The Shades of Racism in the Beauty Industry*

An exploration of inclusivity and tokenism within fashion and makeup industries

Huda Sahaf

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This paper aims to investigate the history of racism in the beauty industry and how this impacts the inclusivity in the market. The complexions of models are assigned a lightness value and analyzed across 8 years. These results are compared to the foundation shade ranges across all major makeup brands across the U.S revealing a continuation of compounding racism within the industry as a whole.

1 Introduction

You can and should cross-reference sections and sub-sections. For instance, Section 2 and Section 4.1.

2 Data

2.1 Data Management

All analysis on the data sets were done using R (R Core Team 2020). The data was read in, cleaned, and manipulated using `dplyr`(Wickham et al. 2023), `tidyverse` (Wickham et al. 2019), and `janitor` (Firke 2023). The graphs and tables in this paper were coded using the following packages: `ggplot2` (Wickham 2016), `kableExtra`(Zhu 2021), `knitr` (Xie 2023), `readr` (Wickham, Hester, and Bryan 2023), and `RColorBrewer`(Neuwirth 2022).

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/hsahaf/Racism_Beauty_Industry.git.

2.2 Source and Sampling

In order to conduct an analysis on the various parts of the beauty industry, three separate data sets were used. The Pudding is a digital publication that makes its data sets open to the public *The Pudding Repository* (2023). A closer look is taken at Vogue using the first two data sets used for the article *Colorism in High Fashion* (Handa, Thomas, and Diehm 2019). All covers of Vogue from the year 2000 to 2018 are analyzed and categorized in these data sets. The female models on each cover are identified, and then their skin tones are filtered out of the cover, and an average color value is assigned based on the all skin tone pixels. These color values are then drained of any hue or saturation and therefore assigned a lightness value based on how light or deep the complexion of the model is, which allows for the comparison of all models on the covers of Vogue over the span of 8 years. The first data set contains the name of the model, date of their appearance on Vogue, the hex code of their skin tone, and their lightness value once the hue and saturation has been removed. This includes multiple appearances of the same model. The second data set contains the names of the models, the hex code of their skin tone, the number of covers they have made appearances in, and their average lightness value across these appearances.

The data set behind The Pudding article, *Beauty Brawl* is the third data set used in this paper (Li, Thomas, and Manian 2018). It contains data about the foundation shade ranges through lightness values of multiple beauty brands around the world. For the sake of this paper, we are focusing on beauty retailers based in the US, especially since Vogue is also based in the United States.

3 Results

Figure 1 is a graph of the lightness value of every model that has been on the cover of Vogue from 2000 to 2018. Lightness value is measured on a scale from 0 to 1, 1 being extremely pale in skin tone, and 0 being extremely deep. There is a general trend present almost immediately, in that across the entire 8 year period, Vogue has consistently had lighter skinned individuals with a lightness value of 0.5 to 0.8 on their covers. It has only been after around 2009 that we see a model on Vogue with a complexion deeper than 0.4.

Table 1 is a table of all the models on Vogue who have had more than 4 appearances on the covers of Vogue between 2000 and 2018. In all of the names on this list, Rihanna is the only black woman, and her average lightness value across these five appearances has been fairly midtoned, at a lightness value of 0.62.

