AN EXPLORATION OF COLORISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

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AN EXPLORATION OF COLORISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

AN EXPLORATION OF COLORISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

by

Angelique Howard

This mixed method, quantitative and qualitative study was conducted as a means of examining the existence of colorism within the African American and Caucasian American communities. Fifteen African American and twenty-one White American adults completed a Skin Color Satisfaction Scale and participated in a supplementary interview, which were used to determine the participants' self-perception of skin color, skin color satisfaction, and ideal skin color. Additionally, the survey and interview were used to explore how one’s skin color positively and/or negatively affected various aspects of their daily life. Moreover, the research questions allowed the participants to relay their perceptions of whether or not media has affected colorism. The Skin Color Satisfaction Scale and subsequent interview suggested that both interracial and intraracial colorism were prevalent factors in the upbringing and everyday life of the participants of both ethnic communities.

__________________________________________, Committee Chair

Teiahsha Bankhead, Ph.D., LCSW

__________________________________________

Date

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DEDICATION

All praises and thanks to God, whose blessings and provisions were apparent throughout this entire process. This experience has taught me that all things can be accomplished when you are consulted and the forefront. To God be the glory.

I would like to thank my parents, Raymond Howard, Jr. and Matricia “Pat” Howard for instilling in me the importance of education and living a life of purpose and fulfillment. Their belief and encouragement of me were not merely words, but backed through actions, emotionally, morally, and financially. Thank you for making ever effort to make sure this process and transition went as smooth as possible.

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To my grandparents who are no longer with me, thank you for laying a solid foundation of Christ within us. You have taught us that despite one’s beginnings and/or circumstances with God and perseverance, all things are possible. A special thanks to Dorothy Mae Howard who taught is to “Hold High the Torch”. Also, a special thanks to a special uncle, Ricky Lee, and a host of other relatives who have shown me unconditional love and support.
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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

The issue of colorism became apparent to me when I began to observe the differences in the interaction between my grandmother and my cousin and me. My cousin was born to the union of a Creole mother and a fair-skinned father. She was subsequently born with fair skin tones, her hair was fine, straight and long, and she had traditional European facial features. I, on the other hand was born to the union of a dark skinned African-American mother and a dark skinned African-American father. I have a dark skin tone, my hair in its natural state has tightly coiled ringlets, and I have ethnically representative facial features. Due to my particular phenotype, my grandmother tried to encourage me to have more traditional European phenotypes though instructing me to: stay out of the sun in order to preserve my skin color, not to cut my hair so that it would be long and desirable, press my hair to mask its naturally kinky texture, and not to wear lip gloss and lip liner to prevent further accentuating my already large lips. Obviously, these issues were never the substance of conversation my grandmother had with my cousin. These conversations with my grandmother grew to be disheartening as they began to resemble and reinforce similar experiences I had with other non-African Americans who verbalized the issues they had with my ethnically specific physical features. I experienced a genuine sense of grief as it became apparent that I would not ever have traditionally European physical features, nor experience the privilege associated with such phenotypes and Whiteness.
Unfortunately, this grief soon melted into resentment toward my cousin, as she had the European physical features that I desired, and the symbolic and social implications these phenotypes appeared to offer. However, this resentment quickly dissolved into empathy as I began to realize the complex plight she faced as an African American person with fair-skin and relatively straight hair. My cousin tended to experience resentment and rejection from members of the African American community due to her ability to pass as White, and benefit from the privileges associated with the Whiteness. As a result of this resentment, sometimes racial and color epithets such as “house nigger”, “bleached”, “Oreo”, “Uncle Tom”, etc. were used when referring to her. Conversely, despite her initially receiving more social acceptance by the White American community than other African Americans with darker skin tones than hers, she was frequently reminded of the fact she was still an African American. This was especially the case when she introduced her family members to her White friends she interacted with, or when she talked in a dialectic traditionally different from White Americans living in California.

Additionally, a few years ago I watched an episode of the show Moral Court (a court show where litigants are awarded monetarily based on moral rather than judicial standards), when a dark skinned African American man “sued” his dark skinned fiancé because she refused to have children with him because she feared that their mutual child would be dark skinned as well. As the story progressed the young lady began to relay heartfelt stories about how she was teased and ostracized by both black and white children due to her dark complexion. Additionally, she spoke about how the adult family
members treated her differently than her lighter skinned siblings and cousins. One could visibly see the deep-rooted pain this woman was experiencing as she wept in genuine fear about the possible similar disposition of her future children. Despite logical reasoning of her fiancé, the mediator, and the audience members, the young woman maintained that she would only adopt children or utilize sperm banks for invitro-fertilization (of a white, non-Black, or light-skinned donor) so she would be fully aware of her children’s complexion prior to making a full commitment to the child. However, this further proved her naïveté since such efforts may be futile because there is no way these methods can insure that her child(ren) would not have a dark complexion.

**Background of the Problem**

Since post-abolition and the implementation of integration laws, there has been a consensus about the fiscal and social effects that colonization, slavery, and segregation have had on the African American community (Keith & Herring, 2001). However, there has been a great debate about whether or not the aforementioned occurrences have had negative psychological implications for African Americans (Clark, 1940; Martin, 1998). Many scholars contend that the rise of the Black-consciousness movements of the 1960s and 1970s curtailed the process of African Americans internalizing such discriminatory practices aimed toward them (Williams, 2002). Yet, the prevalence of colorism and self-hatred within the African American community appears to be more common than once believed (Hill, 2000; Hochschild, 2007).
**Statement of the Research Problem**

During my undergraduate and graduate scholastic career as a social work student at California State University, Sacramento I enrolled in many courses about diversity as a means of completing the required core curriculum mandated by the Division of Social Work. It was very interesting to me that the specific issue of colorism was not addressed in any of these diversity courses. It was only when I completed a presentation about intraracial colorism within the African American community that I became aware that this issue was not widely familiar to many non-members of the African American community; however, I noticed nods of agreement from fellow African American students. It was at this time that I began to question whether or not colorism was a silent issue negatively affecting members of various ethnic minority communities. This realization also made me question how social work practitioners can effectively address the specific needs of clients experiencing effects associated with colorism when they have not received formal training on its existence, as well as effective ways of relating to clients.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater knowledge about the prevalence and severity of internalized ideologies directly stemming from the effects of racism and colorism perpetuated against African Americans. Having a greater knowledge of such latent effects of racism and colorism can assist in the process of socially deconstructing the perception that Eurocentric phenotypes and lighter skin tones are to be valued as superior to other ethnic phenotypes and darker skin tones due to the social and contextual
connotations awarded to those “privileged” enough to be in the former group. Additionally, scholars can work toward reversing the negative implications that such ideologies have had on the psyche and social interactions/perceptions of members in the African American community. It is when we do this that society will begin to benefit from valuing such inherent differences less in terms of superiority/inferiority and more in terms of beautiful diversity.

**Theoretical Framework**

There are two main theories that relate to the issue of colorism. The Social Constructionist Theory contends social concepts and practices are not typically a natural phenomenon, but usually develop due to members of a particular social group inventing or creating a social reality as a means of adaptation or gaining social advantage. The classification of individuals into racial groups initially began because of the obvious biophysical differences (skin color, hair texture, eye color, and ethnically specific facial phenotypes) of members of specific ethnic groups. Unfortunately, such racial designation was often utilized as a means of constructing various social dichotomies, and rationalizing the unequal treatment of certain individuals due to racial classification (Smedley, 2008; Aronson & Aronson, 2008). Similar occurrences happened based on individuals’ skin tones.

Secondly, the Systems Theory contends that micro, meso, and macro entities have bilateral relationships with one another, which has implications for the functioning of each individual system. It is important to understand how socially constructed racial and color classifications manifested on the macro level affect the functioning of mezzo and
micro levels and vice versa. For example, the most prominent phenotype used in racial classification is skin tone. When institutional forms of racism are largely employed based on skin color, many times such racist/colorist ideologies are often times internalized by individuals negatively affected by such structured and residual effects of racism and colorism.

**Definition of Terms**

**African American:** An American of African descent.

**Black American:** An individual belonging to any variety of racial or ethnic groups having dark pigmentation of the skin that lives in the United States and/or have United States citizenship.

**Colorism:** Prejudicial or preferential treatment based solely on skin color.

**Internalization:** The process of acceptance of or adherence to a set of ideology or norms established by people or groups, which are influential to the individual (especially majority populations or populations revered as the racial and social standard).

**Interracial Colorism:** The practice of a member of one racial group making clear distinctions and judgments on an individual from another racial group based solely upon skin color.

**Intraracial Colorism:** The practice of a member of one racial group making clear distinctions and judgments on an individual from his/her same racial group based solely upon skin color.
Kinky/Natural Hair: The traditional state of many, if not most African and Caribbean descendants’ hair that has not been altered chemically or thermally as a means of straightening, thus maintaining its natural, soft, and tightly coiled/wavy texture.

Mulatto: The first-generation offspring of a black person and a white person; a person of mixed white and black ancestry (Jones, 2000).

Positive Stereotype: A positive fixed, exaggerated, or preconceived idea about members of a particular ethnic, cultural and/or social group.

Racism: A belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others; discrimination or prejudice based on race.

**Justification**

I found it very interesting that when I presented the topic of my research project to some of the faculty and students in the Division of Social Work, they questioned whether or not colorism (both interracial and intraracial) was still a prevalent issue or whether or not colorism was common or significant enough to warrant an entire research study being dedicated to its merit. The fact that the field of Social Work is not well-versed about the issue of colorism or being proactive in addressing the specific issue of colorism does not mean the issue does not warrant attention or that this socially constructed issue will remedy itself. This concept is relevant and important, as the process of socially constructing the phenomenon of colorism was a deliberate, intricate,
and lengthy process that was meant to last for centuries. We as social workers would be misguided to believe that the process toward rectifying the manifest and latent effects of colorism would require any less effort than it took to construct this form of discrimination. In fact, it can arguably require much more concerted efforts. For instance, it was once believed that the effects of racism and colorism only resulted from the discriminatory and prejudicial acts experienced outside of one’s home setting. However, research and personal testimonies have shed light on the fact that colorism is a prevalent issue within familial units and ethnic communities (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Graham, 2000; Thompson & Keith, 2001; Banerji, 2006; Merida & Fletcher, 2007; Womack, 2007). In fact, in some instances colorism is most prominent within the family of origin, as some elders propagate (both consciously and unconsciously) such ideologies to subsequent generations. In instances where this is the case, individuals may not have a venue in which they can escape the manifest and latent effects of colorism. Additionally, caste systems within families and ethnic minority groups can occur due to skin tone discrimination.

