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Colorism's Impact On Dark-Skinned African-American Women's Self-image, Case Study: Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" (1970) and Sharon Flake's "The Skin I'm in" (1998)

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family and to my Friends, be it those I know in real life or my online friends who supported, encouraged, and believed in my potential and ability to achieve everything I've done so far.

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I thank Allah The Most Merciful. His Highness kept me strong and gave me the strength to finish my studies despite the hardships I was going through. He is my protector and The one I rely on.

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Abstract

Colorism is a global phenomenon. It is the discriminatory favor of light skin over dark skin. This academic work focuses on Colorism in the African American community. Specifically African American women. This dissertation explores colorism's impact on dark skinned African-Americans self-image. This research aims to try to prove how dark skinned African American women's exposure to colorism has caused them to have a negative image of themselves. An analytic study will be done in order to try to prove the latter statement through the novels; "The Bluest Eye" (1970) by Toni Morrison and "The Skin I'm in" (1998) by Sharon G. Flake.

Keywords: Colorism, African-American, Impact, community, Self-image, Dark-skinned, women.

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General Introduction

Since physical features are what first meets the eyes, they are often the most distinguishable traits about a person. A person's skin color is one of these features. Prior to racial categorization. Nations were less concerned with someone's skin tone and simply more aware of human physical differences in regards to color. The western world or the occident has played an immense role on increasing people's fixation on color. Historically. Europe's colonial history created the myth of white western superiority in contrast to the East or the orient, whom they consider "The other", those who are inferior to them. It allowed the creation of the term "people of color" of anything that is other than "white". The idea of white being the antithesis of black bloomed. However. Superiority or inferiority was but a simple excuse to maintain power for Europeans, it was never about skin tone. Often, when the term POC arises. People of African descent are included. African-Americans, are the descendants of ancestors that were kidnapped from their own homes and forced as slaves for white people. Their long journey of fighting for their rights and for their existence have yet to end. The Black Lives Matter protests are proof of that. The oppression persists. From the times of slavery till modern day issues like police brutality.

Living in a dominantly white society does not make matters easy for neither light or dark skinned African-Americans in all fields of life. However, in a dominantly white America. Color matters. Colorism is favoritism shown for a person with lighter skin tone over darker skin tone. The intermingling of white masters and black slaves gave birth to generations of light skinned black people that were and are still given privilege for their proximity to whiteness, for possessing Eurocentric features. These features represent the beauty myth that mostly praises whiteness and rarely includes diversity in skin tone. As result of the latter, dark-skinned black people therefore, not only, suffer more discrimination from other racial groups but from their own brethren. Although colorism impacts both men and women alike, women have been proved to be more affected by colorism (Fears,1998) due to beauty being more affiliated with women than men. Dark-skinned women especially struggle the most as colorism impacts the way they perceive themselves. In order to grasp how colorism impacted and still impacts dark skinned women's self-image, one must get to know the roots of this phenomenon, what is race? What is the basis of colorism? How did it come to be?

The first chapter will provide a definition of race, racism and an in depth definition of colorism and how racism and internalized racism are what created colorism.

The second chapter will dive into an exploration of the self, the image, self-image both physical and psychological and colorism's impact on the self-image of dark skinned African American women.

Literature is the mirror of society. It is a written record of issues, situations and subjects that are taking place in the community, world, or even inside an individuals' mind. Through the writings of authors, a clear perception of what really goes on in society, and life in general, is given. The issue of colorism is global, it doesn't solely apply to black people. However this academic work focuses on African-Americans exposure to colorism. Specifically women and the way it impacts their self-image. In chapter 3 and 4 works of literature such as "The Bluest Eye" (1970) by Toni Morrison and "The Skin I'm in" (1998) by Sharon G. Flake will be used as a way to try to prove that Colorism is present in the African American community and has indeed impacted dark skinned African-American women and most importantly their self-image.

Time context is one of the factors why I, specifically, chose Morrison and Flake's literary works. Morrison's craft takes place in the 1940s. The 40s was the era where segregation was slowly coming to an end. Racism during these times was at its peak and African Americans were fighting for their rights. White Eurocentric beauty standards were also advertised more than ever. Moreover, "The Bluest Eye" tackles the issue of intraracial colorism through Maureen Johnson and Pecola's black classmates. However, it also sheds light on internalized racism, which is the leading cause of colorism to begin with. "The skin I'm in" focuses more on intraracial colorism because the story takes places in an era (1990s) where racism decreased to a certain amount contrary to the 1940s, the 1990s was an era were women of color were starting to be more included in beauty, film and other type industries. However, that inclusivity was solely for black people that were light-skinned. Moreover, "The Skin I'm in" by Sharon G. Flake has a positive ending meanwhile the Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison has a negative tragic ending. Such dissimilarities causes each book to tackle and show colorism in different ways and presents us with two outcomes of being exposed to colorism. The manner these novels handle the topic of colorism serve as a confirmation of how colorism is revealed in various ways in society and how it can impact dark skinned African Americans women's self-image.

Chapter One:

Race, racism and Colorism

Chapter I : Race, racism and Colorism

I-Introduction

The only race that truly exists is the "Human race". The modern socially constructed term "race" and related words such as the word "racism" are words that have been utilized for a long time by generations. Such terms are yet to be fully eliminated and are still used till this day. Historically, African-Americans, have been exposed and subjected to extreme cases of racism since they've been abducted and enslaved by white people. However, the problem does not lie here. The issue relies on the fact that not only do Black Americans have to deal with oppression from other racial groups, majority of that being the dominant white society. They are faced with another dilemma that has been going on for years within their community. This complication bears a relation with race and racism too, and that is the phenomenon of colorism. In this chapter I will define the terms and provide the origin of the words race, racism and colorism and lay out the connection between racism and colorism.

I.1 Race (definition and origin of the term)

In the past centuries. Race did not have the same meaning. The term was introduced to the English language in 1580, it comes from the French term *rasse* (1512) and Italian term *razza.* It was later used by The English, who considered themselves to be superior, in order to distinguish themselves from those who weren't English. The English perceived Irish people as "savages" and their failed attempt to conquer their whole land and force labor on them led to their point of view when it came to colonizing other nations during the start of the 19th century and creating what the modern term of race is defined as. (Britannica, race) which is: the "*externally imposed social categorization that is applied to a group of people thought to share social, cultural, or phenotypical traits and a common ancestry*" (Omi & Winant, 1994; Golash-Boza, 2010).

