



## Exploring Skin Specificity and Colorism in E.Lockhart's *We Were Liars*

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### Abstract

This research is conducted to investigate the representation of racial color classification in E. Lockhart's *We Were Liars* through the postcolonial lens of Fanonian philosophy. The selected novel primarily explores wealth, familial dynamics, and racial themes, specifically through the character of Patil. Patil's non-white skin juxtaposes him against the white Sinclair family. This research aims to highlight the concepts of racial identity, colonial gaze, and postcolonial body through Frantz Fanon's theory from *Black Skin, White Masks*, which focuses on the skin color complex and surveillance. This exploration provides a broader discourse on racial identity in young adult fiction to uncover deeper meanings. Previous research, such as Seogijono's (2018) doctoral dissertation, explores *We Were Liars* through a psychological lens and examines Cadenece's use of sublimation and repression fantasy to recover her lost memory. In contrast, this research addresses the gaps in Fanonian theory to explore racial and postcolonial themes in *We Were Liars*. The author uses qualitative methods and close textual analysis to examine the theme of 'Skin Connects' through the lens of 'racial color classification'. It involves a detailed reading of specific passages where Patil's racial personality is highlighted. Fanon's ideology incorporated comprehensive themes of how skin color affects character interactions and their relationships. This study analyses Patil's emotional challenges through the colonial gaze and racial othering. This Researcher concludes that Fanonian postcolonial narratives advance to understanding of contemporary young adult fiction. It reveals *We Were Liars* offers valuable insight into racial identity, colorism, and skin specificity in the postcolonial context. The research extends a broader view for future researchers to explore cultural sensitivity and intersectionality of race and mental health in characters.

**Keywords:** Skin color, Colorism, Frantz Fanon, *We Were Liars*, Gatwick Mathew Patil, Postcolonial lense.



## Introduction

E.Lockhart personified racial classification and social interaction through the character of Gat Patil in her Mysterious novel, *We Were Liars*. Gat's skin tone is alluring in portraying how people view him because of his non-white skin tone among white Sinclairs. Subtle racial stereotypes held by the Sinclair family, who stand for the boundaries of otherness, influence his connection with Cadence. His Dark Complexion and different cultural backgrounds highlight the social and racial conflicts. The Sinclair family reflects a colonial gaze and racism that exoticizes Gat. Colorism alienated Gatwill Patel by making his difference a contention point. 'Light skin associated with Whiteness, medium skin with Latinidad, and, most strongly, dark skin with Blackness'(Feliciano, C. 2016) is the main racial indicator used to classify others.

This study explores E. Lockhart's *We Were Liars* through a Fanonian Postcolonial lens. The role of Gat Patil, an Indian who is central to the conflict in the wealthy, white world of the Sinclair family, is key to this study. This paper explores how Gat's darker skin acts as a symbol of "otherness," drawing on the theories of Frantz Fanon from *Black Skin, White Masks*. An advanced understanding of the Sinclair family's views and how they dealt with Gat is made feasible by Fanon's theories on colonialism, racism, and the psychology of the oppressed. This article addresses concerns about race in *We Were Liars* by focusing on Gat's specific connection with the Sinclair family to evaluate colorism and the colonial gaze. Overall, a view of postcolonial culture can be seen in young adult fiction.

## Research Objectives

- To discover how Gat Patil's personality was influenced by skin color classification in *We Were Liars*.
- To evaluate how the Sinclair family's colonial perspective shapes Gat Patil's place in the novel.

## Research Questions

- How does racial color classification shape Gat's social position in the Sinclair family?
- What is the role of Gat's racial background in influencing his relationship with Cady?

## Literature Review

Reynold (2004) addresses Dante's *Divine Comedy* to examine intertextuality in Levi's *If This Is a Man*. By contrasting Levi's memoirs, this study explores interconnected networks and evaluates highly significant layers. The researcher studied how intertextual links connect the literary past with daily life, so fusing bodily and emotional anguish. Levi's use of the visceral facets of his identity and reaction to the Holocaust, as if literature fills his identity and the painful event itself, goes above simply reading or reciting these books. In short, Levi shows that literary devices cannot adequately explain the Situation. Levi's method focused on interpretation and highlighted the limitations of words in expressing such an experience.

Slocum, R. (2008) uses the corporeal feminist theory from Elizabeth Grosz, which explores the body's role in understanding race through materiality rather than just representation. The focus is on the *Minneapolis Farmers' Market* about food practices and body interactions shaping racial divisions and intimacy. The research employs qualitative observational methods to analyze how phenotypical different bodies interact in the market environment. It examines movements and physical interactions with food to explore practices of racial bodily politics. The study concludes that racial divisions and



intimate connections in the market shape bodily practices. These interactions illustrate race and phenotype are influenced by physical spaces and food practices offer insights into the politics of race.