Figure 2 takes a closer look at Vogue's presentation of Rihanna's skintone on her five appearances. Vogue has been publicly accused of whitewashing Rihanna's complexion on some of her covers, and it is apparent that only after 2016 does her lightness value drop below 0.4 (Barmak 2011). While lighting and editing can account for some fluctuations in the lightness
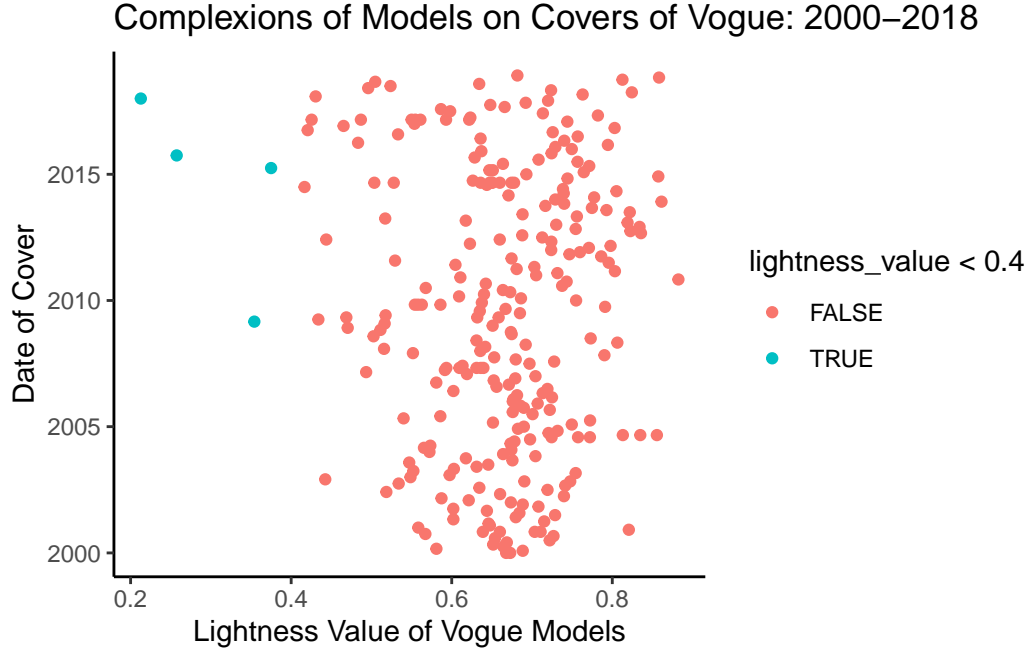
Figure 1: Complexion Values of All Models on Vogue Covers from 2000-2018

Table 1: Models With More than 5 Appearances on Vogue

Model	Number of Covers	Lightness Value
Angelina Jolie	5	0.67
Cate Blanchett	5	0.68
Charlize Theron	6	0.68
Gisele Bundchen	9	0.67
Gwyneth Paltrow	5	0.69
Kate Hudson	5	0.67
Keira Knightley	5	0.71
Nicole Kidman	7	0.70
Penelope Cruz	5	0.62
Reese Witherspoon	5	0.63
Rihanna	5	0.62
Sarah Jessica Parker	6	0.62

value, but it does not explain the extent of the contrast between her first three appearances and her most recent two.
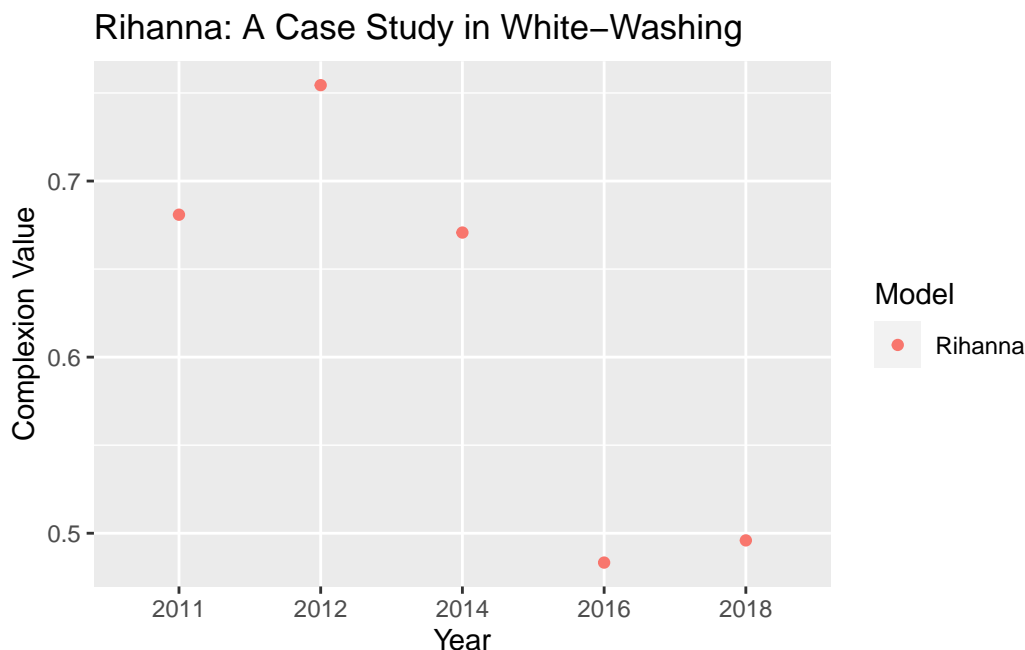

Figure 2: Rihanna's Appearances on Vogue

Figure 3 takes a closer look at the fluctuations in lightness values in the appearances on the models with the deepest complexions on Vogue. Rihanna has had the highest number of appearances at 5 total covers from 2000 to 2018, followed by Lupita Nyongo, at 4. Amongst these models, Lupita Nyongo has the deepest complexion and her appearances on Vogue are the most recent, her last two being in 2015 and in 2018. The fluctuation is apparent in her appearances as well, in that it is only in her most recent cover that her lightness value is shown to be deeper than 0.3.

