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This paper is a breakdown of negative media representation of black women specifically focusing on colorism and “blackfishing”. The images in question for this analysis feature two different social media influencers who have recently went viral for “Blackfishing”. “Blackfishing” is a recently coined term used to describe someone accused of pretending to be black (or Hispanic, Arab) on social media by using makeup, hair products, photo editing and in some cases, surgery to drastically change their appearance. Although, it is mainly done by social media influencers, celebrities have been known to participate as well, such as Kim Kardashian and Ariana Grande. This is especially problematic in an age where black women are fighting for proper representation and opportunities to write their own narrative rather than portray ones given to them. When we look at the images and focus solely on the denotation aspect, they look like your everyday selfie of 20-something influencers on the internet sharing their look of the day. Black women with their makeup done, natural hair on display in clothing made popular in black culture while taking advantage of the great lighting; they look like models I might follow for outfit and makeup inspiration and judging by the pages who reshared the photos, even ones for black models only, the internet believes it too. But upon further inspection we discover these women are actually not women of color at all and they’ve done multiple things to make themselves appear in photos as black women. They’ve applied foundation to their skin several shades darker than their actual skin tone, overdrawn their lips along with fillers, changed their hair texture, donning traditional “hood” or “ghetto” aesthetic clothing including poses, and filters on the photo to make it cohesive and exaggerate their curves (some have even been

outed for how badly they've altered the photo to make their bodies look curvier). If we removed the skin, hair and body modifications, these are all signifiers that represent not just black culture but, pop culture as well due to it becoming mainstream. When looked at from a connotated perspective, it would fall under a possible form of cultural appropriation but, not overly offensive. Add the skin, hair, and clothing changes in and this becomes a much more insidious issue. Black women are already heavily affected by colorism where darker skin tones and coarser hair are typically frowned upon especially in media; the lighter you are and the looser your curls, the more attractive and successful you are thought to be. Blackfishing taps into a strange market where even black women are too black for their own culture and aesthetic which then becomes a much larger issue because while non-black models are receiving praise for their looks. To viewers, it says this look is cool depending on the skin wearing it. These models portraying black women in their photos are able to capitalize on their appearances in a way that black women who naturally look this way are not because they are looked at as exotic but, it also reinforces the oversexualized image of black women in media because the only thing accentuated are organs that are associated with sex: full lips, wider hips, big butts, large breasts and small waists, almost cartoonish like while posed in a way that says they are available. When women want to be viewed as rebellious, cool or the bad girl, they darken their skin and when the times comes for the good girl image to return, they lighten back up reinforcing the notion that dark skin especially on women equals deviance. The black women viewing these photos feel inadequate yet on display. When these white women grow tired of the aesthetic, they can just try on something else while black women are stuck with a negative interpretation of themselves and in media.

Reference Links

Twitter Link of Blackfishing Exposure:

https://twitter.com/WannasWorld/status/1059989652487069696?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1059989652487069696%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.teenvogue.com%2Fstory%2Fblackfish-niggerfish-white-influencers-using-makeup-to-appear-black

Blackfishing Definition: <https://www.insideedition.com/what-blackfishing-how-some-influencers-can-insinuate-they-are-black-when-they-arent-48928>

Blackfishing Issue: <https://www.theweek.co.uk/98291/what-is-blackfishing>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-46427180>

Blackfishing Analysis: <https://slate.com/comments/culture/2018/11/blackfishing-instagram-models-emma-hallberg-appropriation.html>

Reality TV Tropes: <https://psmag.com/ideas/why-cant-reality-tv-stop-stereotyping-black-women>

Why Representation is Important: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/zmwq3x/why-diversity-on-screen-is-important-black-panther

Archetypes: <https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/six-annoying-women-character-tropes-in-black-romantic-comedies>

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/4-tired-tropes-misogynoir/>

Black Women Whitewashed in Art: <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20190114-how-black-women-were-whitewashed-by-art>