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EXPLORING COLORISM:

VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF COLORISM IN COLLEGE-AGED BLACK MALES

BY

ALMA JAM

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
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Committee Approval

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of ALMA JAM find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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EXPLORING COLORISM: VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF COLORISM IN

COLLEGE-AGED BLACK MALES

Thesis Abstract--Idaho State University (2016)

Concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity, colorism

provokes prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically

by people of the same ethnic or racial group. Recent studies indicate that colorism has a

sustained presence in the black community and other communities of color. I conducted

two focus groups with 12 black men between the ages of 18 and 25 to explore how black

men understand, talk or think of colorism; how skin tone plays a role in their day-to-day

experiences in aspects of self-esteem, masculinity, and intimacy and the different

domains that influence positive and/or negative aspects of colorism. Utilizing W.E.B. Du

Bois' concepts of 'double consciousness' and 'veil,' I argue that as black men embark on

the pursuit of white privilege and opportunity, they undergo identity conflicts in the

struggle of being both Black and American. I also utilize Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the

habitus to demonstrate that socialization plays an important role in internalizing ideals

and practices of colorism. Findings indicate that stereotypes and perceptions about light

and dark skin documented in earlier generations of black Americans persist. However,

both light and dark skinned men in this study have very similar experiences.

Compensatory and discriminatory practices dictate behaviors and interactions with other

black members and people of other races. The findings also reveal the role of family,

school, relationships, and the media in mediating these scripts and practices. Yet, despite

the negative stereotypes associated with dark-skin, most dark-skin males embrace a

feeling of 'black pride.' This research adds empirical findings and theoretical

conceptualizations to the phenomenon of colorism in the 21st century.

EXPLORING COLORISM: VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF COLORISM IN

COLLEGE-AGED BLACK MALES

Introduction

My interest in conducting this study was driven by my own experience of

colorism as a young girl. Though discourse about skin color often took place in my home,

my mother always told me I was beautiful in my dark-skin and always cautioned me

never to alter my skin-color for anyone or anything. It was not until I started spending

time with my aunts and other women in my community that I started to see the practices

of colorism on a daily basis. I grew up in Cameroon, West Africa. Right around the age

of 8, I began to notice that skin-bleaching was a very common practice among women. I

migrated to the United States at the age of 10. My family and I settled in a small,

conservative community where the racial majority was overwhelmingly white. I was one

of the maybe 3-4 black children in the elementary, junior-high and high schools. When I

started college, I was surrounded by a more diverse group of students. It was during this

time of my life that I started to truly understand the bias and prejudices of colorism. The

inclusion and exclusion of individuals based on skin tone was evident in the little Latino,

Asian, and African groups within the college community. From the competition for men

and women to the membership in exclusive social cliques, skin color appeared to be an

important factor, even at the predominately white college that I attended.

Based upon my personal and academic experience, I embarked upon this thesis

project to explore how young black men between the ages of 18 and 25 are viewed and

affected by their skin complexion. Colorism is an issue that highly affects dark-skin

women of color as they perceive themselves less admirable compared to their lighter-skin

1

counterparts. The issue of colorism is then an important subject for men because their expectations of beauty sets the provenance that controls the perceptions of how women view themselves. According to this, the research question that guides this study is what do young (college-aged) black men understand, say and or think about colorism? Specifically, what do they feel about practices like skin bleaching? How (if at all), does skin tone play a role in their day-to-day experiences? Borrowing from Jeffrianne Wilder's study on women (Wilder, 2008), I also wanted to examine how colorism reveals itself 50 years after the Civil Rights Movement, and during this period of a presumed "color-blind" society. Central to this study is an exploration of how young black men talk about colorism and if this discourse reflects a shift in color consciousness and identity. Providing an open-arena for dialog about colorism grounded within the experiences of young black men was important in this study. Empowerment and social change was also a goal for this project.

The term "colorism" has developed a range of definitions over the years. In respect to this study, colorism is defined as "the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts" (Hunter 2005). Colorism places emphasis on the skin tone, instead of the racial or ethnic identity of the individual.

Skin-tone has commonly been assessed within the scope of colorism. The present body of research on race theory is quite broad and expansive. Many scholars have advanced our theoretical understandings of the various forms of race. Sociologists like W.E.B. DuBois argue that colorism has been grounded within race. Racial models have been used to explain the dual phenomena of race and skin tone. Just like racism, colorism

has typically been viewed as a consequence of slavery or colonial domination. It is arguably another form and derivative of racism but in contrast to race studies, colorism lacks independent theoretical development. A gap remains in the literature in regard to the theoretical foundations of colorism.

Given theoretical limitations, this research aims to understand the contemporary nature of colorism. I will explore how everyday experiences of colorism can be useful in understanding other forms of oppression experienced by black men. Guided by the theoretical contribution of Pierre Bourdieu and DuBois, this study will contribute to a theoretical frame that seeks to understand the voices and experiences of black men.

Colorism, is comprised of language, "the everyday vocabulary and system of meaning attached to skin tone" (Wilder, p. 84). Through this language we are able to understand and internalize internal scripts which refer to the socially constructed ideas, expectations, emotions, and beliefs black men and women carry with them about skin tone.

Racial discrimination has been a prevalent problem in the United States for a long period of time. However, hidden within the shadows of racial discrimination is the issue of colorism. Concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity, colorism provokes prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically by people of the same ethnic or racial group (Hunter 2007). Several studies indicate that lighter-skinned people of color receive more substantial privileges than their darker-skinned counterparts like higher wages, more education, access to better neighborhoods, and higher-status marriage partners (Hunter 2007, Arce et al. 1987;

Espino and Franz 2002; Hill 2000; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Hunter 1998, 2005; Keith and Herring 1991; Murguia and Telles 1996; Rondilla and Spickard 2007).

Literature Review

Origins of Colorism

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois, p. 2-3).

In American, the pursuit of whiteness for the black man has not been an effort to become white in physicality, but rather to obtain rights, freedoms, and privileges traditionally granted to the white man. Yet the fact is attainment of these privileges continues to be associated to physical attributes of skin-color.

Prior to European colonization, North African and Asian cultures had traditionally favored light skin. For example, traditional Indian folk songs admired the beauty of women who possessed skin with "the color of butter," that is, white, rather than yellow (ColorQ, 2002). Likewise, pre-colonial Indonesian women used plant-based skin

treatments to make their skin complexion pale (ColorQ, 2002). But pre-colonial colorism

is fundamentally different from modern Western colorism. To understand the origin of

the latter, one needs to inquire the historical economic imagery of rich versus poor in

ancient Africa. Here, traditional mythology claims that because wealthy people did not

have to work under the sun, they therefore had lighter complexions than working class

citizens. Rich people were also afforded the lifestyle of prestige and abundance, so

fatness was also considered an attractive attribute. As a result, light skin and fatness

became symbols of wealth, class, and beauty (ColorQ, 2002).

European imperialists, who colonized Africa built upon this mythology,

producing the colorism that prevails amongst Africans today. As Europeans started

spreading their ideas of the white European master race, the "toxic reaction between old

lifestyle-based colorism and new Western racism" created a harmful new ideology which

associated European features (especially color) with power, wealth and beauty (ColorQ,

2002).

The legal oppression of African Americans going back to their enslavement by

European colonial powers is well documented. Likewise, the experience of colorism

among African-Americans has a long, complex history. It originated from plantation life

(Stevenson 1996). In many cases, nonconsensual sexual relations (i.e. rape) took place

between slave owners and enslaved Africans. The biracial offspring, referred to as

"mulattoes," were sometimes freed by their white fathers and eventually came to

compromise a large part of the free black population in the American South (Frazier,

1997 p. 14). Since slave owners typically used skin tone as a measurement of status

(Horowitz 1973), this resulted in a popular association of light skin tone to leisure,

intelligence and "British" heritage. (Jones 2004; Rondilla and Spickard 2007). In other cases, mulattoes were given the privileges of education or other marketable skills that set them apart from their darker-skin, "backward" counterparts working in the fields. The members of these families were able to get a head-start on those who remained crippled by their lack of access to wealth accumulation, particularly when it came to owning land (Frazier, 1997, p. 30).