In trying to rectify the issue of colorism within American society, we can utilize the analogy of the significant amount of time it takes for individuals to establish a habit, and the even significantly longer amount of time and effort it takes for an individual to break the same habit. With a greater knowledge of the significance of colorism within various ethnic minority groups, social work practitioners can work toward working more effectively with clients affected by these issues. Moreover, social workers can also begin to broaden the rigid definitions used to describe various forms of social injustices.
Limitations

The researcher recognizes that this study may offer some limitations with regard to generalizing the research findings to the greater U.S. population. This is largely owing to the researcher’s use of a snowball sample, a non-random sample. Moreover, all the participants reside in California, which is considered to be one of the more liberal and progressive states. Consequently, a lack of data from more rural, Southern, Eastern, conservative, and/or less diverse areas, may limit the representativeness and ability to generalize the findings.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What is Colorism?

For the past century scholars have aimed to explore both the manifest and latent effects of the historical occurrences of racially motivated colonization, slavery, discrimination, segregation and oppression on members of the African American community (Keith & Herring, 2001; Maddox & Gray, 2002). However, it was just recently that scholars have begun to analyze the prevalence and effects of colorism within ethnic minority populations, more specifically the African American community (Gabrielle, 2008). Most research with regard to racism and color discrimination has mostly been considered in terms of Black versus White (Harrison, 2010). The issue of colorism was not initially addressed by the social sciences, but rather by judicial disciplines (Eberhart, 2004). Historically speaking, with the progression of race relations many companies, institutions, and organizations have been able to argue they have not engaged in employing racially motivated decisions and treatment because Blacks and other minority groups have been hired or awarded the same opportunities as their White counterparts; however, deeper investigation generally reveals that with regard to admitting, hiring, and promoting lighter skinned Blacks, there is a disproportionate higher amount in comparison to their darker skinned counterparts (Gabrielle, 2008; Harrison, 2010). Additionally, the criminal justice disciplines also began to address and analyze not only how racism, but also colorism affects profiling, arrests, charges, convictions, and sentencing (Eberhart, 2004).
Additionally, scholars are trying to educate the greater population, especially minority populations about this socially constructed phenomenon referred to as colorism. Colorism is defined as a constructed social hierarchy based on the gradation of one’s skin tone within and between various racial/ethnic groups (Walker, 1983; Glenn, 2008). One of the most obvious effects of colorism is the foundational preference of a particular skin tone over another, and the subsequent social privileging that occurs due to one’s skin tone being revered as more desirable than another (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Glenn, 2008). However, it is important to understand skin tone is often times highly correlated with other physical features, such as eye color, hair texture, hair length, hair color, the shape/size of the nose, the shape/size of the mouth, and the shape of the eyes (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Gwaltney, 1980; Maddox & Chase, 2004; Thompson & Keith, 2001).

According to Trevino, Harris, and Wallace (2008), “The irony is clear: Those who are themselves victims of discrimination can also be victimizers of others who are perceived to hold even more racially subordinate positions” (p. 10). Colorism is unique in that unlike other social stigmas, it is a subphenomena found under the umbrella of racism, and subsequently has intergroup and intragroup consequences (Harvey et al., 2005).

Additionally, Colorism is particularly complex in part due to its subtlety. Unlike racism which typically is overtly exhibited, colorism is more covert and “concealed beneath the still waters of social etiquette” (Williams, 2002, p. 8).

Colorism has caused many negative effects within various affected ethnic groups, specifically African Americans, African Cubanos, native Brazilians, and native Hindus of India, etc. (Glenn, 2008). It is important to note that there are two different types of
colorism: interracial and intraracial. Colorism in its early form, was a phenomenon found among beneficiaries of the slave trade and slavery toward their slaves. This form of colorism has shifted and subsequently created social stratification among African Americans. This concept is known as intraracial colorism, which is the social distinction that one makes on other members of his/her race solely on the basis of skin color (Jones, 2000). For some African Americans, colorism is just as, if not more devastating than racism, largely in part due to it being compounded by members both outside and inside the race (Hochshild, et al., 2007). Such colorism within one’s ethnic groups makes the discrimination that much more personalized and intimate (Hochshild, et al., 2007).

Skin tone is viewed as having so many social implications that many darker skinned members of the African American community attempt drastic measures in an attempt to acquire many social privileges awarded to their lighter skinned counterparts via marrying lighter skinned life partners, procreating with light skinned individuals with the idea of increasing the likelihood that one’s child(ren) will have lighter skin tones, and in some instances resorting to skin and phenotype altering procedures (Glenn, 2008). The production and advertisement of products that offer lighter/whiter skin to consumers is now estimated to be a multi-billion dollar industry (Glenn, 2008). Unfortunately, many members and/or leaders of the African American community have internalized the interracial colorism they have experienced, and perpetrated such ideologies to subsequent generations.
Social Construction of Race and Its Effects on Racism and Colorism

According to Smedley (1998), “Race was a form of social identification and stratification that was seemingly grounded in the physical differences of populations interacting with one another in the New World, but whose real meaning rested in social and political realities” (p. 693). Racial categorization is the process of utilizing characteristics to place the continuum of human beings as distinct, socially meaningful categories (Maddox & Chase, 2004). For example, Black people are typically classified by having darker skin tones, broad noses, fuller lips, short tightly curled hair and darker eye colors, which are more Afrocentric phenotypes (Maddox & Chase, 2004). Conversely, individuals who are categorized as being white tend to naturally possess light skin tones, narrow noses, long, straight hair, and light eye colors (Maddox & Chase, 2004).

Moreover, racial categorization and subsequent stratification began to beget substantial social, fiscal, and political advantages to members of majority groups. Bowser (1985) contends racism is often a result of elite social groups’ desire to maintain their historical privilege and retaining their self-interest. Peggy McIntosh spoke on her realization of her privilege in her article, White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies. “As a white person, I realize I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had not been taught to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege puts me at an advantage” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1). McIntosh further stated, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on
cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1988, pp. 2-3).

Smedley (1998) suggests that the American tendency of regarding one’s race as the most prominent factors of human identity have posed a substantial amount of problems that “have been enormous, immensely complex, and almost intractable. Constant and unrelenting portrayal of [minorities’] inferiority conditioned them to a self-imagery of being culturally backward, primitive, intellectually stunted, prone to violence, morally corrupt, undeserving of the benefits of civilization, insensitive to the finer arts, and (in the case of Africans) aesthetically ugly and animal-like” (p. 695). Moreover, Smedley contends, “In the United Stated the biophysical features of different populations, which had become markers of social status, were internalized as individual groups and identities,” (Smedley, 1998, p. 695). According to Aronson, “As we have seen, one determinant of prejudice in a person is a need for self-justification. . . . we have seen that, if we have done something cruel to a person or a group of people, we derogate that person or group in order to justify our cruelty. If we can convince ourselves that a group is unworthy, subhuman, stupid, or immoral, it helps us to keep from feeling immoral if we enslave members of that group, deprive them of a decent education, or murder them.” (Aronson, 2008, p. 172).

Skin color and race are often fallaciously used synonymously, as people often utilize skin color as a means of determining race (Jones, 2000). This is most notably
identified when the term Black is used to refer to African Americans and the term white is used to describe Caucasians despite the fact that these are general terms used to encompass a plethora of ethnic groups. This socially accepted form of racial identification has become problematic when the concept of whiteness is closely associated attributes of purity and fairness (i.e., little white lie and white hat, etc.); conversely, blackness is associated with dirt, evil and death (i.e., black magic, black market, blackmail, black sheep, etc.).

Such derogatory terms associated with the color black have had negative effects on individuals with darker skin tones. For example, historical studies of African American college students found they tend to favor the color white over the colors brown and black (Williams, 1964). Studies have indicated, people generally tend to apply racial stereotypes more to person’s who possess more ethnic features rather than those who do not (Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004; Blair, Judd, Sandler, & Jenkins, 2002; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdue, & Davies, 2004; Maddox, 2004; Maddox & Gray, 2002 & 2004). Similarly, African Americans with darker complexions are commonly linked to the stereotypical traits attributed to Black people (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Darkness is typically associated with toughness, meanness, poverty, criminality, masculinity (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992), inferiority and barbarian. More specifically, people with black physical traits are perceived to be more criminal as opposed to those with more Eurocentric physical features (Eberhardt, et al, 2004). Conversely, more fair-skinned African Americans are often associated with counterstereotypical traits often imposed upon darker-skinned Blacks (Maddox & Gray, 2002). People with light to medium skin
tones are thought to have intelligence, refinement, prosperity, and femininity (Russell et al., 1992). The former is made evident when one analyzes how Time Magazine opted to utilize a digital artist to darken O.J. Simpson’s mug shot as a means of trying to make him appear more sinister to their readers (Jones, 2000). Additionally, the latter is observed in the fact that Vanessa Williams was the first African American women to be crowned Miss America. One would be hard pressed to consider it a mere coincidence that she has light skin, long and light colored hair with a less “kinky” texture, and green eyes (Hall, 1995). Historical research has indicated when African American children were presented with a white and black doll, most children stated they would most like to play with the white doll. Additionally, they attributed niceness and physical attractiveness to the white dolls (Clark & Clark, 1947). It is also concerning that more recently, actress Gabourey Sidibe’s portrait on the cover of Elle Magazine was digitally enhanced to lighten her skin color (CBS News, 2010).

This sentiment is also felt when one looks at the election of President Barack Obama. Senator Harry Reid was under fire for stating that President Obama was elected president because he is a "light skinned black man with no Negro dialect unless he wanted to have one" (Ragland, 2010). The sentiment causes one to question if the election of a darker skinned black man with similar credentials would have been possible. Hochschild & Weaver (2007) indicates that Black elected officials are disproportionately lighter skinned, and their physical attributes tend to be dissimilar from members of their constituency and/or the greater black community.
History of Colorism

Colorism among African Americans living in the United States has historical implications stemming from slavery. When native Africans were unlawfully removed from their homelands and distributed to the various countries and annexes of their respective colonizers, their skin tones were obvious physical markers identifying them as being individuals who could be abused by the colonizers who had white skin (Harvey, 1995). This created an unspoken symbolic dichotomy of power, which made one's white skin superior; conversely, one’s dark skin tones made one inferior (Fanon, 1967; Harvey, 1995). Subsequently, negativism associated with darker skin tones served as an instrument making Africans more subjugate to colonizers’ control.

