Though Bambi acknowledges how “traumatizing” using papaya soap and rubbing lemons on her skin was, she also sympathizes with her mother’s intentions. Bambi notes, “I can see why she did those things that she did to me.”

During her interview, I ask Bambi if other women in the family are encouraged to use skin lightening products. She responds:

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<sup>13</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Bonnie Berry, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power* (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Bonnie Berry, *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Perennial, 2002); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

*Mostly to me because I was darker than her [my sister]. The other thing she [my mom] made me use was Eskinol.<sup>14</sup> Eskinol, I mean, you don't need that when you're a kid. It started when I was young, in elementary school. And then every single time someone would go to the Philippines. I guess it was cheaper to get it in the Philippines? I don't know why, but they would always bring back Likas<sup>15</sup> and Eskinol. That's the only two things I would always get.*

— Bambi, 25, United States

This excerpt suggests that in Bambi's family, there is an intimate beauty queue. Her sister, who is lighter skinned, does not have to use skin lightening products. As the darker skinned sister, Bambi is encouraged to use these products. The values of the intimate beauty queue are imposed on Bambi at a very young age — since she was in “elementary school.” These values have an incredible impact on her in part because other members of her intimate circle give her skin lightening products. Bambi states that when other family members visit the Philippines, they bring back *Eskinol* and *Likas* as gifts for her. By bringing these products from the Philippines to the U.S. for Bambi to use, these family members are also telling her that her skin is too dark. This illustrates that using skin lightening products is not just her mother's suggestion. Other members of the intimate circle also encourage the skin lightening process.

Later on in the interview, Bambi states that by the time she is in high school, she seriously considers getting a professional skin whitening treatment:

*In high school, I actually did consider getting a lightening treatment.... I just remember my mom had told me about it.... At that point I was really dark because I was in the sun almost everyday.... I looked at myself in the mirror and realized how dark I actually was. I saw myself in pictures and I had gotten really really dark. It was almost kind of gross.... No [I did not get the treatment]. I mean, that stuff is expensive. When it comes down to it, my parents wouldn't pay for it. It would be something I'd have to take care of myself.*

— Bambi, 25, United States

When I ask Bambi if she actually goes through with the treatment, she says she does not do it because it is costly and she will have to cover the expense herself. As she gets older, she becomes darker, largely because she plays outdoor sports. Unfortunately, having dark skin still affects her self perception, describing herself as “gross.” Bambi's story highlights the complicated relationship that many women have with their own skin color and how it is valued (and de-valued) in one's intimate circle.

Though it is not her own personal story, Robin shares a story about a dear friend of hers whose mother forces her to undergo skin lightening treatments:

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<sup>14</sup> *Eskinol* is a popular astringent commonly used in the Philippines. It is thought to lighten one's skin. Many interviewees reference using this product both in the Philippines and the U.S.

<sup>15</sup> *Likas* is a popular skin lightening soap that can be found at local grocery stores in the Philippines or ethnic grocery stores in the U.S. Most recently, it made headlines in the Philippines when it announced Kris Aquino (daughter of former president Corazon Aquino) as their new celebrity endorser.

*I had a friend who was forced by her mother to go get a whitening wash of her body of some kind. And it didn't really help. I mean, she looks almost the same. But her mother's insisting that she has to go like every few months to strip away the melanin or whatever.... I honestly think she's a really pretty and a really cute girl. But in the eyes here [in the Philippines], she's sort of considered the not beautiful Filipina. Because she's short, she's darker skinned, she has a flat nose, she has you know, curly-ish hair. So she's not considered, in the narrow spectrum, right.... But her mom has a really hard time accepting it, that she turned out that way.... The mom really insisted that she had to go [get a lightening treatment]. So my friend felt really bad for it. But I think she felt even worse because no one noticed that she went to get such a procedure. 'Cause she looked the same to us. So I think it hurt her even more that she'd go through all of that crap and it's not really that much of a noticeable difference.*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

Though Robin's story is not directly about her, the example of her friend and her mother, again, emphasizes the value of light skin in these intimate circles. Robin describes her friend as a "really pretty and a really cute girl." However, for societal standards in the Philippines, Robin's friend is not a "beautiful Filipina" because of her height, skin color, nose shape, and hair texture. Responding to societal definitions of beauty, the friend's mother insists on making her daughter undergo skin lightening treatments. When the treatments fail, Robin's friend is left to feel failed (as opposed to the other way around). Robin's friend and her mother are responding to societal pressures for beauty. When they respond to the pressure unsuccessfully, it is their actions that are seen as failures – not the beauty standards themselves. In their book, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr state that, "Women are praised for beauty, and blamed for beauty — that is, given responsibility for it although they do not have control over it.... Yet we seem never to realize that women do not have power through beauty: beauty has power. Therein lies the paradox." Robin's friend and her mother reflect this because rather than rejecting unattainable standards of beauty, Robin's friend and her mother are trapped by them. It should be noted that although skin lightening may be popular in the Philippines, very few women in the interviewee sample actually go to clinics for such treatments. In the Philippines, only two of the interviewees have gone to actual clinics to get skin lightening treatments. Though eleven of the Philippine interviewees claim that they have or would like to use skin lightening products, clinical skin lightening treatments are extremely expensive and can start at approximately fifty U.S. dollars and go up to the hundreds per treatment. Out of the two interviewees that had skin lightening treatments administered at a beauty clinic, one admits that she had to take out a loan to pay for the procedure.

In this next interview, Maya explains that like Bambi, her mother gives her skin lightening products. She talks about her reaction when her mother comes back from one of her trips to the Philippines and brings back skin lightening products for her to use. When this first happens, Maya says she is in her thirties. Each time her mother goes to the Philippines for a visit, she always comes back with skin lightening products as *pasalubong* (gifts) for Maya. She explains:

*I think it's a slap in the face. In a way that I if could describe what I felt when I was first was offered that [skin lightening products] was, "I can't believe my*

*mom would be doing this. Is she not proud of me as a person?” I don’t blame Filipinos for that. I think it comes from the larger Asian populations – Japan, China and other countries that feel the need to stay very light. I don’t believe in them. I think women are wasting their money. Why can’t they just accept themselves for who they are?*

— Maya, 42, United States

Much like the mothers in Robin and Bambi’s stories, Maya is asked to use skin lightening products by her mother. Maya asks an important question regarding her mother’s intentions: “Is she not proud of me as a person?” Beauty pressure from one’s intimate circle is often painful for many women — especially when they are made to feel like they do not measure up to a specific standard or that they bring some kind of shame to the family. What makes these feelings difficult to cope with is that it is coming from a personal source: the family. Maya tries to understand her mother’s desire for Maya to have light skin by pointing out that the pressure to have light skin is answering to a larger Asian cultural value. Regardless of this reason, on the personal level, many women are left to feel failed or inadequate.

### **Dating and Marriage Expectations**

During the interviews, I incorporate a specific section about dating and marriage expectations. Of all the interview questions, this section seems to be the one that piques the most interest from interviewees. For the most part, interviewees are very candid with their answers. Though they are given the option to decline answering questions they feel are too personal or too probing, none of the interviewees exercise this option.

In this section, we will discuss issues regarding the dating and marriage market, how it relates to skin color, and how intimate circles influence (or do not influence) one’s dating and marriage choices. Often times, the interviewees share stories about how vocal their families are regarding who they choose as dating or marriage partners. This concern revolves around two things: 1) the class background of the potential partner and 2) a concern about the future offspring, or *what will the children look like?* In particular, members of the intimate circle are concerned with the skin color and facial features that the hypothetical child may inherit from a dark skinned or unattractive parent. As stated earlier in this chapter, skin color is often related to one’s social capital. The lighter one is, the more attractive that person is, the more social capital that person has. Social capital can also determine one’s dating and marriage options, educational attainment, and overall quality of life.<sup>16</sup>

Given that skin color matters, family members often express the importance of choosing the right dating and marriage partner so that (1) a person’s social capital can be maintained or elevated through the dating and marriage partner and (2) that one’s social capital can carry on to future offspring. For example, an interviewee expresses that she cannot date or marry someone who is darker skinned because doing so is unacceptable to her intimate circle (e.g. her family). The family stresses this because they do not want her to date or marry someone with low social capital. Further, the family becomes concerned if the relationship with the darker skinned partner

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, please see: Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Ronald E. Hall, *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001).; Ronald E. Hall, *Beaching Beauty: Light Skin as a Filipina Ideal* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2006); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1992).

evolves because should it lead to having children, there is a chance that the child will be dark skinned. From there, the family assumes that having dark skin will affect one's overall quality of life. Though such conclusions seem harsh and unfair, intimate circles caution this because of a historical understanding that in society, skin color matters. People in one's intimate circle also caution having a dark skinned partner because they feel they are sharing practical advice and are protecting their family member (and her future children) from having a hard life.

Before we begin this discussion, I would like to make a few points. First, it is important to note that forty-five out of forty-six interviewees speak in terms of hetero-normative relationships. Only one interviewee identified herself as bi-sexual. I recognize that more research needs to be done with respect to skin color, homosexual relationships, and sexuality in general because my interview sample does not reflect this issue.<sup>17</sup> I look forward to other scholars picking up this topic for future research. Second, to clarify the purpose of the interviews and this project, I would like to remind readers that the assessments I make are not meant to be overarching generalizations about Filipino women and their dating preferences. In no absolute terms is this portion meant to be construed as dating or marriage advice. Rather, I am trying to illuminate the connections between dating preferences, familial dating expectations, and the ways in which skin color is and is not a factor with respect to such personal choices and expectations.

Finally, when talking about dating and the marriage market, there seems to be two different discussions at work. For interviewees who talk about dating and marriage in the Philippine context, the discussion focuses on skin color.<sup>18</sup> Interviewees understand the dating and marriage market in terms of lighter skinned and darker skinned partners who are of the same ethnic (or racial) background. Perhaps this is largely because the interviewees' exposure to non-Filipinos (or non-Asians) is limited. When they use terms such as *negra* or *negro*, it is in relation to skin color within the Filipino community. When the discussion shifts from skin color to race, the racial difference is explicitly noted. For example, when discussing dating and marriage in the Philippine context, if the interviewee mentions dating someone who is black, they refer to that person as a black American or African American. In contrast, interviewees who talk about dating in the U.S. context focus more on interracial dating as opposed to skin color. For example, when asked about dating someone who is darker skinned, the assumption is that the darker skinned person is of a different racial background (e.g. the darker skinned person in mind is of African descent). Perhaps this is largely because unlike the Philippines, the racial diversity in the U.S. is much greater. The difference between skin color and race is an important one to make because though they are related, they are definitely not the same. Scholar Angela P. Harris, in her essay, "Economies of Color," notes: "hierarchies of color can destabilize hierarchies based on race."<sup>19</sup> Harris's point will be illustrated later on in this discussion, where an interviewee expresses a preference for a partner who is a lighter skinned Filipino over one who is white. In this instance, color overrides racial hierarchy.

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<sup>17</sup> Many thanks to insightful conversations with Dorothy Santos, Mike Campos, Gladys Nubla, and Nerissa Balce regarding these important issues.

<sup>18</sup> I make special note about dating and marriage within the Philippine context because some U.S. interviewees who were raised in the Philippines talked about dating in the Philippine, not the U.S. context.

<sup>19</sup> Angela P. Harris, "Economies of Color," in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1.

*“I don’t want to date so much dark guys.”: On Skin Color and the Dating and Marriage Market in the Philippine Context*

When asked about dating and marriage preferences, there is a range from no preference to strong preferences for partners with a particular background or specific physical features. In this section, I will focus on skin color the dating and marriage market in the Philippine context. Because class is so intricately tied to skin color in the Philippines, it is no surprise that interviewees express the importance of skin color in the dating and marriage market. Angel Chloe, a forty year-old, light-skinned court secretary explains how she fares in the dating market and what she looks for in a partner with respect to skin color. She shares, “I haven’t experienced guys, um, all guys want to date me [laughing lightheartedly]. I haven’t experienced being rejected. It’s because they want my color. They want my color! *Ako naman* [But me] towards them, it’s, I, I don’t want to date so much dark guys. I hate *negros* [dark skinned men]!” Angel Chloe shows that skin color is a factor in how people choose her and how she chooses her partners. She claims that “all guys” want to date her because they are attracted to her skin color. Her claim shows how light skin acts as social capital for her in the dating and marriage market, which gives her a plethora of options. These men want to date her because they find her skin color appealing. Angel Chloe shows us that light skin is equated to attractiveness. It also gives one social privilege. She candidly admits that she has a strong dislike for partners who are “*negros*,” or darker-skinned.<sup>20</sup> If we understand skin color as social capital, Angel Chloe’s dislike for a darker skinned partner can be attributed to her exercising a social privilege in rejecting a darker skinned partner. Having a darker skinned partner can devalue Angel Chloe’s social status. With that, she does not want to lose her social capital. Finally, a darker skinned partner, by virtue of having lower capital, may not measure up to what she believes is her social worth.

In her next excerpt, Angel Chloe explains how she approaches the dating market and how skin color factors in such decisions. “I first, I began knowing a guy at first through chatting.<sup>21</sup> First I will ask them their skin color. If I find out they are so dark, like a *negro* [dark skinned man], I will reject them at once. I’ll no longer chat with them. I will stop knowing them.... I am not interested.” Here, Angel Chloe illuminates how important skin color is in finding a dating or marriage partner. She explains that she has such a strong dislike for darker-skinned men. When she finds out if a potential partner is “so dark, like a *negro*,” it results in immediate rejection. In terms of social capital, if light skin has high social value, it seems that Angel Chloe simply does not want her dating and marriage choices to decrease her social worth. This is why she will, “no longer chat” with someone who is darker skinned.

Since light skin seems to be an important value to Angel Chloe, I ask her about dating someone who is of European descent (or white). She responds:

*I haven’t experienced dating foreigners. I prefer Filipinos.... I prefer attractive, at my age, kasi [because] it’s different during my childhood dream.... During my childhood, my dream, my dream guy is, he should be lighter in skin. Handsome. Lighter skin, perfect face, shape of the face. Nice eyes, nice nose. Nice body build. Nice haircut. Yeah. As a whole, handsome. But it’s different now [laughing lightheartedly]. I don’t look for handsome guys anymore. As long as he’s okay,*

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<sup>20</sup> The term *negros* in the Philippine context does not necessarily refer to people of African descent. Here, it refers to someone who has dark skin. In some contexts, it is a pejorative.

<sup>21</sup> Angel Chloe is referring to internet chatting.



*presentable, more on how he dress well, you know, at saka ano, yung pocket na. [and you know, his pocket] If he's financially stable. That's the biggest point now. [laughing lightheartedly]*

— Angel Chloie, 40, Philippines

Angel Chloie explains that she has never dated someone who is white<sup>22</sup> and actually prefers Filipinos to foreigners. When she is younger, she says that good looks are a strong value to her. However, as she gets older, she focuses less on good looks. Now, Angel Chloie prefers a Filipino partner who is “financially stable.” Again, her preference for someone who is lighter skinned is explained by her desire to find someone who is financially stable. For Angel Chloie, skin color and income are directly related. Therefore, a darker skinned person may not be of the income bracket she is looking for. Though she herself may not come from a rich family, her light skin grants her the right to demand a partner of equivalent stature.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Angel Chloie expresses a preference for Filipino men over white men. This is partly due to a lack of exposure to white men and a cultural commonality she has with Filipino men. As mentioned before, in the Philippines, skin color is an indicator of one’s social status. However, race is treated differently in Angel Chloie’s case because though white men technically have light skin, they are not ideal partners for her.

Heart,<sup>24</sup> a twenty-three year-old street vendor in the Philippines explains that though there is never any pressure for her to date anyone of a particular background, she does have a strong preference for a partner who is lighter-skinned. She explains her approach in the dating market:

*Sa textmate, kung sa textmate dapat kasi bago ako, katulad ako kapag makipag meet ako sa textmate tinatanong ko muna sya ano itsura niya, syempre kung ako man ayoko ring makipag meet sa kanya kung hindi siya perfect din sya akin.... Kung maputi sya pwede.... Pag hindi, hindi ako makikipaglokohan. [When I meet with a textmate<sup>25</sup> I will first ask how he looks like. Of course, I don't want to meet with someone who will not be perfect for me. If he is light skinned, I can meet with him. If he is not, then I won't, I won't fool around.]*

— Heart, 23, Philippines

For Heart, skin color is a major factor in the dating and marriage market. Relative to Angel Chloie, Heart is darker skinned<sup>26</sup> and is of a lower socio-economic background. She is a single mother who works as a street vendor selling bread and sweets at a local college campus in order to support her and her three children. When looking for a partner, Heart is very specific in wanting to be with someone with light skin because skin color and social status are connected. Like Angel Chloie, Heart says she will cut ties with someone when she finds that his skin color

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<sup>22</sup> Interviewees in the Philippines often referred to non-Filipinos, particularly those of European descent, as foreigners.

<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed discussion, please refer to chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> For my interview with Heart, I used a translator. The translator was a mutual friend, whom I felt would make Heart feel at ease with the interview situation.

<sup>25</sup> In the Philippines, text messaging is one of the most popular forms of communication. A “textmate” is similar to a pen pal, but for dating purposes. The main difference is that these “textmates” meet over text messaging.

<sup>26</sup> In terms of skin color, to my eyes, Heart is not particularly dark. I would describe her as more medium toned. However, she is darker skinned relative to Angel Chloie, who is very pale.

is not acceptable. Her desire for a light skinned partner can be related to wanting to increase her social capital and her economic standing. A lighter skinned partner is presumed to be economically well off. With that, such a partner is supposed to be capable of helping Heart financially support her family.

