

COLORISM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTRA-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE  
CLASSROOM

by

Shannan M. Moore

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2016

COLORISM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTRA-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE  
CLASSROOM

by Shannan M. Moore

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2016

APPROVED BY:

Jose A. Puga Ed.D., Committee Chair

Daphne Washington Ph.D., Committee Member

Donna Joy Ed.D., Committee Member

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. The sample size consisted of 10 study participants. The theory guiding this study was Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory. This theory studies people, ideas, and values of institutions in a cultural context. Most recent studies on the phenomenon of colorism have focused on preferential treatment in the workforce and media. These studies concluded that lighter-skinned Black people are frequently provided opportunities and believed to be more capable than their darker-skinned counterparts. This study examined the phenomenon of colorism as it relates to African-American teachers and their African-American students. The way in which teachers perceived a student's academic potential, behavioral expectations, and overall capability for success was examined through in-depth interviews of each participant. The data collected were then coded, which allowed the researcher to organize the data into a logical group of categories and common themes. The findings of this study identified the existence of colorism in the classroom and as well as the way in which some African American teachers view their African American students as it related to intelligence, behavior, and attractiveness. Further research should be conducted in order to ascertain how colorism affects African American students in the primary classroom. Elementary school is the critical time in which students develop self-esteem, and it is imperative to explore this area. Furthermore, the degree to which colorism may impact the relationship between White teachers and African American students would also be valuable research.

*Keywords:* Colorism, intra-racial discrimination, skin-tone bias, color complex

### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. You've both instilled in me the belief that I can do anything, be anything, and accomplish anything. You gave me the tools and upbringing I needed to keep me going throughout this long doctoral journey. The thought of giving up occurred a few times, though fleetingly. I knew that failure was not an option. Thank you Rosalind Rowe-Bronner and Elwood Moore for your love, your sacrifices, and your guidance. I love you both more than words can say.

To my children Lexington and Jaden, always remember that you have the power to move mountains! With God in your heart and a hard-working, determined spirit, you can achieve absolutely anything.

**Table of Contents**

ABSTRACT .....	3
Dedication .....	4
List of Tables .....	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview .....	12
Background .....	12
Situation to Self.....	14
Problem Statement .....	15
Purpose Statement.....	15
Significance of the Study .....	16
Research Questions.....	17
Research Plan .....	19
Delimitations and Limitations.....	20
Definitions.....	21
Summary .....	23
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	24
Overview .....	24
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Related Literature.....	26

Theory of Assumption: Does White blood equal superiority? .....	29
Tragic Mulatto .....	31
Free People of Color .....	34
Traditions and Folk Lore .....	37
Complexion Tests .....	38
Passing .....	40
Skin Color, Media, and Sexuality .....	43
Dark-Skinned African American Males .....	46
Dark-Skinned African American Females .....	48
The History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities .....	49
Socio-Economic Status Based on Skin Tone .....	51
Reverse Colorism .....	52
Black People with Albinism .....	53
Project Specific Information .....	55
Related Research .....	56
Summary .....	58
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Overview .....	60
Design .....	60
Research Questions .....	61

Setting .....	62
Participants.....	63
Procedures.....	63
The Researcher’s Role .....	65
Data Collection .....	66
Data Triangulation .....	66
Pilot Study.....	67
Pre-Survey.....	68
Interviews.....	69
Interview Length.....	75
Post Survey .....	76
Data Analysis .....	76
Trustworthiness.....	77
Credibility .....	77
Transferability.....	77
Dependability .....	78
Confirmability.....	78
Method of Bracketing .....	80
Strategies to Achieve Bracketing.....	81
Researcher’s Personal Biases.....	82

Ethical Considerations .....	84
Summary .....	84
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	86
Overview .....	86
Participants.....	86
The Participant’s Introduction to Colorism .....	87
Results.....	88
Theme One: Introduction to Colorism at an Early Age.....	91
Childhood Background .....	93
Sub-Theme One: Colorism at School .....	94
Sub-Theme Two: Colorism in the Family .....	96
Sub-Theme Three: Parents of Opposite Skin Tones.....	98
Theme Two: Colorism and Self-Esteem.....	98
Sub-Theme Four: Dark-Skinned Women .....	101
Sub-Theme Five: Colorism in the Media.....	101
Sub-Theme Six: Dark-Skinned Actors Are Underrepresented and often Negatively Portrayed .....	102
Sub-Theme Seven: Relationships .....	102
Theme Three: The Existence of Colorism in the Classroom.....	105



Sub-Theme Eight: Teacher’s Expectations Related to Socio-Economic Status .....	107
Sub-Theme Ten: Dark-Skinned Students Receive More and Harsher Discipline .....	109
Summary .....	112
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .	114
Overview .....	114
Summary of Findings .....	114
Discussion .....	116
Implications .....	129
Theoretical Implications .....	130
Social Representation Theory .....	130
Practical Implications .....	130
Limitations .....	131
Recommendations for Future Research .....	132
Summary .....	133
REFERENCES .....	134
APPENDIX A .....	146
APPENDIX B .....	147
APPENDIX C .....	148

APPENDIX D.....	149
APPENDIX E.....	152
APPENDIX F.....	153
APPENDIX G.....	156
APPENDIX H.....	157

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Data.....	87
Table 2. Codes .....	89

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

In this chapter, the historical background of colorism and its effects on African Americans is explored. Colorism is defined as “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). Previous research on the topic along with the gap in research literature are discussed. The researcher’s life experiences are explored as well. A series of research questions guided this study: How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom? How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers? How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher’s ability to treat African American students fairly? And lastly, how does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students? The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States.

### **Background**

The issue of colorism has been a problem for Blacks in the United States from the time of slavery (Glenn, 2009). Social status among Blacks was strongly associated with skin color prior to the Civil War when slaves were divided into two groups: house slaves and field workers. The criteria for classification were directly related to the skin tone of the slave. A definitive caste system existed in which the outdoor laborers were almost entirely dark-skinned. The house workers were primarily fair-skinned and often related by blood to the White family by whom they were owned (Graham, 1999). For years after the Civil War, many Blacks internalized the

declaration that the lighter one was the better one. The problem is that colorism unjustly gives preferential treatment to persons based solely on the hue of their skin. In turn, it also penalizes others based on the perception of being too dark. Colorism affects identity, self-esteem, education, and mate selection. Colorism also has an integral role in how it affects race, class, and gender (Barrett, 1999). Much of the research on colorism pre-dates the Civil Rights Movement, and current research often refers to older research to analyze the evolution and changes of colorism. Studies show that skin color not only matters in the way Whites may perceive Blacks, but it also matters in the way Blacks perceive one another. The deep wounds inflicted by colorism have caused a rift in the Black community (Barrett, 1999). These wounds make the subject of colorism a difficult topic of discussion, yet one that many agree demands additional research to promote awareness, acceptance, and healing.

Previous research on the phenomenon of colorism revealed that skin tone plays a considerable role in a myriad of situations among African Americans. One such study, conducted by Matthew Harrison (2004), found that skin tone contributed to a job applicant's chance of getting hired. Harrison's study implicated skin tone bias within the job market. His findings showed that skin color is relevant within the job market, more highly regarded even than one's educational background and prior work experience (Harrison, 2004). Another such study, conducted by Natalye Pearson-Trammell (2010), explored colorism and self-esteem among dark-skinned African American women. Trammell's study concluded that the participants who encountered colorism were negatively affected and experienced extreme difficulty developing healthy self-esteem. This study also found that dark-skinned African American women suffered intense emotional trauma related to colorism (Trammell, 2010).

The conducted research contributed to existing knowledge by exploring the potential phenomenon of colorism in the secondary classroom as it pertained to the relationship between African American teachers and their African American students. African American teachers will benefit by exploring and determining whether the occurrence of colorism exists within the classroom.

### **Situation to Self**

My role in this qualitative study was to be an instrument. As the “human instrument” in this study, my goal was to gather data from participants while taking on the role of scholar. The philosophical assumption that led to this particular choice of research was ontological. My worldview is advocacy/participatory. The basic belief behind this worldview is that “research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researcher’s lives” (Creswell, 2009, p. 21). As a self-identifying Black woman, I have been aware of colorism my entire life, though not by its formal name. It was a concept that was introduced indirectly through casual comments such as, “She’s pretty, for a dark-skinned girl,” “I want my kids to be light,” or even “I only date light-skinned girls with good hair.” I became keenly aware from an early age that value was placed on Eurocentric features. There have been times in my life in which I accepted colorism as a habitual aspect of the African American community.

There have been times where I have been secretly ashamed of my own feelings regarding skin tone and features. More recently, I have become consciously aware of the atrocious implications colorism has had on the Black community. It is my goal to raise awareness of the issue of colorism and inspire open communication with the intention of educating and eventually eradicating the problem.

### **Problem Statement**

It is evident that the fixation on skin color by both upper-class whites and blacks derives from the fact that light-skinned blacks were given a favored status by white slave owners from their very early interaction during the period of slavery. (as cited in Graham, 1999, p. 7)

This statement describes the root of colorism. Though in the year 2016 we may seem very far removed from slavery, it is still true that African Americans suffer from the stigma of that time (Graham, 1999). The problem is that colorism unjustly gives preferential treatment to persons based solely on the hue of their skin. In turn, it also penalizes others based on the perception of being too dark. The value placed on Eurocentric features is the predecessor of colorism as we know it today, and colorism negatively affects several aspects of the lives of African Americans.

Colorism in the United States finds its roots in the notion of White racism (Hunter, 2005). According to Hunter (2005), “dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority while white skin, and thus whiteness itself, is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority” (p. 2). This study serves to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on colorism as it occurs in the secondary classroom between African American teachers and their African American students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. Colorism is generally defined as “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25).

A theory of relevance to this study is Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory.

This theory studies people, ideas, and values of institutions in a cultural context.

Moscovici described Social Representation Theory as:

systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973, p. 181).

A number of studies have looked at differences in educational achievement and socio-economic status obtained by Blacks based on their skin tone; however, past research is severely limited in its explanation of why these disparities exist. One such study conducted by Hughes and Hertel (1990) found that lighter-skinned Black people were more likely to complete additional years of school, which, in turn, lead to more prominent careers and higher salaries. Thus, according to Seltzer and Smith (1991), lighter-skinned Blacks are generally more educationally advanced, economically sound, and likely to experience status advancement than their darker-skinned counterparts. This study examined whether the inequities within the Black race are, in part, a result of preferential treatment due to skin complexion.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study filled a gap in the literature by examining the phenomenon of colorism as it occurred within the classroom of secondary schools. Previous literature has examined colorism in the workplace (Harrison & Thomas, 2009) and on the post-secondary level (Alford, 1997). This study added insight to the issue of colorism by bringing the topic to light and facilitating



open, honest conversation on how African American secondary teachers view their African American students based on skin tone. This study sought to impact the issue of colorism by deeply exploring its roots, how it is still affecting African Americans today, and why it is still affecting African Americans today. Previous studies have examined the phenomenon of colorism. These studies, however, are very few in number and have left significant gaps in the literature. In Alford's 1997 study, African American women were sampled to ascertain their views on skin tone and how it affected their everyday lives. A similar study by Harrison & Thomas in 2009 investigated skin color bias as it related to job selection. This study provided in-depth insight as to how colorism directly affects an African American's career potential.

This study hoped to provide new applications of Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory as it sought to establish a direct correlation between colorism and the systems of values and order which enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world. This study also aimed to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973)

This study may be utilized on a wider scale to affect change in African American teachers' viewpoints of their African American students based on skin tone. Doing so will expose the phenomenon and make it more acceptable to discuss.

### **Research Questions**

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. In this study, colorism is

generally defined as “the privileging of light skin tone over dark skin tone (Glenn, 2009, p. 25).

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom? Literature provides considerable empirical evidence that colorism affects Black Americans in every aspect of their lives. Hughes and Hertel (1990), found that Blacks with lighter skin achieve “higher educational attainment, occupational prestige, personal income, and family income than those with darker skin” (p. 1109). Research question number one sought to determine how African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom and how this could directly affect their African American students.
2. How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers? Empirical research on colorism explored the role of skin tone as it relates to class divisions and racial attitudes within the Black community. Keith & Herring (1991) and Seltzer & Smith (1991) found that “lighter skin is more advantageous for Black Americans; a fairer complexion indicates higher levels of income, occupational and educational achievement” (Wilder, 2008). Research question number two sought a correlation between colorism and the relationships built between African American teachers and their African American students.
3. How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher’s ability to treat African American students fairly? Research question number three sought to answer whether African American students are given preferential treatment for having fair skin in the schools under investigation. According to Keith & Herring (1991), on average, light-

skinned Blacks make 65% more and earn an average of two more years of education than darker-skinned Blacks. This research question sought to fill a gap in the literature of whether this lack in educational equality begins in the secondary education environment.

4. How does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students? Research question number four sought to determine whether African American teachers have higher or lower expectations of their African American students based solely on skin tone. Historically, “having a lighter skin color and European features provided access to better opportunity. Skin color became a criterion for the attainment of prestige in the African-American community” (Wade, 1996, p. 359). Based on empirical research of colorism within the Black community, it has been found that lighter skin is associated with higher expectations in many realms including education, income, and occupation (Wilder, 2008).

### **Research Plan**

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design was most appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to “look at things openly, undisturbed by the habits of the natural world” (p. 27). Moustakas defines the challenge of transcendental phenomenology as to “describe things as they are, to understand meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection” (1994, p. 27). Creswell (2009) proposed that phenomenological research “captured the essence of human experience concerning a phenomenon described by the participants in the study” (p. 15). The

research questions in this study explored the subjects' experiences with the phenomenon of colorism in the classroom.

Two different sites were used for this study. The first setting was an alternative high school in a suburban community in central Georgia. The second site was a traditional high school in a suburban community in central Georgia. Both were public schools with diverse populations. The participants of this study included 10 self-identified African American teachers age 25 and older. The data collection procedures for this study consisted of a pilot survey, pre-survey, in-depth interviews, and a post survey. The data were then analyzed using open and axial coding.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations are characteristics within the researcher's control that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Simon, 2011). This study had several delimitations. First, the participants were self-identified African American teachers on a secondary level. Second, each teacher was age 25 and above. This age was chosen so participants could give a more mature perspective on the topic. Finally, the sample participants were chosen from the metro Atlanta, Georgia, area. This location was chosen based on convenience for the researcher. These delimitations were established to define the scope and focus of the study by targeting a specific group of participants.

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are beyond the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). The limitations of this study were the sample itself. The issue of colorism is not one that is typically shared and discussed openly. Establishing a comfortable, trusting environment in which study participants felt at ease enough to share true thoughts and feelings proved to be a challenge. Further limitations included the willingness of sample participants to

provide honest feedback from the interview questions and survey. The location of the two sites did not provide additional limitations. Both schools were located in the metro Atlanta, Georgia, area.

### **Definitions**

Throughout this dissertation, several words and terms are used related to the topic of colorism. The meanings of some of these terms have changed over time. Others are used interchangeably with other words and terms. The definitions for these words are provided because many of them are not currently used in today's vernacular. Additionally, some of the words and terms are considered politically incorrect and racially insensitive. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand these terms and the impact that colorism has on the Black community.

The following are the words and terms that will be defined:

1. *African American* - For the purposes of this dissertation, African American will be used interchangeably with Black, Black American, People of Color, Colored, and Negro. These terms represent the race of the subjects of the study (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).
2. *Colorism* - For the purposes of this study, colorism is defined as "the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone" (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). Colorism is also known as skin tone bias or color complex (Russell et al., 1992).
3. *Paper Bag Test* - Historically, this was a test conducted by various Black organizations in order to ascertain whether a person's skin was light enough to engage in certain activities. A person was made to put their hand into a brown paper bag. If the person's skin tone

was the same tone as or lighter than the bag, the person would be allowed entrance/admission into the activity or group (Kerr, 2006).

4. *Gens de Couleur Libre (Free People of Color)* - A classification of people in Louisiana during the French rule (1718-1768). They were of mixed African, European, and Native American ancestry. Not completely white, not completely black. Neither slave nor completely free (Kein, 2000).
5. *Creole* - For the purposes of this study, the term Creole is used to describe a person of mixed African, European, and possibly Native American ancestry who is born in Louisiana or descended from those who were born there (Kein, 2000).
6. *Passing* - When a person of mixed Afro-European ancestry possesses enough phenotypically European traits to “pass” for white and does so by living their life as a “white” person (Graham, 2000).

#### *Terms Associated with Light, Medium, and Dark Skin Tones*

The following terms are used to describe the varying skin tones of Black people (Wilder, 2009):

*Light*: bright, light bright, high yellow, red, red bone, fair, pretty skin, house nigga, yellow, caramel, mixed, white, vanilla, high-brown, light-brown.

*Medium*: brown-skinned, brown, tan, caramel, pecan tan, cocoa, mocha, medium brown

*Dark*: black, blackie, tar baby, chocolate, blue-black, charcoal jiggaboo, midnight

*Multiracial Blacks*: Black Americans have historically been defined according to their varying blood quantum. The following labels were created by sociologist Edward Byron Reuter to define Blacks of mixed ancestry (Kerr, 2006, p. 5).

- *Mulatto* - Half Negro and half White
- *Quadroon* - Mulatto and White

- *Octoroon* - Quadroon and White
- *Cascos* - Mulatto and Mulatto
- *Sambo* - Mulatto and Negro
- *Mango* - Sambo and Negro
- *Mustiffee* - Octoroon and White
- *Mustifno* - Mustiffee and White

### **Summary**

Chapter One provided an overview of this study on colorism among African-American teachers and their students. The value placed on Eurocentric features is the predecessor of colorism as we know it today, and colorism negatively affects several aspects of the lives of African Americans. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. The topic of colorism is one that has plagued the Black community from the time of slavery and continues to determine how Blacks view each other. Black Americans deal with the nuances of colorism on a regular basis. It is something that exists in families, in the workplace, in social situations, and in relationships. It affects our status in the workplace, and, in some cases, our ability to get a job at all. It affects the choices of a spouse, which correlates to the desire for children of a certain skin tone. This study sought to determine if colorism also affects the way African American teachers view and treat their African American students.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Colorism is defined as “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). The issue of colorism has been a problem for Blacks in the United States since the time of slavery. Social status within the Black race was strongly associated with skin tone prior to the Civil War.

Through the centuries of slavery, lighter skin signified closer kinship to the master- son or daughter, sister or brother. Lighter skin might mean kinder treatment because of those blood bonds. Lighter skin might have meant easier labors. And after slavery, lighter skin might have led to greater opportunities in education, in the work force, and in the marriage market – especially for women. Darker skin meant greater limitations, harsher treatment, and a greater remove from privilege (Folan, 2010, p. 111).

Research suggests that skin tone bias within the African American community has created power disparity and continues to perpetuate stereotypes originally initiated by white slave owners (Mitchell, 2002). Historically, the belief existed that dark-skinned African American slaves were considered by Whites to be less attractive, lazy, and unintelligent. On the contrary, light-skinned African Americans were seen as more attractive, intelligent, and capable, due primarily to their biological relation to their white slave-owners (Russell et al., 1992). Chapter Two will explore the theoretical framework of the study and the vast literature related to colorism and provide an overall summary.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two



public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. A theory of relevance to this study is Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory. This theory describes people, ideas, and values of institutions in a cultural context.

Moscovici described Social Representation Theory as:

Systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973, p. 181).

According to Moscovici, Social Representation Theory "hopes to elucidate the links which unite human psychology with contemporary social and cultural questions" (1998, p. 241). Social Representation Theory has the potential at least to address contemporary social problems and so invite practical engagement and intervention (Moscovici, 1998, p. 405). This theory has informed the literature on the topic by addressing the phenomenon of colorism as a societal problem within the African American community. The research topic of colorism relates to Social Representation Theory because the theory attempts to address the social and cultural questions that exist as to whether colorism still has a significant effect on the African American community. The specific research focus may advance the theory by finding a correlation between the existence of colorism in the secondary classroom and the relationships between African American teachers and their African American students.

The researcher's worldview was advocacy/participatory. The basic meaning of this worldview is that "research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives

of the participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researcher's lives" (Creswell, 2009, p. 21).

### **Related Literature**

The skin tones of African Americans are widely varied, from the palest ivory to the darkest ebony. Historically, this wide spectrum was due primarily to miscegenation, interbreeding between slaves and their white masters, sometimes willingly, but more often by force. There was also interbreeding between African American slaves and Native Americans. In 1619, the first Africans entered the United States as indentured servants. These native Africans worked alongside White European settlers (Neal & Wilson, 1989).

During the early 17th century, historians documented the disproportionate ratio of men to women in the United States. Among African Americans, the ratio was three men for every two women. The ratio for Whites at that same time was three to four men to every woman (Russell et al., 1992). This significant gender disproportion led to several interracial unions, both legal and non-legal, between White men and Black women, White men and Native American Women, and African men and White/Native women. Initially, unions of this type were legal, therefore, miscegenation was common. These unions were the direct result of the "gender imbalance" (Russell et al., 1992, p. 12). This imbalance in combination with rough frontier life created the need for relationships that were "more pragmatic than romantic" (Russell et al., 1992, p. 12). The focus of marriage at this time was opportunity, procreation, and protection (Russell et al., 1992). During this time, free White men married African slaves and White female servants married Black men. The latter arrangement, however, was far less common and often met with more opposition. The low number of available African women was further drained by marriages

to White men, so African men turned to Native American women for love and marriage (Russell et al., 1992).

White colonists found no issue with the sexual unions of Africans and Native Americans. Both groups of people were considered to be of low status and were therefore ignored so long as there was no interference with the colonists. There was so much intermixing between these two groups that entire tribes of Native Americans were “genetically absorbed into the Black population” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 12). This accounts for the fact that at least one quarter of all African Americans today have some Native American ancestry. The results of these diverse unions produced a population of diverse skin tones and physical features (Russell et al., 1992).

Virginia officially acknowledged slavery as a legal entity in 1661. By 1662, the first legislation was passed to obliterate widespread miscegenation. The law stated that children born to Negro women would inherit the status of the mother, whether the mother was free or enslaved (Alford, 1997). Also, a “Christian” (a label that only applied to Whites at this time) who had sexual relations with a Negro woman would be subject to steep fines (Russell et al., 1992).

In other parts of the United States, interracial amalgamation continued to occur and often took a different pattern. For instance, in many parts of the South, the shortage of White European women in sparsely populated areas contributed to White plantation owners’ sexual and often emotional relationships with their Black female slaves (Hunter, 2004). The children conceived as a result of these unions were either enslaved along with their mothers or given their freedom by their White fathers. Some of those who were freed were given land and provided with an education. As a result of this, a separate, “third-class” of mulattoes was established (Russell et al., 1992). Whites, Blacks, and Biracial/Multiracial people formed a “three-tiered” society in which each tier had distinct social values. Social distinctions between Blacks and

mixed race people became divergent and a rift between light and dark skin was created (Russell et al., 1992).