Additionally, during slavery, many slave owners collaborated with one another to combat the great number of insurrections they were experiencing at the hands of their slaves. As a result, the slave owners planned a symposium in which they invited renowned slave owner William Lynch of the Caribbean Islands. During this symposium William Lynch stated if the slave owners utilized the tactics presented in his speech they would be able to control the slaves for a minimum of 300 years. According to Lynch, it was imperative the slave owners emphasize the differences among the slaves and sensationalize them. The list of differences included: age, skin color, sex, hair texture, positions within the familial structure (son vs. father, wife vs. husband, etc.), the geographic location and size of the plantation they lived on, their social status as a slave, etc. (The Gospel According to William Lynch, 2001). Lynch stated:

Now that you have a list of differences, I shall give you an outline of action, but before that I shall assure you that distrust is stronger
than trust, and envy is stronger than adulation, respect or admiration. The Black slaves after receiving this indoctrination, shall carry on and will become self re-fueling and self-generating for hundreds of years maybe thousands (The Gospel According to William Lynch, 2001).

William Lynch’s prediction that magnifying the differences among slaves would compromise the cohesiveness of members of the African American community was true. Subsequently, skin tone differences among African slaves were used by slave owners as a means of creating a caste system among slaves living on the plantation (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005), as well as creating discourse within the slave community to deter slave insurrections (The Gospel According to William Lynch, 2001).

We can even see how this “divide and conquer” tactic was utilized during in the Belgian colonization of Rwanda and Burundi in the early 1990s when the Belgian colonizers pitted the Hutus against the Tutsis and vice versa by sensationalizing the differences of their respective ethnic physiological features (i.e., height, skin tones, and the width of their noses, etc.) and language, which resulted in atrocious acts of genocide being committed throughout the country (Glenn, 2008). To date, there still remain acts of genocide, discrimination, oppression, etc. stemming from the “divide and conquer” tactics utilized by the Belgian colonists.

Similarly, the occurrences of pregnancy due to the unfortunate rapes of African American slave women at the hands of their white slave masters begot a unique multiracial category commonly referred to as “mulatto” (Keith & Herring, 1991; Gullickson, 2005; Harrison, 2010). This created a two-fold benefit for mulattoes. Primarily, nepotism often afforded them the luxury of having more respectable domestic
duties that included: cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring, rearing the children, etc. (Keith & Herring, 1991; Russell et al, 1992; Snider & Rosenberg, 2006). Conversely, more dark complexioned slaves often had more menial jobs of manual labor like toiling the soil and picking cotton (Jones, 2000; Keith & Herring, 1991; Russell et al., 1992; Snider & Rosenberg, 2006). Additionally, the punishments for darker complexioned African American slaves were substantially more severe than lighter skinned slaves.

The second benefit lighter-skinned African Americans had over their darker-skinned counterparts was their ability to more closely resemble whites. This fact allowed for them to have higher social statuses and more educational opportunities than darker-skinned African Americans (Russell, et al., 1992). Despite the advantage and “head start” bestowed upon mulattos, Jim Crow ideologies and the “one drop rule” did not allow them to cross color lines (Davis, 1991). The “one drop rule” categorized a person as Black if they had any trace of Black ancestry, no matter how minute (Gullickson, 2005). This inevitably led to both interracial and intraracial stratification based on a color gradient (Gullickson, 2005). Furthermore, many lights skinned Blacks would not marry or procreate with darker skinned Blacks to maintain or strengthen the wealthy and elite status for themselves and their progeny (Bondenhorn, 2006).

Inevitably, the preferential treatment awarded to African Americans with lighter skin tones and other “Caucasoid” features suggested to many African Americans that “the more they conformed to the White, majority standard of beauty, the more rewarding their lives would be” (Gatewood, 1988, p. 16). bell hooks reiterates the power lighter-skinned African Americans have over darker-skinned African Americans when she stated “color
prejudice is much more complex than wanting to be White. It's more about the politics of White supremacy and the aesthetics of White supremacy” (Bates, 1994, p. 82).

After the Civil War, many Black based social clubs and churches began to implement various tests that would have to be passed in order for one to participate in the respective activity. One of the most prominent tests during the time was the blue vein tests, which required that the participants’ skin be light enough to see their veins through (Snider & Rosenberg, 2006). Additionally, in many social situations the brown paper bag test was administered; this test mandated that the complexion of the participant be lighter than the color of the bag (Russell, et al., 1992). As a result, in an attempt to obtain lighter skin, many African American women utilized products traditionally used to remove dirt from porous surfaces such as homemade blends of lye, lemon juice, bleach, and urine (Wilson, 2004), despite such remedies containing high concentrated levels of toxic lead, mercury, corticosteroids, hydroquinone (Glenn, 2008). Lastly, the “comb test” was used as a means of denoting whether or not the participant had "good hair" (Bond & Cash, 1992), by requiring them to run a fine tooth comb through the back of their hair with ease. These prompted the fashion movement in which African American women began to straighten their “kinky hair” via chemical processes and thermal straightening methods. Such tests, which ironically were created by Blacks, begot a slippery slope in that many Whites sought to rationalize and justify their racist, centric, and colorist ideologies based off the fallacy that such ideologies must be true since blacks themselves embraced and enforced them (Harrison, 2010).
Similar practices are still in effect. For example, many historically African American based fraternities and sororities have been under scrutiny for the covert discriminatory practices they have utilized against darker pledges which are made manifest through admission, hazing, and other initiation processes (Harrison, 2010). More recently, a situation arose in which a young African American event promoter offered all-night free admission to Black women with fair to light skin, while mandating their darker skinned counterparts pay the full required admission price (Failed Party Promotion Highlights Color Divide, 2007).

The 1960’s and 1970’s birthed a black consciousness movement that eschewed traditionally European paradigms for a more Afrocentric paradigm. This movement was prompted by groups such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam who were paramount for pushing the Black Nationalism, Black Empowerment, and Black Pride movements that encouraged the Black community to view one’s blackness as a source of pride and richness, rather than a source of barbarism, retardation, and subservience (Williams, 2002). Unfortunately, instead of neutralizing the ideologies, in some cases these movements have over-corrected the sentiment by birthing new issues of resentment and thoughts of superiority toward anything Eurocentric (Williams, 2002).

These forms of intraracial colorism did not and do not exist without having dire consequences on the individuals and social systems within the African American community. As a matter of fact, many African American children internalized such ideologies and often played hand games with the lyrics "If you're white you're all right; if you’re yellow then you’re mellow, if you’re brown stick around; if you’re blacks stay
back" (Harvey, 1995, p. 4). Additionally, Derbyshire’s historical study (1966) indicated that African American college students believed Blacks with lighter complexions were valued over individuals with darker skin. Similarly, Black college students believed lighter-skinned African Americans were provided with more opportunities for status enhancement than those with more dark skin (Parrish 1946; Jeffers, 1973).

The experiences associated with interracial colorism compounded with intraracial colorism have become disheartening to many African Americans, especially those who have had to internalize ideals that are often radically inconsistent with their outward appearances (Levine & Padilla, 1980). For example, it may be extremely difficult for darker-skinned African Americans to prove themselves in educational and professional arenas. Moreover, the complex issues of colorism also affect the dynamics of the African American familial unit. Boyd-Franklin (1991) indicated that African American families in clinical settings commonly treat darker skinned like outcasts and/or are scapegoated.

**Colorism and Workforce Issues**

There has been documented correlation between one’s skin tone and social economic status and achievement levels (Hunter, 2005; Sheriff, 2001; Telles, 2004). Historically speaking, "mulattos" and light-skinned slaves received preferential treatment on plantations by way of receiving specialized treatment and skill training (Bondenhorn, 2006). This begot a socioeconomic dichotomy between lighter and darker skinned blacks (Bondenhorn, 2006). Subsequently, the combination of skill training, nepotism, and in some cases the ability to pass for white, allowed most light-skinned Blacks higher paying jobs (Bondenhorn, 2006). Additionally, during the Antebellum period, light skinned
Blacks were generally taller than darker skinned Blacks, making them viewed as more healthy and desirable within the job market (Bodenhorn, 2002).

In Hughes & Hertel’s historical study (1990), lighter skinned Blacks were found to have higher education levels, higher salaries, and more prominent jobs than their darker skinned counterparts. Additionally, the educational and socioeconomic gaps between lighter and darker skinned blacks were considered to be comparable to the gaps between Whites and the entire Black community (Hughes & Hertel, 1990). In Matthew Harrison’s 2006 study entitled, “Colorism in the Job Selection Process: Are There Preferential Differences Within the Black Race?” research indicated that lighter skinned males with bachelor degrees in mediocre work experience are preferred over darker skinned black men with MBAs and past managerial experience (Banerji, 2006).

Conversely, in some instances lighter skinned blacks are not allowed promotions in African American based companies or admittance into African American organizations because they are not considered to be “Black enough” to represent them (Womack, 2007). Unfortunately, some lighter skinned black professions have become stagnant within their profession due to both external pressures to remain neutral, neither timid nor assertive, as a means of not assuming threatening or stereotypical traits to both Black and White co-workers and management (Womack, 2007).

To date, there are lingering effects of racism and interracial colorism. Minorities living in America are faced with the negative effects of colorism throughout various aspects of their lives via hiring practices, lifetime earnings, self-concept, internalized images of beauty, etc. (Vontress, 1970). Unfortunately, many members of the African
American community have begun to believe the fallacy that lighter-skinned African Americans are superior to more medium or dark complexioned Blacks due to them possessing more European features. Light skinned Blacks are revered for their potentiality for upward social mobility (Hall, 1995) and their more aesthetically pleasing physical attributes (Herton, 1965).