An accurate representation of human biological variation is not given through race. Neither in the past nor in contemporary race does not give a precise representation of human populations. There are no distinct continental types or racial genetic clusters among humans. Rather, the Western concept of race must be comprehended as a categorization that arose from

and aided European colonialism, oppression, and discrimination.. It thus has its origins not in biological reality, but in discriminatory policies. This modern idea of race is not accurate and a product of western white ideology because *No population is or has ever been biologically homogeneous or "pure." Furthermore, human populations are not, and have never been, biologically distinct, isolated, or stable.* In the United States, the term was commonly used in the mid-1660s. European colonialists brought the term to the New World (colonies) and used it in order to define Indians as the "savage" race and "subhuman" race when it came to Africans. (National Museum Of African American History and Culture, historical foundations Of Race)

I.2 Racism (definition and origin of the term)

Similar to the word race, the earliest meaning of the term "racism" did not have anything to do with physical differences between people. French was the first language to have used the terms "racisme" and "raciste". It was used in the 1890s among members of the French far right who utilized the word to give a description to their own racial attitudes. Gaston Méry coined the term "racisme" in his novel Jean Révolte, which revolves around a man who forms an organization to preserve the integrity of the French "Celtic" race from the allegedly dangerous influence of Jews and the "Latin" race of southern France. He refers to this concept as *"racisme"* rather than "*patriotisme." (Mery, 1892).*In a 1938 document, Italian fascists used the term *razzismo* to describe their own racial policy. This document claimed that Italians were Aryans and advocated for harsh laws against non-Aryans, particularly Jews. Point 7 of the document even stated, "IT IS TIME FOR ITALIANS TO DECLARE THEMSELVES RACIST." The modern meaning of the term however is different.

The modern definition describes racism as *"The belief that humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races"; that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and behavioral features; and that some races are innately superior to others."* (Britannica)

I.3. Colorism (definition and origin)

Colorism is a practice that happens within a certain racial group in which people favor and classify as superior the ones with a lighter shade of skin and the darker ones as inferior and discriminate against darker-skinned people for not possessing a lighter skin tone. At first, this type of internalized oppression did not have a name but was coined by Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker in 1982 in which she defined it as the *"prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color". It is "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." (Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, Hayward Derrick Horton, 2004). It is vital to mention that Colorism is a global prejudice. (Baruti, 2000). It is not only restricted to African-Americans. It carries on existing in other nations, for instance: south East Asian nations communities (Sims, Cynthia and Malar Hirudayaraj,2016) However, the focus of my dissertation will be about specifically about Colorism for African-Americans.
Before I go on to define what Intraracial and Interracial colorism are, I shall dive into the origins of colorism.

I.3.1 Origins of Colorism (in The United States Of America)

Colorism has been a contentious, stratifying, and prominent issue in the African-American community (Robinson & Wade, 1995; Wade & Bielitz, 2005). However, to be able to understand what made colorism what it is today, one has to revisit the past.

Colorism's roots and traces go back to slavery. Slaves that possessed a lighter shade of skin were a result of black slaves having had a non-consensual sexual relationship with their masters and given birth to mixed children. Those light-skinned mixed children were favored and privileged (Brown, Ward, Lightbourn, & Jackson, 1999; Keith & Herring, 1991) contrary to dark slaves, lighter-skinned slaves were not given physically fatiguing outdoor labor and instead had household indoor jobs such as housekeeping in order to be closer to White people. As time passed by, such advantages in the antebellum period granted lighter-skinned Blacks the opportunity of education (Wirth & Goldhamer, 1944) and ownership of property (Frazier, 1957).

"Some masters who recognized their paternity publicly sometimes sent their partially colored offspring to the North to be educated. This practice explains in part the belief that blacks of lighter skin were more intelligent (they simply had more educational opportunities)" (Tudier Harris, p.1)

Slavery is one of the major causes of colorism, in his book, Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market (2001). Walter Johnson mentions that white slave owners in the antebellum period had different opinions about the utility of slaves based on their skin color, according to historian Walter Johnson. Slaves with dark skin, particularly men, were thought to be especially well suited to hard labor. They were, however, thought to be naturally

nonconformist, prone to theft, unable to control sexual urges, and prone to violence if given the opportunity. Light-skinned blacks, on the other hand, were assumed to be more faithful, able to comprehend activities that required knowledge, and more presentable. Light-skinned slaves were assigned to serve as maids, chauffeurs, and other household duties, while darker-skinned men and women were assigned to the laborious task of planting and harvesting the fields. Although, Colorism wasn't a planned idea by that enslavers meant to be put into existence by impregnating their slaves and creating light-skinned offspring. This division in labor and overall privilege given to light-skinned people led to colorism, it led black people of a lighter shade of skin tone to go against their own people because they wanted to still have access to those advantages and were in fear they'd be stripped from them. Those fears came in form of intraracial discrimination.

I.3.2 The Brown Paper Bag Test : A colorist test documented by Audrey Elisa Kerr took place in churches, fraternities, social clubs, and sororities by African Americans. It was done in a way where a brown paper bag was placed next to a person's face and if it didn't match and the person was darker than the color of the paper bag they'd be denied entry.

"Some of the brothers who came from New Orleans held a bag party. As a classmate explained it to me, a bag party was a New Orleans custom wherein a brown paper bag was stuck on the door. Anyone darker than the bag was denied entrance" (Gates Jr 1996)

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, the Girl Friends, the Links, Jack and Jill, Howard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Hampton University, and many others, are rumored to have been "paper bag clubs" *(Kerr, 2006).*

Their fears were also displayed in the creation of clubs and societies like

I.3.3 The Blue Vein Societies.