When I ask Heart if it is acceptable for her to date white foreigner, she responds with a resounding, “Yeah *naman, mas pabor*. [Yes. Of course it’s more favorable.]” Again, Heart emphasizes her desire for a light skinned partner and claims that if he’s a foreigner, it is even better. This response is closely related to her class standing. It seems that for her, dating or marrying a white foreigner fulfills an economic need for her and her three children. Heart sees white foreigners as extremely wealthy and capable of making her dreams come true. Since she considers herself darker-skinned, she envisions a white foreigner will have the means to take care of her. In contrast, when I ask Heart if she is willing to date a foreigner who is black (of African descent), she adamantly responds, “Hindi ako ..ayoko, ayoko talaga, gusto ko talaga maputi. [I don’t... I won’t, I really won’t. I really want light skinned.]” Heart states that she has no desire to date a black foreigner because her focus is having a light skinned partner. This could be because she associates positive things with having light skin. Heart explains:

*Mas gusto ko yung puti ako parang minsan sinasabi ko pag may dumadaan sana ganun ako kaputi sasali ako sa beauty pageant why not di ba, tapos kung ganun lang ako katangkad, naku baka marami akong napangasawa. [I would like for me to be whiter. Sometimes, when someone is passing me by, I wish that I was as white and then I will join a beauty pageant. Why not right? And if I was also just as tall, then I might have had many husbands already.]*

— Heart, 23, Philippines

Heart explains that she wants to be lighter skinned because she feels it will grant her opportunities that she currently does not have. She feels that if she were taller and lighter skinned she will be able to improve her economic standing by winning money from beauty pageants. She also states that having these physical attributes will give her many options in the marriage market. Heart shows that she believes that light skin and beauty equates to one’s advantages in life.

I point to Heart and her story because it raises some interesting points that I discovered during my research trip to the Philippines. Before my visit, I had assumed that Filipino women in the Philippines had an automatic attraction to white men because of the country’s colonial past – Spanish and American colonization. History and popular media depicts white men as heroes, saviors, and desirable mates.<sup>27</sup> However, in Heart’s interview, the informal conversations I had with people in the Philippines, and in my own personal observations, I was surprised that this assertion was quite far from the truth. While milling around in Manila, if a Filipina is walking around with a Euro-American man, the assumption is that the Filipina is a prostitute, thus making such a pairing undesirable.<sup>28</sup> In fact, I found that such couples were sometimes looked

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<sup>27</sup> In fact, there is an entire mail order bride industry that relies on this belief. For more information, please see: Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Asian America.Net : Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2003), especially Part III and Boye De Mente, *Women of the Orient: Intimate Profiles of the World's Most Feminine Women* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> For a more discussion about Filipino women and military men, please refer to Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and

down upon. In addition, when I talk to Filipinas about having a foreign (Euro-American) partner, many of them express very little interest because foreign men are thought to be unattractive, hairy, loud, and rude. For those who are interested in foreign partners, their desire to have such a partner had less to do with attraction and more to do with economic need. It seems that interest in white men is related to them being seen as a way to move up in class stature. In no absolute terms am I implying that this is true across the board. Nor am I trying to discount actual love in interracial intimacy. Instead, I want to offer a different understanding of how Filipino women in the Philippines perceive Euro-American men as romantic partners. On the contrary, there are economic reasons why some women (such as Heart) prefer such a partner.

Going back to examining skin color and the dating and marriage market in the Philippine context, D.A. is a sixty-three year-old yoga and dance instructor who immigrates to the U.S. from the Philippines in the 1970s. Coming from a well-to-do family in the Philippines, she shares a story about a former boyfriend who is extremely dark skinned and grows up very poor, but manages to earn high rank in the military:

*There was this guy. He was so dark skinned. Dark skinned to the point like, not black, but dark, okay? But, he was from the poor. He lived in those houses on stilts in Tondo. But he went to school and ended up being a cadet in the Philippine Military Academy. And that alone was a status already.... So he ended up being a navy, a reserve commander, and he ended up being my boyfriend. [laughing] My nosey mother wanted to find the background of the family. For me, whether he was poor or rich, as long as I loved him, I will stick with that person. My nosey mother went and found out where he lived. She came home and she was going – she’s one of those upper-crest, white-skinned.... [mother describing the boyfriend’s house] “Now this time I went over. Oh my God, I went to his house, and I had to step up, one step after the other, I can’t believe that a man of this caliber, that they can produce a man of this caliber, and look at him. He’s coming from this poor family. Do you really want to get married to him?” He ended up not being my boyfriend anymore after that incident. Because my mother really said, “You better think about it.”*

— D.A., 63, United States

Though D.A. loves her then boyfriend, she explains that she ends up breaking up with him because her mother strongly disapproves of them dating. Her mother’s disapproval is largely due to his class background. These feelings are emphasized when she visits his home.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that D.A.’s mother wants to “find the background of the family” because of his dark skin. This explains why D.A.’s mother decides to find out “where he lived.” Coming from a well-to-do family, her mother is curious about the man her daughter is dating and wants to see if he is an appropriate partner. After finding out how poor he and his family are, D.A.’s mother finds it hard to believe his high rank in the Philippine Military Academy. This is why she does not understand how “a man of this caliber” could come from “this poor family.” D.A.’s mother insists that D.A. “better think about” the possibility of a relationship with this man because she does not think that

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Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), especially chapter 7.

<sup>29</sup> This visit was not by invitation. In the interview, D.A. explained that her “nosey mother” went behind D.A.’s back to find out where her then boyfriend lived.

he is suitable for D.A., largely because his family is poor. Even his military ranking cannot override his family's class status. This story reminds us how influential intimate circles are in determining how one chooses a partner to date or marry. Though the man's class status and skin color do not matter to D.A., it matters within her intimate circle. Eventually, D.A. gives in to her mother's warning and ends her relationship with the man.

Also, D.A.'s story shows that a darker skinned man has the potential to change his class standing. For example, her former boyfriend, despite his darker skin is able to move up in class status by virtue of his military ranking. The military ranking "was a status already." In our research on colorism in Asian American communities, scholar Paul Spickard and I go over the ways in which skin color is often gendered. Where a woman who is poor and darker skinned is considered unattractive, her educational status or class standing does not necessarily move her up the beauty queue. However, it is different for men because a dark skinned, poor man can work his way up through his education and/or economic status because families will find these factors acceptable.<sup>30</sup> However, this is not quite reflected in D.A.'s story. Though her mother acknowledges D.A.'s boyfriend as a "man of this caliber," he is still rejected by D.A.'s mother because he comes from "this poor family."

*"You can't date a black guy.": On Skin Color, Interracial Partners and the Dating and Marriage market in the U.S. Context*

As mentioned earlier, discussions about skin color and the dating and marriage market in the U.S. context tends to revolve less around actual skin color and more around race. In particular, when asked about dating a darker skinned partner, the assumption is that this hypothetical partner is black, while a light skinned partner is presumed to be white. The difference in how interviewees understand skin color in the Philippine context versus the U.S. context can be attributed to the racial diversity in the U.S. Interviewees in the U.S. have more exposure to people of different racial backgrounds as opposed to interviewees in the Philippines. Also, interviewees mention interracial dating is often a point of concern – for themselves and the people in their intimate circle. Often times, interviewees are given advice about dating – who to date, who not to date, why certain people make better partners than others, etc. The advice given is often related to the racial background of the potential partner (which, in turn, is related to the skin color of the potential partner). It is common to hear interviewees share stories about how they are discouraged to date outside of the Filipino community – especially if the potential partner is black.

Lilya, whose husband Larry is African American, candidly shares her story about her and her husband's initial courtship:

*We've been together for seven years now. Our first year of dating, it was really nice. He's not your typical black man. He's not ghetto. He's very well-spoken, very, he's a gentleman. The nicest person I've ever met. It takes a lot for him to get mad.... A little after a year my mom found out and at first they [my mom and brother] were like, "You can't date a black guy." To begin with, I wasn't even allowed to date.... We were dating and they were like, "You can't date a black guy." So it's fine. We'll be friends. So we were "friends." And I would hang out with my friends, but with him. And they still noticed that. And it got to the point*

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<sup>30</sup> Joanne L. Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher's, Inc., 2007), 57-58.

*where like, “You can’t have any black friends.” And I was like, “Excuse me?!” And they were like, “You realize you can’t have any black friends.” This thing caused so much drama in my family that I got into a fight with my mom. She was literally pulling me out of my room, pulling my hair.... I was nineteen. And my brother... he got so upset.*

— Lilya, 24, United States

Lilya begins by explaining that her husband Larry is a very well-mannered man. She begins this way because it seems that she is trying to note why her husband is different from what her family expects black men to be. Unfortunately, much of how black men in the U.S. are perceived has to do with the way they are represented in popular culture. They are often seen as violent, disrespectful, poor, not family oriented, and highly sexualized.<sup>31</sup> Despite her husband’s kind nature, her family does not approve of them dating and declare that Lilya “can’t date a black guy.” When Lilya’s family discovers that she and Larry continue dating, they then tell her that she “can’t have any black friends.” Lilya explains that her relationship with Larry leads to a fight. Her mother and her brother see Lilya’s relationship choice as an act of defiance – especially since she continues her relationship with Larry even after her family forbids her to do so. She continues:

*For them [my mother and brother], I’m the problem child ‘cause [they are wondering], “Why are you dating a black guy?” Where he [my brother] strangled me. Like his hand around my neck. And my sister-in-law had to stop the both of them because it was them against me. And it was a bad night. I was screaming my ass off. But that was the time I decided I really love my husband. I love Larry and I walked away. I didn’t walk way that night. But about a month later, a couple of weeks later we started looking at apartments, looked at how much I had money-wise, and then a month later we put a deposit for an apartment. And then two weeks later we moved in.*

— Lilya, 24, United States

Lilya explains that her relationship with Larry leads to a physical altercation with her mother and her brother. She describes her mother pulling her by the hair out of a room and her brother strangling her. She explains that her family is disappointed in her for dating Larry because of his racial background – it has nothing to do with them meeting Larry and actually getting to know him. The tension between Lilya and members of her intimate circle are caused because they refuse to see that Lilya has genuine feelings for Larry. Also, at the time, her family refuses to actually get to know Larry because they cannot see past his skin color.

In her candid story, Lilya shows us the negative consequences that interracial dating can have in intimate circles. Her family’s disapproval of her partner leads her to leaving the home because she feels she has to choose between her partner and her family. Similar to D.A.’s story, people in one’s intimate circle have a strong influence on how one chooses a romantic partner. In D.A.’s case, advice from her intimate circle causes her to break up with her then boyfriend. In Lilya’s case, it causes her to leave home. This story also illustrates that as a black male, Larry cannot escape the negative stereotypes associated with his racial identity. Ultimately, these

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

negative perceptions become the cornerstone of Lilya's family's concerns about their partnership. Lilya's family has such a visceral reaction to her dating Larry that they physically attack her as a way to show their anger towards her decision. When I ask Lilya to further explain what she thinks is the major issue her family has with Larry, she states:

*Just race. They're [my family are] just kind of like, "What would people think? What would people think of you? What would people think of our family?" They're like, "You know, they're going to tell us that we can't raise our own daughter." I can't pick who I love. But it was just mostly what other people thought.*

— Lilya, 24, United States

In this part of her interview, Lilya points to two things that she thinks causes her family's disapproval of Larry: his race and the family's concern for their reputation. If Lilya chooses a dating or marriage partner who is unacceptable (as defined by her intimate circle), then this reflects poorly on her family. They become concerned that others will think that they "can't raise [their] own daughter." For Lilya's family, dating someone who is black is unacceptable. Lilya's choice then reflects badly on her and her family.

Another important point I would like to make about Lilya's story is that early in her interview, she mentions that she grew up poor in the Philippines. She and her family are from Tondo (the same area that D.A.'s boyfriend is from), which is considered to be a very poor and densely populated part of Manila. It was once described to me as worse than any ghetto in America.<sup>32</sup> With that, I wonder if Lilya's family's rejection of Larry has to do with perceived race and class issues. Since they immigrated to the U.S. for better life opportunities, perhaps for them, dating a black man is seen as Lilya degrading their aspirations for her. This is because one's potential partner has social meaning. That social meaning can add or subtract from one's social capital.

Lilya's detailed account of their relationship also addresses the sensitive issue of Filipino-black romantic relationships. It is important to note that Lilya's story is not representative of such relationships, but the issues she brings up are nonetheless important. I point to her story because it shows one of the many contours of inter-racial intimacy that is often overlooked or silenced. Negative stereotypes of racialized people in the U.S. (especially with respect to those of African descent or who are from what Eduardo Bonilla Silva describes as the darker races<sup>33</sup>) have negative consequences in the dating and marriage market. For some intimate circles, dating someone black is seen as bringing shame to the family. Again, Lilya's story illuminates this. I commend Lilya's candor in sharing her story and bringing some very important issues to life.

Other interviewees such as Aniya, a twenty-three year-old chiropractic assistant states that growing up, she is strongly advised against dating someone who is black. She elaborates:

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<sup>32</sup> Many thanks to Oscar Campomanes, Gary Devilles, Ferdie Lopez, Jack Wigley, and Lito Zulueta for their insight, friendship, and company during my stay in the Philippines. In particular, many thanks to Ferdie Lopez for sharing stories about Tondo.

<sup>33</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David R. Dietrich, "The Latinamericanization of U.S. Race Relations: A New Pigmentocracy," in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 41-42. See also: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

*What they [my parents] told me was, "You don't ever want to be with an African American person." Because my dad always thought that they have no future. Like they're just full of, I guess, drama or they just have kids and they end up having the wife work and make the money and they just get to stay at home and just be with the kids and just be a lazy husband. Basically, they're not good for you. You know, they would put down your self-esteem as a woman and take the best out of you where you have kids and they leave you with next to nothing.*

— Aniya, 23, United States

In Aniya's story, we again see how negative stereotypes of black men affect the way in which her intimate circle determines her dating and marriage choices. She is advised against dating black men because members of her intimate circle believe that black men "have no future." Her father describes these men as "lazy" and likely to "leave you with next to nothing." Often times, this advice is not grounded with actual merit. Rather, it is informed by popular stereotypes or a small handful of people that Aniya's father may have encountered.

In her interview, Madonna shares a story about a conversation she has with her mother. The conversation begins with a discussion about Madonna's brother's girlfriend. Madonna shares:

*One day we [my mom and I] were talking about my brother's girlfriend who's Filipino. And I'm like, "I don't really care what she is. She can be white. She can be black. She can be purple, whatever." My mom's like, "What? You know your brother can't bring home a black girl. I don't want him to." And I was like, "What are you talking about? Do you know how racist you sound right now?" ...She was like, "I'm not racist." ....I told her, "You know, you pretend to be open minded. What are your reasons? Why do you think, if he's with a black girl, why would it be an issue for you?" She said, "Well, I've known several black girls and they always have attitude, they always give me crap.... They never work hard." All this other stuff, "they're lazy" and she has all these pre-conceived notions.... My mom's a sixty year-old Filipino lady. So obviously, she's got certain ideas.*

— Madonna, 32, United States

Madonna begins by explaining that for her, it does not matter what racial background her brother's girlfriend is, "She can be White. She can be Black. She can be purple, whatever." However, Madonna is completely thrown off by her mother declaring that her brother, "can't bring home a black girl," because of previous interactions she has had with a small handful of black women. Madonna's story shows that again, in intimate circles, family members have strong opinions about interracial intimacy. In particular, her interview shows that dating someone who is black is highly discouraged and unacceptable in her particular family. Madonna explains that her mother's attitude about her brother (and her for that matter) stems from the people she has encountered and that her mother is set in her ways.

In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, scholar Patricia Hill Collins illustrates the ways in which negative portrayals of U.S. black women justify their oppression. It does this by concentrating on the negative images of black women as overly aggressive or whore-like and creates the idea that these are typical characteristics of all black women. Such stereotypical notions in turn, affect everyday social

relations of black women.<sup>34</sup> We can see Hill-Collins's theory at work in Madonna's story. Madonna's mother is convinced that her son should not bring home a black woman because of such stereotypes. Though her mother also explains that her feelings also stem from personal experience, she still makes such blanket statements based on the interactions with a small handful of people.

Madonna's excerpt also points to an inter-generational conflict between immigrant parents and their children. Madonna makes sense of her mother's stance by explaining that her mother is, "a sixty year-old Filipino lady. So obviously, she's got some ideas." Through this, Madonna states that her mother is set in the way she understands black women. Therefore, Madonna is doubtful that her mother will change her mind. However, Madonna's willingness to see her brother with a partner of any racial or ethnic background illustrates that latter generations of Filipinos or American born Filipinos are more flexible about their own personal dating and marriage preferences. Immigrant parents and their children often have disagreements about dating and marriage preferences. These expectations often come from a lack of understanding and exposure to a diverse set of people. Finally, Madonna's excerpt illuminates that preference in dating and marriage partners within one's intimate circle is not reserved for just women. As in her story, men are also affected by these preferences.

In this next excerpt, Tyler Haro explains how popular media images negatively affect perceptions of black men. These images inform her family's preferred choice of partner for her. Tyler shares:

*There is a preference within the family only because of this stereotype that black African Americans we're talking about, or actually Africans, African heritage for that matter. Yeah. There's just this stereotype that it's like they're criminals.... It doesn't help when they portray themselves that way in music and in films and stuff like that. [I ask if it would be favorable for Tyler to bring home a black partner.] No. It would give my mom a heart attack – but white men too. It's like she, it's a cultural thing. It's like, yeah that [white] would be more preferential over black. But it's not like that's the best. It's not her ideal either, you know?*

— Tyler Haro, 32, Philippines

Tyler acknowledges that in her intimate circle, she is advised against having a black partner. This is because what her family knows of black people is largely informed by media stereotypes that define these men as "criminals." Tyler also points out that black people themselves feed these images and do not challenge them. She candidly notes that images like these are why bringing home a black partner would, "give [her] mom a heart attack." However, Tyler also states that the opposite – bringing home a white partner – would inspire the same reaction. This is because her intimate circle is most concerned with Tyler having a partner who has similar cultural values. This point provides us with another reason why interracial dating is discouraged. It is possible that a person's intimate circle prefers that the dating and marriage partners to be of the same ethnic background because of shared cultural values. Also, in many situations, white men are not considered ideal partners.