Tate, S. A. (2016) uses Black Critical Race Theory to analyze how White Power Operates in organizations and how racism is often invisible. The invisible existence of racism in academic institutions and organizations focuses on post-race sensibilities. The study uses theory and critical approaches to examine the invisible transmission of racism in organizational settings. Especially how Black bodies are marginalized. The research concluded that racism persists subtly through the rejection of Black bodies and theories like BCRT. \

Rietvel, D. E. (2016) uses narrative theory and particularly focuses on how narrative helps characters and readers to be active entities through time. This research utilizes Abbott's theory on various classic novels like Jane Eyre, Oliver Twist, Pride and Prejudice, and The Scarlet Letter. This analysis employs narrative methodology and focuses on the novel's grappling with the themes of identity, motivations, and self-understanding. The researcher reveals that characters are engaged with the questions about perception and motivation. It reflects the universal human struggle to understand who we are and how we are perceived by others.

Feliciano, C. (2016) focuses on the process of classifying race based on appearance and adopts racial categorization impacted by phenotype. This study's primary goal is to look at a distinctive database of observers' evaluations of pictures uploaded by white, Black Latino, and mixed online daters. Photos are analyzed using qualitative data for the research. The study examines an original dataset of observers' views of images uploaded by online daters that identify as White, Black, Latino, or mixed. Multiracial people tend to be regarded as Black, especially those with a dark complexion who identify as both Black and another race. The results show that the racial framework in the United States has moved beyond binary classifications, with Latinos being placed between Blacks and Whites and having dark skin acting as an effective marker of Black racial identification.

Soegijono, M. (2018) uses Psychoanalytic theory to analyze the defense mechanism in E.Lockhart's *We Were Liars*, particularly focusing on Cadence Sinclair's memory loss incident. This study adopts a psychology of literature approach and uses library research data for the analysis. The study concludes that defense mechanisms help Cadence protect herself and aid in memory recovery after an accident.

Ningrum et al., (2023) apply Gayatri Spivat's postcolonial theory of subalterns focusing on how colonialism disproportionately affects women. The study analyzed Mas Marco Kartodikromo's *Student Hidjo* to identify subalternity forms specifically among females. By using the descriptive method of textual analysis to examine words, sentences, and paragraphs in the novel. Collected data through reading and textual analysis. The study concludes that female characters in Student Hidjo experienced cultural oppression, arranged marriages, lack of education, and psychic violence, a reflection of women under colonial and social structures.

Chen, Y., & Zou, Y. (2024) examine John Donne's poem To His Mistress Going to Bed through a postcolonial feminist lens, analyzing the exploitation and the colonization of the female liable by patriarchal and societal structures. The research looks at how women in the Elizabethan and James I eras dealt with cultural colonialism and identification loss. According to their results, Donne's poem creates a universe in which



the female subject is rejected and viewed as "other." This approach emphasizes the importance of considering identity building in patriarchal environments and provides a new angle on postcolonial feminism.

Duxbury, S. W. (2024) investigates the connection between slavery and modern conviction rates in the U.S., analyzing how past events shape current justice system results. The study looks at relationships between state jail rates between 1970 and 2015, historical populations that were slaves, and demographic changes caused by the migration of people. The study demonstrates through quantitative and mediation studies that states with higher numbers of enslaved people and large migration inflows from the South had higher rises in imprisonment rates. These findings support the long-lasting impact of racial histories on criminal justice policy by showing how past slavery indirectly affects widespread jailing through present social factors and public opinion.

Tewolde, A. I. (2024) investigates the idea of "regionalizing race," stressing how racial classifications of migrants alter in various historical, sociocultural, and political situations. To illustrate the disparities in racial classification between the two nations, the article examines the author's experience of being classified as "Coloured" in South Africa and "Black" in the US. The research looks at how the one-drop rule in the US categorizes persons from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia as "Black," while in South Africa, the classification of races is more complex and dependent on appearance. It does this by using secondary literature and personal stories. The study reveals that there are substantial differences in racial classifications between nations, and it proposes a framework for comprehending these variances called "regionalizing race."

Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, Y. (2024) is concerned with the established view that urbanization is led by wealthy White people by investigating the idea of "gentrification of color," in which middle- and upper-class ethnic and racial minorities influence gentrifying trends. Reviewing 46 research conducted in American cities between 1960 and 2021, this investigation evaluates the effects of policy, location, class characteristics, and ethnicity. Through an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the study sheds insight into the conflicts and unity that exist across different ethnic groups. The results highlight the importance of cheap housing regulations and laws that keep poorer inhabitants from being displaced, and they call on planners to take racial, ethnic, and class intersections into account when making choices about urban growth.

