

UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF  
COLORISM: DISCRIMINATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS BASED ON SKIN COLOR

by

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## Dedications

I could not be here without both parents, Reverend Oree Johnson Sr., *Strong Tower* and Henry Ann Johnson, *the BEST in the world*. Love you so much. However, I must extend a special dedication to my mother.

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my deceased mother, Henry Ann Johnson whose tenacity and will to aid others made it all possible in me reaching my goals. When reflecting on her example and how her modeling was instilled in me and all my siblings, I am grateful she imparted so many things, but one salient thing are the words she spoke quite often, “You can do anything you put your mind to do,” so I persevered because she persevered in everything that she accomplished to make people better and to make our family one unit. Words really cannot express what she has done for me individually, so again, in loving memory of my dear mother, thank you and I will never forget your words of wisdom that is a part of me now and helped me along this journey. I love to call her mama, mommy, mother, and ma depending on my mood; she still lives through me.

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## Abstract

Colorism is a complex phenomenon which was birthed by racism and uses the observable human characteristic of skin color as a metric for worth in society. Colorism as practiced since its inception demonstrates intolerance for African features and promotes acceptance based on the approximate physiological similarity to a European standard. This social construct has served as a divisive wedge in the Black community. The issue is further complicated by the dynamics of interpersonal beliefs and group socialization in a variety of settings. Skin bleaching, tanning, and chemical hair straighteners all have the potential risk to impact physical health that causes cancer and even death. The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to understand the psychosocial and physical health impacts on African Americans related to discrimination based on skin color. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was utilized to collect data from six men and six women in a southern state that range from age 18-30. The essence of this phenomenon generated six themes: 1). Perceptions of Colorism as “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society, 2). Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group, 3). Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma, 4). Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family, 5). Perceptions of Colorism Origin, and 6). Resilience Despite Colorism. The themes denote the participants’ lived experiences with colorist people. It provides insight into racial socialization influencing intra-racial and inter-racial colorism impacts on physical health, mental, and social stratum. This study provides a contribution to the discipline of social work, it informs practice, policy, and provides direction for future research.

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## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The physical appearance of people of African descent has long served as a barrier to their equality in American society (Gordon-Reed, 2018; also see Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Landor et al., 2013). Racial preferences can be traced back to practices of slavery in England and the United States (U.S.) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Gordon-Reed, 2018). Early servitude in the English colony of Virginia was initially based upon contractual agreement as Europeans worked alongside Africans as indentured servants (Galenson, 2017). Because the enslavement of Africans was routinely justified by their perceived religious infidelity, in some circumstances, non-indentured African slaves gained freedom by converting to Christianity (Burr, 2016). African slavery, however, became a legally permanent and inheritable condition linked to the physical characteristic of skin color (Gordon-Reed, 2018).

The legal enactment of skin color discrimination simultaneously determined who would be enslaved and ensured those slaves would not escape and integrate into greater society (Waldstreicher, 2017). This dynamic polarization of rights and privileges gradually evolved with the offspring of Africans and Europeans into a complex system of skin tone-based interactions known as colorism. Although never codified by law, discrimination based on color manifests when lighter skin Blacks are given advantages and preferential treatment over darker skin Blacks, also known as colorism (e.g., Asante & Hall, 2011).

Colorism has been argued to reflect the larger system of societal racism but it is distinct in that it is practiced by Blacks and non-Blacks. Race and racism were employed by Europeans and can be perpetuated as such (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). It can also be institutionalized and systematic. Additionally, racism can be between groups and against one's racial status. Intra-racial colorism occurs among people of color against their own race (Norwood, 2014;

Washington, 1990) because of skin color gradations, and inter-racially with whites toward African Americans, or toward minorities due to skin color differences.

Some of the manifestations of colorism are the promotion of stereotypes and exaggerated caricatures, the ridicule of darker skin Blacks as unintelligent or lacking morality (Burrell, 2010; Kennedy, 2002; Alexander, 2012). The denigration of Blackface through minstrel shows was one of the most salient caricatures that whites used for centuries (Kennedy, 2002; Alexander, 2012). For example, during a campus party at an institution of higher education in North Texas, white students made a mockery of Martin Luther King Jr. Day by demeaning African Americans and painted their skin Black, consumed malt liquor, watermelon, fried chicken and mimicked other stereotypes such as exaggerated physical features (Cannick, 2007). The legacy of colorism exists to present day, and Blacks continually struggle to overcome perceived deficiencies related to the way they look. Colorism is also collectively known as skin-tone bias, having a color complex, or being color-struck (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

Literature reveals that colorism is perpetuated by Black families, within social institutions, and by employers (e.g., Wilder & Cain 2011; Bryant, 2013; Hunter, 2007). Findings from a focus group of 26 Black women specified that colorism is reinforced within families, influencing their viewpoints and experiences with colorism (Wilder & Cain, 2011). Colorism is also reinforced through comedy and other avenues of entertainment, such as film and movies (Webb, 2013). A prominent rapper and artist, now deceased, once wrote “heart throb never Black and ugly as ever” to describe his dark skin as undesirable and socially unacceptable (Burrell, 2010). Women with light skin were filmed in Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) documentary, *Light Girls*. Their darker counterparts would state things like, yellow girl or light bright (you think you are cute; you are not Black). Those women highlighted the potential to blend in

everywhere and trying to compensate for not being considered Black due to incidents of people in society being critical of their Blackness. The women in the film vicariously learned within their Black community that they were detested and seen as special (Beharie et al., 2015). The light skin women filmed in *Light Girls* identities were compromised illustrative of emotional traumatization experienced from previous incidences of colorism. Intra-racial color discrimination is not well known to others, however, is observable in the African American community (Hannon, 2015).

The psychological internalization of the color Black and the idea that being Black was bad, inferior, and unworthy became ideological beliefs for some (e.g., Ledford, 2012; Uzogara, 2016). This leads to the primary reason to explore the psychosocial impacts among African American men and women. The adverse effects of colorism that manifest harmful physical behaviors that causes one to change their physical appearance is a social problem that requires research to gain a better understanding of why people alter their skin color and the physical, psychological, and sociological consequences of such actions. Research indicates that colorism results in psychological trauma (e.g., Fultz, 2014; Turner, 2013). It effects one's self image and impacts self-esteem (e.g., Townsend et al., 2010). Researchers have also illustrated that colorism has negative effects on one's overall well-being and life experiences (e.g., Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). Despite the many studies conducted on colorism, no research known to this researcher to date has been conducted on the psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism on African American men and women qualitatively to understand their lived experiences (e.g., Hall, 2007).

This study will provide insight to better understand this marginalized population and view history's influence on both the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships of African

Americans in all its complexities. In other words, the study aims to understand individuals' awareness of self, the connection to others, and how colorism impacts Blacks collectively in terms of social, mental, and physical health. Although social work research is fluid; broad and interdisciplinary, this very research is understudied within the field.

### **Problem Statement**

Few studies have been conducted on the psychosocial impacts of colorism (Hall, 2017; Fultz, 2014). Other studies investigated the psychological manifestations of colorism. For example, Hall (2016) examined the psychological effects of colorism on African American children's educational attainment. Another study, Hall (1995), examined the psychological impacts of African American women and the negative portrayal of their body image.

Scholars note that despite the progress realized by African Americans, inter and intra-racial colorism remains a significant social problem (e.g., Hannon, 2015; Ryabov, 2013; Hannon & DeFina, 2014; Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013). For example, Ryabov (2013) revealed that light skin male and female African Americans will be offered employment more readily than their darker counterparts. Additionally, Steinmetz and Koepfel (2017) found that skin complexion was a significant predictor of probation length across the full sample, the proportion of variability is explained by 30.5%. Furthermore, Villanova researches have conducted studies among African American women regarding skin color association with prison sentencing in over 12,000 cases. The results showed that lighter women were sentenced to 12% less time than darker women. The studies build from previous work of Stanford University and the University of Colorado at Boulder which looks at how phenotypes and skin complexion impact Black men in the criminal justice system (Serwer, 2011).

Although there are studies that document the episodes and poor outcomes related to colorism, there is no study known to this author that documents the two components of psychosocial and physical health impacts on African Americans. Exploring the experiences and life stories of African American men and women experiencing colorism as an intra-racial phenomenon will move the research forward to understanding the current components that trigger acts of preferences and discrimination among and between Blacks. Documenting the lived experiences of African Americans is important because colorism can contribute to deleterious health problems including suicidal behavior (Perry, Stevens-Watkins, & Oser, 2013). The trauma of discrimination based on skin color has pushed some to alter their appearances in draconian ways through bleaching, skin peeling techniques, and skin whitening pills that can lead to health issues (Abraham, 2017; Portia, 2016; Gavura, 2015). Skin cancer has been reported as one of the main causes of death for skin bleaching (Azadeh, 2016). Although some research suggests glutathione skin lightener injections may be safe to use, it is controversial due to insufficient information (Gavura, 2015). Those bleaching items are indicative of psychological implications as to infer why one would alter his or her skin color.

An iconic writer and orator, James Baldwin, like many Blacks have found that in their efforts to express their predicaments of being Black in America, African Americans are forced to deal repeatedly with the inescapable dilemma of the “Black American” (Dance, 1974). Thus, African Americans may lack a sense of positive self-identification. As Erik Erickson postulated in his psychosocial developmental theory of identity formation, identity is a harmonious mix of the past and the future both in each person and in society (Dance, 1974). The presence of Blackness as a bad connotation has influenced others to discriminate and label African Americans based on their skin tones, creating skin color stratification. Skin color stratification

also referred to as colorism, is a belief that lighter skin is better. It applies more to a physical scaling system where lighter skin people are viewed as more capable and beautiful and darker skin members are not provided with as many opportunities. This constant bargaining for acceptance and recognition has a psychosocial ramification that is a huge social problem affecting African American people.

Alice Walker coined the term colorism in 1983 to describe a situation of discrimination and privilege between Black people. Alice Walker is a social activist and African American author of *The Color Purple* (Dehghani, 2014). Walker was the first to use the phenomenon of “colorism” publicly. *Essence Magazine* published an article in 1982 with the initial documentation of the term colorism. Walker’s initial purpose of the article was to show the multiple forms of discriminatory acts that only African American women suffered (Donovan & Walsh, 1991). *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* 1983 publication, Walker later modified colorism. According to that text, colorism is a looking-glass alien social phenomenon relating to the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker, 1983, p. 209). However, color stratification existed long before the term was utilized, and it is as old as the history of race in the United States (Hannon, 2015). Colorism, is therefore, a byproduct of racism (Keith & Monroe, 2016) where race and discrimination are intrinsically linked (Hannon, 2015).

The psychological disposition of colorism is unknown (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007), however, social psychologist, Gordon Moskowitz and others (Moskowitz, 2005; Maddox & Gray, 2002) have asserted that it emanates from social cognitive patterns of how people conceptualize information. Bandura, on the other hand, talks of the reciprocal determinism that emphasizes one’s learned experiences through social interactions, intrapersonal, environmental

influences, and behavior response, which are factors influencing each other (Bandura, 1986). Social cognition indicates a memory for social information, such as understanding societal norms and ideologies, how social structures are formed, and show whether and how social categorization define people (Morris, Tarassenko, & Kenward, 2006).

Accordingly, researchers have documented the psychological impact of discrimination based on the color of African American women. Incidences of suicide ideation where women with darker skin being three times more likely to report suicidal ideations and behaviors compared to their light skin counterparts (Perry et al., 2013, also see Young, 2014). According to Hannon (2015), the 2012 American National Election Study revealed that darker skin African Americans were 52 % less likely to be perceived as intelligent by white interviewers even when they have equivalent educational achievements and political prowess as light skin people. Much like racism, colorism may occur unintentionally (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018). It can be overt, or sometimes covert.

Thus, because of discrimination, some African Americans have engaged in skin lightening by bleaching their skin and utilizing harsh hair chemicals; demonstratively unsafe practices (Basch et al., 2018; Fillon, 2017). Various aspects of beauty to conform to the standard of beauty in the U.S. for gainful employment such as straightening one's hair have been employed sometimes (Phoenix, 2014; also see Burrell, 2010). In fact, this has become a multi-billion industry where Global Industry Analysts, Inc. projected global spending for skin lighteners to triple in the U.S. to an estimated 31 billion dollars by 2024 (Abraham, 2017). It is evident that colorism affects African Americans in many ways, socially, environmentally, and psychologically.

### **Phenomenon of Interest**



The overall health of Blacks that have experiences with colorism may be gravely affected, such that their mental health becomes an issue. Mental health is complex in its causes. It can involve an underlying mental state rather than a physical cause or source. Accordingly, the psychosocial impact of colorism involves being socially and psychologically affected by partiality, discrimination, and stereotypical messages. Researchers have stated a similar case for racism (Pinkston, 2015; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). There is a deleterious effect of color discrimination on the psychological well-being of African Americans. The nuances of skin complexions in the African American community affect each person differently when considering intra-racial color discrimination.

Bleaching the skin is one of the most pervasive actions caused by colorism which is a major physical health concern. Numerous studies indicate that physical and mental health are related, and one affects the other (American Psychology Association [APA], 2018; Batty, Russ, Stamatakis, & Kivimäki, 2017; Collingwood, 2018; Ohrnberger, Fichera, & Sutton, 2017; Surtees et al., 2008). According to Monk (2015), the risk of psychological and physical health issues is due to the major stressors of discrimination. Color discrimination is more widespread among women. However, daily racial discrimination occurs in more than 75% of African American adults and increases for African American men (APA, 2018).

Racial discrimination against the African American male is also inherently linked with color. The police brutality that is present today is rampant in Black culture, especially with the African American males. Society's image of the Black man is excessive fear founded on stereotypical messages (Hall, 2007). One reason this occurs is the media highlights Black crimes and typecast Black men as animals (Hall, 2007). In the book *The Color of Crime*, the author lists incidents and statistics that indicate whites commit similar crimes at the same rate as African

Americans, however, Black men suffer more punitive measures disproportionately (Russell-Brown, 2009). This ongoing one-sided discriminatory act based on color, such that darker males are highly judged influences severe health problems that are irreversible. Hall (2007) demonstrated that social status and discrimination are highly related to hypertension in African American males in contrast to whites, especially in the South where racism occurs pervasively. Skin color discrimination makes a difference in health outcomes (Monk, 2015).

Identity also matters regarding the influence of colorism on individual's lives. Attitudes and beliefs about one's racial identity inform how that individual experiences colorism. Erikson (1968), views a healthy identity formation as a central task developmentally. Identity formation model is consistent with an Eriksonian approach. However, the framework is broad in developmental, lifespan, the contextual application of related theories that inform identity, considering the environmental influences, and viewing lifespan as lifelong in development (e.g., Grotevant, 1987).

Colorism in the U.S. is a continual or recurrent phenomenon. Intra-racial color discrimination is a critical issue in the African American community. History has shown that it stems from the oppression of slavery and is perpetuated in families and Black social organizations (Keith & Monroe, 2016; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Norwood, 2014; Wilder, 2009). Some of these practices still exist today (Bryant, 2013). Hence, this study is imperative to better understand the psychosocial and physical health consequences colorism has on the Black life with the identity formation model in mind.

### **Research Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to gain better insight into the psychosocial and physical health phenomenon of colorism among African American men and women. It fills the gap in the

literature by answering the following question: “How do African American men and women make sense of their life consequences in physical health and psychosocial well-being pertaining to colorism experiences?” This is a fundamental way to pose the primary question when using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to make the research more specific to the individuals being interviewed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). Psychosocial here means the attempt to understand the functioning or well-being of African American men and women in the context of their experiences with intra-racial colorism. Physical health impacts are defined in this study as action taken that can potentially cause bodily harm. The research is essential because there has been no research conducted to assess the psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism as the experiences of African Americans. The study focused on Texas, a southern state where racism and discrimination are paramount. The recruitment took place in a predominately African American community in a large metropolitan city in Texas.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study are multifaceted. 1). This study will aim to provide better insight into the psychosocial and physical health concerns that are influenced by colorism, and how it impacts real people in their lived experiences. 2). It will attempt to demonstrate how discrimination, a deep-rooted problem privileges lighter skin tones compared to their darker skin counterparts. 3). This study advances human rights by underscoring the need for social workers to understand various forms of oppression and discrimination, such that they become more culturally competent in understanding the experiences of African Americans. 4). It will promote policy changes within institutions as well. 5). The last objective is to disseminate knowledge that will attempt to contribute to more beneficial health related behaviors for the African American population.

## Definitions

African Americans will be used interchangeably with Blacks in this research. There are other relevant associations to African Americans of African ancestry, such as Negroes and Colored people utilized to express the time period or era which it occurred. The frequent use of Colored people, Blacks, and Negroes was prior to the 1800s and used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Kennedy, 2002). In the 1960s Afro-Americans became a used term (Bennett, 1967) and in the late 1980s, African Americans replaced the term Negroes that was used most frequently for racial identity (Martin, 1991). However, Blacks have been consistently used throughout the ages. See other defined terms in *Appendix A: Other Definitions*.

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots” ~ Marcus Garvey (2016, p. 58)*

### Historical Context Introduction

For African Americans, skin color stratification is firmly rooted in the system of slavery (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010; Keith, 2009; Hunter, 2007). Europeanization, the colonizing and enslavement of African people has caused a great divide and identity crisis among African Americans that still exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g., Ledford, 2012; Muhammad, 2004; Asante & Hall, 2011). The Transatlantic Slave Trade was the largest slave trade in the world. This slave trade involved the enslavement of over 12 million Africans to the Americas (North and South) with an estimation of a half million Africans enslaved in the United States alone (e.g., Lewis, n.d.). The numbers do not include the millions who died during the passage in which they were shipped as cargo (e.g., Muhammad, 2004). Imagine being forced to board a ship and transported thousands of miles from home, made to speak a different language and brutally punished as grown women or men. This was especially tragic for youth to be captured and not realize at the time that they would forever be separated from their loved ones. The dark skin color in comparison to their white counterparts that the captives were born with is salient in a way that one cannot hide and was used for that very purpose, so blending in is impossible. Quickly learning that one’s skin is an issue and believing darker skin is indicative to lower value or less than, eventually, one would form a poor schema of self. Schemas are perceptions or interpretation of the world through one’s own experiences.

Researchers from various disciplines continue to reveal how this historical cruelty affects the African American people (Ledford, 2012; Muhammad, 2004). African Americans lost their

identity as a people from the crusade of Europeanization (e.g., Ledford, 2012). In other words, their culture and language were obliterated due to enslavement and those characteristics are the most important necessity for identity and humanity. The indoctrination of the European culture as the dominant culture in the U.S. and the ongoing stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, perpetuate Black inferiority and has a social function that white is superior and better (e.g., Harris, 1998). This mental slavery ideology lives through African Americans in the context of colorism, discrimination within a race, based on color.

### **Theoretical Framework**

An identity formation model is utilized in this study that incorporates several related theoretical perspectives to illustrate how African Americans have formed their identity in this country. The premise of such theoretical perspectives will aid in understanding colorism among African American men and women. The identity formation model is a guide to view the internalization of colorism in the literature; however, the current study may reveal theory differently in the findings as an inductive research process.

According to Erickson as cited by Hud-Alem & Countryman (2008), identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning in which the individual contemplates how others (society) perceive him and how he perceives himself. (p. 38)

### **Transatlantic Slave Trade Manifests Colorism Among Africans in America**

#### **Colonization: Historical Context of the Study**

Blacks in the U.S. continue to be a stratified class since the inception of slavery (e.g., Berlin, 2010). They are stratified among other races and stratified within their race (e.g., Berlin, 2010; Monk, 2014). Social stratification is a societal status hierarchy and helps explain the

stratifying groups in the African American strata. Social stratification, particularly, during the Transatlantic Slave Trade was regarding economic gain and power for Europeans while Africans were merely considered the property of Europeans for forced labor (e.g., Williams, 1994). However, social stratification can also be observed through the lens of viewing the color lines; color differences and treatment because of differences historically and presently inter-rationally among whites and African Americans.

Inter-racial colorism among Europeans and Africans began as early as 6th Century A.D (Sanders, 1969). It was illustrated through the Hamitic myth from the Bible known as the curse of Ham. This myth indicated that Africans were unintelligent children of Canaan seen as deviant. The curse included the depiction that they would be born Black, ugly, have kinky hair, protruding lips, remain nude, red-eyed, and physically oddly disproportionate (Sanders, 1969). These phenotypes would become internalized as aberrant later in Africa based on Arab and European colonization and enslavement of Africans (e.g., Ledford, 2012). Europeans ideology of being more superior to Africans aided in the internalization of Black inferiority (e.g., Ledford, 2012). According to Helms (1990), *Black Racial Identity Theory* explains how Blacks adopted the European's philosophy and idolized them as the symbol of beauty and great acumen of all civilizations. It comes down to social constructionism; a constructed worldview based on shared assumptions, values, beliefs of the colonizer, enslaver, and dominant group socialized Blacks overtime. The power to label Africans as inferior or Europeans labeling Africans as any derogatory term is a way to control (e.g., Kennedy, 2002). In fact, race, fables, and labels surrounding physical features and skin color have been prevalent and common in Black and white relations. In accounts of those interactions despite scientific evidence to the contrary, many have the mentality to internalize Black inferiority causing it to continue to thrive (Harris, 1998).

Black Racial Identity Theory, also known as the *Nigrescence* perspective can be viewed as a synonymous concept as Black inferiority. Black inferiority and Black Racial Identity Theory both indicate that Blacks view whites as better on a racial, social, and political hierarchy. This is referred to as the pre-encounter stage of the Nigrescence model created by Psychologist, William E. Cross in the 1970s. It was later adopted by Helms within the Black Racial Identity Theory to illustrate that Blacks infer their identification with the European culture. Black Racial Identity Theory underpinning involves discarding or denying the Black culture (Helms, 1990). However, the act of rejecting the Black culture was forced upon the Africans by the Europeans with practices of indoctrination of their culture, through beatings, raping, and or killings of Africans aboard the ships and once enslaved to create subordinates or an oppressive group of people to be subservient (e.g., Muhammad, 2004).

Based on Koppelman (2017), *Black and White Syndrome* specifies that any positive connotation is related to the color white and any negative connotation relates to Black. This color identification that has made the U.S. such a racialized nation informs all races that any person's complexion that is closer to white is pure and privileged; treated with an indispensable status and any color or phenotype resembling African is nefarious and highly disadvantaged (e.g., Norwood, 2014). "*When you're white, you're just right; When you're yellow, you're mellow; When you're brown you can come around; But when you're black, get way back*" (Parrish, 1944, p. 37). Many researchers have also indicated white as the established standard of beauty (e.g., Norwood, 2014; Gooden, 2011; Berry & Duke, 2011; Gasman & Abiola, 2016; Hill, 2002; Clark & Clark, 1950). The existence of colorism supports that color stratification results from attitudes of color prejudice and behaviors inspired by white supremacy (Hill, 2000). Similarly, a racist perspective exists contrasting "evil and ugliness of Blackness with the goodness and purity of



whiteness” (Johnson, 1941, p. 257). “However, without apparent reason, Blackness itself was viewed as denigration in all facets of Western civilization” (Asante & Hall, 2011, p. 3). One’s color or race was socially constructed by the mass of Europeans who uphold and make the laws on a continuous cycle through structural and political power.

Not many if any Africans referred to themselves as Africans while being apprehended by force, dragged across Africa, and herded into barracoons, however, they referred to themselves by many names. The names came from their ancestries, their habitat, national affiliations, or varied ancient alliances. The captives received other designations from “captains and supercargoes” while being stuffed and clasped on embarked slave ships and they invented new terminologies from their way of life and limited knowledge of the African Continent (Berlin, 2010).

No longer were the peoples who filled the holds simply Angolans or Efiks, Kongos or Wolofs-labels that spoke more to how outsiders identified them than how they thought of themselves. Instead, they took on new names bereft of any ties to lineage, place of origin, or even port of embarkation. (Berlin, 2010, p. 50)

Africans were no longer allowed to converse about the great kings and queens in their land-dwelling. Similarly, they could not talk about the universities, such as Timbuktu or African empires, for instance, Mali, Songhay, and Ghana. The European slave owners purposely broke Africans’ sense of pride, autonomy, self-esteem, and feelings of safety. The slave owners severed ties between the Africans in bondage and those left in Africa. Additionally, these slave owners were ignorant regarding African culture and history. For many of the Africans enslaved, over the course of centuries, the knowledge of the past they once knew became nonexistent (Asante & Hall, 2011).

The white power philosophy of slaveholders' justification of slavery as a way of life was the premise that people of African ancestry were inherently inferior to whites. "In the 1830s the alleged scientific study of race- the measurement of facial features and head size-received extensive attention in popular newspaper and magazines, suggesting a connection between a group's physical features and its mental and moral traits" (Doob, 2013, p. 269). Particularly Anglos of Scottish and English ancestry were thought to be the superior models of the subjective and pseudoscientific experiments. Other races were considered inferior to the archetype of whiteness (Doob, 2013).

Racialization distinguished the measure of social status and morals were based on observable characteristics, such as the shape of the nose, the texture of hair, the color of eyes, size of lips, and skin color became strongly symbolized messages for beauty, worth, and eminence. Throughout slavery these color distinctions were permeating to the Black life, as the lighter slaves (mulattos) often kin to their white master generally had special privileges contrary to the darker slaves (Hill, 2002).

In addition, an entire book was written about mixed blood races encompassed all over the world. This later became the legalization of the hypodescent law, also known as the one drop rule which emphasized whites maintaining racial purity. The book includes the French and English version of the breakdown of those races of African descent which originated from a writer in the 1800s (Reuter, 1918). See *Table A* for the English Version.