*"I didn't date white guys... because I didn't want to be a trophy.": Lighter is not Always Better*

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<sup>34</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp 69-70.



While dating someone who is darker skinned or black is often undesirable, it would be easy to assume that the opposite: that dating someone light skinned or white would be more ideal. However, the opposite is not necessarily true for many people. Balbina, a twenty-nine year-old from the U.S. who works in youth development, explains that she is not interested in dating white men. She shares, “I didn’t date white guys. I think it’s because I didn’t want to be a trophy.... You know, because I think that maybe the ones that did approach me, I thought it wasn’t because of me. It was because of the whole exotic thing. I didn’t want to be part of that.” Balbina is of Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Puerto Rican descent. She explains that because of her mixed heritage, she does not experience the pressure to have a light skinned or white partner. In the above excerpt, she explains that her lack of interest in white men comes from her not wanting “to be a trophy.” For her, white men make her feel exoticized and she does not want that to carry over in her personal relationships.

Along similar lines, Milen shares the same concern about not wanting to have a white partner. She states:

*Where I grew up [San Francisco bay area], during my 20s knowing that there were these certain. I named them. I call them SWMWAFs: Scary White Men With a Fetish – for Asian women? And I would always be on guard for those because you know, they obviously gross me out. And if my husband ever dated anyone who was Asian before, I never would have dated him. Never never never. I just can’t deal with, I don’t know, people - I just couldn’t have psychologically dealt with that.*

— Milen, 40, United States

Balbina and Milen bring up an important issue regarding dating white men. They point out that in their experience, they notice that Filipino and other Asian women are exoticized in particular ways by white men. The way Filipino and Asian women are exoticized influences how they are perceived in personal relationships. This is very similar to how black people are perceived relative to personal relationships. In her work on Asian American gender relations, scholar Yen Le Espiritu addresses the ways in which popular constructs of Asian women as the sneaky Dragon Lady or the submissive Louts Blossom are used to subjugate Asian American women. The images also help dictate how white men perceive Asian women.<sup>35</sup> Such stereotypes, as Espiritu explains, feed into white male fantasies of what Asian women are. Interviewees in the U.S. such as Balbina and Milen express that these popular notions of Asian women have an affect in choosing white men as romantic partners. Both women assert that they prefer to not date white men because they do not want to be treated as objects used to satisfy one’s fetish for Asian women.

Another reason why interviewees may choose to not date or marry a white partner is because, like Tyler Haro shares earlier, they may not have similar cultural values as white people. For example, Billie explains that in the U.S., and as someone from an immigrant family, she has a preference for dating other non-white people. For her, there is a comfort level she has with non-white partners that she does not have with white partners. Billie shares:

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<sup>35</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 86-106.

*Since college started I think I've only dated Filipino guys. But before then I dated Latino guys.... I never dated white and I don't think I will. I think there's a comfort-ability that comes with like, dating folks of color and just, I mean, especially in immigrant communities. And there are certain things that can be talked about but it's already understood. You know, in a sense, whether it's talking about it in intellectual conversation or if it's just something that's just experienced, it's known.*

— Billie, 26, United States

Billie notes that one has to have a comfort level with her partner. This is why she (along with Milen and Balbina) prefers partners who are not white. For her, non-white people have a shared experience, that “there are certain things that can be talked about” and mutually “understood.” In particular, among immigrant communities, the bonds are strong. This is why inter-racial intimacy is not an issue for her.

*“It's better to have lighter babies than darker babies.”: How Children Fare*

In this last section, I will briefly discuss concerns about the future offspring. In the beginning of this chapter, I mention Keith's essay, which points out that black women are encouraged to choose a partner who is lighter skinned so that they can increase their child's chances of having lighter skin.<sup>36</sup> This is especially important if the woman is darker skinned because having a lighter skinned partner will potentially rescue the child from a harsh life. Though the idea seems cruel, it is nonetheless applicable to interviewees in both the Philippines and the U.S. When interviewees are advised by members of their intimate circle to avoid having a partner who is darker skinned or black, these concerns are also tied to what the future offspring are going to look like.

Carmen, a twenty-four year-old library administrator in the Philippines shares a story about a cousin who marries a dark skinned woman:

*The eldest cousin actually, married this girl. She's really really Pinay. And I guess they didn't really like her character but every time the elders would, I don't know, I guess make comments about her, they would always say, “Oh yung negra na yan.” [Oh that black girl.] Or whatever and I guess it was that. And then when the first child was born, they were kind of disappointed because he wasn't tiso<sup>37</sup> [light skinned] like the rest of them. He was like kayumangi, di ba? [brown skinned, right?] He's such a cute kid. I mean, everyone loves him. But at the start since you had like tension with the girl and all that stuff, that was it. But of course, they like being white and having Castilian features and all those things. I mean, it's not that they think they're better than anyone else for it. But I guess according to preferences or whatever they'd prefer to be white skinned than to associate with other people with white skin.*

— Carmen, 24, Philippines

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<sup>36</sup> Keith, “A Colorstruck World,” 25; See also: Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith, “The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self Esteem, and Self Efficacy,” *Gender & Society*, 15, no.3 (2001): 336-357.

<sup>37</sup> Tiso<sup>y</sup> is a mixture of two words: *mestizo* and *Pinoy*, denoting that one is mixed race.

Carmen explains that her cousin's wife is not favored in the family because, "She's really really *Pinay*." This description of her as "*Pinay*" connotes her dark skin and other features that mark her as undeniably Filipino as opposed to members of Carmen's family whom she describes as being very light skinned, with Spanish *mestizo* features. Her cousin's wife is often criticized for her "character" and is referred to as the black girl. This shows, in part, how skin color determines the cousin's wife's placement in the family. Her character seems to be determined more by her skin color as opposed to what she is actually like. The question of her character (or skin color) causes tension within the family. When Carmen's cousin and his wife have a child, the family is disappointed that the child does not inherit his father's family's light features. It seems that the family's disappointment with the dark skinned mother and the child has to do with the intimate beauty queue. The mother's dark skin gives her a low ranking in this family. In turn, when she gives birth to a child who is not light skinned, the family sees the mother as holding the child back because of the features he allegedly inherits from her. Carmen points out that the family loves the child, but that there is initial disappointment because he is dark skinned like his mother.

Anne, a thirty-two year-old grant writer from the U.S. shares a similar sentiment with respect to marriage choices and concern about the children when she states, "This is going to sound so horrible, but it's better to marry a white person than a black person. It's better to have lighter babies than darker babies. You know, like if you can marry someone who also has beautiful light colored skin, then you're going to have beautiful light colored babies." Anne asserts that light skin automatically equates to beauty. Therefore, it is better to have a good looking child than one who is not. She also points out a popular belief that having a child with a lighter skinned partner will automatically make the child lighter skinned. Anne acknowledges the unfairness of her statement, but she asserts that it is nonetheless true. When I ask her to elaborate on why it is important to families that the offspring is lighter skinned, she continues:

*I think it goes back to just what you see as the people who, you know, the haves versus the have-nots? The haves are the ones that are usually lighter skinned. 'Cause if you have lighter skin that means that you're able to afford taking care of yourself. You can afford being out of the sun. You can afford not having to work for a living. Versus if you're darker, it's much harder. And it's obvious that it's harder because you had to work. So I think it's always going to be preferred to be lighter so that kind of seeps into your ideas of beauty.*

— Anne, 32, United States

Anne explains that a lighter skinned partner and lighter skinned child will be granted greater opportunities. In her interview, Anne begins by explaining that skin color determines one's class standing, the lighter skinned being the "haves" and the darker skinned being the "have-nots." Marrying a lighter skinned partner and giving a child the opportunity to have lighter skin is a way for a parent to grant opportunities for their children. In short, skin color determines social vale. This is why she asserts, "it's better to have lighter babies than darker babies." Parents will see this as being in the better interest of the child.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For a more elaborate discussion, see chapter 2. See also: Ronald E. Hall, *Filipina Eurogamy: Skin Color as a Vehicle of Psychological Colonization* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001); Lavina Melwani, "The White Complex: What's behind the Indian prejudice for fair skin?" *Little India*, August 18, 2007, <http://www.littleindia.com/news/134/ARTICLE/1828/2007-08-18.html>.

This chapter has dealt with the sensitive issue of skin color and how it functions in intimate circles, such as among one's friends and family. One concept I introduce is the intimate beauty queue. I argue that within intimate circles, there is a system that ranks people based on what that particular intimate circle values as beautiful or attractive. We have heard the voices of different Filipino women in the Philippines and the U.S. sharing stories about how they are affected by beauty standards within their intimate circles. Regardless of whether a person is ranked high or low in the queue, these rankings often affect personal relationships such as causing tension between siblings or feeling like one is liked or disliked in the family because one's beauty does not measure up. Interviewees also share stories about being encouraged to use skin lightening products by members of their intimate circle in order to be more attractive. Though such advice is well meaning, it again, leaves many women feeling like they are not valued in their intimate circles.

The second part of the chapter addresses the dating and marriage market. Specifically, I explore how one's intimate circles affect or do not affect one's dating and marriage choices, and how these choices are related to skin color and ideas of beauty. How intimate circles perceive potential dating and marriage partners often affect how interviewees choose these partners. When members of one's intimate circle express concern about a potential dating or marriage partner, these concerns revolve around issues of class: Is the potential partner of the same class or can the potential partner elevate the class of the woman in question? Another issue that surfaces is the question of potential children. What will the potential children look like and how will the skin color (and other physical features) of that child reflect the presumed class standing of the child? Often times, concerns about class are conflated with skin color and perceptions of beauty. Throughout the chapter, I argue that beauty acts as social capital – the more beautiful a person is considered to be, the more social capital she has. The amount of social capital a person has is a reflection of who she is and at times, the family she comes from. Because this social capital is a reflection of her intimate circle, people in the circle often feel invested in increasing the woman's capital. This is why one's physical features, choice of partner in the dating or marriage market, and how a person's child will look like are all matters that are taken up within the intimate circle. Though this research focuses on women, I believe that similar issues exist with men. However, I do not think that it is as far reaching for men as it is for women.

Finally, though it seems that even within intimate circles standardized notions of skin color and beauty bind people, there are exemplary examples of how these women refute the norm. With that, I am reminded of Lilya and her bravery in defending her relationship with her now husband Larry. There is also the example of Madonna, who acknowledges that though her mother has a very narrow idea of what an ideal partner is for her children, Madonna points out that for her and others in her generation, ideas of skin color and beauty are changing.

## Chapter 5: Global Beauty and Selling Lighter Skin

A 2008 Philippine advertisement for Oil of Olay's White Radiance Intensive Whitening Cream reads, "Love the skin you're in." The advertisement features a close-up of an Asian model's light brown eyes, almost paper-white face, flawless skin and light pink lips.<sup>1</sup> A 2003 report states that over two million units of skin lightening soap are sold annually in the Philippines. Less than a year later, a survey about skin lightening usage conducted by research firm Synovate reveals that among its respondents in the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines reported the highest rate of usage with fifty percent of the respondents stating that they currently use a skin-lightening product.<sup>2</sup> In June 2005 the *L.A. Times* runs a major article addressing skin lightening usage among Asian women in the U.S. It states that skin lightening products make approximately ten million dollars in domestic sales per year.<sup>3</sup> A 2006 survey reports that nine out of ten Asian women in the U.S. are likely to invest in skin care products.<sup>4</sup> Such ethnic-specific markets have grown nineteen percent between 2001-2006. By the end of 2008, this market is expected to gross approximately \$2.6 billion and by 2012 and is expected to reach \$3.3 billion.<sup>5</sup>

There are various reasons why Filipino women are encouraged to use skin lightening products. These reasons range from emulating celebrities in popular media, wanting to feel good about oneself, or pressure (from the media or one's family) to be more physically attractive. In an autobiographical essay, Charmaine Tuason, a second-generation Filipina in her early 20s explains: "A friend of my mother's called me a 'dark beauty.' I was so offended. 'Dark' was a loaded word and she pulled the trigger.... The word *dark* and *beauty* just did not go together. Dark cancelled beauty out. Dark meant you were lower class, ugly and unimportant."<sup>6</sup> This common perception of dark skin as an indicator of lower social class and racial inferiority among Filipino communities speaks to histories of Spanish and U.S. colonization of the Philippines, class assumptions about skin color, gender expectations, and product consumption. Given the images presented in the cosmetics advertisements, the reports of skin lightening usage and sales projections in the Philippines and the U.S., skin lightening is a growing business on both sides of the Pacific. Tuason's story gives us insight to the value of skin color and how these values affect Filipino women.

In this chapter, I argue that this hierarchy among Filipino women is inspired by media representations of beauty, which emphasize the desirability of light skin. I do this by examining the ways in which beauty has become increasingly globalized, especially through the image of

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<sup>1</sup> The Philippine advertisement is from *Cosmopolitan Philippines*, February 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Margie Quimpo-Espino, "Can her face launch P1B worth of sales?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 27, 2003; Linda Collard, "Asian Women in Pursuit of White Skin." Press release, June 16, 2004. [http://www.marketfacts.com/en/news/press\\_details.php?id=53](http://www.marketfacts.com/en/news/press_details.php?id=53) (accessed December 15, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Euromonitor, a market research firm reported the sales figures. Jia-Rui Chong, "Beauty and the Bleach," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 2005, sec. A. The article notes that these are sales figures for the U.S. and do not necessarily speak to the racial or ethnic background of the clients who purchase these products.

<sup>4</sup> Nine out of ten was the highest rate out of any ethnic group surveyed. ---, "Ethnicity and its Impact on the Beauty Industry: The NPD Group's Latest Report Finds Hispanic Women Favor Makeup, Asian Women Gravitate to Skincare Products and African American Women Fancy Fragrance and Bath Products," *NPD Press Release*, January 22, 2007, [http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press\\_070122.html](http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_070122.html) (accessed August 26, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Staff Reporter, "Johnson and Johnson Targets Diversifying Ethnic Market," April 1, 2008, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Products-Markets/Johnson-and-Johnson-targets-diversifying-ethnic-market> (accessed August 26, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Joanne L. Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher's, Inc., 2007) 27.

the mixed race body in cosmetics advertising. I am interested in exploring the extent to which perceptions of light skin change or are maintained across national borders and how communications media contribute to the spread of ideas favoring light skin and the usage of skin lightening products. With the advent of the internet, the ease of travel between the Philippines and the U.S., the growing Filipino immigrant population in the U.S., and the accessibility of Philippine television in the U.S. such as The Filipino Channel (TFC), ideas of beauty and skin color in the Philippines do have an effect on U.S. born Filipinos. Specifically, I look at the idea of global beauty and how this seemingly new, inclusive standard of beauty is carried through the light skinned, mixed race body. By weaving interviews, observations from my field research, and current studies on marketing and mixed race people, this chapter will illustrate how skin color hierarchy operates in popular media in the Philippines and the U.S.

In addition, I explore how skin lightening products in the Philippines and anti-aging products in the U.S. are marketed and sold, and what these advertisements say about skin color and beauty. I specifically chose advertisements from the Philippines because skin-lightening there is an age-old practice that is rooted in the multiple layers of colonialism the archipelago has had to endure: from Spanish and American colonialism, to the rise of the Chinese and Spanish *mestizo* middle class. Additionally, it is influenced by its proximity to countries such as China, Japan, and Korea and the various media from these countries that is brought into the Philippines such as TV and film. Finally, this chapter will look at how women respond to skin lightening usage. In particular, we will look at how the interviewees in this study resist popular notions of lighter skin as superior to darker skin.

It is important to note that using skin lighteners in the Philippines is not simply a move towards whiteness or Euro-American-ness.<sup>7</sup> It is also related to looking East Asian.<sup>8</sup> While the standard of beauty in the Philippines (as seen in these advertisements) is more East Asian-inspired, it is a very specific kind of beauty consisting of extremely pale skin, straight jet-black hair, large, double-lidded, almond-shaped eyes and a sharp nose. The standard of beauty that we see here illustrates the valorization of East Asian beauty — but how that beauty is defined is still influenced by European standards. Also, though skin lightening advertisements in the Philippines and anti-aging advertisements in the U.S. employ different marketing strategies, the messages they convey are still the same in that they both equate youth to light skin and light skin as superior to dark skin. Examining these layers is vital because doing so illuminates the issue of colorism beyond black and white terms. It does so by highlighting how it functions within the Filipino community, in relation to the broader Asian and Asian American community.

### **Defining Global Beauty**

The notion of global beauty can point to a number of things. Most commonly, it is often used in reference to international beauty pageants. These pageants weave together women from different parts of the world in hopes of finding contestants whose physical features are distinctive to the community she is from, yet embody an inclusive sense of beauty. For example, a Miss China contestant must have features that mark her as distinctively Chinese such as almond-

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<sup>7</sup>Depending on the terms that interviewees use, I tend to use Whiteness and Europeanness interchangeably. Simply put, these terms refer to people of European or Euro-American descent.

