

## COMPELLING COMMENTS

### To Our Brown Skin Girls

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Melanocytes are a type of skin cell in the epidermis that produce melanin, which is what gives skin its color. The more melanin someone has the darker their skin. Far too often darker skin is thought to be unattractive or of lesser value.<sup>1</sup> The alarming number of skin lighteners and bleaching treatments in Asian and African cultures are proof of skin color hierarchy.<sup>1,2</sup> In 2017, the global skin-lightening industry was worth several billions with as much as 61% of women in India use skin-lightening cream and 77% in Nigeria.<sup>1-3</sup> Instead of pointing fingers at those choosing to lighten their complexion, we must instead bring awareness and change to the society that discriminates against darker skin.

In recent years multiple social media movements have made strides to dismantle the notion brown is not beautiful. Popular Instagram hashtags to celebrate dark skin are “melaninpoppin”, “melaninqueen”, and “blackgirlmagic” with over 20 million tags. Most recently, Beyoncé’s song “Brown Skin Girl” celebrates the enormous beauty inherent in brown and black skin that is often maligned and overlooked—this message is one that can be amplified by physicians.

Dermatologists have a unique and relevant role in supporting patients in their journey to love the shade of their skin. An essential part of that is preventing and stopping unsafe skin

lightening and bleaching practices. These colorism-promoting products are a public health concern as they propagate an unhealthy obsession to chase fairer skin using dangerous, unregulated ingredients.<sup>1,3</sup> Our population is more diverse than ever, and the messaging and language dermatologists employ in their practice can empower and influence patients’ perceptions of what it means to have beautiful, healthy skin.

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