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**Table A:** Races of African Descent, English Version- *Source: (Reuter, 1918, pp. 12-13)*

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The English version by author, Davenport's classification of African ancestry blood line as follows:

Mulatto.....Negro and white

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**Table A (Cont.):** Races of African Descent, English Version- *Source: (Reuter, 1918, pp. 12-13)*

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The English version by author, Davenport's classification of African ancestry blood line as follows:

Quadroon.....	mulatto and white
Octoroon.....	quadroon and white
Cascos.....	mulatto and mulatto
Sambo.....	mulatto and Negro
Mango.....	sambo and Negro
Mustiffee.....	octoroon and white
Mustifino.....	mustiffee and white

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The mulatto, of course, differs in certain marked ways from other type of intermixture. He is the product of the cross between pure races and, like all first generation hybrids, shows an unvarying uniformity and a universal instability of physical type. The Negro characters are always dominant and appears prominently; the Caucasian characters are recessive and for the most part remained concealed. It is possible to predict with scientific certainty the characters that will appear in the first generation hybrid. (Reuter, 1918, p. 13)

Colonization ushered more than slavery into the U.S., consequently an organized structure of white power and racism followed by a systemic language, systematic arrangement of people, dominance, and brought partiality to whiteness over Blackness. Utilizing visual distinctions of skin color to justify oppressing and enslaving Africans, European colonizers

established a social ranking order that placed whites at the top and Blacks at the lowest level (Wilder, 2010). “This social structure subsequently caused internalized divisions among African Americans” (Wilder, 2010, p.186).

Skin tone gradation within the Black community mirrors an extensive and immoral history of racial unification in America. Miscegenation was common among Europeans and African slaves during slavery which resulted in an extensive amount of biracial progeny. These children were frequently privileged and likely freed by the white owner. Biracial slaves who were not freed were more likely to be skilled house workers within the plantation than were their darker counterparts. Some free Blacks, the biracial children also the descendants of slave owners were privileged to have the power to grant enslaved Blacks manumission (Gullickson, 2005). The 1860s Census discovered that mulattos were over 55% of the free Blacks in comparison to approximately 12% of the Blacks enslaved (Mullins & Sites, 1984). As stated by Hill (2000), mulattos had a better chance in their parental upbringing to have parents who were literate and have families employed as skilled workers.

The Black Codes, laws that established a racial caste system, alluded to race as being defined by blood which exacerbated the problems between Blacks and whites. With the evolution of Jim Crow philosophy, the one drop rule overrode the ranking status in the lower South and became mainstream in the U.S. (Davis, 1991). The one drop rule demarcated Blackness as anyone with a trace of Black lineage. Ultimately, the consequence of early mixing of Black and white in the U.S. was to stratify Blacks internally along a color gradient which continued, at least, until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gullickson, 2005; also see Norwood, 2014).

It appears that the historical influences of colorism among whites and Blacks and the distinctions of color among African Americans in various shades, such as light to dark, has been an issue for them in how some of the lighter ones interact with their darker counterparts and vice versa (Wilder & Cain, 2011; Hill, 2000). Historically, colorism was perpetuated from benefits passed down from privileged whites and biracial lineages to their descendants (Hill, 2000). In the racialized U.S. system, subtle phenotype variants can have considerable implications for one's identity and life possibilities (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

The idea of African Americans internalization of Black inferiority is linked to the theoretical explanation in the Nigrescence model and Black racial identity theory also encompassing Parham's model, Self-Hate Paradigm, Psychology of Black Identity, Helms's People of Colour, Racial Identity Model, Manganyi's theory of Being-Black-in-the-World and Lambley's perspective on internalized racism. The internalization of Black inferiority insinuates that one has self-hate, consequently a derivative of social identity, individual self-concept, and not knowing one's membership of a social group or groups combined with beliefs and affect attached to those memberships (Mtose & Bayaga, 2011). The internalized and socialized Black experience is constantly reminded that the color Black is bad and whiteness or lighter is good.

The classic study of psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1950) is revisited, that implemented a doll test to African American children, known as Negroes in that era. The children were asked a series of questions regarding a white and Negro doll, such as, which one is bad or good, which one is pretty or ugly, and which one would (you) the participant like to be. The children referred to their preference as the white doll over the Black one and gave a description as good and pretty. The Black doll was described as bad and ugly. This classic study assisted in appealing to the *United States Supreme Court* to aid in understanding the damage

done in society and continued damage if remaining a segregated society and having segregated school systems for Negroes in the case of *Brown v Board of Education* (Clark & Clark, 1950).

The study revealed explicit Black inferiority associated with self-hatred (e.g., Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

Being Black affects the way a person walks and talks, his or her values, culture, and history, how that person relates to others and how they relate to him or her. It is governed by one's early social experience, history and politics, conscious input and labeling, and the genetic accident that dictates external appearance. Skin color appears to affect identity, but in complex and seemingly unpredictable ways. (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992, p. 62)

The historical context of slavery manifests colorism. Going back as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. outsiders, such as Arabs invaded Africa and made an issue of color, not on the African's intellectual ability. The outsiders did not try to get to know the people on the African Continent. It was because of color and way of life that the outsiders saw Africans way of life as deviant and viewed them as savages (e.g., Jalloh, 2018). "Colorism is one expression of internalized racism" (Grills, 2013, p. 1). Colorism continues to be a major phenomenon in the African American community from the internalized concept of Black inferiority.

### **Lightness to Darkness of Skin**

Multiple terms describe discrimination based on the lightness or darkness of skin complexion. Such bias also includes other physical characteristics beyond skin color such as Afrocentric phenotypes involving hair texture, thickness of lips and nose broadness (Maddox 2004; e.g., Thompson & McDonald, 2016). Historically, a person's skin tone either carries privilege or disadvantage. Typically, the lighter the skin, the greater the privilege, with the

reverse being true for darker people. Lighter skin people are perceived to be smarter, wealthier, and even happier (e.g., Steverson, 2015; Phoenix, 2014; Thompson & McDonald, 2016; Steverson, 2015). Skin tone routinely influences socioeconomic status, political achievement, and education accomplishment. Additionally, cognitive bias is associated with darker skin tones (Glenn, 2008; Thompson & McDonald, 2016).

According to Hochschild & Weaver (2007), there is a psychological explanation to colorism, which is a mentality that white skin color is better, superior and good looking and the opposite is true for Black skin. Similar thinking informs the idea for light skin tone represents smartness, better, intelligent, and all things positive in the U.S. (e.g., Steverson, 2015; Steinmetz & Koeppel, 2017; Thompson & McDonald, 2016). The reason for this is less understood (Baldwin & Peck, 2017), however, part of the reason is the dominant culture mentality (Steverson, 2015). The idea that the dominant culture wants to impose its will on the minority culture in order for them to dominate the minority culture (Wilder, 2010). It is sociological dehumanization of a human race akin to majority tyranny (Kennedy, 2002; Hill, 2002).

For people who had been dehumanized for over 400 years, living in sub-human conditions and treated as beasts of labor, one can understand how these messages of racialization and colorism are internalized and “believed” as real, as true (e.g., Hill, 2002). African Americans have been trying to figure out racialized systems in American society for centuries (e.g., Du Bois, 2005). The oppression has influenced continuous struggles for African Americans through the institution of slavery that broke family bonds. Other struggles such as African Americans going through the Jim Crow Laws that made it unlawful to share public facilities with whites. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the 60s voting rights act, and the 2013 Civil Rights

movement to fight police brutality in the name of Black Lives Matter have all been struggles to reclaim Blacks' rightful humanity (e.g., Monk, 2014).

Whites and light skin Blacks have received rewards over time, in employment, education, and integration. Color prejudice has been traumatizing, precipitating into their psyches since slavery (Turner, 2013, also see Norwood, 2014). "One of the more easily identifiable vestigial of the slavery era that has been incorporated into the socialization of many descendants of slaves in the Americas is color racism and a class hierarchy based on skin color" (Turner, 2013, p. 38).

These privileges brought greater fortune in contrast to all the other Blacks and their advanced status were passed down discriminatorily through generations, this homogeneous racially biased practice was performed by many Blacks with lighter skin tones (Monk, 2014). For example, the biracial progeny were likely trained workers, known as professionals, and were able to own land (Hill, 2000). Gasman and Abiola (2016) also found that lighter skin Blacks engage in intra-racial segregation by denying membership to darker skin Blacks based on skin color alone. This elitism extends to other aspects of life including social organizations, churches, employment opportunities, and romantic partners (Gasman & Abiola, 2016; Monk, 2014). Fraternities and sororities are still associations within historical Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that are divided among skin tone differences (e.g., Bryant, 2013). In fact, the fraternities and sororities utilized the paper bag test to see who would be able to join the organization. Anyone darker than the paper bag was grouped in one category to join one or the other (McGee, Alvarez, & Milner, 2016).

Other tests included the comb test and *Blue Veins Society* test. The comb test meant the comb had to slide easily through the hair and could not be kinky or coarse and the Blue Veins Society was indicative of being able to see the blue veins through the skin to participate in the



social organizations (Bond & Cash, 1992). “These findings consistently indicated that light skin tone resulted in clear social and economic advantages” (Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014, p. 202). Consequently, McGee et al. (2016), illustrated devaluing darker skin African Americans have the tendency to harm them [...].

### **Discrimination within a Race Based on Color**

Among African Americans, their perception of skin-tone or color is left up to the eye of the beholder mainly because of the variations in the skin-tones. One might identify themselves as or refer to oneself within the African American culture as high-yellow, red, caramel, medium, brown, chocolate, Black, blue-Black, tar-baby, and purple (e.g., Wilder, 2010). The differential treatment based on those varied shades that range from light skin to dark skin is a practice of colorism based on colorist messages formed over generations (e.g., Wilder, 2010).

A qualitative study was conducted in southeast Tennessee. A grounded theory approach was utilized with 8 focus groups that totaled 67 women age 18-72 (Hall, 2017). Hall (2017), wanted to know the psychosocial impact of skin color stratification in the lives of those women. Most dark skin women agreed that Blackness meant the void of many privileges and carried negative consequences. Some darker skin women described that men support the stereotypical message that dark skin women are unattractive which others disclosed the darker the person, the more aggressive she should be. A participant stated, “Every day [my dad] just drove it into my head that I was ugly because I had dark skin [...]” (Hall, 2017, p.75). The lighter skin focused groups had polar opposites experiences than their darker skin counterparts. Familial validations pertaining to socialization played an essential role in skin color stratification. It was illustrated that darker skin women felt ostracized and emotionally vulnerable due to a lack of social mobility and full social inclusion (Hall, 2017). Hall (2017) proclaimed that generally Black

women internalize through socialization to be strong, are heavily burdened with sexism, colorism, and racism which puts them in a place of mental turmoil.

The “veil” is spoken about throughout Du Bois’ published work *The Souls of Black Folk*, where his perspective of double consciousness was written in detail. “The underlying theme [...] is the “veil” of racism that separates Black from whites and defines the African-Americans as “a problem” (Du Bois, 2005, p. 268). Double consciousness is a critical theory that emphasizes that Blacks are not fully American because they could not exercise many of the basic rights enjoyed by others, yet Blacks’ roots in the U.S. go back many generations (Du Bois, 2005).

Discrimination within a race can be seen through the lens of double consciousness; the African Americans’ innate need to progress in America and physical characteristics, such as skin color sometimes makes it seem impossible. Historically, broadcast shows predominately showed white actors/actresses and the depiction of newscasters and media personalities for African Americans had lighter skin. Presently, some darker skin African Americans are broadcast, but that was not the norm in the past.

Double consciousness illustrates that society is still far from the equity one would hope to have some day. Ebony magazine featured a discussion about which actress should play Nina Simone, a famous singer, in a movie portraying her life. Prior to Nina Simone’s death, at an award ceremony she announced that if her life story were to be broadcast, she would like Whoopi Goldberg to play her part having similar features. It was stated that Zoë Saldana was chosen to play the part (Ebony Debate, 2013).

The celebration quickly turned to disappointment, sadness and outright anger when it was announced that Simone’s character would be played by actress Zoë Saldana. The primary

reason for the change in sentiment is the fact that Saldana, a light-skinned Afro-Latina with European features, looks nothing like Simone. (Ebony Debate, 2013, p. 135)

In 2011, the OWN broadcast a documentary entitled *Dark Girls* and 2015 *Light Girls*. Both documentaries gave poignant information about Black women's individual experiences with discriminatory acts within the same race. Within the *Dark Girls* documentary some depicted themselves as ugly, having unfavorable outcomes when dating, some purchased skin bleaching products to make themselves feel more attractive. This documentary also included questions similar to the doll study conducted in the 1940s. Within the *Light Girls* documentary some expressed how they felt excluded from their race in general, feeling like they were not dark enough because of the derogatory comments made from their darker counterparts, and made more friends as a child with non-Blacks (Berry & Duke, 2011; Beharie et al., 2015).

Julie yearned for a long time about the concept of Blackness in her memoir, *Real American a Memoir: Julie Lythcott-Haims*. On her journey to come into herself she believed she became the "other" which was white because she did not consistently have anyone Black around her. She was born in Nigeria to a British woman and African American man who were conducting research in Africa at the time of her birth. However, she was raised in the U.S. (Lythcott-Haims, 2017).

Julie stated her need to belong to her race. Growing up in her era the hypodescent law existed, she was considered Black and not biracial, but really did not understand what it meant to be Black. For example, Julie found out in college her struggles were different than the average Blacks in America. She also felt that some opportunities she had were because of her Blackness, like getting into Stanford University as the token Black. The demographics for Stanford at the time was only 6% Black which made it the first time she ever been around as many Black people

in her life. According to Lythcott-Haims (2017), she came from a background of being the only Black during most of her educational experience which made her the Blackest person among the whites and felt she was not Black enough on campus among her African American counterparts.

At one point in Julie's life, she indicated that she won when marrying a white guy. She illustrated going from Blackness to whiteness came with privileges and pain. However, Julie was seeking whites' approval. "I hated being Black. I was afraid of Black people. I tried to be what white people valued" (Lythcott-Haims, 2017, p. 127).

Dark Girls documentary revealed comments stated on blogs by African Americans toward other African Americans regarding skin gradations. An African American female gave an example of how she was conversing with her cousin on Facebook when he revealed "I love white girls, and nobody can do anything about it. Okay that is fine, but don't discriminate. It ain't their fault white skin looks better on females" (Berry & Duke, 2011, documentary).

Age of the internet and blogs, now you really get to see what people are thinking because they can hide behind the internet. [...] it is really shocking and disgusting at the same time, to see a lot of comments that are made by Black people about other Black people. (Berry & Duke, 2011, documentary)

On the Light Girls documentary, Dr. Hunter exposed skin bleaching as a multi-billion dollar business that is marketed worldwide. Blacks are big consumers of that product and some Blacks who are lighter are tanning to get darker (Beharie et al., 2015).

I began to believe the criticism and started to hate my complexion, so what I started doing was tanning a lot. Over the years of excessive tanning, I developed skin damage called melasma on my forehead [...] as a result, I now have to use expensive laser treatments and bleaching creams to fade away the dark spots. I find it ironic in hindsight,

trying to be accepted [...] that I now have to seek therapy to change the complexion of my skin. (Beharie et al., 2015, documentary)

A cosmetic surgeon stated that his practice sees patients weekly to lighten their skin or to try to remove skin lesions from engaging in such things as tanning. The extremities of tanning and bleaching appeared to be worth it, in their perception to be beautiful (Beharie et al., 2015). “TO ENGAGE IN a serious discussion of [colorism] and race in America, we must begin not with the problems of [B]lack people but with the flaws of American Society-flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes” (West, 1994, p. 6).

Tom Burrell explains that Blacks still have a Black inferiority (BI) complex in his work, *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*. African Americans cooperate with the westernized culture to get along indicates the slave mentality manifesting in self-defeating behaviors (Burrell, 2010).

[African Americans] are bombarded with images of Black women flinging, flipping, flicking copious mounds of weaves, extensions, wigs, falls, and relaxed hair. Cosmetic surgery, with nearly a billion annual expenditure by African American men, women, and even some children, plays a large part in eliminating telltale signs of Blackness. (Burrell, 2010, p. 81)

Burrell (2010) indicates that African Americans should weigh the cost and benefits of centuries of propaganda on their lives. The propaganda piece that Tom Burrell speaks of is a representation of Europeans misrepresenting Blacks and marketing Black inferiority for epochs, such that through the colonial era thru present day the exploitation of Blackness brainwashed people to depict Blacks negatively. For example, a recent beer commercial had a dark skin Black woman sitting at the bar while a beer specified as *light* slides down to the light woman on the

opposite end then announced *light is better*. Accordingly, he presented a call to action to dis-enslave and reprogram the way African Americans view themselves. He emphasizes a need to expose the wounds caused by the socialization process that sometimes occurs in subtle forms as the commercial described.

An additional critical theory to view is *Critical Race Theory* established by Derrick Bell and other legal practitioners to emphasize that all systems in the U.S. are racialized. Critical Race Theory indicates the social injustice in this society is based on constructed systems. It goes back to addressing one of the objectives for this study seeing colorism affecting the human condition. For example, one could view the system of slavery (that scholars emphasize is the root cause of colorism), Black Codes, and Jim Crow all permeated through other systems, such as the criminal justice system, education, employment, and the overall livelihood of African Americans. This is indicative of society's view of Black skin as deviant highly influencing the African Americans' view in the same way through socialization.

### **Skin Color Stratification**

The studies show that in the U.S, the impact of skin color stratification on African Americans varies across social contexts. The salient findings in the criminal justice system are horrendous when it comes to skin color stratification. The darker the African American skin and the more Afrocentric phenotypes they possess, the odds are exponentially greater for a prison sentence than that of whites (King & Johnson, 2016). Through socialization, the hierarchical stratification of racial minorities based on skin tone and phenotypes shows the pervasive impact of oppression and white privilege on society (Blake et al., 2017).

King and Johnson (2016) conducted a study involving all adult males. The study included a sample size of 866 convicted persons (white 264, African American 602) arrested with felonies

in 2009 in Minnesota. They investigated the relationship between skin complexion, Afrocentric phenotypes, and criminal penalties. King and Johnson (2016) described type of sentencing and length of stay, first offenders have a sentenced of *imposed and executed* defined as placed in custody for a prison sentence. Second is potentially a *stay of execution* defined as a short prison sentence, only serving time if persons are noncompliant to the conditions of probation (King & Johnson, 2016). The third is a *stay of imposition* defined as no specific prison time serve or no specific sentence, however, felony convictions in this scenario are reduced to a misdemeanor (considered a minor criminal offense) if the offender accomplishes completing the conditions of release (King & Johnson, 2016).

In the second model King and Johnson (2016), replaced the continuous skin complexion variable with dummy variables to examine the degree of linearity in the relationship. The reference category was offenders coded 1 (lightest possible skin complexion), values between 1 to 2.75 are offenders coded light, medium skin complexion are values between 3 to 5.75, and the values 6 or above are coded dark (King & Johnson, 2016). It revealed the likelihood of dark skin African Americans given a stay of execution comparable to a stay of imposition are roughly twice as high and the likelihood of sentenced to prison increased by more than 3.5 times. The stay of imposition increased by 63% for medium skin tone likelihood for a prison sentence, the darker skin complexion increased likelihood exponentially by 139% (King & Johnson, 2016).

Recognizing that colorism is a serious issue, in 2007 the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) established a team to address skin-tone bias (Hannon & DeFina, 2014). The EEOC incorporated the Massey-Martin scale to promote consistency in investigators' descriptions of skin tone. The scale measures skin tone through 10 possible choices and requires an investigator to document skin tone in a method that is comparable

(Hannon & DeFina, 2014). Hannon and DeFina, (2014) studied skin-complexion based complaints to the federal government using the Massey-Martin skin color guide and employed logistic regression analysis. The purpose of the study was to create consistency when describing skin complexions, but also to determine how rater race influences perception on skin complexion.

Samples were taken from the 2008 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1,797 and the 2012 General Social Survey 263 (Hannon & DeFina, 2014). Participants involved a combination of youth and adult African Americans that did not self-identify as Hispanic. The study revealed that white investigators had a tendency of assigning significantly darker classifications (assigned 34.2% of respondents as darker) than African American investigators (assigned 17.8% of respondents as darker) (Hannon & DeFina, 2014). White investigators were also likely to assign the darkest classification twice as often as African American investigators. The EEOC demonstrated that the race of the investigator or interviewing party mattered when determining skin tone (Hannon & DeFina, 2014).

Looking at educational performance through skin complexion, researchers found that darker skin students' grade point average (GPA) is (.4) points lower than their lighter counterparts (Thompson & McDonald, 2016). Blake et al. (2017) showed racial disparities among darker skin females are roughly 97% more likely than their white female counterparts to have a school suspension. The results were statistically significant that colorism predicted school suspension risk for darker skin females when controlling for such factors as socioeconomic status.

Jezebel is a ubiquitous negative stereotypical image that carries on the perception of African American women indulging in promiscuous sexual activity (Townsend et al., 2010). The



treatment African American females have experienced historically has had a lasting impact on their self-concept and societal viewpoints on African American girls, teens, and women (Townsend et al., 2010). Townsend et al. (2010) investigated the relationship among colorism; stereotypic images, the western culture of beauty and identity elements of 270 African American girls age 10-15 to determine the effect of these factors on girls' sexual attitudes. The 7-item Modern Jezebel Scale was utilized for a younger sample size to assess stereotypical images. It was adapted from the 20-item Stereotypic Roles of Black Women Scale (Townsend et al., 2010). Multiple interaction model results indicated in the first regression that girls with a strong sense of identity reported intent to have sex in the next three months. However, this main effect was attributed to a significant interaction effect for colorism and ethnic belonging, such that high endorsement of ethnic belonging was correlated with a decrease in intent to have sex when colorism was low, but an increase in intent to have sex when colorism was high (Townsend et al., 2010).

Wallace et al. (2011), asserts that messages of racial socialization are moderators related to colorism and substance use in their study conducted on 272 female youth. Colorist microaggression is a byproduct of racial microaggression inclusive of disparate treatment from others within a homogeneous racial group on those with darker skin or physical features resembling more African (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018). The themes in the study by Hall and Crutchfield (2018), indicated that the women's experiences with the colorist microaggression phenomenon suffered from psychological trauma.

### **Literature Summary**

Overall, the dynamics of colorism cannot be spoken of without understanding the dynamics of racism. Therefore, the identity formation model would indicate that the lack of

Black cultural influences to form healthy identities heightens internalizations of race and color. It is apparent in the previous studies that internalized racism and colorism manifest salient high-risk behaviors. For example, colorism contributes to sexual promiscuity and substance use among girls (Townsend et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2011) and influences tanning, bleaching skin, chemically treating hair, and hair weaves that cause severe hair loss and potential health risk among women (Beharie et al., 2015; Berry & Duke, 2011; Burrell, 2010).

Other components are high-risk outcomes of colorism showed that there is a present and historical context that illustrates darker skin Blacks as less inclined to achieve several socioeconomic benefits and educational advancement that society has to offer others (Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014; Wilder & Cain, 2011; Hill, 2000; Thompson & McDonald, 2016; Blake et al., 2017). Lighter skin Blacks have feelings of isolation from their race (Beharie et al., 2015; Lythcott-Haims, 2017). Blacks' inequities from prolonged and ongoing oppression are illustrated in the literature as well to show colorism practices contributing to darker skin Black males being incarcerated at higher rates (King & Johnson, 2016) and it is a cause of psychological trauma among women (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018; Fultz, 2014; Hall, 2017). Numerous researchers attribute colorism to low self-concept (Townsend et al., 2010; Clark & Clark, 1950; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Berry & Duke, 2011; Beharie et al., 2015; Lythcott-Haims, 2017; Burrell, 2010).

Eric Erikson would view or explain the salient high-risk behaviors and some high-risk outcomes of colorism as an identity crisis from the perspective of the identity formation model. Identity crisis is psycho and social which can occur throughout a person's life as people confront new obstacles, examining themselves, and exploring the ways one looks at him or herself through various experiences (Erikson, 1970).

Identity formation normatively has its negative side which throughout life can remain an unruly part of the total identity. The negative identity is the sum of all those identifications and identity fragments which the individual had to submerge in himself as undesirable or irreconcilable or by which atypical individuals and marked minorities are made to feel “different.” (Erikson, 1970, p. 733)

Researchers also affirmed this ideology, that it is quite an opposition for Blacks to achieve identity congruence in the face of racism and systemic oppression (Parham, White, Ajamu, & White, 2000). Thus, African Americans have grave and unique experiences of how colorism internalizations and racism socializations, both interconnected, manifest through historical influences.

### **How Current Study Differs from Previous**

Considering the above research there are explicit gaps to indicate the need for a study that addresses the psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism among Black men and women originating from primary data collection. Respectively, studies that are closely related to the current study involved only women participants and inquiry that investigated psychosocial phenomena of colorism (Hall, 2017; Fultz, 2014). This dissertation will contribute to a fairly new body of work, especially in social work. Much of the literature involves the social context of colorism. The literature reveals quantitative binary variables of light and dark with inter-racial colorism indications. This study will include participants with a gradation of colors and will also fill a gap in the literature regarding intra-racial colorism. This study also goes beyond the dichotomy of Black and white relationships, although the historical context of those relationships and identity formation model are critical in understanding the present context of colorism. This research is designed to examine self-perceptions exploring the combined components of

psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism on African American men and women. It will attribute to primary data collection for the intended purpose of the study that may lead to other studies.

## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Restatement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore African Americans' lived experiences of colorism and its influence on their physical and psychosocial health. This entails engaging in and understanding the participants' cognitive thoughts, attitudes, environmental influences, and behaviors, surrounding their lived experiences with colorism. Prior to conducting research, a key component to the research design is one's worldview (e.g., Creswell, 2007). The study espouses a philosophical or ontological worldview, such as social constructivism. The social constructivist worldview is dependent on the participants' perception of their condition (Creswell, 2007). Often the meanings are shaped through interaction with other individuals and through historical context and normed culture that operate in their lives (Creswell, 2007). This worldview is concerned with lived experiences of others, such that meaning and human engagement are relative to qualitative research (e.g., Creswell, 2007).

### **Design of the Study**

The research design utilized a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a theoretical method to study individuals' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2012). Philosopher, Husserl pioneered the approach. The approach came about through Husserl's work on *Logical Investigations* that illustrated the idea of descriptive psychology as phenomenology followed by it being a transcendental philosophy (Drummond, 2008). Other philosophers, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Moustakas have expanded on Husserl's approach (e.g., Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2012). For example, Moustakas (1994) operationalized the transcendental phenomenological as understanding the essence of a particular phenomenon.

The specific approach used in this study is IPA. IPA became popular in the mid-1990s due to Jonathon Smith's publication in *Psychology and Health* regarding the claim that psychology can also be experiential and qualitative (Smith et al., 2012). This approach began in the discipline of psychology and in the United Kingdom; however, it has now been utilized in other geographical locations and in the human, health, and social sciences. A component to IPA is seen as psychological, that is, a focus on the systematic investigation of the human experience (Smith et al., 2012). It uses an inductive process to research, emphasizing three theoretical underpinnings which are phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2012). Smith employ all three approaches, however, two foundational approaches come from Husserl and Heidegger (Smith et al., 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

### **Phenomenology**

It is an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness; the direct experiences of phenomena which is distinct from the nature of being. Husserl's phenomenological perspective was concerned about the examination of the individual's learned experiences, and through these experiences, one would identify those essential aspects that would transcend to others. In other words, one could relate to another's experiences in what would be referred to as interpersonal transcendence. It is a state of maximal receptivity and absorption in an interaction that is characterized by a sense of mutuality, connection, insight, and discovery (Smith et. al, 2012).

### **Hermeneutics**

Heidegger was an apprentice of Husserl and is notable for hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is known as the theory of interpretation whose methodology is concerned with the interpretation and the problems dealing with meaningful human actions, especially the interpretation of texts

(Smith et al., 2012). Hermeneutics discipline, therefore, offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts, and other meaningful material (Smith et al., 2012).

### **Idiography**

The final theoretical underpinning for IPA is the idiographic perspective which deals with things that are concrete, individualized or unique. It is the focus on the particular; commitment to the particular functions at two levels. One level is detailed accounts of the experiences for the depth of the analysis and the second is understanding the particular experiential phenomenon by which this phenomenon has been understood from the participant's perspective in a particular context (Smith et al., 2012). Idiography can allude to the commitment to the individual case and the process that moves from the individual case to general claims of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012).

### **Research Questions**

Accordingly, the research questions focused on each participant's understanding of his or her experiences. The research questions for the study are "How have African American men and women experiences with colorism impacted their lives?" and "How do African Americans perceive their psychosocial and physical health experiences that result from colorism?"

### **Interview Questions**

IPA recommends developing at least 6-10 open-ended questions, providing an in-depth analysis to aid in participants' disclosure of their lived experiences. For this purpose, a mixture of descriptive and structural questions that may provide contrast, narrative, comparative, as well as evaluative prompts were created using IPA as a guide and using broader questions related to some of J. Camille Hall's questions in study, "No Longer Invisible: Understanding the

Psychosocial Impact of Skin Color Stratification in the Lives of African American Women.” I had seven semi-structured questions (see Appendix E: Research Questions). A semi-structured process allowed for reliable (see *Credibility* below for validity and reliability), qualitative data collection, and still offer the flexibility for unstructured interview questions (e.g., Rubin & Babbie, 2014).

## **Data Collection**

### **Participants**

The participants in the study included individuals who self-identified as African Americans ages 18 thru 30 (see Table B: Characteristics of Participants). Based on Smith et al. (2012), narrowing the sample characteristics and developmentally closely similar as much as possible makes the sample more homogeneous, thus followed the protocol. I recruited six men and six women participants and conducted individual one on one interviews for an in-depth analysis utilizing one setting. According to IPA, although larger samples have been used, the idiographic perspective focus on smaller sample sizes. Smaller sample sizes aid in gathering rich detail of the reported phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The sampling process is a convenience sampling technique known as snowballing and homogeneous suggested in research using an IPA approach (Smith et al., 2012).

The setting of the recruitment site included a church located in North Texas. Historically, the church has been a place of refuge for the African American community away from “outsiders,” especially in the South when segregation laws kept them from public facilities (Hunt & Hunt, 2001). It is also one of the places for colorism practices such as using the paper bag test for entry. The paper bag was used as a symbol to differentiate people’s color from dark to light



skin. It indicated whether a Black person was light enough to enter certain places or participate in events held by Blacks (Kerr, 2006).

**Table B: Demographics of Participants**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Parents Nationality</i>	<i>Reported Skin Tone</i>	<i>Year Born/Age</i>	<i>Highest Education Reported</i>	<i>Yearly Income Range</i>
Bella	F	African American	Light	1997/22	Associate's Degree	10,000-20,000
Yung	M	African American	Dark	1992/27	High School	Under 10,000
Roxane	F	African American	Light	2000/18	High School	Under 10,000
Casban	M	African American	Medium	1995/24	Associate's Degree	10,000-20,000
Ali	M	African American	Dark	2000/19	In College	Under 10,000
Tay	F	African American	Dark	1991/28	Bachelor's Degree	30,000-40,000
Elaina	F	African American	Medium	1990/29	Master's Degree	70,000-above
Lena	F	African American	Dark	1996/23	In College	10,000-20,000
Bishop	M	African American	Dark	1996/23	High School	50,000-60,000
Tim	M	African American	Dark	1992/27	High School	Under 10,000
Anika	F	African American	Light	1989/29	Bachelor's Degree	70,000-above
David	M	African American	Medium	1993/26	Some College	30,000-40,000

In reference to *Table B: Demographics of Participants*, the six men and six women participants reported that both of their parents were African American. This indicated that they were African American as well. The average age of the participant was 25 (24.58). The self-identified skin complexion consisted of only three reported as light skin, three medium skin, and the others made up the majority reported dark skin complexion. Over half of the 12 participants had some college education. Five completed their degrees, one was at the master's level, two at

the bachelor's level, and two were at the associate's level. One guy completed his degree and the rest were females. Four of the participants highest education completed were high school. The majority were working. Yung and Roxane were not working. Two of the participants with the highest salary range of \$70,000-above were females. Out of six men, one was making the next highest salary of between \$50,000-\$60,000 a year.

### **Procedures**

The university institutional review board (IRB) granted approval on April 2, 2019. Data collection did not begin until the following week, April 13, 2019. Upon the fourth phone call, an African American pastor, found via internet search, spoke with me about the potential recruitment at his church. The pastor and I did converse more in-depth regarding my study topic, such that I needed a letter authorizing permission to recruit potential participants and private place to interview. The pastor granted permission to utilize his church for privacy before IRB approval, however, the pastor was provided with the flyer in person after IRB approval (see Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer) and we went over days I could have access to the church building. He provided me with a key to use any day and time. There was a private office I had access to as well which all 12 interviews took place.

I went to the church to recruit potential participants on a Wednesday evening Bible study, April 10, 2019. Approximately 12 people were in attendance. I spoke to the attendees about the study and only two volunteered. To follow the snowball sampling method, after each interview the participants received a flyer to refer someone else. The two volunteers recommended someone, and that process continued until about three and a half weeks. Then I put one flyer in a Starbucks and received an email to potentially interview another person. This potential participant set the date and time, however, canceled and never rescheduled. There were

inclement weather conditions, I reached out twice and he never responded, so I speculated that he lost interest due to the nature of disclosing personal information. At that time, I needed four more participants. The data collection came to a halt until a previous participant contacted me to see if I needed more people and from there continued the interview process. The previous referred someone and so forth. I completed all data collection in a little over a month, May 14, 2019. All the participants except the first two came from word of mouth through the previous participants. When I was contacted by interested participants via phone call the initial conversation consisted of reiterating the research topic along with informing that their participation is voluntary, the benefits, purpose, and importance of the research. At that initial contact the times and days were established to interview.

On the day of each interview, I went over the detailed informed consent adapted from UTA (see Appendix C: University of Texas Informed Consent Document). Participants were informed of confidentiality and that their identity would be kept confidential. To maintain confidentiality, participants chose a pseudonym of their choice unrelated to their real name. A master list was created in Excel to link the prospective participants' identifiable information to the pseudonyms. An eight-item demographic survey was administered prior to the commencement of the interviews (see Appendix D: Demographic Survey). The items included pseudonym, gender, two questions regarding parent's nationality, self-reported skin complexion, approximate age, educational level, and economic status adapted from Wilder (2010) and Fultz (2014). Each interview was completed in approximately 40 minutes to one hour.

The incentive for participants was a \$10 Starbucks gift card. A benefit of the study is the nature of the research provides the individuals with the opportunity to talk about an experience that may benefit them in many ways. For example, this topic and issues related to colorism may

help raise awareness for the participants and others to alleviate or lessen discrimination within the same race of people. In turn, during the interview process, it may help participants think about and discuss colorism with family and friends. It may even help them understand that their own participation within the overall process is essential for personal change or influence them as a change agent.

In addition, participants were informed that they could waive their right to interview or end the interview at any time without penalty. All participants were provided with two optional sources of contact information for one free counseling session regardless of whether they experienced psychological distress resulting from the study. IPA also emphasizes this as transparent ethical standards aligned with the IRB (Smith et al., 2012).

Data will be kept on the UTA campus in a safe or locked file cabinet behind a locked door which will only be accessed by the principal investigator (PI) for research purposes. The collected data will be stored for three years prior to being destroyed. Electronic data, which include audio recordings and the Excel master list, was stored in UTA Box. The audio recordings were uploaded to UTA Box and after successful transfer, I deleted audio from the Phillips DVT5500 3 mic system voice tracer device. Additionally, the Excel master list was uploaded to UTA Box and after successful transfer was deleted from the PI's personal computer. Additionally, the pastor or any affiliated church members were not involved in the project as part of the research team and they did not have access to identifiable information in the research study.

### **Data Analysis**

As explained earlier, phenomenology is the study of lived experiences of an individual (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Using IPA, it synthesizes both the phenomenological and

hermeneutic method (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2012). The study aimed to capture the lived experiences of African Americans experiences of colorism. The phenomenology inquiry is, “What is this experience like?” It tries to determine the meanings of human experience as it is lived (Polkinghorne, 1983), extract what is common, and, perhaps, uncover new and/or forgotten meanings (Husserl, 1980). A hermeneutic approach demands that researchers engage in the process of self-reflection to recognize all the biases and assumptions that they bring to the research that could cloud their interpretive process. Thus, researchers are called on to self-evaluate and to give considerable thought to their own experiences and how these experiences or positions relate to the issues being researched (Allen, 1996; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993).

### **Instrumentation**

IPA indicates that researchers are used as the primary analytical instruments to interpret the experiences of others (Tufford & Newman, 2010; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Smith et al. (2012) emphasize that the purpose of IPA is for the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants’ perspective of the phenomenon acknowledging the researcher as the primary investigative instrument. The ongoing supervised training I have as a researcher and past supervised clinical work in the field as a licensed master social worker are essential skills that qualify employing the methodology used in this study. In researching the psychological and social impacts of colorism, scholars have not conducted a study that includes concurrently, the psychosocial and physical health impacts among African men and women intra-rationally. The interest in conducting this study is due to the personal experience I had with colorism as a child.

### **Theme Extraction**

Prior to the theme extraction, I used a professional service to transcribe the verbatim accounts of the participants' experiences. The analysis of the study was based on the contextual interpretation of the transcripts using the oral interviews of participants. The data are descriptions of verbal experiences conveyed by the research participants and the written documentation sources. After each interview was completed, I wrote out my observation. The observation was the start of the analysis process, engaging in the data I wrote out the participants gestures, my emotions, reactions, and what this means to me initially. The process of hand-written notes also aided in the articulating the reflexive script in Chapter 4. The audio recording tools and hand-written notes were used to collect the data to aid in the formulation of themes from the in-depth analysis. Audio-taped interviews were conducted to comprehensively gather information.

The data analysis consisted of a five-week process spending many days and over 90 hours to complete the analysis. IPA consists of a rigorous process of systematically analyzing the data. There are six identifying steps that are essential in IPA prior to the emergence of common themes. I followed the steps of 1). reading and re-reading; 2). initial noting; 3). developing emergent themes; 4). searching for connection across emergent themes; 5). moving to each case individually, and 6). the final step was looking for patterns across all participants verbal accounts (Smith et al., 2012).

I used Atlas.ti8 software intended for qualitative research to code the data using the open-coding method. Data were assigned categorical themes and comparing across the individual cases some were grouped together with the same themes. The open-coding process generated 326 codes which 66 initial themes emerged. The analysis is not a linear process. Finally, after going back to the data several times to look across the cases for patterns I had to think about, "Which themes are the most potent?" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 101). According to Smith et al.

(2012) going back to the hermeneutics to dig deeper transitions the data from the part to the whole. Creating a table was also helpful to interpret the lived experiences of the participants. Smith et al. (2012) also suggested this in the final step above to form a table of some sort to aid in identifying the patterns between cases. The essence of the colorism phenomena was generated by going back and forth between the thematic inquiry and data (Creswell, 2007). The following six themes 1). *Perceptions of Colorism as “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society*, 2). *Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group*, 3). *Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma*, 4). *Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family*, 5). *Perceptions of Colorism Origin*, and 6). *Resilience Despite Colorism* are illustrated further in Chapter 4.

### **Credibility**

In qualitative work, internal validity occurs through such processes of triangulation, reflexivity, saturation, prolonged contact with participants and so forth. Transparency is increased when the research study is valid and reliable. While the terms reliability and validity are vital for quality in quantitative research, qualitative researchers use the terminology credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability to indicate quality (Golafshani, 2003).

Triangulation in qualitative work is a way of testing validity (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). There are four identified types, however, in this study, I have utilized theory and methodological triangulation. Theory triangulation involves at least two theories to support or disprove findings. The theories utilized for triangulation in this study are *Social Distance Theory*, *Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism*, *Critical Race Theory* (CRT), and *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (PTSS) which will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5. For the methodological triangulation, I have used the data collection of participants from

the audio interviews, notes, observation, including member checking to confirm the data. Data source triangulation was also done; it overlaps with the methodological triangulation to validate data which includes the use of the literature for support. Triangulation also allows one to gain different perspectives of the phenomenon through the convergence of various sources (Carter et al., 2014). I confirmed the participants' responses and uniformity of their response within methodological triangulation (Casey & Murphy, 2009). This method tests instrument reliability related to the semi-structured questions as well.

**Research bias.** My personal bias cannot be controlled totally. Researchers suggest that controlling personal bias can be done utilizing a bracketing technique (e.g., Tufford & Newman, 2010; Moustakas, 1994) or reflexivity (Smith et al., 2012). In this research study I used the process of reflexivity, a discretionary tool used to recognize qualitative researchers' interpretive role to mention their bias if it exists (Fade, 2004). Heidegger also disagreed with bracketing viewing engagement, meaning, and being in the world as a way of knowing (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher's philosophies are not seen as biases, but imperative for the interpretative role to make sense of the lived experiences of others (Fade, 2004).



### Reflective Script

According to Smith et al. (2012), there are various layers of reflection adopted from theorist Sartre regarding awareness. Most are not able to engage in the final layer of reflection; deliberate controlled reflection. “This is phenomenological reflection. [...] My analysis represents a phenomenological reflection on my spontaneous reflection on what has happened to me” (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 189). I call this a self-reflection.

I remember when I was a little girl. I do not recall the age, but one of my older sisters always said you don't want to get too Black. She had a product in a squeeze type dispensing bottle which she used to get the Black off her face every summer. I used it a few times to make sure after the summer was over, I didn't have any Black on my face either, so I could see my brown skin. I didn't think anything of it. Again, I was young. I also heard my mama say several times to people that you have nappy hair or good hair. She told me mine was nappy, but I just laughed most of the time. I've been natural for over ten years, but I stopped using chemical straighteners on my hair because it caused severe scalp irritation and I later discovered how detrimental such harsh chemicals were to the body.

Although, there are darker people than myself, I am considered very dark in my Black community. Growing up I knew this from my peers and things people said in my family like, hearing my mother say her daddy called her “pretty little Black gal” and I looked just like her. I also knew I was very dark from my observation of being around people in my community. I never thought it was anything wrong with my color, but I knew some of my family's friends and relatives who were lighter seemed to be viewed as beautiful. I had an Aunt once say that “you pretty” for a Black girl. My perception of “pretty for a Black girl” in that sense meant to me that I was very dark, but somehow pretty. I ponder now about those experiences with colorism, if it

has affected how I interact and exchange information with others. What I know for certain is that I try to embrace my whole-self every day of my life; my natural hair and all. Today, I want to be the model of change and not live vicariously through others that use colorist messages blatantly, secretly, or subconsciously. *“Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced” (Baldwin & Peck, 2017, p. 103). “History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history” (Baldwin & Peck, 2017, p. 107).*

## Chapter 4: FINDINGS

*“Black is frequently a life sentence of cultural isolation and social invisibility” ~ Dr. Joy*

*DeGruy (2017, p. 4)*

This study was to gain insight into the psychosocial and physical health phenomenon of colorism among African American men and women. Skin tone bias also known as colorism “is the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Maddox & Gray, 2002, p. 250). This definition and the following research questions informed the study: (RQ1) How have African American men’s and women’s experiences with colorism impacted their lives? (RQ2) How do African Americans “make sense” of their psychosocial and physical health experiences that result from colorism? The participants all had their own unique lived experiences with colorism with mostly convergent or shared life experiences as a whole. View *Table C: Themes*.

**Table C: Themes**

<i>Perceptions of Colorism as “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society</i>	Emergence came from the participants’ view of colorism in terms of racial socialization; the disparaging connotation of “Being Black” in comparison to whites in the United States. Additionally, it displayed white privileges and dominance.
<i>Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group</i>	Emergence stemmed from the emphasis of being treated differently based on skin color, the isolation manifested, and limitations participants displayed in comparison to whites when it comes to the color line; the social dichotomy of African Americans and whites. The color line also has a representation in the U.S.- that western white culture influenced a conflict between lighter skin African Americans and the darker skin

**Table C (Cont.): Themes**

<i>Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma</i>	Emergence was interpreted by “this is how it is” for African Americans in the U.S. essentially desensitization by the norm in society. To further explain “this is how it is” implies the reoccurring situations with skin color bias with this population. No one is really shocked about it. It signifies the unnamed trauma in one’s daily environment when encountering others. This theme also showed the expectancy to be a certain way because of being Black in inter-racial relations due to socializations of western culture regarding skin tone bias.
<i>Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family</i>	The emergence occurred from color discrimination in interpersonal relations. In other words, it demonstrates inter and inter-racial colorism scenarios in various social settings. The encounters are with family, peers, strangers, and teachers.
<i>Perceptions of Colorism Origin</i>	Emergence of this theme occurred through participants referencing their experiences back to slavery and participant reference to European ideology of superiority through socializations. Socializations are also the normed images regarding Blacks; from familial and other people in regard to rejection and discrimination based on color. It includes generational attitudes.
<i>Resilience Despite Colorism</i>	The emergence occurred because most of the participants indicated a response of resilience despite colorism experiences. Some responses occurred from participants wanting to add something or within their general experiences with colorism.

The accounts of discrimination based on color are listed under six themes, organized by semi-structured questions, and research questions. The themes are 1). *Perceptions of Colorism as “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society*, 2). *Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group*, 3). *Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma*, 4). *Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family*, 5). *Perceptions of Colorism Origin*, and

6). *Resilience Despite Colorism*. IPA suggests verbatim and thick descriptions of the participants' accounts for transferability (Smith et al., 2012).

### **Perceptions of Colorism as “*Being Black*” in a Predominately White Society**

#### **Theme One**

A major theme that emerged from the participants indicates the meaning of colorism in terms of socializations and participants disclosing the continued view of being Black in the U.S. When asked what does colorism mean to (you) participants began responding in terms of color or racial hierarchy and ranking based on skin color. Some examples of meaning, Bella stated, “So, when I say being Black, we’re always being categorized by just simply Black. There is a burden there.”

Yung went on to say, “Cause uh, being Black in America is already hard on me anyways.” Tay shared, “So for me, I consider myself, you know, dark skin. So, to me, it's just... I feel like people try to make it to be something negative but for me it's not. It's kind of, like, you have to grow into loving your own skin.”

“So, for me, I would say that I had to learn to grow [into] my darker skin as I got older.” Lena, she responded similarly to the others,

Well, I feel like it's because everybody think- well, not everybody, but the people that have this mindset feel like that if you're lighter, then you're prettier or you're hand- you're more handsome or you're better than someone because you might classify yourself, I would say, as bougie. That's usually what you think of when somebody say light skin, they think bougie. And they think- dark skin, you think ghetto, ratchet and all this stuff. So, like, that's what we're classified 'cause we're dark and they're light, so.

Ali illustrated Blackness in terms of being categorized in the U.S. as well. “Well, I was making a claim as to in white society. You being Black. You have certain talents that you can offer the community.”

So, they'll use you for your talents, when you are no longer able to give them what they need. You go back to being Black. Uh, and I think they can, they, they do a good job of making that distinction. When you're talented, you're an American when you can no longer provide them with that talent. Now you're Black, you go back into that category. Um, so that's, that's the claim I was making.

Socializations are normed roles in society. Through the socializations above the Perception of Colorism as “*Being Black*” in a Predominately White Society theme displays the participants interrelations with whites or other people of color as their perceived lived experience with colorism. Typically shown with this theme was white privileges.

### **Experiences of Colorism- “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society**

When asked her experiences with colorism Tay went on to say, “I feel like colorism also can go with, you know, Caucasian people.”

So, I feel like when you are trying to get to a- a certain place in a workplace, I feel like I've experienced that, um, people of another race may not have to go as- through many hoops as someone who's African American may have. (Tay)

“Um, there was a job with the last organization I worked with where I basically had to interview, like, three times” (Tay).

I was working for the company where you have some people of a different race that can just say they're interested in moving up or interested in a position. And all of a sudden, "Oh, it was just the right fit, so we just slid them into that role because it made sense

where they didn't have the interview for it." You don't even post the position where I basically had to- You posted the job, had to go apply for it, interview at- in- interview just like everyone else, interview again. (Tay)

“Like, the whole process, like, from even the... Because the very beginning, it was a phone interview” (Tay).

So, I had to do the whole process like I was somebody coming in from the outside and "You didn't already know my work ethic or my character?" Yeah, so colorism in that way is- whereas you are- You have people of African- African American descent or- or some type of cultural something on the ground working with the communities that look like them. But then, when you start moving up to the higher up people that's making the decisions with the people that- like me, that we're on the ground working with these people, ya'll are making the bigger decisions but, uh, without input from people like me that are actually working on the ground with these communities. So, how do you know if you're not including the people that's working everyday with these people- with the- You know what I'm saying? In the community. So, you're making decisions based off things you can't even relate to. (Tay)

Similarly, Anika illustrated white privilege as her worldview in the workplace. She stated, “I guess it's, this is going more into just race in general- where people who are not Black get certain privileges or things like that” (Anika).

Where like, so I had one job in an employment law firm where we were on an intake team and there were three people. I was of course Black, one of my coworkers was Hispanic and then one was white, and then the white coworker, she got to do all sorts of things. She had a flex schedule where she could work from home, because she wanted a

disabled dog, or she just had all these things that nobody would even think to ask for- And it seemed like she got all these special privileges and everybody else it was like, "You just have to fend for yourself or do whatever," and she always had excuses. "Oh-" I mean, it could have been true, but she would say things like, "Oh, you know, I have medical issues, I have headaches, I have all these things-" But it's like everybody has something, but we're still sitting here the whole day and working. (Anika)

"And just, it just seemed very unfair, a lot of that, a lot of nepotism. I mean, the boss was white and he had like his nephews working" (Anika).

They weren't doing any work- And it's like I'm over here killing myself from nine to six, and you, I don't know what you're doing all day. And then I, I'll get extra work, and so I don't even have time for extra people, like there are other people who don't have work. Like, "Why can't this other girl who's supposed to be our team leader, the white girl, like why can't she help with this or why can't you just hire somebody else outside instead of trying to basically squeeze all that you can out of me without giving me a pay raise?" (Anika)

Correspondingly, Yung was getting more work and paid less than his inter-racial counterparts. He stated,

Yeah, 'cause I, I be uh, I was working at uh, [this fast food restaurant], and I was a college kid, I would work all day every day, you know, I had, I was the first one that got the job, you know. Going through the interview, you know I as looking raggedy but, I got a job, I don't know how I got the job, but, I got the job, and I was doing cooking, cleaning, like they was working me as a slave, but they was, you know I used to be cashier, cleaning, maintenance, all that you know.



“But they were paying me less money, as the Mexicans, they were paying them more money than, you know, more money than me. So, I feel like they really discriminated on, you know, discriminated” (Yung).

Back when they were discriminating on my dad, 'he was feeling like the same way you know, back then, you know 'cause it was actually more powerful. Nowadays, today it's obvious reasons. But like I know, I feel my dad's pain when he got, you know, discriminated. But I felt discriminated so- I've been there, I've been there, so. It's all about skin color you know, in this world. (Yung)

Bishop shared that his credentials did not aid in upward mobility even when he had more experience. His perspective was his skin color was the reason he did not get the managerial position over the white applicant. Bishop emphasized that everyone in the company were white.