### Methodology

Frantz Fanon's theories about color and race offer *We Were Liars* a valuable prism through which to look at the dynamics of prejudice and exclusion. Fanon sheds light on the variety of issues encountered by Gat through his concepts from '*Black Skin, White Masks*', especially his examination of how racial identification affects one's social position. This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how underlying prejudices and social structures impact Gat's attachments to the Sinclair family by exploring the textual and symbolic depictions of race within the story. This methodology enables a deeper awareness of how skin color classification controls character dynamics and underscores the universal nature of racial injustices. This study efforts to figure out the multiple ways in which Gat's ethnicity influences his bonds via a close reading of the novel's characters, dialogues, and specific settings. By doing so, it is believed to add to a larger review of bias based on class and racial background.



### Theoretical Framework

*"The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line," according to W. E. B. Du Bois (Malkani, 2021).*

Skin color functions as a primary emblem of belonging, difference, and power in colonial discourse. It is a visible sign that links the colonized subject to an overall structure of racism and objectification rather than just being a physical trait. Skin tone becomes the main means by which the colonized people are seen as inferior, and are limited to the color of their skin, as Frantz Fanon examines in *Black Skin, White Masks*. This "skin specificity" racializes and dehumanizes the colonized as the colonizer's gaze forges a concrete connection between outward looks and internalized inferiority.

The skin marks the line between oneself from others, or colonizer from colonized. Skin frequently appears in postcolonial literature as a site of struggle, alienation, and identity negotiation, especially when the colonized subject struggles against the imperial gaze and the devaluation it enforces. Anyone's identity is fundamentally determined by their color identification, especially in postcolonial literature. The idea of color identity refers to the traditional use of skin color in Eurocentric beliefs widespread during colonial authority to define and classify people within a structure of races.

*'The imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations, and confirms its subalternity and powerlessness.'* (Ashcroft et al., 1998)

The "imperial gaze" reduces the victim of colonization to their skin color, which is presented as inferior or distinct from the colonizer's white, Eurocentric identity. Therefore, color identity becomes an illusion that at once defines and devalues the colonized subject, elevating them to a lower status. It suggests how a person's skin, which serves as a physical barrier, links them to their heritage, their colonial past, and even their psychological self-image. Frantz Fanon explains in *Black Skin, White Masks* how the black subject's skin tone immediately connects them to the degrading effects of colonialism, enforcing psychological isolation and a shattered identity. The technique takes into account both the color of the skin and the experience associated with being racialized. The notion of hybridity and mimicry expands on how colonized persons negotiate the conflict between their skin color and their enforced identity from the colonial gaze in postcolonial literature, as in the writings of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said. In an attempt to emulate the identity of the colonizer, the colonized subject is linked to their skin as a sign of inferiority, leading to a shattered and confused sense of self. This "double consciousness" results from the colonized subject's affinity with their skin, which functions as a social sign of belonging as well as a personal identity. A broken and alienated self is the result of a conflict between the individual's view of their worth and the colonizer's perspective of them.

*'The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence.'* (Fanon, 2017)

The internalized racism that arises from the rule of colonialism and the enacted superiority of whites are the primary themes here. The colonial system convinced the "black man" in this quote that being white equates to authority, power, and humanity, thus he wants to be like the "white man." The black person rejects his heritage in favor of



a white existence, which causes friction between himself and the enacted colonial ideal. This results in a severe identity crisis.

Fanon criticizes this connection, stressing how colonialism alters the colonized's sense of self and inspires them to strive for a "white destiny" that is eventually unrealistic and destructive to their sense of self. This study makes clear the issues of racism's psychological impacts, colonial oppression, and alienation.

*'In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema ... was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects ...'*(Fanon, 2017)

It shows how colonial assumptions hinder the growth of one's perception of self and identity. According to Fanon, racial stereotypes cause mental and social harm by warping people's views of their physical appearances and values.

Racism based on skin color, frequently within a racial or ethnic community, is referred to as colorism. It entails treating people with lighter colored skin tones better than those with darker skin tones. Fanon addresses colorism in *Black Skin and White Masks* by looking at assumptions and social conventions that are linked to skin shade and how they affect people's opinions of themselves and how they interact with outsiders.