**Colorism and Romantic Relationships**

Colorism has become a significant factor in the mate selection process (Glenn, 2008). There is a silent skin color paradox that suggests African Americans with lighter skin tones are viewed as more preferable romantic partners because they are viewed as moral, chaste, and intelligent; conversely, the darker skinned counterparts are viewed as sensual and promiscuous (Harvey, 1995). The study conducted by Thompson & Keith (2000) found that woman who have more “Caucasoid” features are perceived as being more physically attractive and more successful in their romantic relationships than their darker skinned counterparts. Additionally, African American women tend to view lighter skinned African American men as more desirable (Harvey, 1995). Moreover, marrying a person with lighter skin and more Eurocentric features is an invaluable asset to the process of one’s assimilation to mainstream culture and values, and enhances one’s chance of achieving upward social and economic mobility (Glenn, 2008; Thompson & Keith, 2000). Similarly, darker skinned blacks are less likely to marry than their lighter skinned counterparts (Edwards, Carter-Tellison, & Herring, 2004).
Gender Disparities

There are also significant differences between how both interracial and intraracial colorism affects men and women. This disparity is often a more paramount phenomena among Black women than it is for Black men (Thompson & Keith, 2001). There is typically a higher positive relationship between having lighter skin tones and a higher self-esteem among women than there is for men (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Thompson and Keith (2001) argue there is such a high correlation between African American women’s skin tone and self-esteem due to women being socialized to concern themselves to external appraisals more than their male counterparts, and are more prone to making personal changes due to negative evaluations of others. There is a fallacy suggesting that light skinned and beautiful women have better and easier lives than those of their darker skinned counterparts; conversely, many of these light skinned women experience a tri-fold of discrimination pertaining to 1.) racism, 2.) sexism, and 3.) colorism (specifically other blacks disliking them due to the assumption of privileges availed to them due to their lighter skin color) (Thompson & Keith, 2001; Womack, 2007).

Nevertheless, Black men still experience both the positive and negative effects of colorism. For example, one of the most prominent negative stereotypes attributed to darker skinned African American men is that they are dumb and aggressive (Harvey, 1995). Conversely, darker-skinned tones among Black men are often viewed as intriguing due to the perceived notion that they are more sexually attractive (Wade, 1996) and have more sexual prowess than their lighter-skinned counterparts. Moreover, both male and female darker skinned African Americans are viewed as being good sexual
mates (Harvey, 1995), which is evidenced by the commonly utilized adage "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" (Thurman, 1970). Similarly, darker skinned African American men are also revered as being more masculine and more authentically Afrocentric than lighter skinned African American males. Conversely speaking, lighter skinned African American men are more likely to be viewed by darker skinned African American men as "punks", less masculine, or more emotional (Harvey, 1995).

This phenomenon also has implications for Black women because lighter skin terms are often associated with purity and femininity, women with darker skin tones are fallaciously generalized as being masculine, less physically attractive, and invincible (Wilson, as cited in Bates, 1994, p. 81). Additionally, the issue of colorism is not as paramount of an issue for African American men because they do not have the same pressures of their female counterparts to be deemed by the greater society and their peers to be “beautiful” (Boyd, as cited in Bates, 1994, p. 81). Physical attractiveness of African American men is revered more as a beneficial social amenity than a requirement. One can see this connection when analyzing the entertainment industry’s tendency to accept and embrace both light and dark-skinned African American men; whereas, African American women with more Eurocentric physiological features are more readily utilized for romantic roles and advertisements depicting beauty and happiness, and darker-skinned African American women are reserved for matronly depictions (Brown, 1993).
The Experience of African Americans with Lighter Skin Tones

Unfortunately, when the issue of colorism within the African American community is discussed, the overwhelming majority of the time African Americans with darker skin tones are often discussed in terms of being the victims in this rift; little effort is given to explaining the dilemmas faced by light-skinned African Americans. One of the primary issues is the fact that the skin color of many African Americans is utilized as litmus paper, assisting in determining one’s commitment to the preservation of and their ability to relate to the African American community. Additionally, during the Black Empowerment and Awareness Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the African American community began to see a significant shift as leaders in the African American community began to emphasize the beauty and richness of darker skin tones (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Womack (2007) describes the complexity experienced by some light-skinned blacks when she stated, “Many ‘near white’ Blacks have to not only defend themselves against racism among the Whites, who malign Blacks in private circles, they are assumed to be apart of, but also must prove their own blackness to those who feel there are benefiting from the privileges of white or fair skin” (p. 80).

In addition, many lighter skinned African Americans feel a great amount of pressure to conform to the expectations that are unfairly projected onto them solely because of their skin tones (Bates, 1994). It is especially devastating when lighter skinned African Americans fail to successfully adhere to those expectations. This phenomenon is very similar to those who experience the negative effects of positive stereotyping. A positive stereotype is a positive fixed, exaggerated, or preconceived idea
about members of a particular ethnic, cultural and/or social group. Some examples of
common positive stereotypes are: Hispanics are family-oriented and Asians are smart and
excel academically. Even though these stereotypes are positive, they can cause a
significant amount of turmoil and stress to individuals of those particular groups,
especially for those who fall short of these expectations or whose ideologies defer from
the standards that are projected onto them. Nevertheless, many people would argue that
African Americans with darker skin tones are more likely to experience severe color-
based prejudice on both interracial and intraracial levels (Bates, 1994).

**Colorism and Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a general evaluative view of oneself, which includes one’s feelings
of inner worth, personal competence, and self-approval, as opposed to having feelings of
self-rejection and contempt (Porter & Washington, 1989). Self-esteem is heavily affected
by the comparisons individuals make with themselves in relationship to others, and
reactions and evaluation an individual receives from others (Thompson & Keith, 2001).
The negative effects of interracial and intraracial colorism were especially prevalent
among African American children. In fact, one of the defining issues within the
historical groundbreaking court cases of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and Brown v. Topeka
Board of Education (1954) were the psychologically detrimental effects that separate, but
equal facilities had on ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans (Martin, 1998).
The historical research of Clark & Clark (1940) indicated an overwhelming majority of
Black schoolchildren valued light skin over dark skin. The Clarks’ study concluded that
racial segregation had a direct positive correlation with feelings of inferiority and damaged self-esteem (Martin, 1998).

**Conclusion and Significance of Literary Findings**

The lethal combination of the realities that many African Americans face due to colorism and the unfortunate internalization of such experiences and ideologies is a latent effect of racism and interracial colorism that unfortunately still plagues and threatens the psyche and social functioning or interactions of members within the African American community. This phenomenon can be linked to the fact that there is a negative correlation between darker skin tones and low self-esteem level (Robinson & Ward, 1995).

Despite the dramatic decline of covert and other forms of racism over the last fifty years, colorism has not declined at the same rate (Hochshild, et al., 2007). One of the primary issues stunting the eradication of colorism within the Black community is that many of the members believe that the fight against racism should be the primary concentration of the time, energy, and resources; colorism is deemed an afterthought as if they are two issues that cannot be fought simultaneously or that racism plagues the Black community more negatively than colorism (Hochshild, 2007). Another reason that colorism has not been directly addressed as aggressively as racism is because many African Americans believe that if racism is eradicated, colorism would be eradicated as well (Hochshild, et al., 2007). Although this thinking is misguided, it is likely believed because both racism and colorism are based on the underlying fallacy that links
appearance and descent to desirable or undesirable human characteristics and qualities (Hochshild, et al., 2007).

It is imperative that prominent leaders of communities negatively affected by colorism provide venues in which people affected by this socially constructed form of discrimination can vent their concerns and frustrations, and subsequently create an environment conducive to change. It is equally important to ensure the proper steps are taken to eradicate the issues associated with colorism that threaten to stunt the cohesiveness of members of the African American community.

As a possible solution to the issue of colorism, Williams (2002) suggests it is a two-fold process: “It begins with a certain pride in one’s own unique heritage. It is sustained with intelligence. The combination of the two can largely murder colorism” (p. 8). According to Harrison (2010), exposure and discussion about colorism is the first step in eradicating the issue. Additionally, he contends that media members should be more conscious about not typecasting actors/actresses in stereotypical roles based on their race and skin tone (Harrison, 2010). More specifically, clearly differentiating between racism and colorism is key in working toward shedding light and eradicating the issue of colorism that plagues many ethnic communities (Harrison, 2010).

**Summation**

Both historical and current literature articulate the prevalence of colorism and the manifest and latent effects it has had in every conceivable aspect of life. William Lynch’s monumental speech that encouraged slaves owner’s to implement extreme “divide and conquer” tactics and seasoning processes with the promise of such
indoctrination becoming self-refueling and self-generating for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years has unfortunately come to fruition. Colorism is not a serendipitous phenomenon; it was carefully calculated and constructed.

The lack of knowledge about, acknowledgement of, and slow progression toward eradicating the issue of colorism are disconcerting. However, it is very difficult to deconstruct a phenomenon that many people are naïve about, minimize, or outright deny exists. It is the hope of this researcher that by educating people of the existence and sustained prevalence of colorism, that both covert and overt occurrences of the issue will become as socially unacceptable as other “-isms”.

It is also important to realize that despite this phenomenon’s foundation largely being paved on the macro level, a more effective way of retroaction may include tackling issues on a more micro level. Although the lack of macro level intervention to eradicate the issue is unsettling, it is not at all surprising. There is almost always reluctance of sorts when issues of one’s power, interest, and privilege are being infringed upon. However, there is great consolation knowing that a fire of great magnitude always starts with a small spark.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

The structure of this research is qualitative and exploratory. Data was collected via a face-to-face questionnaire and an interview. The focus of this research study is centered on exploring the current effects of colorism within the African American and White American communities. The purpose of administering the survey and conducting interviews is for the research participants to share their opinions, feelings, ideas, and anecdotes about their respective life experiences, specifically surrounding issues of skin color, eye color, and hair texture, color, and length. This process will assist the researcher in gaining a greater knowledge about the psychological, social, and cultural effects of colorism on African American men and women. As well as, explore the effect white privilege has on colorism within the White American community. Additionally, the researcher hopes the information concluded in this research project will aid in bringing to light this unspoken phenomenon, and assist helping professionals and others to better understand and accommodate the special needs of individuals affected by colorism. Similarly, this research study will aid in stunting and eventually eliminating the perpetuation of ideological principles consistent with colorism.