Mm- I think it was once I was as-, my, um, I really, I think, I know I could have got this manager job, but there was this other, and there was girl, too, so I don't know if that had something to do with it or not, but I don't know. I know I was there first, I felt like I was more qualified, but they still went with her. But. And uh, I know no one else Black in the office anyway, but it's still one of those positions that I'm gonna try for 'cause I know I could do a good job, so.

Elaina provided a similar depiction of color discrimination in the workplace. “Now, what I experienced in, you know, more white aren- white arenas when I worked in research and evaluation, um, my experiences there were different” (Elaina).

You know, um, I had to fight and struggle with upward mobility, you know, dealing with

glass ceilings, not being able to, um, not getting raises and, um, not getting promotions when I deserved them, um, even after acquiring creden- degrees and credentials, you know, um, over whites (laughs). (Elaina)

“Um, you know, it was like I had to work extra hard. It didn't matter that I had seniority, that I had the job experience and that I had been there. I wasn't promoted until I acquired degrees” (Elaina).

And so, yeah, that was, that was a trip (laughs). Everyone who was, like, without acquiring, without acquir- acquiring any, um, degrees, a white girl came in as an editor and promoted all the way to president of the company. Within a matter of five years. I was there almost eight years, and I came in as the administrative assistant and I was only able to promote to a project assistant. I wasn't able to promote to a policy consultant. I wasn't able to, you know, promote to editor or to any of the other positions. I was only able to promote to project assistant, even though I did all of the work and the writings of the senior policy consultants (laughs). So, you know, that was real interesting. (Elaina)

### **Factors that Contribute to Colorism- “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society**

The following are some examples of the participants’ worldview regarding causes for their experiences with colorism in the workplace. The U.S. ingrained structural systems were revealed in the responses from past enacted laws. Yung’s response indicated people’s belief system remain the same for African Americans as the slavery days that contribute to his experience with colorism in the workplace.

No, I felt that way because, like, I felt that like slave mentality. While I was working, I felt that slave mentality. Through it all, but I, I didn't scratch myself as in-. 'Cause I quit before they fired me, 'cause I feel like they was trying to work me until I get in trouble

right? I was doing, I was the only one doing the work by myself, you know, I tried to do everything, trying to clean, you know, trying to be like really, basically it's like really loud Mexicans against Blacks. There's probably like about two or three places like, um, cashier, and like other stuff. They were cooking maybe, they weren't doing the stuff I was doing, and that's hard, hard labor pretty much. (Yung)

“And then, in the workplace. I just think it's always gonna go back to, like, the very begin- very beginning which is sad because okay- African Americans already had it hard from the very beginning” (Yung). Tay emphasized a similar thought process regarding barriers through ingrained systems.

But I feel like even then, you know, white people at the time found another way to, kinda- Where at the time, we should've all been so close. They found another way to pit us against each other because I'm sure even then, the slaves that had to work in the fields and weren't able to be inside. I'm pretty sure really, definitely, felt some type of way about the ones that were allowed more opportunities or able to be in a house just because their skin tone was lighter, but their parents were Black too. You get what I'm saying? (Tay)

Elaina described the ingrained systems within every institution in society. In other words, she indicated why these systems continue to discriminate against African Americans based on color. This is her explanation of why she experienced colorism in the workplace.

Um, and it's, you know, through every fiber, through every thread of our institutional systems, and so, um, you know, it, it's, it's that way. It's, it's that way because, you know, again, the darker you, you are, were, you were considered to be subhuman, and it justified mistreatment of you. It justified you not having rights. (Elaina)

### **Impact to Colorism- “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society**

The colorism impacts and responses revealed if there are any potential psychological, social, or physical health impacts. Anika’s impact and response were a depiction of depression. “Oh, I was very stressed at that job. I would come home just very tired. Even though I hadn't done anything physically I was just very tired” (Anika).

I didn't have the energy for anything else, and it just came to the point where I was like- "I, I need to get out of here." Like, "No matter what other job I get, I need to get out of this place." And just, it just seemed very unfair, a lot of that, a lot of nepotism. I mean, the boss was white and he had like his nephews working. They weren't doing any work. (Anika)

“And it's like I'm over here killing myself from nine to six, and you, I don't know what you're doing all day” (Anika).

And then I, I'll get extra work, and so I don't even have time for extra people, like there are other people who don't have work. I mean, I think I definitely lost weight during that time period. I was (laughs) getting real small, and just I didn't have energy for just like regular things. Like I like to work out, and I would usually go home and say, "Oh, I should go running or something," but it was like after that, after those days there it was like I was drained, it was literally just going to work, coming home and going to sleep, which could depress somebody. (Anika)

### **Response to Colorism- “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society**

Anika shared response was about her experience with skin color bias within the workplace. She indicated isolation in not building relationships due to her experience. The

humor in most of the participants' response to their experience appeared to be a defense mechanism used to cope with the distressing condition.

I know with my white coworker I tried, I just try not to talk to her. I tried to just not really talk to anybody besides probably my Latino coworker, because we got along really well, but besides them like I was isolated. Like I didn't really talk to my coworkers, I didn't want to talk to them, I didn't want them talking to me unless it was specifically about what work needed to be done. And I got there right at nine and I left right at six, and it wasn't going to be a minute over (laughs), because I felt like I needed, like I put my time in, at the end of the day like I need to leave, so it was very much like no, not building relationships. Like with your coworkers, because you don't feel comfortable, you feel like things are unfair. (Anika)

### **Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group**

#### **Theme Two**

This theme emerged from the convergent language of being treated differently based on skin color, the isolation, and the limitations in comparison to their white counterparts when it comes to the color line. W.E.B. Du Bois indicated the problem with the American Black is the color line polarization of Black and white that separated and pitted the lightest complexions against the darkest. This color line, known too well in Western civilization began the social construction of race was the dividing factor (Du Bois, 2005; Mathew, 2013).

#### **Experiences of Colorism- Disenfranchised Racial Group**

Bella shared her experiences with skin color bias within her military workplace. Her colorism experience was more convergent with the police experiences as marginalized. "Ooh um yes, I was in the military for about two years and I was stationed in Fort Riley,

Kansas. Um me being young and a Black soldier in Kansas it's pretty, it's still fairly racist out there so” (Bella).

They already don't like me, because I think I'm all that because I'm a soldier, but and on top of that I'm Black too. So, when I try to give an order, they're not going to listen to me because of my skin color. And then when I get to saying, "Well you have to listen to me." It's not even about my skin color, it's about my uniform and my rank, it doesn't matter about that. They're still not going to listen because of their color and they, "Okay we are authority," they're not use to nobody Black being in charge. Especially me, being young, Black, and I know what I am talking about, it's a threat. So, either, I'm going to get in trouble or they're not going to call my name to the ranks or I'm not going to be able to go to formation. And with that being said it limits me to the stuff that I can do, it limits me to the like, it was so much stuff that I was limited to, um when I went down there in Kansas. (Bella)

“Yeah because it was a group of us. Like they separated the females and the males and that's suppose to be it” (Bella).

Now the males, um I don't know how they were separated because we get separated once we start doing the PT [physical training] test. But I do know that is females that was colored like me and we were placed on the sidelines until the other white females were done running. And then automatically out of nowhere the stopwatches don't work. So, we got to run, you didn't know it wasn't working before we ran the test and then you got to run it again right after we just ran 2 miles. Like I don't know if you ran two miles at full speed before but you going to be tired. You going to be extra tired, so it was just a horrible experience but that is one of the reasons why I choose not to be in the military

anymore for that simple fact. Because it's like, it's still dealing with colorism and I can't rank up or I can't move up for the simple fact that because I am Black. That don't have nothing to do with who I actually am. Like yes, I am Black, but I am also you know like I said smart, talented. I got my associate's degree when I was still in high school, so it's like. You know but it's, I'm limited because of my color. (Bella)

“I mean we have, we will have our little cliques and stuff like that. Even when we go out, we go to one particular bar and that's it everywhere else it's like for white people” (Bella).

Um and we do that because it's like we are in Kansas and I'm not trying to be funny but Kansas it felt like I was, felt like I was in 1866 or some type of like transportation back in time. Because it was like we would get stared at, oh you think you are all that because you got that uniform on. No, I'm just walking inside of Walmart getting my stuff, I just got off work. Just like anybody else I just got off work. Maybe I didn't have time to stop at the house and change my clothes or maybe I didn't feel like it because I mean, I just got off of work. Why can't I just come to this Walmart in peace, it's always staring down, or oh are you trying to steal something or and do you even have enough money? (Bella)

“Yeah one guy had asked me did I have enough money to pay for my meal. Um where was I at? I think I was at Zaxby's or Zag something like that, Zaxby's or something like that” (Bella).

And he asked me do you even have enough money to pay for that? I'm like yeah of course I do, you know I do. I mean I have on my uniform right now, so you know I have a job but are you trying to be funny? But when stuffs like that happen, I notice that they try to push us more when we are in our uniform because they know that we can get in trouble. Because we suppose to have self-restraint, self-control, you know where you can

block all that out no matter what nobody says. Because if I "holl off" and punch him in the face. They just going to say Black soldier punched white male in the, you know, punched uh Donny Gooding Jr in his face and he did this for all that mess. They going to try make it something that it really wasn't. (Bella)

“So, I just say yes Sir I can afford my meal, do you need help paying for yours? You know when they talk to you and address you stupid, you address them smartly” (Bella).

So, they feel like an ass after you finish talking to them. And I hate to be like that but it's like there is no other way else we could really be. Like if we be like, oh yeah well, I can pay for my stuff or I would have been like ratchet and been cussing. "Oh, mad bad girl or crazy Black woman." You know they always trying to call us crazy or say there is something wrong with us. When all actuality if you wouldn't came talking to me sideways, I wouldn't said "NONYA," "You wouldn't even heard nothing from me because you addressed me crazy, so what did you expect?" You give crazy, you get crazy so. (Bella)

Both David and Tim are seen as people who fail to comply with the law. Their descriptions of their experiences with the police were indicative of a marginalized racial group. I don't know, I've been through things where it just seems like even police treat you a little bit different” (David).

You have a different, they address you different like it's whole 'nother conversation than it is between a- may I say a lighter person than me. - Just from a simple pat down, uh, between a, uh, a live event at a concert, it was different. Just the group of white friends in front of me go by with a simple pat, "How you doing, have a wonderful day," and when it comes up to me, "Hey, sir, step to the side, let me, let me, uh, can you move? Put your



hands up against this wall," why they didn't have to do that? They didn't have to get up against a wall. They just had to stand in the plain aisle way that we was in and they just go, keep on walking after the simple pat down. Me, it's like I have to be frisked-- assume the position type thing, that wasn't even cool. So certain things like that-- you can just notice the, uh, the difference. (David)

The humor in Tim's voice was evident as a defense mechanism to cope when he described skin color bias experience with the police. I recall the hesitancy in his voice when clearing his throat to then laugh about what occurred. "Yeah, there was that, well, one time I was, um, in and me and my friend were hanging out. We were sitting on this thing called green box, it's outside, whatever" (Tim).

We sitting out there on it, and some guys had walked by. They were walking really fast. Okay, whatever. We know the guy, so like, "Was sup?" He didn't stop, didn't talk, just kept walking. So, about 5 minutes later, 3 police pulled up with guns drawn- Making us get down. So, we like, "What's going on?" They got us in handcuffs, and they telling us we just robbed a house- Apparently, yeah. So, um, my- my friends Dad comes out, we right across the street from his house, he comes out and he's like, "Wha- What's going on? Why you got my boys in handcuffs?" "Oh, they just burglarized a house." So, this is what the cop is saying. He said, "They just left it." And the Dad is saying, "Well, they just left out of here, so how do they have time to go burglarize a house down there." Or whatever, but, [clear his throat] I feel like, that had a lot to do with my skin color. We don't all look alike. (Tim)

"Hmm, yeah, again with the police, but, what do you call that? Because that's quite common nowadays. And, um, not saying it's right, but it's quite common because, because it's

what's happening, you know with the police and young Black men. It's just- this is what's happening right now” (Tim).

Bella was gravely impacted by her experiences with colorism. Here is what she had to say, “Mental health um. It's like a mind game. It's like a mmmh, it's like checkers. Like they always try to be one step ahead of you or something like that” (Bella).

Um more so they try to make you feel, not make you feel but more so manipulate you into feeling, into a feeling like you are not no good or that Black is not good enough. And I don't know why they feel so strongly about this, but it takes so much from us, but which is really crazy. But it's like I just, it's so crazy in my, the way I am picturing everything is going in my head, the way it's flowing it doesn't make sense. It never makes sense to nobody, as many times you try to recite it, reword it, it doesn't make no sense basically it is bullying in my opinion. Colorism is another way of bullying. So is racism, so is like a lot of stuff. But they don't see it like that. So, it's manipulation, manipulation that's the way how I would explain it. (Bella)

“It's like um, like okay um they have pain like pain, okay you take a painkiller to reduce your pain” (Bella).

More so when people start feeding you words and stuff like that not like their pain killers but it starts making you like think okay am I really like that? Or you know is this really what's going, am I really ugly because my skin color. They keep on saying I am and it gets in your mind to where it is like dang, and I might actually, you second guess yourself. I might actually be ugly or I might actually be something wrong with me. In all actuality there is not nothing wrong with you it's something wrong with that person. But there's so many people that's jumping on you saying, you know throwing these words at

you. Saying you wrong, Black is wrong, Black is ugly. "You know, you shouldn't play with that doll because that doll is Black, the white one is prettier." Then of course you going to be starting to feel like okay insecure. (Bella)

“Once you hit that stage of insecurity then it’s just like okay, well now she is insecure about herself we can say whatever we want and it’s going to bring that person down” (Bella).

That's their main goal and that's when I say, manipulation. Once they manipulated you in your mind to make you feel like you are nothing they now have control of you and you don't even know it. And when I say control that's where all the pain pills, the Prozac, the oh if you have a mental disorder, this that and the other, okay well, "Where does that mental disorder come from? Why does this person have that mental disorder?" Because In all actuality it might not be nothing wrong with that person, but that person just might needed somebody to talk to correctly. And when I say correctly, don't come at them wrong because you don't know what's going on with them. You don't know if they really just having a bad day and they spiraling out because they ain't have nobody to talk to. Ain't nobody saying hey what's really going on with you. Instead you saying are you crazy? What's, you know labeling them. Throwing things into their mind, once you give somebody a word, a word is very powerful. You insert that into their ear and you don't know what could tick them off, what that word had meant to them anything like that. It just brings you down. (Bella)

“Once you in that down state of mind, you can't really get back up. Unless you know you talk it out” (Bella).

That's really the only way you are going to have to open up your mouth and say hey, this

is what's going on with me because this is what happened. But you got to be strong enough to that and the nowadays they don't teach us to be strong. They teach us to be weak minded, oh go smoke this and go you know go and do that to ease your mind or relax you and make you feel better. When in all actuality you just need to open up your mouth and talk. But we don't have that many resources and stuff. People to talk to because we already afraid or insecure because they already talked us down. Once we're talked down, there is not really nothing that you can do. There is nothing that you can move forward with, so that why in my opinion the like I said manipulation, the mind games, getting into the people's head. Like you have to open up your mouth, if you never open up your mouth then you like (sigh) it could kill a person it really can kill a person. (Bella)

“I have actually done um anti-depressants. Not only just to get through colorism but just to get like, pick myself up” (Bella).

Um and it doesn't work um and then there's a white man-made drug, basically it makes you feel, you are present, but you are not present. You are a zombie basically um and when I say zombie, no you are not gnawing nobody's face off or anything like that. But you basically, you are just there. You have so much to say, I had so much to say when I was on that medication, but I couldn't say nothing. I did not eat, I did not, I yeah, I didn't talk on the phone at all. In all actuality, I remember it because my mom was like, I don't think she getting better, I think she getting worse. It was like my mouth, I don't know how to explain it. It's a weird feeling, like my mouth was like I could talk when I wanted to say some stuff. But my feelings, it could not, it's like I couldn't let them out. I couldn't let how sad I was or how hurt my feelings was, anything. Like all my emotions just felt

like just they was, the words was just taken right out of my mouth and I couldn't speak on it. Like that's how I felt when I was on Prozac and so I stopped taking Prozac. (Bella)

### **Response to Colorism- Disenfranchised Racial Group**

Bella shared her response to colorism. “Oh yes, I cut my hair off. Um multiple times because I was just like I don't care. I cut my, I don't want nobody looking at me. I know I have very pretty natural face, but I really didn't” (Bella).

I got so depressed to a point where I didn't want nobody looking at me because I didn't want say anything. Not because I didn't want them to say anything to me, but I don't want to say, I don't feel like talking to nobody. And then the reason why that's behind this because I didn't have no type of self-esteem, no type of self encouragement, no type of nothing. Now my hair is just all over my head because the baby (chuckles). I got to give the baby some milk and then go back in there and then got to come back over here do this, that's why. But I rather have this reason that I have now then just more so because I don't want nobody talking to me. And I don't why I was, honestly, I really don't know why I was like that, but I think I was just trying to find out who I was. (Bella)

“You know what I tried to cha, I cut my hair again and I had tried to um, what did I do. I tried to change it up a little bit” (Bella).

Like make a little fro, afro little thing and have a little color to it, something that was my style. Because they was like, why would you cut your hair? You have such pretty hair. I didn't want nobody looking at me for my hair. If you want to look at me, look at me for my face. Like who I am, my hair and stuff shouldn't matter. It's me, my face is me. So that's not going to ever change unless you know I get older or younger. But that's just wrinkles, that's it. So that what mind state I was last year. When I first cut my hair, but I

don't know it's, that's really the only changes that I really ever did to myself. Um, I wore tattoos, but I love art. I always got tattoos because of the art not because of the actual meaning behind it. Like some of my tattoos do have meanings but um I like the art so. But I got this one especially, um after I pulled myself out of depression. It says, don't let the pain destroy you. It's in Arabic. (Bella)

### **Common Experiences are Compared to Others- Disenfranchised Racial Group**

“Yeah being Black generally. You will get that Black experience basically. And I hate to say it's a Black experience but yeah” (Bella).

You would get, okay I wouldn't say it's like a tour but its more so like um, like okay. You ever been pulled over by a police officer, a white police officer he asks you 20 million question that he would not have asked "Mary-Jane or Billy-Ann." You get what I am saying, like he will ask you like, "Where are you going? Where are you headed tonight?" You don't need to know that what's going on? But if you say you don't need to know that, what's going on? Now you are neglecting to answer a police officer and now you got a ticket. For like stuff that white people would normally wouldn't get. (Bella)

“We get pushed so hard, for what? Because we Black? Like so I, I mean if you Black you are going to experience the Black experience someday, somehow. I can't necessarily say how because it is different from everybody” (Bella).

Lena had a similar response of everyday occurrences for African Americans. This was in reference to police because of skin color differences. “Um, just from the- okay, from a previous story I just heard about a lady, uh, that was an officer, uh, that was white that shot an African American man in his own apartment” (Lena).

To me, the fact that she wasn't arrested immediately, or anything was done immediately,

that made me feel uneasy. Because when you look at it, it's so many cases of white people killing Black people where nothing is done. And then, whenever you see somebody Black doing something it's all broadcasted as if it's just this- this vigilante that's went just ragged. Like, I don't- I don't get it. So, like, I have no choice but to look at it as, that's what you guys look at us like because you have- when you look at the judicial- the uh- the judicial system. (Lena)

“In the court room, we don't have a fair trial. When you look at a whole bunch of cases that are exactly the same, they have different sentences for different colors” (Lena).

And it's- it's sad, but it's proven 'cause it's in paperwork. So, it's like, you could have a Black man kill- you could have a Black man shoot his self in the leg and go to prison for 20 years versus a white man killing a Black five year old and go to two years in prison and one year probation. That doesn't make sense. So like, if you look at the- that- that specific situation with the lady killing the- the young man, I feel like that was just not right because if it was a Black man that went and killed a white girl, it would be a totally different story. Totally different. Just by the way- just by the way stuff is broadcasted. You could tell, it would be totally different, "If it was the other way around." (Lena)

### **Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma**

#### **Theme Three**

This theme represents “this is how it is” for African Americans in the U.S. essentially desensitization by the norm in society. To further explain “this is how it is” implies the reoccurring situations with skin color bias with this population. It signifies the unnamed trauma in one’s daily environment when encountering others. Additionally, this theme also showed the

expectancy to be a certain way because of being Black in inter-racial relations due to socializations of westernized culture regarding skin tone bias.

The unidentified trauma is really explicit in Tim's case. Tim provided another colorism experience with the police. He recently had a friend murdered by police.

Yeah, there were this one- this one accident that just like happened a little while back.

My um, other friend got killed in Arlington by police, yeah. And um, yeah, I think that had a lot to do with it, because of his skin color. Yeah, that had a lot to do with it. R.I.P.

Jimmy. (Tim)

### **Impact to Colorism Experiences- Unidentified Trauma**

Tim described the impact of his colorism experience with the police. He initially did not process the traumatic situation of guns pointed at him. However, realized he could die.

And, um, yeah. Hm. Yeah, I just don't know how to feel about it, it's just- Hm. My reaction was nervous. It made me feel like, "Wow!" Especially when the police came and made us get down on the ground with the draw... with their guns drawn. It made me feel, "Wow! What's going on?" I didn't know, like, "Is this really happening right now?" I don't know. I didn't know how to feel about it at the time, but, um, my God- my God-Dad talked to me, he was like, "Yeah, you're gonna experience that." I was nervous when that happened. If we're still talking about that situation? Yes, I was very nervous, like, got my hands up trying to get on the ground. All I seen was, you know, red, like, "Oh, I'm about to die." (Tim)

Tay impact took place in the workplace. The unnamed trauma in Tay's case is the norm that no one looks African American or darker skin like Tay when moving up the corporate



ladder. Such that is the way it is. "In the workplace. I just think it's always gonna go back to, like, the very begin- very beginning which is sad" (Tay).

Because okay, African Americans already had it hard from the very beginning, but I feel like even then, you know, white people at the time found another way to, kinda- "Where at the time, we should've all been so close." They found another way to pit us against each other because I'm sure even then, the slaves that had to work in the fields and weren't able to be inside. I'm pretty sure really, definitely, felt some type of way about the ones that were allowed more opportunities or able to be in a house just because their skin tone was lighter, but their parents were Black too. You get what I'm saying? So, I feel like all those things and all those factors still affect us today especially in the workplace where we work for organizations where, as soon as you start getting, like, higher up in the organizations so nobody really looks like you anymore. (Tay)

Tay also indicated color names from family was not impactful but showed in her preference to date darker guys after being rejected by the lighter skin guys. In the family it was okay for Tay to be called Blackie. She did not view it as an offensive name. She indicated that most of the defaming colorism names came from boyfriends or the media.

Everybody was nice to each other and never made any comments about, So I guess, most those things came from outside people like a boyfriend or- or just images on TV or anything. But yeah, thank God I didn't have to deal with that at home, or with my immediate, or even my extended family. (Tay)

Roxane shared a story that appeared impactful regarding her colorism experiences. Roxane was not initially explicit about her impact with colorism. However, it was something she perceived as having a lingering effect on her. She provided an analogy of abuse to indicate the

effects. “Not really. I guess some of the comments that were made I never gave it that much thought” (Roxane).

And the people that asked me before if I was mixed because of my lighter skin tone and hair texture I got mad at them for saying that 'cause I thought it was dumb. I don't know. Um, I guess how people like praise like people who are mixed. That gets kind of annoying but I never like have doubts about my looks or anything like that. But I don't really- it didn't affect how I think. I wouldn't say it affects my health to an extent where I want to change something about myself. But I guess those are like things that I'll probably never forget and that's just like the comments that are said. Those are things that stick to you. Like for example, if somebody has like a ver- like verbally abusive parents and they call the- their kids like curse words and call them stupid and stuff like that, they're not going to forget that. That's something that stays with them forever. Even after like so many years. And I feel like those comments, whether they were something that was supposed to be like I guess making me feel good, like you're pretty and all that stuff about my skin tone, it's just something that- that'll stick with me, like whether it was, uh, positive things or negative things that are said. (Roxane)

### **Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family**

#### **Theme Four**

It indicates color discrimination in interpersonal relations. In other words, it demonstrates inter and inter-racial colorism scenarios in various social settings. The encounters are with family, peers, strangers, and teachers.

#### **Experiences with Colorism- Between People and Family**

Elaina experiences with colorism initially are among people referring to her with color names. She shared how her adoptive family saw her as more fair skin than them. Because of that, she had more advantages than her intra-racial darker counterparts. “I am, like, some people would call me, paper, paper bag brown. Like, I'm, like, in the middle. Um, if I get in the sun, like, my, my hands would cross over to just being, you know, dark skinned enough” (Elaina).

But, like, the rest of me, you know, I mean, I don't think you can see this on the recording, but my hands and my chest look like two different people. You know what I mean? So my hands are darkest of me, but the rest of me, you know, I may be able to get my face a couple shades darker if I, you know, am out in the sun enough, but for the most part I'm just not. (Elaina)

“And, uh, my adoptive family, all of them, are, um, much darker than me. Um, they are among some of the darkest skin of people” (Elaina).

Um, you know, they're several shades darker than me and so, um, I, you know, some of my siblings would just be like, you ain't one of us. You know? I mean, like, w- would mistreat me, um, would say mean things to me, would belittle me and be mean, and I later find out it was because they believe I have preferential treatment because I was more fair skinned to them. So, when I'm in a room with them, I'm considered to be lighter skinned because they are so much darker. Um, and so I just remember being a kid, trying to stay out in the sun so that I could be dark skinned like my family, you know, just for that sense of belongingness. You know, wanting to belong and, um, wanting to just be accepted by my family. (Elaina)

And then, you know, as I got older, like, even in church, you know, um, I have six sisters, um, six sisters and two brothers in my adoptive family.