Skin Bleaching

Since color plays an important role in the acquisition of white privilege, Ronald Hall (1994, 1995, & 1997) clams that 'the bleaching syndrome,' as he calls it, the white aesthetic ideal, was internalized by many Africans and African-Americans (Wilder, 2008). Skin bleaching is the practice of using chemical products to lighten or whiten the color of skin (Pierre, 2008).

Skin bleaching products usually contain one or a combination of hydroquinone and mercury. Hydroquinone "is a powerful and toxic substance originally used in photo processing, the manufacture of rubber, and hair dyes" (Pierre, 2008). Mercury is "a heavy metal that exists in different chemical forms; skin bleaching products often contain ammoniated mercury that is normally used as an ointment to treat impetigo, psoriasis, and other skin disorders" (Pierre, 2008). Hydroquinone has been used for a long time in cosmetic products to lighten areas of darkened skin such as freckles, age spots, and cholasma. Hydroquinone works by "destroying or inhibiting melanin-producing cells, aiding in the removal of the top layer of skin, resulting in less pigmentation, and ultimately the lightening of the skin's colour" while mercury-based bleaching chemicals

limit the production of melanin (Pierre, 2008). The bleaching syndrome, as Menke states, is a "self – denigrating process" that can "occur at any time in history, where a less powerful group must assimilate" to survive and thrive. "It is particularly evident in post-colonized societies. When applied to people of color, its existence is substantiated in a most dramatic fashion, for it is they who have had to idealize norms, which are often radically inconsistent with outward appearances" (Menke, 2009).

Figure 1. Skin Bleaching
Source: From *Black America Today* (Jalen, 2013)
Note: This is Sammy Sosa; a well-known retired Dominican professional baseball player.

In the contemporary era, discourse on colorism has been prominent in both literature and media entertainment. This infatuation has taken up by writers, poets, social scientists, filmmakers, and everyday people. Dating back to the mid-1800s, the issue of skin color in the black community influenced countless literary, academic, and popular culture works (Wilder, 2008). One of the first black American novels, written by

William Wells Brown, documented the complexity of skin tone in the 1853 classic *Clotel* (Kerr, 2006; Walker 1983).   The concept of color consciousness spread to classic literature such as *The Blacker the Berry (1929)*, *The Bluest Eye (1970)*, and *The Color Purple (1983);* recent literary works like *The Color Complex (1992)* and *Don't Play in the Sun (2004)*; race studies such as *Black Bourgeoisie and Black Metropolis*; films such as *Spike Lee's School Daze (1988)*, Oprah Winfrey's *The Wedding (1998)* and *CC Stinson's Light, Bright, Damn Near White (2007)*. Given this, we can see the persistent fascination with skin tone bias and color discrimination in black American culture (Wilder, 2008).

Although the present body of literature has produced valuable information on the manifestations and effects of colorism, few studies directly focus on the perceptions and day-to-day experiences of colorism among black males. Hence, my goals are to (1) explores the impact of colorism on self-esteem, masculinity, and intimacy; (2) understand the different domains that influence positive and/or negative aspects of colorism; and (3) produce culturally relevant knowledge on the varied experiences of colorism that will inform recommendations for social change.

Theoretical Framework

W.E.B. Du Bois

William Edward Burghardt "W. E. B." Du Bois' was an American sociologist and civil rights activist. His work on *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)* addresses the issues of race from a subjective standpoint. Here, he argues that colonialism and imperialism led to the domination and exploitation of Africa, saying that beginning in the fifteenth century, race became significant to world history. In identifying the 'color line,' Du Bois' addresses race as both an objective demographic categorization, and as a symbolic and experiential reality (Du Bois, 1903).

Du Bois' concept of 'the veil' refers to "a relationship that is simultaneously antagonistic and interdependent; that develops over historical time; and that links the small-scale and large-scale (or "micro" and "macro") dimensions of social life" (Winant, H. 2004). It mainly refers to three things: (1) the veil is the literal darker skin of blacks signifying physical separation of difference from whiteness. (2) The veil suggests white people's lack of clarity to see blacks as "true" Americans. (3) The veil refers to Blacks' lack of clarity to see themselves outside of what white America describes and prescribes for them.

Theoretically speaking, the veil is a metaphor that stands for the dynamics of race that fosters both a barrier and connection between white and black. Its complexity progresses over time and articulates both the conflict, exclusion, and alienation inherent in the dynamics of race and racism. The concept of the veil was used by Du Bois to interpret and change the black-white racial dynamic influenced by slavery that prevailed

in the United States. The concept of the veil illuminates the black soul's striving for wholeness, synthesis, and integration.

Du Bois also introduced the term 'double consciousness' or racial dualism and argued that it both troubles and transforms the black soul by separating its experience and self-awareness by injecting racism into the racially oppressed self, and also affording that self some means of defense against racial oppression (Du Bois, 1903). According to Du Bois', double consciousness, or the 'two-ness' of being both American and 'Negro,' refers to the experience of being black in a WASP dominated America. Using Du Bois' concepts, my study explores the subjective standpoints of African-born and African-American males in regard to colorism. It analyzes how 'double-consciousness' inflects their experiences in pursuit of whiteness (Truslow, A. 2015). The whole framework of double consciousness describes an identity of the black-self divided by forces rising both within and outside the self.

Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist who greatly contributed to contemporary sociological theory. His concept of the habitus, practices, and fields are very applicable to this study. The 'habitus' refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experience. The habitus are the internalized beliefs, thoughts, and ideas that guide the ways in which we understand and view the social world According to Bourdieu, it is through socialization that people acquire their habitus. As they internalize the rules and structures of the world, these realities become part of one's consciousness. Bourdieu

further maintains that though each individual's habitus is shaped by differing social location and position in society, an element of collectivity also exist within the habitus (Bourdieu, 1985).

'Practices' according to Bourdieu, constitute the externalization of habitualized thoughts and ideas. These practices, or *what one does*, represents the behavior facilitated by structure and agency. Bourdieu understood the social world as being divided up into a variety of distinct arenas or 'fields' of practices like art, education, religion, law, etc., each with their own unique set of rules, knowledge, and forms of capital.

His concept of the 'field' symbolizes the setting of shared relations which gives meaning to group interaction and identity. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, practices, and fields is aimed at resolving the separation of the micro and macro level in the social world as Ritzer (2008) explains, "the field conditions the habitus; on the other hand, the habitus constitutes the field as something that is meaningful" (p. 408). Bourdieu's perspective is critical to this study as it upholds that the habitus, practices, and fields are critical elements in how people construct life and social reality.

Methodology

This study utilizes focus groups. The focus group method employs group interviews to generate knowledge on a topic of interest. They are used to learn how people talk about a phenomenon in groups (Wilder, 2008). There are many advantages to focus groups. Through them, the researcher interacts directly with respondents, allowing participants to "feed" off each other, building upon and reacting to the responses of others. In addition, focus groups are a quick and easy way to get data. Because of the open-response format, focus groups can produce vast and varied amounts of information. This study used two focus groups, one consisting of African-born black males and the other of African-American black males.

Prior to holding the focus groups, approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board. Consent was also obtained from the prospective participants prior to their interviews. The names of the community, university, businesses and other geographical identifiers were changed; pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' privacy, identifiers were deleted during transcription. The African-born focus group lasted for 1 hour 15minuets and the African-American focus group lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes. Focus groups were held on March 19, 2016 and March 30, 2016. Immediately after data collection, all data was transcribed and analyzed. Utilizing grounded theory, the data underwent several rounds of coding: first, the interview data was coded by paragraph; then, categorical coding across all interview sections was conducted. Lastly, codes and categories underwent theoretical analysis. Throughout the data analysis, memos were kept to lay the foundation for later theoretical analysis. In-vivo codes were recorded to illustrate categories and theoretical codes.

