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Skin Bleaching Narratives: Responses from Women Bleaches and Stakeholders in Ghana (1950-2015)



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ABSTRACT

Based on a qualitative design and a qualitative analysis of responses from primary informants and secondary sources we present a narrative on the attitudes and perception of the Ghanaian on skin bleaching. Based on retrospective and thematic analyses the authors conclude that there is the need for education and enforcement of laws that protect the consumer from patronizing cosmetics that bleach the skin. The study further highlights the role of institutions that are responsible for legislating, regulating, preventing and educating the general public. It is envisaged that this article shall reinvigorate the need for further research and discourses on skin bleaching in Africa and Ghana in particular. Policy makers and policy implementers should be spurred on to make a difference.

KEY WORDS: skin bleaching, women bleachers, stakeholders, Ghana

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Introduction

Skin bleaching is the intentional alteration of one's natural skin colour to one relatively, if not substantially lighter in colour, through the use of chemical skin lightening agents, either manufactured, homemade or the combination of the two (KONLAN 2016). The history of skin bleaching can be traced to the Elizabethan age of powder and paint but in its current manifestations, skin bleaching is practiced disproportionately within communities of colour (YABA 2011). In its current manifestations, skin bleaching is practiced disproportionately within communities 'of colour' (BLAY 2011). In Africa and Ghana in particular, it is situated within the first wave of independence struggle within the 1950s where bleaching came up as a very important cosmetic practice (BLAY 2011). Specifically, the 2005 Ghana Health Service report estimated that approximately 30% of Ghanaian women and 5% of Ghanaian men were actively bleaching (KONLAN 2016). Contemporary evidence suggests that 50% to 60% of adult Ghanaian women are currently or have at one time or the other actively used bleaching agents (KONLAN 2016). Also, memories of historical overtones of colonization, slavery, discrimination, and better job opportunities, executive positions and chances in beauty (TENAI 2016) seem to have upheld the supremacy of the white skin and this in essence necessitated and continues to enrich the quest for dark skin persons to bleach.

The motivation for skin bleaching is used by cosmetic companies to market their skin bleaching products globally (CHRISTOPHER 2010). Anecdotally, the literature points to several complications or problems associated with skin bleaching. These products contain mercury, hydroquinone, or corticosteroids, which cause health problems. Neurological deficits such as insomnia, irritability, neuropathies and loss of memory; eye problems such as glaucoma and cataracts; and skin problems such as fragile skin, scabies, pitch black pigmentation and colloid milium ochronosis, adrenal insufficiency, kidney damage, Cushing's syndrome, vulval warts, immunosuppression and hypertension have been reported (CHRISTOPHER 2011). Lactating mothers who bleach their skin and who breast-feed their babies transfer mercury to their babies. Bleaching of the skin can delay the diagnosis of leprosy (CHRISTOPHER 2011).

Light skinned individuals historically have had advantages over their dark skinned counterparts in social conditions relating to better job opportunities and higher socioeconomic status in the communities as discussed by Lopez and Ho, in their work, 'Skin Colour' (LOPEZ – HO 2012). Similarly Hunter's work on colourism shares the same proposition (HUNTER 2007). They discuss the colour of the skin and its attractiveness, relating the colour of the skin to self-esteem. Discomfort with one's skin colour is readily evidenced in the worldwide practice of skin bleaching (LOPEZ – HO 2012). They analyze

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the predictors of skin bleaching, relating the act to skin colour, gender, age, socioeconomic status, interpersonal factors, and lack of knowledge, desire for greater perceived attractiveness and marriageability, low self-esteem, self-hate, social factors such as peer pressure and desire to change economic status and the influence of more macro-level forces (westernization/acculturation and the media). Lopez and Ho re-echo the voices of colourism writers on the fact that having a darker skin colour is the most obvious reason for engaging in skin bleaching but may also be used as a way to prevent darker skin colour. Additionally, the desire to bleach one's skin may be related to cross-cultural differences with regard to beauty (LOPEZ – HO 2012). However, they postulated how the methodological difficulties in assessing skin colour.

Blay has argued that much of the discourse on skin bleaching in Ghana has been limited to dermatological studies and opinion-based commentary offered by the popular press. Thus far, the available literature on Ghana does not pay specific attention to the evolution and analysis of the perception and attitude of the people from the colonial period to the twenty-first century (BLAY 2009).