I remember, um, the pastor, um, the pastor, the, the first lady, pastor's wife of the church. She was pastor too, um, was asking about me, and she was saying, you know, saying, you know, my siblings' last name, because I have our mom's last name and they have their father's last name. She was, um, divorced and, and he had just passed away when she adopted me. And so, um, just me and my two younger siblings have her name. And so, um, you know, but they were saying my siblings' name. And then she said, um, "No, the light one." Or, "No, the cute one." But it would later come out. And then my, um, my sister told me about maybe four or so years ago, she came out with it. She was just like, "I always thought that you received preferential treatment." Like, she just went on this rant. (Elaina)

One of the phenotypes well known in the Black community that a lot of people try to fix and that other racial/ethnic groups are intrigued about is hair. Elaina illustrated that she began chemical straighteners at very young age. She indicated the familial influence of chemical straighteners based on offensive names associated with Africanist people hair. "And then we had biracial cousins, you know, who came to live with us, you know, um, who had long hair" (Elaina).

I mean, my hair has always been long too, um, but, you know, just super long hair, you know, and then a different texture of hair because they were biracial. Um, hair that was easier to straighten. So, you know, my hair started being relaxed when I was 10 years old, like, you know. Yeah. Lik- so, you know, before I got to, um, the foster home where I was going to be adopted, I mean, just being an unkept kid and my hair not being combed, you know, I was always taught that my hair was nappy. It didn't look, you know what I mean, you've got to get, you, you've got a "kitchen" and get those "bee-d-beeds" from

around your edges and, you know, just being bullied and talked about for being unkept, you know, um, or just being bullied or talked about with my hair being in its natural state (Elaina).

“I was always taught that my hair being in its natural state was not acceptable, and that my hair needed to be straightened at all times” (Elaina).

My edges needed to be laid down and slicked at all times, and in order to achieve that, I had to have my hair relaxed. You know? And so, I mean, it's been all these years now, and then now I'm finally, you know, it's been almost a year now since I've been relaxer free, but I've been rela- you know, hair relaxed- (Elaina)

Elaina spoke about getting preferential treatment while working with her intra-racial counterparts due to her hue. She also talked about dating preferences. “And so, when I was a hairstylist, working in, um, a beauty and barber salon where it's men and women, you know, I receive preferential treatment. Oh, yeah, like, I wouldn't have to pay my booth rent” (Elaina).

I could kind of come and go as I pleased and could do what I wanted. Like, it wasn't, you know- Uh, I, the rules didn't apply to me as much as they applied to other people. I really could just do whatever I wanted, you know, which isn't fair, but I know, I knew I received preferential treatment because of it, because they thought I was prettier. You know, people would say that. You know? So yeah. -It was like, she's a different kind of dark skin. She's not really dark skinned. She's, she's really light skinned. You know what I mean? That was a predominantly Black shop. (Elaina)

“Oh, no, I was a equal opportunity offender (laughs). I have dated, you know, my ex-fiancé is, like, super dark, super- well, that's an interesting question, because (laughs) I- I don't tend to prefer men who are super light (laughs)” (Elaina).

Roxane detailed information regarding her hair and light skin. Family and strangers thought of her as mixed. She had a special name given to her by family due to her light complexion.

My aunt has told me that I had the best hair texture because my hair is loose curls. And she said she wish she had my hair. A lot of people just talked about how my hair is different and there was one person that thought I was mixed because of my different hair texture. But also, uh, my parents told me that a white lady said when I was a baby, we make the best babies, meaning whites and Blacks. (Roxane)

“I always had a nickname from my aunt dealing with my skin tone called, Golden” (Roxane).

And I notice that my darker cousins don't have a nickname as based on their skin tone but I do have a lighter cousin that's way younger than me and she calls her, Vanilla. I really didn't think anything of it, but I guess seeing that she didn't give my darker cousins a nickname it probably meant that like she was probably saying subtly like, like your skin's like very beautiful. (Roxane)

Roxane's skin color was supposed to represent how she talk and behave among her inter-racial peers. It did not matter that her skin was light she should be "ghetto." Among her family she was criticized for the same that appeared with her family she needed to be Blacker. “Well I go to a predominately white school. And I don't think I've ever heard anything based on my skin shade. But I've heard like maybe like one person say something about the way I talked and my behavior” (Roxane).

You know, 'cause we were in PE and we were all running and there's this biracial girl, she

still goes there, but this other girl that said this comment is no longer at the school, but she said, "She's more ghetto than you are." As if to say like she's more Black than you are. Yeah. I left that school for one semester 'cause the school goes all the way to 12th grade. But I left the school in 7th grade for one semester and I went to a mostly Black school. And a lot of people would talk about how I talked different and that was basically it. And how I behave, I guess. And I guess I've had even family members say things about me going to that predominately white school. Talking about, "Ha, you hang out with a lot of white people." And then talk about how I talk and my mannerisms. And even, even like some of the things- like some of the phrases that I said. (Roxane)

Tay's light boyfriend thought she should feel lucky he would think to date a dark girl.

Derogatory color names came from boyfriends and family. "Um, I would say, one incident was probably with a guy I was dating who was definitely lighter than me".

He was light- a light skin guy and he would just, kind of, make- make remarks as far as like, "Well, you should be lucky that I'm talking to you anyway because I don't usually talk to dark skin girls." Yes. So, he would just- I don't know. He was just always make comments referring to me being of a darker skin tone than him. Um, because if I'm not mistaken, I can't remember the exact comment but I think he even said that his mom had mentioned something about me being a darker skin tone like, "Oh, like, you know, she's not your usual," I guess, "Girl you may talk to," or whatever. Maybe comments is, like, as a joke but it's not funny to me as far as, like, Blackie. Like, you know, something like that. Or- or- Of course guys don't necessarily say that to me but of course we say that about ourselves if we have darker skin. Or, you know, if I have a friend that was tanning or a friend wanted to do something, especially in Texas in the heat and I may be like,

"Girl, I'm not staying out here. I'm not trying to get any darker," (laughs). You know, just, kinda, comments like that. (Tay)

Blackie did not appear offensive to Tay coming from her dad. She felt that the good relationship made it acceptable. "My mom is, um, has a darker skin tone" (Tay).

My dad, but the funny thing is me and him have a good relationship, so I didn't necessarily take offense to it because he likes, because he's probably, like, caramel, like, um, probably in the middle. So, he- I can't remember, he had like a nickname. He actually- But he's not the one that insulted me with Blackie, but he uses Blackie. Yeah, like- He's like, "You and your Black mama," but I mean, but he's. The wife he's married to now is somebody- She's darker skin than me so he likes dark skin women but I mean, he does make comments like that but not in a- It's- He's really goofy so it's never made me- it's never made me feel uncomfortable. (Tay)

Casban mentioned he comes from a Creole background. He chose medium skin tone as one of his characteristics, however, referred to himself as light during the interview because most people saw him that way. He felt colorism was a way to rank girls. "No, I don't feel I experienced colorism until I- I got to uh, the public schools. The- I didn't know I was light-skinned (laughs). You know, until I got to uh, public school. I thought I was Black, brown skinned" (Casban).

You know? I just thought I was just a little lighter than everybody else. - Um, and then I- I- I got on all these different terms uh, uh- What is the- there is the yellow bone-- and there's the red bone, and - I don't know. I didn't think too much of it at the time, but it is uh, kind of de- divisive- Uh, at first, I just took it as a, (laughs), like a categorizing-- type



of thing uh, because it was more for uh, when I was in school, it was more for uh, picking up girls more than anything, classifying girls. (Casban)

Casban indicated privilege from his inter-racial counterparts due to his lighter hue. He was classified as the good kid even when he hung around bad people. He indicated his darker intra-racial counterparts did not receive the same treatment as he did. "But then yeah, I guess from white people I- I would receive a lot of colorism-- uh, because I do get by uh, I do get by with white people a little easier than most" (Casban).

Um- I think white people are really infatuated with Black people and that's- that's the reason that they uh, have such animosity towards them. I feel like Black people have almost everything that white people want. Excuse me, I don't want to say it like this. There's a lot of qualities in Black people that white people want, and they don't have. And I feel like, seeing themselves mixed in with that is like a, I- I do- it does something to them subconsciously. I don't know. Um, I just feel like, for instance, uh, I- I definitely uh, in high school I think that because I was light skinned, I received the benefit of the doubt of being a good kid--yeah, even my teachers. Because of my lightness. (Casban)

Casban indicated he was physically attractive, well spoken, and had light skin. These traits meant to Casban that people were more accommodating to his needs but did not happen for his darker counterparts. "And even though I- I mean, I would attend every class. I- I wasn't a skipper. Uh, I- I- did have a problem with authority so I would argue a lot" (Casban).

But- but no one labeled me as a bad kid, and no one - But I hung out with the bad kids, but I didn't receive any of the scrutiny that they received whether it would be like both of our pants would be sagging down the hallway, and the assistant principal would tell my friend to pull his pants up, but wouldn't say anything to me-- type of thing. Or uh, I'd be

late to class. I'd be coming back in from being off campus. We're not supposed to go off-campus, and I'd get a free ride as if somebody else came in, they'd probably get, you know, written up. I don't want to be like arrogant or cocky or anything, but I think if more people just think you're physically attractive and then they are just willing to do more for you to help you, or to accommodate your needs. Uh, even though I hung out with those kids, I was a little bit more well-spoken. It- it's hard for me to speak because I submerged myself in both like, hood settings, and then environments where people are educated, and it's hard for me to go back and forth. Uh, but I- I think that I was able to- to slick talk my way out of a lot of things, too. Um, I don't know-. (Casban)

Anika was light skin and known as white girl or mixed. She referenced her intra-racial counterpart viewing darker skin as a negative trait. The guys generally only dated lighter skin females. "Um, people have called me "White Girl," before because of my complexion" (Anika).

But besides that, or some, I don't know if it's necessarily colorism, but I know when I was younger a lot of people would ask, "If I had a white parent or if I was mixed?" So, I'm not, I guess it's not colorism, because you're not treating me differently, but that is, you know, looking at my skin tone, I guess assuming certain things. I was younger, especially in high school, people would talk about classmates who were dark skinned in a negative way, or even into my adulthood people would say things like, "Oh, I only date light skinned girls," like some men, like that's supposed to be preferable and that's better.

(Anika)

Anika had familial influence to wear certain clothing color to get a job and tried to get Anika to straighten her natural hair. She spoke about this was a way some people perceived to get a job. She mentioned the ideology of people thoughts regarding changing their appearance to

fit in. "No, I haven't, but that's an interesting question, because when I first graduated from college like I had short natural hair" (Anika).

And I always wore it that way, and one of my cousins, when I was interviewing, she was telling me I should try and straighten my hair or wear a wig, to go on an interview to look a certain way, and I told her "Why am I going to do something like that when that's not me?" I mean, I come interview with a wig and tomorrow I'm going to have my natural hair. So it's wasn't, so I just felt like it wasn't worth it. And I don't think it's worth it to change yourself to try to fit in, because if somebody doesn't like you for something that is who you are and you can't change, I don't want to be around you anyway. (Anika)

"I don't know. It surprised me. I don't, because I feel like she's aware of diff- like I don't know, it was, it surprised me, but she really encouraged me, "Oh, you should,"" (Anika).

She didn't, I mean, it would be different if she said, you know, "You should style your natural hair, you know, in this certain way," even though to me that's too much too, because I feel like my natural hair is my natural hair, and if it's looking quote - unquote "wild," then that's just what it is, but I think that would have even been more acceptable, to say "Oh, you should just try to style it like this," rather than totally change yourself, "Put on a wig?" Like, hair that's not even mine, that hasn't even grown from my head, "To try to get a job?" (Anika)

"I think some people do. I think things are changing where, like especially in the area I live there are a lot of natural hair styles" (Anika).

There are a lot of locks, and braids and just 'fros and things like that, but I think some people do feel that way, like they have to look a certain way to be in the workplace or they can't be too intimidating. I remember at that time my cousin always told me "Blacks

in Black" are intimidating, so I don't wear a Black suit to get interviewed because that's going to be too, I guess, if I have natural hair, and I'm a Black person and I'm in a Black suit, that is looking too militant for a white employee, or that is looking too, I don't know, just too out of the box for a white employee. (Anika)

Ali had colorism in his family and within inter-racial environment. "So, my, I'll start with my mother. My mother is a dark skinned woman and my dad at a point in time in their youth, he would discrimi- He would kind of say stuff, state things about her" (Ali).

Um, when I was born, uh, again I was a darker complexion, so I would always have this, this, disdained for whiter skin. Um, whether it was inherited or I just heard it, you know, it was always a separation and a push back. In fourth grade, I was a private school student, so I was around a lot of people that did not look like me. Um, I was one of the smartest students in the class and I was a spelling bee champion prior to fourth grade, three years in a row at my other school. But that school was shut down, so I have to move to another one. And I was, I could not participate in the spelling bee because the teacher didn't want me too. And it was weird, you know, why would you not want your best candidate to participate in the spelling bee? She chose another student who was a white student. And it was at that moment that I realized at these institutions, you're not really cared for in that regard. (Ali)

"They are some situations you'll be used for your benefit. Uh, I know the private school arena, because I graduated at [this school in Fort Worth], which is right around the corner" (Ali).

So, we've seen firsthand Black students being pulled out of our school to go to private schools and you'll notice they'll use you for your gift. But those students that are returning, because once that gift is exhausted, they no longer need you. And so I was kind

of surprised at fourth grade how I had a gift I had, I had a talent, but it didn't matter because she could not send the young Black boy on stage to represent that fourth grade class, a Black student representing the fourth grade class. In a school that's majority white. That doesn't fit the image or the agenda. So, you get that when you get older in fourth grade, you're just like, why doesn't she want me to go up there. In high school at [at this same school in Fort Worth], I'll say middle school, not high school. There was a student who, you know, in, in our culture, the only way to joke or jones on somebody is by their skin color. In white society, they look at you all the same. Now, in some instances they'll accept the lighter skin, but usually y'all all Black. And our society or our culture we separated ourselves. And so, I was separated where I will get talked about for my dark skin. (Ali)

Ali spoke about the influence of inter-racial colorism on intra-racial colorism. He emphasized the history of whiteness as better being reinforced and Africanist people being taught to dislike their phenotypes and skin color. This is what he had to say, "Every student got talked about something, whether you know your nose is big, which is another Black trait. But it seems that our community, that's what we talk about" (Ali).

We "high-side" on the things that make us Black, our lips, our nose, our features and it's, it's part of it is ignorance because we don't realize we were programmed to do these type of things. So, in middle school I experienced it from my people, which was a shocker. In elementary school I experienced it from them and it was totally different. In one instance they separated us all together in our community. We separate you by your skin tone, by your features that make you Black. (Ali)

“My mom's family or my dad's family that there is this, uh, this kind of, you know, separation” (Ali).

I will say, I feel as though my grandmother on my dad's side being light skin, she may have those prejudice, but she hasn't shown it. She still shows me love. I do feel like I can recall a moment. However, I can't really give you uh, facts about what was said, but I do kind of have a feeling maybe she has certain dispositions on darker tone people. I can say that. (Ali)

“It's uncomfortable, it, it can be uncomfortable cause you're like, you know, your my grandmother” (Ali).

Uh, but it, it I mean for my dad, like I said, my dad will say things to my mother so I can understand where he got it from. He's not a lighter skinned man and it's kind of crazy how in, I think this goes into the definition of colorism to, not only light skin's but darker brown skin people, try to make this large separation from the dark skinned community. And I can almost look at you and say, you know, you're not that far away from me and darker brown skinned people really like to separate themselves and join the lighter skin. My grandmother's a lighter skin. My Dad isn't. So, to hear him or to know that he would say something like that, it's kind of like, it's kind of weird how you can, you know, try to make that distinction. (Ali)

“Uh, lighter. So, my, my one of the quotes, I use is light, light dang near white type concept. We have, uh, in our minds subconsciously, I believe, have this image of white is pure” (Ali).

Something about being white is pure. Even in our, a, flags, you know, when you look at certain flags, the white represents the purity and that translate. Um, in 1995, the

American Anthropological Association, deemed the term Black and white, we're not classifications of race. There were classifications of power. So, to call yourself Black, you were putting yourself on a lower register while calling yourself white. You put yourself on a higher register. We don't know these types of things in our community, we don't know that those terms don't have anything to do with race. (Ali)

“They have to do a classification when we still use them. I think, like I said, it goes back to slavery. We and a lot of people don't really take this into account” (Ali).

We were not in control of the way we think. We were given these, these ideologies. We were not in control. We were raised by people who were raised by people who are raised by slaves, our, our ancient ancestors, raised us with their slave mentality. They were slaves. They didn't have any way to think of it and so when they raised our great grandparents, our great grandparents had a disdain for white and when our great grandparents raised our grandparents they raised them with a disdain for white, but it was this fear of white that kind of subjected them to a higher being. (Ali)

“If I fear you, I feel like you have some power that I don't for the Christian Church, they fear God” (Ali).

You fear God because you believe he is the all powerful. So, if I fear you, if I have a, a set of fear built up, I feel like you have a power that I don't. This exaltation of white people or white period is kind of where we get it from. It's, it's this fear of white one, and I think in some communities, some people want to be white. Whether they know it or not, so I think that's what it is. It's this fear and this wanting to be that kind of, you know, propelled that idea. (Ali)

Ali illustrates the hate of being Black with his intra-racial counterparts. This is what he stated, “Oh, in middle school I, like I said, we used to, you know, when you, when your a male, the, the idea is we’re going to "high-side," we’re going to play around, we’re going to "kick it." We’re still cool” (Ali).

At the end of the day, a lot of people don't realize out there in the male community at that age. The stuff that you say, you go home and you take it in. So, you can laugh, you can have a good time in front of them, but when you go to your own corner, a lot of that stuff sits. So I was, I was talked about for being dark skinned. I was made fun of for that, but everybody at our school had something to get on them about. And like I said, that goes back to the, the comments about, oh your nose is big or your lips is big. That's what we face in, in our community is the, the hate of being Black. You know, you've been dark skinned. You're close to something that's dirty. And so, I think in my community, as I have faced it. We've just, you know, I was "high-sided" on for being dark skinned. That was my niche. That was something that they could talk on me about. So, I have faced it in my community in that regard. (Ali)

Bishop shared his experience with inter-racial colorism in the school. This is what he had to say, “I feel like, that's how I feel like, you know, putting people as far as categorizing people. Uh, my football team was like that” (Bishop).

Like, it was predominately, well, I ain't gonna say, it was all half half for Black people and white people, but predominantly the people that was like starting and being on the field were white. Even if there are Black people that had, that could do it completely better and it was obvious. It was still them; I know that for a fact. So, but that's just how my team was. Now, I feel like that was just because of the, how it was, where we were as



far as Mansfield goes. It was predominantly white already. It was only there for a couple years and it, from the beginning it's been like that, so, I feel like it was just in that, I feel like now it's in that time where it's changing from not just so many white people to you know, more Black people, more Mexican people, and they're becoming the majority. But back then and when I was going to school, I do-, I don't know, I feel like, I feel like that's how it was, there was more white people than Blacks. (Bishop)

### **Factors Contributed to Colorism Experiences- Between People and Family**

Bishop shared what contributed to his experiences with colorism. “Um, I honestly don't know. Like I said, I feel like it maybe been just because, there was a predominant white school already” (Bishop).

And it's really been like this since the beginning since it's only been open like not even ten years yet. So, I think, so I feel like that mainly, that maybe what it really got to do with it, um, I don't know. Most of the coaches have been there since the beginning, too. So. Just 'cause you're expect, you know, everybody to be on the same page, being on the team, and you expect everybody to be trying to do what's best for the team. And then you see that certain people shouldn't be in the position they are or doing the thing that they're doing. And other people who are doing it better or working harder at it and they might still have been passed up, you know. (Bishop)

Anika spoke about contributing factors specific to phenotypes. She went on to say, “But I think some people do- do that, but fortunately in my town I've seen a lot of people who do embrace their natural hair, and if they do straighten it” (Anika).

It's like a per- it's not because they're trying to be somebody else, it's because they just

want to change up their hairstyle. So, I think for the most part I've seen people who embrace it, rather than try to be something else just to get a job or fit in. (Anika)

“I think it's just the whole idea of that, or what Europeans have pushed on society, as like thinking their superior or thinking you can't get ahead if you don't look a certain way” (Anika).

I mean, fortunately like in college and my work experience hasn't been about that, like I have had, haven't had those experiences where people trying to change themselves, but definitely in high school it was like people thought their hair needed to be straight to look a certain way, or, and I think it's different when you're, maybe when you're a kid, because you don't understand as much. If you're not getting an education at home then it can be just really hard trying to figure out what's going on, because society is always pushing those European looks on you, but I know when I was in high school I would get my hair pressed, and I would go to band practice or something and it would like curl up a little bit, because it's, it's natural when there's heat, people would say "Oh, your hair is nappy." (Anika)

“Well historically, you know, if maybe you were lighter skinned, you got to, you know, have duties that weren't as hard” (Anika).

Or if you were darker skinned and you had to probably be in the fields more often, or if you got raped by a slave owner and now you're having a kid who's biracial, maybe you do get treated a little better because of that. I think people have interna-, and that's unfortunate, people have internalized that in saying that, "Oh, being lighter skinned is better," when really that's just the, that's just slave ideology. And then that's just embracing- To me, that's embracing slave thought for you to think like that. You're used

to saying, "Oh, this is how you treated us. This is what system you put on us and yes I believe in that system." (Anika)

Ali shared his contributing factors for his experiences with colorism. "Um, I think, I think it's a slave. I think it's a slavery type thing. I always take it back to slavery. I'm one of those, I'm very, uh, I study African American history" (Ali).

I had a debate here, so I was surprised actually that we were coming to this location because I had a debate about African Americans and who we were. Identity-Wise. Um, but during slavery you see we had programming and a lot of people in today's society will point the finger and say, look at how they act, look at what they do, look at how they interact with each other. But a computer programmer, when he programs a computer, if he would have uploaded a virus in that computer, nobody will point the finger at the computer and say, you have a virus. They will point it at the programmer. (Ali)

"And so, we've suffered 300 years of this systematic programming of the ghettos was an experiment and the Nazis did it to the Jews. And then they named the same thing in our community and then call it the ghetto" (Ali).

So, I don't blame us for how the way we react the way we do things, I blame the programmer, so to basically answer your question. I think it has nothing really to do with us. It's the pro, it's the way we were programmed it's the way we were made to act, is the, it's the way we're made to react. That's, that's who we are. We can't help it. So, it stems back 400 years ago when we were pitted against each other where the lighter skin was put further in this position. The darker skin was further back and we were made to, you know, kind of "Why does he get those certain privileges?" So that shifted paradigm, I think it goes all the way back to our programmer. (Ali)

### **Colorism Impacts- Between People and Family**

Bishop was impacted by colorism in the school. He went on to say, “And then at the end, and then at the end, it's, you know, you're having a losing season and you done did that two, three years now 'cause you, you un-, had the same people all four years, so” (Bishop).

Just like that, you know, and trying to keep thinking you're gonna succeed and then not 'cause their assholes. I mean, that puts you in some depression when you're trying to like be on a team and win and you just keep losing. Yeah, that brings complete depression. Um, yeah, uh- I, I don't know necessarily what it means to me. Um, at the time, it, it upset me, you know, going through that. Like I said, I end up, try making myself used to it and not really thinking about it, you know. Just trying not to be depressed about it if we did lose, but I don't know, I just tried to not care as much. (Bishop)

Anika shared her impact with colorism. “Or like "Oh, you need a perm," and I would get that a lot” (Anika).

I mean, luckily it didn't- I mean, I guess it affected me somewhat, because I was self conscious about it at some point, but it wasn't to the point where I felt like I actually needed to get a perm for people to like me, but and I guess if you were in the environment as a kid, and maybe, you know, into your adulthood somehow you're still around those people, I think it could really beat your self-esteem down. (Anika)

And she went on to say, “I think it mostly came from school, or when I first graduated college” (Anika).

I had, uh, I had a job at a retail shop where one of my coworkers, he was Black, where he would just always say, "Oh, like you white girl, you're so light," like, "You're a white girl," and things like that. I mean, that didn't really offend me or anything, because I- I

mean, I knew he was joking. I mean, I don't think those terms are appropriate. I don't know why you would use them, but I personally was just like, "Whatever." Like, "You're just talking." Or but, or in school people would say, they might just say like, "Oh, like you're really light," or "Oh, are you mixed with something else?" And honestly, as a kid I was confused. (Anika)

“Like I was just, I didn't understand why people, especially I guess, I mean, I guess as Black people you all come from families where there's so many different colors” (Anika).

Like I have a mother who's lighter skinned, a father who's darker skinned, and to me it was just always Black, so when people are asking are you mixed because maybe your complexion is a little lighter, it was just confusing to me why they, why, why they would even have that idea. That you have to be, that you have to have a white parent because you don't look a certain way. (Anika)

Anika illustrated a desire to be darker and tanning. “I one hundred percent don't wish my skin was any lighter. I think when I was younger, I even wished my skin was a little darker at some points” (Anika).

Now I'm just, I mean, I don't think about that. I'm like, "I'm just Black. I am who I am," but no, I don't want to be any lighter at all and I know, even though I don't know anybody who does this so I don't know how common it is but, you know, you have heard stories where people are using a harmful product to lighten their skin to look a certain way, and that's just really extreme and, but no, I don't wish I was any lighter though. Um I think I had, not like go to the tanning salon, but I think, like when I was younger, I was like, "Oh, like, if it's Summer, like, I just want to go stand (laughs) like, I want to be in the sun. I want to go stand in the sun." Or I want to be in the sun for a very long time, until I

get some more color." I think I definitely did that when I was younger. I don't know where that comes from. I don't know if that is some sort of almost self-hate, I guess.