Subjects

Research subjects consisted of 36 research participants (15 African American and 21 White American) male and female adult persons living within the United States.
**Sampling Plan**

The researcher utilized the snowball sampling method by utilizing ten subjects, consisting of individuals who were available acquaintances of the researcher. The researcher used the snowball technique, as the ten initial research subjects will refer subsequent potential research subjects to the researcher as a means of assisting the researcher in meeting her sample goal.

**Instruments**

The researcher utilized a survey entitled "The Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)" (Appendix B). The survey was initially created and utilized by Jameca Woody Falconer and Helen A. Neville in their exploratory research study of African American College Women’s Body Image. The SCSS is a 7 item survey, which utilizes a Likert Scale. The short survey assists in collecting data on the participant’s perception and satisfaction of his/her personal skin tone/color. This particular survey was distributed to the African American research participants. The researcher subsequently changed the language of the original SCSS as a means of becoming more befitting to White American research participants. This version of the survey was utilized with White American research participants (Appendix C).

The researcher also created a supplementary interview questionnaire for the purpose of this research design (Appendix D). The researcher’s interview consists of 43 inquiries. There is a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The interview questions attempt to gain a greater knowledge of the participant’s socio-demographics, as well as gauge how their family of origin, geographic location, exposure
to media, experiences of racism have influenced his/her self-esteem, perception of skin color, eye color, hair length and color, and other ethnically-based forms of phenotypes.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Upon receiving approval form the CSUS Division of Social Work HSR Committee, the researcher initiated contact with potential research participants. During this initial meeting, both the researcher and the potential research participants relayed and discussed their respective concerns and desires regarding the research study. This discussion also informed the participants of the anticipated duration of the interview.

Secondly, as a means of inquiring with potential participants about referring their acquaintances, the researcher asked the potential research participants if they would be willing to offer the names and contact information of any of their acquaintances in which they believed would be interested and/or willing to participate in this research study in order to fulfill the snowball method of sampling. The researcher informed the participants that their identities would not be revealed when the researcher contacts the referral to protect the confidentiality of the potential participant. The researcher has decided to request the referrals at this point in the process as a means of lessening the likelihood of the potential research participant feeling less compelled to refer individuals to the researcher due to his/her in-depth knowledge of specific information and content included in the survey and interview.

Upon agreement of participation in the study, the researcher gave the participants a copy of the Informed Consent Form to read. The researcher offered to read the Informed Consent Form and SCSS to all participants in attempt to avert the issue of
participants’ possible illiteracy or lack of understanding being problematic. The researcher subsequently asked the participants to voice any concerns or questions, and offer subsequent clarification. If the participant agreed to participate in the study through his/her volition, he/she signed the Informed Consent Form.

The researcher distributed the SCSS to the participants and instructed them to read the directions and questions/statements carefully before marking an appropriate answer. The researcher requested the research participant to answer all the questions truthfully and to the best of his/her ability. The researcher reiterated key components of the Informed Consent Form, such as the participant can choose to not answer questions without any consequence to him/her. Additionally, participants were informed of their volition to withdraw from participating in this study without suffering any repercussions. The participants proceeded to complete survey.

Next, the researcher conducted the interview. Prior to the interview conclusion, the researcher informed each participant that the researcher is cognizant that the questions may evoke strong feeling and responses, and the researcher will be sensitive to this fact. Similarly, the research participant can request to take a break from the interview process if he/she wishes. The researcher proceeded with the interview process.

Upon the completion of the survey and the interview, the researcher informed the research participant of what steps he/she can take if he/she wishes to follow up with the results of the research study. The researcher offered the participant her sincere thanks and appreciation for the participant offering valuable input and time to the integrity of the study.
Human Subjects’ Protection

Taking every aspect of this exploratory study into consideration, the researcher believes that the risk level for this study would be categorized as “minimal risk”. In this research study, "minimal risk” is defined by the researcher’s educated anticipation that the risks existing due to participating in this research study are no more harmful than those that are encountered in daily life. Despite inquiries within the interview appearing to be innocuous, the questionnaire may, nevertheless, cause a participant to feel uncomfortable by answering them. As explained in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A), participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any given time without any consequence to them. Additionally, participants can choose to not answer individual questions within the survey and interview without consequence to them.

Respondents will be provided with a list of mental health service providers, which will be listed at the bottom of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). Participants can utilize these resources as a means of processing his/her feelings and responses to the survey and interview. There are minimal physical procedures involved for research participants. The only physical exertion required of the participant is the utilization of a writing instrument when signing the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) and completing the written survey (Appendix B or Appendix C). Additionally, participants are expected to verbalize their responses to interview questions. The participants’ risk of physical discomfort is null to minimal.

As to the issue of confidentiality, the signed Informed Consent Form will be the only potential link between the research participant and the investigation. This form will
be appropriately destroyed upon completion of study. The research participants’ names will not be kept with the data in the study. The researcher utilized a code system. A log matching the codes and names of the participant was kept, but did not include any other personal identifying information. The log was kept separately from the coded questionnaires and forms in a locked box in the home of the researcher until the data had been collected and thoroughly analyzed and the thesis project had been completed.
Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Summary of Participant Surveys

There were 15 African American participants, 9 females and 6 males. There are twenty-one Caucasian American participants, 17 females and 4 males (see Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian American</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected from surveys indicate that 74% of African American participants reported satisfaction with their skin tone, whereas 66% of white participants reported skin color satisfaction (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Fourteen percent of African Americans wish their skin was darker and 55% of Caucasian Americans reported wishing their skin was darker (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Seven percent of African Americans wish their skin was lighter, whereas 10% of Caucasian Americans wish their skin tones were lighter (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Sixty-six percent of African Americans indicated if given the opportunity to change their skin tone they would choose the same skin tone; 27% indicated they would choose a darker skin tone and 7% would choose a lighter skin tone (see Figure 7). Given the opportunity to change their skin tone, 71% of Caucasian Americans reported wanting to choose a darker skin tone, 24% would choose a skin tone
similar to their own, and 5% would choose to be lighter (see Figure 8).

**Data for the Most Significant Survey Questions**

When the researcher individually asked the African American participants their position on the statement: “I am satisfied with my skin color”, 13% of participants strongly agreed, 0% moderately disagreed, 13% indicated they had a neutral stance, 13% mildly agreed, 7% moderately agreed, 20% agreed, and 34% strongly agreed (see Figure 1).

![Pie chart showing percentage distribution of responses to the question: I am satisfied with my skin color.](image_url)
When the researcher inquired of the Caucasian American participants their position on the statement: “I am satisfied with my skin color”, 0% of participants strongly disagreed, 5% moderately disagreed, 29% indicated they had a neutral opinion, 10% mildly agreed, 10% moderately agreed, 14% agreed, and 32% strongly agreed (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Caucasian American Participants: I am satisfied with my skin color*
As to the statement: “I wish my skin was darker”, 46 % of African Americans indicated they strongly disagreed, 7% disagreed, 0% moderately disagreed, and 7% mildly disagreed. Twenty-six percent of the participants were neutral, 7% mildly agreed, 0% moderately agreed, and 7% agreed with the statement (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. African American Participants: I wish my skin was darker](image)
When Caucasian American participants were asked their opinion on the statement: “I wish my skin was darker”, 11% indicated they strongly disagreed, 0% disagreed, 17% moderately disagreed, 6% mildly disagreed, 11% of the participants were neutral, 22% mildly agreed, 27% moderately agreed, and 6% agreed with the statement (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4. Caucasian American Participants: I wish my skin was darker*
When the researcher inquired of African American participants their stance on the statement: “I wish my skin was lighter”, 47% of participants strongly disagreed, 13% disagreed, 7% moderately disagreed, 13% mildly disagreed, 13% indicated they had a neutral opinion, 0% moderately agreed, and 7% agreed (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5. African American Participants: I wish my skin was lighter*
As to the statement: “I wish my skin was lighter”, 56% of Caucasian American participants strongly disagreed, 5% disagreed, 14% moderately disagreed, 5% mildly disagreed, 10% indicated they had a neutral opinion, 5% moderately agreed, and 5% agreed (see Figure 6).

*Figure 6. Caucasian American Participants: I wish my skin was lighter*
When asked their response to the phrase: “The skin tone I would change my skin tone to”, 7% of African American participants stated much lighter. Sixty-six percent of African American participants stated if given the opportunity to change their skin tone they would choose the same skin tone. Zero percent indicated they would change their skin tone to mildly darker, 20% would change their skin tone to moderately darker, and 7% would choose a darker skin tone (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. African American Participants: The skin tone I would change my skin tone to
When Caucasian American participants were asked by the researcher what skin tone they would change their skin tone to if given the opportunity, 5% indicated mildly lighter, 24% stated about the same color, 29% relayed mildly darker, 37% said moderately darker, and 5% stated darker.

![Pie chart showing skin tone preferences](image)

*Figure 8. Caucasian American Participants: The skin tone I would change my skin tone to*
Findings for the Most Significant Interview Questions

How has your skin color helped you?

African American Responses

Eight out of fifteen African American participants (53%) indicated they do not believe that their skin color has ever benefited them. Participant #2, a 56 year old woman, indicated her skin color has helped her on her job. She is an elementary school early intervention teacher at an urban school and has observed that students and parents/caretakers of color are more receptive to her help and suggestions as opposed to white teachers. She attributes this to the fact that many students and parents tend to relate to her more and don’t identify her as symbolizing “the man or whitie.”

Participant #4, a 61 year old woman, indicated she believes she was hired for a position because it was required that there be at least one minority working at the job site. Participant #5, a 77 year old woman shared the same sentiment. She further elaborated the she was offered a position despite a Caucasian applicant having more education and experience. Participant #6, a 23 year old woman, indicated she believes that she has always been judged by others based on her skin color. This thought of judgment has pushed her to succeed due to her goal of proving others wrong.

Participant #13, a 21 year old man, stated his skin color has helped him to blend in while living in a predominately African American community. According to Participant #15, a 21 year old woman, her skin color has allowed her to get into colleges and programs, helped her to qualify for scholarships, and helped her to be hired due to diversity requirements through schools and work places.
Caucasian American Responses

Fifteen out of twenty-one Caucasian Americans (71%) indicated they do not believe that their skin color has ever benefited them. Participant #4, a 32 year old woman relayed that her skin color helped to offer her “free passes” with her interactions with law enforcement agencies. Participant #5, a 26 year old woman stated her skin tone has afforded her greater positive attention while shopping in stores, and allowed her to get jobs easier. Participant #6, a 42 year man relayed he feels his skin tone allows him to “get a job easier.” Participant #9, a 22 year old woman stated she believes her skin tone has helped her with admittance into school and “it [skin tone] generally affords me more opportunities than ethnic minorities.” Participant #6, a 30 year old woman, relayed her skin tone helps her when she is hired for a job or applies for promotions. Participant #19, a 53 year old woman indicated, “I think my skin color has helped me most by allowing me to blend in. This was especially useful in school where we did not have very many African American students.”

