

COMPELLING COMMENTS

Vitiligo and Beauty

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Vitiligo is an autoimmune condition targeting select melanocytes in the epidermis producing segmental areas of depigmentation. There is a predilection for involvement on the face and hands, which can have devastating psychological results including lowered self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Individuals with extensive vitiligo, dark skin, or onset at an earlier age are especially affected.¹

Winnie Harlow, born Chantelle Brown-Young, has defied the norms of beauty by entering the modeling industry despite suffering from vitiligo (Figure 1). During her childhood she became self-conscious after being bullied, by being called “cow” and “moo.” Harlow later said, “I don't actually think I'm ugly - I think I'm beautiful. So where did I get this idea I wasn't? From someone else.”² She has become a well-known supermodel and spokeswoman for encouraging the public to see beauty in everything.

Others like Harlow have realized the beauty in Vitiligo. Jasmine Colgan, an American photographer discovered she had vitiligo at age 21.³ While at first devastated, capturing body on camera, led her to conclude that her skin was a work of art. Her project “Tough Skin,” demonstrates the mental toughness of individuals with vitiligo and highlights the unique beauty of this skin condition. Colgan

hopes to extend the campaign of “Tough Skin” to reveal the beauty of all individuals with an outer difference including albinism, cleft palate, and Down syndrome.³



Figure 1. Photograph of Winnie Harlow. Photograph attributed to Georges Biard [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons.

Vitiligo is a condition that is very difficult to treat. Some patients disguise their appearance with self-tanning lotions or cosmetic camouflage. Others may decide to accept the natural history of this condition treatment. Harlow and Colgan have not only learned to live with vitiligo, they have embraced their skin's unique look. Dermatologists should be open to receiving the message that treatment to correct this

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condition is not the only option available to patients.

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