<sup>8</sup>Throughout my work, I use the term East Asian to refer to those from East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc). However, interviewees were often more specific in using the term Chinese or China as a point of reference. At times, these terms will be used interchangeably because my terminology is different from the interviewees.

shaped eyes and dark silky hair. However, her features must also be neutral enough to be universally appealing. Thus, she should have a symmetrical face, a thin body, smooth skin, etc.<sup>9</sup> The term global beauty is also used by various cosmetics companies as a marketing strategy to help convince potential clients to use their products or shop at their stores because they emphasize that their companies know no boundaries and their products are suitable for people from all walks of life.<sup>10</sup> Often included on their websites and advertising are images of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Though these women are distinctively ethnic, their features are, again, universally appealing.<sup>11</sup>

The November 10, 2003 issue of *Newsweek* magazine features a cover story about shifting global standards of beauty. In it, authors Fred Guterl and Michael Hastings declare that Saira Mohan, a Punjabi-French-Irish-Canadian model is the “new global face of beauty.” Part of the reason why she fits this title is because she is “just Asian enough to suit Western sensibilities, while retaining some ambiguity.” In the same article, fashion photographer Atul Kasekbar declares, “She's [Mohan] one of those beautiful women who can easily be Italian, British or Spanish.” He adds, “And she can very well be an Indian in a sari.” Mohan explains how being mixed race is advantageous to her career: “I capitalize on all the angles. I am what I am, and if they want to pay me for being Punjabi, great. If they want to pay me for looking Spanish or Italian, wonderful.” The authors are quick to note that another appealing thing about Mohan is that she is a natural beauty and has not dabbled in plastic surgery.<sup>12</sup>

Each explanation of global beauty focuses on ethnic people (usually women, though it also includes men) who have features that are not typical of their respective ethnic backgrounds (e.g. an African woman with light skin, straight hair, and a sharp nose). Such features are often European features. Given these examples, I further define global beauty as having three specific attributes. First, global beauty refers to a particular aesthetic that is racially ambiguous. Global beauty is when a person is (or looks) ethnic, but possesses physical features that are European or have European appeal. Aesthetically, global beauty emphasizes a generic sameness, not difference or diversity in beauty. Scholar Bonnie Berry, author of *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power*, explains how the globalization of popular media has homogenized beauty standards across cultures. Berry asserts:

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<sup>9</sup> Global Beauties. Home. <http://www.globalbeauties.com/about.htm> (accessed on July 28, 2009); See also Neville Hoad, "World Piece: What the Miss World Pageant Can Teach about Globalization," *Cultural Critique*, No. 58 (Autumn 2004): 56-81; Bonnie Berry, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power*, (Westport: Praeger, 2007); Bonnie Berry, *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008); Sarah Banet-Wiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Please see the following websites: <http://globalbeauty.net/>; <http://globalbeautyinc.com/>; <http://globalbeautyandhealth.com/index.html>; <http://www.global-beauty.net/>; <http://www.globalbeautycollection.com/>; <http://www.globalgoddessbeauty.com/>; <http://www.globalbeautyworld.com/>; <http://www.globalbeautyconcepts.com/default.htm>; <http://www.globalbeauty.co.nz/>; Accessed on July 28, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> I acknowledge that the term “universally appealing” is a tricky one. Often times, it really means “appealing to whites.” Here, it is perhaps more appropriate to state that though the images of these women are distinctively ethnic, their features are acceptable according to Euro-American standards.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Guterl and Michael Hastings, "The Global Makeover: How we are remaking ourselves and in the process creating a new global standard of beauty," *Newsweek*, November 10, 2003, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/60488>.

Northern European standards of attractiveness apply across all societies, including African and Asian ones, such that tall, slender, white, blonde, light-eyed, and flowing-haired features are the standards against which we are all judged. These features are represented on billboards and by department store mannequins all around the world.<sup>13</sup>

Berry explains that beauty standards shift depending on time and cultural contexts. She points out that by and large, “Northern European” standards of beauty (e.g. light skin, light hair, and sharp features) are acceptable in all parts of the world. In relating this to Saira Mohan, she is described as being a “global beauty” because she is an ethnic woman whose beauty “suits Western sensibilities.”<sup>14</sup> That her European features appease Westerners is what makes Mohan “global.” This is why scholar Margaret Hunter succinctly describes global beauty as, “white beauty repackaged.”<sup>15</sup> Hunter illustrates this point in her assessment of Mohan as the new global beauty because of her ability to “easily be Italian, British, or Spanish” as well as “an Indian in a sari.”<sup>16</sup> Hunter articulates:

The paradox of purporting “global” beauty to a woman who could be mistaken as “European, European, or European” seems an obvious contradiction. But this is the paradoxical discourse of the new beauty regime. It is simultaneously inclusive, multicultural, and new, while remaining exclusive, Eurocentric and old... This means that beauty, and thus capital, is still elusive for many women of color as it continues to be defined by primarily Anglo bodies and faces.<sup>17</sup>

Hunter emphasizes that beauty for ethnic women is defined by Euro-American standards. Global beauty does not affirm the unique qualities of ethnic features or ethnic women. Rather, it celebrates racial ambiguity because it is not threatening to Euro-American sensibilities. Though there are moments when certain elements of ethnic beauty are celebrated (such as an Asian woman’s almond-shaped eyes, or the rich skin tone of an African woman), the parameters of *what* is beautiful and *how* beautiful it is still relies on the Euro-American archetype. Therefore, Mohan’s beauty is not attributed to her distinguishing ethnic features. Instead, her beauty is described as “global” because she is an ethnic woman whose features are generically European.

Second, global beauty is also a representation of a changing world – one that is less Eurocentric and more accepting of diversity. This is why racial ambiguity is a key part of understanding what global beauty is. When international beauty pageants and cosmetics companies tout the idea of global beauty, their intention is to present an inclusive idea of beauty that speaks to people across boundaries (be it racial, ethnic, or national). This is also why people who are described as global beauties are often mixed race. Scholar Kimberly DaCosta quotes a casting agent who explains that images of mixed race people, “[conjure] up an immediate sense of both globalization and technology. The blended look says ‘we’re all in this together’ and that ‘the world is getting smaller.’”<sup>18</sup> With respect to marketing and selling products, global beauty

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<sup>13</sup> Berry, *Beauty Bias*, 2007, 3.

<sup>14</sup> This is why the Newsweek article describes Mohan as being “Asian enough to suit Western sensibilities.”

<sup>15</sup> Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone*, (New York: Routledge, 2005) 57. See also: Zed Nelson, *Love Me*, (Roma: Contrasto, 2009) and Hannah Beech, “Eurasian Invasion,” *Time*, Apr. 16, 2001, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,106427,00.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Fred Guterl and Michael Hastings, “Global Makeover.”

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, *Race and Gender*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Kimberly DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 166.



implies that in matters of attractiveness, the world is moving forward and race no longer matters because beauty belongs to everybody.

Though this sounds ideal, I emphasize Hunter's argument: that global beauty is a contradiction. The third point I would like to make about global beauty is that while it intends to embrace diversity, it instead re-enforces racial hierarchy by highlighting that beauty is global as long as it appeals Euro-American sensibilities. Scholar Bonnie Berry, in her book *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance* writes about the globalization of beauty:

Globalization has forced an homogenized sameness in beauty standards, such that we find Iranian women in large numbers getting Anglicized noses, and Asian women undergoing eyelid surgery to gain a more "open" and "American" look to their eyes. We are becoming more alike in terms of skin color, with the advent of skin lightening. Most Asian women avoid exposure to the sun and use skin lightening agents to further lighten their skin. Due to global marketing, the social desirability of white or lighter skin is being promulgated throughout more and poorer countries.<sup>19</sup>

Berry's point illustrates how globalization affects beauty standards. She says that it has "forced" sameness in women's beauty expectations around the world. Also, these women respond, in part, by succumbing to these standards through physical alteration procedures. Finally, Berry emphasizes that these homogenized notions of beauty are being promoted in poorer countries (perhaps as a way to give these women these illusion of upward mobility). Even in non-European countries, European beauty is celebrated as it is inscribed on the bodies of ethnic women across the globe.

### **Global Beauty and the Mixed Race Body**

*"She was this Filipino girl that didn't look Filipino.": New Faces, Old Standards*

While conducting field research in the Philippines, I met Tyler Haro, a model, actress, and television host. She was in the midst of promoting a new reality series, which was an offshoot of a popular U.S. television show. Tyler and I talked extensively about her work in the Philippine entertainment industry. Tyler is thirty-two years old with light skin, light brown hair, sharp features and green eyes. She identifies herself as Filipino and Eurasian and explains that both of her parents are Filipino, but her eye color and her features are from a British ancestor.<sup>20</sup> During her interview, Tyler explains why Filipinos are so marketable as models and actresses.

*There's so many different faces. I mean, the Philippines is the only country in Asia that you're going to find all of the faces of Asia in one country. You know? There's no such thing as it's just one look anymore. It's becoming such a fusion and such a global Asian thing. And you see it more so here in the Philippines. We're so mixed already. We have the Spanish. We have the Filipino. We have the Malay.*

— Tyler Haro, 32, Philippines

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<sup>19</sup> Berry, *Power of Looks*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> I also interviewed Tyler's sister Rae. I found it interesting that Rae identified as only Filipino, but acknowledged that she did have a mixed heritage as well. I wondered if Tyler specifically described herself as Filipino and Eurasian because she had been questioned about her identity so much.

Tyler emphasizes that Filipinos embody such a diverse array of looks and describes this diversity as “global.” She explains that the success of Filipinos in the entertainment industry is largely because Filipinos are “so mixed already,” and that their ambiguity embodies a variation of looks that is appealing to a wide range of people.

I also had the honor of interviewing Rae Haro, Tyler’s younger sister who also works in the Philippine entertainment industry as a fashion stylist. She often styles her sister’s photo shoots and runs a local youth lifestyle magazine with another one of their siblings. When I asked Rae to explain her sister’s appeal in the industry, she states, “She [Tyler] was this Filipino girl that didn’t look Filipino.” Rae affirms the parameters of global beauty – that one possesses global beauty because she is an ethnic person who has European features. Like Saira Mohan, Tyler’s look is flexible. She can be Filipino, Asian, or European depending on what the job calls for. Audiences in the Philippines relate to Tyler because of her ethnic identity. Tyler is identified (and identifies herself) as Filipino. She speaks *Tagalog*. She comes from a well-known local family. Locally, when her image is used to promote her newest television show (or whatever advertising campaign she happens to be in), audiences relate to her because Tyler is one of them. From a marketing standpoint, these factors make Tyler relatable and in turn, marketable. At the same time, Tyler’s light skin, green eyes, and sharp features make her racially ambiguous. Therefore, non-Filipinos also find her desirable. This allows Tyler to reach a larger market – one that is not limited to the Filipino community or to the Philippines. Yanto Zainal, president of Macs909, an advertisement agency in Jakarta has a similar explanation when talking about mixed raced models in Indonesia: “Indos (mixed-race Indonesians) have an international look but can still be accepted as Indonesian.”<sup>21</sup> Global beauty is created to challenge European notions of beauty and include women who are non-European or have darker features. However, it still highlights difference by emphasizing that ethnic women are attractive as long as they possess features that are acceptable to western sensibilities such as round eyes, smooth skin, and silky hair. It is no wonder that most people who are deemed global beauties (e.g. Halle Berry, Beyonce Knowles, and the majority of popular actresses in the Philippines such as Bea Alonzo, Claudine Barretto, and Miriam Rivera) are considered beautiful. It is because they are ethnic women whose features are again, appealing to Euro-American sensibilities. Tyler notes that her unique features helps get her jobs in the entertainment industry, “I get booked for work. It helps my work. I look different to them [advertisers]. And the fact that I am Eurasian with green eyes, or mixed Filipino with green eyes, it’s different. And to them, that’s beautiful.” Tyler notes that being identified as Eurasian with green eyes puts her at an advantage because that is what casting agents are looking for.<sup>22</sup>

*“You notice that the people they get for advertisements on TV, they’re all fair-skinned, mostly. Rarely do they use dark skin.”: The Mix Makes the Difference*

In the summer of 2007, I was hired by a local Filipino television company to work at a Filipino festival in San Francisco as a make-up artist to their celebrity line-up. One of the women I worked on was Irene, a contestant on an American Idol-inspired reality television show in the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> Irene is mixed race<sup>24</sup> and originally from the San Francisco bay area.<sup>25</sup> Irene tells

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<sup>21</sup> Beech, “Eurasian Invasion.”

<sup>22</sup> Tyler did note that there are situations where her look backfires on her. She shared a story where she was auditioning for a popular Hollywood film that was set in the Philippines during WWII. The casting director told Tyler that she would not get the role because she did not look “Filipino enough.”

<sup>23</sup> This is a pseudonym to preserve her anonymity. Irene was a singing contestant on the Philippine reality TV show.

me that she has been living in the Philippines for almost a year. When her show wrapped up taping, she stayed to pursue a singing career because the opportunities are greater for her overseas than it is in the U.S. Irene's story is not unique. A good number of popular celebrities in the Philippines are mixed race Filipinos from the U.S., Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. They travel to the Philippines to capitalize on the opportunities that are not readily available in their home countries.<sup>26</sup>

In her interview, D.A., who works as a yoga/dance instructor, jokingly refers to this practice when she talks about her Filipino/Irish American grandchildren.

*Like the kids of my daughter. Because her husband is Irish American. They're very mestizo. The long nose. I told my daughter, "I'm going to bring your daughter to the Philippines. I'll make money out of her. I'll be her agent!" [laughing] The moment they [casting agents] see mestizas come to the Philippines, oh! Grab them for ads! Grab them for ads! Regardless of ads – ads for tampax, ads for toothpaste, toothbrush, for your chocolates, and milk. Oh my God! You notice that the people they get for advertisements on TV, they're all fair-skinned, mostly. Rarely do they use dark skin. Or if they are dark, maybe they lighten them up.*

— D.A., 63, United States

D.A. explains that her granddaughter's look is extremely marketable in the Philippines because she is light skinned. At the same time, D.A. points out that not all mixed race people are equally sought out for advertisements. In fact, darker skinned people (even if they are mixed race) are not nearly as desirable in Philippine media. Robin, a mall studio photographer, explains:

*You don't see dark people in the media. If you do see them, they're the jokes. They're the butt of the jokes. You see the negra girl. Unfortunately, I'm not really good with Philippine cinema. Otherwise I'd give you names. But you know, they're always the people who are laughed at. They're always the butt of the jokes. And it's ridiculous. And you realize the only thing that makes them funny, the only reason that makes them a joke is that they're darker skinned. So they're automatically the butt of the joke. And the girls who are pretty, you know the vida girls, the heroines, they're the paler ones.... And you notice our beauty queens or beauty pageants, they're all populated by really really fair people. It's ridiculous. When I look at them, I wouldn't even think that she was Filipino. If I show this picture to someone who wasn't Filipino, I couldn't say this person's Filipino. Because that's not how we look like. But that's the perception that you have in the*

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<sup>24</sup> Irene's mother is Filipino and her father is white American.

<sup>25</sup> Coincidentally, she and Tyler Haro are hauntingly similar in appearance.

<sup>26</sup> Some examples are Sam Milby, who was born and raised in Ohio. <http://www.sammilby.org/> accessed August 13, 2009; Maui Taylor was born and raised in England, <http://www.mauitaylor.org/> accessed August 13, 2009; Gerald Anderson was born in the Philippines and raised in Texas, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald\\_Anderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Anderson) accessed on August 13, 2009; Derek Ramsey was born in England and moved back and forth between England and the Philippines, <http://www.mostbeautifulman.com/actors/DerekRamsey/bio.shtml> accessed August 13, 2009. See also: Rafe Bartholomew, *Pacific Rims: Beermen Ballin' in Flip-Flops and the Philippines' Unlikely Love Affair With Basketball*, (New York: New American Library, 2010) especially chapter 9.

*media. This is what we're supposed to look like. And this is what's considered beautiful.*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

Robin asserts that darker skinned people in popular media are rare. When one does see a darker skinned person on a television show or film, that character is often used as comic relief. She also asserts Rae Haro's point when Robin states that what makes these light skinned performers in the media desirable is that "when [Robin] looks at them, [she] wouldn't think that [the actress] was Filipino." The difference is that the actress can claim a Filipino (or Asian) identity while being desirable to non-Filipinos or non-Asians. When I ask interviewees in the Philippines if there are any popular actors or actresses who are dark skinned, or who have African ancestry, the same person is always referenced – model and television host Wilma Doesnt. In 2007, Doesnt was on the panel of judges for Philippines' Next Top Model.<sup>27</sup> Shirley, a twenty-seven year-old freelance writer/editor echoes Robin's point when she states:

*On TV shows, mixed race European, they usually get prime roles. For the latter, dark person, they are usually given comedic roles.... Wilma Doesnt is really successful as a fashion model. Even in the show she has, she really does, I don't know, it's probably her personality as well. But she's less serious. But yeah, her role is sort of the lighter host, you know? ....Aside from Wilma Doesnt, I don't think anybody, anyone of that [African-Filipino] mix has been more successful, have been really successful.*

— Shirley, 27, Philippines

Shirley's interview shows that darker skinned performers are used as comedy, while lighter skinned performers are given "prime" or "serious" roles. In particular, Shirley points out that mixed race African-Filipino performers are rare in popular media. This is largely due to skin color. With respect to darker skinned men, interviewees often mentioned actors such as Richard Gomez, Jericho Rosales, and Derek Ramsey. Though these men are darker skinned (relative to most mainstream Philippine performers), they are often described as handsome and do take on leading roles. Their characters were not reduced to the comedic roles. This is largely due to them being men.<sup>28</sup>

Some interviewees express that darker skinned men are more acceptable (as leading men in popular media as well as marriage/dating partners) because they are seen as masculine. Ella, a court secretary, explains that for her, she feels that men who are too light skinned are too effeminate, which is why she chose to marry her husband, who is darker skinned:

*Oo, strong personality, dark siya attracted ako sa mga dark when it comes to men kasi pag mga mapuputi parang nababaklaan ako,.. Oo ganun. [Yes, he has a strong personality, he's dark. I'm attracted to dark men because I find men to be effeminate if they're white.]*

— Ella, 61, Philippines

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<sup>27</sup> Jocelyn Dimaculangan, "Philippines' Next Top Model" Premieres on March 13," *Philippine Entertainment Portal*, March 8, 2007, <http://www.pep.ph/guide/tv/378/philippines39-next-top-model-premieres-on-march-13> (accessed on July 28, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> For a more elaborate discussion on gender and skin color, please refer to chapter 4.