To capitalize on these new class distinctions between Black and Biracial, light skin and dark skin, Whites implemented a “divide and conquer” strategy which had tremendous implications for the Black race. Lighter-skinned slaves were afforded more privileges from their White fathers/slave masters. Generally, these slaves were allowed to work in the home of the slave owner, cook his family’s meals, and be companions to his pure White children. Dark-skinned slaves, however, were forced to perform arduous duties in the cotton fields. Opportunities available to light-skinned slaves, such as education and freedom, were hardly, if ever, offered to those with dark skin.

Blacks with fairer skin tones and Caucasian features were seen as “genetically superior” to Blacks with darker skin. Most Whites adopted this theory in assumption that lighter-skinned Blacks had a significant amount of White blood, and were therefore given preferential treatment. Lighter-skinned slaves were often prized over darker-skinned slaves and commanded a significantly higher amount at slave auctions (Neal & Wilson, 1989). Lighter-skinned Blacks were “systematically privileged via their connection with the white slave owner and thus their connection with whiteness” (Hunter, 2005, p. 19). It was common practice for overseers and members of the white, slave-owning family to give preferential treatment to racially mixed children with fair skin tones. These mixed people, commonly known as mulattoes, were often given opportunities for freedom. These mulattoes formed a growing class of free, light-skinned Blacks (Hunter, 2005). The majority of these mulattoes were ex-slaves granted their freedom by their slave owners/fathers; others were Blacks who had never been slaves. “In 1850, mulattos or mixed bloods constituted 37% of the free Negro population” (Hunter, 2005, p. 19). These free

Blacks was able to gain skills that enabled them to become successful businessmen and women. In many of the major Southern cities, these freed Blacks were the beginning of the “light-skinned elite” in the United States (Hunter, 2005, p. 19).

After the Civil War, the light-skinned elite were in the position to lead the now-free population of African Americans. They were able to take these leadership positions effortlessly because they had been “economically established” for years (Hunter, 2005). Popular opinion by many whites held that the success of these mulattoes was evidence of the superiority of white blood. They also believed that there was a direct correlation between the quantity of white blood one had and “his or her intellectual capabilities” (Hunter, 2005, p. 19).

#### **Theory of Assumption: Does White blood equal superiority?**

Literary critic Sterling A. Brown wrote of White stereotypes of mulattoes which were based on racist assumptions:

First, the mulatto inherits the vices of both races and none of the virtues; second, any achievement of a Negro is to be attributed to the White blood in his veins. The logic runs that even inheriting the worst from Whites is sufficient for achieving among Negroes...The mulatto is a victim of a divided inheritance; from his White blood come his intellectual strivings, his unwillingness to be a slave; from his Negro blood come his baser emotional urges, his indolence, his savagery (Russell et al., 1992, p. 137).

E.B. Reuter’s work written in 1918, *The Mulatto in the United States*, is an example of the assumption that White blood causes genetic superiority. According to Reuter, mixed-race African Americans have “emerged as leaders of the black community because of their genetic likeness to whites instead of the opportunity structure available to them as light-skinned descendants of Freedmen” (Hunter, 2005, p. 19). Reuter believed that mulattoes were

considered superior by pure Blacks due to their possession of white blood. In his own words, “the possession of white blood is an evidence of superiority” (Reuter, 1918, p. 103).

Reuter believed that mulattoes held a precarious and often grievous position in society being neither Black nor White. According to Reuter:

They despise the lower race with a bitterness born of their degrading association with it, and which is all the more galling because it needs must be concealed. They everywhere endeavor to escape it and to conceal and forget their relationship with it. They are uncertain of their own worth; conscious of their superiority to the native they are nowhere sure of their equality with the superior group. They envy the white, aspire to equality with them, and are embittered when the realization of such ambition is denied them.

They are a dissatisfied and an unhappy group (1918, p. 103).

Reuter developed a series of distinct racial classifications based on blood quantum. These included the categories, including mulatto (Negro and white), quadroon (mulatto and white), octoroon (quadroon and white), cascous (mulatto and mulatto), and more.

According to Reuter, any amount of mixed blood “is a problem” (Kerr, 2006, p. 5). Reuter believed in the superiority of white blood and the inferiority of black blood. He stated, “Regardless of color or training, (people of color) would never be in any social organization of cultured white people anywhere in America” (Kerr, 2006, p. 5). Reuter believed that all people of color, regardless of blood quantum, were inferior and incapable of achieving great success. Reuter failed to realize through his own classifications, that “white had become black, and black had become white” (Kerr, 2006, p. 5). The possibility of maintaining racial boundaries disappeared with the first incidents of miscegenation hundreds of years ago. Of Reuter’s classifications, the term mulatto is the most common. Mulatto is a term that originated in 16<sup>th</sup>

century Spain. The term is derived from the word mule and is commonly used to describe the offspring of a person of African descent and a person of European descent (Kerr, 2006).

Reuter's theory of White supremacy was based on racist ideologies. The impact of skin color on education, occupation, and income is extraordinarily significant (Hall, 2005). According to Hall (2005), "the association of skin color with power and dominant group privilege has sustained its existence as an open question in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (p. 4). The relationship between skin color and education in the African American community derives its foundation from the "values of external groups" (Hall, 2005, p. 25). In the United States, the quintessential external group is European Americans. According to Hughes & Hertel (1988), European Americans are generally the "decision makers" (p. 25). In addition, Hughes & Hertel (1988) believed that when confronted with a dark-skinned person, European Americans believe they are seeing someone "less competent – someone less like themselves than a fairer-complexioned person" (p. 25).

This view originated during the slavery era of the American Antebellum South. It was during this time that African Americans with lighter skin were shown privilege, often given special treatment, and provided with opportunities made unavailable to the darker skinned. These opportunities eventually included education, which would, in turn, create a direct correlation between skin color, occupation, and income (Hall, 2005).

### **Tragic Mulatto**

Nineteenth-century White writers felt compelled to portray mulattoes in a way that precluded their acceptance into White society. This was accomplished through writings which tainted the character of the mulatto (Russell et al., 1992). *Old Creole Days*, a novel written by George Washington Cable in 1879, depicts "beautiful octoroons of New Orleans" who became

the mistresses of wealthy, White men (as cited in Russell et al., 1992, p. 136). The majority of writers of this time portrayed racially mixed women as frail beauties who were incapable of having healthy, successful relationships. More often than not, these women were destined for unhappiness. Consequently, men having any quantum of Black blood were usually portrayed as “dark-skinned brutes since a sexually appealing portrayal of a Black man would have been far too threatening for White readers” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 136). The female mulatto characters of this time almost always met a tragic end. The misfortune and disgrace associated with light-skinned, Black female characters were so common in nineteenth-century literature that the term “tragic mulatta” was coined (Russell et al., 1992).

Literary critics have speculated that the tragic mulatta genre was popular due mainly to its audience, which consisted of White females. These White women resented mulattas and the miscegenation they represented. White women in the South witnessed the brutal victimization of slave women by their White husbands. This caused great offense and resentment towards Negro women. Literature featuring the products of these forced relationships offered its readers a way to acknowledge the “unsavory history of plantation rape” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 136). The tragic ending to these stories served to “soothe White anxieties about unchecked mixing of races” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 136).

Consequently, the tragic mulatta genre was also prevalent in early Black fiction writings. In general, the early Black American authors were mulatto themselves, and writers commonly write about what they have experienced (Russell et al., 1992). The point of view of these authors differed greatly from their White counterparts. Black American authors found a medium in which to explore the concepts of slave rape, racism, and injustice. Their writings often depicted mulattas who were light enough to pass into the White race. This topic served to explore the



“question of allegiance” to the Black race and provide a comic relief to Blacks who felt that these mulattas were playing the biggest joke of all on oppressive Whites; that is, blending unnoticed into their society (Russell et al., 1992).

In the 1920s, there were very few opportunities for Black actors and actresses. Skin tone played a huge role in whether they were hired for jobs. The great Harlem entertainer Josephine Baker was considered “light-skinned”; however, she was not deemed light enough to be hired as a chorus girl in 1921. She went on to become famous worldwide and achieved great success as an entertainer in Europe (Russell et al., 1992). Though European audiences adored Josephine, Americans still praised light skin and continued to hire women with white or near-white skin. It was a common belief at that time that “dark-skinned girls would offend middle-class White and Black patrons alike” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 143). It is an unfortunate fact that Blacks during this time were only given three stereotypical roles: the coon, the brute, and the tragic mulatto (Russell et al., 1992).

In the classic tragic mulatto film *Imitation of Life* (1959), Juanita Moore starred as the dark-skinned mother of a very light (mulatto) daughter. This film depicted the trials of a very fair-skinned girl who grew up confused at her position in life, being neither White nor Black. As she grew, she decided to pass for White, which caused a great deal of strife and ultimately led to the death of her mother from a broken heart. The message behind this story is the following: “If you do not mix races, you will be generously rewarded; if you try to pass as White, tragedy awaits” (Russell et al., 1992, p.147).

Ironically, the majority of actresses portraying a “tragic mulatto” were themselves White. At the time these films were most popular, Hollywood felt uncomfortable with interracial romantic relationships (Russell et al., 1992). In 1930, the Code of the Motion Picture Industry

banned any and all on-screen contact of a sexual nature between Blacks and Whites. This ban was lifted in 1968, however, films portraying interracial love still had very little physical contact between Blacks and Whites (Russell et al., 1992).

### **Free People of Color**

One distinctly fascinating aspect of U.S. history pertains to free people of color in New Orleans. This society, also known as the *gens de couleur libre*, consisted of former slaves freed by their masters, slaves who purchased their freedom from their masters, or Blacks who had never been enslaved (Blassingame, 1973). In 1860 New Orleans, “color was closely correlated with status; 80 percent of all Blacks were slaves and 70 percent of all Mulattos were free” (Blassingame, 1973, p. 21).

The *femmes de couleur libre*, or free women of color, were another distinct tier of mixed race women from this society. These women were often classified as quadroons. A quadroon is a person who is one-fourth Black and three-fourths White (Voltz, 2008). These women occupied a complex space in the social hierarchy of New Orleans. “As part of the population of free people of color, the quadroons were in a class higher than slaves but lower than poor whites” (Voltz, 2008, p. 22). “Limited by the encumbrances of race, class and gender, free women of color occupied a precarious position in their society” (Voltz, 2008, p. 26). These “quadroons” chose to use their social status by capitalizing on opportunities for financial and social gain. They were keenly aware that their “exotic” beauty was coveted among high-society White males and therefore offered themselves as mistresses in exchange for money, protection, and social status (Voltz, 2008). This practice was known as placage. Placage was a system “that existed in Louisiana, and other French and Spanish slaveholding territories, whereby women of color entered into long-standing, formalized relationships with white European men” (Kein, 2000, p.

58). These relationships were established at very high-society functions known as Quadroon Balls. Most scholars agree Quadroon Balls were officially established in 1805. The sole purpose of these balls was to introduce elite White males to mixed-race women.

Under the careful watch of their mothers or aunts, these free women of color “charmed their way into the hearts and pockets of Louisiana’s white males” (Voltz, 2008, p. 46). The ultimate goal for each mother was to secure a placage arrangement for her daughter with a rich, well-born, white Creole man. This gentleman would serve as her protector and provide a home, financial security for her and any children they may have, as well as a “proper settlement” in the event that their relationship ended (Kerr, 2000). It was customary for him to care for her completely during their time together. Children born of these unions were frequently educated in France. Male children often inherited land from their rich white fathers. This class of free people of color (*gens de couleur libre*) was “well-educated, cultured, wealthy, and powerful (Kein, 2000, p. 69).

“White men chose their mulatto paramours quite intentionally, and not just because white women were few in number” (Kein, 2000, p. 61). This practice had been established some 200 years prior in St. Dominigue, when French planters made the “finest” slave women their mistresses (Kein, 2000). These women were described as “handsome, with silky black hair and straight features” (Kein, 2000, p. 61). The slave women were carefully selected and bred in order to create a caste of exotic beauties known as *les sirenes*. These women and their children were brought to Louisiana after the slave uprising in St. Dominigue (Kein, 2000).

Because most whites believed in white supremacy, their attitudes had a profound effect on the way Negroes viewed themselves. Since white skin was glorified, since whites had all the power and most of the wealth and education, many Negroes accepted the concept

of the goodness, purity, and sanctity of whiteness and the degradation of blackness.

Consequently, many of them tried and a number succeeded in passing for white. Mulatto women sometimes spurned unions with blacks and welcomed white males because they were flattered by the attentions they received from the “superior” race. John Blassingame, *Black New Orleans* (Kein, 2000, p. 252).

Some Creoles of color “fetishized their European appearance” (Kein, 2000, p. 257) because people of mixed African and European ancestry were afforded privileges not available to those of pure African descent. Those Creoles who appeared more European in phenotype often reflected the same white supremacist attitudes of pure whites. They separated themselves entirely from those with a greater degree of Negro blood.

This “color line” adopted by Creoles was both approved and encouraged by whites as a means of dividing the Negroes and making it easier to control them. By law, the light-skinned free Negro was barred from mingling with the dark-skinned slave, and he sometimes held slaves. The education, wealth, occupations, and refinement of mulattoes also acted as a barrier to their intercourse with the poorer, less skilled, and less educated Blacks.

During the Reconstruction Era (1863–1877), division within the Black community began to grow. Skin tone had an essential role in this division. Ideas regarding beauty, class, status, and intelligence were based on skin color and features such as nose width, size of the lips, and straightness of the hair (Parks & Woodson, 2002). Features and skin tone were divided into two categories: good and bad. “Good” features became synonymous with Eurocentric standards of beauty, while “bad” features were associated with African traits (Parks & Woodson, 2002).

Several classifications existed to further separate and distinguish persons within the Black race. These classifications were specific to the varying skin tones from lightest to darkest.

Common terms used to describe light skin are fair, vanilla, light, bright, yellow, and red. Common terms used to describe dark skin are black, chocolate, cocoa, jet black, and blue-black. Those in between the two extremes are often called brown, tan, bronze, or brown-skinned. Often, the descriptors of dark skin are negative in origin, including ink spot, tar baby, and midnight black (Parrish, 1944). Charles H. Parrish was one of the first to study the phenomenon of skin color stereotypes. His study found that junior high students had as many as 145 terms to describe skin color. Each term was associated with a specific skin color as well as a correlating personality type. In general, Parrish found that the students identified light to medium skin tones with “intelligence and refinement,” while darker skin tones were associated with “toughness, meanness, and physical strength” (as cited in Russell et al., 1992, p. 66).

### **Traditions and Folk Lore**

A tradition of folk songs and poems that pertain to skin color is documented in African American history. A “historical awareness of complexion difference” can be correlated through these works (Kerr, 2006, p. 18). The majority of these works admire fair skin and European features while insulting dark skin and African traits. In Thurman Wallace’s “The Blacker the Berry,” a song was sung after a dark-skinned girl comes to a party thrown by light-skinned people: “A yellow gal rides in a limousine / A brown-skin rides in a Ford / A black gal rides on an old jackass / But she gets there, yes my Lord” (Kerr, 2006, p. 16). Kerr (2006) stated that folk songs and folk poetry are “deeply encoded patterns of knowledge that organize, or affirm, our understanding of who we are” (p. 16). As African Americans assemble a self-identity, it is not surprising that the attributes of skin color, hair texture, and facial features would be the main factors from which that identity is defined.

Another poem which still circulates in today's modern society is the following: "If you're white, you're right / If you're yellow, you're mellow / If you're brown, stick around / If you're black, step back" (Kerr, 2006, p. 18). This poem clearly and directly classifies the value of a person based on skin color alone.

### **Complexion Tests**

Whites implemented complexion tests as a means of keeping light-skinned Blacks from "passing" into white organizations and institutions (Kerr, 2006). According to the early works of American writers, there were several ways in which a person's Black blood could be detected. One of the most popular methods of distinguishing a fair-skinned Black person from a White person was the "nail test." This test stemmed from the belief that a person with Negro blood would have a purplish semi-circle on the nail bed. According to the book *Senator North*, published in 1900, "the nails are the last stronghold of negro blood" (as cited in Kerr, 2006, p. 22). Other tests conducted by Whites included the examining of hair roots, searching for a brownish eye tint, or even examining the presence of blue veins (Kerr, 2006).

Another form of complexion testing derived from the assistance of Blacks hired to spot fair-skinned Blacks who were "passing." These "spotters" were hired by Whites from the 1920s until the 1940s to identify Blacks attempting to gain entry into White-only establishments (Kerr, 2006). One of the most prevalent, though unspoken, forms of skin color testing came in the form of the paper bag test. The exact origin of this test is not historically documented; however, it is believed to have roots in Louisiana. According to folklore, the paper bag test was initiated at the Creole Waikiki Club. This club catered to Creole Catholic women insistent upon keeping darker-skinned individuals out. They developed the system of using a brown paper bag as a litmus test of sorts. No one darker than the bag would be admitted to their exclusive club. This

test has since been used to exclude dark-skinned individuals from clubs, social groups, sororities, fraternities, and even churches (Kerr, 2006).

Some of the most prestigious organizations within the Black community are rumored to have been “paper bag clubs,” including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, the Girl Friends, the Links, Jack and Jill, Howard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Hampton University, and many others (Kerr, 2006). Historically, many African American civil rights leaders have been light-skinned due to the existence of colorism in Black organizations (Hunter, 2005). Civil rights leaders were not immune to color tests. The disproportionate number of light-skinned male and female civil rights leaders supports this theory (Hunter, 2005).

Still more tests existed for the sole purpose of excluding those with dark skin and coarse features. Among these were the blue vein test and the comb test. The first consisted of simply observing whether a person’s blue veins were visible through their skin. If one’s veins were indeed visible, then admittance was permitted into the group. The latter describes a tradition that many Black organizations, including churches, instituted to discriminate against non-racially mixed people. The comb test was conducted by hanging a fine-toothed comb on a rope at the entrance of an organization. If a person’s hair was too “nappy,” or coarse, and was snagged in the comb, that individual would not be admitted (Russell et al., 1992). Straight hair was regarded as good hair and was often associated with lighter skin privilege.

Skin color has always been a determining factor in status, reputation, and mobility within the Black elite. Upper-class Black families have historically endured conversations on the advantages of good hair, keen features, and a fair complexion (Graham, 1999). These code words for having less African features have adapted over time; however, Black people, the upper

class in particular, still think about these things. Affluent and middle-class Blacks alike do not want to be White per se; rather, they have seen the benefits that have historically been afforded to lighter-skinned Blacks with more European features. In 1995, the Russell Sage Foundation conducted a study that found that Whites feel “more comfortable around light-skinned Blacks than they do around dark-skinned Blacks, and hence light-skinned Blacks receive better job opportunities from White employers” (Graham, 1999, p. 378).

### **Passing**

Passing is when a person of mixed Afro-European ancestry possesses enough phenotypically European traits to “pass” for white and does so by living their life as a “White” person (Graham, 1999). The phenomenon of racial passing has been studied by social scientists and historians for hundreds of years. There are many reasons why colored people would take the risk of passing for White. Historically, they did so “rather than suffer within the boundaries of the deteriorating material and social conditions of living and working as colored” (Kein, 2000, p. 300). In 2014, Hobbs reexamined the phenomenon of racial passing and stated, “From the late 18th century to the present, racially ambiguous men and women have wrestled with complex questions about the racial conditions of their times, and they have fashioned complex understandings about their places in the world” (as cited in Sloan, 2013, para. 10).

Graham (2000), during conversations with several light-skinned elite Black people, was told a wide variety of secret family experiences. Several key rules were developed in order to successfully pass and maintain secret status in the White world. Among these rules were the following:

1. Passing will be easier if you attempt it while away at college, preferably on a campus that is predominantly White and is located in a small rural town.



2. Change your last name to one that is not associated with Black family names. Avoid such surnames as Jones, Jackson, Johnson, Williams, Thomas, and Brown.
3. Re-create your family tree by describing yourself as an only child born of parents who died years ago, and who were also only children.
4. Relocate to a new community that insulates you from interacting with Blacks and that is at least a few hundred miles from your family's home. Avoid cities like New Orleans and Charlestown, SC, where Whites are adept at spotting light-skinned blacks who are passing.
5. Think of some manner in which to "kill yourself off" in the minds of Black people who know you and your family. If your parents or siblings are willing participants in assisting you, you can say that you now live outside the country, that you have entered a cult or religious order, or even that you have died.
6. Realize that Blacks – not Whites – are the ones who can threaten your security as a black person living a lie. Affluent blacks who understand the passing phenomenon and may try to "out" you are particularly dangerous.
7. Develop associations with organizations and institutions that will buttress your new White resume. Convert to the Presbyterian Church or the Republican Party.
8. Recognize the physical features that can undermine your new identity. Avoid getting tanned at the beach. If your hair is not straight, keep it short, wear a hairpiece, or maintain weekly touchups.
9. Enhance those physical features that can support your new identity. Lightening your hair color, narrowing your nose, thinning your lips, and adopting a more

conservative style in clothing and speech are all simple steps that can aid your transition.

10. Realize that no one in your life, including your spouse, should be trusted with your secret, except for your adult-aged child, who, presumably will maintain secrecy because of his or her own self-interest in living as a white person.
11. Avoid applying for high-profile positions or admission into selective clubs or lineage-obsessed institutions like secret societies or prestigious co-op boards so that you will not be subjected to probing questions and searches.
12. Avoid the appearance of being secretive about your racial identity. If your physical appearance makes it possible, claim to be of White European background. If you have a darker complexion, claim to be a mixture of a White European background and a darker European or Middle Eastern background. Never claim any ethnic group from continental Africa or Mexico or Central America.
13. Avoid sitting with or being photographed with Black people because if you have any vaguely Black features, those characteristics will be exaggerated and suddenly make you seem quite similar to “real Blacks” standing near you.
14. If the members of the Black family you have “divorced” are willing to support your efforts to pass, always meet them on neutral territory where neither you nor they live, work, or socialize. Never meet them at your home and never meet them in settings that are predominately White.
15. If the black relatives you have “divorced” are unwilling to support your efforts, make a complete break from them, because they can too easily undo the façade you have created in your new community and new life.

16. To avoid the risk of giving birth to a “throwback child” with Black features, consider adopting a White child.
17. If having a child is a priority to you, you will be better able to explain your child’s dark features if your spouse is a member of a dark-skinned ethnic group. Southern Italians, Greeks, Armenians, Brazilians, and Cubans are among the groups that fit this category. (Graham, 2000)

The “Rules of Passing” have not changed much throughout the years and hold true for those attempting to pass in today’s society.

### **Skin Color, Media, and Sexuality**

In present-day society, colorism still exists, though it is not openly acknowledged. It is a concept so engrained into the Black community that its presence is both scorned and accepted. It can be brazenly spoken, or quietly acknowledged. It is present in the day-to-day lives of American Blacks whether they are conscious of it or not.

Within the African American community, skin tone is used as a mediating variable in determining levels of physical attraction, intelligence, and competence. It is a widely recognized fact within the African American community that dark-skinned models, actresses, and performers are often not cast in roles depicting them as love interests or beauty queens. Generally, these roles are given to phenotypically European-looking Black women. Black women in the media tend to have the characteristics of lighter skin, long, straight hair, and finer features (Breland, 1997).