After slavery, Light skinned African Americans formed specific types of clubs only meant for light-skinned people, these exclusive clubs solely admitted black people who were light enough that you can see the veins in their arms. (Jaynes, 2005)

I 3.4 Passing: Between the eighteenth and mid twentieth century, plenty of light-skinned or mixed race African Americans chose to pass as white and left their friends, family and partners behind . Due to the dominantly white supremacist American society they lived in. They chose to adopt white identities in order to reap from the benefits white people possessed. Books like Nella Larson's 1929 Passing and Allyson Hobbs 2014 "A chosen exile" tackle this heartbreaking phenomenon. For these African Americans, it meant freedom. In its literal sense,

they felt free to live a live their dark brethren did not posessess *"Passing was an Expedient means of securing one's freedom"* (Hobbs, 2014, pg 31)

I.3.5 Intraracial colorism

It is the way people of the same racial group show favoritism towards people within their own race whose skin tone is more approximate to whiteness. Besides the era of slavery. Intra-racial colorism began first and foremost in the household the black child grows up in. Within black families (Hughes, 2000). Parents often favored their light-skinned children and cared for them more than their dark skinned children. A study was conducted in regards to colorism. Twenty-six black women were interviewed. The research demonstrated that differences in color were often taught, reinforced and contested within families. Therefore it eventually shaped black women's perspectives.(Wilder, Cain, 2010) . Research suggest that "*Racialized dynamics within (families) can compromise subjective well-being in ways that are more devastating than structural inequality*" (Hordge Freeman, 2013). In other words. Before a child even gets to experience the outside world. If the inside world called "home" isn't full of acceptance and love for him the way he is without any words that call for changes. The child will eventually grow up to be a young adult or an adult that will not be able to accept themselves and see the beauty in them.

Intra-racial colorism escalates step by step and is seen everywhere in the lives of these young children. Second to the family environment comes the entertainment shows they grow up watching. In instance, in cartoons like "The Prow Family". (2001-2005) The main character is a light skinned girl named Penny Prowl and is described to be obedient to her parents, a good student and is usually the one that mediates whenever an issue happens within her friend group, while De Jené Johnes, her dark skinned best friend is portrayed as selfish, untrustworthy, a gossiper and often gets Penny into trouble. She is portrayed as loud, aggressive, a ghetto girl that no one wants romantically. This trope of the light skinned girl being given good characteristics meanwhile the dark skinned girl is given the bad characteristics is something black youth grew up seeing in many of their cartoons and even shows like Living Single. Despite the directors and screenwriters being black themselves. In this case it was director Yvette Lee Bowser. They rarely offered dark skinned black girls important main roles. If they did, dark skinned girls were given side characters that were assigned with the worst traits possible similar to Max in Living Single, who is considered aggressive and noisy.

Colorism follows them in their adolescence and adulthood and sets restraints on, for instance, African women's marital and dating status. . Lighter skinned women are more likely to marry than dark skinned women (Snider, 2011; Thompson & Keith, 2001).

I.3.6 Interracial Colorism

" If you's white, you's right

If you's brown, stick around

If you's black, oh brother, get back, get back "(broonzy)

It is the way a racial group shows favoritism and differentiates between members of another racial group based on physically attributes like skin tone. In the case of Dark skinned African-Americans who live in a dominantly white society.

"Lighter-skinned blacks are more prevalent in all forms of advertising (store advertisements, magazines, and billboards) and on television: as news anchors, as cast members in television shows, as dancers and love interests in music videos, and as actors in commercials"(Norwood, 2013).

If one pays close attention, most successful artists or actresses in the past years tend to have lighter shade of skin. Actresses like Halle Berry and Zoe Saldana , tend to get the leading roles often in movies and shows (Onyejiaka, 2017) in contrast to dark skinned African American women. Singers like Rihanna and Beyoncé top the charts, too. (E.Jones, 2019)
What makes matters worse is that dark skinned African American women are excluded from being represented but light-skinned actress are cast for roles meant for dark-skinned women in the case of Zoe Saldana. In 2016, "Nina", the movie that focuses on American musician and civil rights activist Nina Simone was played by Zoe Saldana. A light skinned African American actress who underwent prosthetic alterations and make up in order to create a bigger nose and darken her skin tone in order to resemble the musician. This latter caused a controversy in the African-American community and made not only black people furious but caused the daughter of the deceased artist to be upset about the wrong choice of casting a light skinned girl when there are numerous actresses who resembled her mother could've played the role (Sun,2016, Stewart 2012, Kreps,2016).

I.4 Racism and Internalized Racism : Similar to racism or racial discrimination, which is defined as the "practices and actions of dominant racial and ethnic groups that have a differential and negative impact on subordinate racial and ethnic groups" (Broman, Mavaddat, & Hsu, 2000, p. 165), It can comprise of being called derogatory terms or being discriminated against in a variety of settings or environments (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Colorism involves

derogatory words between African-Americans. When fighting with each other, children and young adults often say “your mama’s so black”, giving a negative connotation to the term “black” (Burrel,2010).

Like racism (white vs black) , colorism downgrades the idea of blackness. Colorism possesses the same concept. It shames others for the concept of skin tone, for having darker shade of skin. Colorism is a product of racism. Both external racism and internalized racism. It is a mix of the two. America has a history of external racism. Specifically, white vs black. However that is not the focus of this dissertation. In The 2004 book “ Skin Deep” by Keith, Herring, Horton. The authors mention that White beauty standards are the preferred measure be it in regards to skin tone or hair or lips ect. African Americans with Eurocentric features are exalted over black or dark skin. Such standards have been portrayed in everything, in the cosmetic market, in films and everywhere in between. Such constant exposure of whiteness put pressure on African-Americans. In families, entertainment industries and everywhere they are, whiteness or anything features close to it remained superior. This pressure has led to internalized racism.

Internalized racism is “the internalization of the racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the white dominant society about one’s racial group”(Pyke, 2010).Colorism is a result of internalized racial inferiority and acceptance of white ideologies. Internalized racism shows in different ways in the lives of African Americans. It shows in intraracial colorism. It shows in the way black people have aimed to adapt to white stereotypes in order to be seen as beautiful. For African American women, such internalized racism and self-hatred shows in the way black women straighten their hair (Banks, 2000,) or shows in the way they bleach their skin. (Hall, 2016).