Figure 4 shows the fluctuation in the lightness values of the top four models with the greatest number of covers on Vogue. All four of these models are white, and all of them have made appearances in 6 or more covers. Vogue's preferences for tanned white women is clear in that in the span of 8 years, the lightness value rarely drops below 0.6.

Table 2 is a table of all of the major beauty brands that are based in the United States, and the number of shades in their main foundation line.

Figure 5 takes a closer look at the inclusivity of the bestselling foundation lines across some of the largest beauty brands across the United States of America. It is clear that there are a greater number of shades available for people with lighter skin tones, with a lightness value of 0.6 or lighter, across all of the major brands. However, for people with a complexion that
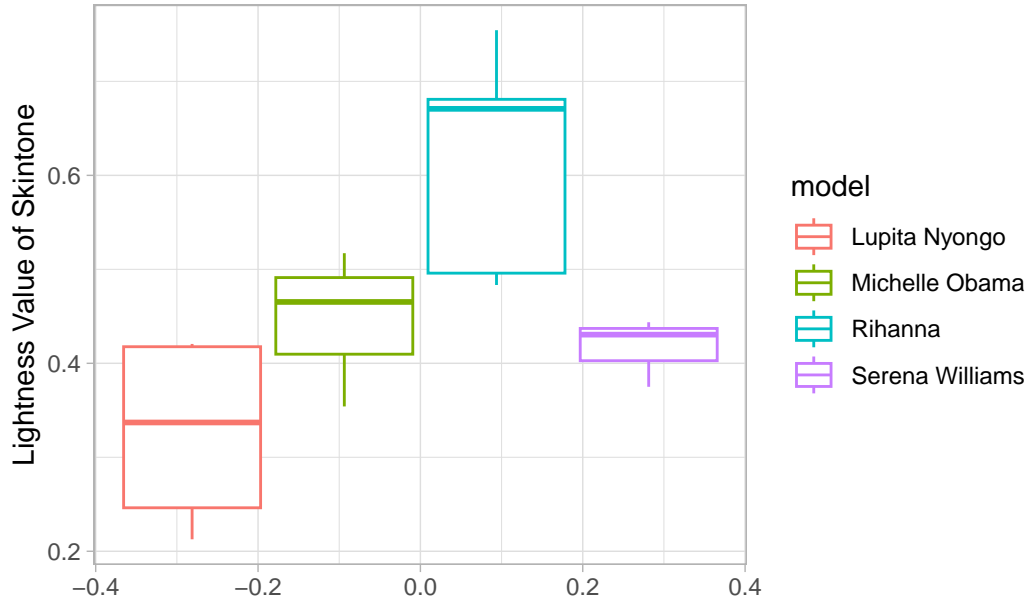
Appearances of Deepest Complexion Models on Vogue