How has your skin color harmed you?

African American Responses

Five out of fifteen African American participants (33%) indicated they do not believe that their skin color has negatively impacted their lives. Participant #2 recalled being called racial slurs while growing up. She specifically remembers growing up in San Francisco, and a teacher advising white children not to play with black children during a school-wide assembly. Additionally, she recalled one of her teachers refer to her as "a hussie", a term that she believes would never have been used when communicating
with the white child. She elaborated that such sentiments seem so absurd now given the fact that San Francisco is currently considered to be such a “liberal and free-spirited city.”

Participant #3, a 79 year old woman, recalled an incident in New Orleans during the 1940s. She went to restaurant with a Caucasian lady she worked for, but was refused service due to her race/skin color. The Caucasian lady sent her to the car and later brought food to the car. Participant #3 threw the food away because she was fearful it might be poisoned and because she was insulted.

Participant #4 recalled several job experiences where her skin color created friction in the work place. At one job, her supervisor would purposely sabotage her job performance through hiding her work-related tools, making it very difficult to complete her job tasks effectively. She recalled another job, where she believed a less qualified (through tenure, experience, and educational background) white co-worker received a higher raise than her. She reflected by saying, “I believe skin color has a lot to do with promotions.” Participant #4 also recalled a situation in which she was applying for a position and the employer called with excitement after reviewing her resume and references; however, after interviewing in person (causing the employer to see her race and skin tone), the employer indicated she was no longer interested in hiring Participant #4.

Participant #6 believes skin tone has harmed her because mainstream America looks at her and lumps her “into a statistic of being unmotivated, uneducated and dependent on welfare.” Participant #7, a 27 year old woman, indicated she has difficulty
fitting in because people often don’t know how to interpret the correlation between her 
“skin tone and proper English.”

Participant #9, a 53 year old man, gave a very detailed account of how his skin 
tone has negatively affected him. According to him,

I had the darkest complexion among my three siblings. As a child I used to question if my oldest two older brothers were adopted. I was labeled by my skin tone by my brothers and Mom. I felt different. They used to call me “Black [participant’s name]” and I hated that name. I wanted to kick their ass every time they said it. They knew I didn’t like it. As a child I felt lesser than due to my darker skin complexion. In fact, me and my second oldest brother would color insult each other; he was what we called yellow and I was black. I used to call him ‘White Boy’, ‘White Nigga’, ‘Vanilla’, anything to demean his skin tone. Growing up kids would often play the dozens, mostly capping about skin tone and body figure; it was part of growing up. I used to think all the light skin dudes would do all the catching of girls, and it always seemed like the light skin dudes had the wavy hair, which girls liked.

Even today, sometimes I am guarded about taking pictures, wanting it to be taken in well lighted areas so I can be seen. Sometimes it is quite humorous, yet still sad that some white women tend to they grab a tighter hold on their purse while walking or in elevators. As a black male, there is this instilled prejudice against myself; this sullen feeling of having to measure up to being accepted by the lighter color and white people. I now wonder why skin tones have metaphors that stigmatize what is good and bad. And that’s what I thought; my skin tone was bad due to not being fair skinned. And now I wonder: How does a skin tone get named fair skinned? Being teased and being an outcast because if my skin color was one of the biggest reasons I began using drugs. Thank you for this survey, it has been very therapeutic for me.

Participant #10, a 35 year old male, indicated he believed his skin tone had 
harmed him on his job, specifically a white co-worker had received a promotion over him 
despite having worked there a shorter amount of time than Participant #10, having poor
work performance and attendance, exhibiting timeliness issues, and earning poor performance reviews.

Participant #13 indicated his skin color has been a barrier in his city of origin, Oakland, California, especially in his interaction with law enforcement officers. He stated, “Even if you have all of your paper work, the police will still harass you.” Participant #14, a 58 year old man, indicated he believes his skin color has negatively affected his workforce advancement. Participant #15 indicated she feels as though she gets racially profiled while shopping, whether it being surveillanced more closely or not being waited upon in higher end stores or car lots.

**Caucasian American Responses**

Twelve out of twenty-one participants (57%) indicated they do not believe that their skin tone has harmed them in any way. Participant #3, a 61 year old man, indicated his skin tone makes him stand out, especially if he is “the only white person there.” Participant #4 indicated her skin tone has negatively affected her romantic life because she was “spit on and threatened by another white person for dating someone outside of my race.” Participant #5 stated her skin tone has harmed her “because in the field of social work I feel like I get overlooked because I am average, nothing different.” According to Participant #6, he was not hired for jobs in urban neighborhoods because management believed that his skin color was a hindrance for him relating to the primary clientele.

Participant #11, a 20 year old woman, relayed her “skin tone has made it harder to find scholarships because a lot of them cater to specific races other than white.”
Participant #21, a 22 year old woman also shared this sentiment, stating, “getting scholarships was hard as heck, nearly impossible.” Participant #15, a 25 year old woman, stated, “I think some people will judge you based on any differences you have with them.” Participant #16, a 30 year old woman, indicated her skin tone has caused her to become more easily sunburned.

Participant #20, a 22 year old woman, relayed an experience where her skin tone has harmed her. She stated,

“I lived in Hawaii for a while and I was definitely treated as an outcast. I was white and was from a military family, and Hawaiians do not like non-tourist white people moving in their land. Hawaiians were just generally outwardly rude toward whites. I was never physically harmed, but I was definitely insulted.”

In your opinion is there a skin tone within the African American community deemed more beautiful or that is preferred more?

African American Responses

Five out of fifteen African American participants (33%) do not believe that there is still a skin tone within the African American community that is deemed more beautiful or preferential than another. Participant #1, a 26 year old man, stated he believed light and medium skin is more attractive in the African-American community. Moreover, he stated women with long, straight hair or smooth tendrils are viewed as more pretty. Participant #2 indicated she believes that historically speaking, both light skinned African American men and women were deemed as more aesthetically pleasing within the African American community. However, she indicated that there seemed to the recent influx in darker skinned men being deemed more "sexy and attractive."
Participant #4 indicated she believes lighter skinned African Americans are still preferred over their darker skinned counterparts. She explained that people interact with her biracial (black and white) granddaughter so much more jovially than they do with her full black grandson. She said, “Light people tend to literally light up the room. It is subtle, but it is still there.”

Historically speaking, Participant #7 believes “that lighter skin and good hair was considered the ideal within the black community, but lately campaigns similar to the ones promoted through Dark & Lovely have promoted the idea that beauty is diverse and is found throughout all races.” Participant #12, a 20 year old woman, stated she believes African Americans tend to value lighter skin and long, straight hair.

According to Participant #13, “Everyone has their own preferences and interpretations with regard to beauty; that is not the problem. The problem is when one’s appearance begets judgments of his or her character, performance, or potential.” Participant # 15 stated she believes that the “Black is Beautiful” movement is stagnant because there is still a hesitance for many black women to wear their natural hair and skin with pride.

**Caucasian American Responses**

Five out of twenty-one Caucasian American participants (24%) stated they were not sure if there is a specific skin color within the African American community that is considered more beautiful or preferential. Participant #2, a 51 year old woman, and Participants #7, #18, and #19 indicated they believed light skin and long, straightened hair is more preferred within the African American community. Participants #3 and #17
believe light skin and wavy hair are considered to be the most pretty among African Americans. Participants #4, #9, #12, and #16 indicated they believe African Americans prefer lighter skin tones over darker skin tones. According to Participant #6, he does not believe that African Americans prefer one skin tone more than others. He stated he has observed the pride shown toward the ideas of diversity and uniqueness in skin tones and hair styles. Similarly, Participants #11, #13, #14, and #21 stated they do not believe there is a certain skin tone preferred within the African American community. Participant #20 indicated she believes that medium skin is preferred within the African American communities because “extremes whether light or dark tend to stand out and not necessarily in a good way.”

In your opinion is there a skin tone within the Caucasian American community deemed more beautiful or that is preferred more?

African American Responses

Two out of fifteen African American participants (13%) do not believe that there is still a skin tone within the Caucasian American community that is deemed more beautiful or preferential than another. Participant #1 indicated he believed fair to medium skin tones are deemed most beautiful in the Caucasian American community. Participant #2 indicated she believes that medium toned skin to be more socially acceptable within the white community. Moreover, she believes members within the white community are no longer seeking to have “porcelain, purist skin tones” for themselves, but prefer olive skin tones, often achieved through the tanning process.
Participant #4 indicated generally speaking she believes light skin colors are preferred over dark skin within the white community. She elaborated, “Just look at CNN, I don't see dark people. The black people they do have are light-skinned, and the black women tend to have long permed hair. Basically, I think they are hiring people that tend to look like the majority of their fan base.”

Participant #6 indicated that she has observed “white women trying to be black. They have gelled swooped ponytails, hair extensions, get collagen injections or use lip plumpers to make their lips look bigger, get breast and butt implants, and go to tanning salons, etc.” Participant #7 indicated she believes that darker skin is becoming more socially accepted within the white community; not necessarily for its essence and beauty, but rather for an appreciation for diversity and differences. Participant #8 indicated, “It’s ironic that back in the day, dark skin was considered to be a bad thing. I don’t know when it shifted, but a lot of white people are tanning to make their skin darker.”