Conclusion :

The modern terms of race and racism are both twisted notions created and used as an excuse in order for white people to maintain economic and social interests and to sustain and exert power over “others” in all fields of life, in the case of my dissertation, the others are African Americans, whom they deemed as inferior. Historically, the exercise of racism’s idea of “superior race” led to an increase in the perseverance of the practice of slavery in the United States, which eventually led to colorism. Although colorism was not arranged and light skinned African Americans were often the result of white enslavers raping their slaves, it allowed the creation of colorism. This latter’s connection to racism pit black people against each other and enforced the ‘racist’ idea of “white” being better through the advantages and treatment given to and directed towards light skinned African from the times of slavery till the present day.

Chapter Two: Self-Image and Colorism

Introduction

Once a person's brain becomes fully developed and reaches a certain age where they are fully able to think for themselves. There comes a realization that they are living with themselves the most even if they are surrounded by others. Their minds are constantly running, creating thoughts and ideas based on their values, internal standards, what they think is right and what they think isn't. They are on a constant analysis of people, situations and so on and are affected by them too. As a result, they create an image of themselves, be it consciously or subconsciously. Moreover. A person's journey through life depends highly on the way they perceive themselves. The quality of their life is dependent on the way they view themselves. Colorism has had and still has an impact on the way dark skinned African American women regard themselves.

II.1.The "Self"

The self, a term people use on a daily constant basis. My "self" your "self" etc. According to Oxford Languages Dictionary, it is defined as *"a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action"*. It can be synonymous to words like persona, identity or psyche. According to Roy F. Baumeister, in less psychologically minded cultures, self is body. He mentions in his book "The self in social psychology" that everywhere in the world finding your "self" starts with the body. However, he went on to say that the self encompasses more than just the body. It is also psychological. It is something unperceived and not understood, unless a person chooses to reveal it. It is also something that people find struggle and work hard to find too. Thus it is much more than just the body when it comes to selfhood. (pg.2).

The self is created and discovered through interactions with others. A child gets to know about his or her "self" through their connections with others. (Baumeister, 1999). The environment a child grows up in and teachings he receives have a massive effect on the creation of their "self". Creating one's self is a mixture of two things. The first is; external factors; family, friends, media ect. The latter affects the self either positively or negatively. The second is; internal decision he or she take to define their "self" regardless of the external factors. In page 10 of Baumeister's book He mentions that people are affected by what others expect of them however it only occurs when the expectancies put upon them are internalized and exhibit a permanent change in the self under certain circumstances which may require some active participation of the self. He states that*" people are quite capable of not living up to others*

expectancies and indeed of rejecting the views of themselves that are implicit in those expectancies"

However, the factors that are outside of the person's control are bound to have an impact and it differentiates from one individual to another.

II.2.The "Image":

Carl Jung describes image as a personal façade that one presents to the world" example: public image. It is synonymous to the terms mirror or reflection. According to Jung, *"the image is an expression of both the unconscious and the conscious situation of the moment."* Those inner images that emerge from the unconscious are interpreted and understood in a specific way by the Jungian psychotherapist. They represent the way our unconscious mental situation interacts with our consciousness as it deals with life's situations. If we can bring these images to the surface, we can learn a lot about what is going on within us as we face life's challenges.

II.3. Self-Image:

When the two previous terms are put together they create Self-image. Which is the way one views themselves, either positively or negatively and ascribes negative or positive traits to themselves. Be it in regards their psychological side or their physical appearance. As mentioned before, the way we regard ourselves can be either by choice or by force from the pressure and expectations from the world and people around us.

In Rossenberg 1965's Book "Society and The Adolescent Self-Image" He defines Self-Image as "An attitude toward an object" He mentions that the word attitude is utilized in a broad manner to *"include facts, opinions and values with regard to the self, as well as a favorable or unfavorable orientation toward the self"*. He goes on to mention that his study is in concern of people having an attitude toward an object that object being the self. (pg.5)

There are three elements of self-image (Oltman, 2014):

- The way a person perceives or thinks of themselves
- What a person thinks others think about themselves
- Their ideal self

II.4. Mental and Physical (body) Image and Colorism:

One's self-image can be in regard to their physique or their psychological traits. As mentioned before it can either be positive or negative, be it in regards of appearance or mental attributes. First of all. Body-Image is described by Meriam Webster as *"a subjective picture of*

one's own physical appearance established by both self-observation and by noting the reaction of others" It also refers to how we think, feel and react to our own self-perceived physical attributes. Body-image development is affected by cultural images and the influence of family, peers and others. A positive body-image contributes to enhanced psychological adjustment" (Cleveland Clinic). My definition of the term is; the way we view our appearance and physical attributes and attribute certain terms to it through observing ourselves and through the feedback of those around us. Jean Lhermitte wrote in his work "L'image de note corps" (1939) which translates to "The Image of Our Body" in English. *"At the threshold of our consciousness, each of us has an image, a three dimensional schema of our body, which enables us to feel, perceive and ultimately develop our actions towards ourselves and the world".* An individual can choose not to take to heart the views of others in regards to his or her own body. However, there is no denial that people's opinions of each other does matter to a certain extent. If one receives positive feedback in regards to their physique, they will eventually start seeing themselves in a positive light. In contrast to one receiving negative feedback from others. The individual might reject most of it. He might accept all of it or little of it but in most of these cases, it is bound to leave an impact on the way they view themselves. Second, Mental Image. Which is the way we perceive ourselves in regards to abstract qualities and describe psychological attributes to who we are as a person. This latter is defined by ourselves and the feedback we get from others. If one is constantly given or gives themselves a positive mental attribute, they are most likely to believe it. Colorism impacts dark skinned women's self-image. Both physical and mental. In a video posted by OWN, Oprah Winfrey's channel on the 24th of June 2020. High school dark-skinned girls were interviewed in regards to colorism's impact on them. One girl cried and stated that *"This shouldn't happen to anyone, we shouldn't have to hate ourselves because of the color of our skin".* Self-hatred is defined by Meriam Webster dictionary as "Hatred direct towards one's self instead of others".