The method of analysis used in this study is based on Kathy Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory. Charmaz writes, that "grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them" (p.10). It is unique in that it enables theory to be driven from the research data, rather than relying on theory to inform the research data. The strategy of grounded theory is to constantly compare and analyze incoming data. This enables it to inform further data collection and analysis (Charmaz 1995).

There were 12 focus group participants: 7 African-American males in one focus group and 5 African-born males in another. My target population includes young black men between the ages of 18 and 25. Age selection for this study was based on the following criteria: (1) younger people are more easily influenced by the norms of society whereas older people are more likely to have developed a solid set of ideals, believes, and ways of doing things. Hence, this study may be able to access the developing understandings and experiences young college-aged males may have of colorism. (2) Older males' experiences of colorism are more likely influenced by historical events like the *segregation era* and *civil rights movement,* whereas young males' understanding and experiences of colorism are more likely to be influenced by popular-culture and social media. Therefore, the experiences and understanding of colorism may differ between younger black males (Kitwana, B. 2002).

Recruitment strategies for this study involved the circulation of a flyer in organizations and clubs that have larger proportions of n of my target study population. In order to gain a large enough sample, I utilized a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves the development of "certain criteria

established by the researcher" to serve the purpose of the research and the questions of

the investigation (Huck, 2004, p.109). Snowball sampling starts with a group of key

individuals who offer referrals to other participants (Wilder, 2008).

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Name	Ethnicity	Skin Tone
Jacob	Black	Dark
Carter	African	Dark
Isaiah	African-American	Dark
Aiden	African	Very Dark
Anthony	Black	Dark
Henry	African	Chocolate
Jayden	Black American, Japanese	Light-brown
Michael	African	Black
Ethan	African-American	Caramel
Lucas	African	Dark
Elijah	(African-American)	Light-brown
Logan	Black, Irish, Indian	Medium/Dark

Reliability in qualitative research addresses the question of whether one is able to

collect data that is internally and externally consistent, and credible (Neuman, 2003).

Data is said to be internally consistent when the researcher records behaviors that are

consistent over time and in different social contexts. Reliability in qualitative research

depends on the researcher's insight and awareness as they observe behaviors and events

from different angles and perspectives. External reliability was achieved by verifying or

cross-checking data with two other graduate students who had previously received

qualitative research training and experience. In the process of checking for reliability, we

each personally assessed the data to check for common themes and categories that

emerged from the data. After this, we cross-checked each other's results to ensure that we

were all capturing similar themes and categories.

Validity in field research is the assurance of the researcher's ability to collect and analyze data accurately, representing the lives of the participants. Validity can be checked in the following ways. Ecological validity reflects the degree to which the data collected and described by the researcher reflects the world of those under study. If the study is accepted by or considered credible to others inside and outside the field site, it is valid. Validation can be achieved by taking the field results back to those under study to check for adequacy and accuracy from their perspectives. To ensure validation, we de-briefed participants about the findings which emerged from the data to ensure there were no misinterpretations or misunderstandings captured in the data.

<u>Findings</u>

This study explores how black men understand, say and or think of colorism; how skin tone plays a role in their day-to-day experiences of self-esteem, masculinity, and intimacy; and the different domains that influence positive and/or negative aspects of colorism.

Though colorism is a significant issue with a long history in black communities, the term itself is not commonly known. At the beginning of both focus group sessions, I asked the group if they had heard of the term 'colorism' before or if they could define it. Over half of the participants in each focus group were unfamiliar with the term. The lack of unfamiliarity with the term was also captured throughout the interviews, as participants preferred using the terms 'skin-tone differences,' 'skin-tone preferences,' or 'light skin vs. dark skin issues.' This inability to describe or define colorism is due to the fact the term itself is primarily used in academic research and rarely in casual discourse. Past studies and more recent literature on this issue refer to colorism as "skin tone bias, discrimination, or stratification." (Wilder, 2008). Because of this, breaking down the term 'colorism' to "issues of skin tone preferences" was necessary for participant's understanding. Despite the unfamiliarity of the term 'colorism,' every male participant in this study easily articulated the meaning and value inherent in skin tone and the problems of colorism that affect the black community.

Language is essential to interaction and communication. Berger and Luckman (1966) point out that, "an understanding of language is essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life" (p.37). Language is significant in that it informs people of

what they feel, desire, and question. It implies meaning, power, identity, and location. Larry Crawford (2000) asserts that:

Language (in regards to race and color) is a very powerful tool. When oral or written symbols are reinforced through entertainment, education and religion, it becomes even more potent. Words communicate meanings that are commonly understood by all participants or they cannot stand as a method for conveying meaning or order. The subconscious, symbolic reality which people speak into existence facilitates the exercise of power or reveals impotence. Words, also, are made into allies or enemies. Our unspoken awareness of the European meanings behind the symbols we use demonstrates a willing consumption of a racist reference group's seductive culture. The language we ape reveals our not so blind endorsement of another's self-benefitting cultural definitions about color, ours relative to their lack of it.

To analyze the power of language, part of my data collection consists of a survey. The questions this survey ask respondents to free-list and discuss the color names they use or hear on a regular basis. (See Table 2 and 3)

Table 2. Group 1: Terms associated with light, medium, and dark skin tones

Group 1 (African-Born Group)		
Light	Medium	Dark
Musungu [1]	Half-caste [2]	Coal
Cracker [3]	Biracial	Devil
Oyibo [4]	Brown-skin	Nigga
Mixed-Child	Mixed	Black man
Vanilla	Foreigners	Bibinii [5]
Yellow	Oyibo [4]	iron
Mugu/Maga [6]		Et cetera (i.e. et al, etc.) [7]
Lottery		

_____

Note: [1] Musungu is term that originated from the Bantu language in Africa that refers to a white person or people of European decent. [2] Half-caste is a person whose parents are of different races, in particular, one parent being of European descent. [3] Cracker is derogatory slang word used to refer to those of European ancestry. The word is thought to have either derived from the sound of a whip being cracked by slave owners, or because crackers are generally white in color. [4] Oyibo or Oyinbo is a word used in Nigerian Pidgin, Igbo and Yoruba to refer to a westernized people. [5] Bibinii is a literal and non-derogatory word for black person originating from the Asante tribe of Ghana. [6] Mugu or Maga is a derogatory term used by African scam artists to describe the people they get money from. Literally translated, it means something like "big idiot." It is used in referring to a victim of fraud or to a person who is duped of his/her money, especially through the internet. (i.e. the white man wasn't clever enough to know that he was falling mugu to the pranks of those boys). [7] Et cetera (i.e. et al. etc.) is an *adverb* used at the end of a list to indicate that further, similar items are included. This term is used to insinuate that 'dark-skinned' folks have other names not mentioned amongst the aforementioned few given to them (UrbanDictionary, 2016).

Table 3. Group 2: Terms associated with light, medium, and dark skin tones

Group 2 (African-American Group)		
Light	Medium	Dark
Yellow	Caramel	Darky
Pretty-boy [1]	Brown	Black
Light-bright [2]	Mocha	Nigga
Light skin is cuter	Mixed	Chocolate
Light-skin (niggas)	Nigga	Dark-knight
Creole	Milky-way	Brownie
Transparent		"Can't see in the dark"
Caramel		"Use light to take pictures"
Redbone [3]		Dark-skin niggas
Soft		Burnt
Nigga		Purple [4]
High-yellow [3]		Blacky
		Midnight
		Too dark

_____

Note: [1] Pretty-boy is a male possessing fine features (i.e. high cheek-bones, full lips, long eyelashes, etc) that may be appealing to both sexes. Often also used to describe a male who pampers himself in regards to his appearance. [2]Light-Bright is a term used by black people to describe fair-skinned black people. [3] Redbone and High-Yellow are terms that refer to a person of African-American descent that has very light skin. [4] Purple is a term used to describe an extremely dark-skinned black person: thought to have skin with a 'purple' tint or hue because they are very dark (UrbanDictionary, 2016).