Within the African American community, the following is widely recognized:

In Black music videos, a fairly accurate barometer of trends in popular culture, fair-skinned, and/or ethnically nebulous actresses/dancers with long flowing hair or hair

weaves are more often than not depicted as the love interest of featured artists. Women of darker complexions are often relegated to lesser roles in the background if they appear at all. (Ebony, 1992, p. 121)

The media perpetuates the belief that light-skinned people of color, particularly women, are the most desirable and attractive. In modern day media, mixed-race women represent Black women as a whole (Hunter, 2005). The implication of this phenomenon is the indoctrination of millions of women to believe that light skin, European features, and straight hair are superior. Print media also influences men by promoting European standards of beauty as superior. This, in turn, influences which features they find attractive in the opposite sex. Tastes and preferences are subliminally socially constructed by the media (Hunter, 2005, p. 87).

Psychologists and sociologists have documented volumes regarding the existence of three main stereotypical depictions of Black women and the way in which they infiltrate our media. These depictions are Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel.

Mammy is, of course, the overweight, dark-skinned woman who offers comfort and security while seeming to require nothing in return. She's the image that has the least sex appeal and today is the "matriarch": the ceaseless caretaker who puts the needs of others above her own and seems never to require anything for herself. Sapphire, the sharp-tongued, tough-talking emasculator, is usually found in the stereotype of a black woman with a finger-wagging, neck-rolling swagger. Finally, there's Jezebel, the shapely, light-skinned, exotic seductress who can't get enough sex: anytime, anywhere. (Folan, 2010, p.108)

Unfortunately, these media stereotypes have ingrained a negative image of Black women in those who may not have the opportunity to interact with Black women on a day-to-day basis.

People tend to believe what they see on television, and these images have had a definite negative impact on the Black community as a whole. Fortunately, “the Black woman stereotype in the media is under renovation” (Folan, 2010, p. 109). Women like Oprah, Michelle Obama, and Condoleeza Rice, among others, have introduced us to a new “type” of Black woman: one that is attractive, smart, isn’t “smart-tongued and emasculating,” is in good physical shape, and is not sexually promiscuous (Folan, 2010).

In 1983, the first Black Miss America, Vanessa Williams, was crowned. Her victory over the other contestants brought both pride and offense to the Black community. The crowning of the first Black beauty queen in the largest pageant in the United States was a major achievement; however, the fact that Vanessa Williams was very fair-skinned with green eyes caused controversy among Blacks. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) issued the statement declaring that Williams was not “in essence Black” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 153). Others showed no surprise that Williams was chosen stating that the pageant chose the “least Black looking person they could find” (Russell, et al., 1992, p. 153).

The modeling industry deals with skin color in less predictable ways. Conservative advertising agencies prefer “mainstream” looking models. More progressive designers and companies often seek “exotic” models. What determines the concepts of mainstream and exotic varies by market. Women with predominant African features often achieve great success internationally in both runway and print campaigns. These same models, however, would find it difficult to book a more “commercial” job due to their strong features (Russell et al, 1992). High fashion magazines find the exotic, African features avant garde and appealing to their readers. Advertising campaigns promoting standard household products; however, consistently

hire light-skinned models. Advertising agencies do not believe that dark-skinned women, regardless of their beauty, can successfully sell their products (Russell et al., 1992).

Black male models are subject to many of the same issues their female colleagues experience. Many advertising agencies use lighter-skinned male models with fine features and light eyes. Models with these features are deemed more appealing to consumers and less threatening than male models with dark skin, broad features, and course hair. “Dark skin on men, especially when combined with broad features, always seems to suggest that they are hard, mean, or poor” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 156).

The perpetual use of light-skinned models in the media has caused strife and conflict in the Black community. Dark-skinned people, particularly women, can be made to feel inferior to the images of fairness with which they are bombarded on a daily basis. This occurrence greatly affects the self-esteem of darker-skinned individuals. In turn, the continuous barrage of light-skinned models has had an adverse effect on Black males. The European standard of beauty the American media supports has brainwashed the Black man into believing that the most beautiful Black women are the ones with fair skin, long, straight hair, and keen features (Russell et al., 1992).

### **Dark-Skinned African American Males**

Dark-skinned African American men are often portrayed in a negative light in the media. Dark-skinned males are often seen as criminals, thugs, and delinquents. Society as a whole views them as “less intelligent and more aggressive than their lighter-skinned peers” (Breland, 1997, p. 22). The trend towards endorsing light-skinned men in the media, however, is shifting. In an increasing trend, darker-skinned males are being featured in movies, campaigns, and various other media outlets as “highly sexualized and attractive” (Hunter, 2005, p. 87).

Outwardly, this seems to be an indication of racial advancement; however, this trend actually ties in with historical racial stereotypes. These stereotypes are based on the beliefs that African-American men are “hyper-sexual and sexually dangerous” (Hunter, 2005, p. 87). Hall (2005) stated, “American men of African descent whose dark skin is a masculine contrast to the Euro-American mainstream are perceived as a super-masculine-sex-crazed-criminal stereotype” (p. 149). By portraying African American men as such, their inhumane treatment becomes irrelevant (Hall, 2005).

In Black American culture, dark skin is believed to be more masculine due to its “dominance value” over light skin (Hall, 2005, p. 156). This assumption originates from the one-drop theory, which suggests that one drop of Black blood is all that is needed in order to classify someone as Black (Hall, 2005). The one-drop theory suggests that “the gene for dark skin is so potent that, regardless of the appearance of the individual, one drop of black blood will dominate a gene pool for generations into the future” (Hall, 2005, p. 157). This belief has contributed to the apprehension, violence, and sexual envy of European men toward African American men.

According to Keeler (1947), there is a direct correlation between certain coloring and “morphological, physiological, and behavioristic trends” (p. 159). Upon observing 15 different mammals, including man, Keeler found that many lighter-coated/skinned mammals were weaker, less aggressive, and more easily susceptible to disease than their darker-coated/skinned counterparts (Hall, 2005). Keeler’s observations are “not irrelevant to skin color in the perceptions of African American men” (Hall, 2005, p. 159).

Sex is deemed the epitome of all masculine activity and the “ultimate culmination of male domination” (Hall, 2005, p. 167). In the aftermath of post-civil war society, the African

American male was progressing toward the “sex-crazed-criminal stereotype” (Hall, 2005, p. 167). This stereotype promoted fear with imagery of rape and violence whereas the Black man was “cast in the role of beast” seeking vengeance against the pure White woman in order to avenge his woman’s violations (Hall, 2005, p. 167). This stereotype incited much of the historical persecution of African American males and continues to justify their images as sex crazed criminals even today (Hall, 2005).

### **Dark-Skinned African American Females**

During the era of slavery in the United States, fair skin was considered an attribute. It was so desired that Black females were purposefully bred with White males in order to create a caste of biracial, quadroon, and octoroon women (Russell et al., 1992).

Pretty quadroons (one-quarter Black) and exotic octoroons (one-eighth Black) were in particularly high demand. Light-skinned beauties called “fancy girls” were auctioned at “quadroon balls” held regularly in New Orleans and Charleston. (Russell et al., 1992, p. 18).

The effects of colorism on the self-esteem of dark-skinned African American women has been documented in various studies. These effects are more prevalent for women than for men (Thompson & Keith, 2001). In previous studies, darker-skinned women were seen as the least desirable in the areas of marriage and career (Parrish, 1944). A study conducted in the 1980s revealed African American participants found dark-skinned women less attractive and less likely to have successful relationships than their lighter-skinned counterparts (Neil, 1988). Lighter-skinned women are privileged in the areas of social acceptance and status, marriage desirability, and workforce advancement (Edwards, Carter-Tellison, & Herring, 2004).



In 2011, *Dark Girls*, a documentary by Bill Duke, encouraged public discussion within the African American community about the negative experiences of dark-skinned women. Bill Duke chose to focus on the difficulties of dark-skinned Black women due to an experience a close friend had with his two daughters. Both girls had dark skin, and his friend “had to console them for almost a month because they were the only two girls in their high school that were not invited to their senior prom because [of their skin color]” (Anderson, 2015, para. 4).

Accordingly, Hochschild & Weaver (2007) stated:

Racial minorities with dark skin in the United States have been disproportionately disadvantaged for centuries. Relative to their lighter-skinned counterparts, dark-skinned Blacks have lower levels of education, income, and job status; they are less likely to own homes or to marry; and dark-skinned blacks’ prison sentences are longer (para. 2).

According to Hochschild & Weaver (2007), “most Americans prefer lighter to darker skin aesthetically, normatively, and culturally. Film-makers, novelists, advertisers, modeling agencies, matchmaking websites – all demonstrate the power of a fair complexion, along with straight hair and Eurocentric facial features, to appeal to Americans” (para. 3). That being said, dark-skinned Black women in the United States are disproportionately affected by colorism, as it may affect them in practically every aspect of their lives.

### **The History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Through research, sociologists have found that lighter-skinned Blacks have more advantages economically and occupationally than their darker-skinned peers (Jones, 2000). The first institutions of higher learning established for African Americans demonstrated this phenomenon. Biased admissions policies were regular occurrences at many of the historically Black colleges and universities established in the nineteenth century (Russell et al., 1992).

Among these prestigious institutes of higher learning were Wilberforce University in Ohio (1856), Howard University in Washington D.C. (1867), Fisk University in Tennessee (1866), Atlanta University (today Clark Atlanta) in Georgia (1865), Morgan (today Morgan State) in Baltimore (1867), Hampton Institute (today Hampton University) in Virginia (1868), and Spelman Women's College in Georgia (1881). Applicants to the most prominent of these schools were purportedly required to pass a color test before admittance was granted (Russell et al., 1992). A principal mission of these schools was to groom mulattoes in the genteel mores of the bourgeoisie; students received a primarily liberal arts education. Many academic administrators considered it a waste of time to train dark-skinned Negroes for paths in life that would be closed to them, and as recently as 1916 it was estimated that 80 percent of the students of these Black colleges were light-skinned and of mixed ancestry.

Many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were originally established for mulattoes or those of mixed-race heritage. These institutions denied access to those who were too dark (Jones, 2000). Many HBCUs also discriminated on the basis of skin tone in their admittance process. Institutions which admitted darker-skinned Blacks often promoted vocational training versus their lighter-skinned peers who received a liberal arts education (Jones, 2000). Dark-skinned students often turned to vocational schools such as Tuskegee Institute of Alabama (1881) founded by Booker T. Washington. Tuskegee provided a "vocational curriculum of industrial education" (Russell et al., 1992, p. 29). Washington believed that Negroes, particularly those not of the upper classes, should focus on becoming skilled workers.

Mary McLeod Bethune, a dark-skinned Black woman, established Bethune-Cookman College in Florida (1927). This school was founded for Black girls and included a curriculum of

“basic skills, home economics, cooking, and house-keeping” (Russell et al., 1992). This curriculum prepared darker-skinned women so that upon graduation, they would have the skills necessary to “do real work in the real world” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 29).

Supporters of industrial education were often darker-skinned, while advocates of liberal arts studies were of a fairer complexion (Russell et al., 1992). As a result, a disproportionate number of darker-skinned Blacks were either uneducated or received only industrial education. These unequal education paths provided further division within the Black community. Darker-skinned Blacks, as a result, often were relegated to lower-paying, less prestigious positions.

### **Socio-Economic Status Based on Skin Tone**

Hall (2005) stated that education and consequently economic affluence are directly correlated. In the African American community, education is a main factor which divides people into classes. There is also a strong correlation between skin color and poverty (Hall, 2005). This is due primarily to the fact that lighter-skinned Blacks were afforded more opportunity to obtain education post-slavery than their darker-skinned counterparts. Institutions of higher learning were specifically created for the “mulatto elite,” and so the light-skinned class traditionally valued education (Hall, 2005). Historically, dark-skinned working families viewed education as relatively unimportant and tended to equate it with the more affluent groups (Hall, 2005). Today, however, education is valued throughout the Black community. There is still division, however, between light and dark skin tones. According to Hall (2005), light-skinned African Americans are exclusively obsessed with education. Education is used as a means to disassociate oneself from those who are illiterate and unskilled.

A 1944 study conducted by Myrdal found that the social and economic gap between dark and light-skinned African Americans is as great as the variation in the quality of life between

Euro-Americans and African Americans in America as a whole. Hughes & Hertel, two sociologists from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, concluded similar findings in their 1988 study.

### **Reverse Colorism**

Colorism is not uniquely confined to preferential treatment toward lighter-skinned individuals. There is also intra-racial discrimination by darker-skinned Blacks against lighter-skinned Blacks (Jones, 2000).

Often, darker-skinned Blacks are distrustful toward their light-skinned counterparts. They often view lighter-skinned people as having a “superiority complex” or seeing themselves as “better” than darker people. Author Elizabeth Atkins stated that her “appearance always inspires ‘hatred at first site’ from dark-skinned people” (2008, p. 164). It is assumed that lighter-skinned Blacks have advantages in today’s society. In particular, the assumptions made about lighter-skinned women are that they are “haughty, wealthy or well-off, over-sexed video vixens, boy-toys with no brains, white-talking, and Black hating” (Atkins, 2008, p. 165).

In the media, fair-skinned models are often privileged over their darker-skinned counterparts. They are, however, sometimes subjected to reverse colorism that prohibits them from getting work. When a campaign calls for a “Black” model, light-skinned models are often deemed “not Black enough” (Russell et al., 1992). This instance has caused some very fair-skinned models to pass as White. One fair-skinned model found that she wasn’t Black enough to book jobs, so she chose to pass as Greek, Italian, or Latin. She stated, “Now they love me. I’m exotic. I’ve even got a national fur campaign from a company that specifically didn’t want Blacks. Joke’s on them” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 155).

The words of Willie Lynch were prophetic in the Black community that still suffers from its destructive effects:

The Black Slave, after receiving this indoctrination, shall carry on and will become self-refueling and self-generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands. Don't forget, you must pitch the old Black vs. the young Black male, and the young Black male against the old Black male. You must use the dark-skinned slaves vs. the light-skinned slaves, and the light-skinned slaves vs. the dark-skinned slaves. You must use the female vs. the male, and the male vs. the female. You must also have your servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, but it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect, and trust only us (1712).

Colorism, the destruction of the Black family unit, and distrust within the Black community can all be directly attributed to these horrendous words spoken 300 years ago.

### **Black People with Albinism**

According to the National Library of Medicine, albinism is defined as “a defect of melanin production that results in little or no color or pigment in the skin, hair, and eyes” (Summer, 2009, para. 1). While African Americans with fair skin have historically benefitted, those with albinism have not. The lack of melanin caused by this condition leads to extremely fair skin and eyes. Though these traits have been prized by African Americans throughout history, albinos are often discriminated against, shunned, or persecuted (Summer, 2009).

According to the University of Minnesota Medical Center, albinism affects about 1 in 20,000 people. The condition is more common among Blacks than Whites or Asians (Summer, 2009).

The history of discrimination of Black albinos stems from African folklore and superstition. In many parts of Africa, albinos were smothered at birth for fear that they were conceived as a result of infidelity, sorcery, or witchcraft (McNeil, 1997). Even today these superstitions abound. In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, albinos are thought to have mystical powers.

Their limbs, organs, and skin are thought to bring good luck. Because of this, albinos are often attacked, maimed, or killed by witch doctors who use their parts to cast spells. Even today, many Africans believe that albinos do not die; instead, they simply vanish (McNeil, 1997).

The difference between the prized fair skin of African Americans and the lack of melanin amongst albinos is rooted in the folklore of Africa. Also, it is common for African Americans with albinism to still have coarse hair and more Afro-centric features. This combination of traits provides no social benefit to those with albinism. In fact, African American albino students often find themselves excluded by their darker-skinned counterparts from clubs and extracurricular activities. They are often targets of resentment and rejection both at home and at school and compensate by withdrawing. Others compensate for rejection by striving harder in school and further activities (Small, 2013).

### **Hair Texture and Features in the African American Community**

Skin tone variance in and of itself is not the only factor on which African Americans are classified and judged. Hair texture and facial features are also used as factors to compare African Americans and determine attractiveness. In the book *Don't Play in the Sun*, M. Golden expresses instances from her childhood in which she would pretend to have long, flowing hair:

My head is draped in four long silk scarves that belong to my mother. Scarves held in place with a bobby pin at the top of my head. Scarves that are a seductive color-drenched kaleidoscope whose silk fabric kisses my brown cheeks as I imagine a White girl's hair must brush her skin-with the most awesome feeling of affirmation, beauty, and power.

(2004, pp. 3–4)

There are two distinct categories which describe African American features, “good” and “bad.” Good features generally pertain to straight, curly, or wavy hair, a small nose, thin lips,

and light-colored eyes. Bad features are generally considered to be kinky, coarse hair, a wide nose, and full lips (Dixon, 2006). Historically, physical features and skin tone were used to create class distinctions among African Americans. Even today, levels of attractiveness are measured by these two categories. Images of African Americans in the media today often portray the most beautiful, desirable women as those who are the closest to the Eurocentric standard of beauty (Dixon, 2006). This unfortunate occurrence has led to Blacks striving to obtain a level of “beauty” that is difficult for most and daunting for others. Skin bleaching, nose jobs, hair straightening, weaves, hair dyeing, colored contacts, and extreme diets are all ways in which African Americans, females in particular, have striven to cope with the idea that their natural beauty is not enough (Lake, 2003).

Although there is a recent trend among African American females to wear their natural, unprocessed hair proudly, there is still the conversation as to which natural hair is “good” and which is “bad.” Though African American females have made a great advancement in the natural hair movement, it is an unfortunate occurrence that even within this new arena of self-acceptance that one’s hair is judged good or bad. If one’s natural hair is curly, wavy, or straight, it is considered “good,” whereas very coarse or kinky natural hair is considered “bad” (Lake, 2003).

### **Project Specific Information**

Colorism is “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). It is a form of “homogeneous group privilege” in which people from within the same race use determining factors to create social caste systems and workplace hierarchies (Russell et al., 1992). Colorism affects identity, self-esteem, education, and mate selection. Colorism also has an integral role in race, class, and gender. Much of the research on colorism pre-dates the Civil

Rights Movement, and current research often refers to older research to analyze the progression and changes of colorism. Studies show that skin color not only matters in the way Whites may perceive Blacks, but it also matters in the way Blacks perceive one another.

Colorism, however, is not only a problem for Blacks, but also for other people of color. Although this is a painful topic of discussion, many researchers agree that more research needs to be done to help people heal from the deep wounds colorism inflicts, and future research should analyze how colorism affects other parts of the world.

For Blacks in the United States, colorism began during slavery when darker-skinned Blacks were relegated to field work and lighter-skinned Blacks, often the children of slave masters, were given housework. For years after, many Blacks internalized the declaration that the lighter one is the better one (Barrett, 1999). Colorism is directly related to the larger system of racism in the United States and around the world. The skin tone stratification of people of color is also unfortunately an issue around the globe. This tragic phenomenon helps to sustain the multibillion-dollar skin bleaching and cosmetic surgery industries throughout the world.

### **Related Research**

Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory on the origin and effects of colorism (1979). According to Bourdieu, in the modern world, there is a constant struggle for capital in two very important fields: culture and economy. People strive to increase not only their monetary capital or financial security, but also immaterial things of value, such as education and refinement. This involves efforts in their daily lives to distinguish themselves from others, whether through manner of dress, articulacy of speech, or discriminative tastes. The group that decides, however, what exactly qualifies as refinement, beauty, or taste in general is the primary group. The primary group has the power, influence, and status, so it is they who decide these matters.



Secondary or tertiary groups have their own standards of beauty, but these standards are still measured in relation to the standards of the primary group.

Another source that gives fascinating insight into the topic of colorism is *Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora* by Deborah Gabriel (2007). Gabriel gives a historical analysis of the origins of colorism in continental Latin America as well as the Caribbean Islands. The most important aspect of her book was not the historical nature of the analysis, but rather how it dealt with the social aspects of colorism and its political implications.

The most important theme of this book was the direct connection she drew between Black enslavement and the “pigmentocracy,” as she calls it, and how this attitude persisted even after emancipation. Unlike most sources, which focus primarily on the United States and the African continent, Gabriel (2007) examines the United Kingdom as well as various countries in Latin America.

Hunter (2002) stated that skin color is “highly stratified” because in America along with most other Western cultures, Whiteness is presumed to represent beauty and graciousness, and in contrast, Blackness signifies ugliness and vulgarity. This dichotomy between various people of color and Whites has extended into a stratification system within the Black American race itself, where light-skinned Blacks take on the aforementioned characteristics used to describe Whites, and dark-skinned Blacks are recognized as having the negative features commonly associated with Blackness. It is therefore not at all improbable to presume that lighter-skinned Blacks receive preferential treatment over their darker-skinned counterparts (Thompson & Keith, 2001).

This study serves to fill a gap in the literature as it relates to colorism among African Americans in the United States. Previous related research conducted by Harrison (2004) examined the preferential treatment in the job selection process of light-skinned applicants

versus darker-skinned applicants. The purpose of Harrison's study was to discover what the inequalities within the Black race are, and if in fact they result in preferential treatment due to one's skin complexion. Dr. Harrison hypothesized that lighter-skinned job applicants would receive higher, more favorable ratings in the job selection process than would their darker-skinned counterparts. Another hypothesis of Harrison's (2004) study was that preferential treatment due to skin tone exists for both Black men and women, but that dark-skinned women will be at an even greater disadvantage than darker-skinned men because of their gender. Results of this study found that Dr. Harrison's hypotheses were indeed accurate.

### **Summary**

If the average person of color were asked to describe themselves based on several physical characteristics, it could be assumed that a majority would list their race as one of the descriptors. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the concepts of race and race relations are not novelties in our society. In the United States of America, when people think of race and race relations, they generally divide these notions into Black and White issues; each group is generalized and homogenized into one grouping (Celious & Oyserman, 2001).

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. A theory of relevance to this study is Serge Moscovici's Social Representation Theory. This theory describes people, ideas, and values of institutions in a cultural context. Most racial identity theories are subject to this generalized categorization. Race is seen as a simple dichotomy between Black and White; the diversity within each race tends to be ignored. According to Celious and Oyserman (2001), these theories are correct in their supposition that there is in-group homogeneity. These same

theories are negligent, however, in their failure to address the potential for distinct differences in racial identities within races.

Today, the African American race continues to be diversified through marriage and reproduction with various other races (Neal & Wilson, 1989). Most current research estimates that African Americans, on average, are genetically composed of 80% African and 20% European ancestry (Public Library of Science, 2008).

Existing literature fails to address the current status of colorism in today's society. There is information on the root of the phenomenon; however, it is not a substantial amount. Colorism is a prevalent and recognized issue in Black society; however, it is not one that is openly acknowledged. This study hopes to address the gap in literature concerning colorism at the secondary school level. Previous research has found that the impact of colorism for the majority of African Americans begins during childhood and adolescence, yet there is no current research relevant to colorism in school. This study hoped to address this issue by examining the presence, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The issue of colorism has been a problem for Blacks in the United States since the time of slavery. This study attempted to understand colorism as it relates to the way in which African American teachers view and relate to their African American students. Some Black Americans consider the issue of colorism within their community to be a concern of the past. Some feel that the topic is no longer relevant or an embarrassing subject that “airs their dirty laundry” (Hunter, 2004). The fact remains that colorism has had a tremendous impact on the lives of Black Americans and has affected them economically, socially, academically. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. Chapter Three consists of the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher’s role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the summary.