This study therefore highlights the key issues that have shaped the bleaching narrative across the African continent and Ghana in particular. Discussions are captured under the themes colonial, post-colonial and contemporary narratives on skin bleaching in Ghana. The 1970s, 80s and 90s were captured under the post-colonial times while contemporary narratives of the topic under review discussed the impact of media: television, documentaries, movies and music. Institutional actions taken against skin bleaching by the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and Ghana Standards Board (GSB) among other authorities were also captured.

In the Ghanaian sense, this will provide a background on which scholars will understand the social demand for light-skinned persons for social engagements. It pays particular attention to interrogation of the perception of the local population and highlights the call for attitudinal change. It also pays attention to the role of established institutions that have oversight responsibility over the use of cosmetic products which have the propensity to create a congenial space for the spread and increase of bleaching.

Method

The social change and institutional theory have been useful for this study. From the former, the idea that men plan consciously and take into accounts not only their success but their

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recognised failures. The latter concerns skepticism about formal stated goals which is the main ends of organisational behaviour, as well as the emphasis which is placed upon the integration of the social system (TWUMASI 2005). This emphasizes the fact that even though institutions serve both to effectively drive change and to shape the nature of change across levels and contexts, they also themselves change in character and potency overtime (TENAI 2016). Our specific institutions include the FDA, Ghana Standard Authority (GSA), media and major actors therein. The human actors within the social change are amply emphasized. Based on these, we teased out from respondents specifically women, how the more resilient aspects of the Ghanaian social structure have affected members of the society's choice for cosmetic products. We gleaned from the narrative parental influence which is normative in most societies and Ghana in particular. Would a daughter bleach because the mother bleaches or would a son bleach because both parents bleach? Would individuals join the community of those who bleach because of the perceived or the extent of prestige the society attaches to it?

It discusses the phenomenon of skin bleaching in Ghana from women's perspective and how social, economic, cultural and political factors have shaped the practice historically. Employing the qualitative method of research, the study featured oral interviews focusing on the semi-structured type of interview. Interviewees selected were 70 bleachers, 3 health officials, 5 cosmetic shop operators/owners 2 personnel from both the (FDA) and the (GSA) making a total of 100 interviewees. The study also explored how structures, including schemes, rules, norms and routines become authoritative guidelines for the behavior of members of the society. For example, have institutions like the (GSA) and the (FDA) have enforced laws to combat the importation and sale of these creams.

The cosmetic shop owners were selected randomly from Accra and Kumasi. These two cities were selected because both have been centers of commercialization and had had a long period of colonial interaction. Also economic activities in Ghana are much concentrated here compared to other place of commerce (Ghana Statistical Service 2010). The two cities had a population of 2.736.287 and 3.007.322 respectively according to the 2010 population and housing census. Bleaching creams which were on sale in these selected shops included *carotone*, *skin light*, *bronze-tone*, *biotone*, *bio claire*, *pro claire* and *movite*. The latter was used as a mixing agent to increase the potent of bleaching. Bleaching creams in Ghana have the mercury content ranging between 0.010 to 0.549 μ gg-1. These products selected were also mentioned as part of the wide bleaching products used by the bleachers interviewed. Other methods implored to enhance the act included pills and injections. Noted among the former include Oral Light and Egyptian Milk. Tatiomax plus Glucotathione and Prestige Skin 5000

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features the latter (AMPONASH – VOEGBORLO – SEBIAWU 2014).

Bleachers interviewed dwelled in respective places like Osu, James-town, Chorkor, Adum and Amakom. Their age range was between 25-75 years. All these residences are in the Accra and Kumasi Metropolis respectively. They were questioned on their reason for bleaching in order to ascertain whether their reason correlated with socio-economic and political undergirding of skin bleaching in Ghana. They were also questioned on their source of information with regard to these creams and the outcomes included media advertisement on radio and television, newspapers, lay recommendations, billboards among others. Telenovelas programs that featured white/light skinned individuals also factored in the bleachers' desire to have a light skin.

Health officials were interviewed in order to understand their professional views on skin bleaching. This was particularly stemmed from their medical experience. This idea was correlated with bleachers' view of seeking medical attention or not. Health officials selected for the interview were all dermatologists.