One's self-image is heavily affected by the environment around the person. First, Dark skinned African American women's psychological self-image is impacted by the society they live in. In a dominantly white society. White people with colorist tendencies tend to determine who among black people is given higher status in regards to certain things. Lighter skinned African Americans have been proved to have a higher income and access to education, (Verna, Keith, 1991) In addition to that. Lighter skinned African American women are given shorter prison sentences (Jill Viglione, Lance Hannon, Robert DeFina, 2010). Light skinned women are perceived to be more educated and well spoken, they are also more prone to being hired for

jobs than dark skinned women (Russel, Wilson and Hall, 1993). This colorist ideology has been internalized by African Americans too and they also engage in the same process white colorist people engage in. In a 2021 BBC interview with Kelly Rowland. She mentions a black mother refusing her son to date Kelly because she was darker than brown paper bag. Colorism intraracially impacts Dark African American women's dating and marriage status to a certain extent. Darker skinned women are likely to get married later in contrast to their lighter skinned counterparts (Keith, Herring, Horton, 2004).

Therefore, in my respectful opinion, dark skinned women feel and see themselves as incompetent due to their difficulty to be hired in regards to their skin shade. In addition, they feel insecure, start thinking less of their potential and avoid aiming towards their goals. They also develop feelings unworthiness and feel as if they are not enough in regards to romantic relationships.

A study investigated colorism and self -esteem among Dark skinned African American women and concluded with results that showed that participants who experienced colorism were negatively impacted and faced extreme difficulty developing healthy self-esteem. In addition to that, this study found that dark skinned African American women suffered intense emotional trauma related to colorism (Trammel, 2010). Causes of low self-esteem and negative body image among dark skinned women is often the result of the lack of representation in various industries. Mainly those fields which focus on outer appearance such as the beauty market, the modeling industry or fashion and magazines. It wasn't until the 21st century that dark skinned African Women began finding make up foundations that resembled the shade of their skin. (Levy, 2020). In the modeling industry. In the 20th and beginning of the 21st century models or celebrities included in fashion shows and magazines were of lighter skin tones. It wasn't until the 21st century that more dark skinned African Americans were included.(Kaiya Thomas, 2019; Malaika Handa, 2019).

Conclusion:

The way we perceive ourselves and create ideas about who we are, be it regarding psychological self-image or physical self-image, impacts our overall well-being. However. The judgements we make about ourselves are not solely based on us. By choice or not. The external world and people influences and will either turns those perceptions we have ourselves positive or negative. Dark skinned African-American women's self-image has been deeply affected by the world around them and caused them to have low-esteem and lack of self-acceptance because they are constantly being treated in an unfair manner, perceived as less attractive, rarely

included and insulted for something they have no power over and that is the dark shade of their skin.

Chapter Three: Colorism In Sharon G. Flake's The Skin I'm in (1998)

II. I Introduction:

"The Skin I'm in" is a realistic fictional book written by African American author Sharon G. Flake. It is a novel published at the end of the 20th century, in 1998. It explores the theme of intraracial colorism through Maleeka Madison. Maleeka is a thirteen-year-old dark-skinned young girl. Due to her constant exposure to colorism. Maleeka develops a negative self-image and struggles to see the beauty of her dark skin. This chapter will investigate the theme of colorism throughout the novel. It will include a summary of the book and background about the author. It will incorporate the writer's writing process, and the impact her craft had on people.

II.2 Summary:

Seventh grader Maleeka is a dark-skinned African American girl who has grown up without her father. She is bullied on a daily basis and is betrayed by her friends. Mrs Saunders, a teacher who has a big birth scar on her face starts teaching Maleeka's class and is made fun of by kids and adults alike. Maleeka indulges in smoking and doing her "friend" Charlese's work to obtain new clothes she cannot afford. She is found smoking. The latter puts her in trouble. Thus, she begins working in the school office. A boy her age named Caleb whom she shares feelings for leaves her and changes his bus seat instead of helping her. She is upset. Caleb tries to win her back. He claims his intentions in changing his place was because He wanted the bullies to leave her alone. He wanted them to stop bothering her.

John-John is Maleeka's classmate. Despite being black himself. John teases her about her blackness and even created a song meant to make fun of her dark skin tone. Later on. Maleeka and John-John are harassed by some gangsters. They both fight for each other but eventually, Caleb and his mom come to their rescue.

Charlese decides to get rid of Maleeka. She sees no use in her and orchestrates a plan. The plan includes her, Maleeka and the twins she befriends. The ploy is to cause chaos in Mrs. Saunder's classroom. The girls break into the school and wreak havoc on the teacher's classroom. The janitor only sees Maleeka. Thus, she realizes she is in massive trouble. After days of reluctance in fear of expulsion and of Charlese. She decides to stand up for herself and tell the truth about what happened. In the end, Maleeka is excused for behavior and Caleb offers her a poem in which he confessed his love for her.

II.3 About The author, writing process and impact of the book:

Sharon G Flake is an African-American female author of children and young adult literature. The author is 66 years old. She was born and grew up in Pittsburgh. She holds a BA in English from The University of Pittsburgh which she earned in 1978. Her debut as an author began in 1998 with The Skin I'm in. However, Flake's journey as a writer did not begin in middle or high school, In fact, she never really wanted to be an author but after she graduated college she discovered her talent for writing and her first book was published at the age of 42. The Coretta Scott King Prize Award Committee gave Flake her first prize for the novel, The John Steptoe Award for New talent for The Skin I'm in. In addition to that, her book was recognized as Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of the Year.

Most characters in Flake's books feature African American children, black children, both boys and girls that needed their voices to be heard loud and clear and their difficult journeys of being black in America depicted through stories where they are the main characters. In an Interview with Publisher Weekly. She stated

"I write to hear their voices because we don't always want to hear them" and in another instance she declared *"to show the world how resilient and creative and loved African American young people are, especially urban youth. I tell people that [Black children] are probably the least valued children in this country, not by their communities, but by America. Everything I've done has always been to shine a spotlight on those young people and to help people see their full humanity."*

Sharon G Flake's inspiration to write "The Skin I'm in" came from wanting to make her daughter appreciate her dark skin and most importantly because the world does not place enough value on dark skin. Her debut novel made a global success and was translated in many languages which led many young children and adults to email her on how she changed their life because of the book. In another interview With "For Brown Girls" Blog She said:

"I get loads of letters from places such as Vietnam, Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, China, and Europe. So many of the young people say they love the book. One girl said she didn't realize she was a bully until she read it." She also declares "*Other young people tell me that the book has given them courage to speak up for themselves and helped them to love themselves exactly as they are. They pass it along to friends to encourage them when they are feeling down. They sneak and read it sometimes during class. And during some of my visits to*

schools, young people speak up about who they are, how they have been teased, and what they like about themselves now that they have read the book."