In African-American culture, color language is associated with slave history (Wilder, 2008). For example, the term "house nigga" originated in slavery as a way to separate house slaves from field slaves. The black community has carried on this distinction. According to one focus group participant, Jacob who stated that "…black people like to divide things up…just like dark skin light skin or just "oh I'm not black, I'm Dominican" …." (Jacob. line 437-438). Though there is some truth to Jacob's statement, Isaiah, a second participant, was quick to point out that the separation was a tactic used by slave masters to separate the black race "… no they did that to us… "house niggas," "field niggas," they did that to us…" (Isaiah, line 439). In color naming, we can see that light skin and dark skin express aesthetic and moral valuations. The terms offered for dark-skin blacks are derogatory, 'burnt,' 'coal,' and 'devil' pointing to a bias toward dark-skin black men. In contrast labels like 'vanilla,' 'caramel,' or 'pretty-boy' imply a positive value to lighter skin males (Wilder, 2008).

Understanding Colorism as Black & White Binary Structures

In analyzing color names, it was made clear in both focus groups that black men do not use or hear very often terms associated with having medium skin tones. As one respondent stated, "I think it's just straight up light skin, dark skin. If you are medium you lean more towards light-skin" (Ethan, line 41). This comment is consistent with the literature on colorism, which has traditionally operated from a "light/dark" binary structure. In contrast to other studies on colorism that have focused on women, the term 'black' for black men comprises both dark and light skin black men, whereas the term 'black' is understood by women as the predominant name for dark skin (Wilder, 2008).

Black men in contrast to black women feel as though other races do not distinguish between skin tones, but recognize them all as just 'black people.' Like Anthony mentioned:

> I feel like when other races look at us, regardless, they see a black man. They see black. You know what I'm saying? They don't necessarily see like "oh you're light skin or you're this" ...in their eyes... if (they) see us all together we're just black ... (Anthony, line 49-51).

Jacob and Isaiah agreed, stating:

> We only consider it dark skin, light skin as a black culture. But overall we are all considered black (Jacob, line 57). If we all walked across the street, everyone would be like "look at those black people (Isaiah, line 58).

> It is important to understand that although colorism exists as its own structure operating at the individual, interactional, and institutional level, participants in this study, especially Africans understood colorism under the strict lens of racism; particularly in the context of discussing 'white vs. black' rather than 'light-skin vs. dark skin.'

Learning about Colorism

Most of the participants in this study became aware of skin-tone differences at a young age with influence from their primary care givers. As Isaiah describes it this way

> I noticed (skin tone difference) when I was in elementary school. My mom she... very light complexed like she has freckles and her hair is red but she's still black just comprised with a lot of things but people would see me with her and then see my brother or my sister and my brother and sister are a little lighter; closer to the skin tone of my mom, and people use to think that she wasn't my mom and they ask like "oh is that your cousin" or something like that and that's when I started looking in the mirror like "Dang! what's wrong with me? like that's my mom." But that's when I started noticing; in elementary school for sure... (Isaiah, line 170-176).

> Interestingly, African-born participants mentioned that their transition to America was a huge transformative agent in their understanding of colorism Aiden said that "...

(in Africa) you think you're the darkest in your class till you get to another school…but when you get here (line 204-205) Carter adds "…it's like there's a social awareness where you know like "oh okay, I'm black now and you're white now" (Carter, line 206-207).

In addition to awareness of colorism, some participants remarked on their family's advice and or suggested precautionary actions passed on to them about colorism. Jacob talked about his mother's advice to him as a big, dark-skinned black man:

> My mom always said that (…) the darker you are, the scarier you are the and the bigger you are, like dark-skinned and big, I should be more careful doing stuff cause that's the way the world is (…) Someone can look at me worse than they would Elijah cause I'm darker skinned. Someone would be more aggressive towards me…and if I have tattoos, (…) that's the ultimate worse…(being) dark, big, and having tattoos (is dangerous for a black man.). So she (mother) was like please don't get any tattoos (Jacob, line 179-183).

While black men face advisory instruction from their primary group on the risks of being dark-skin, other races also advise their children to take caution when socializing with other dark-skin black men. For example, Anthony stated:

> I had a situation that was a little crazy…so when I was younger …I liked this girl a lot. She was Mexican actually... So I'm in her house and …I was hiding in her closet and basically her mom was talking to her about me … She said there's nothing wrong with me but she wants a guy that is lighter skin so when they have kids the kid won't get as much discrimination. I swear to god; I will never forget that. It was nuts. And this girl, it rubbed off (on her) cause this girl she liked to be with me but she didn't wanna "be" with me you know…(laughs) (Anthony, line 319-325).

Interestingly, the points of origin of colorism differed between the African-born focus group and the African-American focus group. All African-born participants denied the role of primary influences like family in their understanding of colorism. Their awareness of skin-tone differences was mostly influenced by friends, and social institutions like education and social media.

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Although family (for African-American men), friends, and education were cited by the men in this study as central in shaping their ideas and experiences with colorism, there were also many references to the media. The respondents in both focus groups talked about the media shaping their lives and this particular generation on the norms of skin-tone preferences. Aiden mentioned:

> I think bleaching is from the movies, like the white skin is revered... Like look at Tarzan, white people they didn't don't have any country that has a jungle…but Tarzan is white (laugh) or like there's a movie *Moses*, or something where they (the characters) should be …brown skin or olive color, but they are all white. You know all those mentalities form colonization. They think the white person is the…so like he said I kind of don't agree with the point of if you want to bleach "bleach" because you can't like people say I don't wanna give birth which is fine. It's your decision but imagine 2 million people not giving birth. That is not good. So if many people bleach, blackness, we lose our identity. (Aiden, line 284-294)

> The media has a huge influence (one skin-tone preference) … (Jayden, line 464 & 472)

> Because the media focus on light skin women or on women of other races with

Eurocentric features, participants in this focus group felt that black men in their generation had internalized societal standards of beauty and carried on the practices of dating only lighter-skin women or women from other races. Jacob and several other participants pointed out the results of this internalization in the following statements:

> Yea you can hear a black man say I want a white girl but you don't hear too many black guys saying I want a black girl… (Jacob, Line 461-462).

> (When) you see a black girl on TV most of the time it's a black girl super embarrassing herself and people see that and they like "Oh my god!" … (Anthony, line 464-465)

The participants also felt that media's positive portrayal of lighter-skin celebrities influenced other races to seek black men as potential partners in order to produce mixed off-spring. Anthony recalled a conversation with a teammate:

I was talking to a white dude …. and we were just talking about interracial couples … Like he said his sister… loved the fad of having a mixed baby. (She would say) "I want a black dude so we could have the cutest baby" …. So the white girls here either want a white dude because that's what they are use to or a black dude cause its cool and they want their baby (Anthony, line 330-334).

It appeared that several of the focus group participants had a clear understanding that the most popular and celebrated images of black women in the media embody Eurocentric standards of beauty.

I just feel like if there was more exposure to more beautiful black women or certain things like that and put into people's minds like "that's beautiful too" then it will influence more people to be accepting. But we see more light skin and the rest is just white (Isaiah, line 467-469).

Experiencing Colorism

It was evident in this study that dark-skin males today feel just like those in the past (during slavery): that lighter-skin blacks are given more privileges because of their lighter complexion; that light-skin is the standard of beauty in the black community; that being mixed race is a positive attribute; that lighter-skinned black are perceived as more intelligent than other darker skinned blacks; that they are seen as less threatening than other darker-skin blacks; and that they have better chances of getting a job than a darker skinned person. These feelings are consistent with a recent post by "Bougie Black Girl" who lists the "30 Light Skin Privileges Light Skin Blacks Have That Dark Skin Black Don't" (http://bougieblackgirl.com/colorism-30-privileges-light-skin-blacks-others-dont/).

Compensatory practices emerged within the interviews, as referred in Henry's remarks: "I bleached my skin and my veins were green. That's [just] to show you the level of bleach I had..." (Henry, line 179). It is apparent that for dark-skin men, the

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pressure to become light-skinned has a lot to do with the images and stereotypes that are

attached to that skin-tone. For example, I asked the group that if they could choose a

skin-tone (dark, medium, or light), what would they pick? Carter said "light skin for

sure…I feel like everybody wants to be on the good side of everything" (Carter, line 40).