(Anika)

“Um, to me, I think it means that you are, I guess, physically more Black, more, I guess, closer to being African, whether as if you're lighter, then it means probably you have a little bit more genetics of a white person” (Anika).

Um, for me, I don't want to be- Even I know my genetics are my genetics, I don't want the association, especially genetically, with, um, white people. I don't want to say any association, but I guess any association genetically. Even when my brother got his- When he did the 23andMe, and it said 20, um, 20% European, that kind of took me back. That kind of took me aback, it was kind of shocking, it was like, wow, that's kind of a high percentage. It made me sad, so I'm like, okay, well, I have the genetics of basically my ancestors' oppressors. Um, I guess, mainly, that's it. I'm not one to be associated with the people who have exper- who have ext- who have historically oppressed your people.

(Anika)

Tay illustrated her impact from colorism. Tay's experiences with colorism has influence her to date a person with a specific hue. “Probably, I have to give credit to that- to my mom”

(Tay).

My self-esteem has never been, like, low so it didn't necessarily, like, crush me or break me but it's just, kinda- It did make me feel like, kinda, have, like, a stigmatism against him and- and lighter skin guys because I do definitely say now that this day and age that I prefer talking to darker skin guys than I do lighter skin guys. Because I've had more than one run-in with comments like that from them or- or I feel like just they may- You know,

how they hear the- the light skin guys or pretty boys, like, "You spend time getting ready than I do." So, it's, like, I find I associate it with that and so I don't really like a lot of light skin guys, especially when you're going to be making comments like that. (Tay)

Casban did not feel he had any impacts from colorism. He emphasized his experience as being light skin made him not be affected so he will choose light skin because of that reason. "It- it- those words are meaningless to me. Like I said, they're more on a categorizing basis" (Casban).

But I think because I- I wasn't bullied or talked bad about for being light skinned, that it didn't really have too much of an af- affect on me. I just didn't-... like I said, my- my family never uh, did anything based off of color so just being light skinned, if- if that means that- that nothing is happening to me, I guess I'll be light skinned. You know? If nobody's bothering me for being light skinned, I'll be light skinned. (Casban)

Elaina shared her colorism impacts. Elaina illustrated the damage of using chemical hair straighteners. She felt her natural her would not be accepted among her white counterparts in the workplace. "Um, I think there are far-reaching impacts that I am, that I may not ever be aware of" (Elaina).

You know, with regard to the harsh chemicals that, um, I put on my scalp and my hair for over 20 years, with regard to, you know, um, different products that are for Black people that just have harmful chemicals in them, um, with this idea that we need to be more European or for us to be acceptable. You know, I can't wear my kinky, curly hair to an interview because I'm definitely not going to be able to get, um, a job.

“And, um, you know, if I don't look a certain way, like, what does that do for me mentally and emotionally is it erodes at my sense of self-worth and tells me that I am not enough because I am not white” (Elaina).

Those are the subliminal messages and the overt messages that have been happening since I was a little girl. You aren't, you, you aren't good enough as yourself because you're Black, and you need, you know, and, and there's a standard that you'll never be able to reach to be enough. And so what that does to a person mentally and emotionally is it makes you struggle and, you know, have an identity crisis, um, you know, where, um, you have experiences that make you think, like, think you're crazy when you're experiencing, like, glass ceilings and mistreatment. You know, it's just like, no, I know, like, I'm, I'm overqualified for this position. I'm overqualified for this. Yet and still, you know, you, there's, you have people who don't have my credentials who are white who are able to, you know, move and shake and, and, and get everything that they need. And here I am, overqualified for the positions, and you're finding reasons to disqualify me, you know (laughs). (Elaina)

I noted that Elaina mentioned treatment and inquired if it was related to her experiences with colorism. Near the end of the interview Elaina disclosed she endured sexual assault in one of the foster homes. The following is how it impacted Elaina. “Um, well, I think, you know, my overall experience in general, you know, I've needed treatment due to my overall experience, but I had a lot of those experiences because of the color of my skin” (Elaina).

So, you know, I've had to, um, seek therapy, been in therapy, you know, in therapy since I was, like, 10 years old. Um, because a lot of the treatment that I received, you know, um, was based on the color of my skin, you know, and I don't really disclose this much. I



don't know that I've ever talked about it before, but I guess I can say it, um, here. You know, before I got to the foster home where I was adopted, um, I was at this house that I would call the house of horrors, you know, where I was being physically and sexually abused, and I was being sexually abused the most because I was lighter than the other girls in the house and considered the prettiest and more desirable by the teenage boys and grown men, and I was, you know, six and seven and eight years old. (Elaina)

“So, um, you know, of course I've been in therapy, you know, um, to kind of resolve, you know, some of those experiences that I've had” (Elaina).

Um, but, you know, I, I do remember going through a period where I felt conflicted, because it's just like, you know, um, it's like, well, you're prettier than them, so it's your fault that you're being abused. (laughs) Like, you know, you're a little kid and it's, this is your normal. Like, you're prettier than them, so this is, this is what you can expect. You know, it's like having to be accountable for the behavior of men, um, based on what you look like. And we see that today. You know, women are held accountable for men's behavior based on what we look like. Whenever we are physically or sexually assaulted by a man, you know, and that goes for all women, not just women of color, but for all women. Whenever we are physically or sexually assaulted by a man, the first question is, well, what were you wearing? What were you doing? Because it is assumed that you did something to trigger him to treat you that way. And so, there's this, you know, idea that we are responsible for the abuse that we receive. We, in some way, shape, or form, deserved it or triggered it. (Elaina)

“And so, um, what that does to a woman (laughs) is just so far-reaching we don't have enough time in this interview to unpack” (Elaina).

But, um, I definitely, you know, have been in counseling, um, you know, and just, just to kind of process through, you know, not accepting and absorbing other people's bad behavior and abuse toward me as any fault of my own as a child, um, or as an adult. And, um, letting people be responsible for their own behavior. (Elaina)

“With that I'll say it was twofold. I, I hate it. I never tried to shame it. I never tried to lighten my skin. I never tried to go that route” (Ali).

However, I think it propelled me on my journey as a pro African, as a pro, uh, Black for lack of better terms. You know, that that's where, that's where I took it. So, I began to study ancient African culture. Um, a part of colorism I believe is when a child is in elementary school or child is in middle school, they start his history as slavery. That's a part of colorism. A Black child doesn't know anything about himself prior to being a slave. So again, now you're reinforcing that, that slavery mindset. Because the first thing I see myself as a slave, that's the first thing I know about myself. While white people, they know that their presidents, they know that they're soldiers, they're fighters. They are, they are leaders. We see ourselves as the subjectiveness. (Ali)

Ali shared his impacts as well. Ali illustrated his journey to reject colorism was to learn about himself. He appeared to be very oriented in Africana history and it has improved his self-esteem regarding colorism. However, he does show the impact that occurred from his experiences with colorism. “So, I started, you know, I'm going back to ancient Egypt. I want to look at ancient Egypt. Uh, I'm going back to Israel because I, I'm an Israelite” (Ali).

So, I believe that we were the first, we were God's chosen people. We were the first people on the planet period. And he had a plan for us. We did follow the way, you look at the Cushite's, they Ethiopians, you look at the Dogan people, the South Africans, I, that

whole region of the world was the birthplace of everything. So, my journey in rejecting colorism was to become connected to my color. I found power in being dark skinned. So no longer could you subject me or you can make me feel bad about being dark skinned because I'll flip it. Dark skin, we were the first people on the planet. We made you lighter skin, you know, Black people, they produce all colors. So, there you cannot subject me to be, you know, sad about being dark skinned anymore cause I know my history now. You can't start me out at slavery anymore. So that's where I took that route. (Ali)

“It affected me in middle school. I was younger. I'd never experienced it prior. I was a private school kid. The only discrimination I faced was not being able to participate in certain, certain programs such as that spelling bee” (Ali).

But again, I was around white people all the time. Whether they had a feeling against or not, it never showed. Black people, "they're raw they'll cut." They'll tell you how they feel about you and, and you got to deal with it. I never experienced that before, so it affected me, but I felt I found myself through that. I was like, I've got to figure out who I am because if I figure out who I am, you can make fun of it anymore. Like one thing you'll find in the community, is kids, the darker you are, they'll "high-side" on you and call you an African, again this is a part of the programming. What's wrong with being an African? What's wrong with it? And if you asked that question, the conversation then goes down a different route because it's like they don't know. (Ali)

“They don't know why they say that. Hi, you African, they don't know why they're saying that. Why is that a dig, why is that a negative? Because if I could turn it and make it a positive, you won't say it anymore” (Ali).

So, to me it's, it's conditioning. We've been conditioned to think the way we do. Uh, we don't realize that being called these terms. There's nothing wrong with being an African. You see it as a wrong because you are programmed to believe it was wrong. When you watch, you know paid programmers and you know ten cents a day you see those Africans. Every African continent isn't like that. You wouldn't know that, but that's, that's what white America want you to believe. (Ali)

### **Responses to Colorism- Between People and Family**

Anika's response to colorism was to tan. Here is what she had to say, "I don't know, but when I was younger I would definitely just, I guess want to tan or not want to be so light" (Anika).

I guess I never really talked about that with anybody or explored like why I felt that way or why I thought that way, but there were points when I was younger, I was like "Oh, like being a little darker wouldn't hurt." So, when I was younger, I definitely wanted to marry a dark skinned person. I was like, "I just want a dark skinned man." That was what was attractive to me, that was what I preferred, but, I mean, now I'm married to somebody who is outside my race, but- When I was younger that definitely was "Oh, I would," like "I prefer a darker skinned person." I don't know where that came from, but to me like that is what I was attracted to. I'm not sure what, I'm sure self-consciously maybe like some experiences played on that, I don't know how. I never really thought about like why that was the preference, but, um, if I had kids, I would want my kids to look Black. I want people to say like "Those are Black children," and that's how I would raise them. Like you are, I mean, societies are going to look at you are, I mean, my husband's Latino so

you're of, I mean, you're going to be of color. No matter what, you're not a white person.

(Anika)

Casban's response to colorism was to begin taking inventory of himself. "It kind of made me curious. It- it made me question myself and other people" (Casban).

Well, what is- what is me light skinned having to do with uh, you know, with anything?

And as it continued, I realized that light skins did uh, catch some of those more positive attributes, and I didn't feel any type of way about it because it didn't affect me in a negative way. (Casban)

Roxane discussed her response to colorism. She went on to say, "Of course I get angry." "Because I find it pretty offensive and I think it's ignorant when people make comments like that regarding your skin tone or whatever school you go to, if it's half Black, half white, mostly Black, half white, whatever" (Roxane).

I guess people do the same thing with eye color. You know, it's like, like I said before with people praising mixed babies and how they're so cute and adorable. I guess people do the same thing with like, not only with like just skin and hair, it's also with eyes, like blue, gray, green. Like those are probably like the most appealing colors to have, other than like brown, hazel, or dark brown. I have gotten an app one time and I edited my eye color, but I feel like that was more for fun than like, "Oh, I actually want to change this about myself." Because, one, I'm afraid of wearing contacts because you have to put them in your eye. And two, I don't think I would ever permanently change my eye color 'cause I'm totally against anything that changes your appearance permanently. (Roxane)

Elaina's response to colorism regarding phenotypes was to straighten her hair. Regarding Elaina's skin she began to tan to be accepted among her intra-racial darker counterparts. "You

know, I'm used to my hair being long and straight my whole life and not, you know, in a shrunken, kinky, curly state” (Elaina).

And so just having to, um, work, work on myself and be accepting of myself and deconstruct this idea that this, the, this idea of what's beautiful. You know? They have programmed us to believe that we aren't beautiful because- in our natural state. And so, um, it's really only been my hair. I've never tried to lighten my skin. When I was younger, I tanned because I wanted to be darker like my siblings because I wanted them to accept me. Um, [tanned] probably from the age of 10 to maybe 15? You know, I wasn't... We weren't well to do. I couldn't go to a tanner (laughs). You know, couldn't do anything like that. (Elaina)

Ali described his response to colorism as to care less about people who were colorist against him. This is what he had to say, “Oh, I can say that I started to become more militant where I could care less about you. I could care less about your issues because you were the reason for mine. You were the cause of my issues” (Ali).

So, I can say some people will say it's a negative, I don't, I don't find being all about my people a negative. People can twist it and say, well, you don't care about all lives. Quite frankly, I feel as though my lives or the people that look like me might as well cared for. So, if, if you want to take it as a negative where, oh, he doesn't care about white people, you can take it that way. (Ali)

“But I just feel like you got to fix what's what's at home first before you can start sweeping on everybody else's porch. So, my response to the white community being, you know, discriminate, discriminative I think is the word” (Ali).

I don't know if that is the correct word or not. My, my response was, I don't care about you anymore. You no longer you, you no longer affect me. I could walk right by you and not care about you. My issue, my care, my love, my support, my adoration, my knowledge, my uh, my giving is for my community, my community. I could care less about yours. So that's my response to, you know, discrimination in in the white world (Ali).

“To me, if you, if, if, if you're facing any type of colorism or you feel subjective to being less than because of the color of your skin, get to know the powers of the color of your skin” (Ali).

Learn about melanin. Why is melanin important, melanin is condensed sunlight, that means you have a direct correlation to the sun, if you were to take the sun away from the earth, the earth would no longer live. So, melanin is condensed sunlight, and the sun is that important to the earth. Imagine how important melanin is to the earth. Why do white people have to put on sunscreen, sunscreen in, in, in the sun. Their skin, they don't have melanin. It can't support it. We have something within us that is directly connected to the, the solar system. You can't find any other people with that, that power. Melanin is power. So, the darker I am, the more power I have. (Ali)

“We've been trained to think the whiter I am, the more power I have in science. Uh, Black you know, the absence of light. You know, everything comes from Black. When when, you learn about science” (Ali).

So, you go in any arena of, of the classroom or your schools or your halls, and you'll see that essence of color is the root to everything else. You can't get white if you don't have Black, but you can definitely get Black without white. So if we learned the power of our

melanin, if we learn our history, if we learned that we were the first people on the planet and we learned that we were the first progenitors of civilization, we were taught Greece, Rome, we didn't look at ancient Egypt. And what they were doing, you didn't look at Ethiopia what they were doing, we didn't look at Africa as a whole. (Ali)

“I think to find power in your color, you have to find powerful people with your color. If you find those powerful people and you figure out what they did, I think being Black wouldn't bother you anymore” (Ali).

There's something called the conscious community. Their whole job is to raise the consciousness within being African and the reason we've been having these centers is because for 400 years we've been subjected to less than by our own people and by white people. All I, all I say is find your power in your melanin. Find power in being Black. Once you find that power being African or being dark skinned won't bother you anymore. It won't be a slap in the face. It'll, it'll be a congratulations. It'll be a pat on the back and I think people realize, I think in their heart of hearts, they know dark skin is powerful. I'll say this, I've seen in the white communities, they attached themselves to the darker and a white person who wants to rule the Black person are usually find themselves with a darker skinned person. Why is it that the white community find that beauty? Whether they accept it or not, they find beauty in your dark skin, but we don't. They know what a great job in tricking us and making us and manipulating our ideologies about each other. But I feel like if you go back to your history and you find somebody that looks like you, which is not starting in 1619 with slavery because again you'll hate yourself. (Ali)

### **Colorist Toward Others- Between People and Family**



Majority of the participants denied being colorist toward other people. Roxane indicated not wanting to be as dark as a specific person was being colorist against them. "Oh, I... I do remember now, one time I was outside, and I jokingly said I'm going to get as dark as... I think I said a person's name, but I don't remember. But the person is darker than me" (Roxane).

I feel like I said it more in a joking way. But at the same time, I guess- I guess I didn't necessarily want to get darker. Because one time I did go out in the sun, and it was one patch of my skin- it was a really dark patch on my arm, and it went away. But I just thought it looked really weird. Oh. Being dark- it's not a bad thing. But for me, I just liked my skin the way it is, so I didn't want it to be any different from what it was. And I have a skin condition called eczema, so I have had, like dark spots on me before, and dark patches. I just think it looked odd. Like it looked completely- completely different from my normal skin tone, and I guess it made me look, like, weird in a way. (Roxane)

Anika describe not being really aware if she had been colorist against others. "At least not in my consciousness. If I've done it, it was in my subconsciousness" (Anika)

But I don't think I just look at somebody and say "Oh, I'm going to treat-" like I'm not going to treat you special because you're light skinned or because you're dark skinned, I'm not going to treat you any worse because you're light skinned or because you're dark skinned. And then, for me, I'm just looking at people like we're Black, like all of us, so whatever is going on, like we just need to like be one people and say "Okay, this-" Like we, we don't need to get into different shades, we just need to get into like issues that are, even though it's unfortunate that this issue is affecting us, but I wish it wasn't, so for me personally I don't look at people and try to treat them a certain way because they're of a certain skin tone-- because to me, that's not important. And I'm looking at you like you're

Black. And even, it's funny, because sometimes even people who are, are not probably Black, I'm looking at them like, they're Black. Because I feel like the shades are so, they're so, the variation is so strong. (Anika)

### **Common Experiences in Comparison to Others- Between People and Family**

Ali and the following participants felt their experiences with colorism are very common with other African Americans. He illustrated getting many Africanist people together would make them all identify how traumatized they are inside.

I think we get it often, everybody doesn't deal with it the same, but if we, if we would have a conversation with a room full of hundred Black students, everybody has a story, we don't get an opportunity to talk about the story because people don't care about the story. People don't care about colorism. And I mean, again, the Black community has made it to where, if it happens in my house it stays in my house, that mentality where if it happens here, it stays with you. That's your, you got to deal with it. And so, we deal with a lot of our issues personally. So, we'll never get to know. You may walk, you may walk by a dark skinned person at the grocery store who's tore up, who is torn inside. (Ali)

Anika shared her thoughts about how common colorism is within the African American community. She indicated that people do not realize what they are doing to others. "How often do I think colorism happens? I think colorism probably happens all the time" (Anika).

But I don't think, I think a lot of people are going to do stuff, just like- So if it's, if it's between Black people I don't think of, I'm not sure if somebody's going to come out and say, or sometimes they will, like "I'm going to treat this person better because they're light skinned." It's like a white person's, for the most part, is not going to tell you outright that "Oh, I don't want to treat you well because you're Black," but I think it's one of those

thing that hap- those things that happens often, but maybe it's hard to track because things happen sometimes and you don't realize why it's happening, because you're not aware of it, or of course somebody, you know, they're not going to tell you, but I think it's, I think it's an experience that's more common than people would think. (Anika)

“And I think a lot of stuff probably is not, people are not even conscious of what they're doing” (Anika).

When you were talking about phenotypes, there are certain hair textures that people think are better or more preferable, or that person has pretty hair or good hair, and I think people do stuff like that every day, like they have a preference for something, or they think this is more beautiful, or that somebody is, like Lupita Nyong'o, she's an African actor and she's beautiful. She's very dark skinned, but it came to the point where it was like she was an object, like "You're so dark, and you're so beautiful, and you're so strange, so now we're just like going to focus on your looks." So, I think it happens, I think it happens every day, all day. (Anika)

She went on to say, “And I think whether people are aware of it or not it does, whether it comes to hair texture, eye color, skin tone. I think it's, I think it's always there” (Anika). Roxane felt it is more common among the extreme ends of darker and lighter. This is what she said,

I think it's very common for some people more than others. So, if a person's like very dark or very light they're probably more likely to experience it and have more comments than people who are like da- like straight dab in the middle, like brown skin as people say. (Roxane)

Casban felt like colorism is worse for darker skin African Americans. He stated, “I think a lot of people may experience this way more than me. Um, I think uh, the darker skins might-might have you know, a bad end of the stick” (Casban).

Um, what I- I think like, this is just my perception. I think it all goes back to being physically attractive. Um, but there are a lot of dark skinned people that I would consider not physically attractive unless they probably had a nice physical physique. Um, and then there are some dark skins that are physically attractive without a nice physical physique.

I- I can see on my brother's part uh, the colorism from the world. He is one of the only uh, Black organists in the world. Um, one of the only famous ones, and he's definitely uh, of lighter skin pigmentation. And people love him, and I would say people would think he was mixed with white. And I think that is why people do uh, give him that- that reverence-- But I don't think personally that I've experienced uh, too much colorism. (Casban)

Elaina had similar sentiments that darker skin females are affected by colorism more. “I think my experiences compared to other African American, Americans are similar, and I think that, um, there are, that darker girls-- I, I know that darker girls have worse experiences” (Elaina).

Like, you know, I mean, you see it in media, the way that people talk about Black women who are darker, you know, who, um, are curvy, you know what I mean? Like, if we aren't... You know, they want us all to look like teenage white boys. You know, stick figures. You know, skinny, flat front, flat back. That, that is, that is the ideal white woman. Ta- a six-foot-tall white woman with very small br- breasts and a flat behind. Who wants to look like that? I don't. (Elaina)

“You know, but when you do look like that, um, in media, in mass media? You know, there, there are very inappropriate and mean things said to you, you know. There are very inappropriate and mean things said to you” (Elaina).

I mean, you know, you have people calling, um, um, First Lady Michelle Obama a ape and a gorilla and just saying all of these different things because she's not a white woman. You know what I mean? It's so, it's just, you know- Meanwhile, what does Melania Trump look like? A six-foot-tall, flat chest, flat back, you know what I mean, white wo-wo- you know, she, wh- whatever country she's from, but that's what she looks like. Very broad shoulders. She looks like a, a, a white boy, you know? Phy- physically. And that is the standard of beauty. That's what they want models. (Elaina)

“So, like, you know (laughs) it's just really interesting that here we are today and we're still struggling with the same things” (Elaina).

You know, you see, like, even the people in reality TV and all, you know, all of the forward and progressive, you know, Black people, they will find the most, what we would call "ratchet" and inappropriate people to kind of focus on and make fun of, you know, um, or to say certain things about, and it, and it really, it's always about appearance. It's always about appearance and it's always about sex. Appearance, sex, economic status, criminal background. We want to, those are all of the things, barriers you have to get through before, before they start to look at your credentials (laughs). You know? It's like, come on now, like, those are all of the barriers you have to get through. (Elaina)

### **Perceptions of Colorism Origin**

#### **Theme Five**

This theme emerged through participants referencing their experiences back to slavery and participant reference to European ideology of superiority through socializations.

Socializations are also the normed images regarding Blacks; from familial and other people in regard to rejection and discrimination based on color. It includes generational attitudes.

### **Factors Contributed to Experiences with Colorist People- Colorism Origins**

Slavery was stated throughout the participants' dialogue, related to experiences, the impact of colorism, responses, and contributing factors to their experiences with colorism. Elaina re-emphasized slavery as a contributing factor to her experiences with colorism. She went on to say, "Slavery's the only factor. Slavery is the only factor because slavery is where it all comes from, you know?" (Elaina).

No one is, um, running around, um- No one is running around making up, um, ne-making up a reason to- I mean, I guess people are looking for reasons to, you know, divide and deny, um, and reject people or to disqualify people, you know, because when you disqualify people, when you deny, when you reject, when you think of them as subhuman, it's easier for you to mistreat them. And so, um, you know, with human beings being better at inflicting pain than they are at experiencing pain, um, you know, they tend to be more divisive. Um, they tend to be more divisive. Slavery in this country has been destructive and far reaching in all of our relationships. (Elaina)

Anika reflects about the process of slavery and the effect on Africanist people. "I think that definitely comes from slavery and people and just lighter skinned children coming about because the slave master is raping people, and then somehow, that becomes preferred" (Anika).

Or maybe they get treated a little better because they're the sons and daughters of a, of a slave owner. So, I think that all that definitely comes from slavery. I think if - I just really

believe there had not been slavery we would not be looking at each other in this way.

(Anika)

Elaina stated, “Um, and it's, you know, through every fiber, through every thread of our institutional systems, and so, um, you know, it, it's, it's that way” (Elaina).

It's, it's that way because, you know, again, the darker you, you are, were, you were considered to be subhuman, and it justified mistreatment of you. It justified you not having rights. You know, your skin is dark, so you don't have rights. You know, we can abuse you. We can rape you. We can make you work, you know, and don't feed you and don't, you know, or just feed you enough for that, so that you can continue to work, um, for us. So, it's, you know, slavery is the only factor. (Elaina)

Yung provided contributing factors of colorism related to his job. He indicated it had something to do with others ideology. Here is what Yung had to say,

I felt that, like, slave mentality. While I was working, I felt that slave mentality. 'Cause I quit before they fired me, 'cause I feel like they was trying to work me until I get in trouble right. I was doing, I was the only one doing the work by myself, you know, I tried to do everything, trying to clean, "You know?" (Yung)

Elaina illustrated that slavery is the main cause for people of color all over the world to begin to bleach their skin for more acceptance in the world. “I've seen the documentary, um, you know, where, you know, over in India and different countries where, you know, there's all these skin lightening products and skin bleaching products” (Elaina).

And even in this country, you see the Lil' Kims and, you know, the, the Michael Jacksons, the people who have, you know, um, this affinity for lighter skin because of how they've been mistreated or treated with their skin being darker and that preferential

experience of lighter skinned people. You know, I mean, you, you see it where, um, in other countries where people didn't have slavery as a caste system. But here in this country, it, the roots are in slavery. (Elaina)

### **Resilience Despite Colorism**

#### **Theme Six**

It emerged because most of the participants indicated a response of resilience despite colorism experiences. Some responses were in indicating if they had something to add or within their general experiences with colorism. Some examples are displayed.

