Gen Z Latinas on TikTok: Uncovering their Complex Intersectional Identities

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INTRODUCTION & LIT REVIEW

Previous research has already established that there is an overrepresentation of Whites within fashion and beauty magazines and existing minority representation is Eurocentric (Duan, 2017; Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022; Kuipers et al., 2014; Yan & Bissell, 2014). This study will use an intersectional theoretical lens to examine how Latinas are affected by multiple systems of oppression which can impact how they see themselves represented. They are underrepresented both generally and within minorities, and the existing depictions of them are Eurocentric or have been co-opted by white women. As brands and businesses continue to move forward with social media marketing, it's important to examine the representation research on social media platforms. Particularly, TikTok is important because its engaging creative features, such as duetting, have made it one of the most popular apps in the last few years (Anderson, 2020; Fang et al., 2019; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).This allows for research to examine how representation is evaluated by them. The following research questions will be addressed:

- RQ1: What role does race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and socioeconomic status play in Gen Z Latinas' self-concepts that influence their evaluation of beauty and fashion content on TikTok?
- RQ2: How do Gen Z Latinas relate to Latina representation that is user generated compared to representation that is curated by brands?
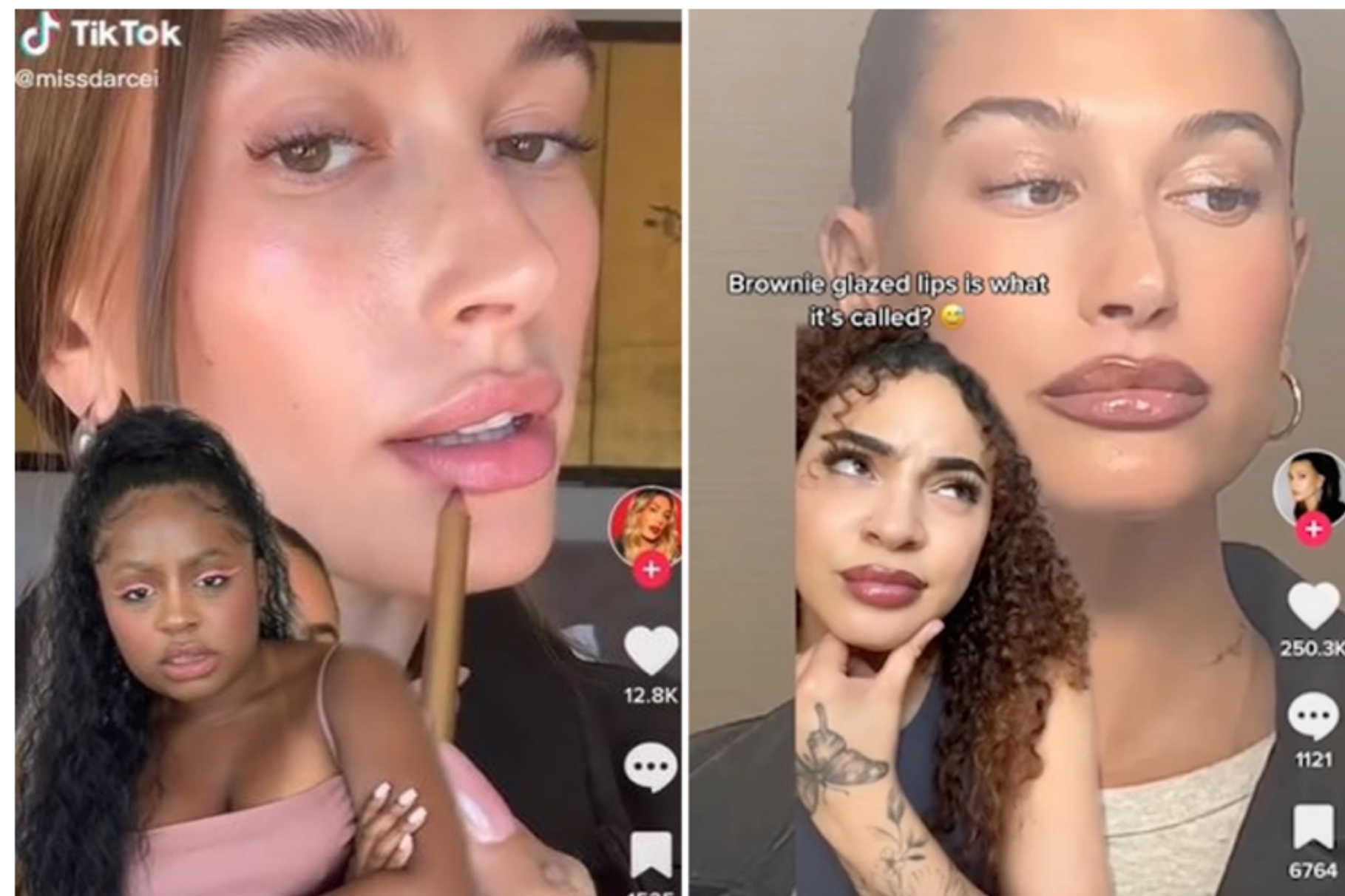
METHODOLOGY