### **Design**

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study. Phenomenology is initiated with an experience or condition. Through the narration of participants of either a shared single incident or shared condition, phenomenology investigates the effects and observations of that experience. “Phenomenologists distinguish phenomena (the perceptions or appearances from the point of view of a human) from noumena (what things really are) (Willis, 2007, p. 53). The phenomenological method interprets an experience by the personal stories of the study participants. This method also allows the researcher to “study

things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Colorism is defined as “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). The qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design choice was appropriate for the phenomenon of colorism due to its ability to allow the researcher to listen to the stories of the participants and interpret the information in a way that provides insight into the existence of colorism in the secondary classroom.

The purpose of qualitative phenomenal research was “to focus on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 71). The research questions in this study guided the researcher to ascertain the subjects’ experience with the phenomenon of colorism in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The specific questions that guided this qualitative investigation are as follows:

1. How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom?
2. How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers?
3. How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher’s ability to treat African American students fairly? This question seeks to describe whether African American students are given preferential treatment for having fair skin in the schools under investigation.
4. How does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students? This question seeks to describe whether African

American teachers have higher or lower expectations of their African American students based solely on skin tone.

### **Setting**

Two different sites were used for this study. The first setting was an alternative high school in a suburban community in central Georgia. The second site was a traditional high school in a suburban community in central Georgia. Both are public schools with diverse populations. The rationale for the choice of these sites is convenience, diversity, and a high population of African American teachers and African American students. In regard to leadership at each site, site one has one White administrator and one Black administrator. Site two has one Black administrator, and two White administrators.

In this qualitative study, the research sites and participants were selected following the strategies of purposeful and judgement sampling. "Purposeful sampling is selecting information-rich cases for study in depth when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalize to all such cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Types of purposeful sampling include the following: site selection, maximum variation sampling, comprehensive sampling, sampling by case type, and network sampling (Patton, 1990). The sampling strategy chosen for this study is site selection. Site selection was chosen based on Patton's description of "choosing a select site where specific events are expected to occur" (1990, p. 170). The judgment sampling technique in qualitative research occurs when "the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions" (Martin, 1996, p. 523). This is a more scholarly strategy than the "simple demographic stratification of epidemiological studies, though age, gender and social class might be important variables" (Martin, 1996, p. 523).

## **Participants**

The participants of this study included 10 self-identified African American teachers, ages 25 and older. The minimum age of 25 was chosen to ascertain a more mature perspective on the phenomenon of colorism. The number of study participants was recommended in the literature of qualitative studies. Samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than for quantitative research. Due to the labor-intensive nature of qualitative research, a smaller sample size is more practical (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

The criteria for participation included self-identification as an African American currently teaching in a secondary classroom and knowledge of and experience with intra-racial discrimination or colorism based on answers gathered from the pre-interview survey. Teachers included in this study were of various ages, both male and female, and of various socio-economic backgrounds. Exclusion criteria for this study included biracial/multiracial people who do not identify as African American. For the purpose of availability and accessibility, the sample was limited to subjects living in the metro Atlanta area.

## **Procedures**

This study examined the phenomenon of colorism as it occurs within the secondary classroom of public schools. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before this study occurred (see Appendix A). Once approval was granted, the researcher recruited participants through letters sent to the principal of each site. These letters requested recommendations of teachers who fit the criteria of the study (see Appendix B). The criteria for the participants were that they be self-identifying African Americans at least 25 years old currently teaching in the secondary classroom. Once these individuals were identified, the

researcher contacted each potential subject personally via email in order to ascertain interest in the study (see Appendix C).

Each participant who agreed to participate in the study then received an email containing documents. The documents included a consent form, instructions that informed the participant of the procedures of the study along with information regarding the interview process, a pre-interview questionnaire, and expected time expenditure. The participants were also made aware that their participation in this study was voluntary and that any and all information gathered is strictly confidential. Each participant was advised that he/she must sign the consent statement before the face-to-face interviewing could begin. Once the subjects agreed to participate, the researcher obtained signed consent from each participant (see Appendix D). The researcher administered a short survey questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to collect demographic information (age, ethnic background, socio-economic status, etc.) and to gauge potential participants' knowledge of colorism (see Appendix E).

Once consent was received from each participant, the researcher scheduled appointments to conduct interviews. These interviews were audio recorded for the purpose of transcribing and coding the data. The researcher scheduled these interviews according to the availability of both the participant and the researcher. Interviews were conducted in public venues, private homes, and private offices. The interview locations were conducive to providing both a comfortable and confidential environment for the participants (see Appendix F for interview questions). The researcher had all data collected from the interviews professionally transcribed. The researcher coded the data for further analysis. The interview locations were conducive to providing both a comfortable and confidential environment for the participants (see Appendix F for interview questions). The researcher had all data collected from the interviews professionally transcribed.



The researcher coded the data for further analysis. Lastly, after each participant was interviewed, a post survey was sent via email (see Appendix G). The purpose of this survey was to ascertain how, if at all, participation in the study had affected their views on colorism and the way in which it affects their African American students.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My role as the researcher of this qualitative study was to be an instrument. As the “human instrument” in this study, my responsibility was to gather data from participants. I have been in the teaching profession for 15 years and am currently pursuing the degree of Doctor of Education with a concentration in Educational Leadership. I am an independent woman who is also a mother, a daughter, a sister, a teacher, a student, a dancer, a traveler, and a believer in Christ. My ethnic background is diverse. I come from an African-American father and a multi-racial mother.

My own personal biases became more apparent as I conducted my research on colorism. Discovering where and why the phenomenon of colorism exists awakened within me a deep resentment of European colonization and its implications on people of color.

My bias developed as a child. I was keenly aware of varying skin tones from a young age. My father is dark skinned and my mother is very pale. She is often mistaken for Italian, Hispanic, or White. I was conscious of my light brown skin, my mother's very pale skin, my father's dark skin.

I remember being told at a young age by my mother that she wanted her children to “have some color,” and yet I was somehow aware that she did not want us to be dark. I remember thinking as a young person that the prettiest actresses and models were the ones with lighter skin. Though I was unaware of why I felt this way at the time, I had a distinct bias. As I grew older, I

developed a preference of lighter to medium-brown skinned men. I had, and still have, a preference for medium-brown skin tones.

Credible research strategies require the researcher to adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study. As such, in the case of qualitative research, the researcher needs to do a balancing act dealing with biases. During the course of this study, I reflected on my own personal biases and kept a written journal documenting them (see Appendix H). I referred to this journal throughout the course of the study in order to stay aware of, document, and acknowledge my biases. I acknowledge and accept my personal biases and I was consciously aware of the need to stay objective during the course of gathering data and conducting my analysis.

## **Data Collection**

### **Data Triangulation**

Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to test validity through the conjoining of information from different sources. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the data triangulation technique of in-depth individual (IDI) interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (2000), the IDI interview is one of the most powerful tools for attaining understanding of human beings and exploring subjects in depth. IDI interviews, ranging from the regulated and controlled to the unstructured and fluid, can produce rich information about personal experiences and perceptions (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005). IDI interviews allow for impulsiveness, flexibility, and responsiveness to individuals, though conducting the interviews, transcribing the data, and analyzing the text may require considerable time and effort.

## **Pilot Study**

The researcher administered a pilot survey in order to ascertain the strength and appropriateness of the interview questions. This pilot was administered to two individuals who were not potential study participants. The two individuals did, however, meet the same criteria as the study participants. The pilot participants were self-identified African American teachers who were age 25 or older. The participants were interviewed using a set of preliminary interview questions developed through the review of literature and research questions. Upon completion of the pilot survey, the researcher determined that the order of the questions should be revised in order to gather information from the beginning of the participants' lives and concluding with questions pertaining to colorism in the classroom. Pilot study participant one was somewhat apprehensive when the researcher opened with questions pertaining directly to colorism in their classroom. The participant was much more willing to share information related to their childhood and family experiences. The researcher analyzed this phenomenon and restructured the order of the interview questions. Pilot study participant two began the interview with questions related to early childhood including experiences with colorism in school as a child and relationships. Participant two readily shared information pertaining to these subjects. Questions related to colorism in the classroom were asked at the end of the interview. Participant two was comfortable sharing information on her experiences with colorism in the secondary school setting. Based on the findings from the pilot study, the researcher determined that study participants are more comfortable speaking about their personal experiences than the more controversial topic of colorism occurring in the classroom. Participant two benefitted from having time to get acquainted with the researcher and breaking the ice with preliminary questions which were less controversial in nature. After the preliminary interview questions, participant

two reached a point where she felt comfortable discussing the subject of colorism. The participant willingly shared her experience with colorism in the classroom. The interview questions for pilot study participant two were used in the same order for the ten selected study participants. During the pilot study, the researcher also determined that the questions must be open-ended in nature in order to encourage the participants to provide detail-rich information. Pilot participant one provided answers which were shorter and less comprehensive. The researcher slightly restructured the interview questions to an open-ended format. Pilot participant two provided answers which were in-depth and thorough. The open-ended question format was adopted for the ten selected study participants.

### **Pre-Survey**

The researcher administered a short survey questionnaire (see Appendix C) to collect the demographic information of the participants. Prior to the administration of the survey, the researcher took a moment to thank each participant for consenting to participate in the study. The researcher also reminded the participant once again that involvement in the study was voluntary. The preliminary demographic questionnaire was sent to study participants via email. This survey gathered information on the participants' knowledge and awareness of colorism. After participants completed the pre-survey, appointments were made with each participant to conduct a formal interview (see Appendix D). Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, offices, or public venues. The researcher allowed the participants to choose the locations based on their own personal comfort level. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed (see Appendix H). Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the privacy of each participant.

## Interviews

When one uses the phenomenological approach during the interview process, the primary goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature or meaning of the participants' experiences (Munhall, 2007). The directive of the questions and the method in which the researchers ask them during the interview affects the way the participants tell their stories. This may limit any data provided by the participants and could affect the richness of the collected data (Munhall, 2007). The interview questions in this study were developed based upon the research questions and a corresponding review of literature. Additional questions may have been asked based on the participants' responses to the core interview questions. The interview questions were broken into several categories: Background, Relationships, Self-Esteem, Family, and Classroom. The questions were as follows:

### Colorism Awareness

1. (a) When, if at all, did you first become aware of colorism?
  - (b) Who introduced you to the concept of colorism?
  - (c) What was the skin tone of the person who introduced you to colorism?
  - (d) What was your reaction to the incident?
2. Give me details about an incident in which you experienced colorism either directly, or witnessed colorism against another person.
3. How, if at all, did that experience impact your feelings about yourself?
4. How did you feel about your skin tone before this incident?
5. If you have ever received negative treatment based solely on your skin tone, how have you coped with this over your lifetime?
6. How do you feel colorism has changed over the past twenty-five years? Explain.

7. In what ways has the media influenced colorism? Explain.

### Background

1. In what ways did your parents discuss skin color?
2. As a child, were you conscious of skin color? Explain.
3. As a child, do you recall people being treated differently based on their skin tone? Explain.
4. Please tell me how people with dark skin were treated compared to people with lighter skin.
5. Tell me about your experiences as a child in school.
6. How did colorism affect you as a student in school?
7. Did you feel that there were equal opportunities for children of all skin tones when you were in school?

### Relationships

1. Do you have a skin tone preference for the people you date (or have dated)? If so, what is that preference?
2. How would you describe your skin tone?
3. If you are currently in a relationship, describe the skin tone of your significant other.
4. If you are attracted to lighter-skinned men/women, please explain why you prefer this skin tone.
5. If you are attracted to darker-skinned men/women, please explain why you prefer this skin tone.
6. Are males/females of a particular skin tone more attracted to you than others? Please explain.

7. Do you think dark-skinned males prefer women of a certain skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?
8. Do you think light-skinned males prefer women of a certain skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?

#### Self-Esteem

1. Do you feel colorism negatively affects one's self-esteem? Explain.
2. If you've experienced colorism, how, if at all, did it affect your self-esteem?
3. What effect, if any, has colorism had on the self-esteem of your close friends?
4. Do you feel that the self-esteem of dark-skinned people in the United States is directly correlated to colorism? Explain.

#### Family

1. Does colorism exist in your family? Explain.
2. Please share an incident where skin color was discussed amongst your family members.
3. Please describe an incident where a family member gave preferential treatment to other members based on skin tone. If so, please describe an incident in which this occurred.
4. If you have children, did you wish for them to be a particular skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?
5. If you plan to have children, do you wish for them to be a particular skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?

#### Classroom (These questions pertain ONLY to participants' African American students.)

1. (a) Please describe the students in your classroom.

- (b) What are the various skin tones present among the African American students in your class?
  - (c) Do you think your light-skinned students are better behaved?
  - (d) Do you think your light-skinned students are smarter than your darker-skinned students?
  - (e) If so, what may be some reasons for that?
2. If you were to divide your classes on the first day of school in terms of intelligence, how would you have done so?
  3. (a) How would you divide your classes based on skin tone?
    - (b) If I asked you to divide them into three groups, what would they be?
    - (c) Describe these three groups in detail. Tell me about their behavior, socio-economic status, level of intelligence, attractiveness, etc.
  4. (a) Do you think your darker-skinned students get into more trouble than their lighter-skinned peers?
    - (b) Are more disciplinary referrals written for darker-skinned students than their lighter-skinned peers?
    - (c) If so, why do think this is?
  5. (a) Tell me about an incident where you have observed a student receive preferential treatment from a teacher.
    - (b) What was the skin tone of this student?
    - (c) Do you feel the preferential treatment was related to the skin tone of the student?
  6. (a) Tell me which students you have higher expectations for? Why do you think this is?



- (b) Do your higher expectations correlate to the skin tone, socio-economic status, or level of attractiveness of the student? Please explain.
7. Do you think “cute” students receive preferential treatment as opposed to unattractive students? Why or why not?
8. Please answer the following questions true or false.
- (a) Dark-skinned students are more likely to do well in their classes.
  - (b) Lighter-skinned students get into more trouble than darker-skinned students.
  - (c) Dark-skinned male students are always getting into trouble.
  - (d) Dark-skinned female students typically have an attitude.
  - (e) Light-skinned students are more attractive than dark-skinned students.
  - (f) Dark-skinned female students have a chip on their shoulder.
  - (g) Dark-skinned male students are often gang members.
  - (h) Light-skinned female students think they’re more attractive than dark-skinned female students.
  - (i) Light-skinned male students are often conceited.
  - (j) Dark-skinned female students dress more provocatively to get male attention.
  - (k) Light-skinned students often get away with inappropriate behavior.

There are several different types of qualitative interviews. According to Ray (1994), research questions should not be pre-determined. Rather, the researcher should follow the cues of the participants. This philosophy is based on the assumption that the researcher may post leading questions into the conscience of the participants (Ray, 1994). Another form of qualitative interview is the semi-structured style. A semi-structured interview is a technique for generating qualitative data and is characterized by open-ended questions that are developed in

advance (Morse & Richards, 2002). The researcher used the semi-structured technique during data collection. The interviewer had a set of pre-determined questions on an interview schedule; however, the interviews were guided by the schedule, not dictated by it. This allowed the researcher to be free to explore any areas of interest as they arose during the conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). To ensure that an extensive amount of information was gathered during the semi-structured interview, the researcher asked focused questions that were not leading in nature. The researcher allowed participants to express themselves freely by asking broad, open-ended questions. This technique allowed the participants to introduce issues which the researcher may not have previously anticipated.

Englander (2012, p. 26) suggests the first question the participant should be asked is “Can you please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced (said phenomenon)?” All subsequent questions should be based on the response to the first. Interviewing from a phenomenological perspective requires the ability to “shift presences within a single mode of consciousness,” thus enabling the researcher to shift between following the responses of the interview and asking pre-determined questions that are geared towards the research phenomenon (Englander, 2012, p. 26).

According to Giorgi (2009, p. 122), “What one seeks from a research interview in qualitative research is as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through.” As previously stated, for the purposes of this study, the researcher used the semi-structured interview technique. In an attempt to direct the participant without leading the participant, the researcher adopted Englander’s suggested phenomenological research initial interview questions. The researcher also, however, asked specific questions pertaining directly to the subject of colorism within the secondary classroom. This combination of interview

questions enabled the researcher to gather rich, in-depth information on the phenomenon of colorism in a way which was not leading in nature.

### **Interview Length**

It is the responsibility of the researcher to set aside an adequate amount of time for each interview. This is essential to the study in order to gather the necessary information without having to succumb to time restrictions. The intensity and, therefore, the length of the qualitative interview impacted choice of sample size. “Longer interviews may provide more data than shorter interviews. A decision may be taken, depending on the nature of the study, to conduct a larger number of shorter interviews or a smaller number of longer interviews” (Wilmot, 1996, p. 4). For the purposes of this study, the researcher conducted a smaller number of longer interviews. The researcher’s sample size was 10 participants.

According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the researcher must be conscious of the participant’s time. Requesting that someone to devote more than an hour and half of time may become challenging for many reasons. Realistically, the researcher will be less likely to get people to agree to be interviewed if more than ninety minutes are requested. “It should be noted that six to ten well-written questions can easily take an hour to an hour and a half to get through” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 5). Each participant was asked to set aside a minimum of one hour for each interview. If, during the course of the interview, the participant’s shared accounts reached beyond the one-hour allotment, the researcher allowed additional time. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to make sure that the subject has a realistic expectation for how long the interview may last (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The researcher’s goal was for each interview to be between 45 minutes and one hour. This allowed adequate time for each participant to share his or her experiences in a thorough and detailed manner.

The researcher recorded each interview using a digital voice recording device. The participants were made aware that each interview was being recorded. The researcher utilized the services of a transcription company in order to secure accurate transcripts of the data. After the data was transcribed, it was segmented and coded.

### **Post Survey**

After the interview process, the participants were provided a post-interview survey. The purpose of this instrument was to gather data on the participants' knowledge and awareness of colorism and ascertain whether this information differed from the pre-survey (see Appendix E).

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using the method of coding. This method permitted the researcher to organize data into a logical group of categories and common themes. The data were then professionally transcribed, segmented, and, finally, coded. The researcher used the techniques of open coding and axial coding. Subsequent to the interview data being coded, a coding table was developed to analyze the qualitative data (Creswell, 2009).

In open coding, the raw data is organized into categories. Each category represents a specific piece of information composed of examples, happenings, and events (Creswell, 2009). Open coding requires the careful assessment of each individual line of data and identifying the actions or events that the researcher observes. Axial coding involves making specific correlations between categories (Creswell, 2009). Axial coding allows the researcher to sort, combine, and classify large amounts of data and reconstruct them after open coding is completed (Creswell, 2009).

It is during this time that the researcher identified which conditions influence the phenomenon, developed strategies for addressing said phenomenon, identified context and

conditions that form the strategies, and defined the penalties of embarking on the strategies (Creswell, 2009). In selective coding, the researcher writes a story that combines the categories in the axial coding model (Creswell, 2009).

While coding data, the researcher asked these questions: What is going on? What are the participants doing? What are the participants saying (Lewins, Taylor, & Gibbs, 2005)?

According to Lewins et al., (2005), behaviors, events, activities, strategies, states, meanings, participation, relationships, conditions, consequences, settings, and reflexives can all be coded.

### **Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility was critical in this qualitative study. According to Lincoln (1995), credibility in qualitative research is said to correspond to internal validity in quantitative approaches. The findings of the study must accurately describe reality. It was the researcher's role to gather and analyze the data in a way in which credibility was not compromised. The researcher utilized Guba's constructs for the pursuit of a trustworthy study (Guba, 1981).

According to Guba, the four criteria qualitative researchers should use in order to ensure a trustworthy study are "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (1981, p. 75). The researcher used member checking as a means to determine credibility. Member checks allowed the researcher the ability to understand and evaluate what the participant intended to say during the course of the interview. Member checking also gave participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as inaccurate interpretations (Creswell, 2009).

#### **Transferability**

According to Lincoln (1995), transferability corresponds to external validity. In order to evaluate transferability, the process of thick description was used by the researcher. Thick

descriptions include comprehensive, rich descriptions of participants' experiences of phenomena, as well as the contexts in which those experiences occur. Thick description allowed the researcher to clarify the patterns of cultural and social relationships and put them in perspective (Holloway, 1997).

### **Dependability**

Lincoln (1995) believed that dependability directly corresponded with reliability. Dependability deals with the issue that "the way in which a study is conducted should be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques" (Gasson, 2004, p. 94). For the purposes of this study, dependability was measured through external auditing. External auditing allowed the researcher to request an outside researcher to examine the process and findings of the research study. This process provides important feedback which can strengthen the study (Creswell, 2009).

### **Confirmability**

The final facet of Guba's construct for the pursuit of a trustworthy study is conformability. External auditing was used once again in order to foster the validity of the research study (Creswell, 2009).

One challenge of this study was the legitimacy of the information provided by the participants during the interview process. Because of the sensitive and somewhat controversial nature of the phenomenon of colorism, it was imperative that the participants give open, honest feedback instead of providing the researcher with the "politically correct" answers.

Dependability is another crucial aspect of trustworthiness. It was imperative that the researcher be consistent in the data collection process and procedures.

In order to combat potential bias within the qualitative phenomenological model of research, the methods of epoch, or bracketing, were utilized. The main challenge for the researcher in searching for an authentic method was the design of an instrument which enabled the researcher to be aware of potential for bias, how to contain that bias at the beginning of data collection, and how to use a process to assess the significance of that bias in data interpretation (Bednall, 2006). In modern English, epoch means "a particular period of time marked by distinctive events" (Macquarie, 1997, p. 716). In qualitative research, epoch can be construed as "highlighting a particular period when significant events occur in the experiences of a researcher, but any impact from the memory of which need to be put aside during data collection" (Bednall, 2006, p. 125). The terms *epoch* and *bracketing* are often used interchangeably and synonymously within phenomenological research (Bednall, 2006).

According to Patton (1990), a phenomenological study focuses on the experiences of people and how they experience those things. Patton (1990) stated that certain steps must be taken in a phenomenological study, including epoch and bracketing. During the process of epoch, the researcher must be conscious of biases, perspectives, and suppositions regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), bracketing involves several steps. First, the researcher must locate within the personal experience key phrases and statements that apply directly to the phenomenon in question. Next, the researcher must interpret the meanings of these phrases. The researcher must then obtain the participant's interpretations of these phrases, if possible. The researcher must inspect these implications for what they reveal about the repetitive features of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the researcher must offer a tentative account of the phenomenon in terms of the recurring features identified.