Here, we can see that his understanding of "being on the good side" or being accepted is

directly associated to lighter skin.

Discriminatory practices emerged from the African-American interviews as well.

Anthony recalls some of his feelings towards darker skinned black girls when growing

up:

> In high school I would say to myself "I would date a light-skin black girl but I
> won't date like a dark-skin black girl… There used to be a lot of black girls in my
> school and none of them liked me and now I know why, because I never use to
> date them. (Anthony, line, 331-334)

Overall, unlike their black dark-skin female counterparts, black dark-skin males in

this study did not participate in ritualistic practices. However, African-born dark-skinned

males were more likely to participate in compensatory practices than African-American

dark-skin males. Carter, an African-born participant stated it this way:

> I think people should bleach if it makes them feel comfortable…because you
> cannot put a price tag on how people feel inside...you can put a price tag on
> complexion (as one can go to the cosmetic store and buy bleaching products to
> lighten their skin) but it's hard to touch how you feel (the feeling of personal
> satisfaction one desires from the results of skin bleaching is priceless) (Carter,
> line 305-310).

Managing Colorism

African-born males in this study were more likely to engage in skin-bleaching

than African-American males. African-American men on the other hand are very

accustomed to seeing lighter-skin blacks in their communities. Some of the participants

even pointed out that though they saw themselves and were perceived by society as dark-skin, they had siblings or parents who were categorized as lighter-skin blacks. Their familiarization and often interactions with light-skin blacks on the peer or intimate level may play a role in limiting the practice of skin-bleaching. One of the participants stated:

> Well my family is mixed up. I have Mexicans, Whites, and my great grandfather is from the south. He's uhmm, I forgot, like Choctaw or something like that, but on my father's side. I didn't know my dad growing up, but I went to the east coast and met a lot of my family and a lot of them is Puerto Rican decent… (Isaiah, line 201-204).

Two of the participants in the African-American group also indicated that they were from mixed racial background. Jayden identified himself as Japanese and Black; Logan identified himself as Irish, Indian, and Black. African-American men are exposed to varying skin-tones and races on a daily basis, whereas African men, due to geographic isolation, had far less exposure to differences in racial and skin-tone variations.

In analyzing the remarks about skin-bleaching amongst African-American men, I noted that although black men had limited knowledge of skin-bleaching practices, their African-American female counterparts (as indicated in other studies) were very well aware of it, and sometimes engaged in it. This limited knowledge of skin-bleaching amongst African-American males could indicate a number of things: (1) It could be that because black men in America feel that other races see them as all 'black,' there is no differential or preferential treatment from other races in regards to skin one. Therefore, engagement in skin-bleaching is not necessary because no matter the differences in skin tone, black men still get treated the same. (2) African-Americans are more likely to have racially mixed backgrounds/identities than Africans. (3) African-American males in this study rarely interact with dark-skin females on an intimate level.

The View of Black Women, Relationships, and Dating

The men in this study recognized that colorism is an issue that plagues black

women more so than black men. Aiden expresses it this way:

> It's hard for black women in (……) because the white guys don't get along with
> you (and) the white girls don't get along with you... Like my little sister, she
> wanted to go to school here and I said, no... Look at them, like right now the
> African girls, they hang out with themselves because it's hard to make white girl-
> friends because white girls think they are intimidating (and) feisty and white guys
> usually only date white (girls) here as far as I've seen, except for a few exceptions
> (Aiden, line 667-677).

It is also evident that although the focus group participants knew to some degree

that black women were more plagued by the issues of colorism, they did not understand

the extend of how much these issues *actually* affected, them and what black women

thought and felt about the issues concerning colorism and racism.

To further examine this issue, I asked both focus groups the following questions:

In what ways does skin color affect your interactions and relationships with other black

women? Do you choose to interact with black women (or women of other races) on the

bases of skin-color? According to both group interviews, color plays no part in

determining who or why they choose to establish a relationship with women. African-

born men felt like personality, confidence, and physical attributes (like the size of a

woman's buttocks) are more important in women, than skin-tone.

> Before you approach somebody there are a lot of things you might look at, like
> "Oh this girl is light." But you talk to her and you see, "This girl is a jerk, she has
> a bad personality," so you lose that (Michael, Line 577-579)
>
> I think other factors for me is more than color… (Aiden, line 573)
>
> I like all my women… if she's beautiful that what matters (Carter, Line 571-574)
>
> That booty must be there! (Laughs) (Henry, line 575)

African-American participants feel that culture and family influences, (especially their mothers) play a huge role on who they are attracted to:

> I don't know if I'm attracted to light skin or whatever, or it's cause my mom is that way but I don't discriminate… (Isaiah, line 337-338).

> They say your mother influences (who you are attracted to) … With my girl it had nothing to do with her being white. Honestly I think it has a lot to do with your mother's influences (339-343) …We don't care! All we care about is, "Is she bad?" (Laughs)… Ethan, line 458).

> Back in the day it was about the cuteness, but now it's like "Can she cook? Can she clean? (Laughs)… (Anthony, Line 356).

> Alright, first of all (Laughs), it don't matter what skin tone she is as long as she is beautiful to me in what I see in her, what she does… I'm with it as long as she plays along and got ma back 100%...I'm with it (Logan, Line 353-354).

> Yea, if you guys can find a match culturally then you good, but usually that where it cuts off…. (Jacob, line 399)

In contrast to white women and women of other races, the black men here feel like there is a social barrier that keeps them separated from white men and from men of other races. They believe this social barrier is formed by the inability of white men and men of other races to truly understand the black-male experience, and other cultural aspects like humor, language, and music. This lack of understanding creates a social barrier to interact on. Overall, the African-American participants agree that the cultural differences in humor affected both male and female relationships. Jayden and Anthony expressed their experiences of misunderstanding in the following statements:

> For me, it's more of like a culture thing. I think our humor is just different. Like some of the things we find funny, other races don't find it funny or they don't understand (Jayden, line 301-302).

> Every time I'm with a white woman, the relationship ends…because culturally we do different things…like what's good to them might be different to me. Or just like the things they say…it's like "what?" (Line 396-398). Cause you like them, but it's the little things deep down that changes everything and (then you) know this is who they are…So yea…every white girl I've been with just hasn't worked (Anthony, line 400-403)

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Another interesting finding was that black men both from the African-born and African-American focus group interviews feel that compared to other races and genders, the black man is the least racist, because they are more accepting and understanding of the experiences of others inside and outside their race. Because of this, they see themselves as open-minded when it comes to dating, not only women within their own race, but across all other races, as long as they can establish a connection with them.

> I think even among all males across all races, black men are the ones who do not discriminate, even in color. There are other things that come first like… (Aiden, line 595-596)

> Honestly I think more black people are open to having more friends. I really believe that...yea there's times we joke around...I don't know much of black people that are only around black people (P, Line 235-236) ...How can we discriminate everyone else in this country; the planet? Like we understand. Like all the white people say "You guys gone through slavery" yea, that's true but we still feel the effect of what happened in slavery…I don't know; I just feel that way (Anthony, Line 245-247)

> Black people…are understanding because of what we've been through… (Ethan, 141)

Black Identity & Black Pride

The repression and devaluing of the black man is perpetuated by several negative assumptions such as "all black men are dangerous" or potential criminals. Elijah and Ethan recounted their experiences:

> I had one encounter here, where I was working at (a smoothie shop). There were a couple guys from the football team and there was one white girl. She was working with us and there's like four of us and a couple people in the lobby and this lady: She walked in and asked the girl, "Are you ok?" "Do you need my number? Do you need help?" And we were all sitting right there and we were like "what?" and then she just walks out and I was just like, "Man, how you gonna do that in front of us like that?" "Like she's working" …I was like, "Come on!" … (Elijah, line 110-115).