- Participants: 16 Latinas between the ages of 18-25 who go to Drexel University or Penn
- In-depth interviews, 45 minutes long, and compensated with $10
- Watched and responded to 6 TikToks related to fashion or beauty: 3 user-generated, 3 brand created
- Respondents answered specific identity related questions about the TikToks viewed, and then more general questions about representation, fashion, and beauty
- Interviews were audio recorded using a cellphone and transcribed using Rev
- Analysis used thematic coding in combination with an open-coding
  - 1st reading: how multiple forms of oppression appear and impact their views on identity
  - 2nd reading: how identity impacts perceived closeness with the TikToks

RESULTS

- Race and ethnicity:
  - Supported previous research finding underrepresentation compared to Whites however within Latin groups there is an issue of overrepresentation of specific Latin ethnicities
  - Tension between embracing Latino solidarity and their own diversity as shown through Spanish language, music, and individual birthplace
  - Issue of appropriation by Whites and Latinos

"Yes. I feel like the content that I watch that's just from people from back home, it feels like people talking about just different things, their own lives... For me, it feels like regular people speaking and regular content. But then more Latinx based pages are, I think because of being part of the diaspora, they try to hang onto their roots more".
- Participant K13, Puerto Rican-born

- Gender and sexuality:
  - Some truth to hyper feminine and traditional gender representations of Latinas that conflict with sexualized representations
  - Character of Gloria on *Modern Family* embodies this tension

"Yeah, I've had white guy friends who are like, oh, I want a big booty Latina, and it's like, why are you already putting us in that context type of thing".
-Participant S2, Nicaraguan-Puerto Rican American

"Yeah. I mean, the main example that I'm thinking of is Sofía Vergara and Modern Family. I didn't watch that show, but I know that was a, definitely, thing, and you had that whole entire like, oh, the spicy Latina. I feel like a lot of what happened in Modern Family contributed to that, or was at least an example of it."
-Participant C6, Ecuadorian American

- Socioeconomic status:
  - Highly tied to colorism

"The socioeconomic status back in Mexico is very closely tied to colorism. People who have lighter skin tones tend to be the ones who are the doctors, the lawyers, the CEOs of companies, and the people who have darker skin tones tend to be the ones of the working class or the poor".
-Participant T11, Mexican American

"Because at least from my experience in Peru, there's a lot of racism there. And they would say that people that have brown skin color are usually people that live in the more vulnerable areas, and then they would say that people that have more lighter skin tone, they're from high class, middle-high class".
-Participant V16, Peruvian born

- User vs brand TikToks:
  - Gen Z Latinas resonated more with User TikToks because they have more creative control, better insight into Latino culture, and no monetary ties
  - Many recommended that brand TikToks allow the Latina spokesperson or creator to have more creative control

"I think the regular TikTok users do a better job just because there's no company that's forcibly using them for their Latin background to appeal to the Latino population. They're just doing it to talk about themselves and their identity".
-Participant D14, Cuban American

CONCLUSION

- Latinas may subscribe to a fluid racial categorization which may explain why there was so much dissatisfaction surrounding race and ethnicity
- In creating content, its important to consider how US-born Latinas may differ from Latin-born ones including culturally
- Latinas are far from being a monolith as this study supports the idea that the Latin identity is shaped by different social categories
  - This supports intersectionality as being an effectively way of studying how Latinas understand themselves
- Limits:
  - Researcher bias in questions asked
  - Social desirability bias to appeal to researcher
  - Some TikToks were already viewed
  - Majority of sample came from Penn
- Future research should:
  - Have clear and specific questions to target a specific identity aspect
  - Compare brand TikToks featuring a creator with the creator's own version for a better comparison

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