*'The light-skinned races have come to despise all those of a darker color, and the dark-skinned peoples will no longer accept without protest the inferior position to which they have been relegated.'*(Fanon, 2017)

It highlights the deeply rooted colorist attitudes that upgrade lighter skin while devaluing darker skin. According to Fanon, these prejudices evolve into a tight race system in which those having white skin are considered superior and those with a darker complexion are inferior. Darker-skinned people's opposition is a reflection of their growing consciousness of and refusal of these unfair societal categorizations.

*'He will insist that attention be paid not to the color of his skin but to the force of his intellect.'*(Fanon, 2017)

Fanon criticizes the tendency to assess people by their skin color instead of their intellectual capacity and personal traits. This comment illustrates the widespread colorism that devalues people with darker skin tones, mirroring larger social biases that put lighter skin tones above cerebral or personal quality. Fanon analyzes the mental struggle that people with darker skin tones have while traversing an environment that frequently associates them with undesirable traits. The battle to either enhance or minimize one's skin tone exposes ingrained colorism and social pressure to fit into these hurtful beliefs.

*'It was not the black world that laid down my course of conduct. My black skin is not the wrapping of specific values. It is a long time since the starry sky that took away Kant's breath revealed the last of its secrets to us.'*(Fanon, 2017)

Fanon challenges the notion that skin color determines personal values or conduct. By rejecting the idea that black skin inherently carries specific traits, Fanon criticizes the racial color classification that assigns value and identity based on skin color. This critique emphasizes the need to move beyond superficial racial categories and recognize the individuality and complexity of people.

Fanon's study into how racial prejudices affect the body schema highlights the inner struggles humanity undergo when they face up to these biases. *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon offers a critical analysis of colorism and racial color categorization,



emphasizing how these concepts affect social dynamics and one's own identity. Using his analysis, Fanon pushes out against the damaging and top-level racial hierarchies that equate value to skin tone and advocates a more profound view of one's worth that is free of these prejudiced labels. His writings remain a significant addition to the debate about race, ethnicity, identity, and the mental implications of colorism.

Skin color is a racial symbol in addition to a physical characteristic, causing those who are perceived as inferior to feel alienated and self-hatred. Racialization impacts how the colonized see themselves and who they are as they struggle with feelings of self-imposed inferiority and acceptance. Both their imposed colonial identification and their customary identities are alien to the colonized. The "double consciousness" theory of W. E. B. Du Bois can be applied in this situation as colonized people are constantly torn between their first identities and the identities that the colonizers enacted upon them. The psychological division produces a feeling of displacement and alienation, turning the postcolonial body into a battlefield between two realities. Fanon's writings are important because they provide witness and shed light on the extent to which racism may deeply racism may integrate itself into our minds.

### Analysis

The wealthy Sinclair family seems perfect from their location on a private island, but they maintain some awful secrets. E. Lockhart's *We Were Liars* follows Cadence "Cady" Sinclair, the eldest granddaughter, as she struggles with memory loss after a tragic event. Cady eventually discovers the truth about her amnesia and her family's network of lies as the story develops. Though at times appears confusing, the story connects the past and present to create anticipation. While the twist can seem expected, the treatment of issues such as grief, growth, and societal standards is engaging. Though there is a startling turn of events, the representation of consumerism, privilege, and family conflict is flawed, and the ending finally feels inadequate. Readers' opinions vary; some think the plot is compelling, while others, like the reviewer, think it's shallower. The characters themselves don't grow or change, but the protagonist's awful choices have an enormous effect on her cousins.

Gat is the nephew of Johnny's mother's lover, and being around the Sinclair family is an ongoing symbol of his outsider spot. Gat is of Indian heritage, in contrast to the Sinclair family, who are both wealthy and white. Cady's grandfather, Harris Sinclair, severely highlights this difference by treating Gat as worthless. As the story goes on, it becomes evident that Gat challenges the Sinclair family's notion of social innocence, while the island represents their desire for dominance and privacy.

The narrative revolves around Cady's fragmented recollections of specific summer times, during which an unfathomable catastrophe occurred. Throughout the book, Gat is portrayed as the "Other" in Sinclair's society, a symbol of racial and socioeconomic inequalities that shatter the family's ideal appearance.

Frantz Fanon's theories of racial color classification and skin distinctiveness may be utilized in evaluating Gat Patil's persona. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, Fanon highlights how the color of the skin is a marker of identity and often functions as a signifier of inferiority. Due to his Indian heritage, Gat experiences this type of racialization from the Sinclairs, in particular from Harris, who treats him like a stranger. One obvious example of this racial color categorization in the book is Cady's grandfather's decline of Gat as a family member. Harris exemplifies the white, imperial lens that Fanon



portrays, objectifying and fixing the racialized "Other" in a subservient role. Gat is perceived as distinct because of his skin color and heritage, and even with his brilliance and schooling, the Sinclair family never really views him as an equal. The clearest example of this is when Harris says he feels uneasy about Gat's connection with Cady because he believes it violates racial and societal norms.