Figure 3: Top 4 Deepest Complexion Models on Vogue

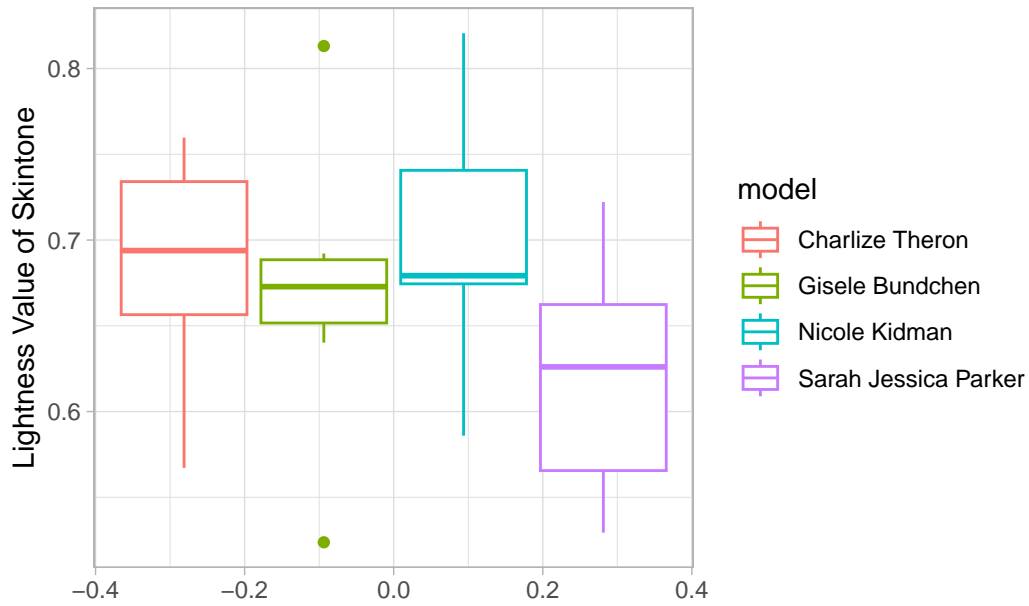## Complexions of Models with Highest Number of Vogue Covers

Figure 4: Models with Highest Number of Appearances

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Table 2: US Makeup Brands: Foundation Shade Range

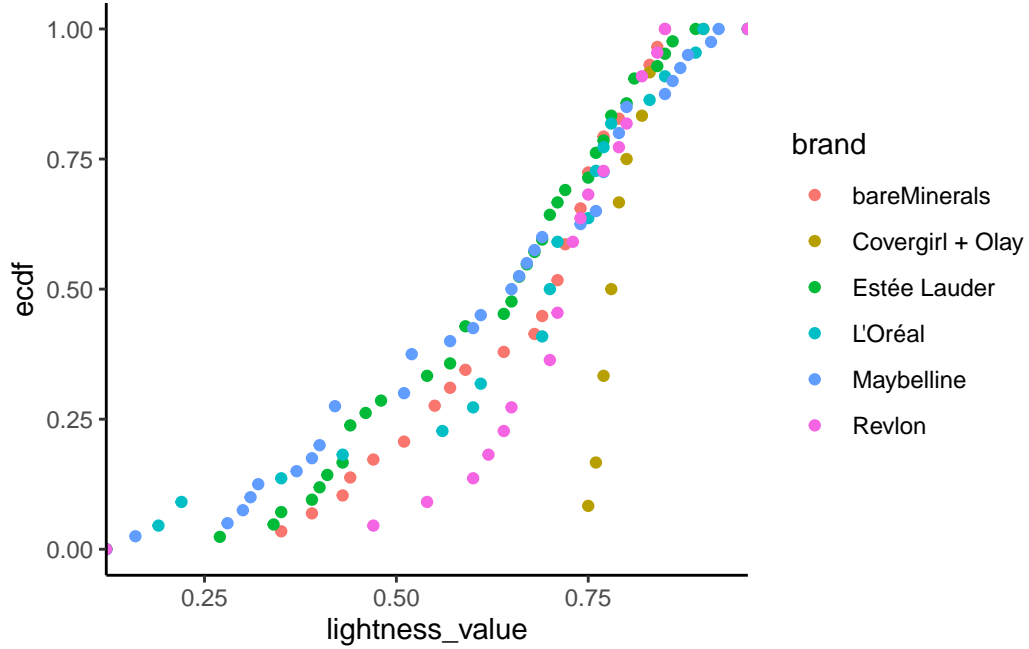| Makeup Brand	Number of Foundation Shades
Beauty Bakerie	30
Black Opal	12
Black Up	18
Bobbi Brown	30
Covergirl + Olay	12
Estée Lauder	42
Fenty	40
Iman	8
L'Oréal	22
Lancôme	40
Laws of Nature	17
MAC	42
Make Up For Ever	40
Maybelline	40
Revlon	22
bareMinerals	29