Munhall (1994) describes bracketing as a process of “unknowing” in which it is essential to avoid the supposition that as interviewers, we know the experiences of the research participants. For the researcher, part of the process of bracketing is to “unknow” our own version of similar experiences. In the proposed research, therefore, I had to “unknow” my involvements of having experienced colorism in my personal life as well as my experiences with colorism in the secondary classroom. Munhall stated that “unknowing” entails more than simply forgetting. The researcher must remain aware of the phenomenon while “unknowing” experiences of it (Munhall, 1994). Bracketing requires consistent reflection and awareness from the researcher when interviewing research participants.

It was my goal to use the method of bracketing while conducting my research in order to refrain from tainting the results. As the researcher, I revealed my prejudices and biases toward the topic of colorism. I acknowledged them clearly and then strongly attempted to prohibit them from affecting the results of the study.

### **Method of Bracketing**

According to Brink and Wood (1998), bracketing can be achieved by the researcher writing out and explaining everything that she has experienced and all personal thoughts about the subject. Primeau (2003) stated that reflexivity is the key to identifying potential influence during the research process. Reflexivity encompasses the awareness of an authentic examination of the beliefs and interests of the researcher that may impose upon research work (Primeau, 2003). Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) propose that using a reflexive diary is essential to bracketing during the process of a qualitative study. Reflexive diaries allow the researcher to journal thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and ideas. It also permits the researcher to



re-examine his or her stance when issues come about that may affect the research process (Primeau, 2003).

### **Strategies to Achieve Bracketing**

The researcher wrote all experiences in detail and explained her personal biases towards the subject of colorism. Bracketing for this study was achieved by the researcher writing a narrative description of her personal opinion of the subject of colorism. This process communicated the researcher's thoughts and allowed for personal biases to be set aside, which prohibited these thoughts from influencing the participants' experiences (Munhall, 1994).

Another method the researcher utilized to achieve bracketing was keeping a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process. This allowed personal thoughts, perceptions, and feelings to be documented (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010, pp. 20-21). The final bracketing technique was participant feedback. The purpose of gathering participant feedback was to verify the interpretation of the data collected against the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. This step served the purpose of screening for misinterpretation of the participants' feedback and assured that the researcher was not influencing their descriptions (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

Bracketing provides a practical methodological device to exhibit validity in qualitative research. Thorough preparation for bracketing in the qualitative study is essential prior to the data collection and analysis process since they are sequentially interrelated. The ultimate goal in qualitative research is to gain in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher, being a human being, inescapably influences the research process. Bracketing the researcher's personal knowledge and experience helped to decrease the influence of the researcher during the research process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

### **Researcher's Personal Biases**

My own personal biases became more apparent as I conducted my research on colorism. Discovering where and why the phenomenon of colorism exists has awakened within me a profound resentment of European colonization and its implications on people of color. My ethnic background is diverse. I come from an African-American father and a Multi-racial mother.

My own personal bias developed as a child. I was keenly aware of varying skin tones from a young age. My father is dark-skinned and my mother is very pale. She is often mistaken for Italian, Hispanic, or White. I was conscious of my light brown skin, my mother's very pale skin, my father's dark skin.

I remember being told at a young age by my mother that she wanted her children to "have some color," and yet I was somehow aware that she did not want us to be dark. I remember thinking as a young person that the prettiest actresses and models were the ones with lighter skin. Though I was unaware of why I felt this way at the time, I had a distinct bias. As I grew older, I developed a preference of lighter to medium-brown skinned men. I had, and still have, a preference for medium-brown skin tones.

I have two children, ages 15 and 11. I fully expected both of them to be born with a medium brown skin tone, given the skin tones of myself and their father. When my eldest daughter was born, I was shocked to see that she was not only extremely pale, but that she also had blue eyes. Because of these traits, she immediately received compliments and praise from family and strangers alike. I found myself reveling in these compliments and was very proud of her beauty, yet I was also aware that if she did indeed have the medium-brown skin tone I expected and the brown eyes of both of her parents, she would not have been the subject of so

much praise. A similar occurrence happened with my youngest son. He was also born with extremely pale skin and gray eyes. I believed my daughter to be an anomaly; however, it became obvious that my mother's lineage was passed down to both of my children. He experienced similar instances of compliments and praise. As they grew, their skin changed from pale white, to a light, golden brown and their eyes from blue and gray to hazel.

These features are still prized in the African American community and hardly a week goes by where someone doesn't compliment their "pretty eyes" or tell me how good-looking my children are. I have experienced fellow mothers with their children present tell me how pretty my own children are and compliment their skin tone or features. Often, their children have dark skin. As I gracefully accept the compliment on my children's behalf, I also feel empathy for these darker-skinned children that their mother, in their presence, would compliment features they do not possess. After all, all children yearn for praise from their mothers above everyone else. She is the one person who is supposed to love unconditionally and wholly. How must it feel to know that your own mother does not find beauty or value in your physical traits?

Most recently, the issue of hair has become present in my life. I made the choice to "go natural" seven years ago and my daughter has natural hair as well. Our natural hair is curly, and is therefore deemed "good." I am very proud of the choice I made to stop relaxing/straightening my hair and accept it in its natural state. I will acknowledge, however, that perhaps if my hair were not curly and instead were kinky, I may not be as happy with my choice.

I acknowledge and accept my personal biases and I was consciously aware of the need to stay objective during the course of gathering data and conducting my analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All data collected from sample participants were kept in a locked filing cabinet to maintain security. All electronic files were password protected. The identities of all sites were kept confidential to protect the anonymity of all parties involved in this study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the individual study participants.

The results of the study could impact the social climate of the schools. The results may raise the awareness of color privilege within the school environment. The study findings may bring forth the occurrence of skin tone preference within the classroom by both teachers and students. Openly acknowledging the issue of colorism could lead to extreme self-awareness and acceptance of personal biases. It is my hope that this awakened self-awareness is the first step to eliminating the phenomenon of colorism altogether.

### **Summary**

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design was used for this study in order to interpret the experiences of the study participants by listening to their personal stories. The research questions in this study guided the researcher to ascertain the subjects' experience with the phenomenon of colorism in the classroom. Two public secondary schools were chosen as sites for the study. The study participant group consisted of 10 self-identified African American educators age 25 or older. Once selected, the participants gave written consent and proceeded to complete a pre-survey in order to collect demographic data. The formal interview process took place over the course of six weeks. Participants provided rich data related to personal experiences with the phenomenon of colorism in general as well as its implications within the classroom. All data were transcribed and coded after the interviews. Several themes

and subthemes became apparent once the data was analyzed. These findings are presented in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. The following research findings are the result of interviews conducted in the summer of 2014 with the 10 selected participants of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings from the data collected during the interview process. This chapter also describes participant demographics. Upon completion of the qualitative data analysis described in Chapter Three, a number of clear core themes and sub-themes emerged. The three main themes were Introduction to Colorism at an Early Age, Colorism and Self-Esteem, and Existence of Colorism in the Classroom.

### **Participants**

The recruitment strategies described in the Data Collection Procedures section of the methodology yielded a participant sample of ten self-identified African American teachers ranging in age from 33 to 56. Permission was granted to conduct research at two public high schools in suburban communities in central Georgia. All of the participants lived in the metro Atlanta, Georgia area.

In conducting the interviews, it was the researcher's goal to capture the participants' experiences with colorism and the affects, if any, it had on their teaching of African American students. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The results for this study are presented beginning with the participants' demographic information:

Table 1

*Participants' Demographic Data*

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Ethnic Identity (Self-described)	Skin Tone Description (Self-described)	Hometown (Geographic Location)
Nicole	36	F	African American	Caramel Brown	Atlanta, GA
John	33	M	Black/African American	Cappuccino Brown	Oklahoma City, OK
Sam	51	M	Black/African American	Pecan or Caramel Colored	Miami, FL
Patricia	54	F	Black	Light Brown	Daytona Beach, FL
Rose	56	F	Black/African American	Brown-Skinned	Eastern NC
Gwendolyn	56	F	Black	Light-Skinned	Daytona Beach, FL
Steve	34	M	Black	Chocolate Chip Brown	East Orange, NJ
Michael	34	M	Black/African American	Dark Brown	Griffin, GA
Reneé	34	F	African American	Dark Brown	Atlanta, GA
Tiffany	35	F	Black	Light Brown	Atlanta, GA

### **The Participant's Introduction to Colorism**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of African American teachers as it relates to their African American students. More specifically, this study aimed to discover how colorism affects the way in which African American teachers feel about their African American students. The research explored the influences of colorism on African American teachers who teach African American students. This section presents data that emerged during the course of interviews and the findings are divided into three sections

according to the following themes: Introduction to Colorism at an Early Age, Colorism and Self-Esteem, and The Existence of Colorism in the Classroom.

### **Results**

The researcher was solely responsible for collecting data for this study. With the support of the school system, the researcher was allowed to solicit African American teachers via email to participate in this doctoral study. This research documented the lived experiences of African American teachers as it pertains to colorism. The results brought forth information on colorism as it has impacted the childhood, family, and relationships of each participant.

The participants were African American teachers between 33 and 56 years old. The interviews were conducted over a six-week period, from June to July 2014. The interviews were held at the researcher's office and did not exceed one hour in total length. Each participant provided permission to audio record the interview.

One hundred percent of the participants were over the age of 25, which was the minimum age required to participate in this study. The minimum age of 25 was chosen to ascertain a more mature perspective on the phenomenon of colorism. All participants identified themselves as Black or African American. The participants were raised in various cities throughout the United States. Each participant is currently an educator in the state of Georgia.

The next section in this chapter presents the data collected during the course of the interview process. The interview questions were divided into six sections according to the following specific topics: Colorism Awareness, Childhood Background, Relationships, Self-Esteem, Colorism in the Family, and Colorism in the Classroom. The Colorism Awareness section of the interview questions referenced the participants' introduction to the concept of colorism. The Childhood Background section of interview questions established the influence of



colorism on the childhood of each participant. The Relationship section of the interview established a correlation between colorism as it pertains to attraction and the choice of mate of each participant. The Self-Esteem section of the interview referenced the affect colorism has on the self-esteem of each participant, as well as other African Americans in the participant's lives. The Colorism in the Family section of the interview referenced the existence of colorism within the family unit of each participant. Lastly, the Colorism in the Classroom section of the interview referenced the presence of colorism within the learning environment and the participants' views on their African American students based on colorism. The following is an overview of the findings of the interview questions and the participants' responses based on their lived experiences. Interview questions and responses are not reported in this section in their entirety in order to focus on those questions from which the themes and subthemes developed. The overview includes the data and information most relevant to the research questions, themes, and sub-themes. Three themes and ten sub-themes emerged throughout the course of data collection. All questions and responses were transcribed verbatim and appear in Appendix G. An interpretation and discussion of results will be detailed in Chapter Five of the dissertation.

Table 2

*Codes*

Category	Data
Introduction to Colorism	Introduced to colorism at an early age Introduced by parents, family members, classmates Introduced to colorism by a lighter-skinned person
Colorism at School	Lighter-skinned students receive preferential treatment Lighter-skinned Blacks are more accepted by Whites

Media Influence on Colorism	<p>Media influences standards of beauty          Media favors light-skinned Black women          Dark-skinned male actors are more accepted today than in the past          Dark-skinned male actors are typecast as thugs, criminals          Dark-skinned female actresses are typecast as poor, uneducated, domestic roles          Dark-skinned actresses are seen more on TV than in movies</p>
Childhood Background	<p>Conscious of skin color          Lower expectations for darker-skinned children          Light-skinned females were pretty          Athletes received preferential treatment          Acceptance and advantages were given to lighter children          Darker students were picked on</p>
Relationships	<p><u>Male Participants</u>          Black males prefer light-skinned women          Light-skinned women are a challenge          Light-skinned women get more attention          Light-skinned women are a status symbol/trophy</p> <p><u>Female Participants</u>          Prefer dark-skinned males          Dark-skinned males are attracted to light women          Want lighter children</p>
Self- Esteem	<p>Self-esteem is related to skin tone          Dark-skinned people have lower self-esteem          Colorism affects self-esteem          Colorism positively affects the self-esteem of light-skinned people          Strong correlation between dark-skinned females and self-esteem</p>
Colorism in the Family	<p>Skin tones of parents were at opposite ends of the spectrum          Light-skinned children in the family received preferential treatment</p>
Colorism in the Classroom	<p>Brown-skinned students are widely accepted          Dark-skinned students receive more disciplinary referrals          Relationship between lower socio-economic level and dark skin          Light-skinned females receive preferential treatment          Cute students receive preferential treatment          Dark-skinned males get into more trouble          Dark-skinned students are stereotyped          Light-skinned students are cocky/privileged</p>

Colorism has been witnessed within the school  
Expectations correlate to socio-economic status

### **Theme One: Introduction to Colorism at an Early Age**

All of the participants were asked to recall experiences with their introduction to colorism. Each participant shared when they first became aware of this phenomenon as well as the person or situation that introduced it. Each participant in the study was aware of the concept of colorism and was introduced to said concept at an early age, ranging from elementary to high school. The participants were introduced to colorism in various forms and from a variety of sources.

**Interview question #1: When, if at all, did you first become aware of colorism and who introduced you to the concept?** Every one of the participants was aware of the concept of colorism. Most of the participants were introduced to said concept during early childhood; however, a few did not become aware of it until later, during their teen years. The vast majority of the participants were introduced to colorism in the school setting. In those cases, other students made the participant aware that skin color mattered in regard to status and acceptability. Nicole described her introduction to colorism:

Personally, I had an experience with it when I was younger dealing with this ballet group I used to be with. It was me and another African American kid in the group. She was very, very fair skinned and I wasn't, and the teachers used to treat me differently than they would treat her.

Nicole learned at an early age that lighter-skinned people often receive preferential treatment. For her, this lesson led to wanting to forgo ballet, something she enjoyed very much. Although her parents instilled a deep appreciation for the African American race and her own brown skin,

she still struggled with the reality that others may view her as lesser than based on her skin tone. Nicole's parents are of opposite skin tones. Her father is a fair-skinned biracial man, and her mother is a darker brown-skinned African American woman.

Gwendolyn was introduced to colorism in high school when she learned that the Whites at her school treated her better than other Black students because she was light-skinned and had light-colored eyes. She recalls this incident below:

I attended a Catholic school where I may have been one of thirty kids in the entire school. I was always referred to as one of those girls, and the one with the light eyes. That was a typical trait in my family. I mentioned this to my daddy and he told me how people see us based on our skin tone and eye color. When I introduced my boyfriend – now husband – to my mama, she made a negative comment because he was dark-skinned. My mama believed that lighter was better. We were raised that way. My daddy didn't think the same way though, and I was a daddy's girl.

Gwendolyn grew up in a household with conflicting ideologies. Her father, a fair-skinned biracial man, did not particularly value the trait of light skin and/or eyes. Her mother, however, was a brown-skinned woman who favored light skin. She raised her daughters to believe that lighter was better and that they should each marry light-skinned men in order to have light-skinned children. This participant was very close to her father.

Several of the participants went into detail on how they were introduced to colorism, while others were uncomfortable with the question, particularly if they were the target of skin tone discrimination. The remaining interview questions delved deeper into the topic of colorism as it pertained to several different areas.

**Interview question #2: Give me details about an incident in which you experienced colorism either directly, or witnessed colorism against another person.** The majority of the participants were able to describe an incident in which they had either been the victim of colorism or witnessed it against another person. Three participants (30%) experienced colorism directly, six participants (60%) witnessed colorism against another person, and one participant (10%) could not recall experiencing or witnessing colorism against another person.

Patricia experienced reverse colorism in a grocery store when she was confronted by a darker-skinned woman who stated, “That’s what’s wrong with you light-skinned women today, you know, you all think you’re better than other people.” Michael witnessed colorism for the first time as a child while hearing kids make fun of each other based on skin tone. One such incident occurred when one child said to another, “Your neck and your shirt are the same color.” In that context, the victim of colorism was wearing a black shirt and the aggressor meant it in a derogatory way. Reneé experienced colorism directly during an incident in which she was compared to her lighter-skinned cousin in a cell phone store. A clerk refused to believe the two women were related because one was dark-skinned and the other was fair. This led the participant to think, “I guess because we’re so different in appearance; of course there’s no way in the world I could be related to someone who looks like that.”

### **Childhood Background**

This section of questions elaborated on the participants’ childhood background and how, if at all, colorism affected them. Each participant was asked to recall details of experiences with colorism during their childhood. Each participant shared stories as to how they experienced and/or witnessed colorism as a child. Some participants recalled being shown preferential

treatment for being lighter in complexion, while others recalled being discriminated against due to their darker skin tone.

**Interview question #1: In what ways did your parents discuss skin color?** Only three participants recalled hearing their parents discuss skin color directly. Patricia recalls her mother being “colorstruck.” She was aware that her mother thought light skin was better, and her mother raised her daughters with the premise that light skin was superior. Rose recalled her youngest sister being the topic of conversation regarding skin tone. This particular sister was the darkest amongst all the siblings and the participant heard their mother speak about it: “I do remember my mom saying to her, ‘You know that you’re beautiful just the way you are. You are a beautiful dark-skinned girl.’” Gwendolyn discussed a conversation had with her mother in which she said, “You want to date and marry somebody that looked a certain way so your kids will look a certain way.” Her mother was implying that she ought to date and marry a light-skinned man in order to have light-skinned children. Though only three participants specifically recalled hearing their parents discuss skin color, others remembered that certain ideals regarding skin color were implied but not discussed directly.

### **Sub-Theme One: Colorism at School**

**Interview question #3: As a child, do you recall people being treated differently based on their skin tone? Explain.** Most of the participants recalled incidents in which people were treated differently based on skin tone. In fact, 70% of the participants witnessed or heard of incidents in which darker-skinned people were discriminated against.

Nicole recalled her uncle treating her brother differently because he was lighter in complexion. Her uncle was biracial and had an affinity for lighter-skinned people. The other participants’ experiences with colorism during childhood varied; however, the majority of them

encountered it in school. John remembered dark-skinned children at school being called names like “Blackie” and one in particular who was nicknamed “Fat Black.” Patricia recalled incidents in school where she jumped line in the cafeteria. When other (darker-skinned) children would tell on her, she would dispute it and the teachers would believe her over them. Steve stated that he “didn’t notice” people being treated differently based on skin tone; however, some of his family members “did a lot more for the light-skinned kids than for the dark-skinned kids.” Michael recalled an incident from school in which he was told by other children that he was “too dark” to play He-Man. Reneé remembered being made fun of by other children due to her dark complexion. The light-skinned children were considered to be “cute” as opposed to their darker-skinned peers, who were not. Tiffany was often called “teacher’s pet” by the other students who insinuated that it was because she was lighter-skinned. She believed it was attributed to her good grades; however, her classmates disputed that.

**Interview question #6: How did colorism affect you as a student in school?** Fifty percent of the participants who recalled people being treated differently based on their skin tone experienced colorism during childhood, most often in the school setting. The skin tones of these five participants varied from very light to very dark, and each of their experiences was unique based upon these differences. For instance, John felt as though if there were ever a situation where a choice was to be made between a student with a dark complexion and himself, that he would have been favored. Patricia believed that colorism worked in her favor as a student in school. She felt more accepted and had more advantages due to her light skin tone. Michael did not feel as though colorism affected him as a student directly; however, he did witness darker-skinned students being picked on. He also recalled boys being more attracted to the lighter-skinned girls. Reneé recalled doing very well scholastically; however, she did not feel that she

was beautiful at a young age. The children with whom she grew up made her feel as though having dark skin automatically made her unattractive. It was much later in life that she was able to let go of that concept and accept her own beauty. Tiffany did not feel as though colorism affected her directly as a student; however, other students made her feel as though her academic accolades could be attributed more to her lighter skin tone than her scholarly practices.

### **Sub-Theme Two: Colorism in the Family**

The following section explores colorism as it pertains to the family experiences of each participant. The participants were asked to explain the presence of colorism, if it existed, in each of their families. They were also asked to share incidents in which they had experienced or witnessed colorism within their families.

**Interview question #1: Does colorism exist in your family? If so, please describe an incident where a family member gave preferential treatment to other members based on skin tone.** Fifty percent of the participants stated that colorism does exist in their families. The other 50% could not recall an incident of direct colorism within their family. Seventy percent of the participants remembered skin tone being a topic of discussion in some form within their families. The topic of skin color was discussed in a variety of ways, but most often when discussing children within the family. Nicole experienced colorism first hand from a family member who favored her lighter-skinned brother over her. She shared the following incident:

My father is mixed and every other generation in his family is very fair, then dark, then very fair, then dark. His youngest brother never had kids and I heard my daddy telling someone that the reason he didn't have kids was because he didn't want them to come out my complexion.



Patricia had vast experiences with colorism within her family. Her family has a history of favoring light-skinned people, and she witnessed the following:

Growing up, I did think I was better because I was light-skinned. My mom prefers light-skinned people. I prefer light-skinned people. All my sisters prefer light-skinned people even though they have darker-skinned extended family members. A perfect example of this is my sister, whose daughter was born with dark skin. When the baby was born, she did not like her daughter because she was dark. After six months, she came around.

Colorism definitely exists 100% in my family.

Gwendolyn grew up experiencing colorism within her family. She stated that she has received preferential treatment and been a victim of reverse colorism. The following are her accounts:

I have two daughters that have two daughters, and they're like ebony and ivory. My daughter with the lighter skin-toned daughter has never mentioned anything, but my daughter with the darker skin-toned daughter has brought it up several times. When I look at my granddaughters, I've prayed that my darker-skinned granddaughter will be treated just like the other one. I get emotional because I know how this world treats people and I do want her to be treated fairly. I know she's going to be a strong little girl; she's a pretty girl, but I just think this world could be cruel to her.

Some of the participants were reluctant to share incidents regarding colorism within their own families. Others shared their experiences, which were often painful, through open and honest dialog. Many of the participants gained awareness of the value associated with lighter skin through familial experiences.

### **Sub-Theme Three: Parents of Opposite Skin Tones**

This subtheme represents a prevalent occurrence within the family dynamics of the various participants. Out of the 10 participants, seven of them grew up with parents who had polar opposite skin tones, in particular, light-skinned mothers and dark-skinned fathers. Of these participants, many of them believed the skin tone of their parents influenced their preferences later in life. The male participants in particular believed that having a fair-skinned mother is directly correlated to the type of women they find attractive as adults. The participants with light-skinned mothers directly correlated their mother's skin tone with what a woman is "supposed" to look like. The male subjects were particularly prone to this phenomenon.

The other three participants had parents with opposite skin tones; however, it was the fathers who were light-skinned and the mothers who were darker in skin tone. Each of the fathers is biracial. They each chose to marry a brown/dark-skinned woman.

The participants feel that their biracial fathers chose darker women in order to solidify their ethnic identities. Two of the participants had mothers who would only date/marry a very fair-skinned man. An unexpected occurrence came forth when each of the three participants revealed that although they had fathers who were light, they each preferred darker-skinned men. These results were the opposite of the findings for the male participants with light-skinned mothers.