#### **Resiliency**

Ali and other participants spoke about their resiliency in colorism experiences, impact of colorism, and responses to colorism. Ali indicated resilience in his continued journey to learn about himself and rejecting colorism. Here are a few examples of the resiliency accounts that were stated more overtly. Yung is proud of his skin color. "Nah, nah. Nah, 'cause I'm proud of my skin. I'm proud of my race, I'm proud of my ethnicity" (Yung).

Lena provides a scenario of things to do when dealing with colorism. She indicated this message for others who are experiencing colorism. As well, she showed finding an outlet increased her self-confidence.

Um, only that I feel like as far as the colorism part, as far as if anybody, you know, that's dealing with that, as long as you- as long as you find something that makes you feel good about yourself, whether it's just reading a book because you just don't wanna be around somebody, that makes you feel good. Find an outlet and then continue to find different outlets to where you come up with a system and something over the years to where you have different things to fall back on whenever you are feeling weak and you are feeling



like as if you're not good enough or that you're being classed as lower than or anything like that because of your skin tone or whatever the case may be. Just find something that makes you feel good. That way, you don't even have to worry about the world because once you find that happy place and that thing that makes you feel good about your self, you start to live for yourself. (Lena)

“You start to wake up and feel like, okay, what are we going to wear today, "Lena? Like, I literally do that. Like, what are we going to wear today? W- how I'm going to do my hair today?"” (Lena).

'Cause I- now, I love my skin. So, it's like, my happy place was singing and I found that and so every morning, I don't care what goes on, I have to pray and I have to sing. I don't care how I sound; I have to sing something. Like, I have sing something so I'll- I'll sing Baby Shark all day with my son, like, I don't care (laughs). Like, as long as I'm singing something, I feel good. So if you find something that makes you feel good, especially in a situation where you feel like you're being discriminated against, I feel like you'll feel a little bit better because then you'll realize, okay, you're discriminating against me because maybe you don't feel good about yourself. (Lena)

Tay also provides a message for others to build self-worth. She highlighted spirituality as a way to know that one is perfectly made. This is what Tay had to say,

Um, I just think, you know, no matter what your skin tone that you should just be confident and proud in how God made you, and don't, kinda, let anyone ever knock you down either way. You know, just be confident in the- the way you look, um, the way you were made because you were perfectly crafted for- for you. (Tay)

## Summary

Consistent with the study objectives, the study findings of psychosocial and physical health are evident in inter-racial colorism and were often experienced in the workplace. Severe trauma in the workplace as psychosocial manifested in mental illness with one participant taking anti-depressants and some participants reported depressive symptoms. For others colorism socially affected their careers which have the potential to influence psychological distress. Inter-racial colorism exposed society's views regarding one's appearance in the workplace and school system where physical health concerns were illustrated with the phenotype hair. Some participants used cancerous products for many years to straighten their hair to assimilate into mainstream society to get jobs or to feel comfortable in school, as a way of being accepted. Additionally, inter-racial colorism as psychosocial with various police encounters were psychologically damaging. The psychosocial influence of inter-racial colorism in the workplace, with police, and in the school was evident with the power dynamics of white supremacy that privileges whites over African Americans. White supremacy is institutional racist systems ingrained in every fiber of society; this racialization is another layer that affected the African Americans in this study through colorism.

Psychosocial and physical health aims were apparent in intra-racial colorism and were often experienced through family in the home and peers in school. In some cases, viewed the phenotype hair as too tightly coiled; not acceptable and darker skin as less desirable. Color names, stereotypes, or colorist microaggression were part of racial socialization for having lighter skin and having darker skin were experienced in the family, school, work, and dating. All of those things are socially and psychologically damaging. Two of the participants affected by colorism and or racial internalizations manifested into tanning to be darker for acceptance which physical health is a major concern. A new finding of intra-racial colorism with sexual assault

needs more research. The study objective regarding discrimination as a deeply rooted phenomenon that privileges people with lighter skin versus darker was evident in this study in both inter and intra-racial colorism that showed darker skin was discriminated most in comparison to lighter skin. This study advances human rights by emphasizing the need for social workers to understand various forms of oppression and discrimination, such that they become more culturally competent in understanding the experiences of African Americans.

Consistent with the study objectives, this study's initiative to advance human rights should be evident for social workers to better understand and recognize varying structures of oppression and discrimination, thus that social workers become more culturally competent in African Americans experiences. As evidence that the psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism are shown through the participants' lived experiences as "Being Black" in a predominately white society. The social, psychological, and physical health impacts are also revealed in their lived experiences as a disenfranchised racial group, it showed up as unidentified trauma, between people, and through the similar systems embedded in slavery.

## Reflexivity

Smith et al. (2012), specified reflexivity as part of the layers of reflection in the analysis process which aids in making sense of the participants experiences. Reflexivity is also a way of indicating the researcher's bias regarding the data (Fade, 2004). Reflexivity is used like the latter in this study, to indicate my bias in regard to the data while helping make sense of the data as well.

This research is important to understand that the world we live in has not changed much regarding African Americans/Blacks and white relations. Because race and color are not something anyone wants to discuss when it comes to the dichotomy of Black and white, I was hoping that this study would lead only to intra-racial discrimination because it becomes very "uncomfortable" as the words the participants stated when it comes to inter-racial. However, it should be uncomfortable for both. It is uncomfortable to me, as an African American because as you grow and learn about the world as it really is, I am dismayed regarding the worldview of everyone when it pertains to the meaning of Blackness.

What I have learned from the participants is this all goes back to slavery which I read over again in my research process. It appears it does not matter what your DNA is when you are African American because the outside appearance is what shows. It does not matter that you are 83% African, 16.2% European, and 0.6% East Asian and Native American if you have dark skin or if your skin is lighter in the U.S., simply Black indeed.

As stated, colorism interrelates with racism and therefore one cannot talk about colorism without racism. However, the topic of racism can stand alone. I was taken aback by the disclosing of sexual abuse, I do not necessarily have the words to describe my initial thought, however, it was a very unexpected case. The Black struggle of African Americans is very unique

in comparison to other races and ethnicities. I believe that in academia that is one reason why people from various backgrounds research African Americans but feel that could be an act of exploitation as well when I consider I am a part of this racial group. However, many do not have a voice and hope for people to see them or hear them as a reminder from Bella and others. They've been invisible in so many accounts on various issues and just need someone to recognize them with respect.

## Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

*“Colorism is one expression of internalized racism” ~ Dr. Cheryl Grills (2013, p. 1)*

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to interpret the intra-racial colorism experiences African Americans have on physical health and psychosocial impacts. However, consistent with the literature review in this study both intra-racial (ingroup) and inter-racial (outgroup) skin tone bias were found from the 12 (six women and six men) participants perceived lived experiences with colorism. Skin tone bias in this study was shown through the essence of the Perceptions of Colorism as “Being Black” in a Predominately White Society, Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group, Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma, Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family, Perceptions of Colorism Origin, and Resilience Despite Colorism which affected participants psychologically, socially, and impacted their physical health. The majority (83%) of the participants; Tay, Elaina, Yung, David, Tim, Anika, Bella, Ali, Bishop, and Lena shared experiences of inter-racial (outgroup) skin tone bias that impacted them mostly socially and psychologically. However, physical health impacts were regarded in the inter-racial colorism stratum with phenotypes concerning participants amalgamation with the dominant culture. Six out of twelve participants; Roxane, Ali, Tay, Elaina, Casban, and Lena were affected by intra-racial (ingroup) skin tone bias that either impacted them socially, psychologically and or physical health. Overall vis-à-vis colorism affected the participants’ well-being.

The study phenomena can be explained through the specific definition of colorism in the *Findings* section by Maddox and Gray (2002). The study can also be guided by Social Distance Theory, and by Psychiatrist, Dr. Frances Cress-Welsing (1991) perspective on the white

supremacy system called the Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism. Social Distance Theory indicates the starkest contrast in treatment occurs between most dissimilar groups (Choi, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2017). In the case of colorism, skin-tone discrimination is greatest against darker-skinned Blacks because they represent the most polarized people when compared to the white majority. To further explain, in the absence of the darkest Black, the lightest Black can become the darkest person and receive the worst treatment in the context of inter-racial skin discrimination. Social Distance Theory indicates the color furthest from white receives the most discrimination, however, if there is only one Black that happens to be light skin, in this context, this person becomes the relative darkest person between white and Black (Choi et al., 2017). Now, to emphasize the marginalization in inter and intra-racial contexts of color Cress-Welsing (1991) explains:

Under the white supremacy system, the more melanin pigmentation present in the skin and thus the darker the individual, the greater the “inferiorization” pressure imposed by the racist system. Thus amongst all non-white people, Blacks are most victimized by this process. Particularly, darker Black people receive extreme victimization-even amongst Black people themselves. (p. 241)

### **Findings Linked to Existing Literature**

Discrimination based on skin tone has been explored by scholars in multiple disciplines. The participants perceived skin tone bias in the workplace, in the form of policing, in the family, and with teachers and peers in school. Psychological trauma, depression, and even physical health were displayed in these accounts for all skin complexions. Social advantages were displayed for medium and lighter skin.

Tay expressed that African Americans have to go through very complex systems to get hired where the hierarchy of color at the top are whites. Both Anika and Tay illustrated privileges in the workplace that whites receive, one based on nepotism the connection of being a family member of the boss and the other was that person just having the privilege of being white like the boss. Anika exhibited depressive symptoms as losing weight, isolating herself, over sleeping, and had no energy. She had extra labor in comparison to her white counterparts, did not receive a pay raise, and determined it as an uncomfortable environment that was unfair. She indicated it was “killing her,” and had to eventually leave for her health. Skin color stratification on the African American population is typically not void of discrimination in the socioeconomic domains (Thompson & McDonald, 2016; Blake et al., 2017; Hunter, 2016).

Bishop and Yung both identified as dark skin perceived discrimination in the workplace based on their skin tone. Yung was given less pay than his Hispanic counterparts and illustrated his job duties were vast in comparison to the other workers. Another workplace encounter with a white applicant and Bishop were candidates for a management position where only whites worked in the company. Although Bishop had more credentials, his white counterpart was chosen for the job. A past study showed that whites in supervisory positions made up 29%, lighter skin Blacks in those positions made up 27% while darker skin Blacks were at a low 15% in supervisory positions (Hughes & Hertel, 1990). A more recent study by Harrison and Thomas (2009) suggested that work experience and educational achievement are subordinate to Blacks’ skin color in terms of employment. Colorism as another apparatus of internalized racism (Grills, 2013; Berry & Duke, 2011) comprises the conscious and unconscious, affirming that a racial hierarchy exists which continuously ranks whites above people of color (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006; Johnson, 2008). Social categories are linked to certain characteristics. “For



example, dark-skinned people with African features are thought of as black, while light-skinned people with European features are thought of as white” (Mania, Jones, & Gaertner, 2013, p. 4).

One dark skin woman, Tay, and Elaina, of medium skin complexion, indicated they could not climb the corporate ladder despite receiving credentialing. She stayed on a job where she did most of the work and was involved in the success of her white counterparts’ upward mobility. “Appearance, sex, economic status, criminal background. [...] those are all of the things, barriers you have to get through before, before they start to look at your credentials” (Elaina, Personal Communication, April 23, 2019). Uneducated whites with a criminal history are more likely to be employed than college educated Blacks with no criminal history (Aja, Bustillo, Darity, & Hamilton, 2013). When one acknowledges the existence of people of color internalized racism, white domination is revealed in society (Pyke, 2010).

Tay had a similar occurrence working for an organization and applied internally for a better paying job. However, she watched her white counterpart as she indicated “slide” in the position without applying because she was a “good fit.” On average, darker skinned Blacks do not earn as much as their lighter counterparts. This economic disadvantage has been calculated at 28% less (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016). Several scholars illustrate the effects of skin tone bias in the workplace (Brown, 2009; Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton & Darity, 2015; Blake et al., 2017; Hunter, 2016). One effect indicates height is often equated with higher compensation but has a negative impact and results in greater income loss for darker-skinned Black males (Devaraj, Quigley & Patel, 2018). Another workplace effect showed darker-skinned females are more likely to suffer depression based on their unemployment which they perceive as skin color mistreatment (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton & Darity, 2015). These findings also reveal

socioeconomic disparities inter-racially and intra-racially based on skin complexion (Ryabov, 2013).

Bella illustrated her workplace experience in the military caused severe trauma and low self-esteem based on inter-racial skin tone bias. She had to consult a mental health professional for treatment. She linked her depression to colorism. There were several accounts where Bella felt discriminated and isolated. Bella indicated isolation could kill a person and used the word manipulation throughout to illustrate the pain of depression. Bella indicated that there are limits in this world when the person is Black, and one can get in trouble because of being Black; typically portrayed as a threat in society. She demonstrated that the manipulation made her internalize that she was “ugly” and Blackness indicated she was “nothing” overtime which meant Bella questioned her value and self-worth.

Tim provided different scenarios regarding the police; one involved the shooting and killing of his friend. Tim did not know how to express the impact he felt about his friend or his encounter with the police officers drawing their guns on him. Mistaking him for a person that just burglarized a home, Tim believed he was going to die because of his skin tone that day. Similarly, David perceived his encounter with the police occurred because of his color. He was perceived as a menace and frisked coming into an event versus his white friends. He detailed the normality of law enforcement policing Blacks similar to the case with Zimmerman viewing Trayvon Martin as a threat because he wore a hoodie and was walking in a predominately white neighborhood. Trayvon’s death led to one of the primary reasons the Black Lives Matter movement was enacted to potentially stop police tactics to maintain law and order in Black communities worldwide (Chase, 2018).

The findings with David and Tim with the police are salient when it comes to skin color stratification (inter-racial/outgroup colorism). Both David and Tim illustrated color discrimination as the norm today for police brutality and both mentioned learning that a person has to think about the potential for the worst being a Black man when leaving their home or altogether going places, it changed how they interact with others and view the world. King and Johnson, (2016) provides reference to race, skin complexions, and retribution, are consistent with scholarship (Levinson & Young, 2010), on implicit racial discrimination in the community of corrections; the criminal justice system, which are subtle yet powerful stereotypical affiliations intrinsically linked to race and the color of a person's skin. David self-reported as having a medium skin complexion and Tim dark skin. In agreement with Steinmetz and Koeppel (2017), darker skin males typically have more punitive consequences in correctional facilities (Alexander, 2012).

Steinmetz and Koeppel, (2017), theoretical framework applying normal crime and racial threat emphasizes the illustration that darker skin is recognized as a threat and normative. This exhibits lighter skin persons having more privileges and better quality of life in many facets (Viglione et al., 2011), such as, a higher socioeconomic status is an essential element for a better life. One could speculate this as the reason for Tim's lower income than David. However, when viewing the gradations of skin tones viewing a lighter skin person could mirror the theoretical framework listed in Steinmetz and Koeppel's study and the Social Distance Theory above. For example, Bella is a light skin veteran female; however, in her position, she was not respected as a higher-ranking officer to give orders which in this case she stated her experience with whites viewed her as a threat. In other words, Bella's light skin is relative in comparison to the whites; therefore, her skin color of being seen as a Black person with authority was a threat and not the

norm. In the case of Social Distance Theory her skin tone is darker in comparison to her white counterparts, thus discriminated based on the perceived notion.

The whites' preconceived ideas of African Americans as disclosed by the participants as inter-racial colorism are viewed by some scholars as the implicit bias of being labeled and stereotyped through socializations. However, a current study found that implicit bias and colorism correlates (Reed, 2017). Hannon (2015), called it white colorism when whites have bias regarding lighter skin Blacks versus darker skin Blacks.

The inter-racial accounts appeared to be ongoing and normed experiences in the African American community. Most of the intra-racial colorism experiences occurred at younger ages. It was indicative of color names supported by Wilder's studies (Wilder & Cain, 2011; Wilder, 2010), showing preferential treatment toward the people with a lighter hue. Although the term African is related to a person's origin, peers and family, like color names it has been used to disparage people of darker complexion because it defies the status quo of more Eurocentric phenotypes. Ali was teased for his dark skin and phenotypes as a child; he was labeled as African. His grandmother, very light skin emphasized an aversion to darker skin. Ali really could not state the specifics but used the word "uncomfortable" to highlight that someone in the family had such a disposition. He also had inter-racial bias in the school where academically he was a better candidate to represent the fourth-grade class spelling bee; however, his teacher declined his participation indicative of having darker skin.

Bishop had a similar encounter in school with the white football coach would not allow Bishop as his best player to get on the field because of his skin color. There have been recent incidences in the media, specifying people having litigation because they were told they were too dark to participate. One incident occurred with a Black female who recently graduated in Kansas

City, Missouri sued the school district in Kansas City due discrimination for being too dark to participate in a high school dance (Rizzo & Bergen, 2019). Research shows whites are more trusting of people with lighter skin tones (Harrison & Thomas, 2009).

Tay and Lena described hating their dark skin when they were younger. Tay specified using skin fading cream only for dark spots. Lena was exposed to her mother bleaching her skin; her mother used skin bleaching creams over the years. Lena indicated she could not understand it because her mother was already a lighter complexion. However, Lena felt her depression was influenced by a phenotypic feature hair texture until suggested by her mother to straighten it and putting on makeup was a way for her to aid in accepting her darker skin. Both Anika and Elaina described tanning in the sun for hours to become darker and Elaina for a number of years. Anika specified it as a self-hate. Because of this self-hate people harm themselves based on low self-esteem which numerous researchers attribute colorism to low self-concept (Clark & Clark, 1950; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Townsend et al., 2010; Berry & Duke, 2011; Beharie et al., 2015; Lythcott-Haims, 2017). As well, tanning in the sun can be just as damaging as salon tanning beds that could very well cause skin cancer. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2018), extensive UV exposure may diminish the immune system that aid in fighting off cancer and studies have revealed a relation between severe sunburn and melanoma, as the deadliest form of skin cancer. Elaina illustrated recently finding out a close family member having approximately 20% of European DNA made her feel despairing because she did not want to be connected in the manner of having the same blood as her oppressors as she viewed it as being closer to whiteness. Her preference was to be viewed as more African indicative of the desire for darker skin.

Natural hair was considered nappy at an early age in the home and remedied with chemical straighteners to be presentable as in the case of Elaina to get a job and Lena to be presentable in the classroom. Both mirrored European culture; to fit in mainstream society. These products are known as impacting physical health in the potential cases of causing cancer. A study considered hair straighteners for African American women as dangerous correlated the chemical fumes released from relaxer use to the potential risk for breast cancer in over 1500 cases. African Americans have the highest mortality rate among other races for breast cancer prognosis and occurrences of breast cancer at a younger age (Llanos et al., 2017).

California lawmakers recently acknowledged how detrimental racist and colorist hair stereotypes can be. They proposed a bill which states in part

The history of our nation is riddled with laws and societal norms that equated 'blackness,' and the associated physical traits, for example, dark skin, kinky and curly hair to a badge of inferiority, sometimes subject to separate and unequal treatment. Professionalism was, and still is, closely linked to European features and mannerisms, which entails that those who do not naturally fall into Eurocentric norms must alter their appearances, sometimes drastically and permanently, in order to be deemed professional. (California, 2019, p.1)

The newly proposed California law, which received no opposition within the state legislature, is currently being presented to the governor. The bill prohibits discrimination based on hairstyles commonly associated with Black people.

Skin-tone bias plays a role in dating and darker women are often considered as less attractive and intelligent (Adams et al., 2016). This bias has resulted in darker women remaining single at higher rates and marrying men of lower social status than lighter skinned women.

Casban stated he just thought he was Black and not light skin until he went to high school hearing names like “yellow-bone” and “red-bone,” was a way of classifying girls. He kept going back to the idea of physical attractiveness and confidence as a way that some people could avoid colorism. Casban indicated this perspective might be coming from a perspective of light skin privilege but regarded a lot of darker skin African Americans as physically unattractive unless they had a nice body shape.

Tay and Lena only prefer dating darker skin men now because of their past experiences with lighter men. “He was light- a light skin guy and he would just, kind of, make- make remarks as far as like, “Well, you should be lucky that I'm talking to you anyway because I don't usually talk to dark skin girls””(Tay, Personal Communication, April 20, 2019). Family also influences the dissemination of the color names that aid in not dating darker women and research indicates these labels as colorist microaggressions, unintentional color discriminating messages can cause psychological trauma (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018). Tay’s father, who is lighter than she is, uses a pejorative term, “Blackie” towards Tay and her mother. She mentioned he uses it in an amusing way which does not affect her.

Lena asked one guy to the prom that stated,

So, he would- he told me, he was like, oh no, uh, and nothing against 'cause you a cool person, like, we were cool. But he was just like, I just- I've always dated- I've always liked- preferred- a light skinned girl. (Lena, Personal Communication, May 3, 2019)

Color struck is defined as only dating lighter skin women (Hurstson, 1926). The unwillingness to date a darker person transcends preference because the decision maker also considers how their mate is viewed by society (Monk, 2015). For those traumatized by the effects of skin color bias. Previous scholarship support findings that Black women experiences with skin color

stratification in the areas of social, economic, and interpersonal relationships influence psychological effects (Fultz 2014; Hall, 2017).

Bella preferred darker skin men and indicated her skin would be better if it was dark but explained it would look good next to a smooth dark man. She specified commercial images of “tall dark and handsome” influence preferences and added opposites attracting for the purposes of having children to give the baby some color. Anika used to prefer darker men, however, married a Latino. She emphasized that she desired her child to look Black and will receive the upbringing as a Black child. Elaina is open to dating all Blacks of various skin tones but tends to date darker skin men. Ali is also opened to dating only Blacks of various shades, however, Bishop preferred only dark skin women.

Casban, and Elaina demonstrated advantages based on their perceived lighter skin. Casban was perceived as the smart one in school in comparison to his darker counter parts by white teachers. He perceived his teachers let him get away with skipping and doing what he pleased because of his lighter skin. This is consistent with Fultz’s (2014) study on the psychosocial effects of colorism between women that demonstrated traits, like “being smart” are associated with skin complexion. Elaina reported her medium tone skin has been viewed by others as light. Due to her lighter skin felt she got away with paying salon booth rent in an intra-racial setting and come and go as she pleased in contrast to her darker counterparts. She received special treatment in her adoptive home setting being considered the prettiest one and lighter one with longer hair. On the contrary, Roxane felt aggravated mostly from people believing she was mixed because of lighter skin and good hair. Casban embraced the ideology of “good hair” and indicated if you can put water on your hair and have little maintenance it was “good hair.” In the cases with Roxane and Anika both being labeled as mixed, have experiences of colorist



microaggressions (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018) that one acts white, talks white or being called “white girl” because of their lighter skin aligns with a study that the connotation of light skin for Black women were compared to white women (Fultz, 2014).

Elaina disclosed she endured sexual assault by boys and men in one of the Black foster homes. She stated this occurred because people perceived her skin tone as the prettiest in the family and has been involved with counselors over the years to work through this traumatic event. At points in her life felt it was her fault for having lighter skin. To date, there has been no research conducted on the direct link of sexual assault with skin tone. However, Steine et al. (2017) study found the effects of childhood sexual assault has a long-term causality for cognitive dysfunction into adulthood. There is a risk of suicidality and manifestations for various mental health disorders and behavioral issues are a high probability (Tracy, 2012; Steine et al., 2017).

Past research has indicated that the people considered medium skin or that the complexion is considered in the middle are not as affected by colorism as the extreme lighter end or darker end of the spectrum (Wilder, 2010). However, my speculation based on this research, viewing Elaina it is dependent upon the setting or situation indicative of lighter in comparison or darker in comparison to people that may place her on the lighter end of the spectrum or the darker end which affords either advantages and or skin tone discrimination. More recent research has indicated a need for more study regarding this skin gradation (Howell, 2015). However, like many scholars have indicated, if one has experienced skin tone discrimination no one is left without wounds rather it is a subconscious effect (e.g., DeGruy, 2017; Lythcott-Haims, 2017).

The participants indicated seeking information or that a family member aided in educating them about being a Black American exposed to the system of racism and colorism in this country. All of the participants appeared very resilient and had a strong sense of self-worth

and identity formation in how they presently view themselves. They presently indicated they would not change or alter their skin tones. This assessment is supported by a quantitative analysis regarding racial socialization among 176 Black college students as a similar age group of 25 demonstrated a high correlation between their preferences and current skin tone of being satisfied with their appearance and phenotypes (Crutchfield, Hall, & Keyes, unpublished). However, this does not negate the trauma on any account permeating through one's life as supported by various researchers (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018; Fultz 2014; Hall, 2017; Pyke, 2010). Roxane and Ali both demonstrated that the intra-racial and inter-racial colorism has lasting effects, indicating the color phrases or words used, whether derogatory or not, "stick with you," like it is a part of that person. It is something unforgettable that molds a person's disposition.

All in all, the Social Distance Theory and white supremacy system perspective demonstrates that inter and intra-racial skin tone bias are influenced through socializations and ingrained systems (Choi et al., 2017). The observations of the participants' findings and this literature review indicate the definition of Blackness as something most disparaging.

Social Distance Theory could also be illustrated as an explanatory theoretical model through the following quotation that was also a published song (also see Chapter 1). "If you're White, you're right, If you're yellow, you're mellow, If you're brown, stick around, If you're Black, get back" (Gray, 2002, p. 250; e.g., Parrish, 1944). The meaning of this sentiment above was emphasized with Maddox and Gray (2002) and also aligns with their study exploring the cognitive depiction of African Americans based on the role of skin tone. I see it as a color status categorization as did some participants in emphasizing their meaning of colorism as a racial hierarchy viewing it through being Black in a predominately white society.

In the participants' accounts of skin tone bias, the majority referenced it to slavery. According to scholars and affirmed in this study that it is important to note the evidence that color stratification is based on; society's racial hierarchy measure that dates back to slavery (Mathews, 2013; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Landor et al. (2013) explored the effect of skin complexion on family and race-related outcomes. It was not explicit to the scholars if skin complexion influences the occurrences and type of racial socialization messages received by teens. However, through the interpretation of the origin of colorism in this study, it is clear that racial socialization influences colorism; surrounding explicit messages about Blacks, considering historical images, media, and intergenerationally. The social ancestor of colorism is racism.