Figure 5: The Shade Distribution of Best-Selling Foundations in the U.S

is a hair deeper than a medium skin tone, the number of shades become sparse, and the distribution spreads out as the lightness value becomes deeper than 0.5.
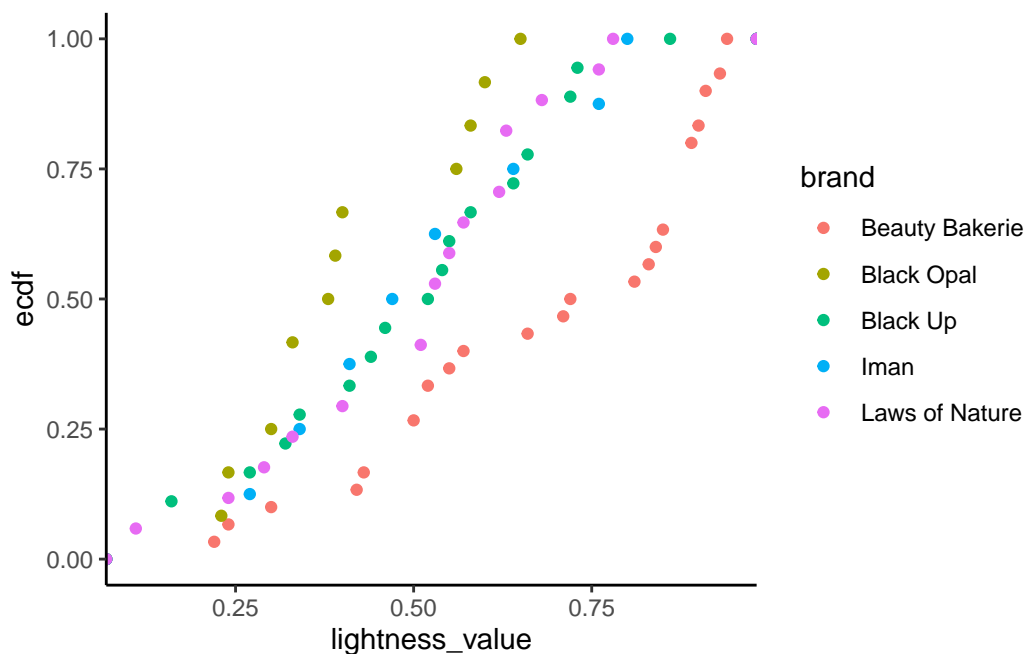

Figure 6: The Shade Distribution of BiPOC-owned Makeup Brands

Figure 6 looks at the shade distributions of the retailers with owners that are black, indigenous, or other people of color. The distribution is much more even, and all of these beauty brands provide options for people that are on both sides of the spectrum, complexions with lightness values deeper than 0.3, as well as complexions with lightness values paler than 0.8.

Figure 7 looks at the distribution across the beauty brands based in the United States with a foundation line with more than 25 shades. The contrast between the number of shades provided for people with light to medium complexions (0.6-1) and the lack thereof in terms of the number of shades for people with deeper complexions (0-0.35) is apparent.

4 Discussion

4.1 First discussion point

The same trend exists across the entire beauty industry. The deeper your complexion, the less options there are available for you. There are far less doors open for people of color in the beauty space, which causes several issues to compound. There is intersectionality at present in the communities of people impacted by this cycle of racism. Not only are these individuals
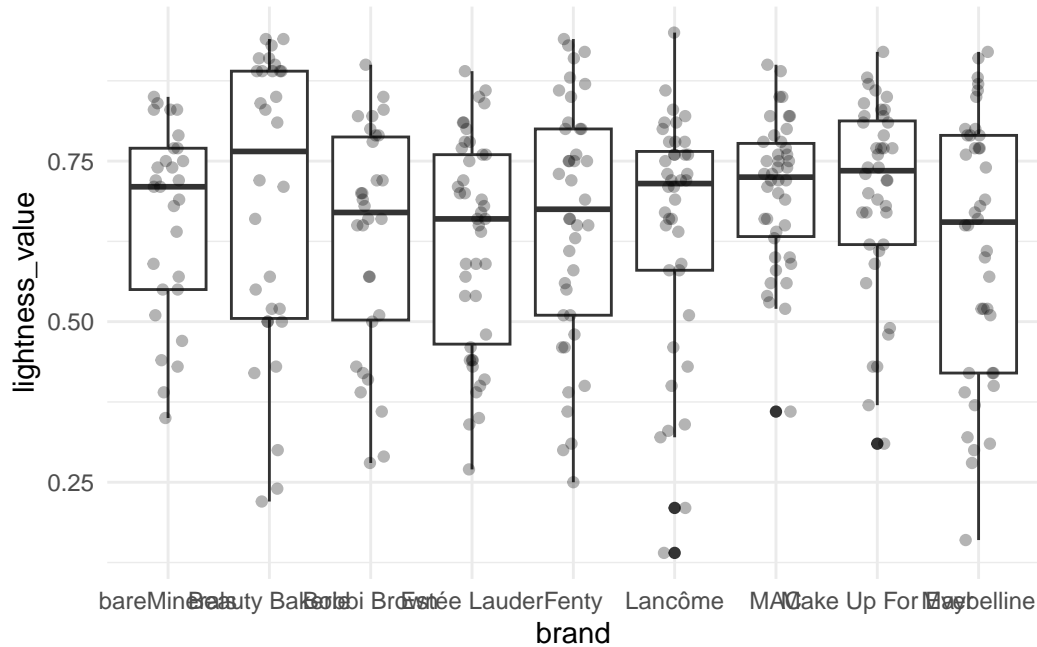
Figure 7: The Shade Distribution of Largest Shade Ranges Offered in the U.S