### **Theme Two: Colorism and Self-Esteem**

This section asked questions pertaining to the potential impact of colorism on participants' self-esteem. The participants were asked to describe the way in which colorism affects one's self-esteem. They were also asked to share if colorism has affected their own self-esteem or the self-esteem of their close friends. Lastly, they were asked to share their thoughts

on whether colorism is directly correlated to the self-esteem of dark-skinned people in the United States.

**Interview question #1: Do you feel colorism negatively affects one's self-esteem?**

**Explain.** All of the participants agreed that colorism negatively affects one's self-esteem.

Nicole grew up with self-pride regarding her skin tone. Her family was very afro-centric and raised her with an appreciation for her culture and skin. She recalled having portraits of African art and playing with Black dolls. She developed an appreciation for her skin tone at an early age; however, she still believes that colorism can affect the self-esteem of individuals who are not comfortable with their skin tone. John stated that colorism does in fact negatively affect one's self-esteem. He believes that if a person not liking his or her skin tone could have adverse effects on their self-perception. Sam thinks colorism has a negative effect on self-esteem. He stated that "if you're a darker person, how other people view you can affect how you view yourself. Being called names like black, tar baby, and ugly can be engrained in your brain." Patricia believes that colorism negatively affects one's self-esteem because darker-skinned people who witness lighter-skinned individuals receiving preferential treatment are more apt to believe that their own skin is not good enough. Rose, a dark-skinned woman, believes that skin color does affect self-esteem. While she is "comfortable" with her own complexion, she has witnessed her even darker-skinned sister struggle with accepting her skin tone and questioning her beauty as a result. Gwendolyn believes her own self-esteem has been affected by reverse colorism. She felt as though people "expect" her to "act like she's better or act like she's cute" solely based on the color of her skin and the texture of her hair. Steve also believes that colorism can affect self-esteem. He stated that because darker skin is not portrayed as being "attractive or sexy," people with this skin tone, if they are not comfortable with themselves, can

be negatively affected. Michael believes that children who are teased because of their skin tone are more likely to suffer self-esteem issues growing up and as adults. Reneé, a dark-skinned woman, stated that there is a definite correlation between self-esteem and colorism. She believes that “if what is painted to you as being attractive is contrary to what you are, then you really might not have a whole bunch of self-love or self-esteem.” Tiffany also believes that colorism affects self-esteem. She stated, “Your skin color is part of your identity. If people are attacking your skin color, they’re attacking you.”

**Interview question #4: Do you feel that the self-esteem of dark-skinned people in the United States is directly correlated to colorism? Explain.** Each participant agreed that there is a direct correlation between colorism and the self-esteem of dark-skinned Black people. Only one participant, Reneé, a dark-skinned female, admitted that her own self-esteem had been affected by colorism. She had the following to say: “I didn’t feel like I was overly attractive. I guess it did affect my self-esteem. I didn’t see myself as attractive until very late in life. I was just a regular looking person.” She went on to explain how she witnessed her dark-skinned college roommate struggle with her skin tone. Her roommate would only date light-skinned men because she wanted her children to be brown to light-skinned. Reneé felt that her roommate hated her skin so much that she was afraid to pass it on to her children. She stated that this was “very, very, very sad and tragic.” Steve, a dark-skinned male, believes that colorism negatively affects the self-esteem of dark-skinned people. He does not believe that it has affected his self-esteem, however. He felt that if someone does not like him because of his skin tone, “it’s their loss.” He believes the self-esteem of dark-skinned Black women is more affected by colorism than Black men.

Gwendolyn, a light-skinned female, believes that dark-skinned people are affected by colorism. She has experienced colorism indirectly through her children, who are darker in complexion. One particular incident occurred when her daughter was in high school. People would question whether she was her daughter's "real" mother because of their very different skin tones. She remembered other students saying things like "that's not your mom" or "you don't look like her." These occurrences were hard for her daughter to accept. Patricia believes that colorism negatively affects the self-esteem of dark-skinned people who consistently witness lighter-skinned people receive preferential treatment.

#### **Sub-Theme Four: Dark-Skinned Women**

Sub-theme four represents a common ideology that was stated by several of the participants. When discussing the concept of colorism as it pertains to self-esteem, each participant stated that there was indeed a direct correlation. The participants also stated that, in their opinion, colorism affects dark-skinned women most strongly. John does not generally find dark-skinned Black women attractive. He is not attracted to dark-skinned Black women "unless they're very well put together." He also believes that when it comes to attracting a darker-skinned woman, "it's easier because they're not a challenge like light-skinned women." Sam has found that darker-skinned women approach him more freely as opposed to lighter-skinned women who wait to be approached. He feels that light-skinned women are viewed as status symbols or trophies.

#### **Sub-Theme Five: Colorism in the Media**

**Interview question #7: In what ways has the media influenced colorism?** All participants agreed that the media has some correlation with colorism in today's society. The majority believe that the overwhelming lack of dark-skinned African Americans in today's

media says volumes about who and what is considered “beautiful” by American standards. John believes that when it comes to the American media, “lighter is better.” Patricia believes the media fails to use dark-skinned actresses in major roles. Rose believes that the media portrays African American beauty as the “person with the wavy hair or the person with the brightest skin.” The majority of participants believe that the media has adopted a European standard of beauty that affects the types of African American actors, models, and entertainers who are most prevalently featured today. While some participants believe that more recently, the media is making strides to counteract this “whitewashing” of African Americans, the majority agree that there is still much progress to be made.

#### **Sub-Theme Six: Dark-Skinned Actors Are Underrepresented and often Negatively Portrayed**

A common sub-theme in the responses of all participants was the continuous use of lighter-skinned actors and particularly actresses in movies, television programs, commercials, and magazines. Over half of the participants felt that the media heavily impacts the concept of colorism amongst African Americans. A sub-theme among their responses is that dark-skinned people are negatively portrayed or under-represented in the media. While some dark-skinned male actors are viewed as “attractive and virile,” the majority of the participants believed that dark-skinned female actresses and models were not as attractive and often did not get major roles in movies, on television, or in magazines.

#### **Sub-Theme Seven: Relationships**

The experiences with colorism during childhood had a major impact on the future adult relationships of the study participants. Virtually all participants had a skin tone preference for potential mates. When asked to respond to interview questions regarding skin tone preference

and attraction, the participants shared their feelings openly. The most important goal of this portion of the interview was to ascertain whether the participants did indeed have a skin tone preference for the people they are romantically attracted to. This question focuses on the correlation between colorism and what is deemed attractive.

**Interview question #1: Do you have a skin tone preference for the people you date (or have dated)? If so, what is that preference? Please explain why you prefer this skin tone.** Nicole prefers dark-skinned males. Though her father has a light complexion, she was raised with a strong sense of pride for her race. Her mother and she share the same brown-skinned complexion. She feels “safer around chocolate men” and that “if something goes down, he’ll be able to protect me.” She also wants to have “chocolate babies,” and is therefore attracted to darker men. John has a preference for lighter-skinned women. He attributed this to the women he grew up around. His first girlfriend, mother, and aunts were all light-skinned women. He also felt as though his mother was the “representation of what women I was to be with would look like.” Sam prefers women with his complexion or lighter. He described himself as “pecan or caramel-colored.” He attributes his preference to his mother’s complexion, as “she set the standard for the women I thought would be of quality.”

Patricia is a light-skinned woman who prefers dark-skinned or White men. She described her opinion on skin tone and attractiveness as follows:

I attract males of all skin tones, but darker men are most attracted to me. Dark males prefer light women. Dark men want light or White. Lighter women have nicer hair and are closer to White and that’s why dark men prefer them. Light-skinned males prefer light or White as well. I don’t find dark skin beautiful or attractive.

Rose is a darker-skinned woman who stated that she is naturally attracted to darker-skinned men; however, looking back in her past, she found that lighter-skinned men generally approached her the most. Gwendolyn is a light-skinned woman who is attracted to dark-skinned men. She has always had this preference, though she could not explain why. She always naturally gravitated towards dark-skinned men and has found that they gravitate to her as well. Steve stated that when it comes to dating and attraction, he is “color blind” and has dated women of various races and skin tones. Growing up, he mainly dated white women. His wife is a dark-skinned woman and also the darkest woman with whom he has ever had a relationship. Michael stated that he does not have a skin tone preference. He described his wife’s skin tone as “very light” when in fact she is White. Reneé is a dark-skinned woman who prefers dark-skinned men. She equates this preference with her father’s dark skin tone and believes that he shaped her perception of what she deems attractive. Tiffany is a light-skinned woman who is attracted to darker-skinned men. She attributed her preference to the men saw her mother and aunts date while growing up.

One phenomenon occurred amongst 100% of the male participants. Each one of them, though different complexions themselves, had a mother who was of a lighter skin tone. In turn, three out of the four male participants preferred a light-skinned mate as a result. They themselves found a direct correlation between their mother and the women they find attractive.

John described his skin tone preference as:

Evolving over time, but more so lighter complexioned women are my preference. My wife is light-skinned. My first girlfriend in high school was light-skinned. My mom is light-skinned. I was comfortable with these women. My mom was a representation of what women should look like. I probably wouldn’t respond to a darker-complexioned woman the same way I would a lighter-complexioned woman unless the darker woman



was well put together. I gravitate towards lighter women. Dark-skinned males prefer lighter women because typically they don't think they could have them. Light-skinned women are more of a challenge. They get more attention, so if you have one of them, you've got something.

The adult relationships of John have been affected by the women he grew up with. Having a light-skinned mother who was "a representation of what women should look like" developed a pattern for his future relationship conquests.

Sam stated that "75% of the women I've dated were lighter" than him. His standard of beauty was his mother, whom he describes as "a beautiful light-skinned woman." He believes that "darker women tend to approach [men] more freely, while lighter-skinned women wait to be approached."

Steve described himself as "colorblind" as it pertains to women; however, he also stated that he "was not initially attracted to dark-skinned women." In the past, he dated "mostly White or light-skinned women." Steve went into further detail on relationships:

I believe that sometimes opposites attract in regard to skin color. That's why dark-skinned males prefer lighter women. People are conscious of who they date because they want their future children to have a particular skin tone. I've heard people say "I don't want to date anyone darker than me." I think they're uncomfortable with their own skin tone.

### **Theme Three: The Existence of Colorism in the Classroom**

The final section represents the epicenter of this research study. These questions deal directly with colorism as it pertains to African American teachers and their African American students. The study participants were asked a series of questions in order to ascertain their

experiences, if any, with colorism in the classroom. Each participant was initially asked to describe the students in their classroom and to classify them into groups based on skin tone. Collectively, each participant divided their students into the categories of light, medium, and dark. Though there are many variations within each group, these are universal descriptions used by African Americans when asked to classify based on skin tone. Each participant was asked if they thought their light-skinned students were better behaved and smarter than their darker-skinned counterparts. All ten participants replied that they did not believe that their lighter-skinned students were better behaved; however, four out of the ten participants did believe that their lighter-skinned students were smarter.

**Interview question #3: Tell me about the behavior, socio-economic status, level of intelligence, and attractiveness of each of the three groups.** The participants' responses to this question varied; however, there were some consistencies amongst the answers. In response to the behavior of the lighter-skinned students, some reoccurring responses included descriptions such as attention-seeking, cocky, privileged, acting out, and entitled. Steve described his light-skinned students as "smart, with smart mouths." John stated that his lighter-skinned kids probably get into more trouble than the darker-skinned kids; however, "whatever the dark-skinned students did would overshadow anything anybody else did." Gwendolyn revealed that her lighter-skinned students possessed a "sense of not necessarily privilege, but of cockiness." Michael found that his students who were biracial and light-skinned often had difficulties identifying with one particular group. Because of this, he believed "those kids tend to maybe act out a little more."

**Sub-Theme Eight: Teacher's Expectations Related to Socio-Economic Status**

The responses regarding socio-economic status were diverse. Forty percent of the participants responded that the socio-economic background of their lighter-skinned students “varied.” Forty percent of the participants responded the socio-economic background of their lighter-skinned students was higher than their brown or darker-skinned students. The other 20% stated that their lighter-skinned students were middle class. John correlated socio-economic background with the skin tone of the students and therefore their parents. He stated the following: “You would assume that the light-skinned kids would come from light-skinned parents, which would probably mean they would have better jobs.” The vast majority of the participants responded that their brown-skinned students’ socio-economic statuses varied. The responses were more polarizing regarding the participants’ darker-skinned students. Fifty percent of the participants stated their darker-skinned students came from a lower socio-economic background than their brown and light-skinned peers. Steve stated, “I would say that 70% of them [dark-skinned students] came from hard backgrounds of probably single parent homes, low income, and rough neighborhoods.”

Nicole believes that socio-economic status does indeed correlate to her higher expectations of her African American students. She believes that “if you’re from a two parent household and you live in a middle to upper class neighborhood, I expect more from you because, in my thinking, your parents are able and capable of exposing you to more.” While John also relates skin tone to socio-economic status under the assumption that his lighter-skinned students would “come from parents that were light-skinned, which would probably mean that they would have better jobs,” he stated that overall, he has higher expectations for his brown-skinned students. Patricia responded that her expectations do indeed correlate to socio-economic

status and not skin tone, and that she has high expectations for students of all skin tones. On a previous question, however, she stated that the dark-skinned students in her class fall into the category of low socio-economic status. It can then be inferred that although she believes she has equal expectations for her students based on skin tone, subconsciously, her expectation for her darker students is lower due to their lower class status. Reneé finds a direct correlation between socio-economic status and her expectations. She stated that “the expectations that I have are the same, but in regards to what really determines how a kid performs, socio-economic status is one of the major, if not the most major, factors.” Tiffany stated that her higher expectations do not correlate with skin tone, socioeconomic status, or attractiveness; however, she also stated the following: “I would see the hair and the clothes and think, okay, is this kid going to be a knucklehead?” She then admitted her expectations correlate to “overall appearance.”

#### **Subtheme Nine: Attractive Students Receive Preferential Treatment**

For this particular question, the participants were asked to describe the level of attractiveness for each of their three groups of students. The responses varied greatly. Nicole and Patricia found their dark-skinned students most attractive. John and Rose found the brown-skinned (medium) students most attractive. Sam found each group equally attractive. Gwendolyn provided vague answers; however, she did state that her brown-skinned (medium) group got “a lot of attention.” Steve rated his students on a 10-point scale with the following ratings: Light, 7 out of 10; Medium, 6 out of 10; and Dark, 5 or 6 out of 10. Michael stated that his light-skinned group of students was very attractive as opposed to their darker peers. Reneé explained that her light-skinned students were “perceived as attractive,” her brown-skinned (medium) students were “accepted by all,” and her dark-skinned students were the least attractive. Tiffany stated that her light-skinned students were “all cute,” while her other students

were categorized as “average.” Based on the responses, 40% of the participants found their lighter-skinned students to be most attractive or perceived as most attractive. 30% found their brown-skinned (medium) students to be most attractive or perceived as most attractive. 20% found their dark-skinned students to be most attractive, and 10% found each group equally attractive.

**Interview question #7: Do you think “cute” students receive more preferential treatment as opposed to unattractive students? Why or why not?** The overwhelming majority of participants agreed that “cute” students get preferential treatment. Eighty percent believed that a student who is viewed as attractive will receive more attention and preferential treatment. One participant (10%) answered no to this question and did not believe “cute” students received preferential treatment. One participant clarified his answer and stated that “cute” students do indeed receive preferential treatment; however, they receive it from their peers, not their teachers.

#### **Sub-Theme Ten: Dark-Skinned Students Receive More and Harsher Discipline**

**Interview question #4: (a) Do you think your darker-skinned students get into more trouble than their lighter-skinned peers? (b) Are more disciplinary referrals written for darker-skinned students than their lighter-skinned peers?** The results of this question were very clear and the participants seemed to answer them with more certainty and less hesitation and explanation than the previous questions. Fifty percent of the participants replied that their darker-skinned students get into more trouble than their lighter-skinned peers. Twenty percent replied no to the question and did not believe their darker students got into more trouble than their lighter peers. Twenty percent of the participants stated that it “varied” and one participant (10%) provided no response.

Regarding the accumulation of disciplinary referrals, 90% of the participants replied yes to the question pertaining to disciplinary referrals being written disproportionately for dark-skinned students. One participant (10%) provided no response.

**Interview Question #5: (a) Tell me about an incident where you have observed a student receive preferential treatment from a teacher. (b) What was the skin tone of this student? (c) Do you feel the preferential treatment was related to the skin tone of the student?** Four participants recalled witnessing a student or students receive preferential treatment that they believed was directly correlated to skin tone. John stated that preferential treatment “typically happens with lighter girls.” He has witnessed them get the “benefit of the doubt” and not be subject to questioning, which differed from what he observed of their darker-skinned peers. Patricia recalled an incident in which she experienced the following:

I had a student with dark skin, overweight, dreads, looked like- I don't know; some people say a monkey or whatever, and I experienced a teacher that just didn't like him. I mean not inside, but didn't like the way he looked. And it bothered me because I loved this kid, but he wasn't attract – he wasn't good looking to the eyes, but then I had another kid in the same class, light skin with green eyes and dreads, now she loved him, but she did not like the darker skin.

Steve recalled an incident where a light-skinned female student continuously talked her way out of In-School Suspension (ISS), whereas other students with lesser disciplinary offenses would be sent to ISS for days. This participant also witnessed a light-skinned female student “just go crazy and cuss out everybody,” but return to school the next day as opposed to a darker-skinned student who did “just a little bit less” and was removed from school. Renee' recalled an incident in which three light-skinned sisters were allowed to:

Pretty much do whatever they wanted to do. Get to class on time, not get to class on time. If they don't get to class on time, they can go wherever to get a pass from a teacher or assistant principal that shows some favor to them.

The three participants found the preferential treatment shown to these students to be undeniably related to colorism.

**Interview question #6: Do your higher expectations correlate to the skin tone, socio-economic status, or level of attractiveness of the student? Explain.** The overwhelming response to this question was a general "I have high expectations for all my students." When asked to specifically correlate expectations to skin tone, socio-economic status, and attractiveness, the participants' responses varied. Twenty stated that they relate their high expectations to skin tone, while 80% said that they do not relate the two. Forty percent of the participants stated that their high expectations are related to the socio-economic status of the student, whereas 60% did not relate the two. Lastly, only one participant (10%) stated that the level of attractiveness of a student directly correlated to his expectations, while 90% did not relate the two.

Due to the results yielded from the interview process, it can be established that colorism does indeed exist in the secondary classroom as it relates to African American teachers and their African American students. Several participants shared information, eye-witness accounts, and personal stories of how they have experienced colorism within their schools and classrooms.

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. The following questions guided this study:

1. *How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom?* Each teacher was able to provide insight regarding their experiences with colorism in the classroom. The interview questions provided rich data that explained how African American teachers have experienced colorism in various forms within the classroom.
2. *How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers?* The presence of colorism in the classroom affects the way African American teachers view their students. In some cases, it was directly correlated with expectation levels and disciplinary action.
3. *How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher's ability to treat African American students fairly?* Several of the study participants have witnessed or experienced light-skinned students receive preferential treatment. This phenomenon directly correlates to an African American teacher's ability to treat their African American students fairly.
4. *How does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students?* Study results found that some African American teachers have pre-conceived expectations based on skin tone, socio-economic status, and/or level of attractiveness of a student.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings for this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. The researcher was accountable for interpreting the phenomena as it relates to the context



of the situation to derive an analysis (Giorgi, 2009). The data from the interview responses indicated that all participants had encountered colorism at some point during their lives. The lived experiences of each participant provided insight on how they viewed colorism and how it related to their lives both personally and professionally. This study recognized that colorism had a direct affect upon the way African American teachers viewed their students.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Overview**

This research aimed to examine the impact that colorism has on how African American teachers treat their African American students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and effects of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students in two public high schools in the Southeast region of the United States. Using individual interviews with African-American teachers currently in the classroom, the phenomenon was investigated. The teachers participated in a structured interview which consisted of 38 questions. The goal of the interviews was to elicit responses from the participants explaining the phenomenon of colorism from the viewpoint of the individuals. This phenomenological inquiry revealed African American teachers' thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of colorism and its effects on their lives.

Chapter Four provided a detailed analysis of the various responses provided by the participants; outcomes from the analysis of the data identified four emergent themes and seven subthemes. The emergent themes represent the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the study participants. In Chapter Five, answers to the four research questions along with an overview of the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of African-American teachers regarding colorism is discussed. The chapter concludes by discussing implications, study limitations, and recommendations for further research on the phenomenon of colorism.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study recognized that colorism had a direct effect upon the way African American teachers viewed their students. The participants of this study were African American teachers over the age of 25. According to the findings, the participants' personal experiences with

colorism correlated to how they viewed their African American students' intelligence, behavior, and attractiveness.

The following research questions were used to guide the qualitative study:

1. *How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom?* Each teacher was able to provide insight regarding their experiences with colorism in the classroom. The interview questions provided rich data that explained how African American teachers have experienced colorism in various forms within the classroom.
2. *How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers?* The presence of colorism in the classroom affects the way African American teachers view their students. In some cases, it was directly correlated with expectation levels and disciplinary action.
3. *How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher's ability to treat African American students fairly?* Several of the study participants have witnessed or experienced light-skinned students receiving preferential treatment. This phenomenon directly correlates to an African American teacher's ability to treat African American students fairly.
4. *How does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students?* Study results found that some African American teachers have pre-conceived expectations based on skin tone, socio-economic status, and/or level of attractiveness of a student.

## Discussion

Colorism is defined as “the privileging of a light skin tone over a dark skin tone” (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). The issue of colorism has been a problem for Blacks in the United States from the time of slavery. Social status within the Black race was strongly associated with skin tone prior to the Civil War.

Through the centuries of slavery, lighter skin signified closer kinship to the master- son or daughter, sister or brother. Lighter skin might mean kinder treatment because of those blood bonds. Lighter skin might have meant easier labors. And after slavery, lighter skin might have led to greater opportunities in education, in the workforce, and in the marriage market – especially for women. Darker skin meant greater limitations, harsher treatment, and a greater remove from privilege (Folan, 2010, p. 111).

Lighter skin has been the recipient of privilege within the African American community since slavery. Hundreds of years later, the African American community is still suffering from colorism and its implications are still correlated to greater opportunity and better treatment.

In relation to the theoretical framework reviewed previously in Chapter Two, a theory of relevance to this study was Serge Moscovici’s Social Representation Theory. This theory evaluates people, ideas, and values of institutions in a cultural context.

Moscovici described Social Representation Theory as:

Systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and

classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973, p. 181).

In light of this theoretical framework, this study's findings provided a direct correlation between Moscovici's Social Representation Theory and colorism. The phenomenon of colorism provides a "system of values, establishment of an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world, and a code for naming and classifying the various aspects of their world" (Moscovici, 1973, p. 181). The system pertains to the value that has historically been placed on lighter African American skin here in the United States since slavery (Folan, 2010). The "establishment of an order" pertains to the hierarchy that the various African American skin tones are placed upon ranging from most valued (light) to least valued (dark). Lastly, the "code for naming and classifying the various aspects of their world" pertains to the often unspoken code to which African Americans adhere in regard to skin tone and its implications on practically every realm of life from professional to personal (Moscovici, 1973, p. 181).