According to Participant #10, members of the white community still tend to prefer and relate better with lighter skinned African Americans and believes that this is why so many light skinned blacks or biracial people such as Halle Berry and President Barack Obama have greater support which transcends racial lines. According to Participant #12, members of the white community value tanned skin and straight hair as most beautiful. Participant #14 indicated tanned skin and blond hair are considered the most beautiful within the white community, so much so, that many of the members use unnatural and unconventional means of trying to achieve that “specific look.” Participant #15 believes, “There is a big epidemic on tanning for your skin to have a sun-kissed glow.”
Caucasian American Responses

Participants #2, #3, #11 (14%) stated they do not believe there is a preferred skin color among whites. Participant #1, a 60 year old white man, and Participant #6 (10%) indicated “the standard blond hair, blue eyes” is considered the most beautiful physical features within the white community. Participants #4, #7, #8, #15, #16, #17, and #19 (33%) believe that fair skin and blond hair is the preferred look within the white community. Participants #5, #9, #10, #12, #14, and #20 (29%) indicated that tanned people with straight, blonde hair are viewed as most attractive. More specifically, Participant #5 believes that tanned women with long blond hair typically get more positive attention, especially from their male counterparts. Participant #13, believes that pale skin is not considered attractive within the white community.

How has media (TV, music videos, films, and advertisements) affected your perceptions about skin color?

African American Responses

Four out of fifteen African American participants (27%) indicated that the media has not affected their perceptions about skin color. According to Participant #3, historically speaking, "white has always been right." She stated despite there being women of color within the entertainment business, "they tend to be a tiny, petite and high yellow Diahann Carol, Lena Horne, or Dorothy Dandridge types. Your Afrocentric types are definitely not as positively portrayed in the media world.” Participant #4 indicated that she did not believe many “dark women” were in music videos; she said women in the videos do not look representative of the typical fan base of many of these artists.
Participant #5, indicated media, talks shows specifically, tend to portray dark skinned blacks more stereotypically.

According to Participant #6, “The media makes African-Americans look unclassy, ghetto, and materialistic, while white people are made to look like the exact opposite. But, I can't blame this totally on the media because African-Americans have allowed this to take place and in some cases black producers have been guilty of typecasting African-Americans in the negative roles.”

Participant #7 indicated that movies tend to typecast darker skinned African American men as criminals or with serious character flaws. She stated as a member of the African American community she has been afforded ample opportunities to see African Americans of all shades exhibit various abilities of social functioning. She further elaborated, “It is saddening to know that many white Americans live in their white bubbles and communities and their only interaction and perception with other ethnic groups is through what they see via news and movies. This is especially bad when the reality of diversity within every racial group is not adequately represented at all, in fact often times it is very skewed.”

Participant #12 indicated on several occasions she has been tempted to change her appearance based on the “model of beauty represented in movies or magazines.”

Participant #14 stated that there are very few examples of positive, wholesome, functional, or value-driven families of color portrayed on television or movies. He stated, “Wholesome families such as the Huxtables depicted on The Cosby Show are non-existent in present-day television.” According to Participant 15, “Most films,
commercials, and TV shows are all white people unless I turn to BET (Black Entertainment Television). It has affected my perception because it makes me feel as though my skin color isn’t represented and therefore must not be desirable.”

**Caucasian American Responses**

Twelve of the twenty-one Caucasian Americans (57%) interviewed do not believe media affects their perceptions of skin color. Participant #19 indicated she would like to think that media has not affected her, but in reflection she does believe that the white women portrayed most favorably tend to have blue eyes and straight, blond hair. Moreover, the most favorably viewed African American in the entertainment world tend to have lighter skin tones and straight hair.

Participant #1 indicated, “The media had given society a false impression of what the perfect human looks like. Its portrayals do not consider the personality or core of an individual.” Participant #2 indicated that the media has not influenced her perceptions of skin color because “I have a mind of my own”. Participant #7 indicated that whites are utilized more than their ethnic counterparts; however, most of the whites depicted have more dark or tanned skin. Similarly, Participant #10 believes that there are an overwhelming number of advertisements encouraging Caucasians to tan their skin via the sun or tanning products.

Participant #11 stated, “Media tends to reinforce stereotypes of the ‘beautiful blond, blue-eyed angel’, the ‘smart Asian, and that many African Americans look similar.” Participant #17 offered the opinion that “media display what is ‘in’ at the moment; therefore helping to shape what adolescents believe to be ‘right’ or
fashionable.” Participant #18 stated that she believes the media covertly and overtly delivers the message that light skin and straight hair is most beautiful. According to Participant #20, “Stereotypes control the media 100%. All the black people portrayed on BET are rappers or athletes that deck out their rides; whereas white people are depicted as social examples living in a house with a picket fence, similar to family on 7th Heaven.”

**Summary of Important Findings**

Overall, the findings suggest that African Americans tend to have a higher satisfaction with their skin tone than their Caucasian American counterparts. Seventy-four percent of African Americans reported being satisfied with their skin tone, whereas 66% of Caucasians reported being satisfied with their skin tone. Moreover, if given the opportunity to choose their skin tone 66% of African Americans would choose their same skin tone, while 24% of Caucasian American would choose their same skin tone. Seventy-one percent of Caucasian American participants indicated they wish their skin tone was darker, and 27% of their African American counterparts would choose to be darker. Seven percent of African American participants would chose to be lighter and 5% of Caucasian Americans would chose to have a lighter skin tone.

As to the perception of their skin color being beneficial to them, 53% of African American participants do not believe their skin color has benefited them. However, 71% of their Caucasian counterparts articulated similar sentiment. Thirty-three of African American participants indicated they do not believe their skin tone has had negative implications for their lives. Of the 67% of African Americans that reported being
negatively affected owing to their skin color, 20% indicated their skin tone has hindered their ability to be hired for a job or granted promotions. Fifty-seven percent of Caucasian Americans did not believe their skin tone has harmed them. Of the 46% of the Caucasian Americans that believed that skin tone has negatively affected their lives, 10% indicated that their skin tone has hindered their ability to qualify for scholarships and 10% indicated their skin tone has hindered their ability to be hired for a job.

Thirty-three percent of surveyed African Americans and 19% of Caucasian Americans indicated they no longer believe there is a skin tone more preferred by African Americans. Nineteen percent of Caucasians believe that within the African American community lighter skin tones are more preferred than darker skin tones. Fourteen percent of Caucasians do not believe there is a preferred skin tone within the white community. However, 33% of Caucasians believe that fair skin and blond hair is the most preferred look, and 29% believe tanned skin and straight, blonde hair is most preferred look.

As to how media affects their perceptions of skin tone, 27% of African American participants indicated media does not affect their perception of skin tone. Of the 73% of African Americans whose perceptions have been affected by media, 33% indicated that most media depicts negative stereotypes of African Americans, especially those with darker skin (20%). Fifty-seven percent of Caucasian American participants do not believe media has affected their perceptions of skin color.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Data collected from both services and interviews of African American participants generally indicate that despite varied levels of social, financial, and romantic challenges many African Americans face owing to their skin tone, only 13% of African American interviewees report not being satisfied with their skin color. Conversely, despite reporting arguably less severe accounts of negative effects of colorism, 5% of surveyed Caucasian Americans reported dissatisfaction with skin color.

A common theme among some African Americans with regard to the benefits their skin tone has awarded them can be categorized as benefits awarded to them through Affirmative Action based initiatives as opposed to more strategic and sophisticated socially constructed reasons. Ironically, this is a primary point of frustration articulated by many Caucasian American participants discussing how they feel their skin color presents them with challenges (i.e., not qualifying for scholarships and racially based selection processes for the purpose diversity hiring practices). Some Caucasian Americans were frustrated and baffled by the concept of why one’s race or skin color had higher merit than more important factors such as experience, education, work performance and ethics, or potentiality. Despite this sentiment resonating as truth in my mind, historically speaking, this was typically the reality and privilege awarded to most whites within this country. It is interesting what emotions are evoked if one’s privileges (both earned and unearned) are threatened, compromised, or enfringed upon.
Another interesting aspect of the data findings is the fact that an astounding 71% of Caucasian Americans interviewed believe that their skin tone has never been an benefit to them. This causes one to now interpret if such reports are based on perceptions or actual reality. This finding is significant if one takes into consideration Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) beliefs that not only does racism (and colorism) disadvantage others, but also awards others (the socially powerful majority) a silent privilege that they have the power to benefit from, while simultaneously having the option of remaining oblivious to.

Lastly, a very interesting theme that emerged from the data results is the desire for a large number of Caucasian Americans to have darker skin. Seventy-one percent of Caucasian American participants reported wanting to make their skin tone darker. Furthermore, some African Americans noted observing white women trying to achieve more ethnic based features such as fuller lips and larger breasts and behinds. The difficulty lies in the fact that it is hard to determine whether the rise in self-love, comfortableness, and/or acceptance of varying skin tones within the African American community has prompted the trends for some Caucasian Americans to desire darker skin or vice versa.

Summary

The data results, although not in alignment with the researcher’s original hypothesis, have been somewhat pleasing to the researcher. Many African American participants seem to have a clear understanding with regard to the nexus of how socially constructed forms of racism and colorism have begot negative implications throughout
various aspects of their lives. Despite this slow progression of self-love and appreciation for diversity and various interpretations of beauty there has been a gradual rise in the rejection of the systematic indoctrination of colorism planted by slave owners and benefactors. Unfortunately, as originally anticipated by William Lynch (2001) this mental and social transformation has taken a long time to evolve and is not nearly complete. In order for continued progression, all members of society must equip themselves by gaining historic information about how such negative social constructs began and make strides to overthrow such viewpoints and practices on micro, meso, and macro levels.

**Recommendations**

The researcher recognizes that the selection of study participants may offer limitations in generalizing the findings because the process does not fully take into consideration the unique social and cultural characteristics of the research subjects. For example, most historically black colleges and universities are typically located in southern and eastern states. These geographic locations are historically renowned for both covertly and overtly harboring racially motivated stratifications through discrimination and segregation practices. The researcher did not take into account the individuals living in these areas may be experiencing residual and internalized perceptions about body image (especially concerning skin complexion and hair texture) due to the multiple generations of people experiencing various forms of discrimination, stigmatism, and oppression. This sample, therefore, may not be representative of the entire greater population because the dynamics of race relations and racial diversity are
not analogous across-the-board. For example, this study will probably not have yielded
the same results if the tests were administered to study participants in a predominately
white or diverse college campus, as it would in a historically African American
university.

Additionally, this study would most likely offer limitations in the diversity of age
of subjects. Having fewer subjects who were older in age limits participants’ firsthand
experience of seeing and/or being involved with civil rights/liberties movements; younger
generations might only be availed details about such experiences on a secondhand basis.
This may skew the results because there is little collection of data from older participants.
Similarly, the researcher suggests that factors such as socio-economic status and
education levels be inquired about on surveys to see how these variables would affect
participants’ experiences and opinions, thus affecting data results.