Similar dynamics translate to popular media, where it is okay for men to be darker because it highlights their masculinity. However, there is a range of skin tone acceptability. If a man (or woman) were *too* dark, it would not be acceptable.<sup>29</sup> Flor a sixty-nine year-old OBGYN from the Philippines contrasts Ella's point by claiming that some darker skinned men understand that they may not be considered attractive because of their skin color. She explains: "Darker men and [presumably] ugly men usually don't intend or don't come close to you and invite you or they keep distance here in the Philippines." This is perhaps their skin color marks their class status. Flor adds that these men, "would judge that woman who is with good stature or is pretty" and will likely incline himself to just be "friends" with her as opposed to becoming a potential romantic partner.<sup>30</sup>

*"It's more of that Asian white skin look that's happening now. It's very very in."*: The East Asian<sup>31</sup> Aesthetic as the Other White Beauty

During my field research in Manila, I observed that light skinned, usually mixed race models and entertainers are the standard on television, in film, and plastered on magazine covers and billboards. Tyler Haro explains why mixed race Asian/Europeans (or Eurasians) are so marketable:

*The Eurasian look generally in Asia works well. We're talking my industry, like fashion and beauty and stuff? It's the Eurasians that get booked a lot. And there's not that many Eurasians with green eyes like me and my sister.... It just looks different from the majority of the population. And for what it is, a brand, when they hire a model, the model has to be able to attract people to the brand. And the only way to do that is if you hire a model that looks different. The only way to do that is if you hire a model that doesn't look like everyone else. You know what I mean? They look different.*

— Tyler Haro, 32, Philippines

Tyler explains that Eurasians are popular in Asia because their features are "different from the majority of the population." From a marketing perspective, if a brand wants to set itself apart from its competition, it is best that the model "attract people to the brand." This is why the model or spokesperson should look "different." It is that difference that makes the model or spokesperson marketable.

*Time* magazine writer Hannah Beech explores the idea of Eurasians as "a global progeny of an increasingly global world" in her article, "Eurasian Invasion." Beech explores the phenomenon of mixed race Asians as the new faces of Asian marketing. In Bangkok, sixty percent of the entertainment industry are mixed race. Chinese-Dutch-American actor/producer Declan Wong states, "When I think of Asia, I don't necessarily think of people who look like

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<sup>29</sup> For a more elaborate discussion, please refer to chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>30</sup> For a more elaborate discussion, please see chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> I completely recognize that Chinese and East Asian have different meanings. However, I am trying to stay true to the terminology the interviewees used. With respect to East Asian beauty, China was often used as the main point of reference. This is why I am specifically referencing China and the Chinese (though sometimes it is extended to Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, etc.) The only exception that comes to mind is Natalie's interview where she specifically talks about Korean actors and soap operas.

me....But somehow we've become the new face that sells the new Asia."<sup>32</sup> It seems that Eurasians are chosen because marketers and casting agents believe that Eurasians are relatable to the masses. Scholar Kimberly DaCosta, whose research examines mixed race people in advertising, emphasizes this point when she writes, "marketers draw on and reinterpret culturally resonant narratives of the meaning of racial mixedness for the purpose of selling things to a general market."<sup>33</sup> DaCosta notes that marketers capitalize on the various ways that mixed race people can be interpreted by audiences. Marketers then take advantage of the ambiguity of mixed race bodies in the name of selling their products. Beech's article explains that using mixed-race models is common in advertising all over Asia because such models are seen to have global appeal and inspire sales. Widarti Goenawan, publisher of *Femina*, a popular Indonesian women's magazine, explains why Indonesians respond well to mixed race models, "Indonesian women see these girls as exotic, but not exactly threatening.... It is an ideal to which they can aspire."<sup>34</sup> The same dynamics apply to the Philippines. Mixed race people are popular in advertising because they relate to audiences while still adhering to standard (largely westernized) notions of beauty. For example, let us again, consider Tyler Haro and her success as a mixed race model. Women in the Philippines can look at Tyler as and see her as different because she has light skin, sharp features, and green eyes. However, these women are not threatened because Tyler is *kababayan*, a fellow Filipina. Tyler occupies an interesting space because simultaneously, she *is* and *is not* like these women. She poses the possibility of what these women can become. This is especially important if Tyler is a spokesperson for a cosmetics company. Like these women, Tyler is Filipina. Unlike these women, Tyler has Eurocentric features. If these women aspire to be like Tyler, the assumption is that consuming the same products that Tyler does will get them closer to their goal.

With respect to the Philippines, Chinese (or East Asian) features are also considered attractive.<sup>35</sup> This aesthetic is different from the Eurasian look in that conventionally Asian features (long dark hair, almond shaped eyes, glowing white skin, and a clear complexion) are emphasized in the Chinese aesthetic.<sup>36</sup> Lily, a thirty-seven year-old yoga instructor from the Philippines explains, "What's happened lately is if you look at most of the actresses, it's more of that Asian white skin look that's happening now. It's very very in.... Look at China. It's huge now." Along with performers who are mixed race European, those who have a Chinese aesthetic are also highly marketable in the Philippines. The popularity of the Chinese look has to do with the Philippines' proximity to East Asia and the rising power that countries such as China currently have. Also, the influx of media from China, Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong that is being imported to the Philippines has affected notions of beauty.<sup>37</sup>

To help explain the popularity of Asia or Asian features in a place like the Philippines, scholar Kiochi Iwabuchi writes:

Globalization processes, however, have not simply furthered the spread of Americanized 'global mass culture.' They have also promoted the flow of

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<sup>32</sup> Beech, "Eurasian Invasion."

<sup>33</sup> DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Beech, "Eurasian Invasion."

<sup>35</sup> For a more elaborate discussion, please refer to chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> In contrast, European features such as sharper noses, lighter hair and eyes are emphasized in Eurasian beauty. It is important to note that idealized Asian beauty is largely influenced by European standards.

<sup>37</sup> I make the distinction between the Eurasian look and the Chinese aesthetic because in the Philippines, it seems that the Filipino/European or Filipino/Chinese (or Filipino/East Asian) mixes are the most desirable in popular media.

intraregional media and popular culture within East and Southeast Asia. These popular cultural forms are undoubtedly deeply imbricated in U.S. cultural imaginaries, but they dynamically rework meanings of being modern in Asian contexts at the site of production and consumption. In this sense, they are neither ‘Asian’ in any essentialist meaning nor second-rate copies of ‘American originals.’ They are inescapably ‘global’ and ‘Asian’ at the same time, lucidly representing the intertwined composition of global homogenization and heterogenization, and thus they well articulate the juxtaposed sameness and difference among contemporaneous indigenized modernities in East and Southeast Asia.<sup>38</sup>

Iwabuchi points out that both global and regional influences can affect popular media. These influences are global and fraught with regional issues and intricacies. He mentions the role of intraregional media in creating difference and sameness in popular culture. For example, Iwabuchi’s research notes that Asian popular culture has its definite American influences. However, they are re-tooled to suit the sensibilities of Asian audiences. With respect to beauty standards in the Philippines, people who are mixed race Chinese (or East Asian descent) are appealing in the Philippines because they simultaneously appeal to local and global notions of beauty.<sup>39</sup> Ava, a court secretary, explains:

*Chinese are also popular here. Like, the features that the Chinese has, we call it chinita. They have like, small, chinky eyes and fair skin as well. And their hair is good also. They don’t have curly hair. Chinese do not have curly hair, I think, I haven’t seen one yet – unless they have it curled or permed.*

— Ava, 29, Philippines

Here, Ava points out the popularity of the Chinese aesthetic. For Ava, the Chinese have different features than the local population. Their eye shape, skin color, and hair texture are desirable. Another interviewee, Lizzie, works as a program manager for a technology firm in the San Francisco bay area. In the past few years, she has traveled back and forth between the Philippines and the U.S. Lizzie gives us a more elaborate explanation regarding the shifting perceptions of beauty (from European to Chinese) in the Philippines:

*I think it depends on the time period. Because right now, if you go to the Philippines, they’re more into the Chinese light-skin. But when I was growing up it was more of like, American light skin. Like everyone would say, “Find me a Caucasian man,” or whatever, right? So I think it depends on the times.... Because now there’s more of the anti-colonialism, anti-American, right? Although, that’s all over the world, I think. But in the Philippines, people are opening up their eyes more towards other countries. People are understanding that America is not the only land of opportunity. So hence, they’re a little more open towards other places. The Chinese used to not be welcome in the Philippines, and yet they’re very rich in the Philippines. You know, people there are opening up their doors to the Chinese and the different Asian countries’ soap*

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<sup>38</sup> Kiochi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>39</sup> Some well known Filipino-Chinese performers in the Philippines are Heart Evangelista, Kim Chiu, and Dolphy.

*operas on TV. And so, they have Spanish<sup>40</sup> soap operas on TV and what they do is they dub them in Tagalog so that everybody can understand them. And so now people are seeing all these, they're falling in love with the story and hence they're falling in love with the faces and features of these characters, that they're becoming more welcoming to Filipinos. So when they see this Chinese man wooing this Chinese girl, they're starting to like, get involved in the whole soap opera. They're starting to say, "Oh my gosh, he's so cute." Perhaps a couple of years ago they would have been like, "Chinese? No."*

— Lizzie, 34, United States

Lizzie explains that the growing popularity of the Chinese look as opposed to the European (or “American” as she describes it) look is related to the dwindling popularity of the U.S. (as a nation), the rising popularity of China (as a nation – especially with respect to economic growth), and the various media (from China and other parts of Asia such as Hong Kong and Korea) that is being imported to the Philippines. The growing exposure of such media affects what people in the Philippines consider beautiful. During her interview, Natalie, a lawyer, explains how watching Korean soap operas affects what she finds attractive in men:

*Korean actors in general. They're so handsome. Before I was really thinking that only Filipinos are handsome in Asia. But then the Korean wave started coming in. I changed my mind. They're so cute. Generally the actors.... They have cute faces. Boyish faces maybe. They're not really moreno. But not as mestizo also.*

— Natalie, 39, Philippines

Natalie illustrates that being exposed to media from different countries slowly changes what people find attractive. Her interview also shows that the East Asian aesthetic that translates well to people in the Philippines. As Natalie asserts, these actors are not really *moreno* and not quite *mestizo*. Like the mixed race body, East Asian entertainers are seen as ambiguously attractive in the Philippines.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this is because they occupy a middle space just like mixed race performers. This is possibly why Filipinos who are part Chinese (and to a smaller extent, those who are part Japanese or Korean) fare so well in Philippine media.

### **Selling Lighter Skin: Advertisements in the Philippines and the U.S.**

In the Philippines, it is quite common to see major advertisements for skin lightening products. Usually, these advertisements will feature Asian women with glowing white skin, jet-black hair and delicate almond-shaped obsidian eyes. The messages in these ads are clear: it is okay to be Asian as long as you are the *right* kind of Asian. This means that you must be light, have big eyes, and a thin body. It seems that these are the requirements for entertainers in Asia and, to some extent, people who sell such products.<sup>42</sup> As with advertising in the U.S., advertisements in the Philippines convey the message that people there are simply one product

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<sup>40</sup> I think Lizzie means to reference *Chinese* soap operas here.

<sup>41</sup> I recognize that the East Asians we are referring to are those who are in popular media. Those who are in popular media are not necessarily an adequate example of what an everyday Chinese, Japanese, or Korean person may look like. It is, however, important to note that features such as the light skin, silky hair, and almond eyes are desirable and this is markedly different from European features.

<sup>42</sup> Lilynda Agvateesiri, “Untitled” (Student Paper, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2003).



(or a series of products) away from perfection. To help us understand the allure of skin lightening products, this section will examine a few skin lightening advertisements from the Philippines and the U.S. We will compare the way such beauty products are marketed in both countries. In addition, we will incorporate interviews conducted with cosmetics professionals to highlight the points made about skin lightening advertisements.<sup>43</sup>

As previously mentioned, advertisers use mixed race people to sell products because they are relatable to the masses. To emphasize this point further, I will examine the Philippine advertisement for L’Oreal’s *UV Perfect* (See Figure 5.1). It is a two-page spread featuring a Chinese-Portuguese movie star from Hong Kong, Michele Reis. The left side of the advertisement features her covering a part of her face, as if she is blocking something. The right side of the advertisement shows a photo of the actual product (the product is about a quarter of the size of Reis’s face on the opposite page) and the text reads as follows:

Technological breakthrough in UV Protection: For the first time in a daily care regimen, the ultra powerful association of Mexoryl SX + XL against harmful UVA and UVB to prevent skin darkening. Activa cell to stimulate skin’s natural repairing process. Maximum pleasure: Ultra-light and quickly absorbent UV Perfect creates an unnoticeable screen on your skin leaving it soft, smooth and matte. Dermo-Expertise. From research to beauty. Because you’re worth it.

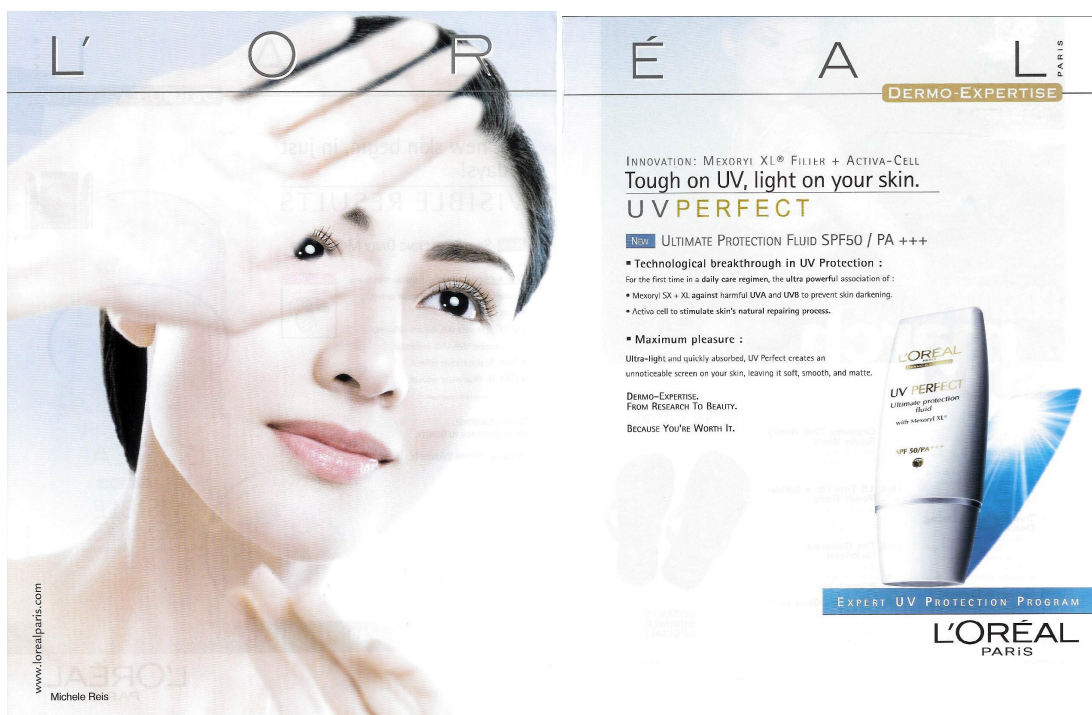


Figure 5.1: Advertisement for L’Oreal’s UV Perfect

This ad primarily focuses on the actress’s face and less on the product. Reis’s look is racially ambiguous. To advertisers, she is white (with some exotic features). To audiences in the Philippines, she is Asian (with some European features). This allows the L’Oreal advertisers to believe that they are embracing a new kind of beauty, one that is not Eurocentric and allows

<sup>43</sup> I conducted five interviews with cosmetics professionals. Four of them were from the U.S. and one was from the Philippines.

women in the Philippines to relate to her Asian face and at the same time aspire to her measure of whiteness. Her face or her beauty represents a relatable ideal. Reis is beautiful enough to be marketable, yet relatable so that the everyday woman in the Philippines can identify with and hope to be like her.

Although advertisers try to position Reis as a relatable ideal, they simultaneously reveal a power dynamic that is prevalent in the Philippines: light skin is indeed a marker of higher class, but that light skin is not necessarily limited to European or American definitions. Light skin because one is (partly) Chinese (or East Asian) is also a marker of higher class. This dynamic can also explain why many public figures (entertainers, politicians, etc.) in the Philippines tend to be light-skinned and look like they are of part Chinese or European ancestry.<sup>44</sup> In Reis, advertisers present the best of both worlds because she is European and Asian. The allure of Reese is similar to the allure of Tyler Haro. Audiences can relate to these women because they see these women as one of them. At the same time, these women are remarkably different because their features are more acceptable to Euro-American standards of beauty. This is what makes Reis represent difference.