You feel so indifferent out here sometimes, just by how people react or respond to you or whatever the case is. Me personally, I had an experience in (the city) a couple years ago…Umm, I actually got wrongfully arrested for something that I didn't do, but I was in that area at the time, but because I was black I can say… 'cause his first question was, 'cause I had a wife-beater on and you could see all my tattoos, his first question was "Are those (the tattoos) gang related?" Mind you all my tattoos have Jesus Christ in them…I told him "No," and one of my boys that I was with had an NBA shirt on and the officer was like, "Are you sure you guys aren't gang related?" This is all in the recording and everything and we had like one lil' white chick that was with us. So he goes to the white chick after asking us these questions and was like, "Excuse me Miss., are any of these people gang related?" I was like, "You literally just went down a whole line of asking if we are gang related and you're not even going to take our answers?" like we were somebody else; And you're going to take this white lady like, "Well I believe you'll tell me the truth so…" come on now! (Ethan, line 93-104).

Because of bitter experiences like this, participants in the study, most specifically the African-Americans, feel a sense of loss in cultural identity. In reference to their understanding of origin and history, African-American participants attributes this loss to their slave history, saying:

That (origins, culture, and history) was stripped from us, though…it's not that we don't have history. It's just we don't know our history. Our history got burned. The only thing they want us to know is that we were slaves…You know we got beat for doing certain things… They did that to us…" house niggas," "field niggas," they did that to us…People don't understand that when the slave ships came, they (i.e. slaves) were dispersed. They don't understand those concepts. They just take on their current culture. They don't understand that they are descends… that they come from African descent (Isaiah, line 435-444).

They (Africans) have something they can tie their selves back to … Us, we are literally descendants of Africa but we don't know we are from. We don't have a culture where we can sit there and say, "Hi! This is where I'm from" …We don't have nothing of our own… (Anthony, line 429-431)

Yea we are the only people who don't have our own language (Jacob, line 432)

Across the board, the African-American participants understood that the struggle to fully identify with American culture and any other cultures for that matter is due to their history. However, African-born participants possess a different type of struggle. Their knowledge of their origin and culture make it difficult for them to smoothly

assimilate into a society's perception of as just "black men". They have to manage both cultural identities and accept and merge the multiple roles of a "black man," with "African man" in America. Carter says, "I think I'm on the path to find who I am. I'm just aware of my environment (being a black dark-skin African) made me conscious" (Carter, line 611-612)

When it comes to interacting with other races, the black men in this study perceived that other races feel they need to change who they were (in character or personality) to successfully interact with them. A constant theme evolved from the data indicating that black men were aware of the cultural switch other races perform when interacting with them. Ethan stated; "I hate that shit" (Ethan, line 360) when someone tries to "talk black" or imitate black-styles of hand-shaking. They constantly reminded people to "be yourself," and not change who they are in order to establish a connection with them.

> I feel like being black, some people feel like they have to act a certain way around me. I think people think I'm cool cause I'm black so they talk different or try to shake my hand a certain way…like you don't have to be a certain way to seem cool to impress me (Jayden, line, 357-359).

> Social media has been a huge influence in our generation…The *Kim K* and *Kanye West* thing …made them think that there's certain things you gotta do to be cool to interact with us or act a certain way …Like when I had this conversation with (a white girl) she said certain stuff that blow my mind. The way she was dressed I was like "oh she think she's black" you know, she was trying to immolate (sic; imitate) that. She was asking so many questions like, "I date black guys because I don't really know about your guy's culture and I date black guys cause I wanna know about you guys…" I was like, "we don't date white girls because we wanna learn your culture we date a person because we like you. Like I'm not a fad or just a thing to do" …. I don't take it offensively but I was just like "is that really you?" You just supposed to like somebody because you like them you don't have to act a certain way, like just be yourself. (Isaiah, line 370-378).

You talk to a white guy and he starts like talking black you know like "wasup" "how ya doin?'" like trying to act or say something I don't even say… (Aiden, Line 163-165).

In comparison to dark-skin women who view the "characterization of" dark-skin "as black," reinforcing "the socially constructed divisions among black women", dark-skin black men embrace their darkness (Wilder, pg. 162). They see no differential treatment by other races in comparison to their lighter-skin male counterparts. Instead, they believe others will always see them all, regardless of skin tone variations, as 'black men.'

Most of the dark skinned- participants in both focus groups relayed positive thoughts on having a dark-skin black identity:

> I feel like just being my color, just being African…we're so diverse…. We just don't have dark skin people or just like one. We have so many different phenotypes that come from being black. I feel like I'm proud of being black. It's unique (Isaiah, line 74-76).

> Michael Jackson was black before he switched (his color) …the innate talents of singing and dancing was in his black genes before he switched his outward appearance…" (line 75-77) …I think being black is a privilege, although the world and society doesn't see it in that way... (Lucas, 234-235).

Despite the negative stereotypes associated with dark-skin, most dark-skin males have embraced a feeling of "black pride." As compared to women, in assessing the pursuit of whiteness, black men hardly seek white privilege through the practice of skin modifications like bleaching. The internalization of colorism for black men is manifested through other forms of behavior like language-use, peer and intimate relationship preferences, and internal identity.

Discussion

This study captures some of the experiences young black males go through on a daily basis due to their skin color. Although respondents talk mainly about personal interactions, there is a broader, macro-level connection embedded, created, and reproduced via non-personal institutions such as the family, school, and the media. In addition, we learn that the language of skin color influences the second component of everyday colorism, internal scripts. Consistent with Bourdieu's interplay of habitus, practice, and fields, the perceptions and experiences of colorism rest on a fine line of individual agency/constraint that is influenced by both micro and macro-level forces. His concepts also help us understand how internalized scripts constitute the socially constructed ideas and expectations of various skin tones. Black men acquire their understanding of "what it means to be black" from their habitus. In various fields and practices, their view of skin tone as a multi-dimensional element (in conjunction of course, with additional interlocking oppressions) shape their agency and/or constrains them within this dynamic system. Their micro-level interactions also speak to macro-level, structural implications. Through this, young men develop an understanding of the color names they hear, which tell them what it means to be light, dark, or brown-skin. Just like Wilder's findings, the participants in this study represent a variety of skin tones and experiences, but share a collective color habitus about skin tones (Wilder, 2008).

The word 'black' has always been loaded with negative implications in Anglo-Saxon linguistics. Neal and Wilson (1989) observe that the usage of the word 'black' is a "derogatory adjective… (and) does little to enforce the idea that black is beautiful" (p.327). This creates a dilemma for black women (especially darker-skin black women).

By becoming aware of the sources and costs of colorism, black men are transformed from passive victims to active transformative agents. In our data, several recurring questions surrounding the nature of everyday colorism emerge: How does the discourse of colorism begin? And how is it maintained? The language, beliefs, and practices associated in the dialog of skin-tone are understood through points of origin which are secured by stabilizing agents, and challenged by way of transformative agents (Wilder, 2008). Just like Wilder's study on females and colorism, results in this study suggest that there are three factors impacting everyday colorism: points of origin, stabilizing agents, and transformative agents. A point of origin is "the way in which colorist ideology is first introduced to an individual" (Wilder, pg. 175). Points of origin serve as the primary means of socialization by providing the knowledge base of language, scripts, practices needed for one to understand the socially constructed meaning of skin tone. These points of origin take place during primary socialization which according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) occurs in childhood and is the most important socialization process in an individual's growth and development.

In their growing awareness of colorism, the people and experiences within these participant's stories transform into stabilizing and transformative agents. Stabilizing agents are defined as "people and/or events that legitimize one's primary understanding of colorism, confirming internalized scripts and justifying the external practices of everyday colorism. Transformative agents then represent people and/or events that change one's primary understanding of colorism" (Wilder, p. 119). The origins of colorism slightly differ in historical background for Africans and African-Americans but these origins manifested the same internalized scripts. For Africans, the acquisition of

privilege and opportunity was more attainable to those with lighter skin. The primary stabilizing agent for Africans was media; for African-Americans their stabilizing agent was family.

Through research and personal experiences, I've become aware of female internal and external skin tone practices to pursue or maintain what is believed to be admirable or socially acceptable in regards to skin color. However, when exploring this pursuit in black males, the data indicated that instead of pursuit of beauty and recognition that black dark-skin girls seek, black dark-skin males (especially African-born dark-skin males) may uphold skin-lightening practices to acquire status, attention, dominance, and ego. African-American dark-skin men on the other hand, carry out and express their black identity or "blackness" with pride.