If similar research is to be conducted in the future, this researcher suggests that
future researchers should be cognizant of the interviewer’s race, physical attributes, and
gender when choosing an interviewer to administer questionnaires and conduct
interviews. Some participants may feel embarrassed to express their experiences or
genuine ideologies. Moreover, participants may feel compelled to “relate” to what they
perceive the interviewer’s personal identities to be or relate to the situations they have
experienced. Additionally, they may feel as though they would offend the interviewer if
they were to speak negatively about the interviewer’s skin tone, facial features, or hair
texture.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
Informed Consent Form

Exploration of Colorism and Its Effects on African American and White American Communities

I yield my consent freely and voluntarily to participate in an exploratory research study led by Angelique Howard, a student in the Master of Social Work Program in the Division of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento. I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the psychosocial effects that colorism has on members of the African American and White communities. Participation in this research study serves as a means of exploration, ultimately aiding in providing valuable information to educators, social service providers, mental health workers, as well as the greater society. Results from this research study will also aid in bringing to light the prevalence of the issues and problems experienced by African Americans and White Americans affected by the effects of colorism. Additionally, the conclusions of the study will assist in the process of educating social service and mental health providers to employ more effective, culturally sensitive techniques when working with African Americans and other ethnic populations affected by colorism.

I understand that this exploratory study will be accomplished through a face-to-face or telephone meeting. In instances of face-to-face meetings, the meeting place will be mutually agreed upon by both the participant and researcher. I understand that I will be one of sixty African American and White American men and women from various social backgrounds. Participants in this research study will be supplied with a survey questionnaire they will complete, and will subsequently be interviewed by the researcher. I understand that entire completion of the interview process may take up to one hour. I understand that the interview for the exploratory study will be carried out by Angelique Howard, [(916)952-4748; Angeliq287@Aol.com] under the supervision of thesis advisor, Dr. Teiahsha Bankhead [(916)278-7177; bankhead@csus.edu]. By taking part in this study, you are expected to answer the interview questions truthfully, and to the best to your ability.

I understand that there may be risks associated with participating in this exploratory study; however, they are minimal. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of the risks that exist are not more harmful than those that are encountered in daily life. I also understand that the researcher has provided me with a list of mental health providers at the bottom of this Informed Consent Form. I may contact these mental health care providers to address any discomfort or distress associated with my participation in the study. I understand that I may withdraw at any time from this study without any risk or repercussion. Similarly, if I do not wish to participate or if I desire
not to answer some questions, I do not have to do so and there will not be any repercussions for me.

I understand the information collected from the survey and interview will be utilized for research purposes only, and will be appropriately disposed of after the completion of the research project. I am aware the interview will be completely confidential. I am not required to offer the researcher my real name, but may do so if I so wish to or offer a pseudonym to be utilized. I understand that this document with my signature will be the only potential link between me and the investigation, and my name will not be indicated in the study. In addition, I understand that the researcher will tape record the interview for the purpose of thorough recording. However, if I wish for the researcher not to record the interview I can opt not to be tape recorded without any consequence. Finally, I understand that if I have further questions or concerns as a result of this interview process, I am encouraged to contact Angelique Howard at (916) 952-4748 or Angeliq287@Aol.com or her thesis advisor, Dr. Teiahsha Bankhead at (916) 278-7177 or Bankhead@csus.edu.

I understand that I will not receive any monetary or compensatory incentive for participating in this exploratory study interview. However, I understand there are other benefits to participating in this study. By participating in this research study, I will be playing an active role in adding to the knowledge of color consciousness and colorism, as well as the implications associated with these social issues. The results of this study may yield a heightened awareness and deeper understanding to educators, social workers, counselors, other human service providers, and members of the greater society. Additionally, the results may aid in helping to alleviate the negative psychosocial effects of colorism and stagnate the perpetuation of discriminatory acts based on racism and colorism.

I understand that I have the right and, therefore, I have exercised the right to ask questions regarding the exploratory study and these they have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that if I wish to receive addition information about the conclusions surmised in this research study, I can contact Angelique Howard via telephone (916) 952-4748 or via e-mail at Angeliq287@Aol.com.
A copy of this consent has been offered to me. Providing my signature indicates I have read, I understand, and agree to the aforementioned terms.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of the Participant            Date

______________________________  ☐   ☐  ______________________
Consent to Be Audiotaped            Yes  No             Date

I have explained in detail the investigation process for the exploratory study to the participant and they have freely given their consent.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of the Principal Investigator/Researcher            Date

List of Mental Health Providers

1. Boys Town Suicide and Crisis Line: (800)448-3000
2. Covenant House Hotline: (800)999-9999
APPENDIX B
African American Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)

Code: B/AA# ___________________

Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)
Written by Jameca Woody Falconer and Helen A. Neville
University of Missouri, Columbia

Directions: Please read each statement/question carefully before circling the most appropriate answer.

1. How satisfied are you with the shade (lightness or darkness) of your own skin?

1                2               3             4               5                6             7             8                9
Extremely Dissatisfied                       Somewhat Satisfied                     Extremely Satisfied

2. Compared to most African American people, I believe my skin color is…

1                2               3             4               5                6             7             8                9
Extremely Light                               About the Same Color                         Extremely Dark

3. If I could change my skin color, I would make it…

1                2               3             4               5                6             7             8                9
Much Lighter             About the Same Color                           Much Darker
4. Compared with the complexion (skin color) of members of my family, I am satisfied with my skin color.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

5. I wish the shade of my skin was darker.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

6. I wish my skin was lighter.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

7. Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other African Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree
APPENDIX C

Caucasian American Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)

Code: C/EA# ___________________

Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)

Written by Jameca Woody Falconer and Helen A. Neville
University of Missouri, Columbia

Directions: Please read each statement/question carefully before circling the most appropriate answer.

1. How satisfied are you with the shade (lightness or darkness) of your own skin?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Extremely Dissatisfied  Somewhat Satisfied  Extremely Satisfied

2. Compared to most White American people, I believe my skin color is…

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Extremely Light  About the Same Color  Extremely Dark

3. If I could change my skin color, I would make it…

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Much Lighter  About the Same Color  Much Darker
4. Compared with the complexion (skin color) of members of my family, I am satisfied with my skin color.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

5. I wish the shade of my skin was darker.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

6. I wish my skin was lighter.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree

7. Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other White Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Strongly Disagree  Neutral  Strongly Agree
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

1. What is your age in years? ___________

2. Do you identify yourself as a.) Female
   b.) Male
   c.) Transgender (Please specify) ________.

3. a. What city, state, and country were you born in?
   b. Please describe the racial/ethnic breakdown of the area.
      □ Mostly African Americans
      □ Mostly White Americans
      □ Evenly mixed between African Americans and White Americans
      □ Other, please specify: ________________________________

4. a. What city, state, and country were you raised in?
   b. Please describe the racial/ethnic breakdown of the area.
      □ Mostly African Americans
      □ Mostly White Americans
      □ Evenly mixed between African Americans and White Americans
      □ Other, please specify: ________________________________

5. How would you describe your skin tone (i.e., fair, light-skinned, medium-skinned, dark skinned)?
Please utilize the skin tone palette above to answer questions 6-11.

6. Please select the skin tone that most closely resembles your skin tone.

7. If you had the ability to select your own skin tone, what color on the skin color palette would you choose?

8. What skin tone is most representative of your family members?

9. What skin tone is most representative of your friends/associates?

10. What skin tone is most representative of your romantic and/or sexual partners?

11. What skin tone do you consider to be the most attractive for your romantic and/or sexual partners?
Please utilize the eye color palette above to answer questions 12-17.

12. Please select the eye color that most closely resembles your eye color.

13. If you had the ability to select your own eye color, what color on the eye color palette would you choose?

14. What eye color is most representative of your family members?

15. What eye color is most representative of your friends/associates?

16. What eye color is most representative of your romantic and/or sexual partners?

17. What eye color do you consider to be the most attractive for your romantic and/or sexual partners?
Please utilize the hair texture pictures above to answer questions 18-23.

18. Please select the hair texture that most closely resembles your hair texture.
19. If you had the ability to select your own hair texture, what hair texture would you choose?
20. What hair texture is most representative of your family members?
21. What hair texture is most representative of your friends/associates?
22. If applicable, what hair texture is most representative of your romantic and/or sexual partners?
23. If applicable, what hair texture do you consider to be the most attractive for your romantic and/or sexual partners?

Please utilize the hair color pictures above to answer questions 24-29.

24. Please select the hair color that most closely resembles your hair color.
25. If you had the ability to select your own hair color, what hair color would you choose?
26. What hair color is most representative of your family members?
27. What hair color is most representative of your friends/associates?
28. What hair color is most representative of your romantic and/or sexual partners?
29. What hair color do you consider to be the most attractive for your romantic and/or sexual partners?
30. Please describe your earliest memory of recognizing your race.

31. Please describe your earliest memory of discovering what skin tone/color you had.

32. Please describe the physical features (skin color, hair texture, hair length, eye color) that you are most attracted to in a potential sexual partner and/or mate.

33. How do you think that your skin tones affect various aspects of your daily life, specifically in the areas of job promotion, educational opportunities, social interactions, and romantic relationships? Please explain.

34. Describe a situation where your skin color has helped you.

35. Describe a situation where your skin color has harmed you.
36. In the African American community do you think that there is still a specific shade of skin and type of hair texture/length that is considered to be more beautiful or attractive. Please explain.

37. In the white American community do you think that there is still a specific shade of skin and type of hair texture/length that is considered to be more beautiful or attractive. Please explain.

38. Do you prefer natural/ethnic or relaxed/thermally straightened hairstyles?

39. Please identify influential individuals within the African American and White American community. What are some of their physical attributes?

40. Please describe the typical complexion of your immediate close friends and associates.

41. How has media (TV, music videos, films and advertisements) affected your perceptions about skin color? Please explain.
42. How has media (TV, music videos, films and advertisements) affected your perceptions about hair textures? Please explain.

43. How has media (TV, music videos, films and advertisements) affected your perceptions about and other ethnically specific physical features? Please explain.
REFERENCES


Brown, J.C. (February 1, 1993). Which Black is beautiful?: African Americans in Adland so light it’s often hard to tell. *Advertisement Age.*