*"Carrie asked Gat to stop coming to supper at Clairmont. "It's riling Harris up," she said. (Lockhart, 2014)*

It demonstrates Harris's discomfort with Gat's presence at supper, as Carrie asks that Gat depart since it is bothering him. Gat embodies Fanon's idea of double consciousness—where the colonized subject sees themselves through the eyes of the colonizer—and is intensely aware of his place within the Sinclair family. Similar to Fanon's criticism of colonial subjects internalizing the inferiority placed upon them by the colonizer, Gat begins to question his position in their world as a result of his growing frustration with the family's affluent and racial prejudice.

It's race that alters the status quo and starts to shatter perfection. While a group of people of the same color and ethnicity went on vacation, everything else remained the same; the first disruption was brought about by the arrival of two individuals of race, in the present case Indian. The only thing that counts about Gat and his uncle is that they are not white Americans, regardless of their race. Lockhart utilizes this episode to bring out the family's overall racism.

*"What if we could stop being different colors, different backgrounds, and just be in love?"(Lockhart, 2014)*

It illustrates a craving for a world where racial and cultural differences no longer create hurdles to love. It suggests an ideal where superficial markers of identity—such as skin color and cultural heritage—are transcended, allowing individuals to connect on a deeper, more meaningful level based on mutual affection and understanding.

Indian-descent Ed and Gat are affected by Harris's latent bias. Carrie is in love with Ed, but she won't marry him as she knows she'll lose her right to inheritance. Gat clarifies this to Cady, emphasizing that Harris is a Democrat who voted for Obama.

*"He knows he's not supposed to be that guy. He's a Democrat, he voted for Obama—but that doesn't mean he's comfortable having people of color in his beautiful family." Gat shook his head(Lockhart, 2014)*

Gat finds out by Harris that he has no place in the family and is an alien. Gat is requested to stop attending family meals at Clairmont, and Cady's mother is pressuring her to avoid him. *We Were Liars* deftly tackles issues of racial color categorization and skin distinction, especially from the lens of Gat Patil's character. Gat's Indian ancestry and dark complexion act as explicit indicators of his outsider status.

If you want to live in a place where people are not terrified of mice, you must leave castles. The mouse needs and wants to leave since he does not belong in the human family. Although Gat stays, his opinions are different from the family's, and they certainly wish he had left. Gat is the one who makes teenagers consider their lives' oppressive norms and the need to "be normal at all times." Here he is, Heathcliff, rebelling as his grandfather had foretold; but, in contrast to Heathcliff, Gat is not alone and his remarks are constructive. He does cause problems for the family, but in a positive sense as he makes them face reality rather than ignore it.



“Heathcliff is a gypsy boy taken in and raised by this pristine family, the Earnshaws. Heathcliff falls in love with the girl, Catherine. She loves him, too —but she also thinks he’s dirt, because of his background. And the rest of the family agrees.”(Lockhart, 2014)

The grandpa of Cady brought up the perpendicular between Gat and Heathcliff, which provides an interesting framework for examining the connection between race, class, and love. Outsiders Gat and Heathcliff both fall in love with ladies from well-established, rich households. However, they are unable to escape the social and ethnic barriers that encircle them.

“Gat is Heathcliff.”(Lockhart, 2014)

Heathcliff, a dark-skinned orphan in *Wuthering Heights*, is adopted into the Earnshaw family but, as he becomes older, is tormented and neglected. Heathcliff is viewed as the "Other," much as Gat. In *We Were Liars*, Gat's growing understanding of his status within the Sinclair family causes his disillusionment. It emphasizes the lasting impact of race and economic differences in forming interpersonal connections by drawing comparisons between Gat and Heathcliff.

“You’re saying Granddad thinks you’re Heathcliff?”(Lockhart, 2014)

### Conclusion

*We Were Liars*'s Gat Patil picture of a character successfully conveys Fanonian ideas of skin exclusivity, postcolonial identity, and racial color classification. In particular, his love for Cady, and his friendship with the Sinclair family allow him to show how race and class interact to influence the characters' identities and interactions with one another. Gat's narrative is a heartbreaking study of the intricacies of race, ethnicity, and belonging in a society still affected by the legacy of colonialism. The link to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* further shows the ongoing impact of these issues. His experiences highlight a more covert form of racial isolation that exceeds overt prejudice and instead reveals a universal, cunning form of exclusion based on skin color.

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