In order to achieve better access to white privileges black people engage in ritualistic, compensatory, and discriminatory practices. Ritualistic practices involve beliefs that have been passed down through tradition, for example, "staying out of the sun" to avoid getting darker. Compensatory practices encompass "behaviors enacted in order to balance or counteract a perceived negative attribute" (Wilder, p. 109) like skin bleaching, hair bleaching and relaxing. Finally, discriminatory practices "are those behaviors that function to include or exclude someone based upon their skin tone" (p. 110). In this study, though one of the African-American participants Anthony engaged in discriminatory practices at a young age, he also pointed out his thoughts then were immature and "stupid" and that growing up changed his thoughts and beliefs as they have become more validated by education and experience. In participating in the compensatory practice of skin bleaching, Henry, an African-born participant acknowledged the fact that

his change in skin-tone from dark-skin to light-skin did give him more attention from women and most of the time, positive treatment and recognition from others. His decision to stop was due to the fact that all the attention got too overwhelming and he decided to return and appreciate the color God had originally intended him to be.

Identity

Like other types of social identities, masculinity is an ongoing dialog construction between one's self-image and that of another. When migration occurs, this dialogue is put in a new social context, in which social identities such as ethnicity, masculinity, and sexuality are challenged and renegotiated (Khosravi, 2009). Historical migration of slaves to the United States affected blacks by forcing them to adopt a new way of being in the world. In the past, a slaveholder's way of defining black identity was to disorganize black families, create status distinctions, and form social classes through skin-tone distinctions in the slave community. When blacks were later granted freedom, the opportunity arrived for lacks to create their own definition of identity. But there was a key problem: manipulative strategies improvised during slavery (brainwashing with inferiority, breakup of the African (slave) family, use of religion as a control technique, the creation of infighting in the slave community and the developing plantation stereotypes) had taught the Africans how to be slaves" (Harris, 1998) and nothing more. These strategies are manifested in African-American males today as they feel a loss of cultural identity. Most of the participants in the African-American groups expressed the emptiness in having no trace of origin of their ancestry lands, customs, or beliefs.

Continuing on the topic of identity, black men in America face a double consciousness in that they are both Black and American in a white society. Thier identity is bifurcated making it difficult if not impossible to have one an integrated identity (Kristin, 2013). In the context of race relations, Du Bois asserted that since American blacks have lived in a society that has historically repressed and devalued them, it has become difficult for them to unify their blackness with their Americaness (Du Bois, 1903).

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903 p.2-3)

Double consciousness forces blacks to not only draw themselves back from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they are perceived by the outside world. Here, blacks internalize the stereotypes perpetuated against them by mainstream culture and base their identity on these outside views. As a result, blacks are damaged (Kristin, 2013). Du Bois asserts that white prejudice elicits "self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals" (Du Bois, 1903). Sartre states that "the looks of the other shapes the way" (Aho 2008 p. 111) one perceives and thinks of one's self. This view of the other creates a stigma that judges and defines one's self. In the case of blacks, the look of the white other accomplishes black inferiority.

Double consciousness also creates an element of the so called 'veil'; a struggle to reconcile their inferior identity as a black person with the equality as an American

citizen. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois cites the example of the black artisan who is conflicted between producing goods that reflect his unique perspective and life experience versus goods that are marketable and acceptable to a broader population (Du Bois, 1903). In the process of working to create what is the best expression of himself, the black artisan will be deemed unsuccessful yet by creating what makes him successful he fails to express himself and as a result, appears to be rejecting his true self (Kristin, 2013). This example exemplifies the conflict of typical black men everywhere (Kristin, 2013). This conflict established a situation in which they are both excluded from their identity as a black man and alienated from their identity as an American. During the emancipation, freed blacks were offered the opportunity to pursue social mobility through education, status, wealth, and equal rights. However, in order to achieve upward social mobility, they had to move away from their "blackness" and toward WASP culture which often caused their degrading in the first place (Harris, 1998).

Expanding on the double consciousness of the American black man, the African man who transitions into an American society faces a triple consciousness. An African-born black man in the United States is automatically assumed to emulate the stereotypes associated with an African-American black male. He is expected to "act black" "dress black" and "talk black. Henry mentioned "…I'm just more aware of the position I'm in right now as a black person and know that oh this type of things happen around here. But for the fact that I didn't grow up here is like I don't get the same feelings an African American…" Carter agrees: "… (African) culture doesn't work here". In order to fit in, he has to form a new identity as an "African-*American* black person." In this way, African-born black men feel alienated from and are sometimes resented by their African-

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American counterparts who can clearly recognize their gait, posture, dress, linguistics, tastes and appetites are put-ons. Thus judge African-born men as mimics. In this way, African men struggle to unite three identities; black, American, and African.

Double consciousness is still applicable in contemporary society, making it difficult for black men in America to reconcile their blackness and Americaness (Kristin, 2013). One of the biggest challenges is media. The media sells images of black men as athletes, rappers, or criminals. As a result, not only does white America perceive black men as such, but young black males see these roles as their only options for advancement.

Relationships

One goal of this study was to find out if colorism affects the relationships of college-age black men, by exploring if black men seek women of certain skin-tones and or races. I found out that my subjects base their decisions not on skin-color or race, but by a 'connection' they could establish with that person. In addition to this claim, the data also showed that family was the biggest influence in partner selection amongst African-American males.

By highlighting the daily experiences of colorism among black men, this study also helped us capture the connection between the individual's behavior at the micro-level and the institutional structures. Colorism is manifested in micro realms like family, personal relationships, and in macro institutions likes media and education. It is important to add that the perceptions and experiences of colorism "rest on a fine line of individual agency/constraint that is influenced by both micro and macro-level forces" therefore,

"evaluating one or the other does not provide an accurate description of how black" men "view their skin tone as a multi-dimensional element that shapes their life agency and/or constrains them within this dynamic system" (Wilder, p.154).

The 2000 census shows that 1.9% of all American marriages are interracial, and that white-Asian couplings account for most of these. Marriages between Blacks and whites still remain the least common of interracial marriages at 0.06 percent (Childs, 2005). Rockquemore and Brunsma (2001, ix) conclude that, "Blacks and whites continue to be the two groups with the greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage." Recent findings confirm this (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Ferber 1998; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell 1995).

According to the 1992 Census, the majority of Black-white relationships involve a black man and white woman. Within the black community, black women (especially dark-skin black women) feel estranged from fellow black men by this fact. Collins pointed out that, "Black women remain called upon to accept and love the mixed-race children born to their brothers, friends and relatives . . . who at the same time often represent tangible reminders of their own rejection" (2000, 165). According to black women, interracial relationships between black men and white women and their children represent rejection, because like incarceration, drug abuse, and homicide, they create shortage of eligible black men (Collins 2004; Dickson 1993).

Historically, the white male power structure was not threatened by a black woman giving birth to a child by a white man. Others argue that this was economically beneficial because it served to increase the slave labor force in the plantations. (Collins 2004; Davis

1981; Davis 1991; Giddings 1984). However, a white woman who gave birth to a child from a black man has traditionally been seen as threat, and as an attempt to "pollute" the purity of the white race, corroding racial boundaries and, most importantly, white power (Childs, 2005). Within the black community, some argue that blacks (especially women) seek out interracial unions not for the love, but as a way to produce lighter-skin off-spring who can acquire more social capital and privileges. Others argue that blacks (especially men) seek interracial partnerships with white women to prove their dominance over white males. Black men in this study deny those claims. As mentioned before they argue that their relationships are based on 'connections' influenced by qualities such as personality-likeness, motherly-resemblance (for African-Americans), and cultural understanding that can be established between partners.