In examining cosmetics advertisements in the Philippines, the spokeswomen are always light-skinned. Dark-skinned women are rarely used. By using light skinned, mixed race women in cosmetics advertising, the implicit message is that *only* light skinned people are beautiful. Those who are *not* light skinned should aspire to be as such. Mixed race models function to illustrate that possibility because they are relatable in ways that European models are not. Scholar Judith Williamson, whose research examines the intersections between gender and colonization explains, “Our culture, deeply rooted in imperialism, needs to destroy genuine difference, to capture what is beyond its reach.”<sup>45</sup> Reis’s face does exactly this for the L’Oreal ad because, since she is Asian, it is assumed that women in the Philippines can relate to her features. Reis symbolizes the ideal that women should strive for by investing in these beauty products. When they invest in these products, consumers are in turn, investing in the idea of what they fantasize they might become – regardless of the actual *result* of the products. Perhaps the mere practice (as opposed to the actual result) is satisfactory to these customers.<sup>46</sup>

The way a skincare product is marketed in the Philippines and the U.S. also differs because it caters to what consumers are most concerned with. In the U.S., anti-aging seems to be the primary concern for consumers. This is largely because U.S. advertising speaks to the needs and concerns of white women. In the Philippines, it seems that skin color is the primary concern for consumers, which is why so much advertising focuses on skin lightening products. For example, the Philippine ad for L’Oreal’s UV Perfect is a sunscreen. As a sunscreen, the UV Perfect ad focuses on correcting and repairing bad skin by stating that the product will help consumers avoid “skin darkening.” In contrast, we will examine a U.S. based ad for UV Plus by Clarins, a French company. The Clarins ad is a one-page ad that features just the product and text with no spokesmodel. The Clarins ad claims that the product leaves the skin “strongly protected against UVA and UVB infrared rays, skin’s youthful appearance is preserved.” The Clarins ad focuses on protection and maintaining youth. It positions environmental stress such as harmful

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<sup>44</sup> Similar dynamics work in Cambodia where a relatively dark-skinned local population has mixed to some degree with lighter-skinned Chinese, Vietnamese, or French, with a hierarchy of light over dark also being formed. For a more elaborate discussion, please refer to chapter 2. See also: Rondilla and Spickard, *Is Lighter Better?*, especially chapter 3.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Williamson, “Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization,” in *Studies in Entertainment*, edited by Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 101.

<sup>46</sup> A more elaborate discussion will follow later in this chapter.

sunrays and one's desire to look young as reasons why one should use sunscreen. In contrast, the sunscreen advertisement in the Philippines presents skin darkening as the problem that needs to be fixed. These themes are extremely different and fraught with racial implications as to why consumers in the Philippines should use such products. The UV Perfect ad implies that for consumers in the Philippines, aging is not their problem; skin cancer is not their problem; their skin color is their problem. By using UV Perfect, these consumers can literally perfect, repair, and correct their skin. Though the products are similar in function, the way they are marketed are completely different. This is because advertisers try to cater to what they believe are specific consumer demands. David Gosling, president and managing director of Avon India Beauty Products states, "Fairness creams are trendy throughout the Asia-Pacific. People here basically want lighter skin. Culturally, fair skin is associated with positive values that relate to class, lifestyle and beauty."<sup>47</sup> With that, cosmetics companies cater their marketing to answer such perceived cultural values.



Figure 5.2: Advertisement for Clarins UV Plus

These strategies are also employed when naming a product. Oftentimes, the exact same product found in the U.S. will have a different name in the overseas Asian market. For example, it is common to find that a sunscreen in the U.S. is sold as a skin lightener in Asia. Olive, a

<sup>47</sup> Miriam Jordan, "Creams for a Lighter Skin Capture the Asian Market; Especially in India Fair Color as a Cultural Virtue" *International Herald Tribune* (April 24, 1998).

skincare specialist for Lancome, a popular cosmetics company, shares a story about a customer shopping for a skin lightener:

*Our markets in China, for example, would have skin lightening products. But the U.S. market did not. We only had specific products like spot lightening. So the spot lightening but not the actual skin lightening. Although, we have a product here... but it's basically an SPF product – SPF 30. And we call it Bienfait Multi-Vitale. And one of our clients came and brought hers and it was the same product except it was called Skin Lightening, which I thought was interesting. Both Lancome, virtually the same product....<sup>48</sup> So the wording was different just to accommodate their concerns, which is interesting.*

— Olive, 32, United States

Olive's story points to the differences in product positioning and marketing strategies. For Olive, a sunscreen is an everyday product. However, when one takes that same product and calls it a skin lightener, it has completely different implications.

#### *“From Ebony to Ivory”*: Transforming Dark Skin

As mentioned earlier, in the Philippines, light skinned models are almost always used in advertising. In the rare occasion that a dark-skinned woman is used in cosmetics advertising, it is usually to illustrate how the said product helps them transform their skin from light to dark. An excellent example of this is the advertisement for GlutaMAX, a skincare line that features skin lightening soaps and pills. GlutaMAX is made by Your Skincare Authority (YSA), a Philippine-based company that offers skin lightening treatments that are administered by medical professionals. In late 2008, GlutaMAX featured actress Jinky Oda, (also known as Jacqui O.). Oda is Filipino and African American. In the advertisement, a “before” photo of a dark skinned, kinky haired, expressionless Oda is shown in the background. The foreground features an “after” image of a much lighter skinned, straight haired, vibrant Oda. The advertisement reads: “From ebony to Ivory. GlutaMAX. Results you can see!”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> I clarified this point with Olive by asking if the consumer's product was bought overseas in Asia. Olive said yes, this was the case.

<sup>49</sup> A version of the advertisement can be found on the GlutaMAX website: <http://www.myglutamax.com/index2.html>; accessed on August 24, 2009. I would like to thank Fritzie De Mata for taking an in-passing photo of this billboard during her stay in the Philippines in December 2008.



Figure 5.3: Advertisement for GlutaMax

By focusing on the “before” and “after” transformation, the ad implies that the products can turn a dark skinned woman into a light skinned beauty. This advertisement is reminiscent of early skin lightening advertisements that were marketed to African American women. Scholar Kathy Peiss writes about skin lightening advertisements targeted to African American women: “By claiming to turn African Americans white or many shades lighter, a number of manufacturers – white and black – in fact reinforced racial bigotry.”<sup>50</sup> The GlutaMAX ad illustrates Peiss’s assertion because the image of Oda transforming her dark skin and kinky hair to light skin and straight hair emphasizes common perceptions of dark skin as an indication of inferiority. Further, the advertisement invites people to engage in the transformation as a way to improve one’s life.

Along similar lines, scholar Noliwe Rooks says this in her analysis of an early advertisement for Black Skin Remover, an early skin lightening product marketed to African American women:

The removal of “black skin” allows forward movement toward civilization, as illustrated by the straight, neatly combed hair. The presence of black skin marks a person as primitive, unclean, and ignorant. After using the product, the image has become a “beauty” as opposed to the “beast” she once was.<sup>51</sup>

A closer reading of the GlutaMAX ad seems to suggest that the product can literally erase the dark and savage out of consumers. As a Filipino, Oda is relatable to potential customers. They see a dark skinned Filipino who transforms her skin color. The transformation tells audiences that if it is possible for Oda, it is possible for them too. The proof is in the photographs.

<sup>50</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 205

<sup>51</sup> Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1996), 27-29.

In her article “Pigmentation and Empire: The Emerging Skin Whitening Industry,” scholar Amina Mire employs an excellent reading about skin lightening advertising:

In many of the advertisements for skin-whitening I come across during my research, a discursive link is made between youthfulness and whiteness and whiteness and racial superiority. Second, in these advertisements, the aging process of white women is often implicitly racialized by the construction of ‘hyperpigmentation,’ ‘age spots,’ ‘dull’ skin tone,’ as signs of “pigmentation pathologies.” Consequently, skin-whitening advertising directed to white women often promises to ‘cleanse,’ ‘purify,’ ‘transform,’ and ‘restore’ white women’s ‘smooth’ and ‘radiant’ youthful white skin. Such advertising tries to expand the skin-whitening market with the covert rhetoric of racializing aesthetics. One recurring theme which runs through most of the promotional ads for skin-whitening posted at Asia registered internet sites is the claim that skin-whitening cosmetics can transform the ‘yellow’ skin tones of Asian women to flawlessly ‘radiant’ white. These advertisements often deploy the visual technique of ‘before’ images of ‘unhappy,’ ‘dark’ faces of ‘Asian-looking’ models and ‘after’ images of smiling ‘whitened’ faces of the same models.<sup>52</sup>

Mire’s work compares how skin lightening products are marketed to white women versus non-white women through language. She argues that cosmetics advertising to white women focuses on maintaining youth, purity, and radiance. In contrast, for Asian women, these products serve to transform (as opposed to maintain) one’s look. The use of “before” and “after” images in cosmetics advertising are highlighted in Mire’s analysis.

Another important point that Mire makes is the connection between youth and whiteness and whiteness and racial superiority. Advertisements in the Philippines and the U.S. reflect these associations. For example, the GlutaMAX advertisement encourages the transformation of Oda from dark to light, or as the ad states, “From ebony to ivory.” It blatantly positions light skin as superior. Though Oda is not born with light skin, she can definitely transform and improve herself by having lighter skin. In the Philippines, class standing is intricately related to skin color.<sup>53</sup> The idea of a darker skinned person being able to transform to a lighter skinned person is so powerful and has contributed to the popularity of the advertisement and the product. In an opinion column, writer Ricardo F. Lo comments on the GlutaMAX advertisement by noting that the advertisement receives a lot of attention for “turning a *negra* (as Jacqui O. herself self-deprecatingly describes herself) into a ‘flawless.’” When asked about using the products, Oda declares, “But my complexion didn’t really turn white.... It has only become lighter. What happened was ‘lightening’ but not ‘whitening.’”<sup>54</sup> Regardless of whether she *lightens* or *whitens*, the final message of the advertisement is that lighter skin is more superior to darker skin. Those with darker skin should engage in the transformation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Amina Mire, “Pigmentation and Empire: The Emerging Skin Whitening Industry,” *Counterpunch*, July 28, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/mire07282005.html>.

<sup>53</sup> For a more elaborate discussion, please refer to chapter 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ricardo F. Lo, “The Lightening of Jacqui O,” *The Philippine Star*, April 06, 2009, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=455678>.

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that the advertisement sparked a number of online discussions such as the one here: <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3163803&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>; accessed August 25, 2009. Though no hard figures were given, representatives from YSA claim that their sales for GlutaMAX have increased in 2008 and 2009. Please see: The Philippine Star, “YSA Reports Higher Sales of

Mire's argument holds true with respect to cosmetics advertising in the U.S. and the Philippines. In the U.S., the advertising does not use words such as "white" to promote skin lightening or anti-aging. Instead, it focuses on key phrases such as "bright," "radiance," and "smoother, more even skin tone." Scholar Kathy Peiss explains that the use of a word such as "bright" implies changing the skin's condition by smoothing out its texture, as well as turning a dark skin into a lighter shade of brown.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, according to the advertisements, Asian women in the U.S. do not "whiten" their skin (to do so would be to insinuate that they were participating in some type of ethnic cleansing ritual). Instead, they "brighten" to improve radiance and prevent aging and hyperpigmentation. Peiss states, "This use of the word bright had a double meaning: By smoothing rough or uneven skin, creams did brighten, in a sense, by improving the reflectivity of light, but among African Americans the term had a distinct connotation, that of light brown skin."<sup>57</sup> Again, while the idea of having radiant and luminous skin is appealing, one must ask, what are the racial implications behind such terms? In truth, to brighten and to whiten are different sides of the same coin. Advertisers have just learned to adapt the jargon to the population they are trying to target.

Although Filipinos do not constitute a large sector of the popular media in the U.S., the beauty pressure for these women is very high, especially within intimate circles.<sup>58</sup> Through independent and ethnic-specific media, there are a growing number of Asian American-specific beauty magazines such as Los Angeles-based *Audrey*. There are large Asian-based cosmetics companies such as Shiseido and Shu Uemura that cater to the specific needs of an Asian clientele. Additionally, smaller, direct sales companies such as Esolis (which is now defunct), DHC, Pola and Noevir tout their products and send their catalogs to Asian and Asian American prospective consumers.<sup>59</sup> Each of the cosmetics companies mentioned above has a line of skin lightening products. These brands claim to target the specific needs of Asian skin. For example, Esolis's primary target market is Asian American women. An introductory letter from the Esolis president Tari E. Reinink explains:

Let's face it, there are clear differences between Asian and Caucasian skin, and it's likely you have been frustrated at finding the right skin care products that work for you... Esolis products address the specific needs of Asian skin including dark spots, uneven skin tone, oiliness, breakouts and skin sensitivities. Our products use clinically proven technologies to illuminate and brighten your skin, repair and protect it from the sun, restore moisture and reverse the signs of aging.<sup>60</sup>

Companies such as Esolis emphasize that Asian skin is different and that popular cosmetics companies do not know how to cater to the specificities of Asian skin (according to the excerpt such problems include hyperpigmentation, uneven skin tone, oiliness, and sensitivity) because they mainly focus on Caucasian skin (who are mostly concerned about aging and wrinkling).

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GlutaMAX Products," *The Philippine Star*, July 06, 2009,  
<http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=484090&publicationSubCategoryId=66>.

<sup>56</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 223.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Please see chapter 4.

<sup>59</sup> Shiseido and Shu Uemura are available in free-standing boutiques or in fine department stores. Esolis, DHC, Pola are all Japan-based direct sales companies whose products are available online, via mail-order catalogs, or through independent sales representatives.

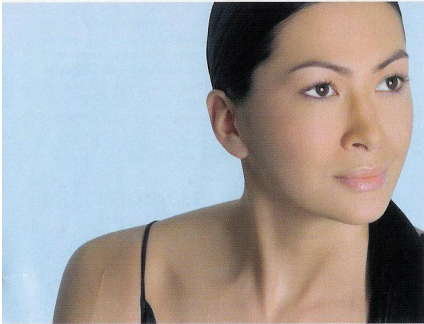
<sup>60</sup> Esolis catalog, March 2003, 2.

Asian women are stereotypically known to have smooth, ageless, light skin. Cosmetics advertising targeting Asian women in the U.S. focuses on this aspect. For example, in the Esolis catalog, the section “For women who are serious about brightening their skin,” features a racially ambiguous model (See Figure 5.4). The model has darker skin in comparison to other models in the catalog. In the photo she seems hopeful and is looking up. She represents the consumers who, as the caption states, are “serious about brightening their skin.” It seems that her dark skin marks her inauthenticity. Hence, if she brightens her skin, she could possibly be “more Asian” than she already is.

UNIQUE BRIGHTENERS SPECIFICALLY FOR ASIAN SKIN.

Hyperpigmentation and related problems like freckles, dark spots and uneven skin tone are caused by exposure to the sun. The sun triggers a chemical reaction within your skin that produces the enzyme tyrosinase, which in turn stimulates the production of melanin, the substance that causes your skin to darken. Esolis scientists have addressed this natural biological process by developing products that brighten your skin's appearance.

Most brightening products available today are either too weak to be effective or not gentle enough for delicate Asian skin. Esolis offers you the perfect balance. Our botanical brighteners incorporate the optimal brightening power available in a non-prescription formulation with a natural blend of cucumber and mulberry extracts that soothes and repairs.



**2, 3, 4 SOL-WHITE BRIGHTENING SYSTEM** A bright, luminous complexion can be yours with regular use of the Sol-White Skin System. Experience the synergistic benefits of **Sol-White Body Bright**, **Nighttime Brightening Essence**, and **Spot Brightener**. Also an excellent gift for anyone who values bright, radiant skin. **\$84.00 FOR ALL 3 PRODUCTS** (REG. \$95.50-A SAVINGS OF OVER 10%) #BR7003

For women who are serious about brightening their skin

Figure 5.4: Excerpt from Esolis catalog

This catalog excerpt emphasizes the uniqueness of Asian skin and the need for products that specialize in such areas. Like the *UV Perfect* ad, the problem posed in the catalog is skin darkening or hyperpigmentation.

Unique Brighteners Specifically for Asian Skin. Hyperpigmentation and related problems like freckles, dark spots, and uneven skin tone are caused by exposure to the sun. The sun triggers a chemical reaction within your skin that produces the enzyme tyrosinase, which in turn stimulates the production of melanin, the substance that causes your skin to darken. Esolis scientists have addressed this natural biological process by developing products that brighten your skin's appearance. Most brightening products available today are either too weak to be effective or not gentle enough for delicate Asian skin. Esolis offers you the perfect balance. Our botanical brighteners incorporate the optimal brightening



power available in a non-prescription formulation with a natural blend of cucumber and mulberry extracts that soothes and repairs.<sup>61</sup>

Both advertisements position darkness as a problem (even though the Esolis catalog recognizes hyperpigmentation as a “natural biological process”). Regardless of whether these products use botanical or scientifically developed ingredients, both see whitening or brightening as the solution to preventing darkness. Hyperpigmentation is simply a pseudoscientific euphemism for the skin getting darker, particularly through sun exposure.

The Esolis catalog emphasizes the uniqueness of Asian skin and the need for products that specialize in such areas. The text is deceptive, because it uses less pseudo-scientific jargon (in comparison to the UV Perfect ad from the Philippines) in order to emphasize the unique and delicate nature of Asian skin. It seems that the Esolis catalog positions science as an inadequate means to address the delicate nature of Asian skin, because to treat Asian skin, one must employ methods that are naturally and spiritually sound. Although this may seem reasonable to some, what this does is reiterate stereotypical Orientalist thinking, which sees Asian women as delicate lotus blossoms and situates Asian culture as meditative, at one with the earth, and uses ancient medicinal practices. With that, the Esolis catalog positions darkness as a problem. It also positions brightening (or whitening) products as the solution to preventing darkness. Whether these products contain botanical or scientifically developed ingredients, using them is a justifiable solution to a process that occurs naturally in the body.