### **Linking Major Themes using CRT & PTSS**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) demonstrates an explanation of the generated themes, Perceptions of Colorism as "Being Black" in a Predominately White Society, Perceptions of Colorism as a Disenfranchised Racial Group, Perceptions of Colorism as Unidentified Trauma, Perceptions of Colorism Between People and Family, Perceptions of Colorism Origin, and Resilience Despite Colorism to better understand the phenomenon. These theoretical perspectives indicate colorist treatment adversely affected the participants psychosocially and impacted their physical health.

CRT affirms that racialization is so deeply ingrained in society, that racism is a common factor in many areas of inequality but is nearly unnoticeable to all except those who actively look for it or those who suffer the negative consequences of differential racial treatment. Race and color are socially constructed mechanisms used to distinguish differences among groups based on some perceived and unchangeable physical characteristic associated with ancestry. Critical Race Theory proposes that people are the target of disparate treatment primarily because of their

race. This is also true for color because that is typically what people see before anything else. Institutional racial discrimination is so dormant and common that many whites are unaware or are insensitive to the affects of race in everyday life as they are privileged by being white, while members of other races are acutely aware of their racial position as they are constantly reminded of their perceived distinction and inferiority through differential treatment.

Black in a White World is better explained through the words by DeGruy (2017), the white world is open for exploration to whites, but [Blacks] learn that there are limits and restraints. This is indicative to some of the participants lived experiences, having limits based on color, mostly because they are Black. CRT has relevance for this study because as stated in Chapter 1 the theoretical underpinning is that all systems are racialized. In the U.S. white supremacy designed such systems that are unbalanced for people of color and in this case for African Americans. The participants lived experiences of color discrimination and disparate treatment for their livelihood was shown in employment, school, and daily living environments. “Being Black” in a white world shows the significance in the color hierarchy of races and ethnicity as stated in the literature that whites stamp on U.S. history, through legal systems, have placed them at the very top, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans somewhere in the middle. African Americans are typically marginalized at the bottom.

The Disenfranchised Racial Group is based on the color-line of Black and white people. There are differences in treatment based on this country’s history; it was evident with the participants’ police encounters. Citizens would like to count on police in the community for safety and equal treatment. However, two of the participants, Tim and David illustrated the criminal justice system as untrustworthy and perceives them as criminogenic just because they were both Black. Also reoccurring, Blacks are viewed as a threat.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) by Dr. Joy DeGruy (2017) explains the basis of her theory as linking the past experiences intergenerationally has impacted how African Americans live day to day, how they see their worldview, their reactions or responses to what occurs in life, how the individual interacts with family and other people in the world. Racial socialization provides strong stimuluses that effect others' perceptions. This is indicative of David, Tim, and even Anika, a light skin woman who had an initial preference to be dark. Elaina, although her colorism experiences were overt, she wanted to be darker as well. Tay and Lena did not initially love their skin because it was dark. Desiring lighter skin or darker skin tone is a reflection of white supremacy. As stated by DeGruy (2017), the supposition that a colored person was a slave legally justified colorism with the white ethnocentric model. Similarly, Ali emphasized how African Americans only learn of slavery as the first point of learning their history and of their African descendants' history is a form of colorism. This coincides with DeGruy (2017) illustration of the white ethnocentrism model. Both Ali's and Bella's deep revelations overlap with Dr. DeGruy's main underpinning of her perspective on PTSS to indicate internalized racism past down generation to generation leaving a group of people traumatized to live in a society where discrimination continues to be the norm.

Somehow the trauma is there; sometimes through resilience it is unrecognizable, therefore, seen as unidentified trauma in the African American life. It is trauma just as DeGruy emphasized, however, I view it through the participants in this study as Unidentified Trauma because the daily occurrences of discrimination based on skin color are something that a lot of African Americans are desensitized to because it is the norm generation after generation. It is mostly unidentified based on the way of the world as verbalized by the participants' accounts in Chapter 4. In other words, *this is how it is*. This juxtaposed idea is kind of complex to fully

explain. However, it is likened to a conscious and subconscious acceptance of internalized oppression that whites are racially classified above people of color (Pyke, 2010). Whiteness illustrates the racial, social, and legal construct of the United States of America (Pyke, 2010; DeGruy, 2017). History is affective and immutable in some ways. For example, the psychosocial and physical health impacts of colorism among the participants have indicated a lasting trauma, according to Dr. DeGruy's PTSS perspective, that affects every part (nuance) of their life; that they may never forget. The essence of the themes illustrates the participants worldview as they live through colorism experiences. Ongoing racial and color discrimination reinforces the condition of powerlessness and marginalization. Such that distress from continued discrimination impacts poor health and has the potential to cause low life expectancy (Adams et al., 2016; Monk, 2015; also see Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010).

### **Conclusions**

This study provided insight into African Americans psychosocial and physical health impacts of skin color discrimination. In this study darker skin people were affected the most by colorism. Inter-racial colorism was the most pervasive in this study. The men and women appeared to have similar experiences regarding colorism due to expressed practices are generally in social and political institutions (Reece, 2018). Likewise, for racism. One participant indicated her inter-racial encounter as racism, nevertheless, most participants perceived their inter-racial encounters as colorism. IPA indicates the cognitive interest on how the participants make sense of their experiences include an element of providing one with a voice that captures and gives reflection to the participants' concerns (Smith et al., 2012) thus colorism was indicative of the participants' lived experiences. The physical health impacts of tanning and the use of chemical straighteners as defined in the study were prevalent among women and has psychological

implication. However, both men and women experiencing psychological impacts as defined by Monk (2015) are intrinsically linked with physical health to affect one's overall well-being. Lighter skin and white privilege were conspicuous as well connecting the intersectionality (as a concept) of colorism to white privilege, the closer to white the more privileges transpire for those with lighter skin.

The findings suggest there is a psychological burden on colorism. It appears that the negative messages that are covert and overt give rise to racialization regarding skin color skin tone bias on African Americans, which are both deeply historical and present. Through racial socialization, the hierarchical stratification of racial minorities based on skin tone and phenotypes shows the pervasive impact of oppression and white privilege on society (Blake et al., 2017). However, for colorism to be fully addressed in the United States it is essential to understand racial bias in relation to colorism.

### **Implications of the Study**

#### **Contribution to the Discipline of Social Work**

This research is pertinent for cultural competency and to produce ongoing research about colorism to disseminate findings that inform practice. Evidence based practice can aid in culturally sensitive interventions with clinicians in the behavioral health arena and with physicians in clinics or the hospital settings for the African American population. This would potentially create fewer stigmas to those that are harmed by the potential effects.

Social workers have ethical and professional standards for social justice and the human condition. Under professional standards discrimination 4.02 indicate, "Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief,

religion, or mental or physical disability” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2019, Ethical Standards). Therefore, it is suggested that all nationalities of social workers engage students in seminar topics surrounding inter and intra-racial colorism impacts to begin dialogue.

Overall this topic is still fairly new within the discipline of social work. Typically, inter-racial colorism supports lighter skin people have more advantages than darker skin people. However, reiterating Maddox’s and Gray’s definition of skin tone bias it can go both ways. Supported by Social Distance Theory, that one has the potential of being discriminated against based on color if “lighter skin” is present in the absence of the darker “person of color” in inter-racial settings. Therefore, something new to contribute to the discipline of social work is the idea of inter-racial colorism occurs among African Americans in various social strata for every color on the spectrum, supported by Social Distance Theory and Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism. This could link to topics of diversity and inclusion training in social work regarding unearned privileges for whites viewing white privilege as a system of power and dominance that still oppress what society views as the most marginalized, African American population (e.g., McIntosh, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

In this study, it was evident that the majority of the inter-racial colorism was among employment. To aid in filling the gap in the workplace and the objective to promote policy changes. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recognized in 2007 that skin complexion discrimination complaints have drastically increased. Colorism, which has always been detrimental, appears to be on the rise in the U.S. (Hannon & DeFina, 2014). Research infers colorism-based discrimination is like other forms of harmful bias. About half of the participants provided colorism lived experiences with employment. Therefore, I suggest that



governmental policies are implemented regarding employment that is similar to policies and laws that prohibit racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism as identified in federal statutes such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (e.g., EEOC, 1990; EEOC, 1991). This enactment may reduce the likelihood that an employer would discriminate based on colorism.

One participant stated colorism is another way of bullying, she was inferring generally and in the area of employment. However, the study findings showed the emotional trauma involved with colorism in school. A policy should be implemented in primary and secondary education regarding anti-bullying against skin color and hope that administrators take this as a serious calamity that one could commit suicide based on the literature review. As evident by research and this study colorism has lasting effects on one's psyche.

The blog by Dr. Sarah Webb was formed in 2013 for the purpose of intergenerational colorism healing in the Black community (Webb, 2019). A recommendation is to expand on her initial idea or collaborate with Dr. Webb to incorporate information that will advocate for the healing of all forms of colorism, intra- racially and inter- racially. Besides the participants perception that their colorism experience stemmed from slavery, some also indicated it is perpetuated through images in the media, whether systematically only indicating white as the normalized standard image of society by leaving out other racial and ethnic groups or Blacks reinforcing stereotypes in films and in reality shows. Reflective of Webb (2019) for more an advocacy movement is a suggestion to aid with curbing the influence of colorism in any form of social media, especially shown in the movie theatre whether or not it is a white film maker writing and producing the show or an African American that illustrate Blackness in a negative light because that all reinforces white supremacy. Therefore, everyone who has access to the web

should complain widely, not only actors/actresses, to aid in reducing all forms of color discrimination and exploitation.

### **Other Implications**

With inter and intra-racial skin tone biases in the workplace, in the home, with peers and teachers, and policing all have implications for trauma, low self-worth, social, mental, and physical impacts. This research has implication for further study on racial socialization regarding the psychosocial and physical health impacts manifested from colorist people. The colorism encounters with the police as conveyed by the participants has implications for psychological trauma, and even death, typically for those with darker skin tones. A study also highlighted the potential for a lower economic status because of encounters with police, since one is less likely to have a good paying job with a criminal record or placed in the criminal justice system. In the recommendation section, policy changes for employment and school were discussed and for more of an advocacy movement, the recommendations for media were suggested to aid with colorism changes more widely. The policing policy is in the directions for future research section.

African Americans using chemical straighteners could potentially cause cancer which a study implied a potential risk for death due to the risk of chemical straighteners causing breast cancer. Both the chemical straighteners and tanning are seen as a physical health impacts according to the definition in this study. This response to colorist treatment has the implication to harm one's overall health, as so with any of the psychosocial encounters the participants had. Colorism may cause severe health ailments. Therefore, it should be viewed as a social ill that impacts the human condition. Although this study was not about how impactful colorism experiences are, there are nuances to the levels of healthy functionality based on one's

individualized encounters with colorism. The essence of the themes illustrates the way the participants view the world as they live through their experiences of colorism and are implications to apply to other people of color who are at risk for colorist acts based on their skin tone.

The scope of this work could not allow for statistical measures, such as on the impacts of skin tone bias with psychological impacts or employment with skin tone discrimination. However, as stated in Chapter 1, one of the reasons for the qualitative inquiry was there are more empirical quantitative studies conducted on colorism generally. Researchers have conducted many quantitative studies concerning various psychological aspects of colorism as well. In contrast, there are multiple grey literature [i.e. dissertations, theses] on various qualitative studies concerning colorism. However, to date, no study has been conducted with the two components psychosocial and physical health as defined in this study to make sense of African Americans lived experiences, especially in the discipline of social work. IPA was the best approach for this study and a quantitative analysis would not have been a better method. This reason is due to IPA methodology approach has a cognitive interest in how persons make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2012) which are the intentions of both research questions that inform this study. A quantitative analysis would not have provided the rich data that only one can retrieve from someone's lived experiences. Although it is subjective reality, IPA approach to "making sense" of one's lived experiences includes an element of providing one with a voice that captures and gives reflection to the participants' concerns (Smith et al., 2012).

Qualitative studies facilitate developed ideas or hypotheses that are useful for conducting quantitative research. Qualitative research also allows for deeper contextualization that may be missed by quantitative studies alone. Qualitative inquiry varies on data collection methods based

on the use of unstructured or semi-structured procedures. Therefore, IPA was most appropriate reflective of the semi-structured questions developed in this study.

### **Limitations**

This research is limited because it is restricted to local places in one state partly chosen for convenience and consequently suffers from sampling bias. The report of skin tone accuracy is subjective. Additionally, the sampling technique did not allow for more skin tone gradations, since the majority of the participants in the study self-identified as dark skin which could have resulted in different findings. This is also true for the limited age range of 18-30. The study addresses the Black perspective in relation to colorism and does so to the exclusion of other races where similar tension might exist, such as in Hispanic or Latin and Asian communities. This study cannot be comprehensive, nor can it suggest representing the opinions of all Blacks in the United States. However, it provided important data that may be used to expand the study with wider demography and geography.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study assesses whether or not the participants had any experiences with colorism that may impact them socially, psychological, or impact physical health, not that it occurred at a certain age. However, intra-racial discrimination appeared to happen at a younger age for the participants who brought it up. Therefore, future research is imperative to find out what are the nuances of colorism among young children or adolescents because of the implications of low self-worth. In the case of the participant perceived her sexual assault in foster care was due to her lighter skin. Research is needed in the area of finding out if there is a direct link between lighter skin and sexual assault among African Americans, although they are less likely to report.

Skin color as a pipeline to criminal prosecution is shown in the analysis of sociologists Viglione, Hannon and Defina. Viglione et al. (2011) examined the perception of skin color by correctional officers as it relates to maximum sentencing and time served. Their investigation encompassed 12,000 Black women imprisoned in North Carolina between 1995 and 2009. After controlling for several variables, the outcome was lighter skin Black women received more lenient sentences and incarcerated less time.

According to the U.S. Census, about 1 and 3 unarmed African Americans in 2015 were murdered by the police and unarmed African Americans were murdered by police five times the rates of whites (Mapping Police Violence, 2015). Due to near death experiences and people dying at the hands of the police in this study indicate more research needs to be conducted regarding skin tone and police interactions. Therefore, future research with law enforcement could expand on a study about race, policing, and perceptions of police use of force through the insight of Black citizens and police officers (Keyes, 2014). The follow-up study could identify if skin color plays a role in the interaction between Black members of law enforcement and Black citizens. How does use of force play into color discrimination? Are darker Blacks perceived as more threatening among Black officers and are lighter Blacks given more leniencies?

It is worth exploring intra-racial colorism in policing because within inter-racial colorism researchers support lighter skin as more advantage in regard to white officers showing more retributive actions toward African Americans with darker skin tones (Viglione et al., 2011; Barlow & Barlow, 2002). Few studies have examined the treatment and use of force that could result in killings of African Americans received from Black officers when it is related to skin tone bias such as the study by Crutchfield, Fisher, and Webb (2017) who viewed both inter and intra-racial colorism. Such a study on use of force and skin tone bias would disseminate

knowledge to aid in better policing policies to reduce racial or color profiling. It could also potentially curb the outcome of death of unarmed African Americans killed by police.

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### Appendix A: Other Definitions

Walker (1983), defines colorism as, “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on the color of their skin” (p. 209). Other terms used are the following for historical context: Hypodescent Law/One Drop Rule- “social and legal principle of racial classification; historical prominence to state if a person has one drop of Black blood is considered Black, coded in the Racial Integrity Act in 1924; concept evolved over 19<sup>th</sup> century and codified into law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Free, 2018, p. 1). Mulatto- “1590s, offspring of a European and a Black African, from Spanish or Portuguese *mulato* "of mixed breed," literally "young mule," from *mulo* "mule." It is an archaic term used, typically referred as mixed race, biracial, multiracial, “half Black half white.” Negress- “usage in 1700s refer to Black woman or girl” (Reuter, 1918, pp. 12-13).

Griffe- “usage in 1700s French Louisiana, mixed person of Black and American Indian ancestry, a mulatto; especially a woman, three quarter Black and one quarter white ancestry.” Sacatra- “offspring of griffe and Black; seven eighths Black.” Quadroon- “a person having one-quarter Black ancestry, with one Black grandparent; the offspring of a mulatto and a white person; three-quarters European ancestry.” Octoroon- “person one-eighth Black ancestry, with one Black great-grandparent; the offspring of a quadroon and a white person” (Reuter, 1918, pp. 12-13). Color line- “A barrier, created by custom, law, or economic differences, separating nonwhite persons from whites. Also called *color bar*” (Free, 2018, p. 1).

Black Codes- law enacted in 1865 to restrict Blacks from certain freedoms, later changed to Jim Crow laws and lasted until the civil rights movement in 1960s. Jim Crow laws- a way of life for Blacks during 1877-1960s that enacted laws to enforce racial segregation; racial caste system. The paper bag test consists of a paper bag used as a measure to determine lightness and

racial status or prestige, it determines if Blacks are too dark to engage in specific activities (Kerr, 2006; Bryant, 2013).

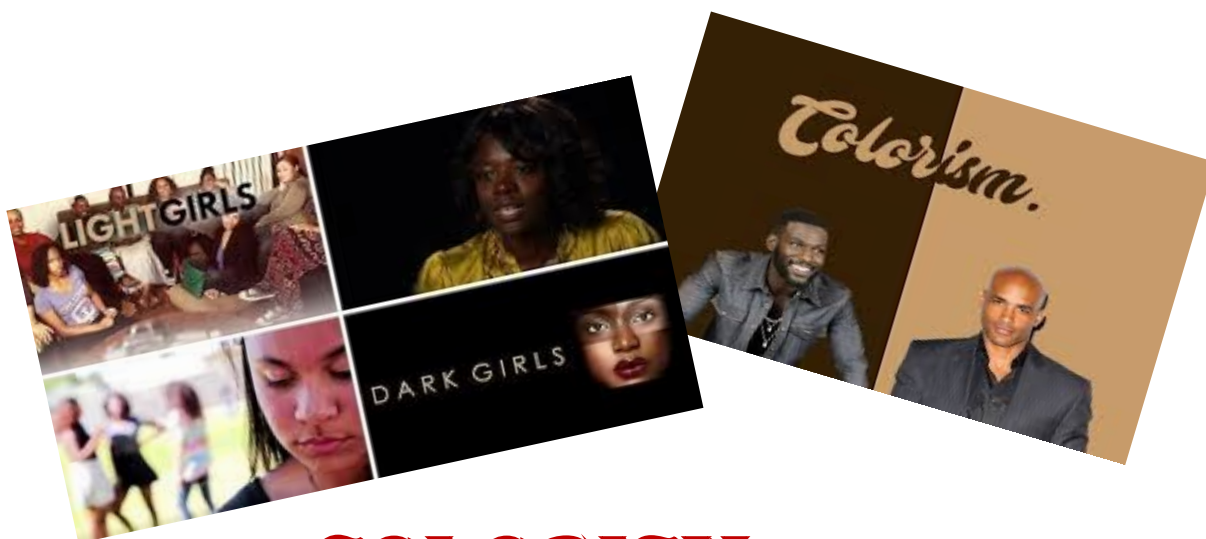
## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

### Recruitment:

University of Texas at Arlington

Research Title: Understanding the Psychosocial and Physical Health Impacts of Colorism: Discrimination of African Americans based on Skin Color

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study



# COLORISM

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Latocia Keyes, LMSW

Department of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Phone#: 817-944-4826 E-Mail: Latocia.Keyes@mavs.uta.edu

**I am an African American PhD student that is conducting research on colorism. Colorism is discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to a person based on the lightness or darkness of their skin complexion. Research indicates colorism affects people differently. If you have been impacted by colorism, identify as an African American man or woman, and age 18-30, there is an opportunity to voice your experiences and contribute to colorism research. A \$10 Starbucks gift card will be given for your time. Please contact the principal investigator if you are interested to set a specific time to meet face to face for about 90 minutes. This research may be beneficial in contributing to cultural competency and possible policy changes in organizations.**

## **Appendix C: University of Texas at Arlington Informed Consent Document**

### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Latocia Keyes, LMSW  
Department of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington.  
Phone#: 817-944-4826 E-Mail: Latocia.Keyes@mavs.uta.edu

### **FACULTY CHAIR**

Eusebius Small, PhD  
Department of Social Work  
E-Mail: ESmall@uta.edu

### **TITLE OF PROJECT**

Understanding the Psychosocial and Physical Health Impacts of Colorism: Discrimination of African Americans based on Skin Color

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are being asked to participate in a research study about colorism. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand after the principal investigator go over the entire informed consent. The results of the study may be shared through scientific publications, or presentations at conferences. Your name or identity will not be revealed to anyone at any point of the study. Any personal information that uniquely identifies you will be removed or disguised prior to the preparation of the research reports and publications.

### **PURPOSE**

The specific purpose of this research study is the examination of the lived experiences with colorism among African American men and women in Fort Worth Texas. This study will attempt to discover and understand the unique social, psychological issues, physical health problems faced within this community through the use of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and content analysis (by closely assessing the information you talk about).

### **DURATION**

Participation in the interview portion of this study will last at least 90 minutes. The interview will be completed in the same day.

### **NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

The maximum number of participants in this research study will be approximately 30.

### **PROCEDURES**

You are being asked to participate in an individual face-to-face interview. You will be asked basic questions about your life and experiences of colorism, if any. The duration of the interview will be at least 90 minutes. First, you will be handed a demographics survey to complete (self-report), which will include questions regarding basic characteristics about

yourself (age, race, gender, etc.). Completion of the demographic survey is estimated to take no more than two minutes. When the interview begins, it will be audio recorded and notated. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means it will be typed exactly as recorded, word-for-word, by the principal investigator. The recording will be destroyed after three years of storage. The data collection process will involve the principal investigator observing and taking notes while also asking relevant questions pertaining to colorism which will be recorded. Observations may include but not be limited to the following: hand gestures, facial expressions, body language (slouching, arms crossed, foot tapping, etc.) non-verbal audio, such as sighs, grunts and laughter.

### **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

This research is beneficial in contributing to cultural competency, possible policy changes in institutions, and dissemination of knowledge that come from primary data collection that may provide clinical intervention or prevention measures for future research. However, you may benefit from talking about your shared experiences. Additionally, this topic and issues related to colorism may help raise awareness for you and others to alleviate or lessen discrimination within the same race of people. In turn, during the interview process may help you think about and discuss colorism with family and friends. It may even help you understand that your own participation within the overall process is essential for personal change or influence you as a change agent.

### **POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

There could be risks of discomforts in this study, such as feelings of unpleasantness at recalling personal or shared memory regarding this topic. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the principal investigator. You have the right to quit any study at any time without any penalty. Any new information developed during the study that may affect your willingness to continue participation will be communicated to you. A behavioral health therapist will provide you with one free session, if you decide to contact Refresh Wellness Center, LLC. at 972-638-9179 or another option for one free pastoral counseling to contact Pastor Chriss at 682-552-8465.

### **COMPENSATION**

Subjects who are paid by UT Arlington funds must also provide W-9 tax information per UTA Accounting Services. A \$10 Starbucks gift card will be given to you for your time. The \$10 Starbucks card is personally funded by the PI.

### **ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES**

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence and still obtain the resources optional for you to call for one free counseling session.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy

of this signed consent form and all data collected including notes, transcriptions, and audio recordings from this study will be stored prior to being destroyed for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be protected by being coded. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Any references to your identity that would compromise your confidentiality will be deidentified with the pseudonym or removed. This research project is for a dissertation and will be published with deidentified information and available in UTA library after graduation.

### **CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

Questions about this research study may be directed to Latocia Keyes, who can be reached by email at [Latocia.Keyes@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Latocia.Keyes@mavs.uta.edu). Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

**As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:**

### **CONSENT**

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18-30 years old and have read or had this document read to you. You understand written English and have read this document, or it has been read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

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**SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER/DATE**

## Appendix D: Demographic Survey

(Adapted from Wilder, 2010; Fultz, 2014)

- Pseudonym:
- African American  men or  women
- Are both parents African American?  yes  no
- Do you have at least one African American parent?  yes  no
- How would you describe your skin tone?  
 Very Light  Light  Medium  Dark  Very Dark
- What year were you born? 19\_\_\_\_.
- What is the highest education completed? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your economic range a year?  
 under 10,000  10,000-20,000  30,000-40,000  50,000-60,000  70,000-above



### Appendix E: Research Questions

1. What does colorism mean to you?
  - a. Probe- How you heard of it
  - b. Probe- How do you define it
  - c. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
2. Tell me about some of your experiences with colorism
  - a. Probe- Family
  - b. Probe- Work
  - c. Probe- School
  - d. Probe- Community
  - e. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
3. What are some of the factors that have contributed to your experiences with colorism?
  - a. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
4. How have your experiences with colorism impacted you?
  - a. Probe- Health
  - b. Probe- Mental health
  - c. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
5. What are your responses to colorism?
  - a. Probe- Changing your appearance
  - b. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
6. How do you communicate your experiences with colorism to others?
  - a. Probe- Tell me more about that
  
7. How common (or not) do you think that your experiences are compared to other African Americans?
  - a. Probe- Global
  - b. Probe- Media
  - c. Probe- Society
  - d. Probe- Tell me more about that

### **Biographical Information**

Latocia Keyes earned her BA in Communications and minor in Psychology from Dallas Baptist University. Latocia has a Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Texas at Arlington. She earned her Doctor of Philosophy at the latter university. She has been a licensed master social worker (LMSW) since the year 2011. Her research interests include Africana studies relating to social ills such as colorism, racism, behavioral health (mental health/chemical dependency), physical health, disparities, and incarceration.