It is important not to forget that colorism is a result of racism. It forms internalized racism that has the same features as racism. Scholars studying colorism in the 1960s and 1970s were optimistic about the future of black people in Americans (Drake and Cayton, 1962; Goering, 1972; Jones, 1973). They predicted a shift in attitudes about skin color; that people born after this time would no longer embrace the anti-black attitudes and myths of generations past (Wilder, 2008). Although black men continue to be perceived through negative labels and stereotypes, many are overlooking these labels and embracing their own unique and positive notions. By doing so, they have empowered one another. The pursuit of whiteness for a black man is no longer the pursuit of color, but involves the pursuit of a whole new identity. By becoming aware of the sources and costs to themselves of colorism, black men are transformed from passing victims into active free transformative agents. Cater says it this way:

I also feel like if we want people, like black people, to be comfortable, we have to teach them like right from when they are young to like…embrace their color because most of the time… (in)getting big, (the) insecure ones are (thinking) like, "oh I'm not light enough," "am not this," so they go ahead and bleach their skin (Carter, line 273-276).

Conclusion

The major finding of this study reveals is that although colorism negatively affects the lives of young black men, they have also internalized an ideology that endorses and values the black men. Black men do not seek whiteness. Though they do struggle with the dual identity conflict of being 'black' and 'American,' they have internalized this struggle and manifest a self-admired consciousness in knowing they are seen and treated as the 'other.'

To facilitate this empowerment, it may be helpful to draw on black feminist theory and by encouraging more dialog about colorism between young black males and black females. Most of the participants in this study felt that media was the primary agent of selling beauty standards, but feminist scholars suggest that it is individuals who hold the key to changing institutions. Change can be achieved through personal politicization and activism. Young men need to realize that their voices and actions can play a huge part in eliminating the notions of colorism in the black community.

As a society, we should place greater emphasis on the education of young black men and women (and white men and women as well) about colorism. One of the major factors that pushes women to participate in colorism and self-hate comes from the fact that they feel unattractive. They engage in practices like skin-bleaching to gain acceptance. Educating them on the origins of colorism can help empower them to embrace themselves as they are.

In this generation, the internet has become the primary source of public information. It is easier for this generation to accumulate and internalize the very often

false information about colorism. It is from Internet social networks like "Instagram" "Facebook" and "Twitter" that young people obtain their information. Creating virtual reliable communities filled with academic resources and information on the subject of colorism could balance negative stereotypes and serves to educate the young black community on colorism and free them from its burdens. In addition to this, it is imperative that we embrace new and alternative means for collecting data that keep pace with the current generation.

As a final strategy for change, I recommend coalition building among black men and women. Individual empowerment and education can only go so far if there is not a concerted effort to unify black men and women across color lines (Wilder, 20008).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research contributes to the existing body of literature by focusing specifically on the voices of young black men and addressing micro-macro linkages. Despite these contributions, I would like to attend to the limitations of this study.

The focus group participants were drawn from a convenience sample of young black men attending a moderate size university in the North-Western region of the United States. This is perhaps the largest limitation of this project as this area has little representation of black people. Most of the recruitment of young men were drawn from the athletic department and African clubs of this college town all of which had to be full or part-time enrollees at the university. Most of the participant recruits for the African-born focus group were from West Africa, predominantly Nigeria. In regards to this demographic profile, this study may not reflect the vast origins and experiences of colorism in the African continent.

This unequal distribution of skin tone categories presents another limitation to the study as most of the participants in both focus groups were dark-skin males. Further, it was assumed that the sexual identity of all participants was heterosexual. There were no questions directed toward same-sex relationships, nor did any respondents share stories related to their intimate-partner relationships with other men. Just like Wilder's study, this points to a gap not only in this research project, but also in the broader realm of research on colorism. I had originally planned on conducting a focus group that combined both the African-born and African-American participants together, but were not able to complete this due to time constraints. Ultimately, there is a definite need for more empirical studies on the continuing significance of colorism among more diverse groups

of young black men. Further studies should consider combining black males from diverse demographics to analyze how their different understanding of colorism may affect the discussion. This may surely illuminate different categories and themes on colorism. Future research on colorism could also conduct studies that include both genders. Dialog taking place with both black men and women can be the first step in helping both genders understand each other's experiences and viewpoints. Such dialog could illuminate a collective understanding of the issue and further empower the black community as a whole.

This study may have generated some biased responses from the participants given that I am a young black dark-skin woman. However, the presence of my assistance (who for the African focus group was a white women and for the African-American focus group was a white man) may have also played a part in controlling biased responses favoring dark-skin black women.

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APPENDIX A

Table 4. Participant's names and group categories

Group 1: African-born Participants	Group 2: African-American Participants
Carter	Ethan
Aiden	Logan
Henry	Anthony
Michael	Jayden
Lucas	Isaiah
	Elijah
	Jacob

Figure 2.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTSHEET
Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey before we start the focus group.

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. What is your major?

4. Please indicate your ethnic background (i.e. Hispanic, Asian or African-American):

5. American-born: What region of the United States do you come from? (i.e. Northeast, Midwest, Southwest, Southwest, West)
   African-born: What region of African do you come from? (i.e. North, South, East, West, Central)

6. Did you grow up in a:
   a. City
      i. Small
      ii. Medium
      iii. Large
   b. Town
      i. Small
      ii. Medium
      iii. Large
   c. Rural Area
      i. Small
      ii. Medium
      iii. Large
   d. Other _____

7. What race/ethnicity is you mother? (check all that apply)
   [ ] Black
   [ ] White
   [ ] Latino
   [ ] Asian
   [ ] Mixed: _____
   [ ] Other: _____

8. What race/ethnicity is you father? (check all that apply)
   [ ] Black
   [ ] White
   [ ] Latino
   [ ] Asian

[ ] Mixed: _____
[ ] Other: _____

9. How would you describe your skin tone?
[ ] Very Light
[ ] Light Brown
[ ] Medium
[ ] Dark
[ ] Very Dark
[ ] Other: _____

10. If you could choose the skin tone of your spouse, what color would that be?
[ ] White
[ ] Very Light
[ ] Light Brown
[ ] Medium
[ ] Dark
[ ] Very Dark
[ ] Other: _____

11. If you could choose the skin tone of your baby/children, what color would that be?
[ ] White
[ ] Very Light
[ ] Light Brown
[ ] Medium
[ ] Dark
[ ] Very Dark
[ ] Other: _____

12. What is the highest grade of school or years of college you have completed?

13. What types of names, either positive or negative, have you used or heard when referring to people with light skin? (List the 3 most common…..)

14. What types of names, either positive or negative, have you used or heard when referring to people with a medium skin tone?
(List the 3 most common…...)

15. What types of names, either positive or negative, have you used or heard when referring to people with dark skin? (List the 3 most common…...)

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What prompted you to decide to participate in this discussion?

Let's first start by defining what colorism means to you:

2. Following up on the demographic face-sheet, what stereotypes do you think are associated with light-skinned men? Dark-skinned men? Men of medium skin tones?
3. If you could choose, would you be light, medium, or dark?
   (Prompt) Why did you choose that skin color?
   (Prompt) What might have influenced your decision?
4. How are you made aware of skin color in your day-to-day interactions?

•Learning About Colorism

1. When did you first become aware of the differences associated with skin color?
2. Did your family play a role in emphasizing skin tone difference?
3. Does your ethnicity play a role in how you learn or understand the issue of skin tone?
4. Can you recall any sayings or advice that you may have received from friends, family, or your community regarding your skin color?

•Friendships/Relationship
1. What are the skin tones of your friends?
   (Prompt) Does this impact how you see yourself?
2. How significant is the issue of colorism among your peers?
3. In what ways does skin color affect your interactions and relationships with other black men? Black women?
4. If you could choose the skin tone of your spouse, what color would that be? Why?
5. If you could choose the skin tone of your baby/children, what color would that be? Why?
6. How is (has) your life shaped because of your skin color? (i.e. What does it mean for you to be a "X" skinned Black man?)

•Other Issues
7. How do you think your generation views this issue, compared to other generations? (i.e. how are you a product of your generation in light of this issue?)

•Closing

1. What things do you think can be done to prevent skin-tone preference?
2. Is there anything else that you would like to add?