*“I don’t believe in whitening products.”: Voices of Dissent*

Skin lightening products are incredibly popular in the Philippines. In fact, Tyler Haro states, “You’re not a beauty company unless you have a skin lightening something here.” The popularity of skin lightening products in the Philippines is like anti-aging products in the U.S. (and the marketing of cosmetics products speaks to such interests). However, there are a small handful of companies who refuse to sell and market their products as skin lighteners – even if they know there is a chance it will hurt their sales. During my field research, I interviewed Admiral Pie, an entrepreneur who launched her own organic skincare line. Admiral Pie’s cosmetics line is small and is available in a boutique in Makati and online. She says that she has a loyal following and is constantly working on new formulations for her skin care and body care products. She developed her line after working with an organic skincare company in southern California. Her interview is refreshing because she has a genuine concern for women’s skincare needs. Admiral Pie understands how not having skin lightening products (or not marketing her products as skin lightening) could potentially hurt her business. However, she makes it clear that that is not her main concern. She is very passionate about organic skin care and even more passionate about emphasizing that she does not sell skin lighteners. Admiral Pie explains:

*I wanted to put out products I personally use and that I can believe in. I don’t believe in whitening products. So I made sure that I don’t market it as, “Oh it’s whitening!” Because I don’t want to make false claims. So I didn’t include anything whitening and whatever. And I didn’t want to use synthetic chemicals that wasn’t extensively studied.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

She explains that growing up, she had a lot of skin issues such as eczema and acne. She also worked for Mary Kay cosmetics for three years. These are some of the things that inspired Admiral Pie to launch an organic cosmetics line. When asked if consumers request skin lightening products and how they respond to her company not making or marketing skin lightening products, she states that the requests are quite common:

*Yes. A lot. Almost everyday. “Is this whitening?” No. “Do you have whitening products?” No. “Why don’t you come out with whiteners?” It’s not in my line. I just tell them it’s not in my line of expertise. But you know, one extract that I do use is the bearberry extract. It’s a raw form of arbutin and arbutin is kind of used in whitening. But I don’t market it that way because I don’t think it whitens a lot. It just has a little whitening.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

She is very definite in making sure that her line will not be associated as a skin lightening line. In fact, in her interview, she mentions that she has absolutely no desire to incorporate skin lightening products. When I ask why, Admiral Pie states that her main concern with skin lightening is safety:

*Is it safe? Because we live in a really hot country where the sun is. If they’re going to do whitening you have to be religious in applying sunblock. And not just that, they have to stay indoors most of the time. What if their occupation requires them to be outdoors? Sunblock, although a lot of Filipinos now use sunblock, they don’t know that you have to reapply when you sweat or after you sweat. They don’t know. They just apply it once and that’s it. So I know a lot of girls who do whitening with retinol and hydroquinone and they get melasma. And it’s because they just apply the sunblock once a day. But they sweat and they go out in the sun and whatever. So I think it’s dangerous. And I think it just increases your risk for skin cancer.*

— Admiral Pie, 29, Philippines

For Admiral Pie, safety – not sales or marketing – is what is most important to running her business. She also points out that consumers need to be aware of what using a skin lightener entails by emphasizing that they “have to be religious in applying sunblock.” If not, there could be an unfavorable aftermath, such as developing “melasma,” which is additional skin discoloration. Admiral Pie also mentions the increased risk of skin cancer if sunblock is not used regularly.

In a recent survey about the popularity of skin lightening products in Asia, forty-one percent of respondents who reportedly use such products state that they have noticed little or no difference in their skin as a result.<sup>62</sup> Despite this, consumers continue to invest in the idea of having lighter skin. Some consumers may claim that skin whitening products do work, and that they are worth the money they invest in them. For these people, they indulge in obtaining the type of beauty they have always desired. Scholar Deborah Root notes that, “Consumption is power, and the ability to consume excessively and willfully becomes the most desirable aspect of

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<sup>62</sup> Collard, “Asian Women.”

power.”<sup>63</sup> Along similar lines, scholar Judith Williamson states that capitalism creates the idea that everything (including one’s social position) can be bought and exchanged.<sup>64</sup> The power of consumption is something to consider because possessing light skin alone does not symbolize power. That one can buy light skin and even be excessive about the buying is another symbol of power. I mention this because we cannot assume that only dark-skinned people use skin lighteners – especially when these products are advertised so widely – to the point where light skin becomes a common desire for *everybody*. Peiss explains,

Beauty may have been considered the birthright of only wealthy or fortunate women in the nineteenth century, but cosmetics advertising sold the idea that an attractive appearance was an accomplishment all could easily achieve. Mail-order and tabloid-style ads promised cheap, instant beauty to working women unable to afford the time and money leisured women spent on beauty culture.<sup>65</sup>

Even if one is not born into money, one could appear to be of a higher social standing by simply looking the part. While this may not actually change one’s social standing, it allows the working class to feel as if they have escaped their social station (even if it is only temporary). Lizzie explains how accessible skin lightening treatments are in the Philippines. She notes that one can get such treatments at high-end clinics as well as local grocery stores:

*If you can afford it and if you want to do it, go ahead. But it’s painful. In the Philippines they are definitely popular. In the Philippines – I mean, no one needs to get like, thousands and thousands of pesos to do it because you can buy a lightening cream. The cream itself you could buy in the grocery stores. There’s a whole isle of them. So it’s definitely very popular in the Philippines. And the companies make it affordable. If you want something more extensive, definitely if you have the money, you can go to what they call a dermatologist or a derma clinic. They have them in the malls. So if for example you want to get your face cleaned up or whatever, go to the derma clinic in the mall. And they’ll do whatever it is you ask them to do. And they have a menu.... Its’ very common and there are competitive franchises. There’s DermaClinic, there’s a Face something. There’s Forever Flawless that’s being sponsored by artists such as Judy Ann Santos. So those are more of like the masses of the Derma Clinics. And then of course, if you had a lot of money, then you go to like Vicki Belo’s medical center.*  
— Lizzie, 34, United States

Lizzie explains that skin lighteners are extremely accessible to everyone from every walk of life. However, she does caution that such processes are “painful” yet “popular.” Skin lightening processes and products can be found “in the grocery store.” Consumers can also opt for more elaborate processes at dermatology offices or “derma clinic[s].” These products are available to fit into every budget.

However, it would be unfair to assume that all Filipino women want to have light skin. Granted, the social and economic benefits are plentiful. Interviewees express how popular skin lightening treatments are. They also express having used or wanting to use skin lightening

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<sup>63</sup> Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>64</sup> Williamson, “Woman is an Island,” 116.

<sup>65</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 146.

products. Lynda, a thirty-two year-old project coordinator for a women's organization in the Philippines shares her experience when she tried using a skin lightener: "Well I'm not interested in the skin whitening. I just want to use it [a skin lightener] for my scars. So I used it for a while, until I thought it was such a hassle to do that, to do the mixing thing. It takes so much effort... Later on [I realized], I have more important things to think about. Why would I even bother with it?" Here, Lynda states that her experience with using a skin lightener is not related to actually changing the color of her skin. Rather, her interest is in diminishing scarring. After a while, she decides it is simply not for her, as she sees the process as an inconvenient hassle.

In addition, there are interviewees who have a critical take on why they choose to not use skin lighteners. Christine, a twenty-seven year-old union organizer from the U.S. shares:

*It's just crazy. I have my own very biased views on makeup and people feeling they have to like, look a certain way. But on top of that have to lighten the shade or color that they are. I mean, I've seen some of the most beautiful people in the world who have very deep brown skin. And I think it's kind of sad that they feel like they need to be lighter. But it's also like this really weird reality that we live in. Regardless of if we're in the United States or somewhere else, that there is a color hierarchy in terms of privilege and what people have and don't have and the opportunities that they're afforded are based on the way that they look. So in some ways, people who don't have other means to move up, I don't blame them. But at the same time I think it's messed up that that exists.*

— Christine, 27, United States

In this excerpt, Christine acknowledges that there is beauty bias, but she states that such bias should not take away from a person's *actual* beauty. Regardless of what standards dictate, she declares: "some of the most beautiful people in the world who have very deep brown skin." In addition, Christine points out that beauty and privilege are related. This is why she understands but is also critical of the need for some people to engage in certain beauty processes.

Like Admiral Pie, another concern about skin lightening revolves around the health and safety in using such products. Shirley, a twenty-seven year-old freelance writer and lead singer in a local band in the Philippines expresses concerns over skin lightening treatments because some of the popular products that are currently advertised have to be taken in pill form.<sup>66</sup> Shirley elaborates:

*I think Filipinos should just stay the way they were born. I don't like the whitening, skin whitening phenomenon. It scares me how now it's not just applied. It's ingested, you know? Like they have Metathione<sup>67</sup> and stuff like that. I am scared at how many commercials there are about that. How it's more, I mean, the technology is better so people are going after it more. I don't think it has helped us accept what we were born with. I just want people to stay natural.*

— Shirley, 27, Philippines

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<sup>66</sup> While in the Philippines, I noticed a plethora of skin lightening pills touting glutathione as a major ingredient. In the U.S., glutathione is sold as a high-level antioxidant.

<sup>67</sup> Metathione is a popular skin lightening tablet that was advertised heavily during my Philippine trip. Notably, local star Jake Cuenca was a major spokesperson for this product. Their advertisements touted the catch phrase, "GetMet."

Shirley acknowledges that skincare “technology is better,” as a way to appease her concern for ingested ingredients. However, she points out that the way people understand skin color and equality are the same. She notes that she does not think skincare technology “has helped us accept what we were born with.” In the end, she hopes that people honor their own beauty. This is a feeling that many interviewees both in the Philippines and in the U.S. share.

Arcee, a forty-eight year-old sales manager for a communications company gives a very thoughtful assessment about skin lightening usage among Filipinos by explaining the difference between valuing one’s skin color versus altering one’s skin:

*I don’t know why anyone would want to lighten their skin artificially, you know? It’s not too healthy. I don’t know so much about the side effects of that. But I’m sure anything you put artificially on your body has always a side effect. So for someone to do that, it makes me wonder if that person – you know you’ve heard of comfortable in their own skin. That makes me wonder if they are, to make your skin lighter. Cleaning your face. Maintaining what you have is a different story. But doing something artificial to me? Maintaining what you have is just preserving what’s given to you. It’s just taking care of your own – it’s a gift that was given to you. Taking care of that means you’re valuing what you have.... Artificially taking a pill or rubbing lotion whatever it is to make it change, to make it not natural, is something else. To me, it indicates that you’re not really happy with what you have.*

— Arcee, 48, United States

Similar to Admiral Pie and Shirley, Arcee begins by talking about safety concerns. As she goes on, Arcee states that she does not understand why one would lighten her skin because there are potential side effects. She then explains that if one is content with her skin, then she is “valuing what [she has].” In contrast, if one makes the conscious decision to change her skin, then it shows that she is “not really happy” with what she has. It is this dissatisfaction with oneself that Arcee feels needs to be confronted. Along similar lines, Starshine, a thirty-five year-old administrative assistant at a local university states, “Filipino women should realize that real beauty is someone who knows how to carry themselves with confidence.” For Starshine, beauty is defined by a person’s posturing as opposed to her physical appearance.

Finally, Robin, a twenty-five year-old photographer shares a more woman-centered view on beauty perceptions in the Philippines:

*I just feel bad we’re supposedly a country of intelligent women. Because if there is any place where we can be more equal and where we can have our voices heard, I feel like it’s here in the Philippines more than anywhere else in Asia. And I feel bad that there aren’t enough women taking advantage of that. That you don’t have enough people who are trying to change the way we look at beauty. I thought we were sort of going somewhere with Dove and their campaign for real beauty. But I felt bad that it had to be an advertising strategy. I was like, why isn’t there a movement on our own? Why does it have to be connected to Dove? Why does it have to be connected to some beauty product, you know? And the same time, I thought it was going somewhere. And then it just sort of died out. Like they*

*never really went far with it. I thought like, it didn't really change the way people perceive beauty. So aside from that, I'm also just really confused at how people don't question why do they not find dark people beautiful. 'Cause if you just look at it, most of us are dark skinned. Why aren't we questioning the fact that we only find pale beauty?*

— Robin, 25, Philippines

Robin begins by pointing out the rich history of women's equality in the Philippines and that women should honor and remember that history as a way to "change the way [they] look at beauty".<sup>68</sup> From there, she mentions Dove's campaign for real beauty by pointing out its contradiction. On one hand, Dove, a multinational corporation, takes a bold step by incorporating the diversity of women's beauty in their campaign. Unfortunately, its goal has less to do with a concern for women's beauty and more with "advertising strategy."<sup>69</sup> Finally, Robin poses the question: "Why do [people in the Philippines] not find dark people beautiful?" She believes that women should constantly keep this question in mind. Robin's excellent assessment points out that perceptions of beauty are intricately tied to popular culture and capitalist interest.

Striving for ideal beauty is always a complicated issue because notions of beauty are constantly changing. This is in part to satisfy market needs and demands, and to affirm the powerful. In the past, when Filipinos would strive for ideal beauty, it meant that they wanted more European or Spanish (given Philippine colonial history) features – pointed noses, lighter skin, larger eyes, etc. Today, when these same women strive for ideal beauty, they look to a different set of standards – one that is influenced by the Chinese *mestizo* ruling class in the Philippines, its proximity to East Asia and popular media imagery. This shift in the Chinese aesthetic seems to acknowledge elements of Filipino beauty. However, these seemingly new standards are not new at all. Instead, they are intertwined with East Asian values that have a Westernized underpinning to them. This is what makes skin color complex among global Filipino communities unique. When these women want to embrace dark hair and almond-shaped eyes, they seem to challenge Eurocentric ideals. In taking a closer look, Eurocentric standards are being masked by Hunter's notion of global beauty—that diverse beauty standards are actually repackaged values that reflect current power dynamics.

Again, in her study about mixed race people, scholar Kimberly DaCosta quotes a casting agent who explains that images of mixed race people, "conjures up an immediate sense of both globalization and technology. The blended look says 'we're all in this together' and that 'the world is getting smaller.'"<sup>70</sup> DaCosta's discussion resonates in this chapter – especially with respect to models in these cosmetics advertisements. Though advertising and popular culture at large seem to move towards greater diversity by casting more entertainers of color, these entertainers are only appealing as long as they remain racially ambiguous. Advertisers do this as a way to try to erase racial and color lines. However, these global faces do the opposite by pointing to difference as opposed to universality. Rebecca King-O'Riain states, "The mixed-race

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<sup>68</sup> For example, the Philippines has had two female presidents: Corazon Aquino (1986-1992) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010). Aquino was Asia's first female president. For more information, please see: Luis Francia, *From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> For more information, please see the website for Dove's campaign for real beauty: <http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx>. See also: *America the Beautiful: Is America Obsessed with Beauty?*, collector's ed., directed by Darryl Roberts (2009; USA: Sensory Overload Productions) DVD.

<sup>70</sup> DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*, 166.

body then does not destroy race, but leads to a repoliticization and problematization of race.”<sup>71</sup> Finally, while skin lightening advertisements attempt to cater to specific markets, the messages, and products are all the same. Though the world may be changing, notions of skin color remain constant.

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<sup>71</sup> Rebecca King-O’Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 22.

## Chapter 6: Epilogue

This project, “Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.,” aims to understand how history, notions of beauty, material culture, and Filipino women’s experiences are connected. We begin by establishing the parameters of skin color hierarchy and illustrating the ways it extends previous research on colorism. In particular, this project moves beyond the black-white binary and contextualizes skin color in a transnational context. It tackles some provocative issues such as examining how the mixed race body is used to define an ideal Filipino aesthetic. Interviews with Filipino women across the Pacific shed light on intimate understandings of skin color, class, and familial relationships. In addition, this dissertation incorporates a comprehensive look at advertising for skin lightening products and connects current marketing strategies to rhetoric used to colonize the Philippines and position Filipinos as uncivilized. Finally, the project focuses on the many ways that women respond and resist imposed beauty standards.

While this project was a huge undertaking, there are many issues surrounding the subject matter that still need to be developed. From the work I did here, there are several projects that I hope to engage with in the future. First, extending this conversation to include men’s voices and issues of sexuality are of particular interest. With the Philippine advertisements for GlutaMax and the increasing marketing of beauty products to men (especially homosexual men), I am compelled to examine in further depth, the various intersections that skin color hierarchy crosses. Also, my current work and conversations with local artists Dorothy Santos and Aimee Suzara has inspired me to investigate how homosexual women are impacted by beauty expectations.

Second, the medical tourist industry in the Philippines deserves some scholarly attention. At the tail end of my research trip in 2008, TriNoma mall in Quezon City was in its final stages of development. Part of that development includes a medical wing – an area of the mall dedicated exclusively to medical and spa procedures including skin lightening, facials, and liposuction. In short, the medical wing serves as a one-stop shopping area for beautification and body alteration. Also, transnational media outlets such as The Filipino Channel (TFC) and Greater Manila Area (GMA) consistently run advertisements or special segments for affordable beauty treatments such as plastic surgery to entice Filipinos in the diaspora to come home and indulge in procedures that they would not be able to afford otherwise. I have conducted some initial research on this topic in *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* and look forward to picking up this project again.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the major project I would like to pursue is exploring perceptions of fat and how it pertains to Filipino/American communities. This interest is in part, inspired by several participants who pointed this out during their interviews. Anne, a thirty-two year-old grant writer from the U.S. states, “I just feel like as a Filipino woman, especially here in the states, my skin tone is secondary to my size. It doesn’t matter if I have lighter, beautiful skin. If I’m fat, I’m fat and I’m always going to be ugly.” She and several participants made similar points. Given the different ways fat is understood in the Philippines and the U.S., I am interested in conducting this transnational conversation.

### *The Final Quest*

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<sup>1</sup> Joanne Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin Tone Discrimination Among Asian Americans* (Latham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007) especially chapter 5.



I have been with this project for many years now. Upon entering gradate school, I received partial funding from my home department.<sup>2</sup> With that, I was going to Berkeley during the week and working at the mall on the weekends. The skincare company I worked for had just launched in Hong Kong and our retinol product sold more in one day in Hong Kong than it did in one month in San Francisco. Our international travelers were buying them by the dozen and before I knew it, the entire company was out of stock. I asked a gentleman who was buying the last of our retinol why he was buying so many pieces. He said that it was the number one skin whitener in Hong Kong. It was all the rage in the magazines. The product is double the cost in Hong Kong, so to find it in the U.S. and bring it back was a total steal. I knew there was something to be said here, but I wasn't sure what it was just yet.