The data captured included primary and secondary data. The primary data were essentially archival materials from the Public Records and Archive Administration (PRAAD) in both Accra and Kumasi and oral interviews. These were from articles published in the Spectator newspaper of the period under review. This information provided the idea that dominated bleaching in the immediate post-colonial period. The archival information was corroborated with the interviews conducted with bleachers whose age ranged from 40 to 75 years in order to ascertain the true reflection of the time. We imply however, that the write-up captures the experiences of the interviewees. In this instance, we were observers and so recorded observations and responses in a narrative. The data that was retrieved from these sources were presented thematically and analyzed using the ethnographic technique. Secondary data included articles published in online journals like the British Medical Journal, the Journal of Human Evolution and the Journal of Cultural and African Women Studies among others.

Discussions

Narratives from the 1960s to the 1990s

The narrative concerning the privileges of the light skinned has not and cannot be left out from the skin bleaching discourse. The desire for light skin among Ghanaian women has

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among other things been based on the special privileges given lighter skinned people (mulattos) who emerged in the Ghanaian society upon the mixed-race unions between Europeans and Africans (BLAY 2009). The mulattos became core members of the indigenous Ghanaian society, for they played key roles because of their mixed identity. At the Gold Coast, they were considered as white by the indigenes who witnessed the special education and privileges given to them by their European heritage and families in the castle and special homes in the Elmina township. This is not decoupled from the persistent view of the superiority of the white man in the Ghanaian society within the early periods of colonization and beyond. Also, the influence of the mulattos in the Gold Coast stemmed from their duties which they exercised. These mulattos became merchant princes who traded on the behalf of their white skinned fathers and they included George Blankson, F.C Grant, Thomas Hughes and James Robert Thompson among others. Due to their background, these men were given the opportunity to receive goods directly from London firms on credit, a position a local indigene found it difficult to get. There were also a handful of religious priests (fathers) who had mixed race background. References here can be made to Philip Quacoe and Christian Protten (BUAH 1980). Though the idea of marrying a white lady was strongly opposed by Quacoe's family, the taste for light skin had become dominant in the Gold Coast society later transcending into the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

Significantly, the mixed-race unions produced a people that were received by both the Europeans and the Africans. Their superiority was partly racial but more so they had had some formal education which the Africans and, for that matter, the indigenous people had not received. It is equally important to advance the argument that the mixed-race unions were preferred because they were partly Europeans and partly Africans. This by inference gave them some racial dominance or superiority; this in essence is also attributable to the colour of their skin. Same would be found in the post-colonial period where there were mixed race unions between Asians and Africans as well as Syrians and Africans. Their off-springs became recognizable because of the colour of their skin. People paid attention to them. If they were women, they had more suitors and vice versa. It can be inferred that this generated a beauty complex in the eyes of the dark skinned women in particular especially within the period under review. Again, the existing literature as well as archival records do not point to indigenous Africans who were fair being preferred by Europeans to serve as missionaries or merchants. The subject of beauty, especially in the case of fair women even among the indigenous population within the period under review has been pronounced - fairness has been associated with beauty and colonization or European presence as well as mixed race unions further accentuated it. It is important to emphasize that the phenomenon of bleaching cuts across the respective communities and ethnicities in Ghana.

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The actual starting point of skin bleaching in Ghana has been credited to prostitutes who were sought after by so-called respectable men. From highly educated to stark illiterates, from grandmothers of fifty and above to adolescents in primary school, from professional (graduates) to unemployed, the one thing that they all have in common is skin bleaching (DORKENOO 1990). Others like Dr. Edmund Delle who spoke on the history of skin bleaching in Ghana in an article published in the *Weekly Spectator*, stated that 'Skin bleaching was first practiced by Ghanaian women soon after the Second World War. This was around the late 1940s, when those who practiced the craft used Asepso and Neko as skin bleaching soaps' (DORKENOO 1990). The taste for skin bleaching in the post-colonial times led to the adoption of varying methods. These saw the use of soaps and dominantly, the use of skin bleaching creams. The use of bleaching soaps was largely common between 1957 and 1980, however, it begun to decline by the end of 1980.

Ghana is the world leader in skin bleaching, having come second to South Africa in the game. Between 1987 and February 1989 when the light skin and half cast advertisement appeared in the paper as authored by Tom Dorkenoo, only four public figures apart from Dr. Delle publicly spoke against the dangers and the disgrace of skin bleaching. These are Lt. General Arnold Quainoo, the General Officer commanding the Ghana Armed forces, Mrs. Selina Taylor, Chairperson of the National Council on Women and Development, Mrs. Esi Sutherland Addy, the Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture, Efua T. Sutherland, Chairperson of Ghana National Commission on Children and Dr. G. L. Boye, Director at the Mampong Centre for Scientific Research into Plant Medicine. The period seemingly highlights what Dorkenoo refer to as the culture of silence on the skin bleaching issue (DORKENOO 1989).