Previous research on the phenomenon of colorism has revealed that skin tone among African Americans plays a considerable role in a myriad of situations. One such study, conducted by Matthew Harrison (2004), found that skin tone contributed to a job applicant's chance of getting hired. Harrison's study implicated skin tone bias within the job market. His findings show that skin color is relevant within the job market; more highly regarded even than one's educational background and/or prior work experience (Harrison, 2004). Another such study, conducted by Natalye Pearson-Trammell (2010), explored colorism and self-esteem among dark-skinned African American women. Trammell's study concluded that the participants who encountered colorism were negatively affected and experienced extreme

difficulty developing healthy self-esteem. The study also found that dark-skinned African American women suffered intense emotional trauma related to colorism (Trammell, 2010).

This study found that there is indeed a direct correlation between colorism and the way in which some African American teachers view their African American students as it relates to intelligence, behavior, and attractiveness. Three core themes emerged during the course of this study. The themes are the following:

1. Introduction to Colorism at an Early Age
2. Colorism and Self-Esteem
3. The Existence of Colorism in the Classroom

The themes that emerged during the course of this study are a result of the lived experiences of the study participants. Theme one developed as a result of the majority of the participants being introduced to the concept of colorism within the school setting. Their experiences vary from having been the target of colorism to having received preferential treatment due to colorism. Eighty percent of the study participants were exposed to colorism in the school setting by either witnessing it against another person or being the victim of it themselves. The study participants reported that colorism affected them in various ways. Only one of the participants stated that colorism worked in her favor. She received preferential treatment due to being light-skinned. Within the school setting, this participant was favored by peers and teachers alike. Twenty percent of the study participants stated that colorism worked against them. These two participants, a dark-skinned woman and a brown-skinned woman, each reported that they had been directly discriminated against within the school setting based solely on their skin tone. Thirty percent of the participants stated that colorism worked simultaneously for and against them in varying situations. Steve reported experiencing colorism against himself

and other dark-skinned students in elementary school. However, as an adult, he has received preferential treatment from women due to his dark skin. Patricia, a light-skinned woman, has been both the benefactor and the victim of reverse colorism. Within the school setting, she received preferential treatment from her teachers. As an adult, she has received both preferential treatment and discrimination due to her light skin. Gwendolyn, a light-skinned woman, was favored in school and often identified by physical traits such as “the one with the light eyes,” yet as an adult woman, she finds herself being discriminated against by other Black women who expect her to “act a certain way” due to how she looks. Forty percent of the study participants reported that colorism worked neither in their favor nor directly against them. Of these four participants, three of them were brown-skinned men who did not think their middle-of-the road skin tone afforded them any certain privilege or discrimination. This was a common response throughout the course of this study. Medium skin-toned Blacks often do not experience colorism in any form, traditional or reversed.

Theme two pertained to the influence media has on colorism and self-esteem within the African American community. All of the participants believed the media had a direct influence on colorism within the African American community. Several participants agreed that dark-skinned actors and actresses were typecast into less than positive roles such as thugs, drug dealers/junkies, or domestic workers. There was also said to be a lack of dark-skinned actors and actresses on the big screen as opposed to television. Another common response was that light-skinned actresses were most often cast as the romantic leads and featured in magazines as the standard of African American beauty. The “Halle Berry, Vanessa Williams, and Paula Patton” types represent what African American beauty is through the lens of Eurocentric standards. Some participants believed that the media portrayed what African Americans are “supposed” to

look like, and therefore they strive to achieve those features. The “bright skin, light eyes, and long hair” are features that are portrayed as being the epitome of beauty. Only recently have actresses such as Lupita Nyong’o been praised for beauty despite possessing features which are not historically prized in the African American community. The latest trend within the media is African Americans who possess multi-racial/biracial features. The curly hair, lighter skin, racially ambiguous look is quite prevalent in commercials, print ads, and television.

All of the study participants believed that colorism can negatively affect one’s self-esteem. In particular, the self-esteem of dark-skinned African Americans was believed to be either directly or indirectly influenced by colorism. John stated that the self-esteem of Black people is directly correlated to colorism. He referred to dark skin as an “obstacle” that can interfere with the lives of dark-skinned African Americans in multiple ways, including in the workplace. Sam stated that the way people view you will eventually affect the way in which you view yourself. If you hear the terms “black, tar baby, ugly, etc.” applied to you from early on in life, it will be “engrained in your brain.” Patricia believed that the self-esteem of dark-skinned Blacks is affected by seeing the advantages lighter-skinned Blacks are afforded. This causes those with dark skin to question “what’s wrong with them” and realize that there is nothing, only a superfluous amount of melanin. Rose, a dark-skinned woman, stated that “this is the hand I was dealt from creation. I’m comfortable with it.” She does, however, have family members who are not comfortable with their skin tone and have had their self-esteem affected due to having darker skin. She believes colorism is a “major contributor” to the self-esteem or lack thereof of dark-skinned people in the United States. Gwendolyn believes that Black women suffer the effects of colorism and self-esteem issues more than their male counterparts. She has two granddaughters, one with lighter skin and one with darker skin. Her daughter with the dark-



skinned child has made several references to the child's complexion and is concerned with how she will be treated because of it. Gwendolyn is concerned that her dark-skinned granddaughter will be treated differently than her light-skinned granddaughter. Her fear is that the "world will be cruel to her." Steve stated that colorism affects self-esteem because if what is portrayed (by the media) as being "attractive or sexy" does not reflect you, then you will feel lesser than. He also believes that colorism affects Black women more severely than Black men. Dark-skinned Black males are often seen as being "fine," whereas dark women are not often seen as beautiful. Michael shares the belief that dark-skinned Black women are more negatively affected by colorism than dark-skinned Black men. He attributes this directly to media influence and the perception of what is considered beautiful. Reneé, a dark-skinned Black woman, stated that colorism did affect her self-esteem. She never felt that she was "overly attractive" until much later in life. She also believes the media portrayal of stereotypical Black beauty worked to the detriment of dark-skinned African Americans' self-esteem. Tiffany believes that your skin color is "part of your identity." If your skin color is being attacked, you are being attacked. She has witnessed her dark-skinned female friends receive backhanded compliments such as "you're pretty – for a dark-skinned girl" her entire life.

Theme three contains information on the epicenter of this study, the existence of colorism in the classroom. Theme three yielded the results that the phenomenon of colorism does indeed exist in the secondary classroom. The various reasons for this have been divided into three sub-themes. Sub-themes eight, nine, and ten fall into this category.

Sub-theme eight discussed teachers' expectations related to socio-economic status. Historically, lighter-skinned Blacks were afforded more opportunity to obtain education post-slavery than their darker-skinned counterparts. More education has generally equated to a higher

socio-economic status for African Americans. Today, however, though education is valued throughout the Black community, there is still division between light and dark skin tones. According to Hall (2005), light-skinned African Americans are exclusively obsessed with education. This study concluded that some African American teachers have pre-conceived ideas of their African American students based on their family's socio-economic status. Forty percent of the participants responded that the socio-economic background of their lighter-skinned students was higher than their brown or darker-skinned students. Twenty percent stated that their lighter-skinned students were middle class. Fifty percent of the participants stated their darker-skinned students came from a lower socio-economic background than their brown and light-skinned peers. Fifty percent of the participants shared that their highest expectations are either directly, indirectly, or subconsciously related to a student's socioeconomic status.

Sub-theme nine discussed the common belief amongst the study participants that "cute" or attractive students receive preferential treatment. Eighty percent of the study participants believed that "cute" students received preferential treatment from their teachers. Twenty percent did not believe that a student's level of attractiveness correlated to preferential treatment; however, these two participants did believe that preferential treatment was given due to alternate factors. Sam believes that "cute" students receive preferential treatment from their peers, not necessarily their teachers. He believes that "cute" students are more likely to be voted class president or homecoming queen by their peers. He did not find a direct correlation between a student's physical appearance and the treatment received from teachers. Rose believes that a student's personality is a factor regarding receiving preferential treatment from teachers. She believes that students with pleasant personalities are more likely to receive preferential treatment versus students who are attractive. The majority of study participants believed that there is a

direct and substantial correlation between a student's physical appearance and the way in which they are treated by teachers. Nicole stated that attractive students are able to "get over with some teachers." She believes that the more attractive a student is, the more likely the student is to be able to "charm" people. She also stated that attractive students are more likely to receive extra help and tutoring. Patricia recalled a specific incident in which an attractive student received preferential treatment that resulted in being kept in school despite several disciplinary infractions. She attributed this solely to the fact that teachers thought the student was "cute," so he received a great deal more leniency than his less attractive peers. Steve believes that teachers are friendlier to "cuter" students. He also believes attractive students get more individualized attention from their teachers and has witnessed this phenomenon amongst his colleagues. Michael believes that "cute" students would receive preferential treatment and gave the following example as to why: "If two women have flat tires, I'll help them both, but I'm probably going to go to the cute one first." Tiffany believes that the discrimination based on physical attraction begins as early as daycare. According to her, a "cute little bright-skinned girl is going to get more attention than a little black boy with twists in his head." She attributes this unfair circumstance to the media and what is deemed attractive in our society.

Sub-theme ten discusses how the study participants correlate student skin tone with disciplinary referrals. More specifically, the sub-theme describes the belief that darker-skinned students received a disproportionate amount of disciplinary referrals as opposed to their lighter-skinned counterparts for the same infractions. Of the 10 study participants, eight of them, or 80%, believe unequivocally that dark-skinned students receive more disciplinary referrals. The other two participants, 20%, were unsure of whether dark-skinned students received more referrals. Michael was one of these two participants. He did believe that "adults and

administrators are a little more intimidated by them [dark-skinned students].” Nicole believes that dark-skinned students get “pigeonholed” and that once they get a “bad rap,” they become known for negative behaviors. John feels that darker-skinned students have the propensity to be “loud, threatening, and will potentially do the most damage.” Sam believes that teachers’ expectations of darker-skinned students may correlate with the disproportionate amount of disciplinary referrals they receive. While he described his own personal classroom as “equal opportunity,” he did admit that there “seems to be a pattern” of darker-skinned students receiving more referrals. When asked to explain why darker-skinned students receive, in her opinion, more disciplinary referrals, Patricia replied that it is because “they’re not attractive.” She believes that lighter-skinned students are “more believable and easier to look at” and feels that administration would rather keep a lighter-skinned student in school versus a darker-skinned student. Gwendolyn believes that darker-skinned students receive more referrals because of the negative stereotypes associated with dark-skinned African Americans. She does believe, however, that teachers and administrators may not be consciously aware of what they are doing when unfairly distributing harsher punishments to darker students. Steve believes that darker students receive more referrals because of their socio-economic background and their academic deficits. He made reference to the majority of dark-skinned students who were receiving referrals as also having IEPs, or Individualized Education Programs. Reneé feels that the racial demographics of her school lead to a disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals being written for darker-skinned students. The majority of teachers at her particular school are White females. Reneé does not think that White female teachers necessarily know how to “interact with darker students, males to be more specific.” She feels as though light-skinned students receive more chances than darker students and that more attractive students receive more

chances as well. According to her logic, if your perception of what is attractive is lighter, then you will naturally be biased towards that group. This participant also believes that teachers may not be aware that they demonstrate this bias, and that it could be subconscious in many cases. Tiffany believes that there are other contributing factors to the disproportionate number of referrals that darker-skinned students receive. She stated that the referrals come from skin color combined with “saggy pants, gold teeth, dreads, etc.” These are negative stereotypes that perpetuate the image of Black males being thugs or criminals. Though 80% of the study participants stated that dark-skinned students received more disciplinary referrals, most were reluctant to admit that they themselves wrote more referrals for their own dark-skinned students.

Sub-theme seven discusses the correlation between light-skinned mothers and future relationships. Each of the four male study participants, 100%, stated that their mother’s complexion had an influence on the type of women they find themselves attracted to as an adult. Each one of these participants had mothers who were either light-skinned or lighter in complexion than their fathers. John stated that he grew up with a light-skinned mother and light-skinned aunts. He believes that he is “comfortable” with women who are lighter in complexion due to his experiences growing up with the women in his family. He stated that his mom was a “representation of what the woman I was to be with would look like.” John reported that his wife is light-skinned. Sam had similar beliefs. His father was his first and primary role model. He saw that his father chose a light-skinned woman (his mother) and felt as if that was what he should choose as well. His father further influenced him by showing him a photo of an old girlfriend, another light-skinned “Dorothy Dandridge” type. Sam found a direct correlation between these images and the women with whom he has chosen to have relationships as an adult. Sam is currently married to a very light-skinned, biracial woman. Steve, a dark-skinned male,

had a mother who was lighter in complexion than his father. He has dated women of all races and complexions and stated that he considers himself to be “color blind” when it comes to women. Growing up, however, he dated mostly White women. He believes that dark-skinned males generally prefer women who are lighter in complexion than themselves. He attributes this preference to the fact that a lot of dark-skinned men want to have children who are lighter in complexion. Steve stated that his fiancée (now wife) is the darkest woman he had ever dated. Michael, a self-described dark brown-skinned man, had a mother who was lighter-skinned than his father. He reported that he does not have a skin tone preference for women; however, his wife is very light (White). He stated that her complexion was initially a deterrent, but he overcame it. Michael does not believe that dark-skinned men necessarily prefer lighter-skinned women; however, he was unable to recall any of his dark-skinned male family members or friends being with women who were “really dark.”

Subtheme four discusses dark-skinned women. All of the study participants believed that skin tone has a correlation to self-esteem, particularly for dark-skinned Black women. John, a self-described brown-skinned man, strongly believes that lighter-skinned Black women are more attractive. He also stated that “I’m not going to probably respond to a darker complected woman the same way as I would with a lighter complected woman because I don’t find them as attractive.” He also believes that most Black men prefer lighter-skinned women. Sam shares similar ideals. He believes that most dark-skinned males prefer women of a lighter skin tone for several reasons, including status and the desire for lighter children. He himself finds lighter-skinned women most attractive as well. Patricia, a light-skinned Black woman, believes that “dark skin just doesn’t look good” and has suffered reverse colorism at the hands of darker-skinned Black women. Rose is a dark-skinned Black woman who described her own skin tone

as “caramel.” She denied ever being a victim of colorism; however, she recalled hearing her male family members make comments that “lead me to believe that they’re more attracted to bright-skin women.” Gwendolyn married a dark-skinned man and her first daughter is darker in complexion. She witnessed colorism against her daughter when she was in high school and other students would tell her “She’s not your mama; you don’t look like her.” Gwendolyn also fears for her dark-skinned granddaughter’s future. She believes that “this world can be cruel to her.” Steve believes the self-esteem of dark-skinned Black women is affected by the media due to the lack of positive dark-skinned beauty ideals. He also believes that dark-skinned and light-skinned Black men both prefer women who are lighter in complexion. Michael believes dark-skinned Black women’s self-esteem is directly correlated to colorism. He attributes this to the standards of beauty portrayed by the media depicting lighter-skinned women as being more beautiful. He stated “if you’re a darker woman you feel like you’re getting looked over or whatever else. You know, maybe no one’s really giving you a chance.” Reneé, a dark-skinned Black woman, didn’t feel attractive or beautiful growing up. She stated that colorism did affect her self-esteem in some ways and that she felt “like a regular looking person, not overly attractive.” Her dark-skinned college roommate’s self-esteem was greatly affected by colorism to the point that she would only date light-skinned men to avoid the chance of having a dark-skinned child. Tiffany, a lighter-brown skinned woman, has heard her dark-skinned female friends say they’ve received backhanded compliments such as “You’re pretty for a dark-skinned girl” their entire lives.

Dark-skinned Black women in the United States have two strikes against them. One, they are women, and two, they are dark in a world where light is deemed better, prettier, and more accepted. These circumstances affect everything from relationships and marriage to job potential and earning capacity. It is an unfortunate fact that lighter-skinned women are

privileged in the areas of social acceptance and status, marriage desirability, and workforce advancement (Edwards et al., 2004).

Sub-theme three pertains to the parental skin tones of the study participants. Seven out of 10, or 70%, of the study participants had parents of differing or polar opposite skin tones. The most common of these skin tone combinations was a light/brown-skinned mother and a dark-skinned father. This occurred amongst 40% of the study participants. The skin tone combination of a light-skinned father and a dark/brown skinned mother accounted for the other 30%. Nicole had a light-skinned (biracial) father. Her mother was of a dark brown skin tone. She believed her father's choice in women was due to his consciousness regarding his African American heritage. Nicole was raised to believe that brown skin was beautiful. She was only allowed to play with Black dolls, and her parents decorated their home with positive images of African art and religious icons. John was the product of a light-skinned mother and a dark-skinned father. His father's choice of a light-skinned woman had a direct influence on the type of woman he finds attractive as an adult. John believes that lighter women are more attractive and has dated them alone throughout his life. Sam had a light-skinned mother and a dark-skinned father. He equated his mother to the pinnacle of beauty, and therefore believed that light-skinned women were more desirable. His mother set the standard of beauty for him.

Patricia was the product of a light-skinned (multi-racial) father and a darker brown-skinned mother. Her mother raised her to believe that light was better, which is why she chose a light-skinned husband. Patricia adopted those same beliefs regarding light-skinned people. She stated that growing up with her light skin tone has afforded her with more advantages, and she found herself being more readily accepted than her darker-skinned counterparts. Rose had a brown-skinned mother and a dark-skinned father. Though her parental skin tones were not



drastically different, the difference still caused issues within the family. Her darker siblings made reference to her being their mother's favorite because she was lighter in complexion than they were. Skin tone was not directly mentioned in their comments; instead, they were made under the guise of her being their mother's favorite because she "looked just like her."

Gwendolyn has a light-skinned (multi-racial) father and a brown-skinned mother. She remembers certain family members showing favoritism to lighter-skinned members. Her parents had differing views on skin color. Her mother favored light skin, but her father was more objective when it came to skin color. Her mother often told her that she should marry someone that "looked a certain way, so that her kids would look a certain way." This was her indirect way of stating that she wished for her daughters to marry light-skinned men so that their children would be light-skinned as well.

Lastly, Tiffany has a light-skinned (multi-racial) mother and a dark-brown skinned father. Her mother was taunted growing up due to her very light skin tone. It was because of this that she chose to have a child with a darker-skinned man in an effort to have a child who would not have to deal with these issues. Tiffany has adopted her mother's preference of darker-skinned men.

### **Implications**

The implications of the findings of this study are extremely relevant to the educational environment. The participants of this study presented their perceptions and lived experiences with the phenomenon of colorism as it pertains to their lives, both personally and professionally. The results of this study have theoretical and practical implications.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The findings from this study supported Moscovici's (1973) theory of Social Representation. Moscovici explained that a social representation is "a system of values, ideas and practices" that works to establish a social order that allows individuals to orient themselves and control the material and social world in which they live (p. 24). This system also "enables communication among members of a community through a shared code for social exchange and for naming and classifying various aspects of the social world including their individual and group history" (Howarth & Sammut, 2013, para. 2).

## **Social Representation Theory**

The primary purpose of social representation is "making something unfamiliar or unfamiliarity itself, familiar" (Moscovici, 1984, p. 24). Social representations facilitate the attainment of a shared social reality; they are "ways of world-making" (Moscovici, 1998). They are created to conventionalize objects, people, and events by placing them in a familiar context. Once established, they assist to influence social behavior and the negotiation of social identities, imposing themselves in social interaction and limiting socio-cognitive activities (Moscovici, 1998).

Moscovici believed in a shared social reality. When asked to discuss and describe their introduction to colorism, the majority of the participants shared similar experiences. Though their experiences with colorism differed, they were all familiar with the concept. Colorism is a shared social reality in the African American community.

## **Practical Implications**

The data from this study reveal several practical implications worthy of future study. It would be valuable to further examine colorism as it relates to the relationship between African

American teachers and their African American students. The implications of this study were that there is indeed a correlation between student skin tone and pre-conceived expectations. Further implications dictated a relationship between high expectations as it pertains to socio-economic status and attractiveness.

This study suggests that teachers may provide preferential treatment to those students they deem attractive. Other suggestions based on data provided by participants suggest a correlation between a person having a dark skin tone and receiving a disproportionate amount of disciplinary referrals. When asked if their darker-skinned students got into more trouble than their light-skinned peers, the participants had varied responses. However, the responses were overwhelmingly in agreement that darker-skinned students were punished more severely for the same disciplinary infractions committed by their lighter-skinned peers.

The results of this study have practical implications on the way in which African American teachers view their African American students in reference to skin tone and its correlation to achievement, behavior, and attractiveness. In order to combat the issue of colorism in the classroom, there must first be an awareness that the phenomenon is occurring. Colorism occurs in both conscious and subconscious forms – more often, the latter. The implications of this study will create the awareness that is the primary step toward eradicating the issue from schools.

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations taken into consideration for this study. Due to the nature of the subject matter, some participants in the study were somewhat hesitant to share their personal experiences with colorism, particularly when it involved them giving preferential treatment to lighter-skinned students. Other limitations included gaining approval from building principals to

conduct research of a sensitive nature in their schools. Lastly, the results of this study cannot be generalized as the focus of this study was only on African American teachers in the secondary classroom at two schools in Metro Atlanta, Georgia.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research should be conducted in order to ascertain how colorism affects African American students in the primary classroom. Adolescence is the critical time in which students develop self-esteem, and it is imperative to explore this area. Current research does not specifically answer questions as to how and to what degree colorism may impact the relationship between White teachers and African American students.

Colorism affects many different cultures and ethnicities. Future research should strive to define the relationship between skin color and preferential treatment in the Latin, Indian, and Asian communities. This particular study focused on African Americans; however, further research should be conducted in the African and West Indian communities. Though Africans and West Indians are racially similar to African Americans, the extreme variations in cultural beliefs would make further research valuable.

In addition, future research should study the correlation between the disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals written for students of color and the particular skin tones of these students. Future research should attempt to study the correlation between dark-skinned African American women's skin tone and their self-esteem. Many of the participants of this study shared that colorism affects African American women much more substantially than African American males.

This research study explored colorism among African American teachers in the secondary classroom in the Southeastern region of the United States. Future research should

attempt to repeat this study in varying geographic areas of the United States. This may further support or refute the findings in light of the delimitations and limitations present within this study.

### **Summary**

The participants of this study were all self-identified African American teachers between the ages of 33 and 56. Their experiences with colorism, both as children and adults, have affected the way in which they perceive and view their African American students. This data has had an impact on the idea that all students are treated fairly and not subjected to pre-conceived notions or expectations. The overall opinion of the research subjects was that colorism does have an impact on the relationships between African American students and African American teachers. The majority of the participants also agreed that colorism negatively affects the self-esteem of dark-skinned African Americans. Other commonalities included being introduced to the concept of colorism at an early age. This early exposure consequently formulated how each participant viewed him or herself as well as other people of color.

As previously stated in the Implications section, the results of this study were that there is indeed a correlation between student skin tone and pre-conceived expectations in the classroom. Further implications dictated a relationship between high expectations is they pertain to socio-economic status and attractiveness.