Through what Flake said. It can be noticed that through her book "The skin I'm in "Sharon G. Flake positively affected young people and allowed them to see themselves in a new optimistic perspective. After The Skin I'm In, Flake wrote plenty of books discussing themes like money In Money Hungry (2001) , survival in Bang (2005), self-worth in Who Am I without him (2004) and Human Trafficking in her sequel to the Skin I'm In, "The Life I'm In" (2021).

II.4 Colorism and Its impact on Dark Skinned African Women in Sharon G. Flake's The Skin I'm in (1998)

In Sharon G Flake's novel "The Skin I'm in". Twelve Years old, Maleeka Madison is a victim of intraracial colorism in school and daily life.

In the first pages of the book, specifically the third page. Our main character Maleeka states

"*My skin starts to crawl before [Miss Saunders] even opens her mouth. 'Maleeka, your skin is pretty. Like a blue-black sky after it's rained and rained,' she says…When she's far enough away, John-John says to me, 'I don't see no pretty, just a whole lotta black.' Before I can punch him good, he's singing a rap song. 'Maleeka, Maleeka-baboom, boom, boom, we sure wanna keep her, baboom, boom, boom, but she so black, baboom, boom, boom, we just can't see her.*'"

Through her statement John-John, Maleeka's classmate, is introduced. Despite being African- American himself too. He bullies Maleeka and teases her about being "too black" and even creates a song about her in order to shame her for her dark skin tone. And we can see that through Maleeka stating:

"He's my color, but since second grade he's been teasing me about being too black. Last year, when I thought things couldn't get worse, he came up with this song." (Page 3).

Interracial colorism occurs between members of the same racial group. It is the process giving a negative connotation to darkness and relating it to ugliness. Through Maleeka stating that he is her color. It depicts how intraracial colorism operates. Although intraracial colorism is often seen as lighter skinned blacks discriminating against their own brethren. It can also occur in a different way.

The favoritism shown towards light skinned African Americans lead and to white beauty standards cause African Americans to self-loathe. They have a preference or wish to be lighter

Thus, they hate their own skin tone and give a negative overtone in regards to another dark-skinned brother or sister's skin.

Maleeka is the fictional character dark skin girls can relate to as they experience the same treatment from people who are black themselves too, especially in school. Despite being fictional, she is a character they read about and see a reflection of themselves. They see someone that goes through the same hardships as they are. On page seventeen of the book, our main character says:

"Malcolm is fine. He's got long, straight hair. Skin the color of butterscotch milkshake. Gray, sad eyes. He's half and half-got a white dad and a black momma. He's lucky. He looks more like his dad than his mom."

Slavery played a vital role in the advantages black people had access to. As mentioned in Chapter one, Light skinned Africans Americans had opportunities their darker skinned brethren didn't have. Maleeka refers to Malcolm as "lucky" to have a black mother and white father. She deems possessing a lighter shade of black skin lucky because of being constantly bullied for her dark skin from both the white dominant society and from her own ethnical community because of the favoritism they exhibit towards lighter-toned black individuals. This negative self-image is a result of the degradation and insults thrown at her from her own people who treat her this way for not having features that are closer to "whiteness" and being a dark skinned young lady. It even goes deeper than skin tone. Maleeka mentions Malcolm's straight long hair, which is a biological feature found in most European people in contrast to African hair which is often curly in nature and takes a longer time to grow. It might seem like a mere description but through her mention of his straight long hair Maleeka is saying, in an indirect form, that she wishes she doesn't have African hair but long straight hair.

On page thirty-nine and forty, Maleeka says:

"*That didn't bother Sweets none. She says she deserves to be in that school as much as anyone. 'You got the right color skin,' I said…'It's not about color,' she said. 'It's about how you feel about who you are that counts…I'm as good as the queen of England, the president of the United States, and ten movie stars, all rolled into one. So they better let me in that there school or else'…I guess Sweet's attitude paid off. They let her into that high-toned school."* (Pages 39–40)

"The right skin color" There is such a thing as that. "Right" is an adjective used to define the correct thing to do, say or is about factual details and should never be a term associated with skin tone. If this term is used in regards to skin color then all skin colors should be "right" regardless of shades of skin. "The Skin I'm in" is a realistic fiction novel. The fact

that it is a realistic novel means it is a reflection of day-to-day life, the main character is a depiction of every dark-skinned black girl who gets bullied and suffers from colorism's derogatory discriminating words and actions. It is a terribly upsetting and saddening thing to see that Maleeka and other black girls have exposed to colorism within their own community that they think they should to be a lighter shade of black to fit in a school. When in reality, academic capability has no relation with one's skin tone. This idea of European (white) physical traits being better has been so ingrained in their minds that they think it is what is "right" to be. Maleeka's damaged self-perception regarding her dark skin led her to refuse to pursue her studies in a school she could've possibly done so well in since she was quite clever. Her intelligence and creativity are things Mrs. Saunders noticed about her, made sure to let her know and encouraged her to keep on doing what she's doing. She showed her that by calling her a "good writer" in Chapter 18.

Maleeka was constantly subjected to colorism to the point that when she knew a boy her age named Caleb found her "pretty", she had a hard time believing him. She saw herself through others' eyes and didn't think her dark skin was beautiful.