Based on a retrospective analysis, the responses of interviewees were employed to piece the narrative on the motivation for bleaching under the period under review. In the 1950s, one of the major motivations was fashion. People were thrilled by the fashion of the time as having a light skin. Society discussed people with light skins and appreciated them as compared to those with dark skin. Ante Fowaa, 69 years old, reflected on the discussions of the time:

Ei! It was the fashion of our time. During funerals and festivals here in Kumasi in the 60's, I remember my mother and her friends bleached and they were the talk of the town especially when they sewed new 'kaba and slit'. It wasn't easy at all. I also wanted to be like my mother but my mother always hid her bleaching soap. She spanked me once when I used it, furiously asking me: 'do you know how much it costs me...you this small girl you want to do what your

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elders do! Wait till you grow older and get your own money, then you can also buy and use them....hahahahahaaaa’ (A. Fowaa, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Ante Fowaa also stressed on the Neko and Asepso soap, mentioned by Dr. Edmond Delle. Another popular substance used was clear-ton which was relatively cheaper than the original clear-ton. Locally referred to as ‘*clear-ton ase*’ this translates as the residue of ‘clear-ton’.

Another way in which skin bleaching correlated with fashion was found on the backgrounds of social festive occasions. During these times, various individuals commemorate events to either end a fasting occasion like the Ramadan or to mark the end of the year (Christmas). While preparing for these occasions, people bleach their skin to appear nice during such celebrations. Amelia (68 years) from the Makola Market in the Greater Accra area of Ghana hinted that:

I came to know and admire fair skin through skin bleaching in my neighborhood while growing up. When Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr or Eid-ul-Adha was approaching, it was the time to showcase your beauty as a woman or young girl. It was fashion and although society frowned against bleaching, it was still common’ (Amelia, personal communication, March 25, 2017).

The quest for beauty also accentuated the quests for bleaching. This was associated with the love of light skin by the Asante populace in the 80s. Preferences were given to women who had sons or daughters who were light skinned. They attracted some prestige and respect among their peers, especially when they were referred to as *obroni maame*, literally translated as ‘mother of a white child.’ This called for women to use creams and soaps which were available at affordable prices; to change the nature of their skin from dark to white since society admires the latter. Eno Kumiwaa, an 80 years old Asante woman, indicated that women purchased bleaching products because they were cheap and available everywhere on the market (E. Kumiwaa, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

The desire to foster one’s business activity is another factor that may lead to bleaching. Rafiatu, a naturally light skinned ‘waakye’ seller at Madina, hinted that ‘*light skin if not for anything is good for my business. The men are attracted by it to buy my food and they make advances at me through that. I have my way of dealing with them but it is certainly good for my business*’ (Rafiatu, personal communication, March 24, 2017). This interviewee agrees with Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s work on skin bleaching, ‘Yearning for Lightness’ where beauty is a marketing tool with high demand and profit. Easy accessibility of bleach products is also a motivating factor for bleaching the skin (NAKANO GLENN 2008). The excuse of skin diseases such as acne and hyperpigmentation commonly known as dark spots were also

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reasons given for bleaching the skin by some respondents. Thus, bleach creams are used to treat dark spots, especially acne.

In an interview with Awonye, a Ga fishmonger in Jamestown, Accra, she hinted that women used products that were not necessarily manufactured for bleaching purposes. Bleachers graduated from using soaps and creams to hair relaxing creams. Awonye hinted that:

It got to a time when women used UB hair relaxer to bleach and it bleached perfectly. It was very strong and could bleach in less than three weeks. Some women also smeared milk on their skin and that one too worked but it made them smell very bad and unpleasant so they stopped. There was also a soap called Robert Soap which was red in colour but in a green box; it was also used during the time' (Awonye, personal communication, March 26, 2017).