I was also interested in the experiences of women of color who worked in cosmetics. What is it like to have to sell beauty products that cater to a mostly Eurocentric standard of beauty? Is that what the job entailed? How does one negotiate such things? At the time, I was trying to make sense of my own life – my position as a graduate student who worked at the mall on the weekend. I was not just studying race and its socio/political/economic implications. I was living it – studying critical race theory on one hand and then selling beauty products because the studying alone wasn't paying the bills.

Finally, I interviewed my mom for the project. It was her interview that changed the scope of what I wanted to do. Though it was brief, I realized that I had never talked to my mom about her being a beauty queen. I never talked to her about beauty at all. In that brief interview, a part of my life suddenly made sense – especially my skewed notions of beauty in relation to myself. This interview made me realize why beauty was such an overarching issue with me and why it had so much meaning in my everyday life. I realized that all this color-coded anxiety stemmed from my relationship with my mom and the women in my family – especially their notions of beauty and the ways they projected those ideas on to me. Over time, I also understood that they did this because someone else did that to them. And so forth. And so on.

I have been told that my project unmasks what beauty is: what it means, who it hurts, who it affects. They are right. In order for me to unmask what beauty is, it requires that I unmask my own self. It demands that I understand what beauty is to me and why on one hand, I have such a hate-hate relationship with it. On the other hand, I work in the heart of the industry. In cosmetics, it is my job is to make women feel beautiful. In my research, I unveil the value of beauty. Both tasks demand that I dance with the devil and at the end of the journey, hope to have some fascinating insight and resolve. Though the dissertation topic is deeply personal, it is ultimately not about me. It is about all of us: women, men, children, and everything else in between. It is a scholarly piece of work that aims to find the balance between the personal, the painful, and the scholarly.

A short interview with my mom inspired this project. Therefore, it made sense that she would eventually travel to the Philippines with me when I conducted my research there. She did not participate in the project. Instead, she did what a mom always does. She kept me company and made my research trip a lot less lonely. In retrospect, having her there with me was an integral part of the process. Just like that initial interview, my mom's presence while in research mode helped me develop a clearer understanding of the project. Though I accumulated over a hundred pages of field notes, it was the moments and conversations we shared that ultimately grounded me. In the end, I am glad that my mom was there because I could not have been able to

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<sup>2</sup> Okay. I'll admit it. I'm still a bit baffled at being one of two people in the cohort who did not receive the standard three to five year funding package.

handle the trip without her. We had our highs and lows. Even during those painful moments, she and I learned a lot.

One day, my Auntie was visiting my mom and I in Makati. Auntie visits every now and again to check in. During her visits she mentions the resemblance between my cousin Carolina and I. My cousin Carolina is a beautiful Filipino-Spanish-Chinese *mestiza* from the Philippines who grew up in the world of ballet, voice lessons, and equestrian. According to Auntie, Carolina and I have the same smile, so when she sees me, she's reminded of Carolina. I took this as a simple compliment. Unfortunately, my mom had a different reaction. In Tagalog (because she was hoping I don't understand), with a clenched jaw, my mom said, "*Kailangan mo nang itigil ang sinasabi mo kay Joy na kamuka siya ni Carolina. Alam nating pareho na mas maganda si Carolina kaysa kay Joy. Itigil mo na ang pagsisinungaling mo sa kanya.*" Though my Tagalog is weak, I understood her words clearly: "You need to stop telling Joy that she looks like Carolina. You and I know that Carolina is much more beautiful than Joy. So stop lying to her."<sup>3</sup> Even a classed woman like Auntie found my mom's comment inappropriate. I pretended that I did not know what was going on.

When this happened, it reminded me of my last trip to the Philippines in 1983. It was a family reunion on my mom's side and the first time in many years she and her siblings would be in the same country at the same time. In my memory, it was that trip to the Philippines that made me aware of what beauty was. At the age of seven, I knew what it was by realizing that I did not possess it. Because of this, it made me think it was normal for my cousins to constantly mock me to tears and make me feel stupid. It was okay for my aunts and uncles to make inappropriate comments about me to complete strangers. It was okay for family members whom I did not know to give me backhanded compliments about the way I looked.

In my memory, I had no defense. No one stood up for me. I felt alone. What I recall most was taking family photos right before we left the Philippines and returned to Guam. We spent a good portion of the summer at the beach. All of the cousins were at least three shades darker than when the trip began. However, I was the only one whose skin color seemed to be a problem. My family made it very clear to me that my dark skin and plump body were ruining the photos. All I could do was cry inside and believe that what they were telling me was true. At a very young age, I learned that the way I looked made me the outsider in the family. It took me twenty-five years to come back to the Philippines. In 2008 I was reminded of why there was so much anxiety in coming back. The Philippines brought me back to an ugly time in my life. As an adult, I have spent a lot of time developing my own sense of self. As a scholar I understand the allure of beauty. As someone who works in the beauty industry, I understand its false pretenses. After twenty-five years of avoiding the trip, I thought I could come back and fight the demons of my seven-year-old self.

In that moment when my mother reminded me that I do not compare to the perfection of my *mestiza* cousin, it hurt. However, after some serious thought and healing, I now reflect on that moment. That was not my mother exercising bad parenting skills or poor judgment. In that moment, she was not my parent at all. Instead, she was enacting what light skinned, classed people do to the dark skinned and presumably poor. I am sure that somewhere down the line someone did this to my mother and to her, it is the right thing to do. I am sure that there are generations of women who do this and feel this is the right thing to do. Unfortunately, very few question these practices. In no way am I defending this scenario. Instead, I am saying that I understand it and I am learning to let it go.

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<sup>3</sup> Joy is my family nickname.

In the documentary film *Dark Girls*, which focuses on colorism in African American communities, directors D. Channsin Berry and Bill Duke conclude with the hope that women challenge the beauty standards that are placed before them and move towards a process of healing.<sup>4</sup> As I sat in Oakland's historic Paramount Theater mesmerized by this extraordinary film, I realized that the best way to conclude this work is to emphasize the importance of healing. Being a critical scholar whose dissertation focuses on beauty while actually working in the beauty industry can seem like a contradiction of sorts. Ironically, working in the industry has helped me with the healing process. Women come to me with one of her most prized possessions — their faces. It is my job to take care of them, to handle them with care, to make sure they love their faces as much, if not more than they did before they met me. This is how I engage in healing.

I am often asked if working in cosmetics has changed the way I see beauty. My short answer is yes. For me, beauty is less about a look and more about a feeling. I have learned that even the most conventionally pretty woman has something she is self conscious about. I have also learned that the most conventionally pretty people can be hideous on the inside and vice versa. For as cliché as it sounds, there is value to inner beauty because it definitely makes its way to the outer self. At the end of the day, this is what matters. It is hard for many to realize and embrace this because this society and this culture at this time put so much value on the outer presentation. In time, I hope that we can echo the wise words of Lola Ganda, a dentist in the Philippines who is in her sixties when she declares, "I'm content with what I am now — without any alteration."

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<sup>4</sup> *Dark Girls*, directed by D. Channsin Berry and Bill Duke, (2011; viewed at the Paramount Theater, Oakland; October 2011).

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## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

- Aeta*: indigenous people from the mountain provinces of Luzon in the Philippines; in some contexts, the term is a pejorative, as it denotes a Filipino who is dark skinned, and/or kinky haired
- Chinese mestizo*: a mixed race Filipino with Chinese lineage
- chinita*: Chinese features (eyes with an epicanthic fold, pale skin)
- Flores de Mayo*: flowers of May; an annual religious event celebrated in numerous Philippine provinces (depending on the province, this event also celebrates the harvest)
- guapo*: handsome
- Hapon*: Japanese
- hybrid*: mixed race
- indio*: a native Filipino (as used during the Spanish colonial period)
- infieles*: animists, native Filipinos who did not practice Christianity (as used during the Spanish colonial period)
- insulares*: a Spanish person who is born in the Philippines (as used during the Spanish colonial period)
- Intsik*: Chinese
- kababayan*: countryman, fellow Filipino, a person from the same town
- kayumanggi*: brown skinned (often considered more acceptable than someone who is dark skinned or *maiitim*)
- lola*: grandmother
- maganda*: beautiful
- maiitim*: dark skinned (in the hierarchy of dark skin, *maiitim* ranks lower than *kayumanggi* or *moreno/morena* because the latter are considered to be an acceptable color, versus *maiitim* is not considered desirable)
- maputi*: light skinned, white (in complexion)
- mestiza/ mestizo*: mixed race; also refers to one who is light skinned
- moreno/morena*: brown skinned, notes that one's skin is beautiful and smooth; like *kayumanggi*, it has a positive connotation and is ranked above *maiitim*
- negro/negra*: dark skinned; also refers to indigenous people from *Negritos*; in some contexts, this term is a pejorative, as it denotes people who are dark skinned, and/or kinky haired
- peninsulares*: a Spanish-born Spaniard in the Philippines
- provinciana*: from the province or countryside
- Reyna Elena*: pageant queen of the *Flores de Mayo* festivities
- Santa Cruzan*: a pageant that is typically held during the *Flores de Mayo* festivities in numerous Philippine provinces
- Spanish mestizo*: mixed race with Spanish lineage
- Tagalog*: a Philippine language
- tao*: people

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that these are simple definitions of these terms. Deepest gratitude goes to Fritzie De Mata for her help with this and other translations in this work.

### Appendix A: Interview Participants

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Location</b> | <b>Racial/Ethnic Background</b>         |
|------------------|------------|-----------------|---|
| Admiral Pie      | 29         | Philippines     | Filipino**                              |
| Angel Chloie     | 40         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Aniya            | 23         | United States   | Filipino, Chinese.                      |
| Anne             | 32         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Arcee            | 48         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Ava              | 29         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Balbina          | 29         | United States   | Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Puerto Rican |
| Bambi            | 25         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Belle            | 30         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Billie           | 26         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Carmen           | 24         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Christine        | 27         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| D.A.             | 63         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Daisy            | 29         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Diana            | 25         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Duffy            | 37         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Elizabeth        | 24         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Ella             | 61         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Esme             | 26         | United States   | Filipino, White                         |
| Flor             | 69         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Frodo            | 36         | United States   | Japanese*                               |
| Grace            | 45         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Heart            | 23         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Jaja             | 22         | Philippines     | Filipino.                               |
| Jay              | 27         | United States   | Filipino*                               |
| Laura            | 42         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Lilet            | 46         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Lily             | 37         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Lilya            | 24         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Lizzie           | 34         | United States   | Filipino                                |
| Lola Ganda       | 60+        | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Lynda            | 32         | Philippines     | Filipino                                |
| Lynn             | 42         | United States   | Filipino                                |

|            |    |               |                    |
|------------|----|---------------|--------------------|
| Madonna    | 32 | United States | Filipino           |
| Maverick   | 33 | Philippines   | Filipino           |
| Maya       | 42 | United States | Filipino           |
| Milen      | 40 | United States | Filipino           |
| Natalie    | 39 | Philippines   | Filipino           |
| Olive      | 32 | United States | Filipino**         |
| Rae Haro   | 29 | Philippines   | Filipino           |
| Robin      | 25 | Philippines   | Filipino, Algerian |
| Sara       | 44 | United States | Filipino           |
| Sasha      | 44 | United States | Filipino, Spanish  |
| Shirley    | 27 | Philippines   | Filipino           |
| Starshine  | 35 | Philippines   | Filipino           |
| Tyler Haro | 32 | Philippines   | Filipino           |

\* Interviewed as a secondary subject.

\*\* Interviewed as both a primary and secondary subject.

46 Total Interviewees

44 Total Primary Interviewees

4 Total Secondary Interviewees

20 Total Primary Interviewees from the Philippines

24 Total Primary Interviewees from the United States

## Appendix B: Interview Guide – Primary Subjects

Tell me a little bit about yourself. (Name, what was it like growing up in \_\_\_\_? Family? Etc.)

Age:

Occupation:

Born/Raised in (generation):

Ethnic Background (mixed race?):

Growing up, were you expected to look (or groom in) a particular way?

Did you experience any pressure to be pretty? How so?

Among your family and friends, do you think there is a preference for certain kinds of physical features over others? If so, what do you think these features are?

Why do you think such features are preferred? [possible prompts: skin color, nose shape, head shape, eye shape or color, height, weight]

Can you tell me a story about a situation you witnessed when someone showed that kind of preference?

Possible follow-ups: What did other people think of this? Did they agree?

What did you think of this? Do you know why they had that kind of preference?

Can you tell me another story? [get as many as possible]

Do you think there are stereotypes about people who have light complexions? Dark complexions? Can you tell me what those stereotypes might be? Where do you think these stereotypes come from (family, popular media, etc.)

Have you or anyone you know participated in a beauty pageant? Who and what was the experience like?

Please name me some famous celebrities who you think embody beauty.

What are the physical traits that make her/him beautiful?

[For interviewees in the U.S.] Do you think people's opinions about skin color preferences are different if they are immigrants versus those born and raised in the United States? How so?

[For interviewees in the Philippines] Do you think Filipinos in the U.S. have different perceptions of skin color than Filipinos here in the Philippines? What are some of these differences?

[For interviewees in the U.S.] Have you been back to the Philippines? What was your experience like? Were you treated differently because you are from America? What did you notice about their popular culture? Perceptions of beauty there?

[For interviewees in the Philippines] Have you been to the U.S.? What was your experience like? Were you treated differently because you were from the Philippines? What did you notice about their popular culture? Perceptions of beauty there?

Among your family and friends, do you think that there are different beauty standards for women than there are for men? What are some of these differences?

Is the pressure to be beautiful different for women than for men? How so? (Ask for specific examples.)

Do you think this is true among Filipino communities in general or is this just among your personal circle? Please explain.

Among Filipinos, do you think that there is a preference for lighter skin? If so, why is there this preference?

Is it because they want to be White (in the European or American sense)?

Is it a class issue? Or is it something else (and what is this something else)?

Do you think there is a preference for one to be mixed race? If so, what are some of the differences if someone has European ancestry versus non-European ancestry?

Can you recall any sayings or advice that you may have received from friends, family, or your community regarding skin color?

What kind of pressure is there for you (from family, friends, etc.) to date, marry, or be friends with people from a particular background? (For example, are you encouraged to date Filipinos or non-Filipinos? Why or why not?)

Is skin color a factor in these preferences? Why or why not?

In terms of romantic relationships, are there particular physical features (or ethnic backgrounds) you look for in a partner? Please explain what these features are.

What attracts you to certain people more than others?

With respect to dating or romantic relationships, have you ever been in a situation where skin color was a factor? (For example: someone refusing to date you, or you refusing to date him because of skin color; their family members rejecting you, or your family rejecting him because of your skin color; uncomfortable conversations where skin color became an issue.) Please share some stories or examples.

Have you ever been teased or scolded by a friend or family member about your skin color or features? (Please elaborate.)

How do you perceive the color of your own skin (light, medium, dark)? Can you identify any personal experiences that may have influenced your perception?

If you could choose, would you be light, medium, or dark? Why did you choose that skin color? What might have influenced your decision?

Do you have a beauty routine? Please share.

Have you (or someone you know) ever used or considered using any cosmetic treatments that lighten your skin? What influenced you (or this person) to use or consider using this treatment?

What were the names of some of these products and where did you purchase them? What did they cost? Were they expensive? What was your experience with these products? Did they work? Would you/do you continue to use them?

What are your thoughts on skin lightening? Do you find that these products/processes are popular? Why or why not?

[For U.S. interviewees] In the Philippines there seems to be a trend in skin lightening among Filipinos there. What are your thoughts on that? Is there a similar trend here in the U.S.? Please explain why or why not.

Have you ever used or considered using any cosmetic treatments that tan your skin? What influenced you to use or consider using this treatment?

What was your experience with these products? Did they work? Would you/do you continue to use them?

What are your thoughts on tanning?

[For Philippine interviewees] In the U.S., there seems to be a trend in tanning among Filipino Americans. What are your thoughts on that? Is there a similar trend here in the Philippines? Please explain why or why not.

What is beauty to you? How would you define or describe beauty?  
What is classic Filipino beauty to you?

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Do you know of anyone who would be interested in being interviewed?

## Appendix C: Interview Guide – Secondary Subjects

Can you tell me a little about yourself? (e.g. name, age, if you currently work in the cosmetics industry or if you did in the past. How long have you worked in the industry? What companies have you worked for? What is your current job title and what does your job entail?)

What is a skin lightener? What do these products do? What type of ingredients is in skin lightening products?

In your experience in working in cosmetics, is there a large demand for skin lightening products? Is this a recent phenomenon or has this been going on for a while? What are some popular skin-lightening products that you know of?

What types of products are more popular – skin lightening products or anti-aging products? Why is this so? What are some popular anti-aging products that you know of?

Why do you think there is such a demand? (Family pressure? Partner/spousal pressure? Popular culture influences?)

Please describe for me the type of customer who shops for a skin lightener. (Gender, age, ethnic background, class background, etc.)

When a customer shops for a skin lightening product, what is she/he looking for the product to do? What kinds of results is this person seeking?

What is your experience with these products? (In terms of usage, sales, etc.) Do you think these products work? (If they don't work, do you find that customers continue to look for such products? Why do you think that is?)

Occasionally, there will be negative news reports about skin lightening products being dangerous to one's health or being available illegally. What are your thoughts on this? Do you find that cosmetics companies are trying to create safer products?

In your job, is there pressure to look a particular way? What kinds of pressure do you face? How do you manage such demands?

Do you think beauty can be empowering to women (and/or) men? If so, how?

There are perceptions of people who work in the beauty industry as vain or out of touch with beauty pressure. What are some things you would like people to know about your job?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Do you know of anyone who would like to be interviewed for this project?