This study suggests that teachers may provide preferential treatment to those students they deem attractive either consciously or subconsciously. The results of this study will serve to create an awareness that colorism not only exists in the secondary classroom, but that it negatively affects our students both personally and academically.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, A. L. (1991). *Ambiguous lives: Free women of color in rural Georgia, 1789–1879*. Little Rock: The University of Arkansas Press.
- Alford, N. (1997). *African American women's self-esteem as a function of skin color: A quasi-qualitative study*. *Dissertation Abstracts International*: 58(8), 3015.
- Anderson, T. (2015, January 18). Q&A: Dark girls to light girls, Bill Duke talks colorism in new film. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>
- Atkins, E. (2008, February). Do light-skinned Blacks have it easier? *Ebony*, 63(4), 164–165.
- Barrett, P. (1999). *The Good Black: A true story of race in America*. New York: Penguin Putnam.
- Bednall, J. (2006). Epoche and bracketing within the phenomenological paradigm. *Issues in Educational Research*, 16, 123–138. Retrieved from <http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/bednall.html>
- Blassingame, J. W. (1973). *Black New Orleans, 1860–1880*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). *Distinctions: A social change of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Breland, A. M. (1997). Airing dirty laundry: Reasons and processes by which skin tone stratification continues to be a pervasive aspect of the african-american community (Order No. 9736052). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (304378294). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/304378294?accountid=12085>

- Brink, P., & Wood, M. (1998). *Advanced design in nursing research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Brooks, W., Browne, S., Hampton, G. (2008). "There ain't no accounting for what folks see in their own mirrors": Considering colorism within a Sharon Flake narrative. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 51(8), 660–669. doi:10.1598/JAAL.51.8.5
- Brown, L.E.C., (2009). "If you're Black, get back!": The color complex: issues of skin-tone bias in the workplace. *National Association for Ethnic Studies*, 32(2), 120–133.
- Celious, A., & Oyserman, D. (2001). Race from the inside: An emerging heterogeneous race model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(1), 149–165.
- Chan, Z. C. Y., Fung, Y. L., & Chien, W. T. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only Undertaken in the data collection and analysis process? *The Qualitative Report*, 18(59), 1-9. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H. (2006). The logic of small samples in interview based qualitative research. *Social Science Information*, 45(4), 483–499.
- Denzin N., & Lincoln Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Dixon, P. (2006). *African American relationships, marriages, and families*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43, 13–35.
- Esmail, A., & Sullivan, J. M. (2006). African American college males and females: A look at color mating preferences. *Race, Gender, and Class*, 13(1), 201–220.

- Fears, L. M. (2009). Colorism of black women in news editorial photos. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 22, 30-36.
- Flowers, C., Garrett, M. T., McFall-Roberts, E., & Nassar-McMillan, S. (2006). Ebony and ivory: Relationship between African American young women's skin color and ratings of self and peers. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development*, 45(1), 79–94.
- Folan, K. L. (2010). *Don't bring home a white boy*. New York: Karen Hunter Publishing.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 645–672). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gabriel, D. (2007). *Layers of blackness: Colorism in the African American diaspora*. London: Imani Media.
- Gasson, S. (2004). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretive perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. E. Whitman & A. B. Woszczyński (Eds.), *The handbook of information systems research* (pp. 79 –102). Hershey, PA: Idea Group.
- Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Gonzalez, C. J. (2009). *The origins and effects of "colorism" in Latin America: A comparative study of Mexico and Brazil* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from [etd.lib.ttu.edu/theses/04022009](http://etd.lib.ttu.edu/theses/04022009).



- Graham, L. (1999). *Our kind of people: Inside America's black upper class*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29, 75–91.
- Hall, R. E. (2005). *An empirical analysis of the impact of skin color on African-American education, income, and occupation*. Lewiston, NY: The Edward Mellen Press.
- Hall, R. E. (2006). The bleaching syndrome among people of color: Implications for skin color for human behavior in the social environment. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 13(3), 19–31.
- Hall, R. E. (2008). *Racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Lansing, MI: Spring Science and Business Media.
- Hamill, C., & Sinclair, H. (2010). Bracketing: Practical considerations in Husserlain phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher Journal*, 17(2), 20–21.
- Harrison, M. S. (2004). *Really, I am qualified: The role of affirmative action stigma on minorities in management* (Accession No 2014-03-04 03:20:11). (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- Harrison, M. S., & Thomas, K. M. (2009). The hidden prejudice in selection: A research investigation on skin color bias. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 39(1), 134–168.
- Hersch, J. (2008). Profiling the new immigrant worker: The effects of skin color and height. *Emory Law Journal*, 58, 357–377.
- Hill, M. E. (2000). Color differences in the socio-economic status of African American men: Results of a longitudinal study. *Social Forces*, 78(4), 1437–1460.

- Hill, M. E. (2002). Skin color and the perception of attractiveness among African Americans: Does gender make a difference? *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 65(1), 77–91.
- Hochschild, J. L., & Weaver, L. (2007). The skin color paradox and the American racial order. *Social Forces*, 86(2), 643–670.
- Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for qualitative research*. London: Blackwell Science.
- Howarth, C., & Sammut, G. (2013). Social representations. *Encyclopedia of critical psychology*. Retrieved from <http://ecp.blog.yorku.ca/>
- Hughes, M., & Hertel, B. (1988). *The significance of color remains*. Blacksburg: Virginia Polytechnic Institute.
- Hughes, M. & Hertel, B. (1990). The significance of color remains: A study of life chances, mate selection, and ethnic consciousness among Black Americans. *Social Forces*, 68, 1105–1120.
- Hunter, M. L. (2002). If you're light, you're alright: Light skin color as social capital for women of color. *Gender and Society*, 16(2), 175–193.
- Hunter, M. L. (2004). Light, bright, and almost white: The advantages and disadvantages of light skin. In C. Herring, V. Keith, and H. D. Horton (Eds.), *Skin Deep: How race and complexion matter in the "color-blind" era* (pp. 22–44) Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Hunter, M. L. (2005). *Race, gender, and the politics of skin tone*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The qualitative report*, 17(T&L Art, 6), 1–10. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/jacob.pdf>

- Jones, T. (2000). Shades of brown: The law of skin color. *Duke Law Journal*, 49(6), 1487–1557.
- Jones, T. (2010). Intra-group preferencing: Problems of proof in colorism and identity performance cases. *Duke Law Journal*, 34 (657), 1515-1521.
- Kein, S. (2000). *Creole: The history and legacy of Louisiana's free people of color*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Keith, V. M. & Herring, C. (1991). Skin tone and stratification in the Black community. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(3), 760–778.
- Kerr, A. E. (2006). *The paper bag principle*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Kiefe, C. I., Liu, K., McDade, T. W., & Sweet, E. (2007). Relationships between skin color, income, and blood pressure among African Americans in the Cardia study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(12), 2253–2259.
- Kwan, S. S., & Mayorova, O. V. (2006). *Gender roles and beauty ideals in visual representations of women: A comparative study* (Master's thesis). Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, GA Online <.PDF>. 2009-05-26 from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p107411\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p107411_index.html)
- Lake, O. (2003). *Blue veins and kinky hair: Naming and color consciousness in African America*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (1995, April). *Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research*. Keynote address presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Lynch, W. (1712, November). Willie Lynch Letter. Retrieved from <http://www.africanamericanimages.com>.
- Lynn, R. (2002). Skin color and intelligence in African Americans. *Population and Environment*, 23(4), 365–375.
- Maddox, K. B. (2004). Perspectives on racial phenotypically bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, (8)4, 383–401.
- Maddox, K. B., & Gray, S. (2002). Cognitive representations of black Americans: Re-exploring the role of skin tone. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(2), 250–259.
- Malik, S. (2007). The domination of fair skin: Skin whitening, Indian women and public health. San Francisco State University: Dept. of Health Education, Retrieved from <https://apha.confex.com/apha/138am/webprogram/Paper223280.html>.
- Martin, M. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13, 522–525.
- McGriff, R. (1995). *Intra-racial prejudice: The myth of brotherhood*. Unpublished master's thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills.
- McNeil, D. G. (1997, February 9). Black, yet white: A hated color in Zimbabwe. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Mitchell, M. (2002, October 24). Willie Lynch lady fighting to unite blacks. *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 14.
- Montalvo, F. F. (2004). Surviving race: Skin color and the socialization and acculturation of Latinas. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 13(3), 25–43.
- Morse, J. M., & Richards, L. (2002). *Read me first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage Publications.

- Moscovici, S. (1973). *Health and illness: A social psychological analysis*. London: Academic Press.
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social Representations* (pp. 3–69). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Moscovici, S. (1998). The history and actuality of social representations. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The psychology of the social* (pp. 209–247). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Munhall, P. (1994). *Revisioning phenomenology: Nursing and health science research*. New York: National League for Nursing Press.
- Munhall, P. L. (2007). A phenomenological method. In P. L. Munhall (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (pp. 145–210). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.
- Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Neal, A. M., & Wilson, M. (1989). The role of skin color and features in the black community: Implications for black women and therapy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 9, 323–333.
- Parks C., & Woodson, K. (2002). The impact of skin color and hair texture on mate selection: Implications for intervention with African American men and women. In D. Russell, (Ed.), *The California School of Professional Psychology handbook of multicultural education, research, intervention and training* (pp. 249–262). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass
- Parrish, C. (1944). *The significance of color in the Negro community*.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Patton, M.Q . (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Sciences Research*, 34, 1189–1208.
- Pearson-Trammell, N. (2010). *Colorism, self-esteem, and resiliency: A qualitative study of dark skinned African American women* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3407390)
- Primeau, L. A. (2003). Reflections on self in qualitative research: Stories of family. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 57, 9–16.
- Ray, M. A. (1994). The richness of phenomenology: Philosophic, theoretic, and methodological concerns. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 117–133). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Reuter, E. B. (1918). *The Mulatto in the United States*. New York: Haskell House Publishers.
- Russell, K., Wilson, M., & Hall, R. (1992). *The color complex: The politics of skin color among African Americans*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Russell, C., Gregory, D., Ploeg, J., DiCenso, A., & Guyatt, G. (2005). Qualitative research. In A. DiCenso, G. Guyatt, & D. Ciliska (Eds.), *Evidence-based nursing: A guide to clinical practice* (pp. 120–136). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Mosby.
- Seltzer, R. & Smith, R.C. (1991). Color differences in the Afro-American community and the differences they make. *Journal of Black Studies*, 21(3), 279-286.
- Simon, M. K. (2011). *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success.
- Sloan, N. (2013, December). Stanford historian reexamines the practice of racial passing. *Stanford News*. Retrieved from <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/december/passing-as-white-121713.html>

- Small, V. (2013, July 11). African Americans with Albinism. Retrieved from <http://www.albinism.org/publications/african-americans.html>
- Smith, J. A., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing phenomenological analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative health psychology: Theories and methods* (pp. 218–240). London: Sage Publications.
- Summer, G. S. (2009). Albinism: Classification, clinical characteristics, and recent findings. *Optom Vis Sci, 86*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002450/>
- Thompson, M. S., & Keith, V. M. (2001). The blacker the berry: Gender, skin tone, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. *Gender and Society, 15*(3), 336–357.
- Voltz, N. (2008). *Black female agency and sexual exploitation: Quadroon Balls and plaçage relationships* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/32216>
- Wade, T. J. (1996). The relationships between skin color and self-perceived global, physical, and sexual attractiveness, and self-esteem for African-Americans. *Journal of Black Psychology, 22*(3), 358–373.
- Wall, C., Glenn, S., Mitchinson, S., & Poole, H. (2004). Using a reflective diary to develop bracketing skills during a phenomenological investigation. *Nurse Researcher, 11*, 22–29.
- Wilder, J. (2008). *Everyday colorism in the lives of young Black women: Revisiting the continuing significance of an old phenomenon in a new generation* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UFE0022480/00001>.
- Wilder, J. (2009). Revisiting “Color Names and Color Notions”: A contemporary examination of the language and attitudes of skin color among young Black women. *Journal of Black Studies, 41*(1), 184–206. doi:10.1177/0021934709337986

Willis, J. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wilmot, A. (1996). *Designing sampling strategies for qualitative social research: With particular reference to the Office for National Statistics' Qualitative Respondent Register*

*Office for National Statistics*. Retrieved from

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guidemethod/method-quality/general-methodology/data-collection-methodology/reports-and-publications/designing-sampling-strategies-.pdf>

Women's News Network. (2013, March 6). *Extreme discrimination causes more albino deaths*.

Retrieved from <http://womennewsnetwork.net/?p=20850>

Wood, F. G. (1970). *Black scare*. Berkeley: University of California Press.





## APPENDIX A

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 13, 2014

Shannan M. Moore

IRB Approval 1858.051314: Colorism among African-American Teachers: A Qualitative Study of the Phenomenon of Intra-Racial Discrimination in the Classroom

Dear Shannan,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**

**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY.

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

**APPENDIX B**

Shannan M. Moore  
[REDACTED]

June 2, 2014

Principal  
Sample School #1  
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Principal:

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. My dissertation topic is **COLORISM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF INTRA-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE CLASSROOM.**

I humbly request your permission to use your school as a site for my research. I am seeking a total of five teachers to participate in a study in which their experiences with colorism will be explored. I request that you recommend individual teachers who fit the specific criteria of being a self-identified African American at least 25 years of age. The teachers will be asked a series of questions in order to ascertain whether colorism exists within their classrooms.

Though my research topic is somewhat controversial in nature, I do believe that participation will provide invaluable insight into the root of colorism and the way in which it may affect the relationship between a teacher and a student.

Enclosed is a copy of the demographic questionnaire, interview questions, and post survey that each participant will be asked to complete. All participation in this study is completely voluntary and the identity of each participant as well as the site is strictly confidential. If you have any questions, please contact me by phone at [REDACTED] or by e-mail at [REDACTED].

If you agree for me to use your school as a site for my research, please provide a brief statement on school letterhead stating your agreement. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Shannan Moore  
Enclosure

**APPENDIX C**

Date: 6/19/14

Potential Research Participant

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Potential Research Participant:

As a graduate student in the Department of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. I am conducting research to better understand a process or phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to ascertain the presence of colorism in the classroom and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a self-identified African American/Black teacher at least 25 years of age and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, submit to a formal interview, and complete a brief post-interview survey. The entire research process should take approximately 2.5 to 3 hours to be completed in separate intervals. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

In order to participate, you must complete a consent form. Please complete this form in its entirety. The consent document is attached to this email. Please sign the consent document and return it to me via email or interoffice mail. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shannan M. Moore  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

#### COLORISM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF INTRA-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Shannan M. Moore  
Liberty University  
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of colorism. You were selected as a possible participant because you met the study qualifications and were recommended by your principal. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Shannan M. Moore in the Department of Education of Liberty University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the presence and effects, if any, of colorism among African American teachers and their African American students. The following questions will guide this study:

5. How do select African American teachers describe their experience with colorism in the classroom?
6. How does the presence of colorism in the classroom affect the relationships between African American students and African American teachers?
7. How, if at all, does colorism affect an African American teacher's ability to treat African American students fairly?
8. How does skin tone affect the pre-conceived expectations African American teachers have for their African American students?

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a brief pre-survey in order to provide the researcher with demographic information.
2. Participate in an interview with the researcher where various questions about colorism in the classroom will be explored. This interview will be audio recorded.
3. Complete a brief post-survey in order to provide the researcher with data on your knowledge and awareness of colorism.

The length of time required for participation is approximately two and a half to three hours. Each requirement will be completed at three separate intervals.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks. The risks are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. The results of the study could impact the social climate of the school. The results may raise the awareness of color privilege within the school environment. The study findings may bring forth the occurrence of skin tone preference by teachers within the classroom.

There are benefits to participation. Openly acknowledging the issue of colorism could potentially lead to extreme self-awareness and acceptance of personal biases.

**Compensation:**

No participant will be compensated for this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Pseudonyms will be used in order to protect the privacy of each participant. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher will have access. All data will be destroyed three years from the date of the study. All recordings will be used in order to transcribe, analyze and code data. Participants will not be asked to provide any information which would reveal their identities during the course of the recorded interview. All digital recordings will be erased three years from the date of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Shannan M. Moore. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. The researcher's advisor is Dr. Jose Puga. His contact information is as follows: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

This study involves audio-recording during the interview. Please initial here if you consent to said documentation

Signature:

Date:

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Numbers:****IRB Expiration Date:**

**APPENDIX E**

## Demographic Questionnaire/Pre-Survey

1. Please indicate your racial/ethnic identity. You may describe your ethnic identity in your own words.
2. Please describe your skin tone.
3. How would someone else describe your skin tone?
4. Please tell me your age.
5. Please tell me where you grew up.
6. Please give me a brief description of your neighborhood environment growing up.
7. If you're not originally from Georgia, when and why did you move here?
8. Did you grow up in an environment primarily with others of your own ethnic group?
9. Are you familiar with the term colorism?
10. Do you think colorism exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
11. Have you ever experienced colorism?
12. What was your concept of beauty/attractiveness when you were growing up?



## APPENDIX F

### Interview Questions

8. (a) When, if at all, did you first become aware of colorism?
- (b) Who introduced you to the concept of colorism?
- (c) What was the skin tone of the person who introduced you to colorism?
- (d) What was your reaction to the incident?
9. Give me details about an incident in which you experienced colorism either directly, or witnessed colorism against another person.
10. How, if at all, did that experience impact your feelings about yourself?
11. How did you feel about your skin tone before this incident?
12. If you have ever received negative treatment based solely on your skin tone, how have you coped with this over your lifetime?
13. How do you feel colorism has changed over the past twenty-five years? Explain.
14. In what ways has the media influenced colorism? Explain.

#### **Establishing Background:**

1. In what ways did your parents discuss skin color?
2. As a child, were you conscious of skin color? Explain.
3. As a child, do you recall people being treated differently based on their skin tone? Explain.
4. Please tell me how people with dark skin were treated compared to people with lighter skin.
5. Tell me about your experiences as a child in school.
6. How did colorism affect you as a student in school?
7. Did you feel that there were equal opportunities for children of all skin tones when you were in school?

#### **Relationships:**

8. Do you have a skin tone preference for the people you date (or have dated)? If so, what is that preference?
9. How would you describe your skin tone?
10. If you are currently in a relationship, describe the skin tone of your significant other.
11. If you are attracted to lighter-skinned men/women, please explain why you prefer this skin tone.

12. If you are attracted to darker-skinned men/women, please explain why you prefer this skin tone.
13. Are males/females of a particular skin tone more attracted to you than others? Please explain.
14. Do you think dark-skinned males prefer women of a certain skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?
15. Do you think light-skinned males prefer women of a certain skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?

**Self-Esteem:**

16. Do you feel colorism negatively affects one's self-esteem? Explain.
17. If you've experienced colorism, how, if at all, did it affect your self-esteem?
18. What effect, if any, has colorism had on the self-esteem of your close friends?
19. Do you feel that the self-esteem of dark-skinned people in the United States is directly correlated to colorism? Explain.

**Family:**

20. Does colorism exist in your family? Explain.
21. Please share an incident where skin color was discussed amongst your family members.
22. Please describe an incident where a family member gave preferential treatment to other members based on skin tone? If so, please describe an incident in which this occurred.
23. If you have children, did you wish for them to be a particular skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?
24. If you plan to have children, do you wish for them to be a particular skin tone? If so, which skin tone and why?

**In the Classroom: These questions pertain ONLY to your African American students.**

25. (a) Please describe the students in your classroom. (b) What are the various skin tones present among the African American students in your class? (c) Do you think your light-skinned students are better-behaved? (d) Do you think your light-skinned students are smarter than your darker-skinned students? (e) If so, what may be some reasons for that?
26. (a) If you were to divide your classes on the first day of school in terms of intelligence, how would you have done so? (b) If you were to divide them in terms of intelligence now, how would you divide them?
27. (a) How would you divide your classes based on skin tone? (b) If I asked you to divide them into three groups, what would they be? (c) Describe these three groups in

- detail. Tell me about their behavior, socio-economic status, level of intelligence, attractiveness, etc.
28. (a) Do you think your darker-skinned students get into more trouble than their lighter-skinned peers? (b) Are more disciplinary referrals written for darker-skinned students than their lighter-skinned peers? (c) If so, why do think this is?
  29. (a) Tell me about an incident where you have observed a student receive preferential treatment from a teacher. (b) What was the skin tone of this student? (c) Do you feel the preferential treatment was related to the skin tone of the student?
  30. (a) Tell me which students you have higher expectations for? Why do you think this is? (b) Do your higher expectations correlate to the skin tone, socio-economic status, or level of attractiveness of the student? Please explain.
  31. Do you think “cute” students receive preferential treatment as opposed to unattractive students? Why or why not?
  32. Please answer the following questions true or false.
    - a) Dark-skinned students are more likely to do well in their classes.
    - b) Lighter-skinned students get into more trouble than darker-skinned students.
    - c) Dark skinned male students are always getting into trouble.
    - d) Dark skinned female students typically have an attitude.
    - e) Light-skinned students are more attractive than dark-skinned students.
    - f) Dark-skinned female students have a chip on their shoulder.
    - g) Dark-skinned male students are often gang members.
    - h) Light-skinned female students think they’re more attractive than dark-skinned female students.
    - i) Light-skinned male students are often conceited.
    - j) Dark-skinned female students dress more provocatively to get male attention.
    - k) Light-skinned students often get away with inappropriate behavior.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Post Survey**

1. Do you think colorism affects the way you view other African Americans? Explain.
2. Do you think colorism affects the way in which other African Americans view you? Explain.
3. Are you more conscious of colorism among others?
4. Are you more conscious of colorism amongst your students?
5. How has participation in this study raised awareness of colorism in your life?
6. Do you feel that participation in this study was a benefit to you? Explain.
7. How, if at all, do you think this study will affect the way in which you relate to your African American students?

Thank you for your participation in this study.

## APPENDIX H

### Researcher's Journal of Bias

The researcher's initial interest in colorism as a viable area of study can be traced back to her own personal experience growing up in a multi-racial family. With an African American father and a multi-racial mother, the researcher was keenly aware of skin tone stratification and its implication on how one was treated. The study participants, like the researcher, are all self-identified African American/Black teachers. Cui (2012) has described this as insider research, where the researcher has some familiarity and connection with the people they are researching. This was the case in the study of colorism in the classroom. The researcher must take into account who she is, how she was raised, where she has been, and what she has experienced. These things may affect the way in which the researcher collects and analyzes data. In order to consistently acknowledge her biases, a reflexive journal will be kept. Within this journal, personal observations are recorded with respect to the initial contacts the researcher had with the research participants.

- Upon the initial interview, the researcher had expectations that participant number one may share similar thoughts and ideas due to her being in the same demographic as the researcher. The researcher took extreme caution to not ask questions that may lead the participant to an expected response.
- Upon the second interview, the researcher had expectations that participant number two may view colorism from a different perspective given that he is male. The researcher expected him to have favorable views towards light-skinned females based on her own lived experiences. The researcher took extreme caution to adhere to the interview questions and let participant number two share his experiences with no input from herself.