Transitions from the 1990s to the New Millennium

Skin bleaching in Ghana between 1990 and 2000 was not much of a difference than its phenomenal and sharp increase. Between 1990 and 2000, over eleven major articles from the weekly spectator alone were recorded on skin bleaching, as reported by Dorkenoo. All these articles addressed the dangers and effects of skin bleaching on humans. Significantly, in one article written by Jones Sutte, an English expatriate living in Ghana, whose real name was withheld by the weekly spectator for diplomatic reasons, he agreed with Tom Dorkenoo that skin bleaching was bad and encouraged women in Ghana to put a stop to it (DORKENOO 1990). In contemporary times, the desire to bleach is largely associated with factors that necessitated the act in the 1960s and 80s. However, the advertisement of bleaching products by the media and other platforms is gradually on the rise in contemporary times. This has strong ties with the increasing bleaching behaviour among the Ghanaian populace.

Products which are common on the market include pro-claire, carotone, bronze-stone and skin light among others. They contain mercury content ranging from 0.010 to 0.549ugg-1. The advertisements are usually carried out on television stations and product marketers feature them in popular TV programmes that catch attention of viewers. Also large billboards are mounted along streets depicting light skinned ladies by their sides. Some marketers tend to use movie stars, usually the fair ones, to market their products on these billboards with the aim of attracting customers. In relation to this, several actions have been taken on various levels against the act in Ghana. These are discussed in relation to institutions and societal

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actions including views from musicians, movie actors and medical doctors on the subject matter. These are captured in subsequent paragraphs.

The FDA, formerly known as the Ghana Food and Drugs Board, and the GSA were the first point of contact as far as litigations against skin bleaching in Ghana is concerned. This body is the custodian of the Weights and Measures decree which was a military decree (Law) passed by the National Redemption Council (NRC 1975:326) that seeks to promote the standardization for the improvement of quality of goods, services and sound management practices in industries and public institutions in Ghana. On the issue of cosmetic products in Ghana, Madam Frances, the head of cosmetic testing lab at the GSA noted the process in which a cosmetic product goes through before it is accepted. This is captured in the paragraph below:

If someone produces a cream, they bring it to us and we do a quality evaluation to know if it meets our standards. The standards for products are not set alone by the Ghana Standards Board. The standard for a product is deliberated on by a committee of stakeholders like manufacturers, who deliberate and come to an agreement that all creams in Ghana would agree to a particular standard and must meet that standard. The sample is brought and tested and if it meets the standard, we send the results to FDA for the product to be registered. So FDA gets to know that product A is registered but with time, they go back to the market and do a market survey, get the product and test again because some clients knowing that they are bringing their products to be tested, bring the best, do the registration and the product is allowed on the market. Because the product is expensive, they find it difficult in doing the right thing. They manufacture the cheap products after the product is approved in order to make their profits (M. Frances, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

The arguments thus far suggest the efforts of the required institutions to deal with the pressing issues of cosmetic products including bleach creams. However, the narrative points to a people who are equally interested in bleaching to satisfy several interests within their respective communities. Again, for want of profit, the manufacturers or suppliers of these bleach creams have found ingenious ways of sidestepping the rules to satisfy their corporate or organisational interest at the expense of the Ghanaian populace. The dangers associated with this practice has been discussed and highlighted by dermatologists and other research scientists.

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Dangers/Hazards of Skin Bleaching in Ghana

Informants with expert knowledge who reported on creams argued that patients who came to them with skin and other related complications due to bleaching reported on and also showed the use of creams with high dose of hydroquinone, mercury among others. These had caused Erythema, permanent leukoderma, skin irritation, contact dermatitis, pigmented colloid millium, nail pigmentation or discoloration, loss of skin elasticity, impaired wound healing, hypopigmentation of the surrounding normal skin. According to Dr. Jeannette Aryee Boi, the common adverse findings reported by bleachers include kidney damages, skin rashes, skin discoloration, scarring, and reduction in the skin's resistance to bacteria and fungi infections, anxiety, depression, psychosis and peripheral neuropathy among others (J. Aryee Boi, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

Interesting to know, skin bleaching does not have adverse effect on only the bleacher but also on others. In Dr. Aryee Boi's presentation project on skin bleaching, she explains that, *'most mercury in skin lightening products enters the environment in waste water, and may be transformed there into methylmercury, an even more toxic compound, by bacteria. Methylmercury accumulates in fish and thus can enter the human diet. Amounts of mercury used in skin lightening products are less than many other sources of mercury pollution, but eliminating this source would significantly reduce global mercury exposure'* (Aryee Boi, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