In page thirteen she goes on to say *"[Caleb] stared at me half the year. I thought he saw what everybody else saw. Skinny, poor, black Maleeka. But Caleb saw something different. He said I was pretty. Said he liked my eyes and sweet cocoa brown skin…" (pg.13)*

Colorism was indeed given more power through The Paper Bag Test, The Blue vein social clubs, and much more colorist practices but when one goes into the depth of society, its effect was stronger through parents and the community around the child or the young adult that created this idea that their dark skin is less beautiful. Maleeka states on page 42 *"I didn't used to mind being this color. Then kids started teasing me about it. Making me feel like something was wrong with how I look…I stare at myself for maybe twenty minutes in Daddy's mirror. I don't get it. I think I'm kind of nice-looking. Why don't other people see what I see?"*

The environment a human grows up in and the society surrounding him has a big influence on their self-perception. During childhood. If a person grows up with a parent or family that teaches them self-acceptance and self-love, it will be instilled in them. In their teenage years, it might be disrupted but eventually the person will remember what they were taught and fight back against the hardships they are going through.

Maleeka grew up with a loving father who made her constantly feel beautiful, loved and that nothing was wrong with her skin tone but after the passing of her father, the environment around her became harsh and cruel and made her, as time passed by, she slowly began to believe there truly is something wrong with how she looks.

Conclusion:

The Skin I'm in is a novel that, not only, portrayed colorism in its many forms but showed how it can impact how one sees themselves throughout the eyes of others from constantly being exposed to this phenomenon. Our character Maleeka associated her darkness with negative attributes. She felt ugly, that her darkness was "bad enough" as she mentioned in the first chapter. She doubted that a boy her age loved her and found her to be beautiful and let her negative self-image in regards to her dark skin stop her from attaining a school she was worthy of even though she was smart. However, in the end of the book, she is able to view herself positively, finds the strength to accept herself, to love the skin she is in and fights back. A character like Maleeka should be an inspiration to dark skin girls as they go on the journey of loving themselves by seeing themselves through their own eyes instead of the eyes of others, just like Maleeka's daddy stated. The previous statements are a depiction of what is mentioned in this academic work's Chapter 2 "The Self" . These young women should know Black is beautiful regardless of the shade of it and that they do not need to have to have any Eurocentric beauty features to be alluring.

However, not all dark skin girls possesses a person in their life that ignites a light of hope within them to fight back against colorism, sooner or later, like Maleeka had. Mrs. Saunders and her deceased Daddy's mirror and words allowed her to gather enough strength within her to expose Charlese and the twins for vandalizing Mrs. Saunders's classroom. Maleeka finally accepts herself and responds to Charlese's comment calling her "ugly stupid black thing" by saying *"Call me by my name, I am not ugly. I am not stupid. I am Maleeka Madison and yeah I'm black, real black, and if you don't like me too bad cause black is the skin I'm in" (Chapter 31, p.167)*.

Chapter 4: Colorism in Toni Morrison's “The Bluest Eye” 1970

IV.1 Introduction

In contrast to the previous book (The Skin I'm in by Sharon G. Flake, 1998) that I dealt with in chapter three of this academic work. The Bluest Eye dives into the topic of colorism in a different method and explores the reason which led to colorism in the first place. The cause is internalized racism depicted through eleven years old Pecola Breedlove and appears as an obsession over white Eurocentric features to gain acceptance, love and be seen as beautiful in the eyes of the people around her. However, it also includes Intra-racial colorism seen through light skinned African American Maureen Johnson. In this chapter, I will provide a background on the author, her process of writing the book and the impact of it. Moreover, I will provide a summary and show how colorism is portrayed in The Bluest Eye.

IV.2 Summary

Ohio is the home town of Claudia and Frieda. Despite their parents constant occupation to work in order to provide for the family. The atmosphere in the household is filled with love. In contrary to Pecola Breedlove abusive and messy household. Pecola's dad is alcoholic, her mother is distant and her brother Sammy runs away often. After her father burned the house, Pecola lives with the girls for a few days and shares her profound love of blue eyed and blonde haired Shirley temple with Frieda. Pecola believes she is ugly due to her dark complexion and because she isn't white and wishes to have blue eyes. Matters get worse for Pecola as she is made fun and ridiculed by her supposedly "friends" and other boys. She even get wrongfully accused of killing a cat when she was trying to save it and had harsh words thrown at her by a certain boy's mother.

The following parts of the novel revolves around Pecola's mother Pauline and father Cholly, their shared marital life and the individual life of Pauline as she works at a white woman's house and treats the daughter of her employers better than she ever treated her own daughter. Cholly's past of being abandoned as a child and raised by his aunt is also mentioned alongside his hatred and feelings of being trapped in regards to his marriage to Pauline.

The next parts mention Pecola's rape by her drunk father who mistook her for Pauline and the disbelief plus awful beating Pecola receives from Pauline after telling her about the incident.

In the last parts of the novel. The Macteers Girls discover about Pecola's pregnancy from her father. Regardless of the neighbors' views, Frieda and Claudia want the baby to live. They buy marigolds seeds and then plant them with money they had saved. They assume that if the

flowers grow, Pecola's child will live. However, the flowers do not grow and her premature baby passes away. Cholly comes back and once more sexually assaults his daughter before fleeing. He is later found deceased in a certain workhouse. Pecola, his daughter loses her mind and goes crazy. She sees everyone glancing at her and believes she finally has the bluest eyes.

IV.3 About the Author , the writing process of the book and its impact

Toni Morrison, whose real name is Chloe Anthony Wofford was born February 18th 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, United States and passed away august 5th, 2019 was an African American Female author, essayist, editor, teacher and professor emeritus at Princeton. She is considered to be an iconic American author praised by many, including the previous president Barack Obama, that contributed in creating literature that openly spoke about race, racism, colorism, and the overall black experience (and various other topics) in America through her characters. Morrison is the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize of literature in 1993 and has many other awards including the prestigious presidential Medal of Freedom.