at a disadvantage in society because they are women, but the issues are compounded further if they are individuals of color. These industries feed into each other, the less representation there is for black and brown women in fashion, the less options will be made available in the beauty industry and vice versa. The lack of representation creates a scarcity mindset. These women feel like they are the exception rather than the norm, and without the options available, without the same advantage of seeing people like you succeed, you are less likely to feel safe in these spaces and less confident when it comes to seeking to be in them. But the presence of black and brown women in these spaces has a significant impact.

An example of this is in the beauty industry. The 'Pull Up or Shut Up' movement in 2020 forced beauty brands to reveal how many BiPOC women were staff members and in senior leadership positions(Shacknai 2020). It pushed for transparency in their marketing claims and resulted in a significant increase in consumer awareness, customers were now able to support brands that supported them. However, the same cannot be said for the fashion industry. The beauty industry is a commercial space that is not as difficult to break into through the rise of beauty influences, but high fashion is still considered to be a very elitist institution. BiPOC women have the power to revolutionize the beauty industry as a whole, but the lack of representation makes the path significantly harder. The compounding racism bleeds into other industries as well, such as television and film, and which hurts young girls the most. Looking into a world that has not made any room for you can be a very difficult and disheartening thing to overcome for children. Despite claims made by major institutions, this data reveals

that it is only recently that black and brown women have been able to break into the industry, and it still has a long way to go in terms of actually uplifting and empowering them.

4.2 Second discussion point

According to Figure 1, there is a very gradual shift of a great number of appearances on Vogue of models with complexions that are deeper than 0.5, but it only recently in 2018, with Lupita Nyongo's cover with Vogue in 2018, that we see a model with a much deeper complexion than what is the norm for Vogue. According to Figure 5, a very similar trend is visible in that in the top 6 bestselling foundation brands in the United states, the number of shades providing for people of color is disappointingly sparse in comparison to the number of foundation shades offered for people who have a skin tone paler than a lightness value of 0.6.

The fact of the matter is, there is a hierarchy present from light to dark. Even amongst black people, the deeper their complexion the more push back they recieve from the beauty industry. The issue with this, is that it creates an idealistic beauty standard. No matter where you are on the spectrum of complexions, you are encouraged to be paler in order to fit in. This is idealistic and racist standard is propped up by microaggressions all over the beauty industry, as well as in society overall. "We found 130 products on Sephora's and Ulta's websites that use a sequential number system to label their shades. Of those, 97% put their lighter shades, and thus the customers that use those shades, first.."(Amaka and Thomas 2021). The way that beauty products are named, the way that they are displayed, the amounts of lighter shades that retailers keep in stock, all of these systems prioritize people with lighter skin. The problem with the way racism is addressed today is that all of these efforts are based in public apologies and pretty speeches. There are systems that are in place that uphold the racist standard, and when we apply these standards to women of color, some of the most disenfranchised groups in society, no amount of pretty speeches will heal a problem that has been hundreds of years in the making. The hierarchy that exists that pushes this standard of acceptability within society based on how pale or deep you are has the power to further divide people, and it is only right to question who stands to gain from this.

4.3 Third discussion point

4.4 Weaknesses and next steps

Weaknesses and next steps should also be included.

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