Institutional Actions against Skin Bleaching in Ghana in Contemporary Times

Both the FDA and GSA complement each other to ensure that, the Ghanaian market is housed with safe and quality products. However, commenting on the amount of hydroquinone in creams, Madam Frances indicated that only 2% of it is allowed in cosmetic products and even that it should be sold by a pharmacist. Due to low public sensitization and education, cosmetic sellers continue to sell creams with high amount of hydroquinone content even though it has been banned. Per the GSA regulations, cosmetic products with 2% of hydroquinone can only be sold by a pharmacist and with a prescription from a doctor. Madam Frances acknowledges that due to low public education and sensitization, people do not know about the decisions and regulations which have been put out by the GSA concerning cosmetic products. Manufacturers who are profit motivated go contrary to the regulations set by these institutions making the work of the GSA and FDA difficult. She further indicated that, though the use of

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hydroquinone has been limited, manufacturers now use kojic acid; a mimic of hydroquinone which still bleaches the skin.

Despite the efforts of the GSA and FDA at regulating cosmetic products in Ghana, a lot of challenges limit them in carrying out their work effectively. Madam Frances makes mention of consumer interest and patronage of these bleach creams. This, they have no regulation over since the consumer chooses to go for the bleach creams. In another interview with Mr. Emmanuel Nkrumah of the cosmetics department of the FDA, indicated that *'entry points of some of the bleach creams are not properly manned. Also, inadequate public education and sensitization, lack of collaboration between stakeholders and their institution as well as limited resources for effective work are some challenges'* (Nkrumah, personal communication, March 25, 2017). Notwithstanding, these two institutions since their inception have strived to regulate and control the influx of skin bleaching creams in the country but it is obvious that they have not been able to achieve much at combating skin bleaching cosmetics on the Ghanaian market. There is still evidence of the increase and growth in the skin bleaching phenomenon in the country with new methods of achieving a light skin as well as more and more bleaching cosmetic products on the Ghanaian market. This has resulted in increased skin bleaching and damage.

Currently, the FDA is alarmed by parents bleaching the skin of their children. Mr. Nkrumah noted that, though some parents unconsciously bleach the skin of their children, others do it on purpose (ADD0 2018). This purpose is correlated with that of the argument raised by Eno Kumiwaa that parents who have light skinned children get public prestige in terms like *Obroni Maame*. This act probes dangerous to the health of children especially future health repercussions like skin cancer and liver problems.

In an article published by the Ghana News Agency (GNA), the FDA expressed much anxiety about the emergence of the use of pills and tablets among other drugs used for bleaching. An interview with Mr. Nkrumah by the news team revealed that, *'doctors are also worried about this new "craze" among some of the citizenry to swallow cosmetic pills and tablets in the name of getting an even or all-round form of bleaching'* Mr. Nkrumah highlighted the fact that, this recent act results from the Ghanaian populace learning blindly from other cultures and has negatively affected the black skin. These pills and tablets stop the production of melanin which protects the black skin from direct contact with the sun (GNA 2018). Infirmities associated with its use include body odour, liver, kidney problems among others (SIABI-MENSAH 2018). Samples of these pills common on the Ghanaian market include Oral Light, Gluta C, Organic White, L-Glutathione, Marevaz, La Mer, Anal bleach Gel,

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Egyptian Milk or Kamana among others. The prices for these products range between two hundred and eighty Ghana cedis and six hundred and fifty Ghana cedis (NUHU BILA 2016).

In relation to the use of pills is that of injection of drugs into the body. Both are used jointly to bleach effectively. These drugs are modified and contain high amount of bleaching components like hydroquinone and mercury which are injected directly into the blood stream. In an interview with Akesse, a news reporter for the Daily Graphic in Ghana, Mrs Emma Yankey; cosmetologist at 2nd Hair Salon and Beauty Clinic indicated what happens when the drug is injected into the body:

Once it is injected into the body, it enters the bloodstream then the blood circulates it all over the system. Most of the creams and soaps take many weeks or months to achieve results but the injections and pills act faster. So you can inject today and in less than a week, you would start seeing some changes on your skin (AKESSE 2014).

Injection products on the Ghanaian market include Tatiomax plus Glucotathione, Tatio Active Glutathione, Veniscy Prestige Skin 5000, Bio Rare Complexion 8 among others. Consumers spend up to 3000 Ghana cedis to obtain both pills and injections (SIABI-MENSAH 2018).