In a Mavis on Four interview in 1988, Morrison stated that she was looking to read such a book but couldn't find it anywhere, so she decided to write it herself. In other words, the author took it upon herself to expose not only the pressure society put them through to feel the need to fit in by adopting more European features and not being proud of their blackness but the intraracial colorism that was going on in the black community by people who were black too. In another interview in 2004, Toni Morrison spoke about her motive for writing and stated :

" *Before we decide that we are all beautiful and have always been beautiful let me speak for just a moment here for some of us that didn't get that right away,"*

She went on to say that black females often were included in books as maids, housewives and but not in a way that most could relate to, especially young children, so she went on to write a story of a "hurt little black girl". She took it upon herself to write about black characters that were misunderstood and unappreciated. "The Bluest Eye" is the author's first novel. Besides the fact that she mentioned writing the book because she wanted to read it and couldn't find it anywhere. The main character she designed was based off of a black girl she knew as a child in her hometown Ohio. In Timothy Greenfield Sanders's Film "Toni Morrison: The pieces I am, the author said:

"I remember an incident from my childhood when a very close friend of mine, were walking down the street. We were discussing whether God existed, she said he did not, and I said he did but then she said he didn't and she had proof, she said I have been praying for two

years for blue eyes and He never gave me any. So i remember turning around and looking at her. She was very, very black and very very beautiful. So I wanted to say, you know, this kind of racism hurts. This is not lynchings and murders and drowning. This is interior pain".

IV.4 . nternalized Racism and colorism's impact on Dark Skinned African American Women's self-image in The Bluest Eye :

Eleven years old Pecola's struggles with her Self-image which is distorted by the environment around her as she is exposed to both colorism and society's advertising of Eurocentric features. The latter causes the little girl to internalize racism.

"As the protagonist of the novel, because of her blackness and her darker skin is doubly pressed and victimized. On the one hand, she [is] pressed by a white racist society due to her black race, but on the other hand, she is victimized within her own black community due to her darker skin. Thus the blackness of her skin gradually disgusts her and leads her to embrace white beauty standards." (Walker 1983)

As previously mentioned Colorism and Racism are two pieces of the same coin. The Bluest Eye investigates intraracial colorism through Maureen and Pecola's classmates. It also investigates internalized racism and the obsession with whiteness which is a product of racism and the leading cause of colorism that was introduced to the protagonist. First, through her family's treatment of her. Second, the society around her and third the media and market industry that praises Eurocentric features and disregards and misinterprets blackness.

First. In spring section: chapter 7. Pauline comforts the white daughter of her employers and blames Pecola instead.

"Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger abused Pecola directly and Frida and me by implication", "Hush, baby, hush, come here. Oh, lord, look at your dress, don't cry no more" (p. 109)

Pecola's need for love and acceptance instills in her the obsession over white beauty standards and she craves having blue eyes in order to be accepted by her mother.

Second, the society around her treats her badly. In page 47 of "autumn". Pecola enters the store to buy candy, she is ignored by the seller who pretends she doesn't exist. Morrison states His lack of acknowledgement of her existence as *"the total absence of human recognition, the glazed separateness" (p.48)*. Similar to Maleeka in "The Skin I'm In" Pecola too was bullied in class due to having dark skin. A song was made about Pecola in order to insult for owning a feature she had no control over or chose to be born with.

Claudia recalls, *"They [the boy classmates] had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence" (pg.65)*

Third. Through her consumption of three quarts of milk (p.16), Mary Jane candy (p.50), and her idolization of blue eyed and blond haired TV star Shirley Temple (p.19)

Intraracial colorism in the Bluest Eye is seen more clearly through Pecola's fixation on Maureen. Maureen is a light-skinned African-American girl whom Morrison describes as

"The disruptor of seasons. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided… Rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of white girls, swaddled in comfort and care… [with] a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion" (pg.62).

To everyone around her. Maureen seemed to be much more feminine and prettier because she was of a lighter shade of black. This had caused everyone to desire being her friend. While Pecola and Claudia were going to buy ice cream. They encountered Maureen. She asked Pecola her about her rape and the girls end up in an altercation. Claudia, therefore is furious and confronts Maureen telling her that she should not ask about Pecola's dad and eventually that she is not cute. Maureen runs to the other side of the road to avoid contact with Claudia. Then, safe on the other side, she screamed at [them*],*

'I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute'" (73)

Although Maureen is black nonetheless, she used the word "black" as insult. This use of the word is itself the basis of both intraracial colorism and racism too.

Conclusion

The Bluest Eye is an influential, powerful novel written by an author who gave so much to not only black literature but literature in general. Toni Morrison succeeded to provide us with a novel that gave us a profound view on intraracial colorism, interracial colorism and internalized racism. The author emphasized intraracial and interracial colorism through people's treatment of Maureen and depicted internalized racism through Pecola Breed love of Eurocentric features and hatred of her dark complexion. Therefore, internalized racism is the leading cause of colorism. In addition, the author didn't fail to show us the dangers of obsessing over Eurocentric physical attributes and colorism. The latter was shown through Pecola tragic descent to madness after the traumatic experiences she went through.

General conclusion:

The way we view ourselves and set certain positive or negative attribute to ourselves will set us on the road for either, our misery or happiness and contentment. Our self-image is not only defined by ourselves but the people around us and whether there is inclusivity, acceptance and appreciation or exclusivity and ignorance of our attributes. I conclude my work by stating that colorism has indeed negatively impacted and twisted dark skinned African American Women's self-image. It is seen in the term they refer to themselves, their lack of pursuing their dreams and goals and the way they try their best to adapt to white beauty standards to be accepted intraracially and interracially too.

Colorism's impact on the way dark-skinned view themselves African-American women started from childhood, and from the environment around them. It spiraled due to the constant pressure and experiences of bullying in the case of Pecola Breedlove, or changed and started during their teens like the case of Maleeka Madison. The Novels provided an insight on the outcomes that can result from the exposure to those peer pressuring types of Eurocentric standards and whiteness which are the foundation of colorism. These standards are found in all fields and have restricted dark-skinned women from succeeding and being represented. These standards have impacted their self-image negatively.

In my opinion, Colorism is a white supremacist strategy meant to divide in order to rule and maintain power. It's an attack towards black identity. It's an attack towards "blackness" and anything that isn't White. African Americans, be it light skinned or dark skinned, men or women, should be aware that this phenomenon is dividing them as a community. Such topic should not be ignored. In order to unite as a community. In order to heal past traumas, create a sense of self-love regardless of one's shade of skin. It should be frequently addressed and discussed and no longer be the community's taboo secret that is constantly avoided.

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