The Role of the Media and Celebrities

More recently, taking a close look at the perceptions and attitude of skin bleaching in contemporary Ghana, a lot of participation has been put into speaking and advocating against skin bleaching. Media houses such as TV3, GTV amongst others through their interviews with health professionals and even skin bleachers are creating a consciousness on the adverse effects of skin bleaching in Ghana.

Documentaries by various individuals, groups and interested stakeholders have been run on skin bleaching to create awareness. Movie production houses are beginning to write scripts and act them to discourage the practice. A movie entitled Black Barbie written and directed by Comfort Arthur who was a one-time skin bleacher has also educated the public on the dangers of skin bleaching. Campaigns on skin bleaching by some prominent Ghanaians such as Ama K. Abebrese and Nana Ama McBrown who are actresses, Paulina Oduro, a veteran musician and Hamamat Monita, a model through their campaign have addressed skin bleaching and its dangers, advocating for a stop in bleaching. Ace television shows such as the Delay show have also made good efforts at knowing why some people bleach. One such

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interview on the show was the interview with Nasara, who won the Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant in 2009, and has taken to bleaching her skin. Health programmes have also been aired to address skin bleaching and its effects and to educate the Ghanaian populace on its dangers.

The Role of Musicians (The Okuntakinte Narrative)

Some musicians have done exclusive pieces of lyrical education on skin bleaching. One of such musicians is Okuntakinte, a young musician who finds the practice dangerous enough and deems fit to address through his music in a song he calls Melanin Girls. This breakthrough single of the British-Ghanaian artist Okuntakinte received critical attention for its appraisal of dark skinned girls. The song contributed to the banning of bleaching products in Ghana. The Hook after the first verse of the song reads:

These melanin girls, melanin girls, melanin girls, (hey yeah)

These melanin girls, melanin girls

Hide your diamonds, hide your pearls

Melanin girls, melanin girls, melanin girls, (yes, please)

The bitter taste of chocolate I saw it first

Melanin girls, melanin girls, (yeah)

Iwan, a dancehall artist from the Ashaiman area of Ghana also put out a song titled Stop the Skin Bleaching to join the campaign to stem the tide of skin bleaching in Ghana. A section of the lyrics of the song reads:

Wa bleach, a bleach, a bleach, babiaa babiaa

You have a white face, yellow hands, black legs, are you a chameleon?

It is a disgrace to hate your race and bleach your face.

Another known hiplife artist in Ghana; Sarkodie in his song Choices also highlighted the issue of skin bleaching in Ghana. A section of the song stated:

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Nku no Clairtone fra, Nope?

Nti Kokoo no ye by chance, Yup?

It is imperative to appreciate the fact that these musicians who are within the youthful population of Ghana have found their voice in dealing with the subject matter of bleaching. This notwithstanding, there seem to be a gap in a more organised persistent social and academic discourse that would seek to address the bleaching menace. Suffice to state however, the owners of capital who continue to produce these bleach creams have found a people whose desire for the light-skin has overpowered their moral and intellectual consciousness.

Conclusion

The notion of racial supremacy and white colour, colonization, enslavement among other things is replete in the literature. These are known to project the skin bleaching lifestyle. This particular study has further highlighted the question of benefits denied by the cosmetic industrial complex that seek to make profit out of the effacement or bleaching of the skin of others. The existing literature for instance points to hawking-down of these bleaching products to urban south- African women in particular both educated (lettered) and uneducated (unlettered). Again, the beauty discourse as found in this particular research dominates the literature on skin bleaching. This is accentuated by the celebrity discourse on skin lightening. This study has shown that Ghana is not an exception.

This particular study for instance, has confirmed studies (BLAY 2009; CHARLES 2009; FORKUO 2009; HUNTER 2011) which have reported reasons for bleaching to include efforts to attract a spouse, attain a better job, maximizing of profits during sales or trade through skin lightening among other things. Again, this study has highlighted a long degree of public campaigns by individuals, celebrities, public health experts and government agencies like the FDA and GSA in attempting to stem the tide of bleaching in Ghana.

The above notwithstanding, this study has highlighted a lot of critical issues. These skin bleaching narratives from the people of Ghana highlighted the social acceptance, prestige, complex among other things as major drivers for the persistent interest in skin bleaching. These narratives have been conveyed through the oral, print and electronic media. The

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subject matter of colour shall continue to remain within the philosophical, the psychological and the physiological realm. Its discussion, especially concerning the depletion of it shall persist in the Ghanaian social discourse even in the foreseeable future.

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